The *Early Childhood Curriculum* (2009) In Vietnam: Tensions In The First
Three Years Of Implementation

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ABSTRACT

In 2009 the Vietnamese Government introduced the new *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* to replace the *Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC)* that was in place between 1994 and 2009. The *ECC* presents a new image of the child as an agentic, competent, and self-directed learner for a globalised society. Recent research on the implementation of the *ECC* has focused on the teachers' reconceptualising of traditional ways of teaching to meet new official aspirations without acknowledging teachers' perceptions of intrinsic valued concepts within both the *RECC* and the *ECC*. In addition, there has been limited investigation of how this implementation has been carried out in practice. This study fills these gaps by investigating how teachers are experiencing the transition from the *RECC* to the *ECC*. A mixed-method approach was used, which involved a questionnaire sent to 472 respondent teachers followed by an in-depth exploration of six case-study teachers' experiences in three early childhood education centres. Data was interpreted using a socio-cultural approach and informed by the principles from Social Reconstruction ideology, which views education as a cultural, political and social tool to foster changes in society (Schiro, 2008).

The study revealed that the teachers held dichotomous beliefs about the valued concepts in the *ECC* and used conflicting approaches within their theories of practice as they implemented the new curriculum. Teachers' age, qualification, and working position appeared to be significantly related to their implementation of the *ECC* in their early childhood centre. In addition, the study found the partnership between teachers and parents was not a strong one in jointly realising the Government's aspirations of preparing young children for life-long learning and holistic

development. Hybrid forms of teaching practice emerged, illustrating the tensions for teachers created by the incompatibilities between the ideal and the reality as the implementation of the Western educational ideology in the *ECC* encountered deeply embedded Vietnamese cultural concepts. This study argues that despite teachers' acceptance of the aspirations of the *ECC*, traditional cultural concepts — including an emphasis on academic education, a traditional concept of collectivism and an ingrained social hierarchy — acted to create tensions, as well as challenges, for teachers who found themselves caught between the ideals of the new curriculum and the constraints placed upon them by their traditional working culture. Additionally, professional development for teachers and administrators were found to be a significant factor that either facilitated or reduced the tensions. Implications of how to improve the implementation of the *ECC* are presented.

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to get through challenges in my study and life
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study investigated the implementation of the Vietnamese *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*, which was promulgated in September 2009. The *ECC* is a theme-based, integrated curriculum with the aim to modernise the education of young children in Vietnam, in response to worldwide globalisation. The implementation of the *ECC* has been carried out as part of a comprehensive and ongoing educational reform, which focuses on curricular renewal throughout all levels of education in Vietnam. This new early childhood curriculum reflects the Government's aspirations for developing a future generation of citizens with human dignity, agency, initiative, and competencies including self-confidence, self-assurance and having a sense of well-being and life-long learning. Furthermore, it represents a reconceptualisation of the traditional ways of teaching young children within the implementation of the previous *Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC)* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 1994) in which young children were treated as dependent and incompetent (Nguyen, 2005). Since the implementation of the *ECC* both teachers and children have been given opportunities to choose what best suits their learning needs (Nguyen, 2005).

1.1. Rationale of the Research

My parents began a private kindergarten in my hometown when I was seven. Consequently, the image of my Mother and her colleagues enthusiastically teaching children to read, write, and do maths are impressed into my childhood memory. These early memories were further embedded by frequently seeing children pointing

to every single letter in their notebooks and trying their best to yell the letters and words the loudest to the teacher with confidence and pride. The classes in my Mother's kindergarten were divided into different age groups and the teachers organised a writing section everyday to train children how to write beautifully and in a correct manner. The children also learnt to solve simple, but nonetheless tricky for their young age, mathematical addition and subtraction. At that time, I understood that parents were very proud of such achievements in their child's learning and I also became aware that it was the norm that children should be taught to read fluently, write beautifully, and do maths excellently before they were sent off to primary school. For the past 20 years, I have witnessed and kept up-to-date with the Government's educational aspirations for the nation's young children. These aspirations have changed over time, especially since the *ECC* was drafted and promulgated. However, I have seen few changes in community or parental thinking about what and how children should be learning. In fact, their aspirations seem to remain embedded in the past despite the innovations in the *ECC*.

The *ECC* was established in the context of discourses defining *curricula* which have emerged in Vietnam as economic and social changes have raised new expectations that education will produce generations of citizens in this new era of globalisation, national reconstruction, and economic growth. Indeed, there has been a need in Vietnam to reconceptualise curricula as pivotal tools for educational reforms. As already mentioned, the *ECC* is considered an advanced and innovative integrated curriculum to be implemented with the national hope of transforming the generation of young children in Vietnam to be more competent, independent learners and to be the future 'owners' of the country. Therefore, within Vietnamese context the *ECC* is a reconceptualist curriculum as it is seeking to transform the status-quo in the society.

It can be categorised as a transformative curriculum in which the goal is to bring about social changes rather than merely regurgitating knowledge and skills. This type of curriculum is in contrast to a transmissionist and a transactional curriculum (McFadyen Christensen & Aldridge, 2013).

The reconceptualisation of curriculum elsewhere in Western countries have impacted somewhat on attitudes regarding and understanding curricula design and have thus influenced the implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam during the period of educational reform. Alongside traditionally well-known developmental theories, emerging theories including socio-cultural theories and critical theories have significantly dominated the curriculum reconceptualising movement. Although there are similarities in ways of doing early childhood education between Vietnam and Western countries, the approach of Vietnamese reconceptualisation is different to Western ones as it has arisen out of a social reconstructionist perspective with a desire to bring about social changes.

From my perspective as a university lecturer who trains early childhood teachers in Vietnam, having been promulgated nationwide for three years since 2009 the *ECC* itself seems unable to bring about significant changes in practice. I appreciate the difficulty the Government, teachers, curriculum managers and all those involved in education have had in reconceptualising their philosophies and developing strategies for Vietnamese early childhood education. However, as I organised apprenticeship for my early childhood student teachers in my university, I observed how teachers in early childhood centres struggled to interpret and to adapt to the philosophical changes presented in the *ECC* in the early years of the implementation. My interactions with early childhood teachers made me realise that they were not

creatively contextualising the *ECC* based on what they knew and believed about children and the culture along with what they were expected to include. Instead, they were still teaching subjects separately and didactically transferring disciplinary skills and knowledge following the rigid models of the prescribed lessons similar to the *RECC*. This made me realise that the replacement of the *RECC* with the *ECC* reflects the essence of the old Vietnamese saying “*bình cũ rượu mới*” (“*new jug but old wine*”), which implies something has changed about the way the outside looks but the same quality remains within. It seemed to me that implementing this new curriculum has, arguably, had limited success.

Literature on the implementation of the *ECC* clearly shows a huge interest in how to implement the new and ‘advanced’ ideas in the Vietnamese context. The pedagogy of integration underpinning the *ECC* suggests viewing young children’s learning knowledge and skills as inter-relating and non-detachable and thus pedagogical teaching should be carried out in an inclusive and holistic manner (Nguyen, 2005). This leaves space for early childhood teachers to frame their own teaching programmes. However, as I have argued elsewhere, many early childhood teachers have insufficient or different understandings of the pedagogy of integration which underpins the ways of implementing the *ECC* as an integrated curriculum (Dinh, 2006b). I believe that teachers are confused by the ambiguity of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the *ECC*. This ambiguity has caused controversy among professionals and the whole community during the implementation phases (Bui, 2004; Dinh, 2006b).

These above inquiries and concerns have led me to conduct this research to learn more about the implementation of the *ECC*. With an assumption that teachers

are the most crucial agent in executing a curriculum reflecting the Government's aspirations, I decided to examine the implementation of the *ECC* from the teachers' perspectives. Taking into consideration the Vietnamese Government's aspirations of a new agentic and competent generation, the children in my research are viewed as "potential contributing members of society" rather than just "active learners", "meaning-makers", "theory-builders" or "problem-solvers". With this belief, I share the Government's aspiration that the *ECC* should be a curriculum whose main foci are long-term goals to create new generations of citizens with essential life-skills and creativity. Therefore, I view the *ECC* as a transformational curriculum model as well as an instrument for reconceptualising and reconstructing Vietnamese society into a desirable one for the future.

1.2. Aim of the Research and Research Questions

Being aware of recent significant changes in Vietnamese economy and society, my particular desires in conducting this research have been to interpret the aspirations of the whole community about actual valued educational concepts and ways to make them become a reality. This thought has been impacted significantly by my belief about the indispensable role of family and community in educating young children. Ultimately, this study was undertaken to gain insight into how the *ECC* can be implemented more successfully within the contemporary Vietnamese context and to identify the positive changes this implementation brings about in educating the younger generations for a better future society in Vietnam. Therefore, this research explored the implementation of the *ECC* within the dynamic of the Vietnamese socio-cultural context from perspectives of early childhood teachers who are intimately involved in the very earliest educational encounters that young children have.

From my perspective as a university lecturer, the process of this implementation can be compared to the very first moments of a rocket ship launched on its journey into space. The Rocket Ship diagram in Figure 1 illustrates my beliefs about the current status of the implementation process of the *ECC* within the Vietnamese socio-cultural context. With the aims of this research stated above, I particularly focused on examining factors that influenced the process of the implementation including: valued educational concepts, curricular theories, governmental aspirations, and parental collaboration from the early childhood teachers' perspectives. These influential factors were drawn from the preliminary literature review of curriculum carried out on interpretations and implementation. All of these factors were discussed in relation to the context from which the *ECC* had been implemented.

Figure 1. The rocket ship diagram

The main research question of this study was: How are early childhood teachers experiencing the implementation of the *ECC*? In order to address this, four sub-questions were posed as follows:

- (i) What Government's aspirations in the *ECC* are teachers aware of?
- (ii) What educational concepts do teachers value during their teaching practices?
- (iii) What theories do teachers identify as underpinning the *ECC*?
- (iv) What are teachers' experiences about parental collaboration?

1.3. Thesis Structure

This chapter has introduced the topic of this thesis and given the reasons for the conduct of this study. The aims of the research are stated. One main research question and four sub-questions are posed. In addition, it provides an overview of how the thesis was organised. The background for this research is presented in Chapter 2 in which a literature of the history of the establishment and development of the national education system in Vietnam is reviewed. This provides the overall context of how early childhood education was established and developed over time within Vietnamese sociocultural-historical context. It also introduces justification for the changes in contemporary educational reforms in Vietnam including the early childhood sector.

Chapter 3 examined the literature in the area of implementing early childhood curriculum. The emergence of concepts from socio-cultural and critical theories in curricular discourse is presented alongside concepts from other longstanding developmental theories that have strongly impacted on the education for young

children worldwide. This chapter places the implementation of the *ECC* within broader educational research as moving forward from a traditionally structured, prescribed curriculum towards a socio-cultural co-constructivist one. In Chapter 4, the theoretical and methodological stances adopted for this study are presented; details of how data was collected and prepared for analysing through two phases including the questionnaire in Phase One and the multiple-case study in Phase Two are presented. Ethical aspects and the issues of validity for this research are also discussed at the end of Chapter 4.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, findings are presented to address the four research sub-questions. These focus on: the Government's aspirations and educational values underpinning the implementation of the *ECC* from the teachers' perspectives (Chapter 5); the teachers' views of the theories they used in practice (Chapter 6); and the parental collaboration (Chapter 7). Within each chapter, tensions from an early childhood teacher's perspective identified from the data analysis are highlighted.

In Chapter 8, the main findings are summarised and tensions presented as potential barriers against the implementation of the *ECC*. These tensions are discussed to consider how deeply-embedded cultural thinking has affected the teachers' perceptions about how the *ECC* should be implemented in work settings and how this has created barriers to the implementation. This chapter also identifies three gains that this research has contributed to the scholarship of early childhood education within both the Vietnamese and international educational contexts. In the end, this chapter concludes by outlining some of the limitations of the research and offering some implications for future research and for the implementation of the Government's policies as well as professional training programmes.

Chapter 2

Background to the Study

This chapter provides a sociocultural-historical background for my study. First, I present an overall picture of the establishment and development of the National Education System in Vietnam, including early childhood education, which has evolved within, and reflects, its social-cultural history. Three educational reforms that highlight the Government's efforts to seek a transformational pathway for education are outlined. Also, I introduce the *Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC)* and the new *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* and how they have informed the contemporary organisation of early childhood education. Next, I present the impact globalisation has had with a focus on the opportunities and challenges it brings to Vietnam. Finally, in this chapter, I discuss Vietnamese traditional cultural values to provide the cultural context of the implementation of the *ECC*.

2.1. The Context of Three Educational Reforms

Located in central South East Asia, Vietnam is a developing country governed by a Communist Regime. The population of Vietnam exceeds 90 million of which the majority are Kinh people. Fifty-four discrete ethnic minorities make up the remainder of the population. Vietnamese culture, including education, has developed during more than a millennium of occupation and warfare — almost 1,000 years against the rule of a Chinese Feudal Emperor (40-938 A.D), followed by 100 years of rebellion against the French subjugation (1858-1954), and then 10 years fighting American domination (1965-1975). Contemporary views of Vietnam's modern educational history look back to the time after the August Revolution in 1945 when

Vietnam declared independence from the French. From that time, education in Vietnam can be divided into three distinct periods of educational reform corresponding to the different periods of history fighting against invasive wars and rehabilitating the nation. These are presented below.

2.1.1. The First Educational Reform

The first educational reform occurred when Vietnam successfully carried out the August Revolution on 19 August 1945. This opened a new period in Vietnamese history of fighting against the colonial French. Prior to this, for nearly 100 years from 1858 to 1945, the French had invaded Vietnam and imposed the “obscurantism” policy as part of their colonial policy. Education during this time was restricted to a very small proportion of the Vietnamese population who could afford schooling for their children. French was taught as a second language, in replacement of Han script throughout all the educational programmes from primary to tertiary levels. Vietnamese culture, including language, was blurred and not taught in schools. As a result, 90 percent of the population were illiterate due to the policy of the colonial French.

The Declaration of Independence from the French, on 2 September 1945, heralded the beginning of the first period of educational reform. Although the declaration embraced the whole country, the South was still occupied by the French who sought to maintain the division of the country into the North and the South. Nonetheless, the liberated North began the regeneration of the country. One of the ways to achieve this was the inauguration of a new education system during the school year 1945-1946 with the mission to preserve Vietnam’s independence and rehabilitate the country. In 1946, President Ho Chi Minh issued the decree SL/146

which marked the start of early childhood education in Vietnam. Since then, early childhood education has developed alongside the establishment, building, and preservation of the country's independence (Dinh, 2003). In July 1950, the Government carried out their first educational reform. The main achievement of this reform was that the high rate of illiteracy was significantly reduced (Tran & Nguyen, 2000).

2.1.2. The Second Educational Reform

The second educational reform was carried out during the period referred to as the "Liberation and the Restoration of Peace in the North of Vietnam" (1954-1965) (Tran & Nguyen, 2000, p. 221). The Government took over the management of the education system in the newly liberated areas in the North and actively prepared for a second educational reform around economic rehabilitation. At the same time, the Government continued the fight in the South for the reunification of the country (Tran & Nguyen, 2000). The second reform was enacted in August 1956 with the aim of unifying the two education systems of the North and the South. At this time, the assistance provided by the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) to Vietnam impacted on every aspect of life, including the educational system. This was somewhat similar to the USSR's in that the curriculum and examination processes were highly centralised and government-run. Education was free to all citizens, and schooling followed uniform programmes (Umehara & Popovych, 1990). As a result, early childhood education in Vietnam has been strongly influenced by Soviet developmental psychologists such as Lev Semonovich Vygotsky, Alexei Nikolaevich Leontiev, Sergey Rubinstein, and Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, among others. Another change, during this period, was that early childhood education became the

responsibility of The Vietnamese Women's Union whose role it was to protect young children and mothers from the tough conditions of the war (Dinh, 2003).

North Vietnam suffered greatly from the war with the United States of America (USA) between 1956 and 1975. With American bombs targeting schools as a place where many people congregated, the Government's goals for education were to continue to develop the national education system through ensuring student safety; strengthening links between school and real life; and expanding the economy while continuing the fight against the USA. On 19 January 1966 the Government established the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) to expand the development of this sector throughout the country. Early childhood education, known by the Vietnamese as *giáo dục mầm non* which means "young shoot" education (Tran & Nguyen, 2000, p. 228), became part of the National Education System. The Direction 153/CP promulgated on 12 August 1966 stated:

Caring and educating young children today has to be regarded as crucial in order to protect children's lives and health. It also supports the women force to take over their mother role during the anti-American resistance war. (p. 2)

With the establishment of the DECE, classes for young children were divided into small class groups and they were evacuated from cities, towns, key transportation points, and large residential areas. This allowed the continuation of teaching and learning activities for young children. Teachers took care of the young children, educated them, and kept them safe while their parents were away fighting in the Resistance (Dinh, 2003). Another significant initiative of the Commission for the Protection of the Mothers' and Children's Ministry, established in 1971, was a range of research carried out on early childhood education and care, including the

philosophy of caring and teaching young children, developing the national language for young children and curriculum, methods, and content (Dinh, 2003).

Nguyen and Nguyen (2008) have argued that the most successful outcome of this period was that schools and institutions at all levels continued to educate and produce a generation of young people who were ready and willing to fulfil their obligations as citizens. This obligation included making contributions to the establishment of a value system, which emphasised patriotism, national pride, and confidence in national independence, and socialism.

2.1.3. The Third Educational Reform

In the spring of 1975, Vietnam's war with the USA came to end. Vietnam gained independence, unity, and peace. Despite earlier initiatives, the Government acknowledged that the low quality of post-war education was not on a par with the development of the other countries' economy, science, and technology worldwide and therefore failed to meet the new requirements of post-war reconstruction. To meet these new challenges, a third educational reform was instituted by the Government in 1981 throughout the whole country, affecting all levels of education. Education was regarded as an important part of the ideological and cultural revolutions, as well as a crucial factor in boosting the development of the country's economy, culture, science, and technology. The aim of the reform was to develop new workers with sound moral quality, scientific and technological knowledge, technical qualifications, and good health. Educational concepts such as "study along with practice", "education combined with production", "school linked to society" became slogans that were implemented at all levels of education (Tran & Nguyen, 2000, p. 223). As one of these sectors, early childhood education expanded both in quantity and quality with

childcare and childrearing being the main focus rather than education. During this time, kindergartens for children under three years and preschool centres for children aged from 3 to 5 years were built throughout the whole unified country.

In the mid-1980s, the Government realised that Vietnam needed to co-operate with other countries to foster international trade in order to improve the quality of life for the Vietnamese people. As a result, the Government removed the policy of subsidisation and implemented the *Thời kỳ Đổi Mới (Renovation Time)* with “open-door” policies that opened up the country’s economy to the rest of the world (Nguyen, 2006, p. 4). These new policies sought to create new economic structures for the country in peaceful times, and adopted a model of a new industrial one with a “market-oriented economy within a socialist orientation” (Ashwill & Thai, 2005, p. 154; see also Nguyen, 2006, p. 2). This strategy impacted strongly on every aspect of society, including the education system.

Consequently, from 1986 to 1990 early childhood education underwent significant change. The market-oriented economy resulted in a decrease in government subsidy. This severely disrupted the sector, resulting in the closure of many kindergartens and preschool centres. The following few years presented many challenges due to post-war consequences but persistence and innovative strategies prevailed, resulting in a gradual rebirth and growth of the sector (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Tran & Nguyen, 2000). Later, the National Resolution 55/QĐ directed the Government and the whole country to take care of the younger generation who were expected to contribute to the future of Vietnam (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 1990). By the end of the 1990s, many early childhood education services expanded to include public centres, public-community centres, community-funded centres, and private

centres. This directive saw a large number of young children, especially five year-olds, enrolled in centres (Dinh, 2003) . Furthermore, families were told they played a vital role in caring and educating young children. To assist families to contribute effectively into the reform, scientific knowledge about childcare and education was widely disseminated with a specific focus on those living in remote and mountainous regions. One of the Government's efforts to foster the early childhood education sector was that they ran a programme called the *Strategy of Developing Early Childhood Education from 2001 to 2010*. The aim of this programme was to:

Improve the quality of *ECC* for children aged up to six years, establish the base for their holistic development including physical, emotional, cognitive, aesthetical development; and enlarge the system of early childhood education centres all over residential areas, especially the rural and remote places. (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001, my translation)

On 7 November 2006, Vietnam joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO), marking a major step towards internationalisation and globalisation. Subsequently, the Government has actively sought out progressive trends from educational systems in other developed countries in Asia (Singapore, Japan, and Korea) and in the West (the USA, Australia, and New Zealand). The Government has continued to implement reforms at all levels of education with a focus on educational curricular development. The post 2006 reforms are now regarded by many Vietnamese people as the fourth educational reform (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). The modified Law of Education (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2005, my translation) stated clearly that:

“Developing education is the first priority of the national policy to improve the people's intellectual standards, to train human resources and to cultivate talents” (p. 3).

Le (2003), commenting on the curricular reform in early childhood education sector,

described its aim was “to develop children’s fullest potential, to shape essential values and skills for life which suit the family’s, community’s and society’s desire, and to be well-prepared for formal schooling” (p. 23).

2.2. Developing a National Early Childhood Curriculum

Since the establishment of the early childhood education sector in 1946, Vietnam has struggled to overcome many challenges exacerbated by the long years of warfare and occupation and rehabilitating the country under the control of the Communist Party. Following the economic reforms of 1986, Vietnam has been aware of the importance of developing a sustainable education for young children who will contribute to the survival and advancement of the country. In response to this new context, Vietnam has been focusing on curricular reforms including the implementation of two consecutive early childhood curricula as national frameworks: *The Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC)* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 1994); and *The Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2009). These are briefly explained below.

2.2.1. The Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC): 1994-2008

The *RECC*, also known as the *Curriculum for Caring for and Educating Infants and Preschoolers*, was developed in the late 1980s. However, it was not until 1994 that it was disseminated and implemented throughout the country as the first national curriculum for early childhood children aged under 6 years old. This curriculum was influenced largely by the USSR’s educational psychology and pedagogy (Dinh, 2003).

The *RECC* was a play-based curriculum with the aim of developing each child as a whole person. As it followed a mandatory and systematically separate-subject approach, the content of the curriculum was set up with a range of sequential lessons. These lessons were designed to achieve particular levels defined by age groups. The teaching content covered education about: movement and sensation; observation of the surrounding natural and social environment; morality and personality; personal and environmental hygiene; and physical education. For young children aged 5 to 6 years, the *RECC* included an introduction to Vietnamese literacy, literature, and mathematics in order to prepare them for their first year in primary school. In terms of teaching methods, the *RECC* highlighted children's play as a dominant teaching method. In order to assist teachers to facilitate these lessons, the *RECC* guidelines provided them with models that included detailed instructions and descriptions of how to prepare teaching materials, methods, and protocols.

The *RECC* made significant improvements in education for young children during the context of the country's recent liberation from long wars and occupations. These improvements, however, exposed some shortcomings. For example, some scholars (Le, Pham & Tran, 2010; Le, Tran, & Le, 2009) wrote in their review about the *RECC* that this curriculum did not fully include essential components of a curriculum such as learning objectives and outcome statements, and evaluation and assessment guidelines. Furthermore, the educational content was subject-based, and was not able to be implemented in an integrated way. In addition, the *RECC* was so prescriptive that it prevented both teachers and children from being flexible and creative, thus restricting cultural and local responsiveness. Teaching methods were also criticised as being mechanical and stereotypical, resulting in teachers taking a very directive role in guiding the children in all activities. Moreover, assessments and

evaluations were heavily based on children's learning outcomes in particular disciplines such as literature, mathematics, and art. This was clearly seen during formal teaching hours (Dinh, 2006b). The report of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001) identified shortcomings of the *RECC* implementation including the lack of trained “nurses” (early childhood teachers were traditionally called nurses), the poor conditions of facilities, and the disconnection between centres and families.

As noted earlier, the early years of the twenty-first century saw the economy of Vietnam rapidly advancing, as indicated by its entry to the WTO in 2006. As a result, the Government began putting more emphasis and resources into education primarily by fostering curricular reforms. Consequently, after several years of implementation, the *RECC*, while still valid, appeared to have inappropriate aspects and did not meet the aspirations of the country's educational reform (Le et al., 2010; Le et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2005). This led to researching the early childhood sector, including an evaluation of the contributions of the *RECC*, and the development of a new early childhood curriculum — the *ECC* — for young children's education (Nguyen, 2005).

2.2.2. The Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC): 2009-present

The draft of the *ECC* was initiated in 1998 when Vietnam was seeking a new pathway to educate the youngest generation. This new national framework supported a holistic education incorporating skills for life rather than just academic knowledge for formal schooling (Dinh, 2006b). In October 2004, the draft *ECC* was piloted. Within five years of this implementation with different age groups in 20 representative provinces all over the country, it was signed off by the MOET in July

2009 and officially replaced the *RECC*. It is generally understood within the Vietnamese early childhood sector that the *ECC* was a step forward from the previous curriculum and that it has resolved its shortcomings (Le, 2003). Like the *RECC*, the *ECC* is age-appropriately designed. However, it constitutes a complete framework with components such as aims, content, methods, procedures, evaluation, and implementation conditions (Le et al., 2010). Additionally, the *ECC* adopts a discourse of collaboration between teachers and parents as a way to achieve the Government's aspirations for the new generation of Vietnamese citizens. This relationship was not emphasised in the *RECC* (Le, 2003).

The *ECC* includes open theme-based content and specific age-related learning outcomes for children aged from 3 months to 6 years. This new responsive format is intended to allow teachers to promote their sense of creativity and respect children's agency (Dinh, 2003). The new framework aims to develop the "whole child" through focusing on five specific developmental domains: physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional and aesthetical (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2009). A combination of a child-centred and an integrated approach is inherent in the spirit of the *ECC*. In this way, therefore, the *ECC* supports an approach of developmentally appropriate practice which calls for developmentally-appropriate and age-appropriate teaching practices for children as well as being culturally responsive (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

2.3. Organisation of the Early Childhood Education System

To operate as official early childhood facilities, centres must be licensed according to the Government's regulations. Licensed early childhood centres include

public centres and private centres. Public centres are fully funded by the Government whereas private centres are self-funded through parental fees. All of these licensed centres are under the direct administration and supervision of the District Education and Training Offices (DETOs). They all use the *ECC* as a national framework for generating their own care and education programmes for young children from 3 months to 6 years. These programmes have to meet the requirements and guidelines mandated by the central MOET (Dinh, 2003). Those licensed centres who meet specific criteria set by the MOET are considered to have met a quality benchmark and are accredited as national-standardised centres. This accreditation recognises that a centre has well-qualified staff, good facilities and provides high quality of education and care (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2008b). It is given by the MOET to help enhance the centre's reputation.

Early childhood education in Vietnam includes kindergartens for children aged from 3 months to under 3 years, and preschool centres for children from 3 to under 6 years. These are classified and named according to the children's age. For instance, *the little infant group* is the name used to refer to a group of 3-year olds; *the medium infant group* for 4-year olds; and *the elder infant group* for 5-year olds. However, in the Middle and the South of Vietnam, people like to use symbols of a growing plant to name these groups such as *The Bud* (3-4 years), *The Shoot* (4-5 years old), and *The Leaf* (5-6 years old). Younger groups, including children aged from 1 to 3 years, are usually named by the children's diet. For example, *rice-flour-fed group* is the name of the 3 to 13-month olds; *soup-fed group* is for the 13-18 month olds; *wet boiled rice-fed* is for the 19-24 month olds; and *rice-fed group* is for the 25-36 month olds (Dinh, 2003). This classification indicates an age-based approach in teaching young children.

Students wishing to become qualified early childhood teachers have the options to do a two-year, a three-year or a four-year training programme. The differences between these training programmes lie in the length of training and content input as well as the title of the qualifications. Students who successfully complete the two-year programme graduate with a vocational certificate and those completing the three-year programme graduate with an Associate Bachelor degree, whereas the Bachelor degree is awarded on the completion of a four-year programme. The two-year training programme focuses on training students in specific skills while the three-year puts more emphasis more on theoretical knowledge. The four-year training programme provides a further step-up in theoretical knowledge about early childhood education. In my experience as a university early childhood education lecturer, students who undertake the four-year programme are taught the updated theoretical framework underpinning the *ECC*, which involves using a child-centred, context-based, and play-based approach. Students who hold a vocational certificate or an Associate Bachelor degree can do an additional programme if they want to upgrade their qualification to a Bachelor degree.

The professional background of the early childhood workforce and administrators in Vietnam reflects the young history of this sector. Mainly, the workforce is seen to be low-qualified (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001). According to the Regulations of Early Childhood Centres (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2008a), teachers holding vocational certificates in early childhood education, or student teachers who are upgrading to a Bachelor level qualification, are eligible to work as early childhood teachers. To be promoted to administrators, teachers are also only required to hold a vocational certificate, but must have at least five years of teaching experience. Seeing this as a limitation, the Government has made the professional

development of early childhood workforce and administrators a central strategic policy goal in order to improve the quality of this newly-established educational sector (for example, Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001; 2014).

Administrators, such as heads of the centres, take an important part in the procedure of assigning or re-assigning responsibilities to junior teachers. Some of the administrators' key responsibilities are to assess and rank the quality of the junior staff's teaching practice in order to assure the quality of early childhood education within their centres (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2008a). As an early childhood student teacher trainer, I have observed that today most teachers who complete four-year training programmes are usually young and lack teaching experience. As a result, they often move into teaching positions rather than administrative ones. Meanwhile, older teachers who have experience but lack professional training hold important administrative roles. This age and experience-based hierarchy created conditions that in my study emerged as problematic for the implementation of the *ECC*.

2.4. Impact of Globalisation: Opportunities and Challenges

Entering the 21st century, referred to as the *time of technology and information* or *time of globalisation* (Le, 2003; Nguyen, 2005), the influence of globalisation has created both opportunities and challenges for the country, including in early childhood education. These are discussed as follows.

2.4.1. Opportunities

The Government's socio-economic policies, also called "open-door" policies, since 1986 have brought about changes in every aspect of life in Vietnam including the economy, politics, culture and society (Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Nguyen, 2006;

Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Tran & Nguyen, 2000). This opening up to the rest of the world has allowed for the importation and exchange of advanced international achievements in education, science, and technology. These imports have accelerated since Vietnam joined regional and international organisations and programmes such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1975; the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in July 1976; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from 1978; and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) in February 1992. These memberships have led to financial support from international organisations to enhance the quality of the education system for young children (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). Overall, the Government's open-door policies since 1986 have transformed Vietnam providing more opportunities for international exchange (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008) and allowed Vietnam to evaluate its position relative to other countries. This process of globalisation has revealed that the long period of war during the 1900s has had repercussions for all aspects of life including the economy and education.

As globalisation has increasingly influenced the economy of Vietnam, it has also caused the early childhood education system to move further to decentralisation, marketisation, and privatisation. To facilitate this, the Government has encouraged input from individuals and foreign agents, and allowed more authority and agency in educational management and assessment. Within this context, the early childhood education sector in Vietnam is now regarded as “mắt xích đầu tiên” (“the first ring of a chain”) in the National Education System (Vuong, 2008, p. 2), which indicates the Government's changing view of the role of the early childhood sector.

2.4.2. Challenges

First, globalisation has led to the importing of “foreign” ideas creating a changing socio-cultural context, risking the loss of Vietnamese indigenous values and identity. As a result of increased access to information resources, multicultural tastes and values, including Western ones, have been imported and assimilated to various degrees (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). For example, the English language has become more common in everyday communication. The opening of the country to tourists and the influx of people from around the world to live and work in the country has also accelerated this importation. These influences have impacted on all aspects of society, including children. For instance, Le (2009) argued that children nowadays have access to far more information than their parents had and this has impacted on their development, including the knowledge they acquire. She commented Vietnamese children are now perceived as being “cleverer” than in the past. Thanks to improvements in family and social living conditions, they tend to be more confident and self-assured (Le, 2009). This is a positive sign of a potential generation of citizens who are competent and agentic, and are able to reconstruct the country during its new period of development. However, it has also been argued that children who are very young still need guidance for their learning and development through social activities within their community and school in order to maintain their Vietnamese values and identity (Le, 2009).

A second challenge lies in the conflict between, on one hand, the Government’s aspiration of an advanced, democratic society and, on the other hand, its desire to maintain the top-down control over the whole country. Globalisation has led to democratisation, which allows, on paper, more freedom in all aspects of life.

To facilitate globalisation, the Government has promoted globalisation strategies of decentralisation, marketisation, and privatisation. Within education, the traditional aim has been reconsidered, with the focus now being on producing a new labour force for Vietnam as a result of the outside influences discussed previously. As Ngo, Lingard, and Mitchell (2006) assert, globalisation has led to a pivotal change of the role of education as a factor affecting the production of human capital to fit with the requirements of the knowledge economy and learning society. Global trends have also affected educational curricula in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2007). Within this context, the early childhood curriculum has been re-oriented to meet the new requirements of the market economy. Some of the new values and skills required are creativity and agency in thinking; problem-solving abilities; computer skills; the English language; and social communication skills in a multi-cultural working environment. Such values and skills are now considered as fundamental as the traditional values and skills of reading, writing, and maths. Schools train students in essential values and skills as the key to accessing their future lives (Le, 2009).

However, it has been argued (Nguyen, 2007) that the Vietnamese Government in practice is not fully committed to the concepts of globalisation. This conflict is reflected in many respects of social life. As the Government insists on following the market economy model within a socialist orientation (Ashwill & Thai, 2005), tensions therefore potentially exist, caused by the top-down nature of national policy processes. There are on-going challenges to progress when new initiatives are set alongside traditional, conservative Vietnamese values. By seeking to adopt advanced teaching models and strategies from developed countries, early childhood education in Vietnam faces challenges to find its pathway to advancement, especially when democracy is not fully practised within society and education.

Other challenges derive from the shortcomings within the early childhood education sector itself. Although it appears that this sector has been taken into consideration by policy makers more than ever before, it is still in its early stages of development and is beleaguered by some key problems. These include a shortage of qualified staff, misperceptions of the role and significance of early childhood education, the disconnection between early childhood and primary educational levels, the high child/teacher ratio in classrooms.

To date, educational curricula at all levels in Vietnam, including early childhood, have not transitioned from the traditional approach to education and continue to maintain a distinct separation across various subjects (literature, history, mathematics, and so forth). Consequently, students are used to following a traditional model-based approach (Tran & Nguyen, 2000). Moreover, this conundrum also affects teachers who lack appropriate professional development to shift them into new ways of teaching. Although the Government sees highly trained educational staff as a crucial factor to improve the quality of early childhood education, there remains a lack of professional staff, including teachers and educational managers, who meet the professional requirements of the early childhood education curriculum (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Tran & Nguyen, 2000; Vuong, 2008). Also, little attention has been paid to other personnel such as curriculum developers and educational planners. As a consequence, most curriculum writers have not been able to go beyond their traditional perceptions or approaches (Dinh, 2003; Tran & Nguyen, 2000). This is also a challenge for the early childhood educational sector.

The wars and occupations have also left difficult conditions for the development of such a young educational sector. One of these is malnutrition which,

although recently greatly reduced, is still an issue in mountainous and remote areas (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001). Besides this, early childhood education is still the newest educational sector in the National Education System, with the general perception still seeing it as childcare and childrearing rather than educating. As a result, this sector is not highly regarded within the community so parents are not as well-informed about their role in children's education and childhood development. The disconnection between the preschool and the school-age curricula has not yet been resolved. A further shortcoming is the child-teacher ratio in classrooms which is still very high with the average ratio for kindergarten classes being 7.5:1 and 21.3:1 for preschool classes (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2001). Such shortcomings are barriers to the progress of the development of early childhood education in Vietnam.

2.5. Vietnamese Cultural Values

Vietnamese culture has been influenced by several cultures and ideologies, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, French culture, socialism, and the USA's culture. Vietnam's approach to these influences has been to selectively absorb some aspects to create its own cultural identity. As discussed in the previous section, cultural traditions are potential barriers for Vietnam on its way to globalisation. In the following sections, I highlight two examples of Vietnamese cultural values that have existed for a long time in Vietnamese society: a tradition of collectivism and a hierarchical social structure. I examine these cultural values briefly in regard to the development of early childhood education because they are important to see how culture impacts on teachers' experiences of implementing a curriculum, and can be argued to potentially challenge the effectiveness of the current implementation of the *ECC*.

2.5.1. A Tradition of Collectivism

Collectivism is seen as the opposite to individualism. While individualism emphasises personal goals with few concerns about responsibilities to the group, in collectivism group-based activities are valued and the integrity of group goals are foremost (Park, Rehg, & Lee, 2005; Triandis, Bontempo, & Villareal, 1988). The logic of collectivism is that since one lives in a matrix of social relationships, any individual decisions must relate to the others living in his/her community or society (Yao, 2000). Therefore, the voice of a group is seen as dominant over the voice of the individual. In other words, within the collectivist paradigm, the individual is often willing to dismiss his/her personal desires and aspirations to suit communal standards (Truong, 2013).

According to Park et al. (2005), values such as loyalty, harmony, cooperation, unity, and conformity are the main attributes of collectivism. These values, norms, and attitudes are often accepted without question within a work environment (Park et al., 2005). Collectivism is also characterised by a set of values such as obedience to authority, intense allegiance to groups, and a submergence of individual identity into the collective one (Englehart, 2000). Collectivism and individualism are used to explain the difference between Western and Asian culture (Truong, 2013).

It is believed that Vietnamese people favour collectivism rather than individualism (Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Borton, 2001; Pham, 1999). Vietnam is located in a tropical region where the people often have to deal with natural disasters such as floods and storms. The disruption these cause, especially to the intensive water-rice agriculture and the building of and maintaining of dykes, requires a collective effort. In addition, throughout the long history of occupations, invasions and wars the

Vietnamese learned that collaboration improved their chances of survival. As a result, the tradition of cooperation, in all things, was formed and has been continuously strengthened, thus preserving the Vietnamese perception of collectivism (Pham, 2007). Within the tradition of collectivism, Vietnamese people maintain a sense of community in their daily living (Borton, 2001; Truong, 2013). An illustration of this is the pervasiveness of the *village* where a group of Vietnamese live with strong connections within that community. Village life is like a big family where everybody knows each other well and their history (Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Pham, 2007).

With the dominance of collectivism over individualism, it is important for Vietnamese people to maintain harmony within the group. The tradition of collectivism emphasises the individual's responsibility towards the community he or she belongs to and as a member of such a community has to think and act properly for the community's sake, not for his/her own. Yao (2000) explains this characteristic as an influence of Confucianism where the concept of harmony is vital in order to maintain the order of a society. According to Yao (2000), harmony is the result of an appropriate accommodation of one's own needs to the requirements of others. Nowadays, although the pattern of social relations among Vietnamese youth appears to be influenced by the individualism of Western culture, collectivism still remains and impacts on people's standards of morality (Dalton, Pham, Pham, & Ong, 2001). This indicates that the indigenous culture is still dominant in Vietnamese society.

Loss of face is also a concept rooted in collectivism (Truong, 2013). Borton (2001) argues that this concept is even more evident in Vietnamese culture than in other cultures which have Confucian influences. Loss of face due to an individual's action will not only affect that person but also the wider family's reputation with

ensuing social disgrace (Pham, 1999). An illustration of this is how meaning is communicated in conversations in Vietnamese culture. To understand the real meaning of the conversation one sometimes interprets another's words not by the meaning of the words themselves but by putting those words in the context of the whole communicative act such as the relationship he/she has with the person he/she is talking with, and the place and space of the communication. Following proper protocols within the communicative act demonstrates respect and consideration to another person during a conversation.

Showing respect and consideration in a working environment is crucial to building and maintaining good relationships (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). To avoid loss of face, Vietnamese people tend to use indirect communication with each other. They also apply a style of impulsive thinking rather than critical thinking when they build relationships. Specifically, during a conversation they make decisions and judgements about others based on how they feel about the other person, not on the person's character and competence. In this way people often behave in line with the old Vietnamese saying: *Thương nhau củ ấu cũng tròn; ghét nhau quả bồ hòn cũng méo* (love rounds square things; hatred squares round things).

2.5.2. The Hierarchy of Social Structures

Hierarchy is an inherent concept within Confucian tradition (Slote & Devos, 1998). This tradition was introduced into Vietnam between 111 B.C. and 939 A.D. when the country was under the control of Chinese imperial rule (Truong, 2013). It was during this time that Chinese Confucian ideology profoundly impacted on Vietnamese people's lives (Jamieson, 1993; Taylor, 2002). In the following section, I

discuss some pertinent Vietnamese cultural values influenced by the hierarchy of social structures. These values also affect education in Vietnam.

According to Confucian teaching, when a person is born he/she is given a role in relation to the others within his/her family and society. Therefore, a child has to learn from a very young age to have proper thoughts, speech, and behaviours to respond to the others in a complicated matrix of relationships, within his/her role. This teaching is pivotal for society to maintain the hierarchical tradition and therefore the stability of the social orders (Pham, 1999). As discussed, within Vietnamese society, the principles of hierarchy are part and parcel of the fabric of society reflecting the way people communicate and build relationships. Age, gender, educational achievement and qualification, and socio-political position are important factors within which one's social status is identified. These concepts affect the construction of relationships (Jamieson, 1993; Pham, 1999). Accordingly, one should always show his/her absolute respect and obedience, without question, to people who are his/her superiors, elders, parents, and teachers (Slote & Devos, 1998).

Truong (2013) asserted that age is the first construct which affects a relationship as it represents power and respect in Vietnamese culture. He explained that being aware of one's age helps a person know how he/she should place him/herself within the community and at home and to use appropriate words and manners to communicate respectfully. Also, being respectful to those considered higher than oneself, and to tolerate those lower, is a common-sense moral lesson a Vietnamese child must learn at a young age and is expected to practise throughout his/her life. The required protocols for age-appropriate communication thus result in taken-for-granted perceptions about how the younger or junior should be positioned

within the hierarchy. Ashwill and Thai (2005) state that normally people who are older are regarded as seniors with greater experience, knowledge, and wisdom compared to the younger or junior. The former, therefore, are considered to be deserving of a higher social status and therefore expect to be respected by the latter. With lower social status, the younger or junior is expected to obey and accept whatever thoughts or ideas the older one expresses. This is reflected in the following Vietnamese sayings: *gừng càng già càng cay* (the longer ginger is grown, the tastier it becomes) or *trứng mà đòi khôn hơn vịt* (an egg is never as clever as a duck).

The second Confucian construct young people must learn is their familial status within the family since this then positions them not only within their family but also within their working group and society. Young people are required to behave according to their social status as a member of the community reflecting their particular role. A parent, a husband, a master, or a teacher is regarded as having a higher role in relation to those of lower social status, such as a child, a wife, a guest, or a student. For example, in education, teachers are always positioned highly (after parents) because the general perception is that teachers are intellectual and play an important role in educating the next generations to live as ideal human beings. This second Confucian construct often results in people pursuing educational achievements and qualifications as an efficient way of obtaining an eminent position highly respected in society.

Confucian thinking is also evident in the hierarchical nature of Vietnamese society. This is linked to the issue of gender, which greatly impacts on one's role and position in the family and society. Despite the recent improvements in gender equality, due in large part to the importation of Western values, Vietnam remains a

model of a patriarchal society in which women are considered subordinate to men (Truong, 2013). From a traditional moral stance, it has always been acceptable for a man to expect absolute respect and obedience from his wife and family. This remains a norm in Vietnamese society nowadays. Ashwill and Thai (2005) support this and state that men are believed to play a leadership role in Vietnamese family and society. Within the discourse of gender, women are considered to be in charge of rearing, caring, and educating their children. Another Vietnamese proverb reflects this, *Con hư tại mẹ!* (It's always the Mummy's fault when a child is spoilt!). It is a source of ongoing concern to early childhood professionals in Vietnam that this tradition often results in the whole society denigrating the important role of education for young children as well as exerting pressure on women, because of the continuing perception of their lower place even in contemporary modernised society. This is particularly evident in early childhood education as most teachers are women. Prevailing attitudes do not support them in their desire for further education, nor recognise their workload and do not consider their low remuneration as not only inadequate but insulting. As a consequence, teaching in early childhood education is generally seen as a low status profession. The prevailing attitudes further compound the pressure on women as they are still expected to bring up their own children and run the home. For some, however, these latter tasks are eased as men are starting to play a role in their children's care. Nevertheless, the majority are still restricted by the hierarchical structure.

This pattern of hierarchical structure has become so deeply entrenched in the structure of family, work organisation, and society that it is now widely accepted as an integral part of the traditional norms of the culture (Truong, 2013) and a moral value that people almost never think they should break (Pham, 1999). Indeed, even

contemplating a change of this norm is seen as a risk to breaking the norms. This is because in Confucian society change opens opportunities for development but also presents challenges, which affect the structure and power of the whole system. Thus, it is not always easy and acceptable to change (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). Traditionally, changes start at the top of the social order and therefore make it easier for people to accept the norms without question (Noss, 1974).

In sum, despite the decline of Confucianism and the rising influence of Western culture, the hierarchical social structure has remained a fundamental underpinning of the culture, even as Vietnam proceeds with modernisation and globalisation (Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Jamieson, 1993; Pham, 1999; Truong, 2013). Additionally, many Confucian values and beliefs are still present in the daily lives of the Vietnamese and affect the way they think about and behave towards each other. Therefore, examining the influence of history and culture is crucial to the process of finding a pathway for developing early childhood education in Vietnam.

2.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the historical background to the current system of education in Vietnam has been briefly presented, focusing on the development of the early childhood education sector. The early childhood education sector has overcome many challenges, including the effects of long periods of warfare, but is now growing quickly. However, the history of wars and occupations has left social and economic repercussions, which have inhibited the development of education in general and early childhood education in particular. As Vietnam opens its door to the world for international exchange to modernise and globalise, the challenges it faces are great.

This new era requires education to be widely reformed to meet the demand of a new generation of Vietnamese citizens with self-assurance, agency, and initiative. As a result, the introduction of the two national early childhood curriculum frameworks — known as the *RECC* (1994) and the *ECC* (2009) — represents the Government's efforts to improve the quality of education for young children. Clear evidence of this is the contemporary *ECC* which adopts new ideas imported from developed countries' educational curricula, including the ideals of a child-centred and culturally responsive pedagogy. This chapter was concluded by highlighting some long-standing cultural values that are an integral part of the fabric of relationships in any Vietnamese context. In doing so, it contextualises this study and signals the sources of some of the tensions in the implementation of the *ECC*.

Chapter 3

Interpretations of Early Childhood Curricula

This chapter provides an overview of research on interpretations of early childhood curricula. In this chapter, I explore the nature of curricula by examining how they are defined and categorised differently. Then, I review theories and philosophies which have influenced the discourse of the early childhood curriculum development worldwide and in Vietnam. Next, I discuss the different images of the child in diverse early childhood curricula and the movement of curricular reconceptualisation internationally and within the Vietnamese context. I also discuss the implementation of curricula with regard to fulfilling societal aspirations for future generations which involves the cultural effects, professionalism, transitions within the early years, and parental collaboration in early childhood education. This literature review positions my study within the global context of discourses about curriculum issues and presents its significance within these discourses. At the end of the chapter, the conceptual framework of this study is presented.

3.1. The Nature of Early Childhood Curricula

Education, to a large extent, is all about the aspirations of a people for the future of its nation, no matter its origins and how it has developed. The aims and the values within an educational curriculum are therefore a good indication of the strategic directions which a community desires for its future society. These directions, as discussed below, reflect different views and philosophies about children's learning and development (McLachlan, Flear, & Edwards, 2010). In this section, I discuss the

nature of curricula in general and early childhood curricula in particular to reflect these differences.

For many years early childhood professionals have debated the nature of curricula, and defined and categorised them in a variety of ways. On one hand, a curriculum is regarded as a prescribed framework which informs teachers of the content and provides methods to achieve its goals in a particular teaching and learning setting (Oberhuemer, 2005; Vartuli & Rohs, 2007). According to McLachlan et al. (2010), this prescribed framework gives very precise instructions for particular activities to suit children's different stages of development and regards teachers as supporters of children's learning. On the other hand, some scholars (Hua, 2009; Kapur, 2007; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; Perkins, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 2003; Tanner & Tanner, 2007) provide more open descriptions of curriculum. These researchers highlight a connection between what students learn and how they experience learning to make knowledge meaningful when dealing with their personal lives and realities.

Depending on how prescribed or open a curriculum is, researchers categorise curricula into various models. A traditional way of classifying curricula is to distinguish the following curricular aims: transmission, transaction, and transformation. This distinction is based on how knowledge is taught within different curricular orientations (Jungck & Marshall, 1992; McFadyen Christensen & Aldridge, 2013). A transmission-oriented curriculum focuses on providing young children with knowledge and skills to support their subsequent years of schooling with "a carefully defined, prescribed" framework with "predetermined ends" (Jungck & Marshall, 1992, p. 94). The other two, transactional and transformational-oriented curricula,

both feature developmentally appropriate practice by emphasising the process of learning and the meaning of these experiences to real life (Jungck & Marshall, 1992; McFadyen Christensen & Aldridge, 2013). In other words, transactional curricula enable the meaning-making process to be constructed and reconstructed by children through the act of teaching-learning thereby providing children with meaningful experiences. Similar to transactional curricula, transformative curricula also include socially constructed knowledge. However, they are generally founded on governmental visions of making changes for a future society (Jungck & Marshall, 1992; McFadyen Christensen & Aldridge, 2013; McLachlan et al., 2010; McLaren, 2007).

Another approach to categorising curriculum particularly focuses on teachers' abilities and rights to contribute to curricular planning. For example, Bernstein (1996) suggested two models of curricula: performance curriculum and competence curriculum. The performance curriculum approach is similar to the transmission-oriented curriculum as it has behavioural objectives which provide teachers with detailed, prescriptive instructions to implement it as closely as possible to their context. In contrast, the competence curriculum is similar to the transactional and transformational curricula because this type of curriculum is more open and requires teachers to spend more time developing their own teaching activities. It also allows teachers to work as a curriculum designer and make changes to clearly target outcomes.

Educational curricula can also be categorised using a cultural historical approach. For example, Van Oers (2008) classifies educational curricula based on the valued concepts within a social community that underpin the approach to curricula

design. He suggested that due to a variety of perceptions of valued concepts a curriculum can be designed using either *a pre-primary approach*, in which *learning to perform* and *learning to make meaning* are overtly dominant, or *a social pedagogy approach*, in which *learning to participate* and *learning to be* are pivotal. These approaches were adopted in this study in order to examine the implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam.

Another scholar, Schiro (2008), pointed out a way to classify curricula based on four distinct curriculum ideologies. The four ideologies are the Scholar Academic ideology; the Social Efficiency ideology; the Learner-centred ideology; and the Social Reconstruction ideology. Schiro (2008) argues that each of these ideologies holds specific perspectives about what a child is, how the child is learning, the role of the teacher in relation to the child, and the teaching profession and how it characterises the corresponding curriculum. These ideologies are listed as in Table 1.

Table 1. *Curriculum Types and Valued Curriculum Concepts Categorised by Schiro (2008)*

Curriculum Types	Characteristics
Scholar Academic	focuses on disciplines to build specific academic skills and knowledge for learners
Social Efficiency	aims to produce a range of social workers to satisfy the society's requirements
Learner-centred	focuses more on children's hands-on experiences and their individual needs rather than those of teachers, administrators, programme-subjects or community groups
Social Reconstruction	recognises society's status, fixing the errors or the weakness of the current society to create a better future.

It is essential to mention here that while the two former curricula put learners in a passive position during the educational process, the latter styles give more attention to the children as learners by recognising their competence and how they actively make sense of the world. In other words, the Scholar Academic and the Social Efficiency types are congruent with the transmission-oriented curriculum as well as the performance curriculum and the pre-primary curriculum discussed previously. The Learner-centred type is similar to the transactional-oriented curriculum while the Social Reconstruction type is related closely to the transformational-oriented curriculum as well as the competence curriculum and the social pedagogical curriculum.

In short, the literature review of how curricula are defined and categorised shows an overlap and congruence among the range of views of curricula. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. *The Overlap of Curriculum Models*

Curriculum Types (Jungck & Marshall, 1992)	Characteristics	Correspondent Curriculum Models/Ideologies/ Approaches
Transmission-oriented Curriculum	Learning to perform Framework is carefully defined with detailed, prescriptive instructions to implement Predetermined ends are included Using a pre-primary approach focusing on disciplines to build specific academic skills and knowledge for learners	Performance curriculum (Bernstein, 1996) Pre-primary curriculum approach (Van Oers, 2008) Scholar Academic ideology and Social Efficiency ideology (Schiro, 2008)
Transactional-oriented curriculum	Learning is meaning making process in which knowledge is socially constructed and reconstructed; focusing more on children's hands-on experiences and their individual needs Teachers are considered as a curriculum designer and make changes to curriculum where necessary	Competence curriculum (Bernstein, 1996) Pre-primary curriculum approach (Van Oers, 2008) Learner-centred ideology (Schiro, 2008)
Transformational-oriented curriculum	Knowledge is socially constructed Teachers are considered as a curriculum designer and make changes to curriculum where necessary Visions of making changes for a future society are included Learning to participate and learning to be	Competence curriculum (Bernstein, 1996) Social pedagogy curriculum approach (Van Oers, 2008) Social Reconstruction ideology (Schiro, 2008)

Despite the difference in defining and categorising curricula, McLachlan et al. (2010) point out that in general a curriculum is usually written in texts. Scott (2008) identifies four components of a curriculum: aims, goals, objectives and outcomes statements; content domains and subject matters; methodological procedures; and

matters of evaluation and assessment. Scott (2008) further commented that these components, however, might be found implicitly or explicitly in any curricula.

According to McLachlan et al. (2010), in response to the globalisation era, more recent research has shown curricular advocates' preference for the social pedagogical approach to curricular design with a focus on the learners' individual learning process to become good citizens of their society. Nonetheless, the complexity of curricula theories and philosophies creates difficulty in classifying curricula. They argued that no model of a curriculum is perfect, which results in eclectic models of curricula. In the next section, theories and philosophies influencing the design of an early childhood curriculum are discussed.

3.2. The Influences of Theories of Learning and Development on Early Childhood Curriculum Design

Curricular philosophy involves explicit and implicit theoretical assumptions, which guide teachers' understanding and implementation of a curriculum. These theoretical assumptions are reflected in how teachers view children as well as their learning and development (Hedges & Keesing-Styles, 2007). This section outlines well-known theories of learning and development that have strongly influenced early childhood curricula worldwide, including Vietnam.

My review of literature on theories of learning and development shows that there have been profound influences of developmental theories within education internationally. Overall, conceptions of children's learning and development have advanced different explanations of how children learn and develop to become adults. Fler (2013), however, pointed out that developmental theories feature age divisions

as developmental milestones in the child's development and divide the child's development into particular domains, including physical, socio-emotional, language, cognitive and aesthetical development. Developmental theories also include the process of maturation as the drive of the child's development.

According to Harris (1957), the concept of development is "linked to the idea that certain relatively permanent changes occur over time in the organisation of living structures and life processes" (p. 3). Conceptions of development differ as they are based on particular basic doctrines including, for example vitalism, mechanism, and organism, and the five characteristics: temporality, cumulativity, directionality, the establishment of a new mode of organisation, and the increased capacity for self-control (Green, 1989, p. 13).

Green (1989) pointed out that there is a wide range of developmental theories, which are often classified into three groups: endogenous, exogenous, and constructivist theories. The first of these paradigms, endogenous theories, proposes that development is "the result of predominantly internal influences", the "unfolding of relatively fixed patterns and being relatively impervious to environmental pressures" (Green, 1989, p. 27). Theorists working within an endogenous paradigm such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Noam Chomsky, Arnold Gesell, and Carl Jung view developmental milestones and stages as maturationally predetermined. On the contrary, theorists working from an exogenous perspective locate the cause of development in the individual's external environment and view human innateness as possibilities rather than necessities. Examples of the exogenous perspective are Burrhus Frederic Skinner's theory of operant conditioning and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Green, 1989). Constructivist theorists (for example, Jean

Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Elliot Turiel) emphasise the holistic qualities of individual-environmental interactions. They view development as “natural products of progressive organisations and reorganisations that are constructed in the process of adapting to and interacting with the external world” (Green, 1989, p. 30).

Among the developmental theories that have been the most influential in education are behaviourist theories, cognitive-developmental constructivist theories, and social constructivist theories. These are discussed below.

3.2.1. Behaviourist theories

Behaviourism, also called the behaviourist approach, was the primary paradigm in Western psychology between 1920s and 1950s, and is based on a number of underlying assumptions regarding the mechanisms that shape and determine people’s behaviour. Key theorists within the behaviourist tradition are Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, John Broadus Watson, Edward Thorndike, Burrhus Frederic Skinner, Albert Bandura, and Clark Leonard Hull. Behaviourism is rooted in the idea that human behaviours are observable and measureable and thus should be studied in a scientific manner (Reber, 1985).

Behaviourists view learning as a change in external behaviour, as opposed to internal events like thinking, achieved through a large amount, and repetition, of desired actions using praise and encouragements as rewards for learners and as discouragement for eliminating bad behaviour. Therefore, behaviourists tend to focus on success and achievements (Williams, 1992). Nonetheless, rather than relying on adverse events such as the teacher’s displeasure; ridicule of classmates; low grades; poor showing in competition; talks from the principal; behaviourists seek to use

immediate, positive reinforcement to modify or strengthen desired behaviour (Feldman & McPhee, 2008). In classrooms, this view of learning results in a great deal of revision of classroom practices, praise for correct outcomes and immediate correction of mistakes.

Competition and cooperation are also largely used in the behavioural approach. Within the behaviourist view of learning, the teacher is viewed as the dominant person in the classroom who uses direct instructions, which are focused on systematic curriculum design and skilful implementation of a prescribed behavioural script to help children master specific learning objectives (Williams, 1992).

3.2.2. Cognitive-developmental constructivist theories

The theory of constructivism is rooted in cognitive psychology and has been evolving with a long and rich history. As an educational approach, constructivism has immensely influenced teaching practice in Europe and America for centuries (Follari, 2011). The central concepts of constructivism include that learning and knowing are viewed as constructed through the learners' active engagement in exploration with materials, inner processes of reasoning, and interaction with peers and teachers (Follari, 2011).

From a cognitive-developmental constructivist perspective, learning is viewed as a dynamic experience, which involves a personal adaptive process that challenges faulty schema, integrates new knowledge with existing knowledge, and allows for the creation of original work or innovative procedures (Gregory, 2002). As a result, learners are viewed as self-directed, with creative and naturalistic intelligences while the constructivist teacher's role, as a more experienced person, is to facilitate

children's internal process of knowledge construction by enabling learning queries and creating rich interactive environments for the learner to explore and acquire new structures of knowledge. Knowledge from a cognitive-developmental constructivist perspective is, therefore, known as heuristic knowledge, and hands-on experiences and collaborative, project-based learning, and task-based learning are typical in a constructivist classroom (Murphy, 1997). Exemplars of the cognitive-developmental constructivist perspective may be found in the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Maria Montessori.

Cognitive-developmental constructivists believe that knowledge acquisition is an active, dynamic cognitive process in which children build, rebuild, discard, and change their ideas rather than just cumulatively collect experiences. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a representative for cognitive-developmental constructivism. He believed that the process of knowledge construction occurs when the child encounters new information that creates cognitive conflicts within the child. With his/her innate desire to explore and manipulate the world, the child organises, operates the established experiences, and adapts to the environment by the internal capacities, particularly through the two-way processes of assimilation and accommodation (Halford, 1982). Therefore, from this perspective children are viewed as actively engaging in learning activities, and that the senses are important during their processes of knowledge construction. This process occurs over time and builds up the child's understandings about the world as he/she grows older resulting in larger-scale changes referred to as stages of development (Parke & Gauvain, 2009).

As mentioned previously, the theories of constructivism have continued to evolve as the field of education moves towards a globalised perspective in which

cultures are viewed as unique and individual differences are highlighted. In interpreting children's cognitive development, some developmental theorists (for example, Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) regarded children's cognitive development as an internal process within individuals, as they pass through pre-determined stages and their interaction with the external environment. In contrast, some others (Burman, 2008; Giddens & Sutton, 2009) view the nature of children's knowledge as a social construction. The next section presents about social constructivist theories.

3.2.3. Social constructivist theories

Social constructivism involves explaining a child's development using ideas from socio-cultural theories (Wertsch, 1995), also known as cultural-historical theories (Vygotsky, 1987) or sociocultural-historical theories (Hedegaard, 2012). These theories view the social-cultural environment as a key source for children's development as they participate in societal situations. Within such situations, the child, as a member of the society, is a uniquely distinctive individual trying to adapt to the various conceptions of a "good life" (Hedegaard, 2012, p. 200) as well as contributing to its reconstruction. For social constructivists, social linguistic interaction with peers is basic and crucial to the learner's knowledge construction. Therefore, knowledge is viewed as socially co-constructed rather than just being constructed through the learner's manipulation of materials in the world (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Parke & Gauvan, 2009; Vygotsky, 1998). For this reason, socio-cultural theories are regarded as co-constructivist theories (Parke & Gauvan, 2009).

When applying this theory in classroom contexts, Vygotsky (1978) also defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where he believed that the children's development could occur as the teachers engaged them in discussions and

activities a step ahead of their current developmental level. Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) defined the ZPD as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.
(p. 86)

Hence, Vygotsky emphasised the role of both adults and peers as crucial to the child's learning and development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The teacher, as a peer with more expertise, works in the ZPD to help children scaffold knowledge through literally guiding them to solve challenging, designed activities that are neither too easy nor too hard (Berk & Winsler, 1995). In addition, regarding the stage-based view of change embedded in developmental psychology, Vygotsky (1998) noted that children's actual level of development is not dependent on their age, but on "reliable traits or functions that can be used to identify the phase and stage of each age of the development process" (p. 199). More recently, another scholar, Hedegaard (2012), suggested that:

One has to formulate ideals of child development that interweave biological lines as well as cultural historical lines of development, so that care-givers and educators can formulate ideals of cultural development that are specific for a cultural tradition, highlighting the ideals for children's development and also highlighting that there are several ideal pathways for the development of each child. (p. 198)

Follari (2011) distinguished two main branches of constructivism that view the construction of knowledge from different perspectives: cognitive-developmental constructivism and social constructivism. While cognitive-developmental constructivism seeks to explain how learners shape their world, social constructivism

seeks to explain how the world shapes the learners (Davis & Sumara, 2002). Follari (2011) summarised the key distinctions of the two branches of constructivism in

Table 3:

Table 3. *Key Distinctions between Cognitive-developmental and Socio-cultural Theories*

Branches of Constructivism	Cognitive-developmental Theories	Socio-cultural Theories
Primary advocate	Jean Piaget	Lev Semenovich Vygotsky
Learner's role	Learners' explorations and actions shape their knowledge of the world	Interactions with their world and the people in it shape learners' knowledge
Teacher's role	Teachers as learners' peers unwittingly provoke cognitive conflict (passive role)	Teacher as more expert partner purposefully guides the exploration of ideas (active role)
View of knowledge construction	Knowledge is individually constructed, shaped by processing new experiences	Knowledge is co-constructed, shaped by interaction with people, and influenced by culture and environment
Relationship of learning and development	Development leads learning	Learning leads development
Relationship between language and thought	Language-knowledge construction not emphasised	Language promoted as strongly influencing thought

Note. Follari (2011, p. 57)

Vygotsky's social-cultural ideas were further developed by his Russian followers, known as 'neo-Vygotskian' (for example, Elkonin, 1972; Leontiev, 1964; 1978; Zaporozhets, 1997). My review also shows that there is a developing amount of research from Western countries since 1960s/70s interested in considering

Vygotsky's cultural-historical ideas about children's learning and development (for example, Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez, 1995). These Western emergent social constructivist theories question former views of child development which emphasise the primacy of individual processes rather than the importance of social processes (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Holzman, 1995; Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez, 1995).

The literature shows that the discourse of how children learn and develop has been continuously revised beyond traditional developmental theories. Each of the behaviourist, cognitive-developmental constructivist, and social constructivist theories presented above seems to have its own strengths and weaknesses. In terms of shortcomings of the behaviourist and cognitive-developmental constructivist theories, Karpov (2005) argues that these theories have not seen the qualitative difference between the development of human and animals, and thus fail to take into consideration the role of the socio-cultural environment in explaining the mechanisms of child development. In fact, several attempts have been found to consider the development of a child with fuller consideration of aspects of human functioning (for example, Kohlberg, 1984; Clayton & Birren, 1980). Still, these studies have not resulted in significant explanations for a child's development because interrelationships between aspects of the child's development have often not been clarified (Karpov, 2005).

As for social constructivist theories, critiques mainly focus on pointing out that heredity contributes to determining human development (Karpov, 2005) but most social constructivist theorists are silent on this. In other words, the role of genotype in human development has not been taken into account. This critique is mainly found in

contemporary Western views. In fact, empirical studies from Western countries have supported the significance of heredity in human development. The studies (Loehlin, Willerman, & Horn, 1988; Plomin, DeFries, & Foker, 1988; Scarr, 1992) about the role of gene in relation to human intelligence are an illustration. These studies showed that there appeared to be a positive correlation in developmental trajectories between genetically related individuals. Other studies (Cattell, 1980; Haywood, 1989; Haywood, Tzuriel, & Vaught, 1992) also suggested that intelligences are pre-determined, almost unchangeable, and dependent on an individual's speed in processing information. However, as Karpov (2005) argues, these understandings of the Western scholars are inadequate to explain human development. He suggests that future insights must come from greater attention to "mediation as the major determinant of cognitive development and learning" (pp.238-239). This approach would still see genetic factors as significant contributors to individual differences in learning and development, but also allow space for environmental input. It can be said that, from a neo-Vygostkian's perspective, Karpov (2005) has pointed out that human learning and development should be interpreted in a holistic way, not just emphasizing one aspect of development or simply a sum of two or more aspects of development.

The discussion of the theoretical discourse about children's learning and development reveals that contemporary curricular discourse has questioned and critiqued these longstanding developmental theories, giving alternative perspectives on the education of young children. In Western education for young children, ideas rooted in critical theories have recently emerged questioning the normed conceptions of children's development (for example, Burman, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; MacNaughton, 2005). Along with a co-constructivist approach to designing

curriculum, contemporary researchers also draw on ideas from critical theories that have arisen from post-modernism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism (Livingston, 2004) and promote a reconceptualising approach to curriculum design. These critical theories are presented and discussed next.

3.2.4. Critical Theories: Emerging Alternative Perspectives

Critical theories stress the idea that teachers and curriculum developers need to take into account voices that have traditionally been marginalised within curriculum development discourses, and other hidden factors including power and gender as they crucially impact on the enactment of curricula. These concepts have challenged traditional thinking about curricula, which are based heavily on longstanding developmental theories, and call for professionals to rethink and facilitate curricula from a critical stance rather than accepting the norms.

Post-modern ideas came into being in the late twentieth century as opposed to modernism, which has been in existence since the seventeenth century in Western Europe (Albon, 2012). During the period of modernism, concurrent with the Age of Enlightenment, a time of significant scientific and technological advancements, it was believed that the world was knowable and that the task of humanity was to use the right tools in order to find out the truth about how the world functions. Thus modernism was linked to the belief in “truths” and the desire of searching for certainty, order, rationality, standardisation, and universality (Dahlberg et al., 1999). In analysing modernism, post-modernists tend to critically appraise attitudes of the contemporary world and argue that modernism prevents diversity, subjectivity, uncertainty, and complexity (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Giroux, 2006). From a postmodern perspective, knowledge is not absolute but socially constructed and

“always context-specific and value-laden” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 23). Within education, post-modernists advocate liberal ideas for education and emphasise “non-judgemental multiculturalism” (Winch & Gingell, 1999, p. 175). Theorising from a post-modern perspective, a curriculum is not only about “established canons of knowledge” (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 332) but it also “includes issues of power, history, personal and group identities, cultural politics and social criticism leading to collective action” (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 330).

Post-modernism is synonymous with post-structuralism and thus also takes the post-structuralist position that children’s understandings about the world cannot be understood in universalistic terms; rather they are culturally constructed and may vary between individuals due to the places, time, gender, and class in which they belong (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; MacNaughton, 2003). These views are also shared by post-colonial writers (Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Madaus & Clarke, 2001) who oppose the notion of hierarchical categories, which distinguish between those who are superior or inferior. In addition, they maintain that diverse knowledge is central to people’s lived experiences and nothing is either completely right or wrong. Decolonisation, however, is a complicated process, which has emerged as a theme for reconceptualising curricula (Ritchie & Rau, 2006). According to Cannella and Viruru (2004), children who are labelled savage, incomplete, and incompetent should be given the right to be themselves. These scholars oppose the notion that adults can give themselves the authority to judge children, create discourses and intervene in their world. Furthermore, they argue that in educational settings, post-colonial perspectives result in an awareness of the oblique and indirect ways in which power is used to control and colonise groups of children, for example through standardised testing (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Madaus & Clarke, 2001).

Post-modern, post-colonial and post-structural theories intersect to transform and shift both individual and social perceptions of curricula (James et al., 1998; MacNaughton, 2003), and they closely relate to each other (Albon, 2012). Moreover, they generally claim there is no absolute model for a curriculum to follow. Some critical theorists (Apple, 1982; Bloch, 1992; Weis, 1987) considered curricula to be influenced so strongly by their political context that they could never be objective. As a result, they try to explicate the relationship between knowledge and power (Apple, 1982; Weis, 1987); politics and culture; ideology and economy; and they see these relationships as also related to race, class and gender discrimination in education and society (Bloch, 1992). Furthermore, Kessler (1992) suggested that curriculum architects should identify and understand the contextual variables to make the curriculum more specific and effective in its particular settings. Also, she claimed that curriculum workers should take into account the community's voice in order to make the curriculum suit the expectations of the whole community.

The literature review presented above shows a variety of theories and philosophies influencing early childhood curriculum design. Within early childhood education, many contemporary curricula employ a diversity of child development theories, creating eclectic models of curriculum (for example, the *Early Years Learning Framework* in Australia and *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand). Some recent insightful writing has merged sociocultural-historical theory and critical pedagogical approaches to curriculum (Anning, Cullen, & Fler, 2009; Fler, 2010; McLachlan et al., 2010; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Others expand the curriculum discussion to broaden cross-cultural dialogues which deploy new perspectives on the combination of Western and Eastern philosophies (Bai & Cohen, 2008; Eppert, 2008; Smith, 2008; Zhang, 2008). These reconceptualist ideas have challenged the ways of

understanding and implementing existing curricula in the early childhood education realm. They not only indicate a shift from the traditional developmentalist position to a more sociocultural-historical perspective, but also illustrate a cross-cultural trend in obtaining insights about curriculum theories and philosophies in the comprehensive globalising era.

Within the reconceptualisation of curriculum, the views of how a child is learning and developing to become a member of a society have also shifted. Some authors have argued that the concept of curriculum for young children has changed in response to new conceptions of children, childhood and children's learning and the role of this educational sector in society (MacNaughton, 2003; Smith & Lovat, 2003). In the following section, the image of the child in curriculum discourse is discussed.

3.3. The Image of the Child

As mentioned earlier, all educational systems implicitly or otherwise seek to create desired citizens. Each incorporates an image of the child which can be conceptualised in different ways (McLachlan et al., 2010). The term *image of the child* is used largely by educators (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Scheinfeld, Haigh, & Scheinfeld, 2008). It refers to a person or a group of people's beliefs about children's capabilities, development, motivations, purpose, and agency, and assumptions of how a child learns and develops in education as well as a member in society. According to Martalock (2012), people develop an image of the child based on their social, cultural, and historical experiences and they may not be consciously aware of the beliefs of the image of the child they hold. Within early childhood education, the image of the child is illustrated by teachers' views of

children and children's learning and affect how they interpret and implement a curriculum (McLachlan et al., 2010).

In prescriptive curriculum models, the child is often viewed as a passive learner because the nature of this type of curriculum positions the teachers as the knowledge transmitters who actively drive the child's learning and development. This is a traditional way of thinking about children's learning. Contrary to the concepts of the image of the child in traditional curriculum models, there is growing research on reconceptualising the role of children, including listening to their voices in making curricular decisions. For instance, Fleet and Robertson (2004), who are interested in the Reggio Emilia approach, described children as "theory-builders and problem-solvers" (p. 1). To enable these attributes, they insisted on creating an interactive exterior environment for children to explore and encouraged them to become significant thinkers who reflect and successfully deal with any problems they encounter. Others have described children not only as "active learners" (McLachlan et al., 2010, p. 19), and "tomorrow's taxpayers" or "future contributors" (Nuttall, 2005, p. 7), but interestingly as "meaning-makers" of the world with the ability to reconstruct a better world in the future (Schiro, 2008, p. 158) or "are prepared to change society for the better" (McLachlan et al., 2010, p. 20). The image of the child has shifted from passive learners to "potential contributing members of society" (McLachlan et al., 2010, p.19).

The reconceptualist perceptions about children have raised queries about the purpose of education and school. In agreement, Kapur (2007) acknowledges that the purpose of education and school has changed and there is a need to catch up with new contexts to meet the future demands of society. He stated:

Schools as we know them were designed more than a century ago. In those times, schools were almost the last place for change, and in fact changed only after the change was established in the society outside [...]. Educationists also need to look ahead. They should attempt to build “cybernetic” systems incorporating the latest advances in technology, concepts and ideas to build institutions/processes that not only meet the needs of the world as it is now, but also anticipate the future. (Kapur, 2007, p. 1)

With this change in perception of the purpose of education and school, curricula appear to be a crucial tool in achieving educational aims. In Vietnam, the emerging views of a competent and agentic child are consistent with the Government’s aspirations for the transformational curriculum embedded in the *ECC* and appear to derive from social-cultural and critical views of children and their learning and development. This is found to link with the literature review of reconceptualising early childhood curricula, which is discussed in the next section as a way of contextualising the implementation of the *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* in Vietnam.

3.4. Reconceptualising Early Childhood Curricula

As discussed in the previous section, how children are viewed is consistent with particular ways of explaining their learning and development. In recent years, there have been emerging debates about early childhood education in terms of how children are viewed and what they should be learning. This has led to a reconceptualisation in early childhood education, which is defined as alternative ways of understanding and evaluating early childhood education (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Kessler & Swadener, 1992), and questioning the presupposed ideas that have long been embedded in curriculum theory (Miller, 1992). Recent research reveals a

reorientation to a socio-cultural approach which questions the longstanding, traditional theories of developmentalism dominant in young children's education. This can be understood as one of the highlights in the contemporary reconceptualist movement of early childhood education (Kessler & Swadener, 1992). Within a sociocultural-historical view, the educational process is seen as a cultural artefact that reflects its institutional, social, and historical contexts (Anning et al., 2009). From this viewpoint, a curriculum cannot be understood without looking at the process of its development (Anning et al., 2009; Berk & Winsler, 1995; May, 1999; Vygotsky, 1986). Furthermore, this viewpoint highlights that understandings of curricula vary because educators themselves assume different interpretive positions influenced by their own practice background (Anning et al., 2009), and diverse educational philosophies, curriculum goals, plans and assessment processes (MacNaughton, 2003).

In line with these understandings, as Oberhuemer (2005b) has argued, the values, traditions and priorities of each cultural and societal background can have an effect and lead to different approaches when setting up an educational curriculum. Curricula should allow teachers to create their own pathways as long as they can achieve the specified goals in alignment with the norms and values accepted by the society (Oberhuemer, 2005b). Schiro (2008) commented that the vast range of curriculum types originated from the numerous curriculum ideologies. Other researchers (McLachlan et al., 2010; Niikko & Ugaste, 2011) have shared this view of curricula and suggested flexibility is needed when interpreting a curriculum outside of its context. This highlights that curricular designs are influenced by the values which a community considers important to be culturally developed.

Such context-based and cultural approaches in defining curricula present a way of understanding them. At a macro level, Scott (2008) emphasised that the term *curriculum* can be understood as a national programme within an institute or a school programme, and would have relevance in any geographical region. In a related frame, McLachlan et al. (2010) explain the presence of various models of curricula around the world saying that early childhood curriculum frameworks should reflect particular perspectives on childhood learning and development and aim to promote a community's valued learning and developmental outcomes. McLachlan et al. (2010) expounded further on this theme indicating that a curriculum should include broader goals and values focusing on particular aspects to make them more flexible, but it should also be associated with children's learning. Similarly, others have suggested that issues including curriculum goals, methods, content, and the collaboration of children, teachers, parents, and community should be considered when making decisions about educational content, evaluation and assessment (Smith & Lovat, 2003).

As already noted, curriculum ideologies vary greatly with several of the more recently developed ones highlighting the inclusion of cultural and community input. These differ according to the aspirations countries have for their future generations and are explicit in some countries and implicit in others. The following examples of national curriculum frameworks illustrate this variety of curriculum.

In Norway the early childhood curriculum is defined as a framework plan which includes aims, methods and main subject areas for the teachers' work in early childhood education, whereas the Swedish early childhood curriculum, *Curriculum for the Preschool*, is a set of guidelines targeting the educational goals without

mentioning methods (Alvestad & Samuelsson, 1999). This curriculum focuses on what the early childhood environment should provide to support children's participation in the community (McLachlan et al., 2010). In New Zealand the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, sets out the goals and visions for teachers to aspire to by interweaving the principles and strands, and views the child as “competent and capable” (Alvestad & Duncan, 2006, p. 41). It also includes the role of family in the community (Ministry of Education, 1996). Furthermore, *Te Whāriki* “gives explicitly formulated goals and directions for teachers’ work with the children, but does not provide methods to use, nor content to choose” (Alvestad & Duncan, 2006, p. 33). In Singapore the early childhood curriculum, *Nurturing Early Learners* (Ministry of Education, 2003), is structured around six learning areas including: aesthetics and creative expressions, discovery of the world, language and literacy, motor skill development, numeracy, and social and emotional development. This is described as a framework for kindergartens “through which children acquire knowledge, skills, and learning dispositions” (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 12). The Scottish curriculum framework for children aged 3 to 5 reflects key aspects of children’s development and learning which are based on domains of development (The Scottish Government, 2008).

Socio-cultural theories are also reflected in the latest version of the Developmentally Appropriate Practice approach (DAP)— an approach to teaching young children and curriculum design underpinned by developmentalism and featuring an age-based approach to teaching and a division of developmental domains including physical, language, cognitive, socio-emotional and aesthetical (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009a). Nevertheless, a literature review of this approach shows that supporters of the DAP approach (for example, Copple & Bredekamp, 2009a;

Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2007) still argue that children's development is regarded as globalised despite the differences in cultural values which affect children's position and power in their respective societies (Lee & Vagle, 2010).

Arguing against the ideas of the globalised child in the DAP, Cannella (1997) posits that young children should be considered as scientists and be supported to explore, to make progress and to develop towards adulthood. She claims the ways of teaching children can be various, and states that although the belief that children learn by doing is sacrosanct, it cannot be applied to all children in every culture, as learning through observation of others is common place in some cultures. Therefore, she argues all curricula should be sufficiently flexible to respond to individual differences in daily practice and empower children to choose what they would like to learn. Additionally, the question of what is appropriate development, and who determines this has been a prevailing theme for these scholars (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Kostelnik et al., 2007).

My review of studies by Vietnamese scholars (Do, 2005; Hoang, 2003; 2009; Le, 2009; T. H. Nguyen, 2009) reveals that the *ECC* is seen to still employ traditional approaches in early childhood education, which favour formal and didactic teaching. Books written by these scholars offer early childhood student teachers ideas on how to facilitate formal teaching sessions, following rigid pre-determined steps, as ways to effectively promote children's prescribed disciplinary skills and knowledge. Within the implementation, teachers seem to be conflicted between applying the traditional and the new strategies. Age-based teaching and standardised testing are viewed by teachers and curriculum workers as the most important parts of the educational procedure. In addition, subject-based learning outcomes on academic disciplines are

usually the teachers' focus in their teaching rather than children's interests (Dinh, 2006a; 2006b). This indicates a strong influence of the longstanding developmental theories still existing alongside the emergent reconceptualising ideas, which involve theories of co-constructivism and critical pedagogy within the implementation of the *ECC*.

Currently, research in Vietnam shows it is time the traditional developmentalist approach is re-examined to determine its appropriateness for children's learning in the new context of Vietnamese educational reforms and the implementation of the *ECC* (Dinh, 2006a; Tran, 2004; T. T. Nguyen, 2009). Although a number of research projects have investigated the teaching of children in Vietnam, most focus on applying innovative techniques to enhance the quality of teaching on each discrete subject (Anh & Nguyet, 2009; Hue, Diem, & Hoa, 2009; Minh & Hoa, 2009; Tuan & Dung, 2009). Other researchers have examined teachers' professionalism (T. T. Nguyen, 2009), or focused on evaluating the curriculum in practice (Tran, 2004). These scholars revealed concerns and raised questions about how best to promote children's individual interests by listening to their voices and thinking, and encouraging them to participate competently in self-evaluation (Dinh, 2006a). Little research has been carried out to explore the influence of understandings of the *ECC* and its implementation process (see for example, Tran, 2004). Therefore, there are few insights into the philosophy and theories underpinning the *ECC* and its significance in education for young children in Vietnam in this new era of globalisation, leaving a gap of knowledge in this area within Vietnamese and overseas. In particular, contemporary Vietnamese researchers are engaged in the theme of curriculum innovation and most of the emerging ideas reflect the influence of socio-cultural and critical theories linked to post-modernism, post-

colonialism, and post-structuralism. However, they do not acknowledge the impact of these reconceptualising theories. To date, there has not been any investigation that has critically reflected on the implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam.

3.5. Implementation of Early Childhood Curricula

When implementing a curriculum into a particular context, cultural background affects how the curriculum is brought into practice. Additionally, the nature of professionalism, the transitioning into Year One, and parental collaboration are issues involved in deciding the quality of the implementation of an early childhood curriculum. These will be reviewed in the following sub-sections.

3.5.1. Cultural Effects on the Implementation of Early Childhood Curricula

Understanding the nature of a curriculum, discussed previously in this chapter, is critical when considering how to implement one. As not all teachers are prepared to accept curriculum reforms, implementing a new curriculum is unlikely to be a straightforward process. This was recently highlighted in a doctoral research project in a South African school in which teachers' responses to curriculum change were described as "reluctant compliance" (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011, p. 156). Clasquin-Johnson (2011) found that there were both external and internal factors which influenced the teachers' responses to curriculum change. Specifically, the external factors included professional development, resources, and support whereas the internal factors involved teachers' beliefs, motivations and job satisfaction (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011). Therefore, addressing teachers' concerns should be a priority when implementing a new curriculum.

Moreover, as Alvestad and Duncan (2006) put it, when a new curriculum is promulgated nationwide, this does not mean that it alone will bring about necessary changes in practice; rather the implementation process is affected by factors such as those discussed above and also teachers' "autonomy over the programme" or "de-professionalism", which are teachers' fears of professional assessments (p. 34). These factors affect teachers' ability to facilitate the curriculum. For example, Nuttal (2005) argued that the open instructions in *Te Whāriki* have challenged early childhood teachers' thinking about curriculum, thus it is constantly emerging and being negotiated in early childhood centres as a response to children's interests and development. As such, curriculum implementation can also depict how teachers interpret the curriculum they are working with. While teachers' interpretations of curriculum can be seen through their daily work at the centres, they also lie in the different documents teachers use to guide their work with young children (McLachlan et al., 2010).

3.5.2. Professionalism in Early Childhood Education

Professionalism in early childhood provision has been a debated issue as the early childhood education sector has played a stronger role in the policy agendas of many countries worldwide (Cable, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005a). According to Oberhuemer (2005a), Osgood (2006) and Cable (2008), *being professional* is defined as having not only a fundamental body of professional knowledge but also skills and competencies, dispositions, values, the "tools" of a profession and notions of professional expertise. These authors also noted that in developing a professional workforce for the early childhood education sector, research on professionalism has identified a variety of dimensions of this concept including notions of professional

quality and standards, expertise, critical reflection, professional identity and social status. As Devereux and Cable (2008) and Cox (1996) put it, the role of teachers as autonomous professionals would raise the status of the early childhood education sector and the practice within it. In contrast, Osgood (2006) claimed that regulatory frameworks can make teachers conform to dominant constructions of professionalism and threaten their professional autonomy and sense of empowerment as active agents of change. As a result, according to Cable and Miller (2008), regulatory frameworks that aim to establish standards and provide guidance, and registration and inspection regimes, should be developed alongside initiatives to enhance early childhood teachers' understandings of the political and ideological processes, thus enabling them to question and provide critical reflection. Devereux and Cable (2008) advocated for the recognition of professional identity and social status for early childhood teachers as individuals, as well as for the collective workforce. However, they recognised that this depends a great deal on how the society views young children as well as how society views the work of early childhood education.

Taking a different perspective to defining early childhood professionalism, Dalli (2008) suggested it was time to rethink traditional understandings of professionalism in early years as involving a focus on training and qualifications, and, instead, redefining it so that it reflects the reality of early childhood teachers' work. Having analysed teachers' questionnaire responses to questions about the meaning of being professional, Dalli (2008) suggested that early childhood teachers see professionalism as involving particular pedagogical strategies and style, holding professional knowledge and practice, and collaborative relationships between teachers, with teachers, and with other professionals.

In this research, professionalism is defined as a quality that relies on the improvement of early childhood teacher training and qualifications, and on acknowledging the role of this sector as being as important as other educational sectors. This perspective of professionalism is examined in line with the Government's agenda of professionalising the early childhood workforce in Vietnam (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 1990; 2001).

3.5.3. Transitions in Early Years

The issue of transitions in the early years is described as a process of relationship formation (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007) and as involving the links between the micro-systems of home, early childhood setting, and school (Brooker, 2012). Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1979) has claimed that transitions involve not only a change of location and environment but also a change of role and identity. In order to facilitate these changes research has focussed on the importance of friendships among children as a way of supporting their transitions (Brooker, 2012; Corsaro, Molinary, Hadley, & Sugioka, 2003). In this sense, transitions are linked to considerations for children's well-being to help them acclimatise quickly as they enter a new environment. Brooker (2012) also added that adults should step back to watch, listen, and respond to children's preferences, rather than interpreting and interfering with their learning; and that this pedagogy helps young children develop independently as individuals with rights and desires of their own.

The term *transition to school* is sometimes understood as closely related to *school readiness* and the necessary preparations for a child when he or she reaches primary school age. In terms of preparing children for transition into primary school, some scholars have asserted that formal schooling is not yet suitable for young

children under five years of age (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011) and that school readiness should be a continuing long-term goal (Kapur, 2007; Koop, 2011). However, some scholars have posited the contrary view; that a curriculum should include an adequately academic learning experience for young children and make solid connections to school curriculum. For example, Blaiklock (2010), Hedges and Cullen (2005) and Stephenson (2009), when considering the effectiveness of New Zealand's national curriculum document *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) claim that because of the open nature of the framework it has given insufficient consideration to the amount of academic knowledge and skills needed to prepare children for formal schooling. Stephenson (2009) suggested helping teachers increase their subject knowledge and to include adequate "future-oriented content" in the document guidelines to effect social change effectively (p. 14). Blaiklock (2010) argued that academic goals should not be the main focus in young children's education and the curriculum should be concerned with an appropriate approach to evaluate children's learning and development, and also concerned about the "push-down" influences from the school curriculum requirements (pp. 207-210). Another scholar, Elliot (2006), concerned about preparing children for transition to school, has suggested that early childhood centres should integrate both care and early childhood education dimensions. She wrote:

Schools do want children to have rich preschool experiences and are well aware of the positive impact of preschool and kindergarten programs. But despite this knowledge, they are remarkably silent in the debate about early childhood provision. There is almost no collaboration between schools and the early childhood sector on policy or program development. Frequently, there is not even a transition to school program (p. 57)

These arguments highlight the issue of how much is enough for educating young children with academic knowledge and skills, and how to prepare them for formal schooling at the next level of education. This involves parents' understandings of the curriculum and their contribution during the implementation of a curriculum. The next section discusses how parental collaboration influences the implementation of a curriculum.

3.5.4. Parental Collaboration

As mentioned earlier, discussions of the educational values underpinning a curriculum inevitably reflect the aspirations that a community pursues. However, research shows that teachers' and parents' aspirations for young children are not always congruent and influence parent-teacher co-operation in the curriculum implementation process (Dockett, Perry, Howard, & Meeley, 1999; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Perry, Dockett, & Tracey, 1998; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). An outcome of this incongruence is that teachers may end up being driven by parents' expectations to reluctantly drill children in reading and calculating skills (Peters, 2000; Talts, 2003).

A number of researchers have recognised the indispensable role of the families' contributions to young children's education, including parents' aspirations in curriculum decisions (Enarsdottir, 2011; Irvine, 2005; Koop, 2011; Veisson & Suur, 2011). Nevertheless, few researchers have explored the issue of parents' knowledge of school preparation. Within the limited research on this topic, findings suggest that many parents consider school preparation for their children to be the responsibility of the early childhood institutions (Koop, 2011). Other academics state that parents are not well-informed about the valued educational concepts underpinning an early childhood curriculum (Nuttall, 2005) and highlight the issue of keeping a balance

between teachers' beliefs about appropriate education and the external pressure for a more formal approach (Peters, 2002).

In summary, when implementing a curriculum factors such as culture background, professional training quality, and parental collaboration are crucial components that need considering in order to ensure the quality and success of the implementation. The implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam also involves these factors. In the next section, an introduction about the nature of the *ECC* and its implementation is interpreted.

3.6. The *ECC* in Vietnam

In Vietnam, curricula are defined in the Vietnamese Dictionary (Hoang, 2000) as scheduled plans of teaching and learning activities in particular educational contexts, and at times they are equated to mandatory educational content frameworks for specific disciplines, classes or grades. This indicates that curricula in Vietnam are traditionally regarded as a closed framework tightly controlled by the Government.

Within the new context of reconstructing the country after a long period of warfare and in response to globalisation, the reconceptualising movement of early childhood education in Vietnam has emerged. This movement sought to renovate the curricular approach with the aspiration of forming a new generation of new citizens. It involves a change in the view of the child's image. My review of research on the *ECC* and its implementation shows an alignment with the recent changes regarding the image of the child in curriculum discourses. As opposed to the previous curriculum *RECC* which viewed children as incompetent and passive learners (Le, 2003; Pham, Le & Tran, 2005), children are now seen as competent and agentic

learners and need to be equipped with life-skills for an advanced economy and society in the near future.

In this context, the *ECC* in Vietnam indicates a reconceptualisation of education for young children for the future of a modern, progressive Vietnam. It constitutes a significant departure from a prescribed, structured curriculum towards a more open and less formal one with a focus on learners' intrinsic motivations (Anh & Nguyet, 2009; Hue, Diem, & Hoa, 2009; Minh & Hoa, 2009; Tuan & Dung, 2009). In other words, it follows the learner-centred approach pattern (Pham et al, 2005). This curriculum employs the philosophy of integration thus seeing the child as a whole person in relation to the environment in which he/she lives (Le, 2006; Nguyen, 2005). Therefore, the *ECC* calls for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching. Influenced by Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, the *ECC* also reflects the philosophy of co-constructivism that emphasises the powerful impact of children's social context on their development and the role of teachers as observers and supporters of children's active learning (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2011; Veraksa & Oers, 2011).

As presented earlier in section 2.2.2, the *ECC* of Vietnam provides a signpost of the Government's aspirations to transform the younger generation into competent and agentic learners and desired citizens who potentially contribute to make changes for the country in the near future. This transformational orientation shows advancement in conceptions of the role of education and the younger generations of citizens. It not only recognises knowledge as socially constructed through children's interaction with the external environment but also highlights the purpose of education for young children as a way of making a better future for the country.

In order to promote the new image of the child, the *ECC* also empowers teachers to plan their own teaching under several basic learning themes such as: *Yourself, Family, The World of Animals, Natural World*, and so forth. It encourages teachers to create their own framework, based on guidelines, and to work responsively with children in their particular local context (Le et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, cultural elements which are deeply seated within Vietnamese society, including the tradition of collectivism and the hierarchy of social structures presented in section 2.5, potentially provide barriers for the implementation of such an innovative curriculum. In addition, the quality of professional training and parental collaboration are emerging issues that challenged the success of the implementation of the reconceptualising ideas within the curriculum. While recent research on a variety of the dimensions of the *ECC* and its implementation has been undertaken, these aspects have not yet to be examined. This has highlighted to me the need to conduct this study in order to investigate and enhance the effectiveness of implementing the *ECC* in Vietnam.

3.7. Conceptual Framework

This research has been informed by ideas from social reconstruction ideology (Giroux, 2006; McLaren, 2007; Schiro, 2008) and a social pedagogical approach to working with young children (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Wigfall, & Simon, 2006). As I reviewed literature about curriculum, I found that these ideas were consistent with the transformative aspirations for a future society in the current innovative educational context in Vietnam. They also aligned with my educational beliefs and understandings about early childhood curriculum design and

implementation as cultural artefacts that reflect the context in which they are constructed. In this way, the theoretical framework of this thesis was embedded in a view of the world as socially constructed. The following section elaborates these ideas and how they have informed this research. First, I discuss what is meant by “social reconstruction” and how it has been implemented in education. Second, the theory of social pedagogy as an approach to teaching young children is presented.

3.7.1. The Philosophy of Social Reconstructionism

Social reconstructionism is a philosophical perspective that, applied to education, arises out of the progressive movement that established itself in Western education in the first half of the twentieth century in the context of the Great Depression that preceded World War II. Theodore Brameld (1904-1987) was the American founder of social reconstructionism. He believed that humans should live and work together to create a better world with social justice and peace rather than submit to potential societal and global destruction as a consequence of oppression and war (Chambliss, 1988). This philosophy was influenced by progressive educators who argued for a reform of education. These include John Dewey (1859-1952) who was opposed to the standardised school and curriculum and believed in a democratic education (Popkewitz, 2005), and George Counts (1889-1974) who recognised that education was the means of preparing people for creating this new social order (Counts, 1932).

Social reconstructionists believe the purpose of school is to help students become active citizens in a democratic society. Essentially, they see current society as flawed and in need of intervention. It is both a philosophy as well as a pedagogy which assumes that the survival of the society is threatened by many problems (for

example poverty, population explosion, energy shortages, global warming, and so forth), and consequently requires something to be done to keep the society from destroying itself (Schiro, 2008). From that viewpoint, social reconstruction educators view the curriculum as a tool for social change and schools (including early childhood education services) as the cultural, political, and social agencies to foster that change. Schiro (2008) explains this by stating that schools have “the power to educate people to analyze and understand social problems, envision a world in which those problems do not exist, and act so as to bring that vision into existence” (p. 134). Dewey (1916) asserted that schools should work “to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own” (p. 79). In this manner, curriculum should be more humanist in nature. According to Dewey (1916), educators should shape their curriculum in such a way that its objectives are consistently striving for social reform.

Within contemporary Vietnam these social reconstructionist ideas have started to influence the reconceptualisation of curriculum in education. Social reconstruction educators call for the destruction of the standardised and prescribed, structured curriculum, which has become more of the focus of educational reform in Vietnam since the 2000s (Dinh, 2006b). Social reconstructionists discuss social reconstruction on different dimensions. For this study, some of the concepts from social reconstructionists’ perspectives that are relevant to the implementation of the *ECC* are discussed. These include the aim of education, the views of children’s learning, the teachers’ role, and knowledge. These are outlined below.

3.7.1.1. The aim of education

Social reconstructionists aim to eliminate undesirable values from their present culture and to replace these with more desirable ones in order to create a more “egalitarian and human [society] than the current one” (Schiro, 2008, p. 157). To achieve this aim requires that these aspirations be firmly embedded in the society’s educational system and in curriculum particularly. The overall orientation of social reconstructionists is to transform the status-quo and to bring about a society with “maximum possible social, cultural, economic, and political equality, satisfaction and justice” (Schiro, 2008, p. 157).

3.7.1.2. The child’s learning in society: A social agent, a meaning-maker

According to social reconstructionists children are social agents. This means that although children are by nature “uncompleted beings” (Freire, 1970, p. 72), “born helpless” (Counts, 1932, p. 13), “meaning-making organisms” (Schiro, 2008, p. 158), they are also members of society who will contribute a great deal to social reconstruction in the future (McLaren, 2007). Education plays an important role in guiding “the development of the child’s potentialities so that they can contribute to the functioning of the good society, which in turn gives value to the developed potentialities” (Schiro, 2008, p. 157). Schiro (2008) has illustrated the view of children as meaning-makers in Figure 2:

Figure 2. The child as a meaning maker (Schiro, 2008, p. 158).

The diagram shows that children's making meaning is impacted by both the subjective reality within themselves and the objective reality outside of themselves. However, meaning only resides within an individual's subjective reality when children are stimulated by the surrounding social environment. This process happens through their interaction with people in the community such as their parents, teachers and peers, and other experiences they encounter in that environment. This socio-cultural approach to viewing how children make meaning of the world links closely to George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on the development of self through the interaction between the actor and the objective world within the social realm (Miller, 1982). This theory also views the actor as having the ability to interpret the social world and both the actor and the world as dynamic processes and not static structures (Mead, 1982).

Within early childhood education, children make meaning of the world through interaction with particular socio-cultural contexts. From a sociological

perspective, Giroux (2006) also highlights that children belong to the community outside the school and the community in the school. Therefore, the nature of learning is a process in which aspects of society that function outside the school should be brought into school to educate children; and conversely, children should be given chances to experience what they have learnt at school. According to Giroux (2006), children's learning involves two significant components: meaning making and meaning structure. The first component implies that children are active agents in their learning to construct meaning in a way that makes sense to them. Meanwhile, the second component emphasises how meaning is structured in connection to what children already know. Based on this conception, Giroux (2006) suggested educators utilise the cultural resources that children bring to school such as their languages, histories, experiences, and voices in constructing curricula; and also integrate “what is taught in schools with the dynamics of everyday life” (p. 6). These ideas relate closely to the expectations as well as the directions of the Vietnamese Government in reforming the early childhood education and implementing the *ECC* as a co-constructivist and transformational curriculum in replacement of the previous one — the *RECC*.

3.7.1.3. The teacher's role

From a social reconstructionist's perspective, the key teaching aim is to reconstruct society in the way society wants it to be. Therefore, teaching intends to stimulate learners not only to reconstruct themselves as an active learner, but also to learn how to reconstruct society and become a potential contributor to make a better future for the society. By helping learners construct a set of meanings, meaning

structures, perceptive functions and interpretive functions, teachers help them develop strategies for how to deal with social problems (Schiro, 2008).

Instructional methods used widely by social reconstructionists include the discussion method and experience method. The discussion method is a group discussion, which requires social interaction in a social context. The discussion must bring forth potential thoughts about a good future society. The strength of this method lies in using language to share meanings of knowledge, which “can be reconstructed and examined during the discussion process” (Schiro, 2008, p. 163). The experience method involves placing students in a learning environment where they encounter social problems. This is crucial to help learners gain appropriate understandings of society and then envision a better society. This method also gives learners insights into “a set of values about what is socially just or unjust, good or bad, fair or unfair, right or wrong.” (Schiro, 2008, p. 166).

3.7.1.4. Knowledge

Within social reconstructionist ideology, knowledge is viewed as a social construction. In this respect, knowledge, or sometimes known as truth, “is socially constructed, culturally mediated, and historically situated” (McLaren, 2007, p. 210). This view is also consistent with the tenets of socio-cultural understandings about knowledge and its nature. According to Schiro (2008), knowledge is truth interconnected with values. In the case of social reconstructionism, the underpinning view of reality derives from the perspective of current social crisis and a good future society. The value of knowledge was seen through the vision of a good future. Whether society becomes good or bad, what is considered worthwhile or worthless knowledge is judged by the desired society in the future (Giroux, 2006; McLaren,

2007). Knowledge contributes to the attainment of a good future society and, to satisfy the vision for the desired society, knowledge emerges out of the cultural context. As a result, knowledge is of worth when it is not neutral and resides within the meanings people create for themselves. In other words, “there is no absolute knowledge that is true for all peoples under all circumstances in all cultures” (Schiro, 2008, p. 170).

The source of curriculum knowledge derives from the educators’ personal interpretation of the nature of their society. Such knowledge is chosen as “it acts to convert the child into a participant in the developers’ visions of the future good society” (Schiro, 2008, p. 170). The social reconstructionist view of the source of curriculum knowledge is portrayed in Figure 3:

Figure 3. The social reconstruction view of the source of curriculum knowledge (Schiro, 2008, p. 171).

In summary, the concepts of the aim of education, the child as a social agent and a meaning maker, the teacher’s role, and how knowledge is viewed from the social reconstruction ideology illuminates the Vietnamese Government’s aspirations

in implementing the *ECC*. These concepts are also in alignment with the concept of social pedagogy which is presented in the next section.

3.7.2. The Concept of Social Pedagogy

Social pedagogy is considered a science which is “based on open communication across theoretical perspectives” rather than a set of theories or methods (Hämäläinen, 2012, p. 95). It has become a profession concerned with the theory and practice of holistic education and care, which has emerged in many European cultures as an educational response to specific social problems (Hämäläinen, 2013). The term *pedagogy* originates from the Greek *pais* (child) and *agein* (to bring up, or lead), with the prefix *social* emphasising that upbringing is not only the responsibility of parents but a shared responsibility of society.

The philosophy of social pedagogy is rooted in the belief that you can decisively influence social circumstances through education (Hämäläinen, 2013). It reflects how a given society at a given time thinks about education and children’s upbringing, about the relationship between the individual and society, and about social welfare for its marginalised members (Cameron & Moss, 2011). Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) argued that “the function taken on by social pedagogy in asking critical questions as well as finding possible solutions within these areas is socially constructed, thus making it difficult to find one definition that would encapsulate social pedagogy in its complexity without trivialising it” (p. 177). In other words, as every culture encounters their own problems, solutions to social problems are highly context-dependent.

In Northern Europe, the worth of social pedagogy has translated into the profession of social pedagogues who work with individuals from early years through to adulthood and old age, and in such places as nurseries and kindergartens, schools, children and youth services, play settings, children's homes and youth clubs, adult services engaging with communities and disadvantaged adults such as ethnic minorities, homeless, unemployed, imprisoned persons, and in supporting older people at home or in care. Within each of these settings, social pedagogues base their work on principles drawn from theories and concepts from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, education, and philosophy to ensure a holistic perspective on their practice of social reconstruction (Cameron & Moss, 2011).

Cameron and Moss (2011) have argued that it is helpful to think of social pedagogy as a continuum. It lies within human nature that human beings have the innate ability to develop and learn. Therefore, social pedagogy is not what one does but rather how one approaches practice, with what attitude and aims. The only question to ask is to what extent a social professional is working social pedagogically (Cameron & Moss, 2011).

In line with the social reconstructionism as presented earlier, social pedagogy aims to achieve social justice, promote people's well-being and ease social problems. Within social pedagogy, holistic education is emphasised including education of the "head", the "heart", and the "hands" which symbolise cognitive knowledge, emotional and spiritual learning, and practical and physical skills (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). Such a holistic education enables children and young people as well as adults to empower their citizenship to take responsibility and make decisions for changes in their society (Hämäläinen, 2012). Within social reconstructionism,

common values and principles are highlighted to guide social pedagogues to work, explore and co-construct to make meaning of the “unknown” instead of relying on examined theories as the “known” (for example, developmental theories). In this respect, social pedagogy is based on humanistic values stressing human dignity, mutual respect, trust, unconditional appreciation, and equality (Cameron & Moss, 2011). Children, young people, and adults are all viewed as equal who are competent, resourceful, active agents (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). As a result, they are all important because they have rich potential to become helpful members of the society to tackle or prevent social problems and inequality and transform the society into an as-desired one in the future.

Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Wigfall, and Simon (2006) identify nine principles underpinning social pedagogy including:

- “- A focus on the child as a whole person, and support for the child’s overall development;
- The practitioner seeing herself/himself as a person, in relationship with the child or young person;
- Children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate hierarchical domains;
- As professionals, pedagogues are encouraged constantly to reflect on their practice and to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to the sometimes challenging demands with which they are confronted;
- Pedagogues are also practical, so their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children’s daily lives and activities;

- Children's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group;

- Pedagogy builds on an understanding of children's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislated requirements;

- There is an emphasis on team work and on valuing the contribution of others in "bringing up" children: other professionals, members of the local community and, especially, parents;

- The centrality of relationships and, allied to this, the importance of listening and communicating" (p. 42)

In alignment with the social reconstruction ideology, social pedagogy includes a set of emancipatory ideas about why and how an education system should be reconceptualised. Within the context of reforming the early childhood education in Vietnam, these ideas are important to consider given the Government's aspirations of a progressive education in an advanced society.

3.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a review of how curricula are defined and categorising in different ways. While some curricula are structured with prescribed teaching objectives, others are open leaving opportunities for teachers to create their own teaching programmes. A variety of curricular theories and philosophies that influence curricular design have been outlined in this chapter which has highlighted the impact of the longstanding developmental theories and the emergence of critical ideas as alternative perspectives regarding children's learning and development. In

addition, interpretations of the image of the child reflected in curricula, which emerged in recent years, have been discussed in parallel with the movement of reconceptualising aspirations for future generations. The literature review has shown that curricula interpretations have given rise to an interesting debate involving multi-site voices from professionals, teachers, children, and governments and communities with regard to what is valued for the future and how to achieve these aspirations. The debate has also exposed some other issues which directly affect the implementation of the *ECC* curriculum, such as cultural elements, professionalism, transitions, and the connection between early childhood centres and parents and communities. A gap in the research about the effects of these factors on the implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam has been identified.

At the end of this chapter, the social reconstruction ideology and social pedagogical approach have been introduced as a conceptual framework that influenced and reflected my viewpoints of education for young children in Vietnam. These emancipatory educational ideals illuminate my thinking of how the *ECC* should be developed as a transformational-oriented curriculum. They have given insight to this study in seeking a new autonomous path and freedom for Vietnamese early childhood teachers and children and to support them during the implementation of the *ECC* in order to bring about positive social changes for the future for Vietnam. In the next chapter, the methodology of conducting this study is presented.

Chapter 4

Methodology

As noted earlier, this study aimed to address the main research question: How are early childhood teachers experiencing the implementation of the *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*? In order to do this, four sub-questions were posed as follows:

- (i) What Government's aspirations in the *ECC* are teachers aware of?
- (ii) What educational concepts do teachers value during their teaching practices?
- (iii) What theories do teachers identify as underpinning the *ECC*?
- (iv) What are teachers' experiences about parental collaboration?

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology used for conducting this research including the mixed-method design, and the general sampling approach. A description of the data collection procedures using a questionnaire and a multiple-case study method in this research is outlined. I also discuss the steps taken to ensure validity of this study and ethical considerations.

4.1. Research Paradigm: A Mixed-method Approach

The aim of this study was to illuminate the implementation process of the *ECC* within the Vietnamese cultural context through conducting an in-depth investigation of early childhood teachers' experiences about the implementation of the *ECC* in its first three years. In order to achieve this, I adopted a mixed-method approach using a questionnaire followed by six case studies in three centres. While the survey methodology of using the questionnaire sought to establish a broad picture

of the phenomenon under investigation, the interviews with the case-study teachers, the observations and the review of documents developed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the teachers' lived experiences. In this way, this study assumed both an objectivist epistemology and a constructivist one. The mixed paradigm of this research specified allowed me to both gain an overall picture of how teachers perceived and experienced the implementation of the *ECC* as well as investigate meanings, which were constructed by the participants within their own particular social contexts (Flick, 2007).

As Morse and Niehaus (2009) put it, in a mixed-method research design the two components of a project, including quantitative and qualitative inquiries, are conducted separately but reciprocally. Each component complements the other and can help the researcher elicit another perspective and obtain data that the method in the complementary component cannot access (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in a version of the convergent parallel design to inter-relate different data types about the same topic by “comparing and contrasting quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings for corroboration and validation purposes” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 77). While this design typically involves that the researcher uses “concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.70), in my study practical considerations meant that the quantitative process happened first followed by the qualitative one. Nonetheless, both methods were equally prioritised, and the strands kept independent of each other during analyses with the results being mixed only at the stage of interpretation. Interpretations and conclusions were drawn after the data analysis of the two parts of the study had been completed separately. This QUAN-

QUAL triangulated mixed method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) thus brought the survey data together with the more in-depth data gathered in the case studies to provide both an extensive and intensive understanding of the *ECC* implementation. Figure 4 summarises the mixed-method design in the study. It shows how the procedures of the research are consistent with the main research question and four sub-questions.

Figure 4. The procedures of research. Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, pp.77-80).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) recommended that researchers using a mixed-method approach in their research need to decide how they will treat their qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, researchers should decide whether one type of data will be dominant over the other, or if they should consider them as equal. Secondly, researchers should decide how the different types of data relate to each other to produce the inferences. This study considered both quantitative and qualitative inquiries equally. Nonetheless, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), researchers position paradigms differently in mixed-method research. It is my belief that methods and paradigms were independent of one another. Therefore, in this research the stance of an “a-paradigmatic thesis” which emphasises the “meaningful answers to practical questions without making a paradigmatic or philosophical pledge of allegiance” (Patton, 2002, p. 145) was adopted. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to generate data, but the overarching paradigm remained qualitative. As a result, the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data was not used in a positivist paradigm, but instead was used to complement the data collected from the case studies. Therefore, the link between method and epistemology was not problematic. The following sections present the two phases of my research with detailed descriptions of the methods used.

4.1.1. Quantitative Inquiry: The Questionnaire

As mentioned previously, the quantitative portion of the study was to inquire into the overall landscape of teachers’ beliefs, understandings, and experiences about the *ECC* throughout the curriculum implementation process. Teachers were asked about their beliefs of educational concepts they valued while working day to day with children during the implementation of the *ECC*. These beliefs were examined

alongside the Government's aspirations for desirable future generations. The dominant knowledge traditions, which helped address the teachers' philosophy of teaching, were examined. Teachers' partnership with parents was also explored. All of these were investigated through a questionnaire hand-delivered to respondent teachers (see Appendix B).

Using a questionnaire was chosen as it was a simple and quick method appropriate for large sample numbers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). The content of this questionnaire was guided by the literature review and the conceptual framework which has been introduced earlier in the previous chapter (see section 3.7). It consisted of 58 questions, and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The questions were categorised into five main sections:

(i) Demographic Information: In this section, participant teachers were asked questions about their age, work position, experience, and highest qualification. Such information provided identification of the historical background and the context they were embedded in. These demographic questions provided a range of optional answers to allow participants to choose the one that suited them best.

(ii) Educational Values: This section presented some typical examples of curriculum concepts valued by teachers while they worked with the *ECC*. This section consisted of 16 five-point likert scale items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), designed to assess participants' beliefs about valued curriculum concepts. By indicating their different levels of agreement with these examples, respondent teachers revealed which educational concepts they valued most. In order to capture participants' beliefs, these items were organised in an illogical manner, including repetition of items where meaning was reversed from positive to negative.

(iii) Implementing the *ECC*: This section suggested ways that teachers might have been implementing the *ECC* in practice, for example, by making daily, weekly, and monthly educational plans or using certain methods of carrying out educational activities. Participant teachers' perceptions about theories of knowledge and thinking were revealed when they indicated levels of agreement with these suggestions. This section included two separate parts relating to: (a) how teachers planned; and (b) how they carried out a teaching session. The first part adopted a 3-point scale of frequency (1 = *never/rarely* to 3 = *always*) with seven questions to assess whether teachers planned their educational plans actively or passively. The second part included 17 five-point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) items, and two open-ended questions to allow participants to add comments on how they felt about the *ECC* in response to their beliefs and the Government aspirations for how they want children to learn.

(iv) Teachers' Awareness of the Government's aspirations: This section aimed to gather more information on participant teachers' awareness and practice in relation to Government aspirations for the future of its youngest generation. It gave the participant teachers some prompts about the Government's aspirations and asked them to write down anything else about these aspirations that they were aware of using an open-ended question. This inquiry also sought to identify similarities and/or differences between participant teachers' beliefs and the aspirations of the Government or the community about directions for children's learning and development. The dimensions included participant teachers' awareness of the aspirations and the influence of these on their teaching.

(v) Parental Collaborations: This section explored the participant teachers' perceptions of the role of family and social community in supporting them to implement the *ECC* in practice. It involved issues such as how often and in what ways parents got involved in teachers' work, and what teachers thought about the role of parents in contributing to their teaching. Optional questions and open-ended questions were used to elicit this information.

4.1.2. Qualitative Inquiry: The Multiple-case Study

While Phase One of the research provided a broad sense of teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices in relation to the *ECC* implementation, Phase Two was an in-depth investigation of specific teachers' experiences of the implementation, using case study methodology. Case study methods typically focus on societal and cultural issues, and on a programme or an organisation since they take on both the researchers' and participants' worldviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Data from the multiple-case study were collected and analysed based on a methodology of qualitative inquiry which ensures the following characteristics:

- Natural settings for data collection
- Direct source of data
- Researcher as the crucial instrument
- Thick description with images and words
- Data that is inductively analysed
- Capturing the participants' actual perspectives

According to Yin (2009), a multiple-case study design is common for researching educational innovations across several sites. Therefore, in this study I adopted a multiple-case study, in which six individual teachers were included as six cases, in order to address the four research sub-questions as well as the main research question. This type of case study design was appropriate for this research for the following three reasons:

(i) Firstly, the research aimed to investigate how early childhood teachers were experiencing the implementation of the *ECC*, rather than more general understandings of curriculum (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Therefore, the research was focussed and specific. Using a multiple-case study method allowed this research to obtain an in-depth exploration of the matter interested.

(ii) Secondly, the study focus was a contemporary and nationwide issue and multiple-case study as a method has the potential to illuminate the implementation of the *ECC* and how this study might contribute to improving the quality of the implementation.

(iii) Finally, as Merriam (2009) stated, using multiple methods of data collection is the major strength of case study research. Therefore, in this study each case chosen was processed in a triangulating fashion, which allowed the researcher to gain insights into real life events in a holistic and reliable way (Yin, 2009). The purpose of studying six cases within three separate sites in this study (described in detail below) was to provide an insight into the issues of curriculum implementation from the case-study teachers' perspective where different experiences, backgrounds and beliefs made the data collection rich and meaningful (Stake, 2006).

Sampling was considered as a crucial step to ensure the validity of this research. In the next section, the strategies that I used to select samples for this study are outlined.

4.2. Sampling Strategies

A primary interest of this study was to investigate the early childhood education teachers' perceptions and experiences about the implementation of the *ECC* in practice. My sampling strategies involved selecting research location, participating centres, and then participating teachers within each centre for both phases of the research.

In terms of research locations, Da Nang and Quang Ngai were the two cities chosen for this research using convenience sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) which focused on factors such as availability and accessibility within the teaching population of each city. Both cities are located in the middle of Vietnam and were chosen because Da Nang is the place where I have been working as an early childhood education university lecturer and Quang Ngai is my hometown. They are about 120 kilometres apart and share similar characteristics in terms of the natural and socio-cultural settings. Moreover, Da Nang is a main city while Quang Ngai is a regional city.

To ensure that the participants were well-positioned to answer my research questions, I used a *typical sampling strategy* which presents samples that are “judged to be typical or representative of that which is being studied” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 431). Therefore, sampling in this study was purposeful and limited to public centres which are licensed and are fully funded by the Government thus ensuring

quality in terms of both facilities and teaching programmes (see section 2.3 for more information about public centres). The sampling was also limited to teachers who had at least two years' experience teaching children using the *ECC*, and who held a three-year undergraduate degree. These specific criteria helped to capture typical-case participants (Mertens, 2005) to reflect on the implementation of the *ECC* in relation to the specific interests of this study. The sampling for each phase is described in more detail as below.

In Phase One of the study recipients of the questionnaire included 472 full-time teachers working in public centres in both cities (412 teachers from Hai Chau District in Da Nang and 60 teachers in Quang Ngai), and who were currently implementing the *ECC* in their daily work.

In Phase Two, I decided to narrow the selection of the case-study teachers to those who worked in the national-standardised qualified centres only as I wanted to choose well-informed teachers for the case studies. These national-standardised centres, as mentioned in section 2.3, characterised popular ones with parents in the locations, and were recognised as having good facilities and a high quality of education and care provided. There were five centres in one of the study regions Da Nang and two in the other study region Quang Ngai, which met this criterion. As a result, I ended up selecting two case-study centres in Da Nang and one in Quang Ngai. This strategy of selection gave me roughly proportional representations of centres from the two regions. Within each selected case-study centres, I purposefully chose two teachers from those who had filled out the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the case study to become my case-study teachers. Consequently, a total of six

participant teachers, and all the children in their classrooms, within three different case-study centres were participants in Phase Two of this study.

The processes of collecting quantitative and qualitative data of this research were conducted in two separate and consecutive phases. In the following sections, I present detailed descriptions of the procedure for each phase including piloting, setting up sampling, data gathering protocols, and preparing the different data sets for analysis.

4.3. Quantitative Data Collection Procedures

4.3.1. Piloting the Questionnaire

To ensure clarity and validity, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of Vietnamese teachers at a private early childhood centre in Quang Ngai city prior to being widely distributed to 472 selected participant teachers at public centres. The pilot respondents included 12 teachers in the private centre who had at least two years of experience teaching children using the *ECC* and held a three-year undergraduate degree. This pilot step was helpful in clarifying the questionnaire in relation to the teachers' knowledge and understanding. Their feedback indicated that all the questions had been clear.

4.3.2. Description of Sampling Procedure

Prior to conducting Phase One, the number of possible respondent teachers for the questionnaire was estimated to be approximately 700 in both Da Nang and Quang Ngai cities. In fact, this number was over 1,000 (personal communication, September 5th, 2011). Due to time constraints, I had to reduce the number of participant teachers

by choosing only Hai Chau District in Da Nang city instead of surveying all five districts of the city. Hai Chau District was selected because this district was the largest and the most central compared to the five others and thus there was a concentration of public centres, which made it easier for me to access. This district contained the highest number of public early childhood education centres in Da Nang city, 17 out of 27 public centres of the whole city. Amongst these centres were five national-standardised qualified centres, which was my target group of centres as I would be randomly selecting two of these public national-standardised centres to take part in Phase Two of this research. By doing this, I reduced the sample size to a potential 472 respondent teachers across cities to ensure the research was manageable, but still achieved a significant sample size for the quantitative data analysis procedure.

Participants in the questionnaire had to be qualified teachers with at least two years' experience teaching children using the *ECC*, and who held a three-year undergraduate degree. Eligible teachers were invited to participate in the study and those who complied with informed consent procedures were included in Phase One of the study. A total of 421 (89.2%) teachers returned completed questionnaire forms. This comprised 366 teachers from 17 centres in Da Nang, and 55 teachers from three centres in Quang Ngai.

4.3.3. Preliminary Meetings and Gaining Access

The procedure of Phase One was approved by the appropriate authorities and well-accepted by all parties. However, it was not a straight-forward process to approach the qualified participant teachers. As I knew that they were working within multi-level administrative systems, including the Board of the Centre and the Hai Chau District Education and Training Office (Hai Chau DETO), I firstly approached

the Hai Chau DETO to request their official approval for approaching these centres (see Appendix A-1). A letter was then sent by the Hai Chau DETO as an official announcement to the public centres in Hai Chau district to introduce me and my research. This meant that I was able to access the public centres, introduce myself, and outline the plan for my project. After providing the Head of each public centre with all the relevant information about the research (emphasising the individual subjectivity of each teacher-participant as a respondent), I obtained the lists of qualified participant teachers for the research.

All the centres I approached were happy to be involved, apart from two centres who were not interested at the beginning because they were “afraid that answering the questionnaire would solve nothing about the current curriculum implementation situation” and accordingly “it would be just a waste of time” (personal communication, September 7th, 2011). Nonetheless, they still agreed to take part in Phase One of the study.

I initially intended to ask the participant teachers to post their paper-based questionnaire responses back to me. However, when communicating directly with the participant teachers in each centre, I realised that it would be better to have them send their questionnaire responses back to me via the centres’ administration offices, rather than using the postal service. Doing this helped the participant teachers to save time, which was their big concern. This was also less costly as money did not have to be spent on postage. I requested the Heads of the public centres to help me collect the completed questionnaire from the participant teachers. To comply with ethics requirements, the participant teachers were asked to put their questionnaire responses

in the sealed envelopes provided in order to keep their responses completely confidential.

4.3.4. Preparing Data and Tools for Analysis

After the questionnaire data were collected, I used Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software to analyse the quantitative data and obtain the statistical results. Each participant teacher's response was entered into SPSS 18.0. During that process, I addressed three types of data issues: (i) Missing data from the questionnaire; (ii) Re-coding items that had negative meanings; and (iii) Re-grouping of response options. Each of these is discussed below.

(i) Missing data from the questionnaire: This issue was addressed while entering the data into SPSS when a response was left blank or had errors. Defining these missing values prevented the investigated issue from being affected, and hence preserved the degree of accuracy. For instance, questions participant teachers left blank or marked twice were assigned as missing values. Another issue was where, in the Government and community aspirations section, teachers' responses in column A were not consistent with responses in column B (see Appendix C). For example, some teachers gave no response to teachers' awareness of the aspirations from item 48 to item 51 (in column A), but they indicated that they had been influenced by these aspirations (in column B). In these circumstances, the responses in column A were shifted into *yes* (instead of assigning them as *missing value*) to indicate that these participant teachers were, in fact, aware of the aspirations. In several other instances, participant teachers answered *no* in column A, which indicated that they were not aware of such aspirations, but they still recognised that the aspirations had been influencing their daily teaching *a great deal* or *somewhat* in column B. For these

responses, I addressed the participant teacher's response in column B as missing value as well because the response appeared to be unclear and illogical, and hence might affect the accuracy of the final results.

(ii) Re-coding items that had negative meanings: In the questionnaire there were some items where I deliberately reversed the questions meaning from positive to negative to ensure the consistency of teachers' responses by asking them about one issue but in different ways. Therefore, the level of reliability and validity were maintained. These re-coded items included items 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20, 32, 36, and 43 in the questionnaire (see Appendix C).

In order to prepare for data analysis, these re-coded items were positioned in different constructs that I computed to measure as shown in Table 4 (Letter R was put in front of the question to indicate that the item was re-coded):

Table 4. *Re-coded Items for Questionnaire Data Analysis*

Constructs	Sub-constructs	Computed Items
Valued educational concept	Academic preparation	$(Q5+Q9+RQ10+RQ15+RQ16+Q18)/6$
	Holistic development	$(RQ5+Q7+Q10+Q15+Q16+Q17+Q21)/7$
Planning strategy	Passive planning	$(utQ25+utQ26+utQ27+utQ28)/4$
	Active planning	$(utQ22+utQ23+utQ24)/3$

(iii) Re-grouping of response options: This process was similar to coding. Where I found that participant teachers' response rates for each option were very different, I re-grouped these options. For item 46, for example, most participant teachers answered *yes* ($n = 318$), some answered *partly yes* ($n = 74$), and only two participant teachers answered *no* ($n = 2$). In order to make the data balanced so that I

could see the relationship among variables more clearly, I re-grouped responses and re-coded by labelling 1 = *yes*, and 2 = *partly yes or no*. For another question, item 54, most participant teachers ($n = 334$) indicated that they discussed the *ECC* with parents each day. Different responses to this item were rare. The number of teachers who indicated *two or three times a week* was 39, *once a week* was 10, *two or three times a month* was 6, and *once a month* was only 3. Consequently, I categorised the responses into two groups: *daily* and *sometimes*. All such items which were re-grouped and re-coded are shown in the Table 5:

Table 5. *Re-grouping and Re-coding in Questionnaire Analysis*

Item	SPSS Variable Name	Coding Instructions
1	Ragegp	1=20-29 and 30-39; 2=40-49 and 50+
2	Posgp	1=Principal/VP and Head teacher; 2= Teacher and Practician
3	Yoegp	1=2-5years; 2=6years+
4	Hqualgp	1= Three-year undergraduate; 2=Bachelor and others
46a	Q46agp	1=Yes; 2=Partly yes or No
47a	Q47agp	1=Yes; 2=Somewhat yes or No
53a	Q53agp	1=Yes; 2=Partly yes or No (1=1, 2=1, 3=2,4=2,5=2)
47 and 53	TsatQ4753	1=Yes; 2=Somewhat yes or No (Q47agp+Q53agp)/2
54	Q54gp	1=Sometimes; 2=Daily (1-2-3-4-5-6=1; 7=2)

57a	RimpQ57A	1=Yes, it's important; 2=No, it's not important (3-4=1; 1-2=2)
58a	RfreQ58A	1=Not always; 2=Always (1-2= 1; 3=2)
58b	RhelpQ58B	1=Very helpful; 2=Not helpful or Sometimes helpful (1-2= 1; 3=2)

The raw quantitative data analysis was processed step-by-step through content analysis, coding, grouping the sets of data and calculating the measures of central tendency (for example, the means, the medians and the modes) (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, pp. 217-222). Most of the responses in the questionnaire were pre-coded. With the open-ended questions, the qualitative data were converted into quantitative data by counting the number of similar responses (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 136). Variance and standard deviation were also calculated to determine the distribution of data. Then percentages were used to illuminate and illustrate the findings in tables and charts (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7).

The next section describes the procedures of collecting qualitative data in Phase Two of this research.

4.4. Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

4.4.1. Selection of Participating Public Centres

To select the centres for the case studies, in each of the two cities Da Nang and Quang Ngai, I identified a list of national-standardised public centres amongst those centres where teachers participated in Phase One. The list included five public

centres in Da Nang and one public centre in Quang Ngai who were recognised and certified as national-standardised public centres by the MOET. Because I intended to use only two national-standardised public centres in Da Nang and one in Quang Ngai to participate in Phase Two — the case-study phase, I drew lots to find out the two centres amongst five national-standardised public centres in Da Nang to be invited together with the one in Quang Ngai to participate in Phase Two. Once the three centres were selected, I approached each of them to obtain their consent to participate in the second phase. The timing of my approach to the centres coincided with a very busy time of the year for teacher assessment so it was difficult for centres as well as participant teachers to take on the project. In the end, only two of the three selected centres were happy to participate in my research including one in Da Nang and one in Quang Ngai. The other one selected centre in Da Nang decided not to get involved due to time constraints. Consequently, I had to draw another lot to select another centre from the list of the five national-standardised public ones in Da Nang, and this third centre agreed to participate in the study. In the next sections of this thesis, all of these three selected national-standardised public centres are called case-study centres.

4.4.2. Criteria for Selecting Case-study Teachers

In each case-study centre, I requested the Head of the centre to select two teachers who had participated in the questionnaire in Phase One and who had indicated that they agreed to take part in Phase Two — the case studies — if required. At first, I had intended to use random sampling to select these case-study teachers as I thought this would provide the participant teachers in Phase One with equal opportunities to take part in Phase Two of the research. Since the case-study teachers were assumed to have a shared understanding of the *ECC* as well as similar

experiences of the recent changes regarding its implementation, I saw the participant teachers in centres as homogeneous samples (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 431) that would yield the best response to the research issues. However, based on the initial findings from the questionnaire analysis, I decided to use a purposefully stratified sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 431) instead. This change allowed me to focus on the research questions more specifically and gain insights from representative teachers. Therefore, I requested the Head of each case-study centre to select two participant teachers for the case studies who met the additional criteria of: (i) having a reputation as a good teacher when working with the *ECC* at the centre, and (ii) having a strong voice or a good reputation amongst the teaching staff at the centre. I expected that these purposefully stratified samples would yield the best responses to the research questions because the case-study participants were likely to have typical understandings of the *ECC* and they also possessed good hands-on experiences of recent changes in the curriculum. Figure 5 shows how each case study in Phase Two was bound by location:

Figure 5. The boundaries of the cases in the multiple-case study.

Table 6 provides the professional backgrounds of the six selected case-study teachers collected during the interviews:

Table 6. *Professional backgrounds of the six selected case-study teachers*

Name	Age	Length of experience ^(*)	Qualification	Children's age-group taught
Sang	Not provided	11 years with <i>ECC</i>	Three-year undergraduate of ECE	5-6 year old
Hanh	50	25 years in total 7 years with <i>ECC</i>	Three-year undergraduate of ECE	3-4 year old
Quyen	34	10 years in total 4 years with <i>ECC</i>	Bachelor of ECE	5-6 year old
Hang	28	4 years with <i>ECC</i> since started working	Three-year undergradutate of ECE	5-6 year old
Thu	41	21 years in total 10 years with <i>ECC</i>	Three-year undergraduate of ECE	5-6 year old
Trang	27	4 years with <i>ECC</i> since started working	Bachelor of ECE	3-4 year old

Note: (*) The *ECC* was first drafted in 1998 and then trialled in selected early childhood centres. It was officially promulgated in 2009 (see section 2.2.2.). This column provides information about the case-study teachers' years of teaching experience, including the number of years they had been working with the *ECC* in both draft and official form.

4.4.3. Preliminary Meetings and Gaining Access

To check for viability and interest, I approached each case-study centre and the selected case-study teachers one by one. The visits to the case-study centres involved a meeting with the Head of the centre and then the case-study teachers to obtain their consent to conduct the research. When I approached the first case-study centre in Da Nang city, the Head of the centre was worried as I used the word *interview* when I presented what the research entailed and the involvement of the

case-study teachers including conducting interviews. After I explained to her that was just to be an informal discussion about the teachers' beliefs and experience of the implementation of the *ECC*, she finally agreed for me to approach the teachers. For the other centres, I used the word *discussion* instead of *interview* in order to make the case-study teachers feel more comfortable. I also outlined that I needed to obtain parental consent for children's participation in the case studies as classroom observations were to be conducted as part of the research. All the selected case-study teachers were provided with information about the research for their consideration prior to making an informed decision to participate in the research. The Heads of the case-study centres and all of the case-study teachers were aware that participation in the research was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the case-study data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions. No one withdrew from participating in this research.

A mutually suitable time for the interviews and observations was negotiated between the case-study teachers and me, and a schedule was drawn up. The case-study data were collected through an analysis of teachers' documents (such as educational plans and curriculum guidelines), observations of teachers and children in the classroom (video-recordings of one formal and one informal teaching session, and field-notes), and audio-recorded interviews with teachers (approximately one hour each). These are explained in more detail below.

4.4.4. Data Collection Methods Used for the Multiple-case Study

As mentioned previously, triangulation is one of the strengths of mixed method research using a multiple-case study. As such, this design included mechanisms to improve internal validity (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

This study used the multiple-case study approach as a methodology and used the three methods of document review, classroom observation, and in-depth interviews to gather data from each case. These methods are described in the next sub-sections.

4.4.4.1. Document review

Document review was one method used in this research. This method is a valuable and convenient means of accessing information about the field prior to the study and identifying other evidence for other sources of data (Yin, 2009). For this study, I asked each case-study teacher to show me their working documents such as annual plans, theme-based plans, weekly, and daily plans; and some of the guidance materials for implementing the *ECC* which they used to carry out their planning and teaching at their centres.

The case-study teachers were allowed to decide at their convenience when to hand over their documents to me. Some of them provided this information after the classroom observations; others did so during or after the interview. With the exception of one teacher who only gave me her plan for the observation section, all the others provided me with adequate documents to describe their teaching practices. All the documents were photocopied from the teachers' original copies and the originals were returned.

These documents were reviewed with reference to the *ECC* and the guidebooks for *ECC* implementation, and the Government administrators' documents and statements. It is important to note that inferences from document analysis were treated as information which needed to be investigated further rather than definitive findings and mistaken assumptions (Yin, 2009).

4.4.4.2. Classroom observation using video-recording

Classroom observation was another method used to collect data for this research. This method suited the case-study methodology in terms gathering data within its natural setting. In each case study, direct observation was used to collect data by images and words to provide evidence of “relevant behaviours and environmental conditions” (Yin, 2009, p. 109). As it was reasonable to expect that teachers’ understanding of the *ECC* would be revealed through their daily teaching activities with children, I used video-recording to observe one formal and one informal teaching session to see the interaction between teachers and children in the classroom at each case-study centre. These sessions were the two regular types of teaching activities that teachers used every day to engage children in learning following the theme-based content scheduled in teachers’ plans. Whereas a formal teaching session was more didactic and structured, an informal one allowed the children more freedom to play and to learn through their play. Informal teaching sessions usually involved a free-play time at play corners or an outdoor session. In this study, examples of these two types of teaching were video-recorded for later analysis (see Appendix F).

4.4.4.3. In-depth interviews

Another method of data collection used in this research was in-depth interviews. This method suggests that the participants should be treated as informants rather than just respondents. This means that the participants have the opportunity to answer the interview questions, and provide certain insights or relevant information, which might lead the researcher into further inquiries (Yin, 2009). Hence, it allows

the researcher to get an in-depth understanding by prompting questioning where necessary.

In this study, in-depth interviews with each case-study teacher were conducted on a case-by-case basis. Prior to each interview, I provided the case-study teacher with a list of guiding questions (see Appendix E). The purpose of giving teachers this list of questions was to allow them time to think over or recall their experiences, if necessary, to bring into the face-to-face interviews. These questions were open-ended, which allowed me to ask the case-study teacher further questions to clarify her ideas when necessary. The interview questions were mainly asked in the order provided. The content of the interviews typically flowed from the observed formal and informal teaching sessions to the case-study teachers' insights on the practice of *ECC*'s implementation in their daily working day.

Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to conduct in a face-to-face setting. Most of the interviews were unproblematic and interactive. Where the case-study teacher's response was unclear or uncertain, I prompted and probed for examples and/or additional information. All the interviews were scheduled to follow on from the observations and on the same day. With one exception, each case-study teacher suggested I conduct the interview after lunchtime when the children in their class were taking a nap. One case-study teacher asked me to return in the late afternoon after the children had gone home because she was busy preparing teaching aids in her lunchtime. All of the case-study teachers gave me their written permission to be audio-recorded during the interview by signing their consent forms prior to starting the case study. They were comfortable with the audio-recorded interview. Two of the case-study teachers, however, expressed concerns about maintaining the

confidentiality of what they said during the interview. After the interview with each of these two teachers, one of them requested a soft copy to be sent to her email for her future reference because she wanted to ensure the accuracy of the information she gave. The other teacher verbally reminded me to keep the given information confidential as she had stated in the consent form.

Audio-recordings were transcribed (see section 4.4.5 for description of transcribing), and sent back to the case-study teachers to be verified and signed. To allow each case-study teacher enough time to check the transcription and make changes (if any), I left the transcription with the teacher until she contacted me to collect it. Some of them made slight changes to the words in the transcriptions, but not the meanings or ideas. Information obtained from the interviews was integrated with the other two methods — document review and classroom observation.

4.4.5. Tools and Treatment of Case-study Data

I used the NVIVO software (Bazeley & Richards, 2000) to sort and code all data collected, including documents, video-recordings, and interview transcriptions. In regards to transcribing the interviews, I transcribed verbatim the case-study teachers' words except for: (i) their repetition of ideas in the same response. For this instance, I added an asterisk (*) to indicate that the case-study teacher had repeated what she had said without additional information. Where necessary, I also described the context within square brackets []; (ii) my utterances (for example, *ah*, *uh* *hmm*, *right*, *okay*) as the case-study teachers were telling their story or their thoughts; and (iii) the case-study teachers' utterances during their comments. This enabled the transcript to be contextualised and thus more understandable and coherent, and prevented the story in the interview from being unnecessarily disjointed. The audio-

recorded transcriptions of the interviews were translated into English. The documents were checked for relevance. Then, all of the three sources of data were sorted and imported directly into NVIVO for sorting and categorising.

The first case-study teacher was the pilot to trial the document review, classroom observations, and in-depth interviews. At the end of data gathering within each case study, data were written up and analysed independently in the first instance. In each case study, all the data (including the texts and images in document analysis, video-recordings of formal and informal teaching sessions, and individual interview responses) were brought together to describe the case-study teacher's perceptions and to set up a coding framework. When all the coding was completed and patterns identified, further coding was done (Mukherji & Albon, 2010; Punch, 2005; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). To generate themes, the patterns identified from the documentary analysis and observations were organised and interrogated against the interview data to gain in-depth understanding from the case-study teacher's explanations (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 232). This was appropriate to the case study data because it ensured an inductive approach for the whole research.

Data collected from the six case studies were organised, categorised and stored in the case study database for later access, which included case study notes, case study documents, tabular materials and narratives (Yin, 2009, pp. 118-120). Once all case studies were written up and analysed independently, cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009) was conducted to compare and converge the themes in relation to the research questions. Interpretations and conclusions were generalised over the six cases studied. These procedures will be illustrated in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 as part of the discussion

of the study findings. Figure 6 summarises the procedures used within my multiple-case study:

Figure 6. The procedures of multiple-case study. Adapted from Yin (2009).

4.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analyses of both quantitative and qualitative inquiries proceeded as a step-by-step process, adopting Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) suggestions for mixed method research. This procedure was followed through from preparing the data,

exploring the data, analysing the data, representing the data analysis, interpreting the results, and validating the data. Table 7 summarises the procedure of data analysis used in this study.

Table 7. *Procedures in Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis*

Questionnaire Analysis Procedures	General Procedures	Case Study Analysis Procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding data by assigning numeric values • Cleaning the database • Re-coding or computing new variables for computer analysis • Establishing coding framework 	Preparing the data for analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising documents and visual data • Transcribing and translating texts • Preparing the data for computer sorting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually inspecting data • Conducting a descriptive analysis 	Exploring the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading through the data • Writing memos • Developing qualitative coding framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding the data • Grouping codes • Checking for tendency and distribution • Calculating percentages • Using SPSS 	Analysing the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding the data • Assigning labels to codes • Grouping codes into themes • Interrelating themes or abstracting to smaller set of themes • Using NVIVO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representing results • Providing results in tables and figures 	Representing the data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representing findings in discussions of themes • Presenting visual models, figures, tables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining how the findings address the research questions • Comparing the findings with the literature 	Interpreting the results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing how the findings address the research questions • Comparing the findings with the literature • Reflecting on the personal meaning of the findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using external standards • Checking the validity and reliability of current data • Assessing the internal and external validity of the results 	Validating the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using researcher, participants' standards • Employing validation strategies (member checking, triangulation) • Checking for the accuracy of the account • Employing limited procedures for checking reliability

Note. Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, pp. 205-206).

4.6. Validity, Reliability, Robustness and Rigour

I was aware that the limitations of using a questionnaire and a multiple-case study might lead to issues of reliability and validity. For example, the questionnaire is standardised on a paper format so participant teachers may have different understandings about the questions asked. In addition, participant teachers may not be willing to answer all the questions in either the questionnaire or the case-study interviews due to (i) their limited time; (ii) they do not wish to reveal the information for their well-being or they do not see the benefits they share from responding to the questions. These concerns made me choose the mixed methods design for this study as it provided a triangulation model, in which the weakness of one method will be the strength of another method, to ensure the validity, reliability, robustness and rigour of the research (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Yin, 2009). In this study, some limitations of the questionnaire such as some unclear or misinterpreting points could be compensated for by the strength of the data triangulation in multiple-case study method such as individual in-depth interviews, observations and document reviews in order to understand deeper perspectives captured through face-to-face interaction between the researcher and particular representatives (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Mukherji & Albon, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Because the questionnaire was anticipated to take approximately 30 minutes to complete, I was concerned that respondents might not answer carefully. To minimise this, I gave the participant teachers the opportunity to return the completed questionnaire within two weeks thus providing them ample time to return to the

questions if they wished. The questionnaire relied on participant teachers' honesty and involved their perceptions which were neither right nor wrong.

Mukherji and Albon (2010) warn that when processing the multiple-case study analysis, the coding process might affect the reliability because of its subjectivity (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 231). Therefore, I was careful to apply the coding framework consistently all the way through for each case. As the case studies progressed, categories or themes were identified which required collecting additional information (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 230).

4.7. Ethical Issues

Because this research used multiple-case study as a method, I was aware of myself being the primary instrument when carrying out the case studies. Therefore, I had to avoid bias and was responsible for obtaining the accuracy and verifiability of the information collected. I was also aware that the relationship and power between the researcher as a lecturer in the university and the early childhood teachers as practitioners, or previous students, might facilitate or inhibit access to information. To deal with this, the anonymity of the participant teachers was protected and their right to refuse participating in the research at any stage without any negative repercussions was clearly specified. All the participant teachers in the questionnaire and the case studies were advised of the reciprocal benefits between the researcher and the participants from the research. For example, participant teachers had the opportunity to share their thoughts and desires about the curriculum implementation and the findings of the research would be available to participants who asked to be sent this information.

A signed formal agreement was obtained from the Heads of the early childhood centres for permission to access the sites in both phases of this research. The researcher had to respect the participating centres and teachers and be careful to not disturb the normal activities in the sites of the study. An information sheet, including commitment to confidentiality, and an informed consent form were sent to each participant teacher to be signed before each phase of the study commenced. The process of data collection was undertaken based on negotiation with participant teachers in compliance with requirements of the Head of each early childhood centre. This included arrangements of time, location and how the questionnaire, interviews, observations, and documentary reviews would be organised.

In regard to classroom observation, although no formal consent form was sent to each child in the group, parental permission and formal consent to observe, photograph and video-record children were sought prior to the research beginning. Children's personal data were strictly protected. On the date each of the classroom observations were carried out, I came to the classroom 30 minutes earlier than the time the session was scheduled. I spent time talking and playing with the children in the classroom about what they were playing and learning. I also explained again to them about the purpose of my presence in their classroom. No child indicated that they felt uncomfortable with my presence in their classroom; therefore I continued the observation as planned.

Data from interviews and classroom observations were collected via video-recordings, audio-recordings, and memo-notes. Data were stored securely in hard and soft copies, and both kept in locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. Participants and centres were allocated pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. All the

analysed data were used for academic purposes only and was only accessed by the researcher, the supervisors, and the Vietnamese transcribers and the English translators. These data will be destroyed in an appropriate manner after five years of the completion of my thesis.

Approval for this research was obtained through the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington prior to conducting the research (see Appendix G).

4.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology and relevant issues for conducting this study. With an assumption that knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed during an individual's interactions bounded by a particular cultural context, this study took a constructivist perspective to conduct an in-depth investigation into the research questions specified. A mixed-method methodology involving the use of a questionnaire and a multiple-case study has been outlined in detail. This combination of both quantitative and qualitative data was expected to inform each other to make the findings of this study more robust. In this chapter, I have also described the sampling strategies for the study and how each phase of the study as well as the treatment of collected data proceeded in order to prepare for data analysis. The issues of validity, reliability, and robustness and rigour of this research were also considered alongside the matter of ethics. All of these helped contextualise this study and enhance the meaning of findings which are presented in the next three chapters.

Chapter 5

Teachers' Awareness of the Government's Aspirations and Their Valued Educational Concepts in Practice

This chapter presents findings to address the two following research sub-questions: (i) What Government's aspirations in the *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* are teachers aware of? and (ii) What educational concepts do teachers value during their teaching practices? These findings draw both on data from the six case-study teachers, including document reviews, interviews, and classroom observations using video-recordings, and the questionnaire completed by 421 (89.2%) early childhood teachers from 20 public centres in two cities: Da Nang and Quang Ngai. In the first section, I discuss the Government's aspirations and the educational values in the *ECC* based on my review of documents including the Education Law and the *ECC* document and the *ECC* guidebooks. This review provides a background for analysis of the data from both the questionnaire and the interviews with the six case-study teachers and the classroom observations of their teaching. The data presented in the Figures and Tables in this chapter are discussed in the order asked in the questionnaire.

5.1. The Government's Aspirations and the Educational Values in the *ECC*:

Document Reviews

The Vietnamese Government's aspirations for early childhood education and the valued educational concepts underpinning the *ECC* are outlined in a range of policies and curriculum documents. These include the Education Law, the *ECC* document, and the *ECC* guidebooks. The Education Law (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2005) refers to the position of early childhood education as part of the National

Education System and highlights its role and overall aim in Article 4, 21 and 22 in the following terms:

Early childhood education is part of the national education system. Early childhood education nurtures, cares, and educates children aged from three months to six years old. [...] The aim of early childhood education is to help children gain physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and aesthetic development; to form first elements of personality, and to prepare for children to enter Year One in primary. (p. 5, my translation)

The *ECC* document (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2009) was issued together with Curricular No.: 17/2009/TT-BGDDT on 25 July 2009 by the Minister of Education and Training. At the beginning of the document, the aim of early childhood education as stated in the Education Law is repeated and elaborated as follows:

The aim of early childhood education is to help children gain physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and aesthetic development; to form first elements of personality, and to prepare for children to enter Year One in primary; to help children form and develop both physiological and psychological functions, and also develop basic competencies, qualities, and necessary skills for life in accordance with their age; to arouse and to develop children's maximum potential in order to lay a foundation for their learning at the next level of education and for lifelong learning. (p. 3, my translation)

These statements provide a clear Governmental direction, and statement of aspirations for early childhood education in Vietnam. They also encompass a general understanding of valued educational concepts for early childhood education. Furthermore, they show that the Government's aspiration for the education of young Vietnamese children is to prepare them for their future lives with both long-term and short-term learning and development goals. Children's long-term learning and

development is reflected in the Government's aspirations for the holistic development of young children involving the combination of five developmental aspects: physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and aesthetic. Meanwhile, children's short-term learning and development refers to preparing them for Year One in primary school.

In the two documents, the term “to form first elements of personality” indicates that early childhood education should give young children basic competencies, good qualities and essential skills for life and socialisation. This shows that the Government regards early childhood education as very important in the national education system. The phrase “to form the first elements of personality” is also repeated in the Decision 55QD, which states that early childhood education is the *mắt xích đầu tiên (first ring in the chain)* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 1990, online translated version). Noticeably, beyond the *ECC* aims for children's physiological and psychological development, the statement emphasises developing children's “basic competencies, qualities, and necessary skills for life”, thus promoting the longer-term aim of maximising children's potential for their lifelong learning and development. As seen in the *ECC* document, the broad aim of the *ECC* is broken down into five developmental goals, which are developed in conjunction with five aspects for children's learning and development. These goals are further divided into two separate sections: (i) kindergarten goals for children aged 3 months to 3 years; and (ii) preschool goals for children aged from 3 to 6 years. Although these five developmental goals are articulated for both age groups, different objectives are identified for each age group to guide the implementation of the *ECC* in practice. These are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8. *Developmental Goals Identified in the Early Childhood Curriculum*

Aspects of Development	Kindergarten Goals (from three months to three years)	Preschool Goals (from three to six years)
Physical Development	Children develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a good health, weight and height of normal development by age. - adaptation to life at kindergarten. - basic physical activities by age. - some initial elements of movement (agility, dexterity, balance). - ability to skilfully coordinate hand and finger movements. - ability to serve oneself in eating, sleeping and bodily hygiene. 	Children develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a good health, weight and height of normal development by age. - basic physical movements in firm, correct posture. - an increasing ability to coordinate sensory and motor skills; rhythmic movements, identify directions in space. - an increasing skill in using hands in some activities. - an increasing understanding of the food and the benefits of healthy eating. - some habits, skills in eating to maintain health and ensure personal safety.
Cognitive Development	Children develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an eagerness to learn, explore the world around them. - a sensitivity of the senses. - ability to observe, comment, remember and express understandings in simple sentences. - some initial knowledge about self and familiar things and phenomena. 	Children develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an eagerness to learn, to discover and to explore things and phenomena around them. - an increasing ability to observe, compare, classify, judge, pay attention, and intentional memory. - ability to detect and solve simple problems in different ways. - ability to express understandings in different ways (by actions, gestures, words, etc.), particularly in spoken language. - a growing knowledge about people, things and phenomena around and some elementary math concepts.

Language Development	<p>Children develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to listen and understand simple verbal requests. - ability to ask questions, and answer a few simple questions with words and gestures. - ability to use words to communicate, to express needs. - an interest in perceiving the rhyme, rhythm of verse and intonation of speech. 	<p>Children develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to listen and understand spoken language in everyday communication. - ability to express in different ways (using speech, facial expressions, gestures, body language, etc.). - ability to clearly express ideas; and to communicate properly within the cultural context. - ability to hear, tell, and recite a story. - an increasing interest in capturing the rhyme, the rhythm of a poem, and folk songs in accordance with age. - initial skills of reading and writing.
Socio-emotional Development	<p>Children develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an awareness of self. - familiarity and confidence in communicating with people they know. - ability to feel and express emotions towards people and things that they are familiar with. - a knowledge about some simple living rules. - a growing enjoyment of singing and musical movement; drawing, tearing and pasting art, puzzle. 	<p>Children develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a sense of self. - ability to identify and express feelings towards people, things and phenomena around them. - some personal qualities: self-assurance, self-confidence, self-reliance. - some life skills: respect and well-cooperation with others, be friendly, caring, and sharing. - an awareness of following some rules and regulations in the social living environment: in the family, school, preschool, and surrounding community.
Aesthetics Development	<p>Children develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a growing recognition and experience the beauty of nature, life and art. - ability to express emotions and creativity in musical activities and arts. - enjoyment and excitement to participate in arts activities. 	

Note. Adapted from online translation version of the Early Childhood Curriculum, issued together with Circular No.: 17/ 2009/TT-BGDDT 25th July 2009 by the Ministry of Education and Training

Comparing the *ECC* with the previous *Reformed Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC)* and reviewing the connection between the aim and the five developmental goals of the *ECC*, I noted some significant differences between the two documents. While the goals for children's learning and development in the *RECC* were set out generally, the developmental goals in the *ECC* reflect the Government's direction of expanding the longer-term aims by emphasising children's socio-emotional, linguistic and aesthetic development. For example, in the *ECC* the goal of socio-emotional development, especially for preschool-aged children focuses more on building life-skills such as problem-solving ability, cooperation in group-work, and a sense of self-confidence to prepare them for lifelong learning. Another focus of the *ECC* is language development especially for preschool-aged children not only for art performance such as re-telling a story, reciting a poem, and some initial literacy skills, but also for social communication.

Unlike the *RECC*, in which the organisation of teaching content was formally structured and prescribed to be applied consistently throughout early childhood centres within the country, the *ECC* is an open theme-based curriculum with a range of suggested available educational exemplars to help teachers develop their plans. These thematic exemplars are arranged systematically to lead the children to explore from the most familiar concepts to the least familiar, broader ones. My review of the *ECC* and the associated guidebooks also suggests that the *ECC* represents the Government's aspirations, and that its implementation has a stronger focus on longer-term educational values for children's learning and development than the *RECC*. Some new valued concepts in the *ECC* are social participation, being active members of family and community, self and cultural awareness, emotional well-being, spiritual

and moral development, creativity, and creative expression. For instance, by introducing a new theme called “Yourself”, it is clear the *ECC* wants young children to develop a sense of self-awareness. This new concept is usually proposed in connection to other social themes (such as *Family* and *Kindergarten*, and so forth) in order to help children perceive their position and contribution within their social community. In contrast, in the *RECC* this concept was not evident and did not seem to be taken into account. Furthermore, when implementing the *ECC* teachers are advised to be flexible in order to prioritise children’s interests and creativity when proposing their educational plans. This focus on the individual child indicates a new way of reconstructing the child’s image for the future (see also sections 5.3.2 and 6.2.3). Table 9 summarises the differences between the *RECC* and the *ECC*:

Table 9. *Comparison between the RECC and the ECC*

	The <i>RECC</i> (1994)	The <i>ECC</i> (2009)
Educational Aspirations	Focuses on short-term values and emphasises achievements of subject-based knowledge and skills	Focuses on long-term values and emphasises holistic development, especially socio-emotional development including life-skills
Organisation of teaching content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lesson-based - Separate disciplinary subjects (for example: maths, literature, gymnastics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theme-based - Integrated multi-disciplinary content
Teaching Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structured and formal teaching style with careful pre-planned outcomes - A directive teaching approach (Bredekamp, 2004) with a focus on the group as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible and creative teaching style with expected outcomes for children’s learning and development - A child-oriented approach with a focus on individual and small group learning
Application of Teaching Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent throughout the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allow differences among programmes suitable for local contexts

In one of the *ECC* guidebooks, Tran, Le, and Le (2011) indicated that early childhood education should focus on developing basic competencies, good qualities, and essential skills for life. This led me to conclude that the *ECC* can be described as having a social pedagogical orientation in which the primary focus is on developing social participation and the overall well-being of young children (Van Oers, 2008).

One other discourse that permeates the *ECC* is that of school readiness. As I reviewed both the Education Law and the *ECC* document, I noted that preparing children for school entry is specified and reflected in the statement of aims in both documents: “to prepare first elements for children to Year One” (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2009, p. 3, my translation). However, in the *ECC* guidebooks it was clear that the Government as well as the *ECC* does not mean that early childhood centres should be teaching children formal writing, reading, and maths skills. In fact, the aspiration of preparing children for formal schooling can only be seen for those aged 5 to 6 years. Rather, the guidebooks make it clear that the intention is to transform children’s initial habits for formal schooling and to inspire them through intentional and academic learning. Skills such as sharing and working in groups are also necessary for children as they enter Year One in school (Le et al, 2009). Other than that, the *ECC* generally indicates that its aims are to make children from 3 months to 6 years familiar with a range of basic theme-based knowledge, which is gradually expanded according to age.

To sum up, my document review of the documents indicated a concept of education aimed at longer-term preparation for young children’s future lives. Within the Vietnamese context, this is a new perspective reflecting the Government’s aspirations about education to create a new generation of citizens for Vietnam’s sustainable development in response to globalisation. Particularly, this change

appears to be in alignment with the reconceptualisation movement in early childhood education, which has been evident in many Western countries since the late 1990s and early 2000s (Burman, 2008; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; MacNaughton, 2005).

5.2. Teachers' Awareness of the Government's Aspirations: Findings from the Questionnaire and the Case-Study Data Analysis

As I expected that the Government's aspirations may have affected the teachers' perceptions of the valued concepts underpinning the *ECC* as well as their teaching practices, I designed the questionnaire to include questions that explored this. In this section, findings are presented from the questionnaire in Phase One regarding the participant teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations reflected in the *ECC*. These findings are discussed in relation to the findings regarding this issue in the case studies in Phase Two.

5.2.1. Teachers' Awareness of the Government's Aspirations: The Questionnaire Data

Teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations for children in early childhood settings was explored in the section *Government's Aspirations* of the questionnaire with a range of items from 48 to 51 (see Appendix B). Each of the items from 48 to 50 was an example of the Government's long-term aspirations, including children are expected to contribute to the future of Vietnam; the new generation must be well-equipped with life-skills for the society such as initiatives, creativity and open-mindedness, and willingness to share ideas with each other; children should learn about their communities before learning about other places in

the country. Item 51 in this section of the questionnaire asked teachers about their awareness concerning the Government's short-term aspirations regarding preparing children for school entry. These examples of Government's aspirations were drawn from either the curriculum goal stated in the *ECC* or the *ECC* guidebooks which appeared to place an emphasis on longer-term aspirations rather than short-term ones involving preparing children for entering Year One — the next level of education. The aim of this section in the questionnaire was to explore whether teachers were aware of the Government's long-term and short-term aspirations in the *ECC* as well as how these aspirations influenced their teaching practices. Therefore, the questions for teachers in this section of the questionnaire involved two parts: (i) was she aware of the aspirations?; and (ii) if yes, to what extent did each aspiration influence her teaching practices? Table 10 below shows the results from the statistical analysis of participant teachers' responses to the items from 48 to 51 in the questionnaire.

Table 10. *Teachers' Awareness of Contemporary Aspirations for Young Children and the Extent to which the Aspirations Influence their Teaching Practice*

Examples of Contemporary Educational Aspirations	Awareness of the Aspiration		Level of Influence		
	Yes	No	A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
Children are expected to contribute to the future of Vietnam	99.7% n=378	0.3% n=1	90.3% n=307	7.1% n=24	2.6% n=9
The new generation must be well-equipped with qualities and life-skills for the country industrialisation and modernisation and for globalisation such as initiatives, creativity and open-mindedness, and willingness to share ideas with each other	99.7% n=373	0.3% n=1	87.4% n=298	10% n=34	2.6% n=9
Children should learn about their home-location before learning about other places in the country	87.5% n=330	12.5% n=47	53.2% n=183	38.4% n=132	8.4% n=29
Children should be well-prepared before starting Year One	89.1% n=327	10.9% n=40	74.4% n=261	22.5% n=79	3.1% n=11

Note. Items from 48 to 51 in the questionnaire

Table 10 shows a large number of the participant teachers held a positive view about such aspirations, including children are the future contributors to the country's development (99.7%, $n = 378$); and children must be well-equipped with qualities and life-skills such as initiative, creativity, open-mindedness, and willingness to share ideas with each other (99.7%, $n = 373$). These results indicate that the teachers were highly supportive of the Government's aspirations for longer-term educational outcomes. These findings are in alignment with those in the case studies in which all six case-study teachers expressed, during the interviews, their advocacy for the valued concepts in the *ECC* including its emphasis on children's holistic development. They recognised that the ultimate aim of the *ECC* is to prepare children for life-long learning, rather than academic preparation for Year One (see also section 5.3.1.1)

Table 10 also indicates that a high percentage of the teachers were aware of the Government's short-term aspiration about preparing children for formal schooling in the next level of education (89.1%, $n = 327$). Moreover, a large number of participant teachers (74.4%, $n = 261$) answered that this short-term aspiration influenced a great deal of their teaching practices. These high percentages suggest that preparing children for school entry was highly taken into consideration by the participant teachers. In the next section, data analysis from my case studies further elaborates teachers' perspectives on this finding.

5.2.2. Teachers' Awareness of Government's Aspirations: The Case Studies

As noted in Chapter 4, six teachers were involved in the case studies. It was clear from the interviews that the six case-study teachers were fully aware of the Government's both long-term and short-term aspirations. In particular, they all clearly expressed their advocacy for the new concepts of teaching young children in the *ECC*, including its emphasis on children's holistic development and its social pedagogical approach. They recognised that the ultimate aim of the *ECC* is to prepare children for life-long learning, rather than academic preparation for Year One and expressed their disagreement with the idea of teaching young children formal writing, reading, and maths at this young age.

One of the case-study teachers — Quyen, for example, said that early childhood children were still too young to learn formal writing; and if they were forced to do so, they just could "scrawl and produce ugly writing". She further explained that children might be at risk of becoming uninterested in formal learning and this would slow down their long-term learning and development. Quyen insisted

that many children from her centre had performed well at primary schools without learning academic skills prior to their school entry. A case-study teacher from another centre, Thu, shared Quyen's view and suggested eliminating the ideas of annual handwriting competitions or the so-called "A Competition of Sitting properly and writing words beautifully", or "Brilliant Handwriting Competition". These two case-study teachers considered other essential qualities such as ability to concentrate, group-work skills, sharing ideas and listening to others as essential to helping children's readiness for formal schooling when they turned 6 years old. Thu also mentioned that training children how to write properly, to read fluently and do simple maths of addition and subtraction should be the job of primary teachers. These examples show that the case-study teachers were fully aware of the Government's holistic aspirations for preparing children for school, and indicated that they were highly supportive of these aspirations which aimed at longer-term educational outcomes and favoured a social pedagogy approach (Schiro, 2008) in implementing the *ECC* rather a narrow focus on specific skills such as reading, writing, and doing maths.

5.3. Teachers' Valued Educational Concepts in Teaching Practices

As noted in the section 5.1, the *ECC*, within its broad aim, outlines five developmental goals including physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and aesthetical aspects of children's learning and development. From my viewpoint, the aim of achieving these five developmental goals constitutes a concept of children's holistic development that underpins the *ECC*. Besides the concept of children's holistic development, my review of the broad aim stated in the *ECC* document also indicated a concept of academic preparation for young children before starting school.

While holistic development for young children is a concept that calls for long-term outcomes aiming at preparing children for life-long learning, academic preparation calls for short-term outcomes aiming at preparing children for the next level of education. In this section, I present findings from both the questionnaire and the case studies about the educational concepts that the participant teachers valued as they implemented the *ECC* in practice.

5.3.1. The Questionnaire Data: *Short-term or Long-term Outcomes?*

5.3.1.1. Academic preparation versus holistic development

In order to examine early childhood teachers' perceptions about the educational concepts they value when implementing the *ECC*, items 5 to 21 in the questionnaire (see Appendix B) were used to determine if short-term or long-term outcomes were valued as important by teachers for children's learning and development during their teaching practices. In this section of the questionnaire, two sets of 5-point-likert scale questions were used to distinguish between *Academic Preparation* and *Holistic Development*. These two sets of questions were inter-reversed in the questionnaire to ensure the consistency of the participant teachers' answers. The Academic Preparation set included questions relevant to academic teachings with a focus on preparing children's entry to Year One of primary school, including teaching them literacy and mathematic skills and concepts. These questions were developed based on Van Oers' (2008) perspective of teaching using a pre-primary approach, which involved using a subject, outcome-based and a standard-based approach, indicating short-term aims of young children's education. The Holistic Development questions focused on developing children holistically in relation to building their life-skills, thus indicating adopting a social pedagogy

approach with a goal of long-term preparation for children's life-long learning and development (Van Oers, 2008). The results are presented in Table 11 below:

Table 11. *Educational Concepts in the ECC Valued and Supported by the Participant Teachers*

Educational concepts in the ECC	Disagree or Have no idea (%) (Average 1-3.0)	Agree (%) (Average 3.1+)
Academic Preparation (<i>TedvaAP*</i>)	41.5 (<i>n</i> = 159)	58.6 (<i>n</i> = 224)
Holistic Development (<i>TedvaHD**</i>)	15.7 (<i>n</i> = 59)	84.6 (<i>n</i> = 321)

Note. Score range from 1-5.

(*) *TedvaAP*: Total educational values- Academic Preparation;

(**) *TedvaHD*: Total educational values- Holistic Development. These codes were used in SPSS during the quantitative data analysis.

The results in Table 11 indicate that the majority of participant teachers (84.6%, *n* = 321) strongly valued and supported holistic development for young children as they implemented the *ECC*. This finding shows congruence between the perspectives of the participant teachers and the Government's focus on preparing children for longer-term learning and development as indicated in the *ECC*. This is consistent with the findings about the participant teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations and suggests that they were supportive of the Government's long-term aims, as argued in the previous section 5.2.

Table 11 also shows that a high percentage of respondents (58.6%, *n* = 224), agreed with academic preparation for children going into Year One. This reveals that many participant teachers, though advocating for children's holistic development, still regarded academic preparation as necessary for children's learning at their centres.

This finding relates to the participant teachers' awareness of the Government's

aspirations about preparing children for school entry (see Table 10, section 5.2.1). It appears that the participant teachers perceived preparing children for school entry as teaching them academic skills such as reading and writing and doing maths to prepare them for Year One. This is not in alignment with what the Government aspires about preparing children for Year One. As discussed earlier by the two case-study teachers, Thu and Quyen (see section 5.2.2), the Government's holistic aspirations for preparing children for school is aimed at longer-term educational outcomes and favours a social pedagogy approach in implementing the *ECC* rather a narrow focus on specific skills such as reading, writing, and doing maths.

In the next section, the participant teachers' age, working position, years of experience and qualifications were examined to determine whether these factors influenced their valued educational concepts during their teaching practices.

5.3.1.2. Factors influencing teachers' valued educational concepts

Independent sample *t-tests* were computed to determine if there were significant differences in the participant teachers' valued educational concepts between the two groups of participant teachers divided according to age, position, years of experience and highest qualifications. Table 12 displays the means and standard deviations for each of the scales for both groups:

Table 12. *Independent Sample t-tests for Teachers' Valued Educational Concepts*

Teachers' Valued Concepts in Their Teaching	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-test	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Aged under 40		Aged above 40			
Academic Preparation (<i>TedvaAP</i>)	3.24	0.52	3.22	0.54	0.40	0.69
Holistic Development (<i>TedvaHD</i>)	3.60	0.49	3.56	0.55	0.69	0.49
	Administrators		Applied Teachers			
Academic Preparation (<i>TedvaAP</i>)	3.23	0.58	3.23	0.53	-0.02	0.99
Holistic Development (<i>TedvaHD</i>)	3.64	0.58	3.57	0.50	0.99	0.32
	2-5 years experience		6 years + experience			
Academic Preparation (<i>TedvaAP</i>)	3.21	0.54	3.31	0.52	-1.2	0.20
Holistic Development (<i>TedvaHD</i>)	3.59	0.52	3.54	0.52	0.76	0.45
	Three-year bachelor		Bachelor and others			
Academic Preparation (<i>TedvaAP</i>)	3.23	0.53	3.25	0.53	-0.27	0.79
Holistic Development (<i>TedvaHD</i>)	3.59	0.51	3.58	0.52	0.24	0.81

Note. Score range from 1-5.

As shown in Table 11, all the *p* values (in the *sig. 2-tailed* column) were larger than the cut off of 0.05, indicating no significant difference in the means between the two categorised groups. For example, when comparing the *TedvaAP* scores for teachers aged under 40 and those aged 40 and over, no significant difference in scores was found. This phenomenon is the same for the other variables of position, years of

experience and highest qualifications. These results suggest that these variables had no significant impact on the participant teachers' valued educational concepts in their teaching practices. In other words, there appeared a convergence of teachers' perceptions about educational concepts which they valued when carrying out the implementation of the *ECC*, regardless of differences in their age, working position, years of experience, or qualifications.

5.3.2. The Case-study Data: Children's Holistic Development as an Overarching Value

Similar to the findings from the questionnaire, the case studies in this research showed that the case-study teachers valued the Government's aspirations about children's holistic development as a new image for the youngest generation of citizens. During their interviews, when asked about the valued educational concepts underpinning the *ECC*, all six case-study teachers responded that the five developmental goals of the curriculum had guided them through their everyday teaching practices. They all used the term *holistic development* to refer to the broad aim of the curriculum for children's learning and development, and recognised it as a prominent valued concept in the *ECC* as well as the biggest advantage the *ECC* had in comparison to the previous curriculum — the *RECC*. In addition, they all indicated that holistic development was a desirable trend for future generations, as illustrated in the following examples:

Quyen: Regarding the goals of the *ECC*, I think I am more pleased by those of the *ECC* (as opposed to the *RECC*) as it includes more progressive points in comparison with the old programme. It is divided into five sections for holistic child development. [...] In my opinion the innovative programme, which is given by the

Ministry of Education and Training, aims for holistic child development, definitely not to teach just literacy to them.

Hang: Generally speaking, at any time we always want our young generations to be continuously and holistically developed. Otherwise, we [the country, Vietnam] will be left behind other countries. So, I think the standards will be continually revised.

It can be seen that Quyen and Hang perceived children's holistic development as an overarching valued concept underpinning the *ECC*. It also appeared that they perceived the aim and goals of the *ECC* as the Government's aspiration about children's holistic development. This indicates that the teachers were on board with the Government in terms of the change in the curriculum and with a belief that this new curriculum would bring about a better future for Vietnam in a globalised world.

Furthermore, I found, too, that the case-study teachers perceived children's holistic development as incorporating a cluster of related concepts. The sub-sections below discuss three themes concerning these concepts which include: (i) Holistic development as preparing children for life-long learning; (ii) Fostering children's awareness of cultural identity; and (iii) Content knowledge education as the basis of holistic development.

5.3.2.1. Holistic development as preparing children for life-long learning

The case-study teachers referred to holistic development as preparing children for life-long learning rather than just a short period of time in a child's life, as indicated in Hanh's following statement:

We need to do something that gets parents to engage, to contribute more at the preschool level, and to share the viewpoint of creating sustainable development for children in the long term, not just the immediate benefits.

In particular, the six case-study teachers spoke during the interviews about building on life-skills for children as a requirement that was included in the innovation of the curriculum to prepare children for life-long learning. It is important to note that life-skills education is a part of skills education, which was identified separately alongside content knowledge education by the case-study teachers. These two aspects of education were written down in the case-study teachers' daily teaching plans as pre-determined objectives of a teaching session (see also explanations about skills and content knowledge education in section 5.3.2.3). During the interviews, all of the six case-study teachers identified many social competencies as important life-skills for children's learning. For instance, Sang listed competencies such as being sociable; being self-assured; using appropriate communication skills within the surrounding environment and acceptable to the social culture; and problem-solving skills. In agreement with Sang, Thu and Hanh said:

Thu: I consider this [life skills education] as a strong point of the new programme.

There are skills such as communication skills, self-help skills, and so forth. One special attention is the education of ethical values and social behaviours for children, such as: education about how to treat the natural environment, awareness education such as obeying the transport law, or health and sanitation education. All of these are provided carefully in the teaching process. Another example is children are taught to be bold, confident, and willing to help other people.

Hanh: The new curriculum now really looks forward to creating a different generation of people who are dynamic, confident, and healthy to show their skills and spirit. They should learn how to adapt in a new environment, learn to show love, to be self-respected, and to be independent.

Hanh also added that children should learn to share with other people. She strongly believed in organising the class so that children could take part in acting out

different roles in a miniature society. Another teacher, Quyen, thought that improvement of children's agency and confidence when in front of a crowd was the most important thing for them to learn. Generally, they all recognised that children's self-confidence, self-awareness, creativity, and agency were valued concepts in the *ECC*. According to the case-study teachers such competencies, or life-skills, were the main focus in their teaching sessions. They believed that children who lacked these life-skills might encounter difficulties later in life. As a result, building on children's life-skills appeared to be an obvious goal while they implemented the new curriculum.

5.3.2.2. Fostering children's awareness of cultural identity

In relation to the valued concept of building on life-skills to prepare children for life-long learning, the case-study teachers also valued fostering children's awareness of cultural identity, which involved children learning about local and national cultural values. Similar to building children's life-skills, the case-study teachers perceived cultural identity as an important aspect of innovation underpinning the *ECC*, as well as an essential part of children's holistic development.

The concept of valuing Vietnamese cultural heritage was clearly articulated during the interviews with the six case-study teachers. When asked about whether she frequently integrated knowledge about local and national culture into her teaching content, Sang answered she did and emphasised that these were "essential knowledge for children to develop their social communication skills". Apart from the theme *Homeland-Vietnam Country and Uncle Ho*, in which teachers could present cultural values to children, all the case-study teachers said that they deliberately and regularly integrated teaching content which was relevant to local or national events or ceremonies. As Quyen stated:

We have a separate aspect of teaching content called *Cultural-historical Events* in our plan. When we teach the children about normal themes, we will integrate content of these events into them. For example, we organise sight-seeing walks for the children to visit some locations on the 22 of December [The Army Day] when children learn the theme *Homeland and Uncle Ho*, or visit a traditional craft village in the local area as they learn the theme *Occupations*.

The case-study teachers all said they initially integrated cultural-historical events within the local region, and then expanded the content to relate to national cultural identities. At the time the case studies were conducted, the teachers were focusing on folk games, songs, and stories to give children opportunities to learn about Vietnamese cultural heritage. This was evident throughout all three case-study centres I approached which indicated congruence in the teaching programmes among the centres. The case-study teachers believed that providing children with adequate cultural knowledge was important to enable them to adapt well within their environment and, more importantly, to promote their well-being in their communities.

5.3.2.3. Content knowledge education as the basis of holistic development

It was clear from my review of the case-study teachers' working documents that these teachers drew on their experience of creating lessons divided into sections that covered content knowledge and skills to be taught. The content knowledge section were listed as subject-based knowledge while the skills section covered physical and thinking skills and life-skills. Content knowledge education was viewed as the teachers providing children with separate bits of information about, for example, science and life, whereas skills education involved developing physical skills such as fine and gross motor skills during physical or art activities. Skills education also included teaching thinking skills (for example, comparing, contrasting, categorising)

and life-skills (for example, confidence, independence, group-working, problem-solving ability, self-regulation, self-awareness, and making meaning of their world). Data from the interviews revealed that the six case-study teachers perceived content knowledge education and skills education as separate but inter-related educational domains. Despite acknowledging children's holistic development as the overarching valued concept of the *ECC*, findings from the case-study data analysis, including the interviews and observations, indicated that the teachers' focus was on content knowledge education for children.

With these understandings of content knowledge and skills education, the six case-study teachers reported that in practice they taught both content knowledge and skills according to educational themes suggested in the *ECC* framework. They said they believed that children acquired information from content knowledge education, which was essential in order to prepare them for either primary schooling or for life-long learning. In addition to content knowledge education, skills education was seen as crucial to support children in their learning, especially life-skills such as social skills to enable them to be successful in their future lives. Moreover, the case-study teachers perceived life-skills education as usually lining up tightly with content knowledge education. As Trang stated:

Actually, life-skill education is weaving in with the cognition education area of the programme. The innovation programme now focuses more on life-skills such as communication skills, confidence, teamwork skills, self-help skills, and so forth.

Yet, while indicating that they taught content knowledge and skills concurrently, the case-study teachers nonetheless seemed to value content knowledge education as more important for children than skills education. In the interviews, the

six case-study teachers emphasised that content knowledge education was the basis of all aspects of children's learning and development. They especially saw content knowledge education as being closely related to children's socio-emotional development. In their understanding, content knowledge education helped children build life-skills as it transformed children into becoming more intellectual and knowledgeable and also enhanced their self-confidence in social situations. For example, one of the case-study teachers, Sang, asserted that children's acquired knowledge was reflected through their performances such as singing, dancing, and poetry recital. She emphasised that such learning activities would provide children with further essential knowledge so they could develop their social communication skills and competencies including their confidence, independence, group-work skills, problem-solving abilities, self-regulation, self-awareness, and making meaning of their world.

It was clear the case-study teachers perceived that the *ECC* regarded subject-based content knowledge education as the main task to promote children's cognitive development in particular, and holistic development in general. For instance, Hanh and Quyen said in the interviews that their formal teaching was based on a timetable, which included a number of specific subjects, and their teaching plans included specific theme-based subject knowledge and skills for children to learn and acquire. Additionally, they referred to the expected results of theme-based subject knowledge learning as a crucial indicator of the success of their teaching sessions. Therefore, they considered it important to find opportunities to incorporate content knowledge from other subjects into the main one to ensure their teaching and children's learning and development was as inclusive as possible.

The comments by Hanh and Quyen were consistent with what I saw from the combined analysis of the six case-study teachers' teaching plans and the video-recordings of their formal and informal teaching sessions (see 4.4.4.2 for definitions of these two types of teaching sessions). My review of their teaching plans showed that they carefully outlined certain theme-based content knowledge within their individual teaching plans. Additionally, the video-recordings of their formal and informal teaching sessions clearly illustrated that the case-study teachers deliberately carried out their teaching sessions as a process of, and with the clear intention of, transferring and continuously consolidating the pre-planned theme-based knowledge for children. The video-recordings further showed that the case-study teachers used consistent teaching practices to help children acquire predetermined sets of theme-based knowledge and they continuously consolidated thinking skills and competencies such as memorising, comparing and contrasting, and making connections between objects, especially during their formal teaching sessions. They also paid regular attention to the levels of children's achievements compared to the expected outcomes they had set out in the plans by encouraging children to perform the acquired knowledge repeatedly and consistently in both formal sessions and informal sessions.

The interview data from the case studies also revealed that fostering children's language development appeared to be one of the foci during the teachers' teaching practices. This was also evident in one video-recording of a formal story-telling session in one case-study setting in which the case-study teacher taught the children how to recount the story by rote, and how to respond to her questions in full sentences. Furthermore, one of the case-study teachers, Quyen, said in the interview that she considered language as "an important means of communication" as well as "a tool for

children's thinking and learning". According to Quyen, fostering children's language development would greatly support her theme-based content knowledge education work with the children, as discussed earlier in this section.

In summary, the findings from the case studies were consistent with those from the questionnaire and indicate that despite being supportive of the Government's long-term aspirations about children's holistic learning and development, teachers viewed subject-based content knowledge education as the dominant focus for children's learning and development. This was partly because they valued the contribution of content knowledge education to children's holistic development. Furthermore, my research found that another justification for teachers' emphasis on content knowledge rather than skills, especially life-skills education, was a discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations, which created a tension for teachers. This is discussed in the next section.

5.4. The Discrepancy between the Government's and Parents' Aspirations: A Tension for Teachers

Analysis of the interviews revealed that all of the case-study teachers perceived a discrepancy between the Government's aspirations about children's holistic development and preparing them for life-long learning, and parents' awareness of these aspirations. This was evident when they talked about parents' views about what children should be learning. All the case-study teachers reported that parents were pleased when their children were taught to recite poems and re-tell stories by rote. Two of them, Sang and Thu, commented that parents supported their children being taught academically at their centres. Two other case-study teachers, Quyen and Hang, affirmed that parents in their classes only wanted to see their child

“perform” specific subject knowledge and skills in much the way of a pre-primary approach (Van Oers, 2008) when they get home. The case-study teachers’ perceptions about parents’ aspirations of what and how children should be taught in early childhood education made it explicit that parents’ expectations were not always in line with the Government’s.

This discrepancy was more evident from the interview data concerning parents’ aspirations for preparing children for school entry, particularly in the interviews with three of the case-study teachers: Hang, Thu, and Quyen, who worked with children aged 5 to 6 years who were about to start school. According to these teachers, for most parents school readiness was simply understood as academic preparation for young children, including teaching them how to read, write, and do maths to prepare them for formal schooling before starting school. These case-study teachers explained that the parents’ major fear was that their child would start school without being prepared with adequate knowledge and skills in these three areas. They also indicated that parents were afraid their children would not keep up with the other children in their class, and thus they would lag behind others in the classroom.

Such a discrepancy between the Government’s and parents’ aspirations created a tension for these three case-study teachers and challenged them during the implementation of the *ECC*. While these case-study teachers did not agree with teaching young children formal writing, reading and maths prior to Year One, parents’ concerns about preparing their child with such skills before they entered primary schools created a “push-down” pressure on their work. For example, one of the three case-study teachers, Hang, asserted that parents’ desire about teaching early childhood-aged children to read, write, and do maths before school entry created a

burden for teachers, and affected the way the *ECC* was implemented. She expressed her concern at the push-down effect from the primary curriculum for the early childhood sector:

Some parents are always afraid their children won't be capable enough to join Year One. I see there is no clear link between the two levels of education programmes [early childhood and primary]. Therefore, parents feel worried. They just want their child to learn to write, to read, and to do maths because they think these would help their child learn in Year One without difficulty.

As these three case-study teachers perceived that teaching children to write, read, and to do maths was part of the parents' aspirations for their child's school readiness, they felt that they had to satisfy the parents and teach this knowledge and skills to their children. Hang, in agreement with Quyen, saw parents' expectations about teaching children how to read, write, and do maths as "a practical desire" and explained that it was understandable when there was still a primary push-down and a discrepancy between the *ECC* and the primary curriculum. For instance, Quyen said:

Teachers at primary schools keep requiring too much from children, so parents turn back to require us to prepare more for children's academic performance at preschools so that they're well-prepared for primary level.[...]. If teachers at primary schools didn't require their children to do too much, parents wouldn't do so.

Hang further explained that she found it important to satisfy parents' desire to teach their child reading, writing, and maths as this ensured that the children stayed at the centre. She was concerned that a reduction in children's attendance rate would put her at risk of losing her job as well. She said that while she did not agree with academic teaching in the preschool years,

We still have to keep doing this because that is one of the ways to ensure the children stay with our centre. In many places, children are taught literacy at this age. This is a great pressure for the centre, especially for those teaching the Leaf groups [aged 5-6]. If our centre didn't do this, many parents would send their child to other places just for the purpose of preparing their child to read, to write, and to do maths. [...]

This is indeed a dilemma for us.

According to the six case-study teachers, the severity of this push-down was dependent on whether parents expected teaching to be focused on childcare or on academic teaching, and this also depended on the age of their children. For example, Hang pointed out that “parents are more concerned about care with younger children, but they would put more value on teaching with older children.” Similarly, Thu said: “the upper [aged 5-6] and medium [aged 4-5] classes are expected to take part in exploration activities and performance, while in the lower [aged 3-4] class there is more priority to put on caring activities.”

During the interviews, Sang, one of the case-study teachers, felt that many parents did not share the same understandings with teachers about the long-term aim of the *ECC*. Her idea was congruent with Hang's, Hanh's and Quyen's who all believed that the *ECC* had not been well explained to parents in terms of its holistic development and its underlying social pedagogy approach. They believed that this had created obstacles for teachers in implementing the *ECC*. Additionally, Hang believed that all parents would agree with the Government in terms of the long-term aspirations of children becoming “mature, poised, strong, and confident in the future”. When asked about their ideas to fix this problem, Hang, one of the case-study teachers suggested “what the Government should do to educate parents is the key thing”, in other words, a public campaign to educate parents about the benefits of children's

long-term development. At the same time, they wanted more action from the Government's administration to reconsider the primary education level in order to solve the push-down pressure of primary school. For example, Hang said that "resolving this situation would depend on our success in educating parents"; and she emphasised "the key thing is educational management". Similarly to Hang's comment, Hanh and Quyen stated that parent awareness was the key issue:

Hanh: We need to do something to get parents involved to contribute more at the preschool level, and to share with us the viewpoint of holistic education that we are doing for children's long-term learning and development, not just the short-term benefits for their school entry.

Quyen: As I said, it depends on the parents' awareness. We can't please them all. I have to implement the programme which the ministry has given. If I come under pressure to teach literacy to children as parents require, I will have to leave it for the upper-level administrators to deal with.

Teachers' perceptions that teaching for school readiness was affected by parents' desires is consistent with the finding in Yang's research (1997) that there was a tension between staff and families' expectations about preschool, including differences in each side's perceptions about what should be valued in early childhood education. Yang's research explained that this tension was caused because of parents' lack of understanding about values such as having a play-based curriculum approach, and the variety of parents' perceptions, which were influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds.

Bearing such a tension while working with the *ECC*, teachers found it hard to carry out the implementation of the *ECC* as expected. The next section throws some light on this aspect by further exploring their perceptions of the strengths and

weaknesses of the *ECC* and examining the participant teachers' levels of satisfaction with the *ECC* and its implementation.

5.5. Teachers' Perceptions of Strengths and Weaknesses of the *ECC* and Their Levels of Satisfaction with the *ECC* and its Implementation

The findings in this section were drawn on analyses of both the questionnaire and the case-study data.

5.5.1. The Questionnaire Data

5.5.1.1. Strengths and weaknesses of the ECC

In Phase One of this research, item 47 of the questionnaire asked: "Does the *ECC* satisfy the Government's aspirations about the future generation for Vietnam?" This item was an open-ended question and many participant teachers took the opportunity to comment about the aspects of the *ECC* that they favoured and ones they did not. My analysis of these open-ended responses, given by 50.6% ($n = 213$) of the participant teachers, showed both positive and negative comments based on what they had experienced during their implementation of the *ECC*. I interpreted their positive viewpoints as perceived strengths of the *ECC*, while their negative responses were seen as weaknesses of the *ECC*. Their comments are listed in Table 13.

Table 13. *Teachers' Responses to Open-ended Question 47 in the Questionnaire Indicating Strengths and Weaknesses of the ECC*

Strengths	Emphasis on a child-centred and/or a child-based approach	25.8%	82.1% (n = 175)
	Emphasis on an integrated and holistic development approach	21.1%	
	Focusing on life-skills (self-assurance, confidence, creativity)	15.5	
	Giving teachers and children more flexibility and context-based teaching	10.3	
	Fitting with the government's aspirations for future generation	5.2	
	Focusing on developing cognitive development and critical thinking	2.8	
	Focusing on transition to school	0.9	
	Focusing on language fluency	0.5	
Weaknesses	Overloading children through impractical and overwhelming knowledge	9.9	17.9% (n = 38)
	Time wasting for plan making, documentary paperwork, teaching aids	3.3	
	Being a stereotyping and mechanical curriculum	1.4	
	Low quality of teaching materials and facilities	1.4	
	Focusing too much on providing academic knowledge	0.9	
	Being incongruent in administration from the central to the locality	0.5	
	Inadequate highly-qualified early childhood teachers	0.5	
100% of 213 responses			

According to Table 13, most of the respondent teachers (82.1%) were in favour of the *ECC* due to what they considered its strengths, while only 17.9% commented on what they saw as the weaknesses of the *ECC*. A large percentage of respondent teachers stated that one of the strengths of the *ECC* was that it was child-

centred, meaning children were the centre of every teaching and learning activity (25.8%). The next most frequently cited strength of the *ECC* was seen to be the value of children's holistic development and the pedagogy of integration (21.1%).

Education in life-skills and personal qualities for developing social participation competencies (such as self-assurance, confidence, and creativity) were identified as a strength by 15.5% of the respondents. Flexibility and context-based teaching were seen as other strengths of the *ECC* (10.3%). Cognitive education, language and school transition preparation were also values perceived as strengths but were not viewed to be as strong as the other values. The teachers' advocacy of these *ECC* strengths again indicated they were supportive of the *ECC*'s holistic and social pedagogical approach to educating young children.

Regarding the weaknesses of the *ECC*, the excessive and impractical learning (9.9%) and teachers' time wastage for documenting plans (3.3%) were mentioned by most. Some teachers claimed that the curriculum was mechanical and not as flexible as it stated (1.8%) while 1.4% of the teachers thought the *ECC* was being implemented under difficult conditions without the available resources to facilitate it successfully. Others were dissatisfied with the professional qualifications of the staff, including teachers (0.5%) and administrators (0.5%). These weaknesses in the implementation of the *ECC* will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

5.5.1.2. Teachers' levels of satisfaction about the implementation of the ECC

Teachers' levels of satisfaction about the implementation of the *ECC* seemed to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the Government's aspirations about young children's education in Vietnam. The questionnaire was used to find out how

satisfied teachers were with the *ECC* implementation. There were two questions regarding the teachers' levels of satisfaction. The first one, item 46, asked the participant teachers whether the *ECC* reflected their beliefs of what is important for children to learn. Of 388 teachers who responded to this question, 79.9% ($n = 310$) indicated that the *ECC* reflected their beliefs of what was important for children to learn while 20.1% ($n = 78$) indicated *somewhat yes*. Interestingly, no one indicated *no*. Figure 7 visualises these results:

Figure 7. Teachers' perceptions of whether the *ECC* reflected their beliefs of what was important for children to learn

As analysed and discussed previously, the participant teachers in my study were found to perceive holistic development as an overarching value in the *ECC* (see section 5.3). Therefore, the results in this section can be interpreted that most of the respondent teachers agreed with the educational values about holistic development for young children in the *ECC*.

The second question, item 53, asked the participant teachers how satisfied they were that the *ECC* reflects the Government's and community's aspirations about education for young children. This was answered by 88.6% ($n = 373$) participant teachers. Similar to the results shown earlier from the analysis of question 46, the

results indicated that the majority of the respondent teachers were satisfied, including 20.1% ($n = 75$) were very satisfied and 61.9% ($n = 231$) satisfied with the *ECC*. Only a very small percentage (2.9%, $n = 11$) was dissatisfied. Figure 8 presents these results:

Figure 8. Teachers' levels of satisfaction about the implementation of the *ECC* as reflecting the Government's and community's aspirations about education for young children

The results from analyses of items 46 and 53 indicate that a large number of participant teachers seemed to agree and be satisfied with the *ECC* in terms of the reconceptualising educational concepts it values. This seems to contradict the finding discussed earlier (see section 5.4) concerning the tension teachers were encountering which was created by the discrepancy between the Government's and parent's aspirations.

Additionally, using *Chi-square* tests to further analyse items 46 and 53 it was clear that age had an effect on the participant teachers' levels of satisfaction. With item 46, the *Chi-square* test was computed to explore if there was a difference between the group of participant teachers aged under 40 and those aged 40 and over in response to the question: "Does the *ECC* reflect your beliefs about what is

important for children to learn?” Similar analyses for groups of participant teachers by working position (*posgp*), years of experience (*yoegp*), and qualifications (*qualgp*) yielded the following results in Table 14:

Table 14. *Chi-square Test by Age Group, Position, Years of Experience, and Qualification for Teachers' Beliefs about What Is Important for Children to Learn*

Variable	Chi-square value	Asymp. Sig	Phi value	Asymp.sig(2-sided)
Age group (<i>agegp</i>)	3.377	.066	-.099	.049
Working position Group (<i>posgp</i>)	.990	.320	.059	.243
Year of experience group (<i>yoegp</i>)	.667	.414	-.051	.321
Qualification group (<i>qualgp</i>)	.071	.790	.020	.693

These results show that the differences between groups divided by position, years of experience and qualifications were not significant. However, there was a significant difference between the two age groups: under 40 and 40 and over, $\chi^2 (1, n = 393) = 3.377, p = 0.049$, suggesting that age had an effect on teachers' evaluation of how well the *ECC* reflected their belief of a holistic education to assist children to learn. Table 15 displays the comparative results between the two age groups.

Table 15. *Teacher's Beliefs about Holistic Education for Children by Teachers' Age group*

Age group	Yes	Somewhat yes and No
Under 40 years old	77.4 % ($n = 182$)	22.6 % ($n = 53$)
40 years old and over	85.4 % ($n = 135$)	14.6 % ($n = 23$)

The data indicates that the participant teachers aged 40 and over were more likely to be pleased with the *ECC* in terms of its holistic approach to education for young children (85.4%, $n = 135$ responded *yes*) than those younger ones aged under 40 years (77.4%, $n = 182$ responded *yes*).

Similarly, with item 53, a *Chi-square* test was used to examine the participant teachers' levels of satisfaction regarding how well the current implementation of the *ECC* reflected the Government's and the community's aspirations. The results of the *Chi-square* test showed there was a significant difference in the means between the two groups of respondent teachers aged under 40 and those who were 40 and over, $\chi^2(2, n = 350) = 6.41, p = 0.041$ ($p < 0.05$). Similar analyses were conducted with the other variables, but no significant difference in the means was found. These results shown in Table 16 revealed that the teachers' levels of satisfaction differed by their age.

Table 16. *Chi-square Values by Age Group, Position, Years of Experience, and Qualification for Teachers' Beliefs and Satisfaction of the ECC*

Variable	Chi-square Value	Asymp.sig (2 sided)
Age group (<i>agegp</i>)	6.413	.041
Position group (<i>posgp</i>)	4.114	.128
Year of experience group (<i>yoegp</i>)	1.793	.408
Qualification group (<i>qualgp</i>)	.318	.853

Within the Chi-square test for item 53, the scale was re-categorised and re-named from a five-point scale to a 3-point scale. This involved grouping *Very satisfied* and *Satisfied* and categorised these as *Satisfied*; *Dissatisfied* and *Very dissatisfied* as *Dissatisfied*. Table 17 presents the results for this age group variable in more detail.

Table 17. *Teachers' Magnitude of Satisfaction with the ECC by Age*

Age group	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Under 40	145	47	23
	67.4%	21.9%	10.7%
40 and over	104	26	5
	77%	19.3%	3.7%

This result indicates that the respondent teachers under 40 were less satisfied with the implementation practice of the *ECC* than those who aged 40 and over in terms of the *ECC* having addressed the Government's and the community's aspirations. This issue was also investigated with the case-study interviews and

observations in Phase Two and the findings will be discussed in Chapter 8 (see section 8.2.3.1).

5.5.2. The Case-Study Data

Data analysis from the interviews with the six case-study teachers showed they were satisfied with the change in the curriculum approach alongside the concept of reconceptualisation of education for young children in Vietnam. Basically, they were in agreement with the Government's direction of shifting the curriculum towards a more open and flexible one. The case-study teachers emphasised the advantages of the *ECC* in comparison to the *RECC* with one case-study teacher, Hanh, specifically commenting that the implementation of the *ECC* was the right trend for the education of young children in Vietnam. The other case-study teachers also advocated for the innovation by giving positive reflections, specifically on being able to be more flexible and to carry out their ideas creatively; and giving children more autonomy and freedom to play and learn in comparison to the *RECC*. All of them were happy with the focus on a play-based co-constructivist curriculum in which the social pedagogical approach was predominant. The case-study teachers considered these changes as the strengths of the *ECC* and indicated that the changes were needed in response to recent socio-economic changes as these had impacted on contemporary childhood. For instance, one case-study teacher, Sang, said:

While the previous curriculum focused on what children could learn, the current curriculum, which adopts some educational programmes from other advanced countries, emphasises how children learn. Forms of teaching, teaching methods and content are changed in the new curriculum.[...] It (such changes) results from children's higher level of cleverness nowadays; simultaneously, the parents' awareness of childhood education now is also different from the past. Children will

be equipped with plentiful knowledge at anytime and anywhere possible during the day at the centre. Therefore, if we insisted on system-based and content-based teaching as in the former curriculum, it wouldn't be appropriate for the ability of children.

Besides the strengths of the *ECC*, the six case-study teachers also identified some points they felt uncomfortable, or unsatisfied, with during the implementation. In the interviews, their comments regarding the weaknesses of the *ECC* involved excessive workloads for teachers, overloading children with academic knowledge, being innovative at the “outer appearance but not the inner core” (Hang, case-study teacher), the incongruence of curriculum administration, the low number of high-qualified teachers and the tough conditions for implementation, such as the “scarce facilities” and “non-highly qualified teachers” (Hanh, case-study teacher). Their concerns covered the same points of weakness previously identified in the analysis of the open-ended item 47 in the questionnaire (see Table 13 in section 5.5.1.1). Additionally, the case-study teachers saw these as weaknesses and barriers to the curriculum's implementation.

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that the teachers were satisfied that the *ECC* represents a reconceptualisation of the early childhood curriculum in Vietnam, which meets the country's need for innovation alongside the ongoing socio-economic changes. However, the teachers' concerns regarding the weaknesses of the *ECC* expose possible tensions and challenges to the implementation of the curriculum. While it seems that all the six case-study teachers indicated that they were overall very satisfied with the *ECC* and its implementation, the results of the survey analysis indicates that the younger teachers were more likely to feel dissatisfied with the

implementation practice than those over 40 (Table 15 and 17 in section 5.5.1.1). This finding will be discussed later on in Chapter 8 (see section 8.2.3.1).

5.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, findings from the analyses of the questionnaire and the case studies concerning the early childhood teachers' perceptions of the Government's aspirations and the educational concepts they valued during their teaching practices when implementing the *ECC* were presented. The findings were consistent throughout the study and indicated congruence in early childhood teachers' perceptions of the long-term educational direction of the Government, regardless of their age, working position, years of experience, and qualification. This governmental aspiration is reflected in the aim of the *ECC* in which children's holistic development is an overarching value. However, the research found that while advocating the Government's aspiration about holistic development for young children, the teachers valued and expressed a greater emphasis on academic teachings, which involved a focus on content knowledge education and formal teaching including teaching literacy and numeracy concepts and skills, to prepare children for Year One. The discrepancy between the Government's long-term and the parents' short-term aspirations about what to teach children and how to prepare them for the future was perceived by the case-study teachers as creating a tension for teachers in implementing the *ECC*.

This chapter has also reported findings about the participant teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the *ECC*, and their levels of satisfaction in relation to their age and years of teaching. The expansion of the reconceptualising educational concepts with an emphasis on providing holistic development for young children were seen by the participant teachers as strengths of

the *ECC*. Nonetheless, there is an inconsistency between the findings about the teachers' perceptions of the weaknesses of the *ECC*, together with the tension the teachers encountered mentioned in the previous paragraphs, alongside the results showing the high number of participant teachers who felt satisfied with the *ECC* and its implementation. This inconsistency has revealed that the status-quo of the implementation in practice was problematic. Additionally, younger teachers aged 40 and under were found to be more dissatisfied with the implementation of the *ECC* in practice, suggesting that age had an effect on early childhood teachers' perceptions of what should be valued in implementing the curriculum, as well as their experience of the implementation. In the next chapter, teachers' perceptions of theories underpinning the *ECC* will be explored.

Chapter 6

Teachers' Perceptions of Theories Underpinning the Early Childhood Curriculum

In this chapter, data from the case studies were used to examine the second research sub-question: What theories do teachers identify as underpinning the *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*? The data included the six case-study teachers' teaching documentation, the interviews with each of them, and 12 video-recordings of their daily teaching sessions (one formal and one informal session carried out by each teacher, each about 30-45 minutes long). This chapter firstly examines the nature of the *ECC* by reviewing the *ECC* document and guidebooks. Then, it discusses the case-study teachers' perceptions of theories underpinning the *ECC* by examining whether a social pedagogy or a pre-primary approach (Van Oers, 2008) was emphasised by the teachers during their teaching practices. Finally, the tensions including the issues of power and time constraints identified through the case-study data analysis are presented.

6.1. Moving towards a Transformative and Reconceptualised Curriculum:

Document Review

When reviewing the *ECC* document and associated guidebooks, it was clear that the *ECC* is a theme-based integrated curriculum. According to Roegiers (1996), the pedagogy of integration embraces educational processes organised and carried out in a comprehensive, complementary, non-detachable way. As written in a guidebook by Le et al. (2009), within the pedagogy of integration learning and playing activities are complementary in Vietnam. This educational approach is regarded as suitable for

young children (Nguyen, 2005). Within the pedagogy of integration, the construction of key learning themes is not based on a division of separate subject knowledge, but rather focuses on the goal of forming human beings' psychological attributes and competencies, and appropriate life-skills in order to holistically develop children's individuality including: physical health, cognition, language, socio-emotional well-being, and aesthetics (Le et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2005). This pedagogy of integration is seen to allow teachers to create their teaching programmes in a way that is context-specific and responsive to the locality, the children, and the whole community including the parents. Taken together, these characteristics of the *ECC* suggest that the concept of the pedagogy of integration found in the *ECC* constitutes a reconceptualising approach to children's learning and development, which was not previously evident in the education of young children in Vietnam.

With its new pedagogical approach, the *ECC* adopts a co-constructivist cultural-historical approach to teaching young children, emphasising teacher-child interaction and children's learning as a process that occurs within particular cultural contexts (Fleer, 2010). According to Fleer (2010), the cultural-historical approach to curriculum allows teachers to be more flexible in terms of bringing their practical experiences and insights into their teaching practices. Within this approach, the teacher-child interaction is taken into account in order to help children construct their own learning and development, which are culturally embedded and institutionally defined. In the section called *Instructions for Implementation*, the *ECC* outlines some implementation guidance for teachers as follows:

1. Based on the *ECC* issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Local Offices of Education and Training guide the early childhood centres in the locality to

build up and implement the annual plans in accordance with specific regional cultures.

2. Based on the *ECC*, teachers, on their own, propose educational plans consistent with the particular group/class, the particular ability of the individual child, and the specific context of the location.
3. The five domains (physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and aesthetical development) are integrated with each other and closely aligned with children's learning topics through a diverse range of activities which are suitable for children of a young age and in accordance to the specific context of the location.
4. Teachers should regularly track and assess children's development, and review the programme objectives and the expected outcomes in the plans to provide learning and teaching activities in accordance with the child's individual development as well as of the group/class.
5. Teachers should be sensitive in identifying gifted and talented children as soon as possible to facilitate their development; teachers should also be sensitive in creating early intervention and inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.
6. Coordinate closely between the early childhood education sector and families and the community to do the best for childcare and education (The *ECC*, 2009, p. 78, my translation from the Vietnamese version)

These instructions for implementing the *ECC* reflect a reconceptualised view of the early childhood curriculum in Vietnam, which derives from the socio-cultural approach to teaching young children. They indicate a context-based approach specific to the area where an early childhood centre is located by encouraging teachers to set up their own educational plans (see point 2 in the guidelines) in accordance with particular local culture and with children's varying levels of learning and

development. In other words, the *ECC* emphasises and promotes teachers' autonomy and authority in making educational decisions to develop their own educational programmes.

The two concepts of giving teachers more freedom to design suitable programmes for children in a particular context, and highlighting parents' involvement in the education process, indicate that the *ECC* has moved from a structured prescribed approach towards a co-constructivist and context-based one. Compared to the earlier curriculum — the *RECC* — this new approach of the *ECC* constitutes a reconceptualisation for Vietnam as it provides teachers with more possibilities to draw on their expertise and creativity. It shows a transformation of the early childhood curriculum in Vietnam to become an open and flexible framework in which teachers, children, and family are offered opportunities to co-construct the content and the ways of conducting teaching aimed at making positive social changes. Moreover, it is clear that the new ideas in the *ECC* including the pedagogy of integration and its adaptation to become a co-constructivist curriculum are in alignment with the social pedagogy approach to working with young children, which highlights children's holistic learning and well-being for long-lasting enjoyment of happiness (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011).

My review of the *ECC* document and guidebooks also showed that the *ECC* utilises an age-based approach to teaching children. Evidence to support this comes from the *ECC* document itself as the goals in the curriculum are categorised into kindergarten goals and preschool goals (see Table 13, section 7.1.1). While kindergarten goals are set out to suit children aged from birth to under 3 years, preschool goals are for those aged from 3 to under 6 years. Each of these age-groups

is separately divided into smaller groups according to age: 3-12 months, 12-24 months, and 24-36 months (for kindergarten age) and year 3-4, year 4-5, and year 5-6 (for preschool age). The goals for each of the kindergarten-aged and preschool-aged groups stated in the *ECC* document are reinforced and expanded chronologically based on children's developmental stages. For example, in regard to physical development, the kindergarten goals are limited to teaching children some initial physical movements and basic living habits (for example, ability to serve oneself in eating, sleeping, and bodily hygiene). Meanwhile, the preschool goals are focused more on establishing skills and knowledge about health, correct movement and keeping oneself safe. Furthermore, for the kindergarten-aged children, aesthetic education is merged into socio-emotional education. For the preschool-aged children, however, these two developmental aspects are presented separately, thus emphasising each of these two aspects more intensively and differently at this later age. This age division indicates a perception of children's learning and development as occurring in developmental stages (McLachlan, Fleer, & Edwards, 2013).

From this analysis, it is clear that although the *ECC* has been transformed to be an innovative and reconceptualised curriculum in the Vietnamese context, it still characterises an age-based and prescribed curriculum with a pre-primary approach to teaching young children. Building upon the goals for preschool-aged children, those for kindergarten-aged children suggest an underlying proposition that children's learning and development is continuous and incremental. Additionally, in the *ECC* document and guidebooks I found that the instructions for the care and teaching of these groups are specifically prescribed within the goals, the procedures (including timetable, content and requirements for care and educational activities, expected outcomes), and the types of sessions and methods to carry out such activities. These

attributes of the *ECC* are very similar to those in the *RECC*, indicating that the *ECC* is not completely different from the previous curriculum *RECC*.

The findings in this section has shown that while the *ECC* is considered as an innovative and reconceptualised curriculum for young children in Vietnam aiming at positive changes for the society in near future, it seems to uphold both the reconceptualising and traditional concepts of curricular approach to teaching young children. In the next section, findings are presented from the case studies about teachers' perceptions of theories underpinning the *ECC* which reveal that the case-study teachers at the same time applied both a social pedagogical and a pre-primary approach in their teaching practice when implementing the *ECC*.

6.2. A Social Pedagogy Approach versus a Pre-primary Approach: The Case Studies

Knowledge is valued differently depending on whether a society bases itself on a pre-primary or social pedagogical tradition (Fleer, 2010). In recent years, early childhood professionals have become increasingly mindful of what concepts underpin a social pedagogical approach and a pre-primary approach (Fleer, 2010). Among those are Van Oers (2008) who suggests dividing learning goals into four categories: (i) learning to perform; (ii) learning to make meaning; (iii) learning to participate; and (iv) learning to be. According to Van Oers (2008), while *learning to perform* and *learning to make meaning* underpin the pre-primary approach, *learning to participate* and *learning to be* underpin the social pedagogical approach.

When reviewing the *ECC* document and guidebooks, it is clear that the pedagogy of integration in the *ECC* was a new concept within the Vietnamese

curriculum context and was certainly not part of the previous curriculum — the *RECC*. Thus, I investigated the case-study teachers' understandings about using the pedagogy of integration in implementing the *ECC*. This analysis is presented in the following section.

6.2.1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Pedagogy of Integration

Data analysis from the six case-study teachers' interviews and their teaching plans showed they perceived the pedagogy of integration as an innovative approach in the *ECC*. For them, the concept of the pedagogy of integration represents a significant shift in the *ECC*, moving from a traditional concept of what children should learn to the view that children learn drawing on their interests. For example, Thu said:

The innovation as well as the strength of the current programme is to help children develop the five sectors holistically [physical, cognition, language, socio-emotion, and aesthetics], through play-and-learn strategy. Children are promoted to explore and study based on their interests. Especially, the programme also builds up life-skills for children. Teachers can have flexibility in the way we integrate the content together.

Furthermore, all of the six case-study teachers clearly indicated that the five-aspect developmental goals in the *ECC* were supposed to be integrated, where possible, in specific teaching practices although they are separately specified in the curriculum. For example, one case-study teacher, Quyen, stated that in order to teach the children about cultural values, she would integrate the content of learning about cultural events in normal weekly themes. Another case-study teacher, Hang, believed that "children can develop their emotional aspect through cognitive development. These aspects of development are integrated with each other". All of the case-study

teachers regarded putting these developmental aspects together as the pedagogy of integration; and teaching in this way was more appropriate for young children compared to the separate-subject approach promoted in the previous *RECC*.

Going beyond that, the six case-study teachers viewed the pedagogy of integration as a way to bring about holistic development for young children which, as argued previously, was the overarching valued concept in the *ECC* (see section 5.3.2). For instance, one of the case-study teachers, Hanh, put it this way:

It's just a Literature session this morning but Ms Oanh [Oanh was Hanh's co-teacher in the classroom who carried out the formal and informal sessions for my case-study observation] has integrated music, creative arts, and life-skill education into this. The story allowed the children to develop their mind; however, the content of this story helped them build life-skills. Every session is integrated that way, which makes me think this is a holistic programme for children's development.

This example indicates how the *ECC* had basically changed the teachers' perceptions about how to teach young children. The case-study teachers saw themselves as integrating a range of these life-skills into the teaching content and children's learning activities in their educational plans. They indicated they regularly found opportunities to do this during a day. They also believed in using the pedagogy of integration as an efficient approach to achieving the goal of children's holistic development.

6.2.2. Teachers' Perceptions of Flexibility and Creativity

The move away from the *RECC*'s consistently structured teaching programme approach to the more open context-appropriate one in the *ECC* was more evident when the case-study teachers talked during the interviews about the increased levels

of flexibility and creativity when implementing the *ECC*. All of the case-study teachers indicated they were aware of the opportunity to be more flexible and creative in their teaching programmes and plans. In addition, they were aware that flexibility and creativity were emphasised so the curriculum would be more appropriate to the specific natural and cultural characteristics of their regional locations. Furthermore, the six case-study teachers regarded this attribute of the *ECC* as progressive, and also added that implementing such a curriculum flexibly and creatively was a new experience for them. To illustrate this change in the *ECC*, Sang and Quyen, commented about the differences between the *RECC* and the *ECC*:

Sang: The previous curriculum — the *RECC* — provided an available system of lessons which were subject-based so that teachers just had to rely on them to teach the children from the beginning to the end of a whole school year. Meanwhile, the *ECC* requires teachers to take time to observe, to collect experiences, to study and investigate so that the teachers could design their whole programme in their own way to suit the children in their classroom.

Quyen: In the old programme, teachers' teaching had to follow a step-by-step structure. The new one is more flexible, it allows teachers to make changes. [...] If I feel that children in my class already know the poem, I don't have to follow the introduction as normally required in my teaching but I can go ahead with the next step. This is to say it's not necessary that I have to follow all the normal steps. That's why I said the new curriculum is more flexible.

During the interviews, the six case-study teachers made a number of statements, that highlighted how they understood the terms *flexibility* and *creativity* in practice, and how their understandings influenced their teaching practice. For example, Sang stated that flexibility was reflected in the teaching plans which were based on children's needs and interests. Sang and Quyen both pointed out that they

could make changes to their daily teaching plans. Trang, together with Hanh and Sang, thought that flexibility meant teachers could make use of any opportunities to teach children and reinforce their learning as intended in the plans. Hanh focused on teachers' agency in searching for and bringing more new ideas into their daily teaching plans rather than just following the content and activities illustrated in the framework. Three of the teachers, Quyen, Thu, and Trang, regarded flexibility as children being allowed more freedom to move around with more options to play and learn.

With regard to creativity, all of the six case-study teachers mentioned this as a desirable quality for teachers in implementing the *ECC*. Trang even noted that creativity was a core criterion that distinguished teachers: those who demonstrated creativity had an outstanding ability to organise the class in different ways to make the children feel free and excited while learning and playing. During the interviews, all of the case-study teachers highlighted efforts they made in their teaching sessions, illustrating creativity by using different teaching techniques and methods to attract the children to their teaching activities.

Also, the way of using teaching aids during a teaching session was considered an innovative aspect of the *ECC*, through which a teacher's creativity could be shown. One teacher, Thu, said teaching aids contributed to the success of her teaching sessions in terms of motivating children to learn. Sang agreed and also indicated that being creative in using teaching aids impressed her administrators when they came to visit her class. These two teachers preferred making their own teaching aids as a way to show their talents and levels of creativity.

Beyond seeing creativity as desirable in teachers' planning and teaching, the case-study teachers also mentioned that it was the role of a teacher to encourage and promote children's creativity during their learning. For instance, Quyen and Thu stated about what and how children are taught:

Quyen: I think the innovation programme does not over-emphasise the child's academic performance. For example, according to the previous curriculum, children are forced to draw beautifully in accordance with a teacher's requests in an Art session. In the new one, children just try their best, and the teachers encourage them to be more proactive and help inspire them to draw their pictures.

Thu: With the current programme, children are promoted to be more active in their learning and they are allowed space for their own playing. This is contrary to what we had in the past, children would be stuck at their tables, and teachers asked them to give this thing, that thing to them. Now, teachers can use as many open questions as they can during their teaching, and the children may contribute more creative ideas to the teachers' teaching.

One teacher, Hang, explained her understanding of children's creativity by arguing that the children were allowed to use the learning kits differently rather than follow the teacher's modelling actions exactly. Commenting on her formal teaching session that I video-recorded for the study, she said:

The children were not obliged to put those birds [in the individual teaching-aid kit] horizontally the same as I did. They did the same as I did because they just wanted to do it that way. They absolutely could place the birds vertically. As you could see, there were a few children who let their birds look for food by placing them vertically, unlike what I was doing with my birds. A math session indeed doesn't need to use too many modelling actions.

Overall, the case-study teachers believed they were able to be more flexible and creative and they also felt their autonomy and authority were intentionally promoted in implementing the *ECC*. They were in charge of both the educational plans and the educational outcomes as long as they adhered to the overall principled instructions given in the *ECC* framework.

Although the case-study teachers perceived that there was an expansion of flexibility and creativity in the *ECC*, analysis of the video-recordings, interviews and reviews of the case-study teachers' teaching plans revealed that the teachers still maintained a widespread use of traditional pedagogy in which teaching children involved an approach that was (i) structured and subject-based; (ii) outcome-oriented; and (iii) standard-based. These approaches are discussed in the following sub-sections.

6.2.2.1. A structured and subject-based approach to teaching

The case-study teachers' teaching plans for formal teaching sessions and observation of their teaching sessions clearly demonstrated a subject-based approach. For example, Thu, one of the case-study teachers, prepared a Math plan for her Math formal teaching sessions, while Quyen, another case-study teacher, prepared a Poetry teaching plan to use as a guide for her Literature session. The nature of their planning was very similar to the planning process required in the implementation of the previous curriculum — the *RECC*. The only difference in how teachers planned their teaching in accordance with the *ECC* framework was that they put different subjects together in an integrated session. Within this, however, they still maintained a main subject focus. This seemed not to be an appropriate application of the pedagogy of integration because, as discussed earlier, the notion of the pedagogy of integration

aims to provide a holistic teaching approach for children without dividing knowledge into separate disciplines or subjects (see section 6.2.1)

Furthermore, analyses of the case-study data in this section suggest that the teachers' teaching sessions were carried out in a very structured manner. A review of the case-study teachers' working documents (for example, workbooks, educational and teaching plans) showed they used a range of educational and teaching plans including annual plans, theme plans, week plans and daily plans in order to achieve the five-aspect goals of the curriculum. Within each centre, they used the annual plans, set up by the centre's academic administrator, to generate the remaining smaller ones so that these covered all the five developmental goals of the *ECC*. Daily plans were the most detailed as they specified the teaching content split into separate domains including knowledge, skills and attitudes. These types of educational plans were very formal and structured on paper, and were based on the children's age level. It was also noticeable that although the teaching objectives in their planning aimed at bringing about holistic development for young children, the teaching content remained subject-based.

Analyses of the video-recordings and interviews showed a similar pattern. Across their teaching practices, all of the six case-study teachers were very purposeful in maintaining a tight structure in their teaching sessions. During the interviews, the case-study teachers said that this structured approach was in accordance with specific subject sessions which they had been trained to do and were required to follow. According to three of the case-study teachers, Hanh, Quyen, and Hang, the knowledge in their teaching content had to remain systematic and fit within the school-year scheme as well as the current theme. As they carried out these plans, Sang, Hanh,

Quyen, Thu, and Trang stated that they had to maintain the pedagogical steps required for different subjects. All of the case-study teachers indicated they used a subject-based approach despite trying to integrate one subject with another to ensure they fostered as many as possible of the five developmental aspects stated in the goals of the *ECC*. For example, Hanh described how she planned for her teaching using a subject-based approach:

In a week, we have subjects which meet requirements for children's development in different areas or dimensions. For example, for children's aesthetic development, we have Music and Art. We have Gymnastics for physical development; and Science Discovery is to provide children with initial knowledge about the natural and social life. In addition to this, teachers also conduct all aspects of child development in other activities, with purposeful formal sessions, at the centre. Generally speaking, we develop all of the aspects anywhere and anytime by distributing them across daily and weekly-planned activities.

Moreover, not only did the teachers have to follow required steps in formal teaching sessions, the informal teaching sessions also had requirements for the teachers to follow. Three of the case-study teachers, Sang, Hanh, and Thu, explained that there was a strict planning schedule for outdoor sessions, which they had to follow. According to these teachers, an outdoor session contained three required steps: purposeful teaching activity, physical games, and free play. This data also revealed that the teachers used their structured planning for formal and informal teaching sessions as a useful strategy to direct children's learning and developmental outcomes. According to the case-study teachers, this structured teaching was important as it ensured the attainment of the five developmental goals specified at the beginning of the curriculum document.

6.2.2.2. *An outcomes-oriented approach to teaching*

It became clear from the documentary reviews and the analysis of the interview data that the *ECC* adopts an outcomes-oriented approach to teaching young children. The *ECC* document includes a section called “Desired Outcomes”, which work as standardised indices. These desired outcomes are specified by children’s age to help teachers review their teaching plans against the curriculum objectives so they can ensure the standard outcomes for children’s learning and development are reached. As the case-study teachers focused on the desired outcomes, it appeared they had a very input-output orientation in their teaching approach in order to obtain their goals. Indicated in the interview, Hanh’s statements below are an example of how all the case-study teachers spoke about desired outcomes from each of their teaching sessions:

The focus of the plan needs to be guaranteed [...] (to) provide children with sufficient knowledge in order to reach the desired outcomes of the lessons. [...]

From the beginning, the children’s characteristics and developmental levels have been identified, so when carrying out the teaching plans, the teacher has to make every effort to attain the desired outcomes. [...] If they have not achieved the desired outcomes, the teacher will modify and supplement with the other activities, generally speaking, where possible during a day.

Achieving learning outcomes was the teachers’ on-going concern throughout their working day. As Thu, Quyen and Sang noted below:

Thu: The fact that we prioritise children’s interests doesn’t mean we don’t value learning results. In fact, we still have assessments of children’s learning results after a certain time. In addition, as a teacher, I definitely won’t be happy if I teach children and they gain nothing. Also, I would be assessed by the administrators to be

incompetent. Well, I would say our job is to teach children in order for them to gain something in the end.

Quyen: The teacher would use many different methods to help them achieve the predetermined targets, such as dividing children into groups, and giving individual tasks.

Sang: Educational plans always have basic steps which are specific to each subject and are revealed on my prepared plan. When planning and carrying out these plans, I usually rely on the outlined objectives and basic steps to reach the desired results.

Sang also shared that the *ECC* was implemented more flexibly compared with the *RECC*, however they perceived that the *ECC* still targeted specific learning outcomes despite this flexibility.

Sang: Normally, I observe all of the children in the class; and of course it's not always that all of them satisfy my expectations. However, the new curriculum has more openness than the previous one as it doesn't require children to achieve teachers' desired targets. In the progress of the plan, I observe and might realise some children who haven't gained the desired targets yet, then we will have additional plans to add more activities alongside the main activities during the day or the next few days to help them grasp the knowledge and skills.

Another teacher, Hang, advocated for the *ECC* in terms of the agency which teachers and children were given. However, she implied that pre-set learning outcomes were very important to children's development, and was directive in her teaching for better results:

Everything is twofold. With the programmes in which learning outcomes are not so important and depending much on children's learning interests, teachers' teaching styles are normally free and not necessary to be well-planned by teachers. [...]
While the good point is that children and teachers have more freedom to do what

they want, the limitation of this approach is, however, that children are more likely to be left to non-directed development.

Hang highlighted the individual differences in children's development. She did, however, emphasise the children's learning outcomes by the end of the educational process. She explained how she managed to help the children obtain the prescribed outcomes.

There are many children in a class and like adults each child has different competencies. It isn't that children in the same school or the same environment will develop the same. So at the end of a learning theme, I will see how many children have achieved the objectives, and how many of them haven't.

All of these examples indicate that the case-study teachers' perceptions about the outcome-based approach dominated their planning. Moreover, in order to obtain the outcome successfully the case study teachers used their planning as a useful strategy to control the input of their teaching sessions. During the interviews, the six case-study teachers explained that the annual plan or theme-based plan would set out broader objectives, which would then be broken down into more specific weekly or daily plans with expected learning outcomes for each theme. This outcome-oriented approach to teaching children became more evident when the case-study teachers revealed, in the interviews, that every part of the teaching content in the plans must be arranged systematically from simple to the more complex so that children can acquire every single knowledge item and skill more easily. This way of planning indicated that these teachers were very intentional about their teaching and the expected outcomes for the children's learning and development.

With regard to the outdoor sessions, the three-step structured planning indicated by the case-study teachers again showed they had clear teaching outcomes,

and used each outdoor session purposefully to help children to achieve specific predetermined knowledge and skills. It highlighted that predetermined knowledge and skills education was the teachers' main integral purpose in teaching children. One case-study teacher, Thu, noted in the interview that children hardly had any free-play time during their day at the centre. She added that the only possible time for this was in the last minutes of the afternoon sessions when children were waiting for their parents to pick them up. All the teachers said they had to take any possible opportunity during a day to expand their theme-based knowledge as well as reinforcing learnt content in both formal and informal sessions.

6.2.2.3. A standard-based approach to assessment

Besides using an outcome-oriented approach the *ECC* employs a standard-based approach to assessment of children's learning and development. As mentioned earlier, the *ECC* document includes a section of expected outcomes as a set of age-based standardised developmental indices on which teachers can base their teaching plans. This means they used a standard-based approach to quantitatively assess children's learning and development. For example, one case-study teacher, Thu, said that the expected outcomes, as well as standardised knowledge and skills, in the curriculum not only gave teachers ideas about how to make educational and teaching plans, but they also functioned as guidelines on how to later assess and evaluate children's achievements throughout their learning process. She stated:

When I make a plan, I must start from looking at the school-year plan of the centre in accordance with the children's background. Besides, the Ministry of Education has just launched "The 5-year-old Standard Set"; and we have to rely on this to teach children in order to achieve those identified standards. [...] With this standard set, teachers can plan to reach the set targets. If some children still don't meet the

required standards in the first semester, we will continue to teach the children the same things in the second semester until they achieve these standards.

Clearly, Thu regarded the standard-based approach as important for her teaching approach as well as for the assessment of children's learning and developmental achievement.

Among the six case-study teachers, only one case-study teacher, Trang, implied that formal learning was not as important for young children in early childhood settings. Instead, she seemed to emphasise children's socio-emotional development.

I didn't focus on providing the children with any academic knowledge. I just wanted them to be interested in playing and to be sociable with their friends in class.

Meanwhile, they learnt to respect others and the teachers. That's enough. [...] It's really good if we reach the predetermined results completely. But if we don't, it's still alright, because teachers can teach children anytime and anywhere. Like this morning, I think there were about 5 or 6 children who didn't meet the requirements set out. I could assess them after the session, and then consolidate the knowledge for them in the afternoon session. I would also pay more attention to those. But I just keep it simple, not too serious at all.

While the other case-study teachers were still influenced by an outcome-based approach, Trang's statement indicated she was focused more on the child-oriented approach even though this approach was new to her. Her perspective of children's learning was more open and focused on the children's process of learning compared to the rest of the case-study teachers. This showed a certain level of influence on her perception from the reconceptualisation of early childhood education which has been occurring in Vietnam.

The findings about the case-study teachers' attention to ensuring the learning outcomes of their teaching activities were consistent with the findings regarding the case-study teachers' directive role in their classrooms. The next section will discuss teachers' perceptions of their role in implementing the *ECC*.

6.2.3. The Role of the Teacher: “A Children’s Companion”, “an Observer” and “an Assistant” versus “an Imposer” and “a Decision Maker”

As discussed in Chapter 5, the case-study teachers perceived the valued concepts of children's holistic development as a new requirement of the *ECC*, which presents a new image of the child within Vietnamese society. They indicated that this philosophical change was a justification for the importance of promoting children's agency in the new educational context. The following statements by Sang and Trang illustrate this:

Sang: The current *ECC* enables children to develop holistically. This new programme contains flexibility so that teachers can expand their searching for teaching content, and be more creative and active in introducing new ideas, which are appropriate to children and specific conditions of the centre. [...] It has brought into play children's freedom and agency. Children no longer have the teacher's viewpoint imposed on them.

Trang: It's harmonious development in five areas. Children are allowed to play and learn naturally, improve their ability maximally and use their senses to experience and discover. Children will actively capture the ideas through teacher's introductory guidance instead of having knowledge crammed into them passively as in the past.

As a consequence of this new focus, the case-study teachers perceived that their roles had also changed from a teacher-directed approach to a child-oriented one. They stated that rather than teacher-directed learning, their focus was now child-

directed learning to the extent that it would be no longer possible for administrators to gauge the quality of a teaching session simply based on predetermined checklists as it had been in the implementation of the *RECC*. They said that they, therefore, could provide children with more opportunities to choose their favourite learning and play activities. Quyen explained this dilemma in the following statements:

The teacher's role is also different. In the past, it was teacher-directed, but now the teacher usually suggests ideas and offers options for children and children can make their own decision about what to learn or to play with. Indeed, children decide the quality of a teaching session, not the teacher anymore.

All of the six case-study teachers spoke about the image of a competent and agentic child as an innovative aspect of the curriculum. According to Sang and Hanh, the *ECC* encouraged teacher-child interaction where children's voices were listened to, and supported by the teachers. As Sang and Hang noted:

Sang: In the past, teachers held such a monologue in math sessions, now teachers still do much of the talking with children, but there is a dialogue which means a two-way exchange discussion. Teachers also raise questions but often allow children to offer the answers.

Hang: I find that the dominant role is played by the children, not us teachers at all [...]. The biggest advantage is that children can learn more openly. Teachers talk less. Teachers and children join together in the activities [...]. Now teachers still do much talking with children, but that is a dialogue which means a two-way exchange discussion. Teachers also raise questions but often leave the answers for the children.

Children's individual personalities and their learning interests were the main factors teachers took into account when making their teaching decisions. Hanh's statement illustrates this:

Hanh: Children today are put at the centre and teaching must originate from them, from what children have known and what they've yet to know, then teachers can plan the teaching content and make their teaching plans. [...] Children are free to speak up frankly and express themselves.

The case-study teachers saw themselves as no longer playing the role of “an imposer”, “a decision maker”. In a different way, they considered their role as “a children’s companion”, “an observer”, or “an assistant” alongside children to foster their exploration and enhance their learning. For example, one case-study teacher, Hanh, explained:

Hanh: In the past, everything was done by the teachers and the teachers also decided everything about the children’s learning. But now [...] based on predetermined subjects, we teachers adapt the material to suit children’s intellectual and interest level.[...] Teachers today focus on being observers to support children’s development, and make changes in their plans where necessary.

These examples show that these case-study teachers perceived their role as moving towards a more child-oriented approach and adjusting in accordance with the Government’s shift towards a new conceptualisation of education for young children education.

Nonetheless, analysis of the case-study interviews and observations indicates a contradiction between what the case-study teachers perceived about the changes in their teaching roles and how they acted in practice. Firstly, although they perceived their teaching role as having changed from an imposer and a decision maker to a children’s companion, an observer, and an assistant, and they spoke about the new image of the competent and agentic child, they appeared to still apply a teacher-oriented approach in their teaching. Video-recordings of the case-study teachers’

formal and informal teaching sessions revealed that they principally practised their role as leaders who directed the children's learning and development. Throughout the formal and informal teaching sessions, the case-study teachers' teaching was very directive (Bredekamp, 2004). In order to "transfer" knowledge to the children (Jungck & Marshall, 1992), the case-study teachers organised games for children to practise the skills targeted in their teaching plans. They followed prescribed step-by-step procedures and showed very little of what could be described as child-centred teaching practice. Generally, their directive role was evident by asking children pre-set directive questions or they requested the children to position themselves at their planned activities. Secondly, the interviews revealed the case-study teachers' perceptions of their role as teachers was heavily influenced by, and reflected their understandings of, Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is defined as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.
(Vygotsky & Cole, 1978)

This notion implies that teaching efficiency is enhanced when teachers correctly identify the children's ZPD as children can acquire knowledge actively through exploring with teacher support.

During the interviews, all the six case-study teachers recognised the significance of the ZPD in teaching and used the notion of ZPD as a guide to their teaching. They highlighted the necessity of clarifying the children's zone of proximal development by identifying their current level of achievement as the basis for

educational planning. For example, Thu, Quyen, and Hanh described how they planned their teaching as follows:

Thu: Right from the beginning of the year, I would find what the kids haven't achieved yet, and then I have to put it into my plans to teach them so that they could reach this standard.

Quyen: At the beginning of the school-year, the school gave a general plan to all teachers. We have to base the level of our classes on this plan, and then identify the goals, and design the teaching plans to suit the children's current development.

The case-study teachers emphasised that an effect of underpinning their teaching with the notion of the ZPD was that it kept children's learning interests as the essential motivations for their learning and development during their learning activities. For example, when asked what the most important point of a teaching session was, Trang said:

It is the interests of children during the session. Therefore, a teacher must always think about how to stimulate the interest of the children, especially to not let them feel tired and bored... We have to base what we do on the characteristics of each child to design suitable plans. [...] The results in practice depend on the children's ability and their current level of development in class. [...] The learning objectives may not be reached but we have to complete them at a certain level. When a teacher prepares for and implements a lesson plan, she should know the children's level of development in her class.

Another teacher, Sang, also emphasised the importance of recognising the children's levels of development to avoid boredom. She said:

Investigating children's abilities and competencies enables us to prepare appropriate plans for children's learning in order to prevent them from feeling bored when

learning and playing in the class. If we teach what children already know, that will hardly have any effect on their development, and any upgrade. [...] For example, I once prepared a number of games for the children, but when I organised the games, I realised the requirements of the game were too easy for the children, so I made them a little harder.

Again, Trang and Sang's statements indicated they were aware of their roles as a guide to support children's learning and development and they see themselves as more expert than the children and they saw their role as inducting the lesser experts into more sophisticated levels of understanding (Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

Another teacher, Hang, saw children's learning outcomes as important and progressing with teachers' directive teaching. She stated:

People say that the pre-school age is the age for learning through playing. But how to learn or how to play in order to make the process be a learn-through-play, not just play only, is the point. So having a result is also important. If there is no development of children, it means the children's development is going down. However, there are certain thresholds, so we can't impose on children to do this or that ...I mean, the children should try harder and harder but they don't have to achieve the targeted learning outcomes at all costs.

Her statements indicated that she aimed to promote the children's learning using Vygotsky's concept of ZPD with a scaffolding teaching approach (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) in order to attain specific learning achievements with the teachers' support and the children's efforts.

Analysis of the interviews also showed that as the case-study teachers worked within the notion of ZPD, they considered children's age as a key clue to identifying their levels of development. Moreover, there was evidence that the case-study

teachers viewed children's development as progressing through stages at different rates. Hence, they aimed to teach children based on their age. For instance, one of the case-study teachers, Thu, when speaking about the teaching session in which she was observed for this study, articulated her view of children aged five: "Only at this age can children absorb this kind of knowledge because their memory is much more stable." Another teacher, Sang, said that she would refer to the old curriculum, the *RECC*, when making plans to choose the teaching content for the children because she believed it was selected to suit each of the age groups specified in the curriculum.

In particular, when I observed Trang working with children aged 3 to 4 years, she frequently verbally guided them during the formal and informal teaching sessions. When I asked why she did so, Trang explained that: "The children are still shy and not really as good at expressing themselves as children in older classes, so I need to prime them with some words and support them to develop their language skills all the time." Her explanation showed she intentionally took her role as a supporter to scaffold children's learning when interacting with the children as she perceived them as lacking the capabilities and/or independence at three to four years old. Trang explained that her teaching styles and methods were based on the characteristics of the children's age group: "It's partly because they are all at Bud age (aged 3-4) with non-lasting memories, so they need to practise over and over again." She repeatedly emphasised how the children's age influenced her teaching decision-making and showed how she was trying to support the children in order to promote their learning and to prepare them for the next level of learning appropriate to their age. Trang said:

Because kids at this age are at the end of the school-year, they are very receptive and are familiar with everyday activities in class. At the beginning of a school-year, it must be much more difficult. [...] My kids are totally "freshmen" in preschool.

Although they practise through playing every day, they are still lacking the skills and awareness of games and themes in comparison with children in upper classes.

Therefore, I, as a teacher, have to regularly support and observe to deal with any situations arising during the class.

Furthermore, in all of the 12 teaching sessions observed, I found all the case-study teachers divided their students into two groups. For example, Hanh, one of the case-study teachers, explained during the interviews that this helped her manage her class more easily as the average number of students in her class was 40. Another reason she gave was that working with two groups enabled her to provide suitable teaching content based on her perceptions of the different maturational levels of the children in the class, as she explained:

We make consistent teaching plans to guarantee that the children [in two different groups] are taught the same lessons. Although the children in the class are supposed to be at the same year of age, there are always some weaker ones who were born at the end of the year, then Ms. Oanh [her colleague] will lower the level a little bit based on the general objectives and requirements to suit these younger children in her group. For my group, I can raise the level a bit for the older children.

These examples of Thu, Sang, Trang, and Hanh implied that the level of intervention by a teacher might depend on the children's age or levels of development and they were aware of children's age levels in order to apply appropriate strategies during their interaction with the children in their classrooms. In other words, these examples reveal a view of children's learning and development as maturational based on their age, indicating that teachers drew insights from a traditionally theoretical position of developmentalism when making pedagogical judgements.

It appeared that while purporting their role as helping children scaffold their learning, the case-teachers tended to impose their teaching on children's learning with an expectation to achieve the pre-determined outcomes as they had planned. An example of this occurred during the observation of Hang in her free-play corner session, one of the informal sessions of teaching observed. During this session, it was clear that Hang acted as a director to guide the children's playing at each corner as she wandered around from corner to corner. She deliberately asked the children at each corner questions with an aim to help the children review the sum of knowledge she had taught them in the earlier formal session. Later in the interview, she emphasised her role in orientating children's learning through play following what she had planned for that session and explained that:

The basic objectives are the most important and without those basic objectives the children are left to develop haphazardly. [...] Sometimes the kids have only developed to a certain level, so he or she must be prompted to develop further [...]. The teacher will be more orientated in terms of knowing the purpose of what she is doing to teach the children. [...] I want the children to keep improving under my training and to keep up with the administrators' expectations.

As a result, the free-play session was not free due to the overwhelming intervention of the teacher. Hang went on to further explain that "the children still play on their own spontaneously, but it must be within the teacher's directions. In fact, children cannot do everything they want themselves." This shows that she indeed still saw her role in the classroom as directing children's learning and development and seemed to take into account the outcomes of the teaching activities. It is also evident in the video-recordings that the case-study teachers often used rewards such as praising words and hand-clapping when teaching as a useful way to

encourage children to try to gain the knowledge and skills as set in the teachers' teaching plan. This teaching strategy relates consistently to behaviourism (Williams, 1992).

As the case-study teachers take a directive role in their classrooms, a lack of freedom for the children to exercise their agency was evident in the observational data of their formal and informal teaching sessions. In particular, the lack of children's freedom was evident in the video-recordings of the informal sessions. Although informal sessions are regarded as time for children to play freely, and learn less formally, and as a time when learning outcomes are not as important as in formal lessons (Le et al., 2009) the case-study teachers still deliberately facilitated structured teaching, targeting expected outcomes they had specifically pre-planned. For example, in free-play corner sessions, three case-study teachers, Quyen, Hang and Tran directed the children's play. Other examples were clear in the outdoor sessions, another type of informal session, carried out by Sang, Hanh, and Thu. In these outdoor sessions, the only time observed children were able to play without the teachers' intervention was approximately the last 15 minutes of each session, in which the children all were very well-behaved and disciplined. For instance, in one setting, the children were queuing at the slide, waiting for their turn. Furthermore, the case-study teacher, Thu, and her colleague asked the children to play in a limited space with a minimal number of outdoor facilities so they could supervise all of them during this period. These video-recordings, in fact, illustrated an overwhelmingly directive approach to teaching (Bredenkamp, 2004).

In summary, on examining the case-study teachers' perceptions of the theories underpinning the *ECC* my research found that although the teachers perceived the

reconceptualising ideas drawn on socio-cultural theories as underpinning the *ECC*, what they were doing in practice was not the same as they perceived. It was clear from my data analyses that the case-study teachers maintained a traditional approach to teaching young children which was based mainly upon the long-standing conceptions of developmentalism. Through my data analysis, I have identified some tensions during the implementation of the *ECC* which involved the issues of power between senior and junior staff, and time constraints due to excessive workload. These are discussed next.

6.3. The Issues of Power and Time Constraints: Tensions for Teachers

6.3.1. The Issue of Power: “I can’t turn everything upside-down!”

As how teachers planned their teaching was investigated, it appeared that there was a relationship between the findings from the questionnaire and the case studies concerning teachers’ restricted flexibility and creativity and this related to the issue of power. In this section, findings from the questionnaire are presented and then are elaborated further using the results from the case studies.

6.3.1.1. The questionnaire data: Planning styles and underlying theories

In the questionnaire, participant teachers were asked about their planning styles to see if these reflected their perceptions of the theories underpinning the implementation of the *ECC*. Two main styles of planning were identified based on their answers to items 22-28 in the questionnaire about which strategies they normally used to plan their teaching. Table 18 describes the strategies used in each of these two styles.

Table 18. *Teachers' Planning Styles*

Passive Planning Style	Active Planning Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applying the model framework exactly as suggested in the <i>ECC</i>; - Using the pre-determined framework designed by the centre's academic assistant principal; - Using colleagues' educational plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individually designing the content framework and educational plans; - Integrating as much as possible the local and national cultural values into their educational plans; - Discussing regularly with the children and integrating the children's interests into their educational plans.

Analysis of these questions revealed that the participant teachers used a mixed planning style in which they applied both passive and active strategies to varying degrees during their teaching as seen in Table 19.

Table 19. *Percentage of Teachers' Styles of Planning*

	Once or Twice a Week (Average 1-2.49)	Regularly (Average 2.50-3)
Using passive planning strategies (<i>pasplan</i>)	89% (n = 345)	11% (n = 42)
Using active planning strategies (<i>actplan</i>)	50% (n = 199)	50% (n = 199)

Note. Score range from 1-3

Table 19 further shows that half of the respondent teachers ($n = 199$) indicated they regularly used an active planning style while most of them (89%, $n = 345$) noted they used a passive planning style once or twice a week. These results indicate that teachers did not maximise their use of the active planning style to demonstrate their

creativity and flexibility in educational planning and teaching. It appeared that teachers were still heavily reliant on readily available teaching plans or resources for their teaching planning, rather than being creative and flexible and developing their own. Moreover, their use of a model-based style of planning indicates a carry-over of traditional teaching planning style which underpinned the previous curriculum *RECC*.

The data were also analysed using independent sample *t-tests* to determine if age, working position, years of experience and qualifications affected how the respondent teachers planned. Table 20 displays the mean and standard deviations for each of the variables (including age, working position, year of experience, and qualification) for both types of planning.

Table 20. *Independent Sample t-tests for Teachers' Styles of Planning Strategy*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Aged under 40		Aged above 40			
Using passive planning strategy (<i>pasplan</i>)	1.90	0.42	1.91	0.45	-0.34	0.74
Using active planning strategy (<i>actplan</i>)	2.32	0.38	2.34	0.39	-0.51	0.61
	Administrators		Applied Teachers			
Using passive planning strategy (<i>pasplan</i>)	1.85	0.42	1.91	0.43	-1.12	0.26
Using active planning strategy (<i>actplan</i>)	2.41	0.36	2.31	0.39	1.81	0.07
	2-5 years		Above 6 years			
Using passive planning strategy (<i>pasplan</i>)	1.89	0.42	1.95	0.51	-0.89	0.37
Using active planning strategy (<i>actplan</i>)	2.31	0.39	2.38	0.36	-1.26	0.21
	Three-year bachelor		Bachelor and others			
Using passive planning strategy (<i>pasplan</i>)	1.94	0.45	1.86	0.41	1.82	0.07
Using active planning strategy (<i>actplan</i>)	2.35	0.36	2.31	0.41	1.06	0.29

Note. Score range from 1-3

According to Table 20, all the *p*-values in the *Sig. (2-tailed)* column were larger than 0.05, which indicates that the mean between each of the two groups were not significantly different. In other words, the quantitative results reveal that age,

working position, years of experience, and qualifications did not affect the type of planning the respondent teachers favoured. This finding indicates that teachers used the mixed planning style regardless of their age, working position, years of experience, and qualifications. Both findings presented from the questionnaire analyses in this section raise a question of why the participant teachers seemed to be resistant to, or lack confidence in, applying an active planning style despite being aware of the necessity of being flexible and creative in their planning. The answer became clear when I conducted the multiple-case study in Phase Two, which is discussed in the following section.

An additional finding in this research relates to the quality of early childhood teachers' professionalism, which related to the teacher training programmes they followed and their qualifications as a result of this training (see section 2.3 for explanation about teacher training programmes in Vietnam). In analysing the items 29-45 in the questionnaire using for my research, independent sample *t-tests* were used to investigate the relationship between the teachers' beliefs about the theories underpinning the *ECC* and their age, years of experience, position, and qualifications. In this regard, I found one result which specifically showed that teachers with Bachelor degrees were more likely to consider Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) — which embraces concepts such as using a child-centred, a context-based, and a play-based approach (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009a) — as underpinning the *ECC*. Table 21 shows the relationship between the participant teachers' qualifications and their belief about DAP.

Table 21. *Independent Sample t-tests for Teachers' Beliefs of Theories Underpinning the ECC*

	Associate Bachelor		Bachelor		<i>p</i> value	
Developmentalism	3.36	0.81	3.26	0.86	1.20	0.23
Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)	3.28	0.92	3.49	0.92	-2.22	0.027
Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism and Post-modernism	3.30	0.79	3.41	0.82	-1.23	0.20
Socio-culturalism	3.34	0.95	3.51	0.91	-1.84	0.67

Note. Score range from 1-5

There was a significant difference between teachers in this study who hold an Associate Bachelor degree in early childhood education ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.92$) and teachers who hold a Bachelor degree in early childhood education ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.92$); $t(386) = -2.22$, $p = 0.027$. This statistical result revealed that those teachers who hold Bachelor degrees had a significantly higher mean than those holding Associate Bachelor degrees, $p < 0.05$. The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = -0.21, 95% CI: -0.39 to -0.02) was remarkably small ($\eta^2 = 0.01$). In other words, there was a tendency for teachers holding Bachelor degrees to be more likely to see DAP as underpinning the *ECC* than those who hold Associate Bachelor degrees. This result indicates that the different teacher training programmes may have affected teachers' beliefs. Apart from this, the other indicators such as age, position, and years of experience did not significantly affect the teachers' beliefs about the underpinning theories of the *ECC*.

6.3.1.2. The case-study data: The teachers' sense of disempowerment

It was clear the administrators of the early childhood centres in this study had considerable power to influence the case-study teachers' working attitude. Two of these teachers said they had to prepare self-made teaching aids as a way to show their creativity, especially when their sessions were being observed regularly by the administrators. They believed this was an effective way through which their pedagogical competence would be assessed. Nonetheless, the case-study teachers were concerned about being assessed by the administrators although they considered their administrators' supervision to be part and parcel of their conditions of work. One of the case-study teachers, Trang, talked about being haunted by the regular un-arranged visits by her administrators and their effects on her career. She said she was under strict control by layers of administration and by administrators who had the absolute right to be involved in any stage of her work. She stated:

We are under supervision of not only our supervisors in the centre but also of those people from the District Education and Training Office (DETO). The supervisors in our centre often observe our teaching to give feedback to us so that we improve our professional skills and experience, which I think is good. But we feel pressure whenever the supervisors from the DETO come and evaluate our classes because we usually have to put more effort, time, and energy than usual to perform up to the assessment standards they require. We are all aware that our performances will decide the reputation of the centre. Although it's normal that we always work at our best, we still feel psychologically worried whenever they're coming. It's really not comfortable at all.

Trang's feelings of discomfort show that this case-study teacher was under pressure due to being assessed by her administrators who are socially regarded as seniors and have the power to judge a teacher's professional quality. Moreover, a

tension for the case-study teachers was evident in the interviews when they spoke about how they dealt with administrative assessment, which did not include innovations of the *ECC* and made teachers apprehensive about doing things incorrectly. For example, Hang recounted a clash between her practice of using the new ideas in the *ECC* and the administrators' understandings about quality curriculum assessment. She expressed her disagreement with her administrators' comments on her teaching session:

Generally speaking, there is always a conflict [...]. The administrators should learn how to assess their teachers, rather than teachers learn about that, right? Just like my teaching sessions this morning, the children played the role as some funny animals. For me, when children played the role as cats, it doesn't mean they each need to have exactly three whiskers, but just need something to describe or to symbolise they're cats, but when the administrator comes to observe and judges my teaching in that case, they are very likely to say that doesn't look like a cat at all.

Hang's statements illustrate her perception that what a teacher considered appropriate might be considered inappropriate by an administrator, thus creating a tension. Such a tension was aggravated because both teachers and administrators felt unsure about the changes teachers should be making in classroom practices under the influence of the new ideas. The fact that on balance the case-study teachers tended to have a greater understanding of these new concepts also created a tension as they are the opposite of the previous formally structured and non-standardised teaching methods. Nevertheless, this tension usually resulted in the marginalisation of junior staff including younger teachers and those who lacked power as teachers. This is because their administrators hold the power. In the interview, Hang continued to explain that she was getting frustrated as the administrators kept adhering to the

previous strategies and judging her on minor things, which were insignificant in the bigger scheme of the improvement of the *ECC* implementation. She said:

The changes here are just minor things and I see the requirements are very mechanical. They [the administrators] ask us [teachers] to give definite labels throughout the teaching plans on paper, such as ‘Activity 1’, ‘Activity 2’ ... without caring for whether teachers can carry out this content during the session adequately or not. I think how teachers conduct a session is absolutely more important than that. Another example is that although we have discussed and agreed that we will write down just main protocols for a teaching plan so that the teacher can perform the lesson freely in relation to the teaching context, in the following month, we are asked to write down the whole teaching plan in detail. [...] They pick on inconsequential details so that teachers are obliged to delete this sentence or that sentence in a teaching plan. Well, I think, indeed, these kinds of errors completely would not affect the overall impact of the teaching at all.

Data from the interviews also revealed the effect of the administrators’ power on the case-study teachers’ perceptions of *flexibility* and *creativity* in their planning and teaching. Overall, they saw these concepts of the *ECC* as innovative and essential changes in implementing the *ECC* as a transformative curriculum, which is openly context-based (see section 6.1). However, it was also evident from the interview and observational data that the case-study teachers were restricted in practising flexibility and creativity. There seemed to be an invisible boundary, which held them back from being flexible and creative outside the acceptable norms. For example, when I asked Quyen why she did not do what she thought she should do, she explained:

It’s just because I am afraid of being wrong, afraid of being different from superiors’ ideas. Sometimes I think it would be interesting if I have something new in my plans, but I wouldn’t dare to... Sometimes when creating my teaching plan, I struggle myself to decide whether I dare to break the norm or not because all the teaching content has

been in the predetermined framework. We're free to raise any ideas but must be within the given framework, and must be approved by the superiors before implementing. [...] In the past, we used the designed framework from the academic vice-principal. Now, we prepare the framework ourselves and submit to our superiors for their approval, which is considered as being more flexible. But the actual freedom for teachers like us is now still far away to become reality.

Quyen's statements indicate that she seemed to be afraid of being creative and making herself different to the others as this would create difficulties in her relationship with her administrators and colleagues. It also revealed a sense of disempowerment as she worked with her administrators. This sense of disempowerment was also evident in other case-study teachers' responses in the interviews. For example, both Hang and Trang expressed their opinions as follows:

Hang: I work in a hierarchical system, from top to bottom, so I can't do whatever I want. So the kids can't develop freely. They have to follow set objectives.

Trang: When implementing the new curriculum, I can be flexible but I must also be careful to fit within the requirements of the guidelines and the administrators' directions. I can't turn everything upside-down.

This feeling of "being afraid of" judgement from the administrators not only affected the teachers' perceptions and teaching practice, but also seemed to affect the way the children were learning. Hang expressed this feeling in the following way:

What I see is we think that we have an innovation, but not quite, which is particularly shown in evaluating the implementation. We're just innovating the outer appearance, not the inner core. In fact, if a child in class is primed about what to say, then they'll answer confidently. But if it is a brand-new lesson, they'd not dare to answer. It's because they were afraid of being wrong, and their teacher will consequently be judged as not having a good pedagogical competency.

Hang's statements indicate that she viewed the implementation of the *ECC* as not actually bringing freedom to both teachers and children in teaching and learning. Her statements implied that the power from the hierarchical working system had strongly affected the overall implementation of the *ECC*.

In terms of preparing teaching-aids for her teaching sessions, Thu explained about the role of *flexibility* and *creativity*:

I personally think it's necessary to have teaching-aids when teaching children. The current curriculum has more openness than the previous ones but it still depends on each centre. In our centre, the administrators require teaching aids to be good-looking and well-prepared. Flexibility doesn't mean we can use any resources. We have to prepare everything one week before the session.

These exemplar statements show that the atmosphere of the teachers' working environment in such a hierarchical authoritarian model created barriers, which kept them from being creative and flexible. This finding shows consistency with the findings in the questionnaire, presented earlier in section 6.3.1.1, which revealed that the participant teachers did not maximise their flexibility and creativity in planning their teaching, but rather used a mixed planning style regardless of their age, working position, years of experience, and qualifications.

The issue of power not only involved the hierarchical working relationship between administrators and teachers, but also between younger and older teachers. During the interviews, two case-study teachers from one centre, Hanh and Sang, said that younger teachers were paired with older ones so that they could learn from them:

Hanh: A new graduate teacher usually lacks experience. [...] The centre's long-term strategy is that one former teacher along with one new teacher will be assigned

in the same class so that they could work together and this teamwork will help new teachers improve more efficiently.[...] Subjects, such as music, are generally appropriate to new teachers, while such rough and tough subjects, such as Mathematics or Gymnastics, require more experienced teachers.[...] Some subjects, such as mathematics, require teachers to remember the terms exactly, which young teachers, as inexperienced, usually find it hard to do. [...] New teachers also have limitations with plan construction as they are required to select themes or content to suit children's ages. [...] a new teacher may find it hard to manage to complete her plan for a whole year.

Sang: The *ECC* cares about establishing children's life skills in theory and instruction and it expects the teachers to manage this requirement. However, some young new teachers have difficulty preparing and putting this requirement of the *ECC* into effect since they don't have much experience.

According to these two teachers, younger teachers are considered "fresh" or "non-experienced" thus they seemed to expect younger teachers to be prepared to listen and obey all their instructions. It is necessary to note these two teachers are senior in the hierarchy and also older and they were in charge of instructing two younger teachers who were assigned as official teachers but regarded as juniors.

6.3.2. Time Constraints: "I feel... overwhelmed."

The case-study teachers also perceived another tension in the implementation of the *ECC* arising from their expectations of creating quality programmes and the excessive workload that they shouldered. Although the case-study teachers saw the philosophy in the *ECC* as "a good trend for the future" (Thu, case-study teacher), they considered implementing the *ECC* a burden. Furthermore, to satisfy the requirements of implementing the *ECC*, time constraints were an issue for the case-study teachers due to their overwhelming workload. They said the teaching and care work required

by the *ECC* consumed all of their day at the centres. Hence, they had to constantly take home the preparation work including documenting the teaching plans and preparing teaching resources, which were also time-consuming. They found doing all this additional work at home in the evenings and during the weekends an excessive burden, which took most of their energy. This is illustrated by Hong, who claimed she felt exhausted catching up with all the requirements following the introduction of the *ECC*. She said:

I feel...overwhelmed. As you can see, the workload of preschool teachers not only relates to teaching the kids but also we have to take much care of them. Apart from the time for teaching lessons, teachers are also needed in the time for free play. Therefore, to prepare teaching plans, we have to work at noon or bring work home to finish. For example, to prepare for corner plans [a type of informal session], we have to bring home work to do on the days off, to prepare everything in advance. So I find myself working all the time.

Two other teachers, Sang and Hanh, saw participating in this research as an opportunity to highlight the teachers' excessive workload issue. It was, however, noticeable that the case-study teachers seemed to accept the workload as part of their job despite feeling overworked. They regarded the extra work as the "must-do" tasks of an early childhood teacher although they also indicated, in the interviews, that such must-do tasks should be reconsidered to reduce the workload. In addition, the case-study teachers commented that they would prefer doing their teaching planning for their use rather than for the supervising administrators.

The case-study teachers further reported they were exhausted by the variety of organised contests about teaching and caring for young children. Firstly, the contest of expert teachers in which attendant teachers showed their excellence in teaching

young children following pre-determined criteria to be the winner. Other contests included the creation of teaching aids, the contest to find the most talented and skilful children, the gymnastic competition and so forth, which happened throughout the school-year. According to the teachers such contests and competitions only brought about superficial innovations. Furthermore, they were assigned to take part in these competitions by the administrators whose reason for them was to get honour awards for the centre to enhance its reputation. The case-study teachers viewed these competitions with dismay as these activities increased their already stretched workloads. For example, Trang said she had very little time to stay with the children in her class. Instead, she, as a representative of her centre, had to leave her class to prepare for such competitions. According to her, such activities created a barrier to implementing the *ECC* to the best of her ability.

6.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented findings about the teachers' perceptions of the theories underpinning the *ECC* based on analyses of the case-study data. There was clear evidence from the case-study teachers' perceptions about the reconceptualising ideas about how young children should be taught that indicated the influence of the socio-cultural and critical perspectives in contemporary early childhood education in Vietnam. However, this study found that the implementation of these reconceptualising ideas was still much in theory only. Analyses of the case-study data revealed that traditional concepts and approaches to teaching young children, which were included in the old curriculum — the *RECC* since 1994 — were found to be still evident in the case-study teachers' teaching practice. Further analyses of the case-study teachers' perceptions of the theories underpinning the *ECC* have highlighted

three other tensions created by the following: (i) the dominance of using developmental theories over the reconceptualising theories; (ii) a clash between the nature of the *ECC* as an openly co-constructivist curriculum versus the top-down operational direction of the administrative system; and (iii) the incompatibility between the requirements of implementing new ideas coming from the social pedagogy approach to teaching young children and the teachers' and administrators' lack of sufficient understanding about this approach. These tensions placed pressure on the teachers during their implementation of the *ECC*. In the next chapter the teachers' perceptions and experiences of how parents engaged in the implementation of the *ECC* will be explored.

Chapter 7

Teachers' Experiences of Parental Collaboration

This chapter answers the final research sub-question in this study: What are teacher's experiences of parental collaboration? The previous curriculum — the *RECC* — did not place importance on parental collaboration with teachers in the early childhood years (see section 2.2.2). In contrast, the contemporary *ECC* places a lot of emphasis on parental collaboration to provide the best education for young children. In this chapter, two themes are presented in order to highlight the teachers' perceptions and experiences with regard to parental collaboration. As in Chapters 5 and 6, data from both the questionnaire and the case studies were analysed in order to examine teachers' experiences of parental collaboration in practice during the implementation of the *ECC*. This involved participant teachers' responses to items 54 to 58 in the questionnaire. The focus of these items was on how teachers communicated with parents, how they perceived the role of parents and the engagement of parents in contributing to the implementation of the *ECC*. The results from analysis of these questions are then compared to the case-study teachers' responses in the interviews.

7.1. Teacher's Perceptions of Parental Collaboration

This section discusses the teachers' perceptions of the parents' role and the extent to which they engaged with the implementation of the *ECC*. Using data from the questionnaire and the case studies, this section argues that although teachers perceived parental collaboration as important in implementing the *ECC*, they only promoted the parents' role in helping children reaching the lesson-based learning outcomes pre-set in their teaching daily plans. In this section, findings about

communication between participant teachers and parents including how frequently teachers communicated with parents; the topics of discussion; and what methods teachers used in communicating with parents are presented.

7.1.1. The Questionnaire Data: Frequency, Topics of Discussion, and Methods of Communication with Parents

Analysis of the responses to item 54 in the questionnaire regarding the frequency of communication between teachers and parents revealed that 85% ($n = 334$) of the participant teachers communicated with parents on a daily basis. A small number of participant teachers (14.8%, $n = 58$) engaged with parents two or three times a week or even less. Participant teachers were also asked in item 55 what topics they regularly discussed with parents. Figure 9 presents the range of topics and the extent they discussed these with parents.

Figure 9. Topics of discussion

Figure 9 shows that children's learning outcomes (86%, $n = 344$) and theme-content of the teaching programme (46.3%, $n = 185$) were the dimensions that the participant teachers and parents discussed most often. Educational methods (27.8%, $n = 111$) and teaching materials (29.3%, $n = 117$) were the least discussed. Only 1% ($n = 4$) teachers answered that they did not involve parents at all in their teaching. The results show that overall the participant teachers perceived parents were involved in their child's education. The results also suggest that the participant teachers viewed parents as being concerned more about children's learning outcomes and thematic content than any other dimensions.

Item 56 asked participant teachers how they communicated with parents. The statistical analysis of this question is presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Methods of communication the teachers use for parental collaboration

(*) some other ways of communication listed by the respondent teachers included hand-out documents, home visits, phone texting, paper notices, physical mailing and notebooks.

The results show that face-to face meetings (94.5%, $n = 379$) were the most popular method of communication with parents. Other ways the respondent teachers communicated with parents were formal group meetings (58.6%, $n = 235$), phone calls (55.9%, $n = 224$), and using theme-boards (49.1%, $n = 197$). Email was seldom used (4.7%, $n = 19$). A very small number of teachers answered that they used some other methods of communication including handing-out documents, home visits, phone texting, notices, mailing letters, and notebooks. These results reflect the tendency to use traditional face-to-face meetings for communication between the respondent teachers and parents. Arguably this method would put added pressure on teachers' constrained time as this method of communication is more time-consuming than other methods such as using emails, hand-outs, profile books, and so forth.

In summary, it is clear from the analysis of the questionnaire data that teachers viewed parents as being involved in their daily teaching but the role of parents was only promoted with the purpose of supporting the teachers' short-term objectives within their input-output teaching process. These findings from the questionnaire were in alignment with those from the six case studies in Phase Two of this research. The next section presents findings from the case studies regarding this matter.

7.1.2. The Case-study Data: “That really contributes to the success of my teaching”

Data from the case-study interviews presented a very similar picture to the results from the questionnaire analysis. During the interviews, the Government's aspiration to promote parental collaboration in their teaching practice was commented on by all the six case-study teachers. For example, Hanh saw parental collaboration as a two-way exchange of information between teachers and parents so that the

children would have a better chance to develop appropriately at home and at the centre. In addition, they all stressed the importance of the role of parents as supporters and helpers in regards to their daily teaching.

Analysis of the case-study interviews also revealed that the case-study teachers deliberately aimed to engage parents' support for the lesson-based outcomes. During the interviews, the case-study teachers mentioned the role of parents as mainly helping them accomplish their teaching tasks, which were specifically set out in the section of learning objectives in their daily teaching plans. For example, Sang said that parents would contribute materials to the teaching sessions and help revise the learnt knowledge and skills at home with their child. Hang also discussed children's learning and levels of development with parents, and asked them to review learnt knowledge alongside preparing their children for new themes prior to them being taught in the centre. Hang said:

For children who haven't reached the requirements that I set up for my teachings, I will discuss with their parents when possible by reviewing learnt knowledge alongside adding new knowledge. [...] I think parents play a very important role. They help the teacher to fulfil the targets set out for the children by memorising and priming the children about what they are being taught in class.

Similarly, Quyen, another case-study teacher, said:

We actually highly appreciate the parents' help. If it weren't for their help, our sessions would not be so good. For example, in the session this morning, my task was to develop the teaching plan and in order to make the session more successful, I wrote to the parents to ask for some help. It's very kind of them to practise with their children at home. There are many factors supporting each other to make a successful lesson indeed.

Sang's, Hang's and Quyen's comments implied that they emphasised the role of parents as helpers by keeping their child practising and 'training' them at home in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes pre-set for their teaching sessions. This style of teaching is similar to a pre-primary approach which defines learning as performing a particular skill or subject knowledge (Van Oers, 2008). Moreover, this is consistent with the earlier findings that the case-study teachers used the pre-primary approach, which involved emphasising knowledge education, the directive role of teachers and using age-based and structured subject-based approach to teaching children, together with the outcome-based and standardised approach to assessment, in their teaching (see section 5.3.2.3). This shows how the teachers were affected by what parents valued and how they responded to the parents' demands, rather than by what the Government valued. To some extent, this further illuminates the tension for teachers, as mentioned previously, created due to the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations (see section 5.4).

The use of a pre-primary approach to teaching young children became clearer when the case-study teachers communicated with parents. The six case-study teachers reported in the interviews that they used a range of methods to communicate with parents, generally for two purposes. The first was to provide updated information about children's theme-based learning content, and the second was to discuss with parents any issues relevant to the child's learning and development progress. In regards to giving parents updated information, all the case-study teachers said they usually used an information board to inform parents about what their children were learning, including the theme-based teaching content and the learning objectives. They often sent to parents a written poem or a song, which parents were encouraged to spend time reading or singing together with their child at home. The

case-study teachers indicated that parent collaboration was an important way to help reinforce children's learnt knowledge and skills at the centre, or sometimes to prepare new knowledge and skills for an upcoming teaching section. For example, Hanh and Hang commented on the role of parents in their teaching:

Hanh: I inform the parents of the teaching content of the programme so that they could coordinate with me to get their child familiar with, or experience beforehand at home, and to consolidate their knowledge learnt from sessions in class.

Hang: Well, in my class, I use an information board. In addition, I usually communicate with parents at drop-off and pick-up times. I also exchange the teaching content with parents and let them know my expectations so they can help me to complete the tasks.

Another common communication method used by the case-study teachers was a regular, once a term and twice a year, group meeting with all the parents of children within the classes to keep them informed about what was going on at the centre, what they have taught children, what children have achieved, and where to next. By doing this, the teachers hoped that parents would be engaged more in their child's learning, and provide appropriate support and collaboration. Other methods to discuss children's learning and developmental progress with their parents included meetings with the parents of individual children (Hanh, case-study teacher); and keeping notebooks in which to keep each parent regularly informed about their child (Trang, case-study teacher). This revealed that the case-study teachers mainly communicated with parents specifically concerning children's short-term learning and developmental outcomes. This finding is consistent with those about the case-study teachers' aims of promoting parental collaboration to gain their support for the lesson-based teaching approach, as discussed earlier in this section.

7.2. Teachers' Perceptions about Parents' Engagement in Implementing the *ECC*

This section explores the participant teachers' perceptions about the extent to which parents were willing to get involved in the implementation of the *ECC*. Using both data from the questionnaire and the case studies, this section reports that parents' awareness of the Government's aspirations as well as the *ECC* affect the levels of their engagement with teachers in implementing the *ECC*. In this section, findings from the questionnaire data analysis regarding teachers' perceptions about the importance, the supportiveness, and the helpfulness of parental collaboration are presented. These findings are then discussed in relation to findings in the case studies regarding the teachers' perceptions of how parents' awareness of the Government's aspirations as well as the *ECC*'s broad aim affected parental collaboration.

7.2.1. The Questionnaire Data: Teachers' Perceptions about the Importance, Supportiveness, and Helpfulness of Parental Collaboration

Item 57 in the questionnaire asked the participant teachers how important they thought it was that parents were involved in implementing the *ECC*. This item was included in the questionnaire in order to examine teachers' perceptions of the importance of parental collaboration. Analysis of the responses revealed a high percentage of teachers (93.4%; $n = 368$) considered parental collaboration important to the *ECC* implementation. Nevertheless, with item 58a, which asked the participant teachers about how supportive they thought parents were, only 34.6% ($n = 135$) of participant teachers indicated that parents in their class were always supportive. Another 65.4% ($n = 255$) of participant teachers indicated that parents were not as supportive as they expected. A comparison is generated in Figure 11 to highlight the

contrast between the teachers' perceptions of the importance of parental collaboration and the supportiveness of parental collaboration.

Figure 11. Comparisons of teachers' perceptions about levels of importance and supportiveness of parental collaboration

These results indicate an overall low level of parental collaboration during teachers' teaching which relates to the previously discussed findings about the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations (see section 5.4). It appeared that parents wanted teachers to teach their child to read, write, and do maths, but teachers were made to reluctantly maintain the traditional pedagogy with a focus on short-term learning and development for children to satisfy parents' demand and aspirations (Peters, 2000; Talts, 2003). This discrepancy in between the curriculum aspirations and parent's aspirations created a barrier for the *ECC* implementation because it was hard for teachers to implement the *ECC* ensuring the longer-term aim of bringing about holistic learning and development for young children while focusing on short-term achievements. Therefore, I suggest that parents' lack of understanding about the Government's aspirations and the *ECC* has discouraged them to fully engage in the implementation of this new curriculum and to share their responsibility together with early childhood centres in educating young children

(Dockett et al., 1999; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Perry et al., 1998; Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

For those participant teachers who answered item 58a that they perceived that parents were always supportive of them in their daily work, item 58b in the questionnaire asked them about their perceptions of the helpfulness of this parental collaboration in implementing the *ECC*. The results yielded from analysis of the responses to this item are shown in Figure 12:

Figure 12. Teachers' perceptions about the extent of helpfulness of parental collaboration

It appears that many teachers were satisfied with the parental collaboration provided by those parents who were involved in their classroom teaching when asked. Figure 12 reveals most of the respondent teachers (81.1%, $n = 287$) found parental collaboration helpful to their teaching while only 18.9% ($n = 67$) indicated that parental collaboration was not helpful. This suggests that once parents understand and make the decision to get involved in their child's education, their contribution is a

positive resource to support both teachers' teaching quality and children's learning and development, thereby enhancing the quality of the implementation of the *ECC*.

7.2.2. The Case-study Data: "It only happens within the boundary of parents' awareness..."

Contrary to the statistical results, which showed a low level of parental collaboration during the *ECC* implementation, two of the case-study teachers, Thu and Quyen, were generally happy with the extent of parental collaboration in their classes and overall expressed their pleasure with the parents in their class during the interviews. One case-study teacher, Thu, said that she was lucky to be assigned to a class in which parents were very willing to coordinate with her in her teaching work. Nevertheless, other case-study teachers were not pleased with the parental collaboration in their classrooms. For example, Hang and Trang indicated they were not happy because Vietnamese society still under-emphasised the significance of early childhood education and considered this sector at a nascent level of education and it was not worth giving it much consideration. For example, Trang said:

Regarding one of the pressures that teachers have to deal with, I feel preschool teachers don't seem to be "well-paid" with what they invest into their work. I don't just mean about salary, I mean the societal view of this career. In the past, teachers only took care of children, but now apparently teachers are required to do more than that...

Another teacher, Sang, indicated that she found the parental collaboration in her teaching practice was not up to her expectations.

When parents coordinate with teachers, their role has not been as much as my expectation [...]. It only happens within the boundary of parents' awareness. [...]

Not all parents expressed their engagement and responsibility to implement these tasks with us. [...] The only difficulty is how to engage parents in what we're trying to do.

Two other case-study teachers, Hanh and Thu, even saw parents' awareness of their important role as having a significant effect on the quality of parental collaboration within a centre:

Hanh: Due to some reasons or maybe different perceptions among the parents, there are some parents who sometimes don't coordinate very well; and the results of the children's progress reflect all. That's really a challenge to us. [...] Generally speaking, this is probably due to the fact that most of the parents in our school are public officials, and thus they have better understanding and awareness of their important role in co-ordinating with teachers than that of the parents who are not.

Thu: Yes. But we still need much parental coordination. Some of them work in the education sector, so they can understand, but others might not.

Hanh's and Thu's statements reveal their perceptions of how parents' jobs affected their awareness of the importance of parental collaboration in early childhood education. It seemed to these teachers that the types of work parents did in society would manifest their understanding and thus awareness of early childhood education. This finding opens a space for further research.

7.3. Chapter Summary

Collaborating with parents in educating young children was one of the Government's directions, or aspirations, in implementing the *ECC*. In answering the final research sub-question in this study concerning how teachers are experiencing parental collaboration in their working practice, it was clear that the teachers

considered the parent's role important in terms of coordinating with them in teaching young children. Furthermore, both the questionnaire data and the case-study data showed that teachers communicated with parents almost every day and mainly by traditional methods such as face-to-face meetings and group meetings. Learning outcomes and thematic content were found to be the two topics most discussed between parents and teachers, which is consistent with findings reported in the two preceding chapters about the teachers using the pre-primary approach and the tensions they encountered. These findings also illuminate the effect of the parents' aspirations and concerns about what and how their child should be learning, and reasons about the situation the teachers were caught in. Additionally, these data showed that the teachers perceived a low level of parental collaboration during teaching practice and this is likely to be a barrier for *ECC* implementation. Nonetheless, it is essential to highlight the teachers' perceptions of a significant contribution from parents who were engaged in collaborating with the teachers, which indicates a need for the Government to work on this issue in order to enhance the quality of the implementation of the *ECC*. These findings and implications will be discussed further in the final chapter.

Chapter 8

Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

The aim of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' experiences in implementing the *Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* in Vietnam. The following sub-questions about early childhood teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the *ECC* were posed in this research:

- (i) What Government's aspirations in the *ECC* are teachers aware of?
- (ii) What educational concepts do teachers value during their teaching practices?
- (iii) What theories do teachers identify as underpinning the *ECC*?
- (iv) What are teachers' experiences about parental collaboration?

To address these questions, this research employed a mixed-method approach that incorporated a questionnaire and a multiple-case study. There were 421 early childhood teachers in 20 public centres who answered the questionnaire and six selected participant teachers from three public centres were the focus of the case studies. This approach allowed the researcher to gain an overall sense of, and in-depth insights into, the first three years of the implementation of the *ECC* in practice from early childhood teachers' perspectives (see Chapter 4).

In the previous three chapters, findings were presented from the analysis of the questionnaire and the case-studies. In this chapter, while providing a summary of the main findings of the research, the focus is to discuss the social and cultural elements influencing the implementing of the *ECC* and to explore some implications from this research.

8.1. Main Findings of the Research: Tensions as Barriers to Implementation

In the preceding three chapters, I have argued that the *ECC* constitutes a reconceptualisation of how to educate young children for a future Vietnam. This reconceptualisation was evident in the early childhood teachers' perceptions of the Government's aspirations from the *ECC* in the context of widespread educational reform in Vietnam. On exploring teachers' experiences of the implementation of the *ECC*, it became evident that the teachers in this research were in favour of the replacement of the *Reformed Early Childhood Education (RECC)* by the *ECC* in which the Government shifted their orientation for educating young children from a didactic stance towards a less formal and structured one. This shift indicated an importation of ideas from Western contexts into the Vietnamese educational context to reconceptualise traditional concepts about what and how children should be learning, with a focus on children's holistic development and preparation for their life-long learning. However, as was clear in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this research has identified the following key issues:

- (i) While the teachers supported and advocated for the Government's aspirations about holistic development for young children and aimed at a long-term preparation for their lives, in practice they maintained an emphasis on academic teaching and tended to prepare children for short-term achievements.
- (ii) Striving to work from a social pedagogical perspective, the teachers found themselves drawn back to traditional ways of teaching by the organisational structure within their early childhood centres which upheld established hierarchical ways of working that were at odds with

the reconceptualised views. In addition, the teachers' qualifications, age, and working positions affected their implementation of the *ECC* in practice. During the implementation of the *ECC*, the teachers found themselves limited in their ability to be flexible and creative in their teaching practice due to the hierarchical relationships. They were also limited in practice in promoting children's agency in their learning activities.

- (iii) From the teachers' perspective, the overall level of parental collaboration they experienced in practice was low in terms of coordinating with teachers to target the long-term achievements for children's holistic development. Instead, the teachers found that parents were very helpful to their teaching, but mainly by contributing to help their child attain short-term achievements within their academic learning activities, including revising learnt knowledge and skills and teaching their child to read, write, and do maths before starting school.

These findings identified the teachers were working under multi-layered pressures created by the incompatibilities between the ideal and the reality. Furthermore, these findings suggest that rather than being a straightforward process, the implementation of the *ECC*, with its new emerging Western educational ideas, has encountered deeply embedded cultural concepts resulting in unanticipated tensions that remain to be resolved. Such tensions are identified in this study in regards to both the valued educational concepts and the teaching approaches when teachers implemented the *ECC*.

Each of these tensions indicates the strong impact of the Vietnamese cultural values which interrelate to each other, including: (i) the traditional culture of emphasising academic education; (ii) the traditional culture of collectivism; and (iii) the hierarchical structure of society. Along with these cultural values, professional development emerged in my study as an important factor that impacted significantly on teachers' and administrators' perceptions while the *ECC* was implemented in practice. Therefore, this is also discussed as a factor that creates tensions for teachers.

Arguably, these cultural values along with the inadequate quality of professional development acted as barriers for the implementation of the *ECC* in practice. In the following section, the impact of these cultural values in creating such tensions in implementing the *ECC* is discussed.

8.2. A Socio-cultural Analysis of Tensions in the Implementation of the Early Childhood Curriculum

My findings indicate that the teachers in my research were likely to act in response to the embedded cultural practices. These results are discussed and interpreted below.

8.2.1. A Tradition of Emphasising Academic Education

As noted earlier in Chapter 5, this study found a discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations about what and how young children should learn that created a tension for teachers as well as a barrier for the implementation of the *ECC*. This discrepancy appeared to arise from a traditional mind-set of the Vietnamese people which emphasises academic education in learning and teaching activities and this has impacted strongly on early childhood teachers' work. In this

section, the impact of this discrepancy is further interpreted in relation to tensions in the valued educational concepts and then in the teaching approaches.

8.2.1.1. Aspiration discrepancy creates a tension for teachers in identifying the valued educational concepts

Looking from a social-cultural stance, the parents' aspirations about academic preparation for their child aimed at children's short-term achievements found in the case studies is understandable. This is because the implementation of the *ECC* is situated within the Vietnamese social-cultural context where there is a general cultural belief that a person who has achieved a high level of education will have more chances to gain a better position jobwise and thus receive more respect in society. This belief is so strong that it actually acts as a norm – a conception being held for so long that is accepted largely within the community without questioning (Park et al., 2005). Thus, having a high level of education is often seen as having a direct connection to a person's success in life. Since becoming qualified and highly ranked in society is based on how well people demonstrate their knowledge and skills in specific areas, the education system in Vietnam tends to emphasise content subject-based knowledge as well as using tests and competitions to assess learners' learnt knowledge and skills. To assess a learner's general competence, content subject-based knowledge is usually considered the most important and is valued more than problem-solving and other life-skills.

Taking this interpretation into consideration, it can be argued that the Government's aspiration of holistic development, in which life-skills education is emphasised for its youngest generation as reflected in the *ECC*, has encountered a cultural barrier. This barrier is grounded in a long-held Vietnamese cultural value

about the importance of academic education, which can be seen as connected to the hierarchical nature of social relationships and will be discussed further later on in section 8.2.3. The finding about the aspiration discrepancy in this research in regards to what children should be learning echo the findings in the Chinese research by Yang (1997), who noted that while principals, teachers and parents seemed to agree with the developmentally appropriate practice approach to curriculum, parents still tended to give priority to the more traditional approaches to kindergarten education. As Yang (1997) explained, parents believed that academic achievements would provide their children with more opportunities to obtain a highly respected societal status in the future. Taking this into consideration, it is clear that Vietnamese early childhood teachers who are mostly responsible for implementing the Government's aspirations in the *ECC* are put under pressure that is multi-layered.

Firstly, in regards to this pressure, the teachers had to focus on children's academic learning outcomes as a response to parental expectations which are greatly impacted by the cultural norm of overemphasising academic education. The results show that while the Government's aspirations emphasised holistic development for young children and focused on building life-skills such as self-confidence, self-expression and so forth, the teachers perceived parents as having a tendency to overemphasise their child's subject-based learning outcomes during their learning activities. This explains why the case-study teachers tended to teach specific subject-based knowledge and skills rather focusing on the aim of holistic development for young children.

In particular, the study identified a 'push-down' effect on early childhood education from the compulsory primary sector, creating pressure for the

implementation of the *ECC* to meet the expectations of higher levels of education. This was clearly expressed in the case-study teachers' views of parents' concerns about preparing their children in reading, writing, and maths skills before they enter primary school. The case-study teachers furthermore perceived that parents expected them to prepare their children to unrealistically high academic levels so they would perform well in primary school. To satisfy parents' demand, results showed that teachers even perceived their role as taking over the primary teachers' work of teaching children to read, write and do maths. This push-down effect is, too, an indication of the cultural norm of overemphasising academic education in young children's learning, which puts teachers under pressure to emphasise children's academic achievements rather than their holistic development, and thus seriously putting the aims of the *ECC* at risk.

Secondly, the fear of losing their job expressed by the case-study teachers adds another layer to the pressure. Analyses revealed teachers seemed to understand that the parents would be unhappy and possibly resist the new teaching approach and leave the centre to go to elsewhere, thus making them at risk of losing their job. Consequently, implementing the *ECC* is likely to become a burden for teachers as they have to fulfil not only the requirements of the *ECC* with the Government's aspirations about children's long-term learning and holistic development, but also the primary school requirements and the parents' embedded cultural beliefs in the valued academic education and their aspirations about short-term preparation for their child to enter primary school. The pressure of having to uphold both the Government's and parents' aspirations when these were in opposition to each other, or at least did not coincide, created a dilemma that has led teachers to feel overworked as was evident in these data (see section 6.3.2). This puts teachers under more pressure of how best to

negotiate this in order to balance the governmental aspirations and the parents' expectations.

Moreover, I found the tradition of emphasising academic education greatly impacted on teachers' perceptions as they identified the valued educational concepts to implement in their teaching practices. It was evident in the case studies that the teachers' perceptions about the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations has resulted in confusion for them about what to do, thus leading to a sense of loss of authority as well as depriving children of the sense of agency the *ECC* was aiming at enhancing. It appeared that the case-study teachers bemoaned the fact that as children enter Year One the reality was that they were expected, by both primary teachers and parents, to be able to read and write at the required level. At the same time, however they tended to accept this as part of the natural order of things. They took it for granted that they had to teach children the skills of reading, writing and maths even though this is not a requirement in the *ECC*. This showed a restriction rather than an expansion of early childhood teachers' agency in the practice of implementing the *ECC* and, arguably, indicated the strong impact of traditional culture on teachers' thinking and actions, which also relates to the tension evident in teaching approaches discussed in section 8.2.2 in this chapter.

In short, the tension discussed in this section created by the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspiration constitutes the main insight from this study: the open and unstructured nature of the *ECC*, which is meant to encourage children to develop their sense of independence, self-assurance and other essential skills for life, was being undermined by long-established traditional parental beliefs and expectations within society. That children's access to the aspirations of the *ECC*

was limited was not due, in the main, to the teachers voluntarily not complying with the goals of the new era of globalisation, but by the barriers they faced in its implementation. As a consequence of the barriers, early childhood teachers are forced to deflect their attention away from the long-term aims of their new curriculum and onto the short-term outcomes in order to respond to community demands. Additionally, their knowledge that they are falling short of the aims of the *ECC* is putting pressure on their perception of themselves as agentic professionals with the ability to make a difference to the future of the country. Teachers' not fully addressing the Government's aspirations about holistic development for young children was also reflected in the tension concerning the teaching approach they identified and used as they implemented the *ECC* in practice, which can be viewed as also resulting from the aspiration discrepancy. This discrepancy is discussed next.

8.2.1.2. Aspiration discrepancy creates a tension for teachers in identifying the proper teaching approach

In this section, I argue that the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations also made it hard for teachers to identify which teaching approach they should follow. Furthermore, it appeared that the case-study teachers in my research tended to choose the traditional way of thinking and doing as a response to parent demand instead of the risk of accepting and implementing curricular innovative ideas from the Government through the *ECC*.

Analysis of the case studies revealed that as the teachers implemented the new ideas in the *ECC* they were still influenced by the longstanding traditional theories of developmentalism, which was previously argued to be the dominant influence in the implementation of the previous curriculum — the *RECC*. The theories that the case-

study teachers used in their teaching practices involved an emphasis on the traditional pedagogy teachers habitually used in the *RECC*, which largely relied on an age-based and structured subject-based approach to teaching children, and an outcome-oriented and standard-based approach to assessment in implementing the *ECC*. Moreover, the continuing use of the traditional pedagogy, as in the *RECC*, was overwhelmingly evident in these data. By way of example, the teachers continued using a structured subject-based approach even while aiming to work within the pedagogy of integration. Thus, the teachers reported that they still relied on the traditional structured teaching lessons, which heavily focused on the children's performances of what they had learnt. Another example is that teachers continued using the outcome-oriented approach to teaching children. Rather than having opportunities to express their interests about what to learn, children received the content knowledge from their teachers, learnt it by heart, and tried hard to memorise all the content knowledge.

It was also evident that the teachers focused on the children's short-term achievements of knowledge acquisition and used knowledge and skills as the key measurements to judge a child's progress against the standards stated in the old curriculum – the *RECC*. This standard-based approach to assessing children's learning achievements was also followed by the administrators. For instance, to assess children's development, the teachers ranked the state of a child's development against the pre-set standards instead of looking for individual children's potential competencies and finding pedagogical ways to support and promote these. As a result, the concept of using the child-oriented approach in the *ECC* fell by the wayside. Instead, all the children were taught using a directive strategy (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) to develop along established norms and to achieve the same pre-set standards.

This constrained the teachers' practice in terms of bringing to fruition the new image of a holistic child as set out in the *ECC*.

The traditional practices mentioned above, as well as the teachers' enduring developmentally-based perceptions about how children should be taught, resulted in focusing on developing children's subject knowledge and skills, rather than the longer-term goals of building their life-skills. This traditional pedagogy is very similar to a pre-primary approach as opposed to the social pedagogy approach to teaching children (Van Oers, 2008) which was used as the conceptual framework for analysing the case-study data. This conceptual framework leads me to hypothesise that the case-study teachers tended to see children's learning as a performance and an act of making meaning rather than learning to participate or just to be (Van Oers, 2008). By focusing on theories about children's developmental stages, emphasising children's learning outcomes, and using a standard-based approach to assessing children's learning achievements, teachers were upholding the tradition of the formal, structured, and age-based teaching styles which reflects the use of a pre-primary approach to teaching young children. As a result, they were diluting the overarching goal of the *ECC*, which aims for children's holistic development. Therefore, I believe that the continuing dominance of using this developmentally-based lens in teaching young children is a barrier for the implementation of the *ECC*, resulting from the Vietnamese cultural concept of overemphasising academic education.

This finding about the teachers' use of the pre-primary and social pedagogical approaches is mainly reminiscent of Bennett's (2005) argument which discussed curriculum issues in national policy-making based on findings of thematic reviews of early childhood and care, carried out by an expert team in 20 OECD countries.

Bennett (2005) posited that teachers' perceptions of the social pedagogical philosophy emerged within their inherently pre-primary traditional perceptions. Similar to Bennett's discussion, it was clear that the previous pre-primary approach, with its attendant traditional values, is still maintained even as the social pedagogical approach struggles to emerge. This creates a tension for teachers as they seek to deal successfully with the challenges presented when deciding which teaching outcomes to prioritise and uphold from the educational values of both traditions. This was despite the fact that the majority of the teachers espoused the reconceptualised values in the new curriculum — the *ECC*. Nonetheless, the findings appear to elaborate further on Bennett's (2005) argument that although the teachers were trying to utilise the two conflicting approaches the pre-primary approach continued to dominate, thus marginalising the Government's desire to bring the social pedagogical approach into effect.

Unfortunately, the case-study teachers' continuation of using the pre-primary approach resulted in obvious consequences. One of these was that the teachers' flexibility and creativity in making decisions for their planning and teaching were restricted as they implemented the *ECC*. The findings from the questionnaire in Phase One showed that participant teachers tended to utilise a passive planning style instead of an active one (see section 6.3.1.1). As also seen in the analyses of the case studies, the teachers found it hard to practise their creativity and flexibility to the extent that they wished as they utilised the pre-primary approach to teaching and conducted their teaching formally and in a structured way while implementing the *ECC*. This reluctance to grasp the opportunities of the new curriculum appeared underpinned by the continued acceptance of the traditional pedagogy, which maintains a philosophy of cumulative learning in which teachers pre-determine the

knowledge to be taught and systematically transfer it to children (Jungck & Marshall, 1992; McFadyen Christensen & Aldridge, 2013).

Another impact of the teachers' continuing use of the pre-primary approach in their teaching was on children's level of agency during their learning activities. The findings, which highlighted the teachers' lack of flexibility and creativity, are consistent with the findings of the children's lack of agency during their learning; that is, they did not have the freedom to embrace a sense of exploration, experience, and child-centredness (Petrie et al., 2006) which the *ECC* sees as desirable in order to learn and develop in a holistic way. Rather, these data showed that the teachers regarded the pre-set expected outcomes by age as reliable standards for children's learning and development. It can be argued that, with a focus on subject knowledge and a pre-primary approach to teaching, the teachers tended to use structured and directive teaching to guide and drill children's learning instead of promoting their creativity and freedom. Therefore, learning tended to rely on memorising and repeating models, resulting in standard outputs. Arguably, because of these pre-set outcomes, or standards, all the teachers tended to teach children in the same way to meet the same standards while paying little attention to children's individual differences. Thus, children's learning processes became focused on performances of the levels they had attained rather than being processes of exploration and experience.

The above findings regarding the impact of the traditional culture of emphasising academic education on early childhood teachers' identifying the valued concepts and teaching approach in implementing the *ECC* in Vietnam link with research in Taiwan (Lin & Tsai, 1996; Yang, 1997), Korea (Kwon, 2004) and China (Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008; Zhou, 2013; Zhu & Zhang, 2008) and

provide support to these studies. Within these studies, the differences in terms of the valued concepts between the national curricula in these countries and Western curricula are highlighted. These differences are exacerbated by adherence to Confucian cultural practices and values, which prioritise discipline and structured protocols in learning, and therefore work against the implementation of Western-style curricula. Similarly, these practices and values are also identified in the implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam. For example, this study indicated that the case-study teachers appeared to regard children's language development as a priority and considered language fluency as crucial to learning achievement. In order to achieve fluency teachers tended to drill children to learn, re-tell stories and recite poems by rote rather than allowing them to speak freely and exhibit self-expression. From Yang's (1997) perspective this differs to Western views of language teaching, which tend to view language as a tool for children to express their own viewpoints, and which promote their self-assurance, autonomy, problem-solving, friendship, and cognition.

Arguably, this difference in educational practices and values has created a barrier for Vietnamese teachers' transition from the traditional style of teaching to the innovative style promoted in the *ECC*. It is indeed difficult to produce a generation of Vietnamese children similar to those in America or elsewhere in the Western world if the teaching remains focused on memorising and regurgitating knowledge. In addition, this traditional style of teaching tends to produce children who are probably good at subject knowledge, but lack practical experiences to enable them to see the applicability of this learnt knowledge in practice. Furthermore, in terms of children's learning, children are being trained and drilled in discrete pre-planned skills instead of learning and building knowledge and life-skills through exploration and free activities.

Their learning is, therefore, more like a performance of how much they can recall than a process of experiencing and exploring their ‘unknown’ world. As a result, within the implementation of the *ECC*, teachers are caught in a dilemma.

The case-study interviews in my research showed that while the teachers could discuss the new Western thinking in teaching and learning they still used the processes of evaluation from the *RECC*. This is another example to illustrate the conflict caused by using the two conflicting approaches: pre-primary approach and social pedagogical approach (Van Oers, 2008). Within the *ECC*, the reconceptualising ideas embrace an evaluation approach based on overall changes in children’s development so they can be directed to develop further rather than assessing every single change they have achieved.

In summary, using the valued curriculum concepts framework (Van Oers, 2008), I have argued in the two sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 that the Vietnamese cultural beliefs have resulted in the teachers’ overemphasis of children’s academic achievements and, in addition to being influenced by developmental theories used in the traditional pedagogy, have driven teachers to emphasise the pre-primary approach over the social pedagogy approach. As a result, the pre-primary approach, also understood as traditional pedagogy, with its age-based and structured subject-based approach to teaching, and its outcome-based and standard-based approach to assessing children’s learning, has remained as part of the teachers’ practice. A significant outcome of using this approach is that both teachers’ and children’s agencies are restricted within the educational context of the country. This has resulted in the Government’s aspiration to develop a new generation of citizens being put in jeopardy. The next section discusses tensions in relation to the impact which

collectivism, another Vietnamese cultural value, has had on early childhood teachers' experience of implementing the *ECC*.

8.2.2. A Traditional Culture of Collectivism

As indicated in section 2.5.1, collectivism is closely associated with a sense of community (Borton, 2001; Truong, 2013) and is strongly reflected in the Vietnamese culture. Within Vietnamese traditional culture, people are group-oriented as opposed to focusing on individual differences. To be accepted in this social environment one tends to learn to do the same things as everyone else, including adapting to the living environment in which she or he belongs. This could detrimentally affect her/ his characteristics as it is a given that she/ he should have the same identity as others within the community. The sameness which this produces leads to people having a tendency to feel safe because they are not different to the others in a community. This opens the possible interpretation that the tradition of collectivism has impacted on the teachers' perceptions concerning the importance of their group identity, thus creating tensions for teachers as they implement the *ECC* in their teaching in practice. In other words, the cultural concept of group identity might have been implicated in the early childhood teachers' ways of thinking and doing when implementing the *ECC* in their teaching practices.

Such tensions mentioned above mainly involve a conflict between the ideal sense of self empowerment for both teachers and children introduced in the *ECC* and the existing Vietnamese concepts of group identity relating to the culture of collectivism in reality. In terms of valued educational concepts, teachers' cultural perception of group identity is likely to be a barrier in promoting the children's sense of individual as a valued concept introduced in the *ECC*. As was clear from my case-

study data analysis, while the *ECC* encouraged the case-study teachers to be flexible and creative in their planning and teaching to suit the children's various levels of development according to their age and learning interests, children's self thinking and voices — as well as their agency — are not truly maximised during their learning and exploration activities. Instead, children are regarded as sharing the same characteristics of personalities and development and this was, in fact, mainly according to their age. This suggests that the teachers' cultural perception of group identity in which individual differences are not emphasised had an impact.

In terms of teaching approach, teachers' cultural perception of group identity is likely to be a barrier to expanding their flexibility and creativity during their teaching practices. The drive toward group identity evident in the data within my study showed that the teachers were concerned about doing something differently and not following the norms. This was particular reflected in the case studies where the teachers felt that they were placed in positions of conflict between the traditional way of teaching and the new ideas in the *ECC*. The case-study teachers, on one hand, were struggling to promote themselves as being creative and flexible; but on the other hand, they had a fear of being different to other colleagues. They had to ensure that any flexibility and creativity in their teaching would be accepted by the other individuals in the group. This meant that rather risking themselves being at odds within the teaching community, teachers tended to find an acceptable balance in their professional practice between 'the old ideas' and 'the new ideas' in order to co-exist within, and become part of, their teaching community. Although the *ECC* encourages teachers to create and celebrate differences, the teachers are, in fact, unable to change due to the cultural characteristics of group identity. This is clearly a tension which teachers could not easily resolve.

In summary, from a perspective that the concept of group identity can be a barrier to promoting one's flexibility and creativity, it has been argued that both teachers and children's agencies are likely to be restricted due to the impact of this cultural concept. This has resulted in the teachers' failure of implementing the curricular aspirations – as well as the Government's aspirations – about children's holistic development where the sense of individual with an expansion of flexibility and creativity is emphasised.

In addition to the impact of collectivism, the implementation of the ECC also encountered another barrier that relates to the hierarchical structure of the Vietnamese society. In the next section, some tensions for early childhood teachers which resulted from this cultural attribute are discussed.

8.2.3. The Social Hierarchy in Work Environment

Hierarchy is a typical attribute of the Vietnamese culture and society (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). In this study I argue that a clash between the nature of the *ECC* as an open co-constructivist curriculum and the cultural value of hierarchical structures of society created tensions for teachers while implementing the *ECC*. On the one hand, the *ECC* on paper promotes teachers' authority and autonomy and encourages them to create their own programme in accordance with the context and to take account of the individual child. In essence this reflects the global impact of post-structural concepts on curriculum design which accept that no absolute model fits all contexts (James et al., 1998; MacNaughton, 2003; Albon, 2012). On the other hand, these data indicated that teachers were caught in a struggle between the need to ensure they were following the direction in the *ECC*, which promotes creative educational plans along with the flexibility to facilitate them, and the need to adhere to the models and

principles imposed by a hierarchical administration system. The constraint resulting from this imposition has placed early childhood teachers under pressure and impacted on their implementation of the *ECC* in practice. In the following sub-sections, the impacts of social hierarchy as affecting both the professional management and the teacher-children relationship are explored.

8.2.3.1. The effects of social hierarchy on professional management

It is necessary to firstly note that a professional management hierarchy in Vietnam is strongly and culturally connected to power. The Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) is the administrative body overseeing early childhood centres throughout the country. To help the DECE to do this, the regional Division of Education and Training Offices (DETO) of the Department have jurisdiction over several early childhood centres within a locality. Government officials from the Department and the regional Divisions have employment power over all centre personnel. Next in the hierarchy is a board of administrators at the centres. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the teachers who work directly with children.

The findings in this study concerning the power senior staff held over the junior staff could be explained as a consequence of the culture of hierarchy, which is a concept in Confucianism and one that is valued by Vietnamese society. This cultural tradition is embedded in, and influences all aspects of life in Vietnam. It is reflected in the way people communicate and interact with each other in the family and in the wider community (as discussed in section 2.5.2). Establishing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships are considerations that profoundly affect peoples' attitudes and emotions toward each other. This is manifested in a person's position in the hierarchical social system and involves her/him strengthening or

reducing her/his power in relation to another. For example, people who are older and hold higher career positions are more highly respected in Vietnam than those who are younger and/or are ordinary workers. In addition, the elderly people command respect from the younger generation because of their more extensive life experiences.

In this study, the evidence of the hierarchical structure of society is clearly reflected in the top-down operational administrative system in which administrators' power is emphasised and can greatly influence to teachers' thinking and actions. It appeared in the analyses of the case studies that the issue of power was one of the teachers' concerns when implementing the new curriculum as a result of this cultural perception. It was clear that one's position in the working hierarchy in early childhood centres decided who held the power. In each case study, administrators inevitably emerged as 'superiors' and teachers as 'inferiors'. Additionally, the top-down nature of the hierarchical structure of society can be seen through the relationship between the older versus the younger people. This study revealed a social hierarchy within centres in which age was regarded as equating to expertise and respect. The older teachers thus held senior positions and had superiority over the younger teachers. This superiority was found to involve guiding and even judging the younger teachers' work.

These overall results showed that senior staff — who usually hold administration positions in the centres — or the older teachers in the classroom context were seen as having more powerful voices when deciding what and how to teach the children in their classrooms than junior teachers, who are usually younger teachers. This leads to the view that in addition to the cultural traditions of overemphasising academic education and collectivism discussed earlier in this chapter,

the cultural element of social hierarchy also affected teachers' thinking and actions, and thus the implementation of the *ECC*. The top-down dynamic of interactions, resulting from a hierarchical working system, prevented teachers from exercising their agency in implementing the reconceptualising ideas in the *ECC*, which would allow them to be flexible and creative. As a consequence of this dynamic, the junior and/or younger teachers' voices were marginalised as belonging to inferiors and thus as less powerful, which made them unable or resistant to putting the reconceptualising ideas into practice. In other words, to be flexible and creative would require the teachers to act in ways which would destabilise the existing social order. This was not something the teachers appeared willing to do.

The effects of this cultural element of social hierarchy were clear in the findings. My case-study data showed that although the teachers viewed the new philosophy in the *ECC* favourably (see section 6.3.1), creative teaching was very limited due to the pressure of hierarchy. It appeared that even when the case-study teachers sometimes thought they were being creative, this was in fact only possible within boundaries that would be acceptable to their 'superior' administrators. These cultural attitudes were also evident from the case studies in my research. Younger teachers and new graduates had little power to express their opinions or implement new teaching methods. This age effect explains the findings that teachers aged under 40 were more likely to be dissatisfied with the current status of the *ECC* implementation than those older than 40 (see Tables 14 and 16 in section 5.5.1.2). This age effect was also evident in the case study teachers' perceptions about younger teachers (see section 5.5.2).

I argue, therefore, that junior teachers (as opposed to the administrators discussed as the seniors in this study) or younger teachers (as opposed to the older teachers) were rarely able, or lacked the confidence, to make their own decisions in accordance with the values they regarded as fundamental and essential for children's learning and development during the implementation of the *ECC*. In their cultural position as social inferiors, junior and younger teachers were more likely to rely on what they were told, or required to do, by the administrators or older teachers. This study found that these teachers were not able to actively build upon their own planning and teaching based on their experience and reflections on a particular child's learning and development. Being younger prevented these teachers with fresh ideas, energy, and enthusiasm from implementing the reconceptualised *ECC* with innovative ideas. Therefore, for the most part junior or younger teachers continued to work passively, applying available models or non-creative planning and teaching while waiting for, or in response to, top-down directions or commands. This is a huge challenge for junior and/or young new teachers when they want to express their views or share ideas and experiences and also a barrier for the implementation of the *ECC*.

In addition, the hierarchical system is closely related to the cultural concept of 'saving face' in Vietnamese's culture. An outcome of saving face is that people consider interpersonal relationships as paramount resulting in less care being taken with efficiency at work. This can be interpreted that people would rather use indirect communication or even sacrifice their own opinions in order to maintain and build on a good relationship with their partner. Considering this cultural concept in relation to the hierarchical structure within early childhood centres, it can be argued that the cultural concept of saving face has added to junior and younger teachers' inability to facilitate the reconceptualised ideas they acknowledge in the *ECC*. Moreover, it is

likely to result in junior and younger teachers' resistance to innovations in implementing the *ECC* when their administrators do not share the same understanding with them and do not support their innovative ideas. This explains why the teachers in the case studies seemed very wary about the "boundary" of being flexible and creative and reluctant to teach something completely different to what they used to do.

The proposed argument regarding teachers' resistance to innovations in the *ECC* is in alignment with Clasquin-Johnson's (2011) study about teachers' resistance to curriculum change in which he pointed out the risk of teachers' voices being marginalised was that the teachers are likely to be resistant if the administrators lack vital knowledge or when the teachers' power is limited. As a result, teachers can react in one of two ways: they can obey their administrators in order to remain in the 'safe zone', resulting in creativity and initiative being ignored; or they can resist and face the fact that they might be at odds with the rest of their working community.

The constraint is greater when teachers perceive that there was a clash between their own professional thinking and their administrators'. This clash was evident when the case-study teachers perceived their administrators as lacking sufficient understanding about the social pedagogy approach in the *ECC*. In such situation, a tension occurs and teachers – as inferiors compared to administrators – are likely to fail to defend their opinions due to the pressure of the social hierarchy within their work place.

In summary, the study suggests that the teachers in my research were not completely free to implement such an open co-constructivist curriculum as the *ECC*. Hierarchical structure of society reflected in work places is one barrier to the implementation of the *ECC* as it prevents teachers who might want to voice their

opinions and display initiative from doing so because they do not want to risk being judged as going against the wishes of the upper levels of administration. To resolve this tension, it is essential to consider the implementation of the *ECC* in relation to reforms in the professional training of early childhood teachers and in early childhood educational management.

8.2.3.2. The effects of hierarchy on teacher - children relationship

Beyond indicating that teachers' lack of authority manifested itself in limited flexibility and creativity, these data also demonstrated that children's autonomy and agency were being restricted. This too can be explained as a casualty of the tension between traditional culture and the change of aspirations coming with the introduction of the *ECC*. From a Vietnamese traditional perspective, moral education and cognitive education are two basic and crucial values, which shape good personalities. There is evidence of this in the lifestyle of the Vietnamese and particularly in their educational ideology (Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Pham, 1999). Within educational settings moral education is considered along with cognitive education as a priority and children are taught, from a very young age, the rules of morality and hierarchical social behaviours including: obedience; showing respect; and being disciplined in their learning. Furthermore, teachers are regarded as always being right because they are adults, and thus they are the "knower" while the child is the "known" (File, Wisneski, & Mueller, 2012, p. 200). This sustains the hierarchical social order in which teachers continue to behave as the superiors of children who are the inferiors in traditional perceptions of education.

Moreover, the concept of saving face – as discussed earlier as impacting on the administrator-teacher relationship – can, too, be a cultural factor that impacts on

teacher-children relationships. In my view, this concept unobtrusively affects children from when they are very young. This has the potential to become another reason for the children's lack of agency in their learning. Within this cultural tradition, children tend to satisfy their parents and teachers by exactly practising what they have been taught, rather than what is congruent with their dispositions and interests. Being so 'programmed' to this cultural norm is arguably a barrier to children's freedom and autonomy during their learning. This turns the new key goals of education away from promoting children's passion in learning what they truly want to learn, and what they will find helpful to their lives, to the goals of teaching and learning that are driven to assess whether children have reached the standards society expects.

8.3. An Analysis of the Impacts of Professionalism for Teachers and Administrators on the Implementation of the *ECC*

As mentioned earlier in section 3.4.2, professionalism in this research is discussed in relation to the qualifications of early childhood teachers through which their general pedagogical competence is mainly reflected and assessed. In this section, it is proposed that there is an incompatibility between the requirements of implementing the new ideas coming from the social pedagogy approach to teaching young children within the *ECC* and the fact that the teachers' and administrators' lack of sufficient understanding about this approach is a barrier for the implementation of the *ECC*. In particular, this is likely to create a tension for teachers if they work against their administrators' understanding and expectations.

Arguably, the lack of understanding about the social pedagogy approach is a result of professional training. As noted earlier in section 2.1.2, since the 1980s

professional early childhood training in Vietnam has been heavily underpinned by pedagogy and philosophy that has emanated out of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Additionally, as a university lecturer working in the area of early childhood education I have seen that the curriculum used for training early childhood student-teachers has not quite been updated in terms of the theoretical aspect of the new teaching approaches in the *ECC*. In fact, early childhood student-teachers are still trained to use a subject-based and formal structured teaching approach to teach young children in early childhood centres. In universities, they learn specific methods to carry out separate subject teaching sessions such as maths, literature, art, music, scientific discovery, and physical development (see for example, Do, 2005; Hoang, 2003; 2009; Le, 2009; Nguyen, 2009a; 2009b). It is, consequently, no wonder that the formal teaching approach with its rigid subject-based pre-determined steps, reported by the case-study teachers in this research, continues to be perpetuated and used in order to effectively control children's learning achievements and development.

Additionally, in this research it appeared that teachers' use of the age-based, structured subject-based approach to teaching, and an outcome-based and a standard-based approach to assessment is linked to their professional development. Evidence for this lies in the quantitative findings of my research which revealed teachers who held a four-year degree qualification were more likely to enact their beliefs and understandings of the inherent new ideas within the *ECC* in their early childhood education practice than those with a three-year degree qualification (see Table 20, section 6.3.1). These beliefs and understandings include a child-centred, context-based, and play-based approach which I found to be adopted from the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009a). This finding suggests that the duration and quality of content of professional training

programmes for early childhood student-teachers is crucial to the success of the implementation of the *ECC*.

Findings about the non-updated nature of current early childhood professional training programmes and about the significance of highly-qualified staff led me to conclude that the teachers in my research were not completely up-to-date with the new approaches introduced in the *ECC*. It is likely that they had not received enough professional development about the social pedagogy which I have argued is a new approach underpinning this new curriculum; hence they lacked confidence in applying their initiative during the implementation of this new curriculum. This explains why the teachers in the case studies seemed to be reluctant to implement innovative ideas as they were likely to feel unsure about what they were doing. Consequently, although the teachers perceived the innovative ideas coming with the curriculum change, they were likely to find their way back to the traditional teaching style they used to in the previous curriculum — the *RECC*, which was heavily underpinned by age-based, subject-based, and standard-based approaches.

The preceeding arguments above about professionalism for teachers are in alignment with McCarty, Abbott-Shim, and Lambert's (2001) and Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez's (1991) arguments that when beliefs about teaching are interwoven with other beliefs (for example, about child development) as well as knowledge about teaching and children, there should be a greater consistency between beliefs and actions. On the other hand, when teachers have little theoretical training, or their training programme does not adhere to a strong theoretical framework, a greater mismatch between beliefs and actions can be expected.

In addition, I found that the case-study teachers were not always satisfied with their administrators' comments on their teaching sessions when they visited their class and observed their teaching. This finding leads to the conclusion that the lack of in-depth understanding of the social pedagogy approach was potentially the cause of the discourse. This discourse should include the incongruence between administrators' and teachers' perceptions of how the *ECC* should be implemented in practice which I reported in section 6.3.3 in this study.

Furthermore, given the findings that traditional concepts of teaching young children are still at this stage being adhered to, it appeared that the *RECC* approach to teacher assessment is still favoured by administrators rather than the approach in the *ECC*. This is evidenced in analyses of the case studies which showed the teachers' professional practice was being evaluated by their administrators using an outcome-based approach. This approach focused heavily on what specific knowledge and skills children had acquired in the teachers' classes. Moreover, many follow-up requirements for evaluating teachers' effectiveness were made by the administrators and teachers in the case studies intimated these were a burden for them as it meant preparing specific teaching plans and resources; and training children how to perform prior to a lesson that was to be witnessed by their administrators, or at times the DETO officials.

Such activities made the implementation of the *ECC* a forced education system in which teachers were only inconsistently able to take advantage of the freedom promised in the *ECC*. As the teachers adhere to the requirements of bringing the new ideas into practice, they have to maintain the same methods of planning and teaching as they did when implementing the previous curriculum — the *RECC*. This

ongoing observance of the principles of the *RECC* added difficulties for teachers to change their teaching practices in ways consistent with the reconceptualising ideas in the *ECC*. It also indicates another tension for teachers, as well as a challenge for the implementation of the *ECC*. This leads to the conclusion that a reform in thinking regarding educational management would address this issue in order to bring about real freedom for teachers in their work.

8.4. Conclusion

The implementation of the *ECC* in Vietnam has been officially started since 2009, indicating a re-conceptualisation in education for young children within the country. This re-conceptualisation adopts the contemporary teaching ideas in Western early childhood curricula which basically involve using an integrated and child-oriented approach to teaching and designing educational programmes. Nonetheless, different to the re-conceptualisation of early childhood education in Western countries in which a focus on promoting individual development is emphasised, that of Vietnam is based on the Vietnamese Government's aspirations about transforming the capital human resource as a national strategy for the sustainable growth of the country in the near future.

As a university lecturer in early childhood education, I have witnessed how this new curriculum brings a breath of fresh air to the early childhood education sector in Vietnam with the potential to transform the younger generations of Vietnam into new citizens who are powerful and competent to create the best future for Vietnamese society. I embarked on this research with a desire to explore how early childhood teachers were experiencing the implementation of the *ECC* in the first three years since it replaced the previous curriculum *RECC*. This research revealed that from

early childhood teachers' perspective the implementation of the *ECC* — as a strategy of the Government for the development of Vietnam — is a step-forward for the national education system. However, the data analyses have also shown that implementing such a new curriculum without considering the approaches that contradict traditional culture has not made it easy to be successful.

In particular, the analysis of data gathered in response to the four research sub-questions of this study has highlighted some key tensions experienced by the early childhood teachers in my study. These tensions were created by the conflicts between the valued educational concepts and teaching approaches reflected in the *ECC* as a reconceptualised curriculum and the Vietnamese cultural perceptions in reality. Additionally, the implementation of the *ECC* was found to be greatly affected by the quality of professional development for both teachers and administrators. Therefore, I have argued in this study that these traditional cultural values along with the quality of professional development for both teachers and administrators hindered early childhood teachers' implementation of the *ECC* in practice.

To visualise the tensions created by the impact of the Vietnamese traditional culture and professional development on the implementation of the *ECC*, I once again use the image of the rocket ship introduced at the beginning of this thesis in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13. The implementation of the ECC in Vietnam from early childhood teachers' perspectives

Figure 13 presents a full look at the implementation of the *ECC* in practice as examined in this study. As can be seen in this diagram, the implementation of the *ECC* occurred in the context of social dynamics that, on the one hand, promoted a social pedagogical approach to working with young children and, on the other hand, still held strongly to a pre-primary approach which was a tradition of teaching used in the previous curriculum *RECC*. In this study, it has been identified, from the perspective of early childhood teachers, that cultural factors have heavily impacted as powerful barriers on the implementation in the first three years. In analysing how the teachers experienced the implementation of the *ECC*, it has been argued that the

continued emphasis on academic education, the traditional concept of collectivism, and the hierarchical concepts impacted in the workplace and the consequences — such as the perception of ‘saving face’ — have dynamically impacted on early childhood teachers’ perceptions of how to implement the *ECC* in practice.

Additionally, the quality of professional training has been found to be a significant factor that affects the implementation of the *ECC*. These cultural and professional factors interrelate to each other and place early childhood teachers in a position of working within tensions as they, at the same time, implement the valued concepts and teaching approaches in both the social pedagogy and the pre-primary educational traditions.

8.5. Implications of the Research

The *ECC* represents a progressive early childhood curriculum in Vietnam, which the Government sees as potentially leading this educational sector as well as the country to a bright future. From my viewpoint and based on what I have discussed in this chapter, I believe it is time for the implementation of the *ECC* to step forward to a new level. However, the study has shown that there are a number of cultural barriers that remain to be overcome. It is going to take time to change these deep-seated cultural values. Therefore, I suggest more considerations being taken in the following matters:

(i) Further research on how to eliminate the impact of traditional pedagogical approaches

It is necessary to consider eliminating the impact of traditional pedagogical approaches as they are no longer appropriate in the context of a reconceptualised early

childhood education in Vietnam. For example, it is important to reconsider whether it is necessary to organise and teach groups of children according to their age or not. Data revealed that dividing children into groups according to their age and teaching them in a formal and structured manner is not an appropriate approach to take on board with the implementation of the *ECC*. Therefore, I would suggest small mixed-aged groups could be an ideal option for early childhood education in Vietnam when implementing the *ECC* because to some extent this would make the classroom environment more like a family, thus become more of a natural and friendly learning environment for each child. This family-like environment would help children learn more efficiently about social relationships and interactions with a focus on life-skills, rather than purely academic achievements. Additionally, given the high population in Vietnam, research on class size which involves teacher-child ratio should be carried out and brought into practice to release the pressure for the teachers while working with the *ECC* which tends to promotes individual learning and development. This would be helpful to enhancing the facilitation and effectiveness of the child-oriented approach to teaching young children and evaluating their learning and development.

Another strategy is to simplify the *ECC* document as a national curriculum framework itself and develop the *ECC* guidebooks as guidelines only to avoid them being used as prescriptions. Arguably, detailed instructions were suitable for the first stage of implementation but should not be kept currently and in the next stage. Teachers should also be allowed to exercise their professional judgements so that they can introduce more flexibility and creativity in setting up their own teaching plans and programmes. This should be done along with a comprehensive professional development not only for teachers but also for management and assessment in early childhood education.

(ii) Further research on how to reduce the workload for teachers to implement the ECC in practice.

This research has found that teachers viewed the production of detailed teaching plans and accompanying teaching aids they needed to create an excessive workload that affected the effectiveness of the implementation of the *ECC*. Furthermore, cultural reasons often led teachers to not always overtly express their thoughts; rather they tended to accept the workload as part of their job despite feeling overworked. This suggests that there is a need for research to explore workload issues further with consideration also given to the impact of the excessive workload on the case-study teachers' working attitudes. Therefore, simplifying the paper work teachers have to deal with is implicated, which appeared in this research as not helpful for the teachers and also overly time-consuming given all the tasks teachers have to do during a day.

(iii) Further research on how to improve teachers' pedagogical competence and leadership in early childhood education.

For the children's sake, a professional development programme is needed to foster teachers' ability to conduct assessments according to the broad aims and the five developmental goals of the *ECC*. This would enhance their ability to use their ideas to enhance each child's individual learning and development. Furthermore, allowing teachers more freedom and authority would enable the spirit of freedom in the implementation of the *ECC* to come to fruition. Therefore, professional development is a key factor in influencing the effectiveness of implementation of the *ECC* and professional development should be fostered not only from top-down but also sideways for both administrators and early childhood teachers. My discussion regarding professional training suggests the following key issues:

- ❖ For administrators, there is a need to improve administrators' knowledge of how to assess teachers' professional practice and their ability to evaluate children's progress in accordance with the long-term aim of the *ECC*, as befits the Government's aspirations for children's holistic development. A new, open, and flexible model of assessment which recognises their individual approaches and allows them to express their creativity is implicated.
- ❖ For early childhood teachers, it would be important for teachers to receive training on how to interpret the outcomes specified in the *ECC* document, and to have access to reference resources that guide and inform them about what they should consider in reviewing children's overall learning and development. Furthermore, these should not be standardised indices to evaluate and quantify children's specific learning outcomes, nor should they be for administrators to evaluate teachers' professional capability based on teachers' knowledge and skills when teaching. In other words, further training for teachers should address how they can use these outcomes as a guide, not as compulsory requirements for children's development. In addition, the development of the learning and teaching plans should be based on children's individual learning interests and their individual developmental stage. Innovations in early childhood teacher training programmes should be examined and continually updated with new approaches in the *ECC*.

(iv) Further research on the discrepancy between the Government's and parents' aspirations about education for young children and solutions for it.

This research has shown a discrepancy between the Government's aspirations about children's long-term learning and holistic development and parents' aspirations

about short-term academic preparation for the next educational level of their children. To resolve this, the Government should re-examine the primary curriculum in relation to the *ECC* to ensure consistency in its approach and its requirements to help children transition smoothly to primary school. In addition, requirements for professional training should be further investigated for both the primary and early childhood educational workforce. This can also be conducted alongside education for parents about the Government's aspirations for the young generation in the near future.

Additionally, in order to strengthen teacher-parental collaboration research on how to enhance the use of the internet in communicating with parents instead of face-to-face meetings every day would be helpful in terms of saving time for early childhood teachers. Other ways of communication between early childhood centres and parents should be taken into account such as using a profile book or e-portfolio which is helpful for keeping records of children's learning and development, and to exchange information with parents.

8.6. Research Contributions

The significance of this study lies in three areas. Firstly, it examines the Vietnamese Government's direction in implementing the *ECC*, with the goal of advancing the country's position in a globalised economic future, in relation to parental aspirations for their children. The directive role of the Vietnamese Government in all aspects of society has been strengthened over time during both times of war and peace. This study explores whether the aspirations of the Government are congruent with other stakeholders, including teachers and parents, and how their interaction affected the implementation of the *ECC* in practice.

Secondly, by examining some key theories influencing early childhood education worldwide, this study informs Vietnamese educators, including curriculum workers, about a variety of influential theories and approaches in early childhood education. This helps to reinforce and theorise the *ECC* as the national framework of Vietnam with its own identity.

Finally, by specifically looking at the dimension of Vietnamese traditional culture as implicated in the implementation of the *ECC*, this study offers insights into hidden cultural dynamics that can either foster opportunities or create barriers for the implementation of curricula in practice. Thus, it provides a background for further research and implementation of policies to improve the significance and the efficiency of the implementation of such a national early childhood curriculum. Furthermore, while speaking specifically to the Vietnamese context, the findings in this study resonate with those reported elsewhere (for example, Kwon, 2004; Lin & Tsai, 1996; Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008; Yang, 1997) that identify factors such as the traditional culture of emphasising academic education; the cultural perception of group identities; and the social hierarchical structures as crucial to the success or otherwise of curriculum implementation. This study also implicated that the quality of professional training would enhance the success of the implementation of the *ECC*. In this way, this thesis also contributes to the international research literature regarding the role of teachers in promoting successful implementation of a national curriculum, and factors impacting the implementation of centralised educational policies including national curricula.

8.7. Limitations of the Research and Possible Future Research Directions

The focus of this study was on the perspectives of teachers. Therefore, the findings in this research about the implementation of the *ECC* was based mainly on the data collected from 421 early childhood teachers who responded to the questionnaire and six selected case-study teachers. In other words, the validity of the findings of this research is restricted within early childhood teachers' perspectives only. One possible line of future research could be to broaden the research to include the perspectives of administrators and governmental leaders in the early childhood education sector as well as parents in Vietnam. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the *ECC*.

Moreover, the research was carried out within the two cities Da Nang and Quang Ngai in Vietnam. These two cities are good representatives for the middle region of Vietnam because Da Nang is a central city and Quang Ngai is a regional city. Both are developing very quickly in terms of socio-economic development in the middle region. Nonetheless, the findings in this research are not able to be generalised because cultural differences between the northern, the middle, and the southern regions of Vietnam might affect the validity and reliability of the findings.

Another limitation of this research is that early childhood teachers' experiences of the implementation of the *ECC* were examined based only on public centres which are fully Government-funded. This means that the Government puts more attention and provides substantial finance into public centres in order to ensure the national standard quality of early childhood education. In contrast, private centres are self-funded under the control of the Government; thus early childhood teachers working within these centres are likely to experience the implementation differently,

potentially facing more disadvantages and difficulties. In other words, what a teacher in a public centre experiences about the implementation of the *ECC* might be different to those in a private centres. Therefore, a comparative study between teachers' perceptions would be helpful in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding about the research questions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Letters and Consent Forms for Administrators and Teachers: Phase One (The Questionnaire)

Appendix A-1

Information Letter for District Educational and Training Offices

(in Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city)

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Dinh Thi Doan Huong, and I am a doctoral student at Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education in New Zealand. I am writing to request your permission to conduct research in all of the public early childhood centres in your location.

This research will explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the educational values and theories underpinning the contemporary *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*. These issues will be examined alongside teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations for future generations. Teachers' experiences of collaboration between teachers and children's family in implementing the *ECC* will also be sought. Overall, the research will investigate how teachers' understandings of the *ECC* influence their daily work regarding young children's education.

The findings of the research may be directly relevant to education courses for teachers in early childhood programmes. It may also be useful in directing the implementation of the *ECC* in practice to make the *ECC* more aligned with the Government's aspirations. This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Ethics Approval Number: SEPI/2011/54: RM18686).

The research will be conducted through two phases. Phase One involves a questionnaire which will be sent to over 700 early childhood teacher-participants currently working at 66 public centres in both Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city who hold a three-year undergraduate degree and have at least two years' teaching experience using the *ECC*. I anticipate that it will take 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants will be asked to identify the name of their centres on the questionnaire, however all information provided will be treated as confidential. Names of individuals and centres will not be used in reporting responses. Three centres (two in Da Nang and one in Quang Ngai) identified during this phase will be selected for Phase Two of the study.

Phase Two includes six in-depth case studies based in three different centres (two case-study teachers from each centre). Six teachers and all the children in their

classrooms from the three different centres will form the research cohort. The case-study teachers will be randomly selected by drawing lots from those who have filled out the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the case study. The case-study data will be generated through document analysis of teachers' workbooks (which include educational plans, reports and academic staff seminars), observations of teachers and children in the classroom (video-recordings of one formal and one informal teaching hours, and field-notes), and audio-recorded interviews with teachers. Inferences from documents and video-recordings analysis will be shown and discussed further with the case-study teachers in the in-depth interviews individually to avoid mistaken assumptions. It is envisaged that this may take two or three days in each of the case-study sites. Participants' consent to take part in the second phase of the research would also be sought prior to beginning the research at this later stage.

Participation in the research is voluntary and each participant may withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.

Access to the data from the research will be limited to the researcher, the supervisors, and the research assistants. The data will be securely stored as hard and soft copies. Both will be kept in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. The material from the research will be used in conference presentations, publication in journals, books, and teaching. Participants will be given the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings.

I am requesting your permission to send the questionnaire to the public early childhood centres that belong to your organisation in Da Nang [or Quang Ngai] city area and if selected, for them to participate in the multiple-case study. If you are willing for your public early childhood centres to participate in this study if they wish, I would appreciate it if you would provide me the list of these centres and communicate to them that you have consented to them being approached to participate. To encourage teachers in these centres to complete the questionnaire, I am offering an incentive. All teachers that respond will be entered into a draw to win one of ten \$20 prizes.

I have attached the consent form for you to sign in and the questionnaire that I will be sending out to participants for your information. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors listed below.

Researcher,

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

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Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui **Appendix A-2****Consent Form for District Education and Training Offices****Research Project:**

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Please complete this form if you consent to Dinh Thi Doan Huong conducting her doctoral research at the public centres in Da Nang [or Quang Ngai] city.

By giving permission to conduct Huong's study in the public early childhood centres, I/we understand that:

- ☐ I/We have been given information about this project and have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my/our satisfaction.
- ☐ I/We understand what is required of the participants from the public centres who take part in the research.
- ☐ The participation in the research is voluntary and the participants may withdraw from the study any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.
- ☐ The centres' identities and the participants' identities will be confidential.
- ☐ All research information will be stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher.
- ☐ The data collected will be used for a doctoral thesis and academic purposes only, and I/We consent for it to be used in that manner.
- ☐ I/We have been provided with contact details in case I/we have any further enquiries about the research.
- ☐ I/We consent to the researcher conducting her project in the public early childhood centres in Da Nang [or Quang Ngai] city.

Name:..... Signed:

Position: Date:.....

Please indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the

research:

☐ Yes

☐ No

(The subject will be given a copy of this to keep after signing this form)

Appendix A-3

Information Letter for Heads of Early Childhood Centres

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Dinh Thi Doan Huong, and I am a doctoral student at Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education in New Zealand. I am writing to invite your centre to participate in a questionnaire for my research.

This research will explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the educational values and theories underpinning the contemporary *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*. These issues will be examined alongside teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations for future generations. Teachers' experiences of collaboration between teachers and children's family in implementing the *ECC* will also be sought. Overall, the research will investigate how teachers' understandings of the *ECC* influence their daily work regarding young children's education.

The findings of the research may be directly relevant to education courses for teachers in early childhood programmes. It may also be useful in directing the implementation of the *ECC* in practice to make the *ECC* more aligned with the Government's aspirations. This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Ethics Approval Number: SEPI/2011/54: RM18686).

The research will be conducted through two phases. Phase One involves a questionnaire which will be sent to over 700 early childhood teacher-participants currently working at 66 public centres in Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city who hold a three-year undergraduate degree and have at least two years' teaching experience using the *ECC*. I anticipate that it will take 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants will be asked to identify the name of their centres on the questionnaire, however all information provided will be treated as confidential. Names of individuals and centres will not be used in reporting responses. Three centres (two in Da Nang and one in Quang Ngai) identified during this phase will be selected for Phase Two of the study.

Phase Two includes six in-depth case studies based in three different centres (two case-study teachers from each centre). Six teachers and all the children in their classrooms from the three different centres will form the research cohort. The case-study teachers will be randomly selected by drawing lots from those who have filled out the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the case study. The case-study data will be generated through document analysis of teachers' workbooks (which include

educational plans, reports and academic staff seminars), observations of teachers and children in the classroom (video-recordings of one formal and one informal teaching hours, and field-notes), and audio-recorded interviews with teachers. Inferences from documents and video-recordings analysis will be shown and discussed further with the case-study teachers in the in-depth interviews individually to avoid mistaken assumptions. It is envisaged that this may take two or three days in each of the case-study sites. Participants' consent to take part in the second phase of the research would also be sought prior to beginning the research at this later stage.

Participation in the research is voluntary and each participant may withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.

Access to the data from the research will be limited to the researcher, the supervisors, and the research assistants. The data will be securely stored as hard and soft copies. Both will be kept in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. The material from the research will be used in conference presentations, publication in journals, books, and teaching. Participants will be given the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings.

I am requesting your permission to send the questionnaire to the teachers in your centre and if selected, for them to participate in a case study. If you are willing for your teachers to participate in this study if they wish, I would appreciate it if you would communicate to them that you have consented to them being approached to participate. In order to select the participants, I would like you to identify those teachers in your centre who hold a three-year undergraduate degree and have at least two years' teaching experience using the *ECC* to receive and respond to the given questionnaire. To encourage the selected teachers to complete the questionnaire, I am offering an incentive. All teachers that respond will be entered into a draw to win one of ten \$20 prizes.

I have attached the consent form for you to sign in and the questionnaire that I will be sending out to participants for your information. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors listed below.

Researcher,

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Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui **Appendix A-4****Consent Form for Heads of Early Childhood Centres****Research Project:**Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Please complete this form if you consent to Dinh Thi Doan Huong conducting her doctoral research at your centre.

By giving permission to conduct Huong's study at my centre, I/we understand that:

- ☐ I/We have been given information about this project and I/we have discussed the research project with Dinh Thi Doan Huong. I/We have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my/our satisfaction.
- ☐ I/We understand what is required of the participants from my/our centre who take part in the research.
- ☐ The participation in the research is voluntary and the participants may withdraw from the study any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.
- ☐ I/We understand that the centre's identity and the participants' identity will be confidential.
- ☐ All research information will be stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher.
- ☐ The data collected will be used for a doctoral thesis and academic purposes only, and I/we consent for it to be used in that manner.
- ☐ I/We have been provided with contact details in case I/we have any further enquiries.
- ☐ I/We consent to the researcher conducting her project in my centre.
- ☐ I/We agree to provide the researcher with a list of potential participants who meet the research criteria of holding a three-year undergraduate degree and having at least two years' teaching experience using the *New Early Childhood Curriculum*.

Name:.....

Signed:

Position:

Date:.....

Please indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the research: ☐ Yes ☐ No

(The subject will be given a copy of this to keep after signing this form)

Appendix A-5

Information Letter for Teacher-Participants

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Dinh Thi Doan Huong, and I am a doctoral student at Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education in New Zealand. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research on early childhood teachers' understandings of the *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* in Vietnam.

This research will explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the educational values and theories underpinning the contemporary *ECC*. These issues will be examined alongside teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations for future generations. Teachers' experiences of collaboration between teachers and children's family in implementing the *ECC* will also be sought. Overall, the research will investigate how teachers' understandings of the *ECC* influence their daily work regarding young children's education.

The findings of the research may be directly relevant to education courses for teachers in early childhood programmes. It may also be useful in directing the implementation of the *ECC* in practice to make the *ECC* more aligned with the Government's aspirations. This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Approval Number: SEPI/2011/54: RM18686). Both of the District Educational and Training Office and the Head of your centre have received a letter informing them about this research and they have agreed that I may approach you.

The research will be conducted through two phases. Phase One involves the questionnaire that accompanies this letter. The questionnaire has been sent to over 700 selected early childhood teachers working at 66 public centres in Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city. The teacher-participants are required to hold a three-year undergraduate degree and have at least two years' teaching experience using the *ECC*. I anticipate that it will take 30 minutes for you to complete. You are asked to put the name of your centre on the questionnaire, however all information provided will be treated as confidential. Names of individuals and centres will not be used in reporting responses.

Phase Two will include six in-depth case studies based in three different centres (two case-study teachers from each centre). Six teachers and all the children in their classrooms from the three different centres will form the research cohort. The case-study teachers will be randomly selected by drawing lots from those who have filled out the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the case study. The case-study data will be generated through document analysis of teachers' workbooks (which include educational plans, reports and academic staff seminars), observations of teachers and children in the classroom (video-recordings of one formal and one informal teaching hours, and field-notes), and audio-recorded interviews with teachers. Inferences from documents and video-recordings analysis will be shown and discussed further with the case-study teachers in the in-depth interviews individually to avoid mistaken assumptions. It is envisaged that this may take two or three days in each of the case-study sites. If you are chosen to be one of the case studies, I will provide you with more information about what will be required once the research design of the case studies has been finalised. Your consent to participate in the second phase of the research would also be sought at this later stage.

Participation in the research is voluntary and each participant may withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and any negative repercussions.

Access to the data from the research will be limited to the researcher, the supervisors, and the research assistants. The data will be securely stored as hard and soft copies. Both will be kept in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. The material from the research will be used in conference presentations, publication in journals, books, and teaching. Participants will be given the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I have attached a consent form for you to sign and a questionnaire to fill in. I would highly appreciate your participation in the research. If you complete the questionnaire and return it in the stamped envelope enclosed by **20 September, 2011**, you will be entered into a draw to win one of ten \$20 prizes. I am also happy to provide a summary of the findings from the survey as mentioned in the enclosed consent form.

If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors listed below.

Researcher,

Supervisors:

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

School of Education Policy and Implementation, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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Dr. Mary Jane Shuker, School of Education Policy and Implementation, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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Prof. Carmen Dalli, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
Phone: +64-4-4635168
Email: carmen.dalli@vuw.ac.nz

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui **Consent Form for Teacher-Participants****Research Project:**

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

- ☐ I have read the information letter about the research project and I understand that I can
- ☐ I have had the purpose of the research explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that participants' responses will be treated as confidential in Phase One.
- ☐ I understand that the research data will be stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher.
- ☐ I understand that my participation in the questionnaire is voluntary and I may withdraw from the project at any time up to the end of the data collection period without
- ☐ I consent to participate in Phase Two of this research under the conditions stated in the information letter.

Name of early childhood centre:

Signature:

Date:

Please indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the research.

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please provide your personal contact details. If possible, please provide an email address, otherwise a postal address so a hard copy can be sent.

.....

.....

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Early Childhood Teachers

Demographic Questions

1. Please indicate which age group you fit into:

20-29 years

☐

30-39 years

☐

40-49 years

☐

Over 50
years

☐

2. Please identify from the list below your role within the centre:

Principal/ Assistant Principal

☐

Head Teacher

☐

Teacher

☐

Practician Teacher

☐

3. How long have you been working with children on the *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*?

From 2 to 5 years

☐

From 6 to 10 years

☐

More than 10 years

☐

4. Please indicate your highest qualification level:

Three-year undergraduate of ECE

☐

Bachelor of ECE

☐

Master of ECE

☐

Others (please specify)

☐

Educational Values

The list below includes typical examples of the values reflecting current perceptions of the knowledge and skills in the *ECC*. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by marking the response that most clearly matches your teaching experiences and/or how you feel, where:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
 2 = Disagree
 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
 4 = Agree

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

5.	In our classroom, we actively teach children by transmitting the academic knowledge and skills for the year-one schooling			
6.	We sometimes find it challenging to teach and evaluate children's socio-emotional behaviours			
7.	At our setting, we are well-supported to use "a whole child" approach when teaching children			
8.	Outdoor activities are not held as regularly as they should be			
9.	Language development is the most important aspect of our programme			
10.	In our setting, we do not have permission to teach children written language nor formal mathematics			
12.	Physical development is the most important aspect of our programme			
13.	We can give good examples of how we foster children's logical thinking and imagination			
14.	Our team can give good examples of how we foster children's aesthetic development			
15.	In our setting, we are not concerned about children's cognitive development			
16.	Our team feels that the values of academic knowledge and skills should not influence our early childhood programme			

17.	We believe that children's playing can foster their socio-emotional development	1	2	3	4	5
18.	We believe that preparing learning skills is our top priority for children's year-one schooling	1	2	3	4	5
19.	We believe that children should not be taught aesthetics in our setting	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Sometimes we feel the pressure of teaching children holistically	1	2	3	4	5
21.	In our classroom, we feel confident and competent in transforming children's life-skills such as self-confidence, self-evaluation, independence, social interaction	1	2	3	4	5

Implementing the *ECC*

To what extent, during each theme, are you able to plan your teaching? Please indicate by marking the response that most clearly matches your teaching experience, where:

- 1 = Never/Rarely (less than once a week)
 2 = Sometimes (once or twice a week)
 3 = Always (daily or almost daily)

		Always
		Sometimes
		Rarely/Never
22.	We apply the model framework exactly as suggested in the <i>ECC</i>	
23.	We use the pre-determined framework designed by the centre's academic assistant principal	
24.	We use colleagues' educational plans	
25.	Individually, we each design the content framework and educational plans	
26.	We integrate as much as possible the local cultural values into the educational plan	
27.	We integrate as much as possible the national cultural values into the educational plan	
28.	We discuss with the children and integrate whatever they like into the educational plan	

Listed below are some typical ways of implementing the *ECC* in your daily work. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by marking the response that most clearly matches your teaching experiences and/or how you feel, where:

- 1 = Strongly agree
 2 = Agree
 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
 4 = Disagree

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
29. In our setting, we teach children completely separate disciplines in formal teaching hours following pre-determined weekly time-tables					
30. We carry out the formal teaching hours following pre-determined steps					
31. In our setting, we are well-supported to actively teach children any knowledge and skills that emerge in the informal teaching hours					
32. We do not have much opportunity to add to the content I would like to teach the children					
33. Including children's voice in our planning during the day at the centre is important					
34. It is expected that we create our own educational plans for each activity					
35. In formal teaching hours, we are concerned about the learning outcomes after each activity					
36. Not all children have an opportunity to learn how to evaluate and self-evaluate					
37. Sometimes we experience difficulties integrating different subjects into the main discipline during formal teaching hours					
38. We always use positive reinforcements (e.g., applause, encouragement, awards) while teaching the children in order to obtain the best results for the pre-determined educational aims					
39. We often find it challenging to plan enough time for all children's voices in formal teaching hours					

40.	Integrating two or more subjects at the same time to teach children is not always appropriate			
41.	Our teaching work is influenced by the standardised assessment on the children's learning outcomes from the administrators			
42.	We carry out the informal activities following pre-determined steps			
43.	In formal teaching hours, we are concerned about children's interests in what they are learning. Learning outcomes are not very important			
44.	Children in our classrooms are always encouraged to evaluate and self-evaluate			
45.	When I teach the children, I usually stimulate and guide them how to deal with problem-solving situations			

46. Does the *ECC* reflect your beliefs about what is important for children to learn?

☐ Yes.

☐ Somewhat yes.

☐ No.

Please give ONE specific reason for your answer:

.....

.....

.....

47. Does the *ECC* satisfy the Government's aspirations about future generation for Vietnam?

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

Please comment if you would like to do so:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Government and Community Aspirations

Below are some examples of the government and/or community aspirations for early childhood education. Please tick (✓) the appropriate box in both column A and B to indicate your experience, where:

A = Are you aware of the aspiration?

B = To what extent do you think this aspiration influence on your teaching practices?

Awareness		Influence on teaching		
A		B		
Yes	No	A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
48. Children are expected to contribute to the future of Vietnam				
49. The new generation must be well-equipped with the life-skills for a society such as initiative, creativity and open-mindedness, and willingness to share ideas with each other				
50. Parents want their children to be taught how to read, write and be well-prepared before starting Year One				
51. Children should learn about their home-location before learning about other places in the country				

52. Any other aspirations for young children? Please specify and explain if you can.....

.....

53. How satisfied are you that the *ECC* reflects the Government's and community's aspirations?

☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Neutral ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Very dissatisfied

Why?

Parents' Involvement

54. How often do you discuss the *ECC* with parents?

☐ Never ☐ Less than once a month ☐ Once a month ☐ 2 or 3 times a month

☐ Once a week ☐ Two or three times a week ☐ Daily

55. What do you discuss with parents about the *ECC*? (Please tick all that apply)

☐ teaching content/activities ☐ teaching methods
☐ teaching materials ☐ children's learning outcomes
☐ Parents are not involved at all in what I am teaching

Please comment further if you would like
to:

56. How do you usually involve parents with the implementation of the *ECC*? (Please tick all that apply)

☐ email ☐ phone ☐ blackboard displays/notice board
☐ informal face-to-face talk ☐ formal meeting ☐ Other:

57. How important do you think it is that parents are involved in implementing the *ECC*?

☐ Not at all important ☐ Somewhat unimportant
☐ Somewhat important ☐ Very/Extremely important

Can you explain why?.....
.....

58. How helpful is parental collaboration in implementing the *ECC* in your current daily work?

☐ Very helpful ☐ Sometimes helpful ☐ Not helpful at all

In what way?
.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix C: Codebook for Questionnaire Data Analysis

Full variable name	SPSS variable name	Coding instructions
Participant	id	Participant code
Age group	agegp	1=20-29, 2=30-39, 3=40-49, 4=50+
Position	pos	1=Principal/VP, 2=Head teacher, 3=Teacher, 4=Practician
Year of experience	yoe	1=2-5yrs, 2=6-10yrs, 3=10yrs+
Highest qualification	hqual	1=three-year undergraduate of ECE, 2= bachelor of ECE, 3= master of ECE, 4= others
Educational values scale	edvaQ5 to edvaQ21	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree
Underpinning theories scale 1	utQ22 to utQ28	1= never/rarely (less than once/wk), 2= sometimes(once or twice/wk), 3= always (daily or almost daily)
Underpinning theories scale 2	utQ29 to utQ45	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree
Satisfaction with <i>ECC</i>	satQ46a	1=yes, 2=somehow yes, 3=no
	satQ46b	String
	satQ47a	1=yes, 2=somehow yes, 3=no
	satQ47b	String
	satQ53a	1=very satisfied, 5=very dissatisfied
	satQ53b	String
Government and Community aspirations: awareness	awareQ48A to awareQ51A	1=yes, 2=no
	awareQ52	String
Government and Community aspirations: influence	infQ48B to infQ51B	1=a great deal, 2= somewhat, 3=not at all
Government and Community aspirations: importance	impQ57A	1=not at all important, 2= somewhat unimportant, 3=somewhat important, 4=very/extremely important

	impQ57B	String
Parents' involvement: frequency	freqQ54	1=never, 2=less than once/month, 3= once a month, 4=2 or 3 times/month, 5=once/wk, 6=2 or 3 times/wk, 7=daily
	freqQ58A	1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=always
Parents' involvement: content	contQ55a to contQ55e	1=yes, 2=no
	contQ55f	String
Parents' involvement: means of communication	meanQ56a to meanQ56f	1=yes, 2=no
	meanQ56g	String
Parents' involvement: helpfulness	helpQ58B	1=very helpful, 2=sometimes helpful, 3=not helpful at all
	helpQ58C	String
Recode Q5	RedvaQ5	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q6	RedvaQ6	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q8	RedvaQ8	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q10	RedvaQ10	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q15	RedvaQ15	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q16	RedvaQ16	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q19	RedvaQ19	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
Recode Q20	RedvaQ20	1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree
aged under 40 and 40+	Ragegp	1=20-29 and 30-39; 2=40-49 and 50+
postion group	Posgp	1=Principal/VP and Head teacher; 2= Teacher and Practician
year of experience group	Yoegp	1= 2-5years; 2= 6+years
qualifications group	hqualgp	1= three-year undergraduate; 2= bachelor and others
Total scores of EdvaAP	TedvaAP	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree

		$(Q5+Q9+RQ10+RQ15+RQ16+Q18)/6$
Total scores of EdvaHD	TedvaHD	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(RQ5+Q7+Q10+Q15+Q16+Q17+Q21)/7$
Using passively planning strategy	pasplan	1= never/rarely (less than once/wk), 2= sometimes(once or twice/wk), 3= always (daily or almost daily) $(utQ22+utQ23+utQ24)/3$
Using actively planning strategy	actplan	1= never/rarely (less than once/wk), 2= sometimes(once or twice/wk), 3= always (daily or almost daily) $(utQ25+utQ26+utQ27+utQ28)/4$
Recode utQ32	RutQ32	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree
Recode utQ36	RutQ36	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree
Recode utQ43	RutQ43	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree
Behaviouralism	behavioural	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(utQ29+utQ30+utQ35+utQ37+utQ38+utQ41+utQ42+RutQ32+RutQ43)/9$
developmentalism	developmental	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(utQ30+utQ35+utQ42+RutQ32)/4$
Developmentally Appropriate Practice	DAP	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(utQ43+utQ39+utQ40+utQ43+RutQ32)/5$
Post-structuralism, post-colonialism and post-modernism	PSTR	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(utQ31+utQ34+utQ37+utQ39+utQ43+utQ44+utQ45+RutQ36)/8$
Socio-culturalism	SOCUL	1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree $(utQ34+utQ37+utQ40+utQ45+RutQ32)/5$
Regroup Q46a	Q46agp	1=yes; 2=partly yes or No
Regroup Q47a	Q47agp	1=yes; 2=somewhat yes or No
Regroup Q53a	Q53agp	1=yes; 2=partly yes or No (1=1, 2=1, 3=2,4=2,5=2)
Total satisfaction Q47 and Q53	TsatQ4753	1=yes; 2=somewhat yes or No $(Q47agp+Q53agp)/2$

Regroup Q54	Q54gp	1=Sometimes; 2= Daily (1-2-3-4-5-6=1; 7=2)
Recode Q57A	RimpQ57A	1=yes, it's important; 2= no, it's not important (3-4=1; 1-2=2)
Recode Q58A	RfreQ58A	1= not always; 2= always (1-2= 1; 3=2)
Recode Q58B	RhelpQ58B	1=very helpful; 2= not helpful or sometimes helpful (1-2= 1; 3=2)

**Appendix D: Information Letters and Consent Forms for Administrators,
Teachers, Parents and Children: Phase Two (The Case Studies)**

Appendix D-1

Information Letter for Heads of Case-Study Early Childhood Centres

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Dinh Thi Doan Huong, and I am a doctoral student at Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education in New Zealand. As you may know, the previous phase of my research was successful due to your support in obtaining the teacher-participants' opinions regarding their understandings of the *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* in Vietnam. I am now writing to request your permission and consent to conduct the next phase of the research at your centre from February 2012 to March 2012. At this stage, I will focus on two case-study teachers at your centre who have been randomly selected from the questionnaire responses. In your centre, two case studies will be undertaken in the following manner:

- **Visiting, information and ethical consents:** I would like to visit [name of centre] to have a meeting with you and the teacher-participants to obtain consent to conduct the research. I would also like parental consent for their children's participation in the case studies when the classroom observations are conducted. All selected participants will be provided with information about the research for their consideration prior to making an informed decision to participate in the research. The individual participants' information will be treated as confidential. Participation in the research is voluntary and each participant may withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the case-study data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.
- **Scheduling:** A mutually suitable time will be negotiated and a schedule drawn up.
- **Collecting data:** The case-study data will be generated through document analysis of teachers' workbooks (for example, documents such as educational plans, reports, and academic staff seminars), observations (video-recordings of one formal and one informal teaching sessions, and field-notes) of teachers and children in the classroom, and audio-recorded interviews with teachers (approximately one hour). It is envisaged that this will take from two to three days for each case at your centre.

Access to the data from the research will be limited to the researcher, the supervisors, and the research assistants. The data will be securely stored as hard and soft copies. Both will be kept in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. The material from the research will

be used in conference presentations, publication in journals, books, and teaching. Participants will be given the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings.

This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Ethics Approval Number: SEPI/2011/54: RM18686). When completed, the doctoral thesis will be submitted to the School of Education Policy and Implementation and deposited in the W.J. Scott Library, and available online.

Your permission to conduct the research at your centre is highly appreciated. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors below.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely yours,

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

School of Education Policy and Implementation, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui **Appendix D-2**

**Consent Form for Heads of Case-Study Early Childhood Centres
Research Project:**

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Please complete this form if you consent to Dinh Thi Doan Huong conducting her doctoral research at your centre.

By giving permission to conduct Huong's study at my centre, I/We understand that:

- ☐ I/We have been given information about this project and I/we have discussed the research project with Dinh Thi Doan Huong. I/We have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my/our satisfaction.
- ☐ I/We understand what is required of the participants from my centre who take part in the research.
- ☐ The participation in the research is voluntary and the participants may withdraw from the study any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.
- ☐ The centre's identity and the participants' identity will be confidential.
- ☐ All research information will be stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher.
- ☐ The data collected will be used for a doctoral thesis and academic purposes only, and I/we consent for it to be used in that manner.
- ☐ I/We have been provided with contact details in case I/we have any further enquiries.
- ☐ I/We consent to the researcher conducting her project in my centre.
- ☐ I/We consent to provide relevant documents about the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* implementation to the researcher.

Name:..... Signed:

Position: Date:.....

Please indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the research: ☐ Yes ☐ No

(The subject will be given a copy of this to keep after signing this form)

Appendix D-3

Information Letter for Case-Study Early Childhood Teachers

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
 Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Researcher: Dinh Thi Doan Huong

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your participation in the questionnaire of my research (Phase One). I am writing to inform you that you have been selected to be one of the six participants to participate in the case studies as part of my research project on early childhood teachers' understandings of the *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)* in Vietnam. I am seeking your consent to participate in Phase Two of this study.

As you may know, my study involves two phases. The first phase was a questionnaire carried out with a large number of teachers working in public early childhood centres in Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city. The second phase will be six case studies of selected teachers to explore in more depth their understandings of the *ECC* and their experience of implementing it in practice.

This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Approval Number: SEPI/2011/54; RM18686). Permission for this research has also been approved by the District Educational and Training Office and by the Head of your centre.

In this phase of the study, I would like you, as a case-study teacher, to provide some documents and materials relevant to your daily work, such as your workbooks and educational plans. Such documents will help me see clearly your conception of how you work on the *ECC* in theory and in practice. I would also like to video-record both a formal and an informal teaching session (approximately one hour each). Parental permission to video-record the children in your classroom will be sought. The video-recordings will be followed-up with an in-depth interview during which I invite you to discuss your teaching practice including the video footage and your documents. The interview would last about one hour and would be audio-recorded and transcribed. You will be given the transcript later to check for accuracy and make changes if you wish. The interview would take place at a time and site designated by you. It is envisaged that this process may take one or two days. Video-recordings and samples of work may be used in publications, shown at presentations, and used in education courses. I would appreciate if you could hand out the parent and child ethics forms and collect these for me prior to the video-recording data gathering.

The name of your centre, your name and the children's name will not be used in reporting in the study. Pseudonyms will be used. You can withdraw from the study at any time up to the end of the case-study data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions. The data will be securely stored as hard and soft copies. Both will be kept in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. The findings will be analysed with the data from the wider survey and will be published in academic journals and shared at education conferences.

I do hope that you will be able to assist me in this project. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors listed below.

Researcher,

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

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Supervisors:

Dr. Mary Jane Shuker, School of Education Policy and Implementation, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Appendix D-4

Consent Form for Case-study Early Childhood Teachers

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
 Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

- ☐ I have read the information sheet about the research project and I understand that I can ask questions at any time.
- ☐ I have had the purpose of the research explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that data collected from document reviews, observations and interviews will be treated as confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the research data will be securely stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher.
- ☐ I consent to participate in this research under the conditions stated on the information letter.
- ☐ I consent to providing the researcher with my workbook and educational plans.
- ☐ I consent to the researcher video-recording one formal and one informal teaching session.
- ☐ I consent to the researcher audio-recording the interview.
- ☐ I understand that I will receive a copy of my interview transcript and that I can make any required changes.
- ☐ I understand that my participation in the research is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study any time up to the end of the data collection period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.
- ☐ I agree to hand out and collect the ethics forms to and from parents and children.

Name of early childhood centre:

Name of participant: Signed:

Qualification: Years' teaching experience on *ECC*:

Please indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the research.

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please provide your personal contact details. If possible, please provide an email address, otherwise a postal address to which a hard copy can be sent.

.....

Appendix D-5

Information Letter for Parent/Legal Guardian

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
 Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Who is doing this study?

My name is Dinh Thi Doan Huong, and I am a doctoral student at Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education in New Zealand. Dr. Mary Jane Shuker and Prof. Carmen Dalli from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand are my supervisors for this study.

This project has ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington (Approval number: SEPI/2011/54: RM18686). Permission for this research has also been approved by the District Educational and Training Office and by the Head of your child's centre.

What is the purpose of this study?

This research will explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the educational values and theories underpinning the contemporary *New Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC)*. These issues will be examined alongside teachers' awareness of the Government's aspirations for future generations. Teachers' experiences of collaboration between teachers and children's family in implementing the *ECC* will also be sought. Overall, the research will investigate how teachers' understandings of the *ECC* influence their daily work regarding young children's education.

How will this study be conducted?

This study involves two phases. The first phase was a questionnaire sent to a large number of teachers working in public early childhood centres in Da Nang city and Quang Ngai city. The second phase will be a multiple-case study which includes six of those teachers to explore in more depth their understandings of the *ECC* and their experience of implementing it in practice.

Why have I received this information sheet?

As your child is a member in the classroom of the teacher who has been selected randomly for the case studies in this research, I am requesting permission for your child to take part in the classroom observation section as a part of this case study. This sheet will provide you with information so that you may make an informed choice about whether you will allow your child to take part in the study. You are required to sign the enclosed consent form if you agree for your child to take part in this study.

How will my child be involved?

You have received an information letter and a consent form. I hope you will take time to read about the study so you may make an informed decision allowing me to observe your child during the observation phase when I am in the classroom. Your child will be observed and video-recorded when he/she plays and learns together with their teacher and other children as a group in one formal and one informal teaching session (approximately one hour each) while I am at the centre. This classroom observation will record how the case-study teacher-participant implements the *ECC* in her daily work with children.

Your child's name will not be used in reporting in the study. Pseudonyms will be used. Your child may withdraw from the research at any time up to the end of the observation period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions. The observation data will be securely stored in password-protected files in a private computer and locked filing cabinets in my home and my office. Access to the data will be limited to the researcher and the supervisors. The findings will be analysed with the data from the wider survey and will be published in academic journals and shared at education conferences. Video-recordings may be used in electronic publications, shown at presentations, and used in education courses.

Any questions?

I do hope that you will be able to assist me in this research. If you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors listed below.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely yours,

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

School of Education Policy and Implementation, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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Supervisors:

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Prof. Carmen Dalli, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand.
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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Appendix D-5

Consent Form for Parent/Legal Guardian

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the *New Early Childhood Curriculum* in Vietnam:
 Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

- Please read this page carefully as it includes information about safety and security issues associated with privacy and ethics of research involving young children.
- Indicate your permission with regards to your child's participation in the video-recordings for the research purpose.
- Complete and sign the form.
- Return this form to your child's teacher.

In the interest of safety and security and the ethics of research involving young children, I require your permission for your child's participation in the video-recordings of my research. All the personal information about your child will be kept confidential. Your child will be allocated a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. You are welcome to contact me to discuss this further if you wish.

Please tick the relevant box that suits you:

- ☐ I have read the information sheet about the research project and I understand that I can ask questions at any time.
- ☐ I have had the purpose of the research explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that data collected from observations will be treated as confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the observation data will be securely stored in password-protected files and locked filing cabinets, and access will be restricted to the researcher and the supervisors.
- ☐ I give permission for the researcher to observe my child using (please indicate your permission by ticking the relevant box):
 - ☐ written observation
 - ☐ video-recording
 - ☐ documentation records
- ☐ I understand that my child may withdraw from the study any time up to the end of the observation period without giving a reason and without any negative repercussions.

Please provide your personal contact details and your email address, otherwise a postal address so a hard copy can be sent.

.....

Child's Name: Child's Class/Room:

My Name: Signature: Date:

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Appendix D-6

Letter of Explanation for Children

Research Project:

Reconceptualising the New Early Childhood Curriculum in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Researcher: Dinh Thi Doan Huong

This letter will be read aloud to each child participant.

My name is Huong. I am a teacher who is interested in finding out more about what children learn and play at your centre.

I would really like to come to your group to watch you learning and playing together with your teacher.

I would like your permission to video-record you, your group and your teacher during the day. The video-recordings will be shown to the other people who are interested in what and how you learn and play. You can choose another name instead of your own to be used when I am video-recording.

You do not have to help me. If you agree to help me then later you do not want me to watch or video-record you, you can let me know or tell your teacher and your parents any time, and I will stop.

Thank you

Huong

Contact:

Dinh Thi Doan Huong

School of Education Policy and
Implementation, Victoria University of
Wellington, Faculty of Education, P.O. Box
17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147, New
Zealand.
Phone: +64-4-463 5233 (Ext.8127)
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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui **Appendix D-7****Consent Form for Children***(This will be read out to each child)***Research Project:**

Reconceptualising the New Early Childhood Curriculum in Vietnam:
Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives

Researcher: Dinh Thi Doan Huong

The letter from Ms. Dinh Thi Doan Huong has been read to me and her research has been explained to me.

I understand that:

- ☐ Huong will visit our group.
- ☐ Huong will watch and video-record my group while we are learning and playing together with our teacher.
- ☐ The video-recordings may be used to show other people what we do.
- ☐ My own name will not be used (I can choose another name).
- ☐ I do not have to help Huong and I can ask Huong to stop watching and video-recording me at any time.
- ☐ I can tell my teacher or my parents to ask Huong to stop watching and video-recording me at any time.

Child's Name Child's pseudonym:

Signature: Date:

Name of Centre:

Please return this form to your teacher

Appendix E: Examples of Interview Questions for Case-study Early Childhood

Teachers

(This is for Phase 2 of the research project)

1. In your view what are the positive points/strengths of the *ECC* in terms of educational values?
2. What do you think are the negative points/weaknesses of the *ECC* in terms of educational values?
3. How do you choose the educational content to make an educational plan?
4. What are the differences between formal teaching hours and informal teaching sessions?
5. Are you obligated to carry out the formal and informal teaching sessions following pre-determined pedagogical steps?
6. Have you experienced any pressure or difficulties when implementing the *ECC*?
7. What do you know about the Government aspirations for the younger generation?
8. How about the aspirations of the children's parents? Are they congruent with the Government's aspirations?
9. In what way does the *ECC* implementation in practice satisfy or not satisfy the Government's aspirations?
10. How important do you think it is that parents are involved in implementing the *ECC*?
11. How do you involve parents in implementing the *ECC* in your classroom?
12. How helpful is parental collaboration in implementing the *ECC* in your daily work? To what extent is it helpful or unhelpful?

Prompts:

1. For example, the *ECC* can stimulate not only the children's cognitive development, but also their socio-emotional life. Is it a good educational value? What values do you think they are good or positive as well?
2. For example, the *ECC* does not focus on children's academic learning outcomes. Is it a negative point in terms of educational values? What values do you think that they are also negative?
3. For example, do you take the content suggested in the *ECC* and apply it? Or you create the educational content yourself? Do you integrate the local cultural attributes or the Vietnamese cultural attributes in the educational plan? How often do you do that way?
4. For example, the role of teacher vs. children's. Do you think it is good or bad? Are you pleased with that role? Why or why not?
5. If yes, why? If not, why? Are you pleased with that? Why or why not?
6. For example, the workload, the group size or the professionalism assessment.
7. For example, the Government's aspirations that promotes children's self-confidence and ability to self-evaluate, and life skills, such as social interaction and communication.
8. Do you think there are conflicts between the Government's aspirations and parents' aspirations?

Appendix F: Examples of Observation Schedule for Case-study Teachers Early Childhood Teachers

Teacher's name:..... Class: Centre:

Examples of teacher's interactions and practices while teaching the children	Frequency	Description	Comment
The children take their seats in an orderly manner		The teacher used chairs for children and she sat in the front.	
Assess the learning outcomes			
Use model or instructional objectives			
Ask the children about their interests			
Give the children opportunity to express themselves			
Encourage the children to evaluate and self-evaluate			
Discuss with children about what they want to learn			
Integrate the children's interests while teaching			
Work with the children individually			
Enhance the social-interaction			
Create problem-solving situations for the children			
Use reinforcements			

Appendix G: Ethics Approval Letter ^(*)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION TE WHĀNAU O AKO PAI

DONALD STREET PO Box 17 310, Karori 6147, Wellington, New Zealand
Phone +64-4-463 9500 Fax +64-4-463 9649 Website www.vuw.ac.nz/education

8 September 2011

Dinh Huong
Phd Student
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education
C/- School of Educational Policy and Implementation
Donald Street
Wellington

Dear Dinh Huong

RE: Ethics application SEPI/2011/54: RM18686

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application '**Reconceptualising the New Early Childhood Curriculum in Vietnam: Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives**', with the required changes, has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Please note that the approval for your research to commence is from the date of this letter.

Best wishes for your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Sue Cornforth
Co-Convener
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

(*) Title of the study was recorded at the proposal stage of this study