UPPER PRIMARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of upper-year students in Vietnamese primary schools about learning in small groups when studying Vietnamese language in comparison to traditional methods. Students' perceptions of small group learning were explored through examination of five main factors: benefits, difficulties, group types, individual accountability, and group assessment.

An interpretive approach was used to explore the topic, from which data were collected in a two-phase multi-case study using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Four classes of three primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, having different applications of small groups in learning, were selected for observation and survey by questionnaire. Twenty four students from the first phase of the study varying in gender and learning achievement were chosen for face-to-face interviews to examine more in-depth their perceptions about small group learning. To improve the trustworthiness of the research, teachers from these classes and principles of the schools were interviewed to obtain a more accurate overview of the research.

The study found that overall, Vietnamese upper-primary students preferred to learning in small groups to the traditional whole-class model despite the differences in implementing small group learning in each school. The results showed a positive concurrence with existing literature on the main findings, such as the three main benefits to students' outcomes (e.g. academic achievement, social skills, and attitudes); and some inevitable difficulties when using this method for learning (e.g. time management, isolation and lack of group skills). The students' choices of group types also reflected the current international students' perceptions (e.g. preference for heterogeneous ability but homogeneous gender group).

The research also presented some interesting points unique to the Vietnamese context which might enrich the current literature of students' perceptions of small group learning. They were the preference for large group sizes, the two-aspects of leadership, the preference for whole-group assessment, and the suitability of this method for learning Vietnamese language rather than other subjects.

The research also showed the underlying influences of the desire for better achievement, the consideration for others' feelings and the collective cultural context on Vietnamese upper primary students' views of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The relationships between students' gender and achievement to their perceptions of small group learning were also mentioned and described though these were not strong enough to generalise. A theoretical framework was proposed to illustrate the research findings.

These findings suggest that small group learning should be implemented more frequently in Vietnamese primary schools and the study recommends that there be further training in group skills for students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Chapter 1:   **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Students are the witnesses of school improvement progress. While the literature on school-based management "advocates more important roles for teachers and parents… students are usually omitted from the discussion" (Levin, 1995, p.17). Over the past 30 years, observational school studies undertaken by Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) (all cited in Rudduck & Flutter, 2000) have raised interest in how children view their daily lives; and students' perceptions of their classroom learning environments have received increasing attention from educators. Furthermore, Peterson, Swing, Braverman and Buss (1982, as cited in Mulryan, 1994) find that students' reported understanding of both lesson content and the use of specific strategies are noticeably related to achievement. Therefore, a study focusing on student perception of particular teaching methods will provide information for improving student learning performance.

Since small group has become a popular method in teaching and learning, studies focusing on how students and teachers perceive its effects have been conducted (Dart, Burnett, Purdie, Boulton-Lewis, Campell, & Smith, 2000; Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, & Dillihunt, 2005; Hallam, Ireson, & Davies, 2004; Mulryan, 1994). However, while these studies have mainly taken place in Western contexts (from which small group learning originates), this method is also broadly applied in many Asian countries as well. The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand how Vietnamese students perceive the benefits, difficulties, and characteristics of small group learning when learning Vietnamese language. This study aims to provide some new information about the student perspective of cooperative small group learning in learning literacy, from the Asian Confucian context of Vietnam.

1.1.1. Rationale of the research

In Vietnam, although teaching in small groups is encouraged by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) for all teachers at all levels (MoET, 2000), it is still rarely used in Vietnamese schools and institutes. For example at primary level, students are taught mostly using the whole-class method. This may be explained as Vietnamese students' "lacking of learning autonomy" (Lap, 2005, p.20), or their tendency towards "saying nothing, doing nothing" (Riley, 1988, p.14). Since 2007, one primary school in Ho Chi Minh City has applied small group learning in all subjects and teaching-and-learning activities. (In this thesis, this school is named School X). This was seen to introduce a new and advanced teaching method at primary level ("Dan tri"). It was elected as one of "The most ten remarkable events of Vietnamese education in 2009" ("Dai hoc Duy Tan"). Based on this recognition, in the school-year of 2010 - 2011, the Training and Education Service of Ho Chi Minh City officially required that all primary schools apply small group teaching in periods examined by educators, and training and education agents. (In Vietnam schools, every year, the principal and training and education agents examine teachers. Further, highly skilled teachers have the opportunity to present their teaching ability in Good-Teaching-Periods contests). As a result, some techniques for teaching in small groups have been implemented across primary schools such as Khan phu ban[1] (Table proof) or Hoat dong goc [2] (Angle activity).

However, it is likely that a change from using whole-class to small group models impacts on both teachers and students who have not experienced this practice before. This research, therefore, studies in depth the students' perceptions of small group learning in some primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, all of which used different models of small group teaching. To get a balanced perspective of small group

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[1], [2] Khan phu ban (Table proof) is organized as in Think-Pair-Share technique but with more than two participants. Hoat dong goc (Angle activity) is carried on as in Send-A-Problem technique (see Barkey, Cross, & Major, 2005).

learning, the students' perceptions were compared and contrasted with the principal's and class teachers' perceptions.

1.1.2. Overview of primary schools in Vietnam

In Vietnam, students go to school at the age of six. Primary level consists of five years. Most students in urban areas spend around eight hours per day at school. In contrast to other countries such as New Zealand, the Vietnamese education system legally requires a national curriculum with close prescriptions of content, modes of teaching and forms of assessment. As a consequence, teachers have to use only one textbook for each subject and are required to follow the curriculum design of the textbook to teach in each period. The textbook is written by a committee and deployed nationally, regardless of the students' ethnicity, gender, geographical location and economic status.

According to MoET criteria (MoET, 2000), a competent teacher is one who firmly follows the prescribed procedures of teaching. The teacher education institutes, as a result, instead of educating and training student teachers in methods, approaches, or models of teaching, focus instead on helping them understand and follow these teaching procedures. In addition, the whole-class approach encourages a focus on a teacher-centered model rather than a student-centered one. Due to these factors, teaching methods in Vietnamese are fixed and unchanging despite the encouragement of the Ministry of Education and Training.

Therefore, the use of small group learning in school X has been considered a sensation in teaching at primary level ("News"). However, in Vietnam, there has been no scientific study conducted into this approach. I hope that my research will provide useful information about this method for Vietnamese educators and teachers.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to explore what Vietnamese upper primary students think of small group learning in comparison to traditional methods when learning

Vietnamese language. The study also aims at comparing how respective students of schools with different kinds of implementing small group learning perceive the benefits, difficulties, and characteristics of this method based on observable differences in learning achievement and gender.

1.3. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms are defined as they appear in this study:

(1) MoET is the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training.

(2) Training and Education Services is an educational administrative organ under control of The People Committee of various provinces or cities or districts, known as Provincial Education and Training Services (PETS) and District Education and Training Services (DETS). Their main mission is to manage the education system in their given provinces or cities or districts by: appointing education missions, curriculum, criteria and policies for teachers, learners and education administrators' recruitment, assessment and evaluation; examining teaching and learning infrastructure and facilities; and assessing, evaluating, and issuing certificate or qualification (for examples, see Cam-Lo-DETS, 2006; Hai-Duong-PETS, 2009).

(3) Asian Confucian education system refers to the education system of countries influenced by Confucianism such as China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

(4) Traditional learning method refers to the teacher-centered teaching approach, individual learning, and classes where students face the blackboard and the teacher.

(5) Small group learning is a method in which students are grouped in pairs or in larger groups to conduct a learning activity. Small group learning refers to a student-centered approach where students interact with each other instead of only with the teacher to solve a learning problem.

Cooperative learning is a small group of students working inter-dependently and interacting in an equal-status (Cohen, 1994).

(6) Mixed methodology explains the differences between using mixed methods in only the research methodology portion of a study, versus using mixed model studies across all phases of the research process, and then presents a typology of mixed methods and mixed model studies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

(8) Mixed methods are research tools to collect data such as surveys, observations or interviews, etc. within a single study.

(9) SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is software assisting in quantitative data analysis.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As mentioned in the rationale of the study, small group learning, although officially recognised by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2000), and in some training material for primary teachers in Vietnam (MoET, 2002), remains under-researched. Studies about this method were mainly found in newspapers, magazines and non-professional websites (for examples, "Dai hoc Duy Tan; Dan tri; News"). This means there is a lack of literature when conducting research, and that, therefore, the study will contribute to the literature for Vietnamese primary education.

By focusing on the small group learning area, the research may be significant in three ways. Firstly, it focuses on primary level where basic knowledge and skill in both academic and social areas for young students are provided. At this level, students still depend more on the teacher's teaching methods rather than their own learning autonomy; therefore, their view of a teaching method will reflect precisely what they get from studying within teaching periods. Secondly, concentrating on literacy will illustrate both the advantages and disadvantages of using cooperative small group learning and learning in literacy. And lastly, centering on an Asian Confucian education system such as that of Vietnam will provide a different perspective on the impact of cultural and social factors in producing student perceptions of teaching methods. This will contribute to the literature of cooperative small group learning and learning.

1.5. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The remainder of the thesis has been structured as follows:

Chapter 2: The Literature Review forms a knowledge base of small group learning, and what upper primary students think of this method in comparison to other types of learning. A review of students' perceptions in relation to their differences in learning achievement and gender is conducted as well. The relevant literature comprises three areas: (1) a general picture of small group learning, (2) a review of studies in cooperative small group learning, and (3) a review of studies in students' perceptions of learning in small groups.

Chapter 3: In the Research Methodology, the research paradigms will be discussed. The rationale for research design will be presented accompanied by a description of research procedures and changes from the proposal noted. The data collection and analysis will be explained with a consideration of limitations.

Chapter 4: A presentation of Data Analysis and Findings will comprise a quantitative and a qualitative part. The quantitative section will provide an overall picture of how Vietnamese upper primary students perceived small group learning, while the qualitative section will explore in-depth their perceptions through interviews and observations.

Chapter 5: In the Discussion, quantitative findings will be presented and discussed in relation with the interpretation of qualitative findings. A consideration of differences in learning achievement, gender, and culture will be included to explore and explain the perceptions of Vietnamese students of small group learning.

Implications for schools, teachers, parents, and educational administrators are also proposed within this chapter.

Conclusion and Recommendations for further study will be also included.

1.6. DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study is deemed to be delimited and limited respectively due to the following factors and conditions.

1.6.1. Delimitations

(1) The study was limited to public primary schools in two districts in Ho Chi Minh City. It may be difficult to generalise the results to other types of schools in other locations or cultures.

(2) The chosen schools and classes were not classified according to size and decile, which might impact on the quantitative results.

1.6.2. Limitations

(1) The classes were not chosen directly by the researcher, but through principals' recommendations which may produce some obstacles in making comparisons across cases.

(2) Due to the limitation of classroom space, some students did not participate in the research. This may cause bias in the interview section.

The limitations relating to research methodology are presented in detail in chapter 3.

1.7. ETHICAL ISSUES

This research was conducted in line with the Victoria University of Wellington's Human Research Ethics Committee and approved on 7 March, 2011 (see Appendix A). The following ethical procedures were adopted:

(1) The working guidelines were clearly set out and explained to all participants.

(2) Permission to observe, administer questionnaires and conduct interviews in the schools under the study were obtained from the appropriate authorities, principals, teachers, students, and parents (see Appendix B, C, and D).

(3) Reports on research progress were disseminated to the participants after the data analysis.

(4) The researcher observed the rights of authors cited in the study.

(5) The researcher is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of selected cases and participants.

(6) The researcher endeavoured to report the findings with fairness and accuracy.

A detailed procedure of ethical issues is described in chapter 3 (see section 3.3.3.2.).

1.8. CONCLUSION

The background has set the stage for the research which provides general information about the research which mainly focuses on small group learning and students' perceptions of it. The following chapter will explore conceptually the topic of the research.

Chapter 2:   **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will synthesise what the literature shows regarding various concepts relevant to the research: small group learning, cooperative learning and primary students' perceptions of small group learning.

Firstly, concepts of small group learning and cooperative learning will be discussed. This will include an overview of definitions and history of small group learning and cooperative learning, and various aspects of a small group model. The review provides a framework to understand the learning method as well as to identify the main factors which affect students' perceptions. Next, the chapter will review the studies which examine the effectiveness of this method in primary students' learning, social, and attitudinal outcomes. Lastly, the study will focus on how primary students perceive learning in small cooperative groups. This section is divided into three parts, dealing with, respectively: students' preference for small group learning; how students of differing cultural backgrounds or ethnicities perceive this method; and students' perceptions of specific factors of the methods such as benefits and difficulties when learning in cooperative small groups, group composition, and group-work effectiveness.

The research attempts to demonstrate how students' gender and learning achievement relate to their perceptions of a new learning method. Thus the review will focus on studies examining these relationships.

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1. Small group learning and cooperative learning

2.2.1.1. Definitions

Although cooperation in learning has long been espoused as a fundamental value for developing democratic and progressive communities, the development of cooperative learning as a clearly defined teaching and learning methodology gained significant momentum in the 1970s and 1980s (Brody & Davinson, 1998; Slavin, 1990). Johnson and Johnson, the leading proponents of this method, delineated cooperative learning as "the instructional use of small groups (where) students work together to maximise their own and each other's learning" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994, p.6). Brody and Davison (1998) characterised this method as one including: (1) a small group of students interacting together; (2) students' engagement on a common task; (3) students sharing a common understanding of their interdependence in successfully completing the task; (4) students exhibiting helpful behaviours towards each other; and (5) students taking responsibility for their own and each other's learning. They also emphasised the effects of cooperation on students' learning outcomes. Brown and Thompson (2000) in another synthesis briefly defined this method as "a teaching procedure that enhances both academic and social skills" (p.11).

Deutsch (1949) on the other hand, emphasised the common goals set by each individual or sub-units of a group to achieve a cooperative social situation. The common goal in cooperation is presented if it can be entered by any individual, whereas in competition, it is not accessible for all members of a group. This point of view was shared by Slavin (1990, 1991) when he asserted that team goals and team success achieved and shared by all members of a team were at the core of the cooperative learning method.

There are many elements determining effective cooperation in group work. Johnson and Johnson (1975, 1989) framed five essential elements [3]:

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[3] Also known as PIGSF (Pigs fly)

(1) *Positive inter-dependence* refers to a commitment among group members to guarantee that each person's effort is not beneficial to only one's own learning but also inextricably linked to that of all the group's members (Johnson et al., 1994). In other words, each member must realise that they need each of the others to complete the assigned task. An "all for one – one for all" attitude is required to achieve this element (Brown & Thompson, 2000, p.27). Positive inter-dependence is the core of cooperative learning.

(2) *Individual accountability* is considered by Johnson et al. (1994) and Johnson (2003) as a consequence of the first element through which each member must be accountable for contributing "a fair share of the work" to achieve the group's goals (p.9). Therefore, nobody is "hitch-hiking" on the efforts of the others. Brown and Thompson (2000) in the same vein, emphasised the sense of responsibility of each student for their individual performance and to ensure their group-mates take the same responsibility.

(3) *Group and individual reflection*, also named "group processing" (Frey, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009; Gillies, 2007; Johnson et al., 1994), exists when the group, and each member, analyse how well they are achieving their tasks while maintaining effective working relationships. Therefore, the group becomes more self-monitoring to decide what behaviour ought to be continued or changed.

(4) *Small group skills* must be taught and trained gradually to promote the collaboration in groups. Learning cooperatively requires students to learn not only academic material but inter-personal skills as well. These skills include leadership, trust building, encouragement, motivation, management, communication, decision making, and conflict control.

(5) *Face-to-face interaction* is an essential element for cooperation. Brown and Thompson assume there are two aspects to face-to-face interaction. First is a physical proximity amongst group members by seating arrangement. Second is the way talking facilitates a more complex conceptual thinking process. This interaction also guarantees and enhances inter-personal relationships. The combination of supporting both personal

and academic outcomes is termed "promotive interaction" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998, p.14, as cited in Frey et al., 2009).

When these elements combine, cooperative learning becomes a powerful tool for thinking and learning.

This list is supplemented by researchers such as, Stahl (1994) who listed 10 factors: a clear set of specific student learning outcome objectives; common acceptance of the student outcome objectives; positive interdependence; face-to-face interaction; individual accountability; public recognition and rewards for group academic success; heterogeneous groups; positive social interaction behaviours and attitudes; post-group reflection over group processes; and sufficient time for learning. Meanwhile, Cooper (2003) considered the following features: positive interdependence; individual accountability; appropriate grouping; student interaction; attention to social skills; and teacher as facilitator. In general, these additions were basically based on Johnson and Johnson's framework (1975, 1989) with some modifications in consideration of the development of cooperative learning through time. However, some elements in these lists are still under debate, such as the use of heterogeneous groups (Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d'Apollonia, 1996; Sharan & Sharan, 1994; Wilkinson & Fung, 2002).

Nonetheless, according to Cohen (1994), cooperative learning should not be confused with small group learning because only productive small group-work can be considered cooperative group work. In a cooperative learning model, students work in groups small enough for everyone to participate in a clearly assigned task. Cohen criticised research which studied cooperative learning based on its productivity. According to her, there were four criteria for productive cooperative learning: (1) producing a conventional academic achievement, (2) contributing to students' conceptual learning and higher-order thinking, (3) using equal-status interaction within group discussion, and (4) enhancing desirable pro-social behaviours among participants of different ethnicity or race. Among these, interaction was defined as the most important criterion

distinguishing cooperative learning from other kinds of small group work, and defining this method as successful or productive.

Slavin (1991) to the contrary emphasised that group goals and individual accountability were essential elements for effective group work. Group must work to achieve same goals or to earn rewards and/or recognition. The success of group work depends on each individual's learning. Any potential harmful effects of individual competition or motivation are compensated by group members' encouragement and help offered each other when working for group rewards. It can be seen that Slavin's point of view was influenced primarily by extrinsic motivation theory; while Cohen emphasised motivation intrinsic to each student and each interaction among the group.

It should be noted here that there is a distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning which are two developed methods using small group learning. For some educators, cooperative learning is synonymous with collaborative learning (for example, Romney, 1997, as cited in McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva-Iddings, 2006). Yet Bruffee (1993) and Romney (1997) (all cited in McCafferty et al., 2006) criticised cooperative learning as a term used in primary and secondary education because it was too structured, and thus artificial, depended too much on extrinsic motivation and focused on lower-order thinking tasks. Collaborative learning, in contrast, was beneficial for older students because it provided opportunities which required higher-order thinking skills. On the other hand, Sharan and Sharan (1992, as cited in McCafferty et al., 2006) suggested there was a wide range of teacher influenced on student-and-student interaction. Consequently, students were allowed to have a great deal of control over matters relating to cooperative learning such as topic selections, group-mate choosing, and collaborative procedures. Therefore, according to them, cooperative learning consisted of collaborative learning.

In summary, it can be clearly seen that small group learning is a broad category which includes all types of co-learning. More recently, Baines, Blatchford, Kutnick, Chowne, Ota and Berdondini's handbook (2009) of promoting effective group work in primary

classrooms, emphasised that group work was more than a group of seated pupils asked to work together, but that pupils worked together as a team to achieve a joint purpose and gain common outcomes. These authors also noted that small group work included more than a single approach. It involves all children as co-learners who work in a cooperative environment, such as cooperative, collaborative group work, and peer tutoring. As a consequence, pupil groups in this book were mapped onto learning activities during the lesson based on the classroom map proposed by Kutnick, Blatchford and Baines (2002). Accordingly, the teacher could organise the class into diverse types of student groups, including a large group (more than six students), small groups (three to four students), pairs, or individuals.

However, Baines et al.'s definition (2009) of small group learning is too broad for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, within this chapter, small group learning will be limited to cooperative learning. We follow the interpretation of cooperative learning defined by Sharan and Sharan (1992) which has been mentioned above. Hereafter, the view of small group learning at the primary level will be confined to the review of cooperative learning.

2.2.1.2. Theories underpinning cooperative learning

Researchers explaining the question of what makes cooperative learning work have suggested two broad theoretical perspectives: motivational and cognitive.

Motivational theories on cooperative learning focus on understanding why individuals of a group are motivated to work interdependently to achieve a common goal. According to Slavin's syntheses (1983, 1990), this primarily depends on the reward or goal structures which create a situation whereby an individual can only attain success by integrating personal goals with group ones. In addition, Slavin (1991) argued that no one was motivated to work with another without reason to take one another's achievement seriously. Team rewards, in his opinion, were an essential element for producing basic skills achievement. Therefore, to meet personal goals, each member of

the group must help and encourage their group-mates to exert their maximum effort. This situation makes cooperation different to competition regarding its rejection of discrimination between high-ability students and the others. Students in cooperation tend to encourage their friends' learning and express norms favouring academic achievement more than ones in competition. Slavin supposed that the "pro-academic norms among students" created through cooperative rewards have important effects on students' achievement (p.14).

From this point of view, Slavin (1991) had developed a cooperative learning model "Student Team Learning" (STL), based on three principles: team rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success. The model tends to promote the learning conditions for enhanced effort, mutual responsibility and equitable opportunity to learn.

In a broader and more detailed perspective, McInerney and McInerney (2002) looked at three approaches: cooperative rewards, morality-based cooperation, and social inter-dependence. Cooperative reward structures (also called "extrinsic rewards") focus on an assumption that a group only succeeds on the basis of each individual's determination. Therefore, it motivates students to contribute and do their best for their group's goals. It also fosters individual accountability.

The second and the third aspects of the motivational perspective have a strong relationship. Morality-based motivation emphasises that cooperative interaction will be motivated by the active and voluntary help extended by each member to group-mates in learning (Ames, 1984, as cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2002). To advance this, a positive social inter-dependence should be established and maintained regularly between group members.

Social inter-dependence was initially developed in the early 1930s by Gestalt psychologists Kafka and Lewin's theoretical propositions regarding the nature of inter-dependence in group tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). Accordingly, the essence of a group is the inter-dependence between members which intrinsically motivates individuals toward the accomplishment of desired goals.

Built on these theories, Deutsch (1949) asserted that if members in a group perceive themselves inter-dependently when attaining common goals, they will actively promote each other to attain these goals together. This circumstance is termed "promotive interdependence" (p.132).

The "Learning Together" model is a development of this theory, refined by Johnson and Johnson (1987, 1989) into the "social inter-dependence theory". By contrasting the academic and social outcomes of three different instructional conditions (e.g. cooperation, competition, and individual), they proved that only in cooperative learning is a promotive interdependence accelerated. Johnson and Johnson also, from this point of view, set out the five essential elements of an effective group work, known as PIGSF.

If the motivational theories of cooperative learning emphasise the degree to which cooperative rewards and positive inter-dependence increase student incentive to work academically and help others, the cognitive theories turn their attention to the interaction between individuals while engaging in active learning tasks to promote conceptual development. These theories can be categorised into two major groups: cognitive developmental and cognitive elaboration.

The developmental cognitive theories are based on an assumption that student development of critical concepts derives from interactions between them about the tasks themselves. Piagetian theorists held that the development of social-arbitrary knowledge – language, values, rules, morality, and symbol systems – could only be learned in interaction with others. In other words, students will learn from others because, during the discussions, "cognitive conflict will arise, inadequate reasoning will be exposed and higher-quality understanding will emerge" (Piaget, 1926, as cited in Slavin, 1990, p.15). In these procedures, the use of language during the student-student interactions, such as arguing, verifying, and criticising, decisively boosts thinking. Deutsch (1949) also emphasised the communication process as "a special case of exerted positive induction", as "a means relationship to some such purpose as

informing, persuading or being expressive of one's self" (p.143). Through comparing the production of "locomotion"[4] between competition and cooperation, he argued the later structure produces more attentiveness, expressive characteristics, common signification, and common appraisals than the former.

Cooperative learning's proponents Johnson and Johnson (1993) developed "controversy theory" in which cognitive conflict was created and resolved through discourse in cooperative group situations when members were exposed to ideas in conflict with those they hold currently. In seeking resolution, members recognised personally-held constructs resulting in enhanced perspective-talking and conceptual development. As a result, the authors emphasised teaching conflict management when implementing cooperation in learning.

Another developmental cognitive theorist who needs to be mentioned is Vygotsky with his proposal of the "Zone of proximal development" (1978). Vygotsky emphasised the role of cooperation with others as one of two ways to form a child's ZPD, in his definition:

> 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).

In other words, collaborative activities among children foster their growth of conceptual knowledge. Through interactive working, information processing enables effective storage in long-term memory (McInerney & McInerney, 2002). Vygotsky also described the influence of using language on learning as follows: "Research shows that reflection is spawned from argument" (1978, p.47).

Another of Vygotsky's ideas is the function of social interaction in the co-construction of meaning and the significance of contextual knowledge: "Functions are first formed in the collective in the forms of relations among children and then become mental

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[4] When a person who has promotively interdependent goals with person A, B, C, etc., he will come to have promotively interdependent locomotions in the direction of his goal with those people (Deutsch, 1949, p. 133).

functions for the individual" (p.47). Knowledge is both mutually and distinctly created within a given social context. Therefore, the notion of building a "community of learners" within classrooms, schools, and wider educational bodies is one of the current applications of cooperative learning to this theory.

Cognitive elaboration theories explain the cognitive processes underlying small group cooperative learning as forms of cognitive restructuring in the minds of learners. Students have higher achievement when they explain something to others who ask for help or clarification. In this view, though both explainer/ recaller and recipient benefit cognitively, Dansereau (1988, as cited in Slavin, 1990) found that the recaller learnt more. This was confirmed by Webb's (1985) study, in which the learners who gained more from cooperative activities were those who provided elaborated explanations for others.

In conclusion, cooperative learning can be viewed as a methodology drawing from motivational, developmental and elaborative cognitive theories which cumulatively identify the processes by which effort is encouraged, thinking is challenged, and social support is provided to enhance both individual and collective learning.

2.2.2. Some reviews in cooperative small group learning

Cooperative learning has a strong foundation in research. Since the first study in 1898, nearly 600 experiments and over 100 studies relating to this method have been carried out (Johnson et al., 1994). Many reviews have been also conducted to synthesise the benefits and implementation of this method into teaching and learning, to point out the most important factors of effective small group learning, and to suggest suitable strategies for teachers and learners using this method. For example, Johnson and Johnson (1989) synthesised studies of cooperative learning across wide educational settings and curriculum areas. There is strong evidence that cooperative situations improve outcomes on all three measures: greater efforts in achievement; more positive interpersonal relationships; and greater psychological health and social competence.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) concluded that working together to achieve a common goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than working alone. In 185 studies about the impact of cooperation on students' achievement, students who worked in a cooperative environment were determined to achieve higher and better than those working in competitive situations (with the effect size = 0.67) and in independent situations (with the effect size = 0.64) (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). One year later, in a total of 323 studies surveyed, the results in more than two-thirds were favourable for cooperation in learning rather than for competition or individual (with effect sizes 0.67 and 0.75 respectively) (Johnson & Johnson, 1990). These findings were confirmed by the synthesis undertaken by Slavin (1995), in which 99 studies resulted in positive achievement gains from cooperative learning.

It was also noteworthy that cooperative learners more frequently use high-level reasoning, elaborative and meta-cognitive strategies and produce more frequent generation of ideas and solution and greater transfer of learning than the two other types of learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Johnson et al., 1994).

In terms of the quality of relationships among participants, cooperative learning promoted higher quality compared to competitive situations (effect size = 0.66) and individualistic situations (with effect size = 0.60) (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The improvement across ethnicities and ability relationships were specifically noted as well. This result was confirmed by Slavin (1995). Eighteen, in a total of 23 studies investigated, strongly illustrate that student learning in a cooperative situation produced better cross-racial friendships than the control students.

Despite some inconsistencies, studies also show that cooperative learning has a more positive effect on self-esteem than competitive and individualistic learning situations. Slavin's meta-analyses (1991, 1995) presented a positive effect of learning in a group on students' general and academic self-esteem, but not learning in a social one. This could be explained as a result of the improvement in learning performance under the influence of cooperative learning. In addition, self-esteem is an abstract state which can be influenced by various social factors.

Slavin's synthesis (1991) reported the positive influences of cooperative learning on a variety of outcomes rather than achievement, social skills, and self-esteem. The positive influences included higher preference for schooling, greater development of peer norms in favour of academic activities, better control of one's own altruism, positive effects on students' time-on-task, and more frequent attendance for black-lower-social-economic students. It was found that if students are taught in cooperation from kindergarten through 4th grade, they tended to be better at resolving conflicts and expressed more support for democratic values.

In a longitudinal experimental study, Stevens and Slavin (1995) demonstrated the significant effectiveness of a long-term implementation of cooperative learning for elementary students in two aspects: learning achievement and social relationships. Although there were not positive results for the last outcome (e.g. attitudes) as expected due to some errors in measurement, the research still showed more positive perceptions of the participants for their ability than those in traditional schools.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1989) and Johnson et al. (1994), the variety of powerful effects of cooperative learning on students' outcomes had distinguished this instructional method from other kinds, making it one of the most important tools for enhancing students' learning success. Furthermore, these outcomes had strong reciprocal relationships to each other. Outcomes of cooperative learning and the relationships between respective factors are illustrated in the following figure.
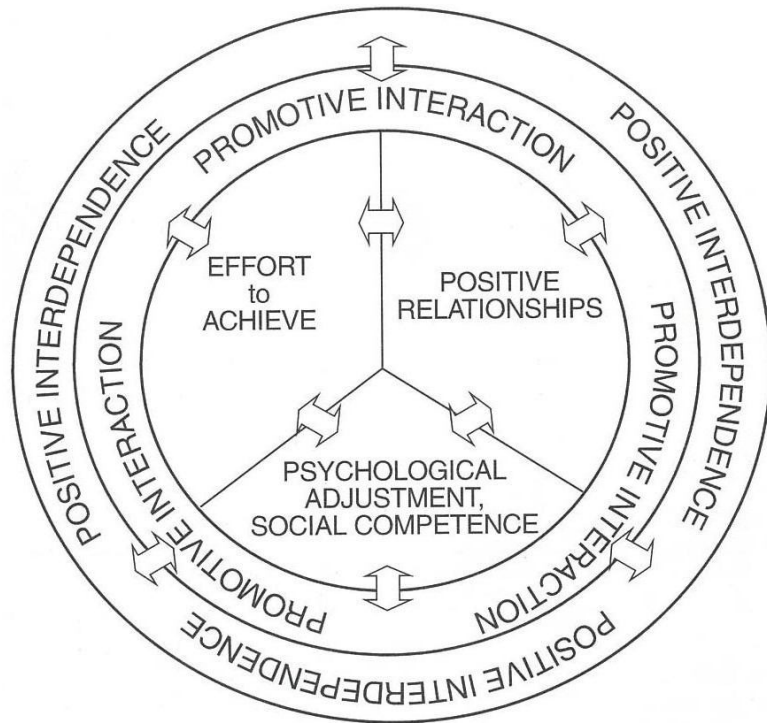
Figure 2.1. Outcomes of cooperation (adopted from Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994, p.12))

Cooperative learning is shown to be beneficial to a wide range of participants. Brown and Thomson (2000) concluded that learning in cooperative situations can accelerate the performance of not only low-achieving students but also gifted and linguistically diverse learners. Johnson and Johnson (1992) asserted that through explaining for other students, gifted students gained an in-depth understanding into the lesson and acquire better communication skills. The studies of Slavin (1977) and Slavin and Ockie (1981) (all cited in Slavin, 1995) had looked for the positive effects of cooperative learning on black students. Slavin's report (1991) showed this method was successful in improving the relationships across ethnicity barriers among mainstream students. The study also evidenced the positive effects of cooperative learning on physically and mentally impaired children and their peers. The use of Student-Teams-Games-Tournament (STAD) significantly reduced the discrimination towards academically impaired

students as well as increased the achievement and self-esteem of all students (Madden & Slavin, 1983, as cited in Slavin, 1991).

Recently, a study on Guatemalan students by Baessa, Chesterfield, and Ramos (2010) showed that working in small groups appeared to be a key to encouraging democratic behaviours among children of different cultures and genders. Traditional learning contexts or large group learning does not correlate significantly with democratic behaviour; and individual seating has negative correlations with the frequency of democratic behaviours.

As Slavin many times mentions, the positive effects of cooperative learning have been consistently found at all grade levels (from two to 12), in all major subjects, in all geographical locations. However, in this research, the main focus is not about cooperative learning, but on how students at elementary level perceive the characteristics of this method. Hence, the next section of this review focuses on research into primary student perceptions of cooperative small group learning.

2.2.3. Students' perceptions of cooperative small group learning

2.2.3.1. Interest in students' voice

Greene and Hill (2005) emphasised that research on children's views should see children as persons rather than as subjects. This implies a view of children as "sentient beings" who can act with intention and as agents in their own lives (p.3). It reflects the moral perspective on the role and status of children with respects, and promotes them as persons of value and persons with rights. These authors argued that if children's views were accepted as those of persons, the nature of their experiences would become of central interest.

Students' voices will provide the central perspective on each individual's feeling about what, why and how they perceive experience. Research on children's experience asserts that children are not the same (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Thorpe & Cadbury, 2004; Soto & Swadener, 2005). They encounter the world as individuals and in a particular manner

as unique and valued experiencers of their own world. Therefore, recognition of children's diversity and individuality is essential for researchers.

Moreover, a study of students' perceptions will provide insights from those whose languages and cultures are different from the majority. For example, studies of African American students' perception of learning environments (Howard, 2002; Wilson, 2002, as cited in Johnson, 2006; Waxman & Huang, 1997) confirmed that cultural differences might lead to differences in perceiving in instructional and classroom learning environments.

This proposed study will focus on Vietnamese students' perceptions of small group learning. By studying the method of teaching from the perspective of students, the researcher can gain insight concerning how students view the new teaching methods in relation to their learning performance and social skills. In addition, research on learning preferences may help educators promote multicultural awareness and develop teaching strategies compatible with diverse cultures.

2.2.3.2. Students' perceptions of cooperative small group learning

In this section, upper primary students' perceptions of cooperative small group learning is reviewed in three main categories: students' preference for small group learning rather than other types of learning; how students in culturally and linguistically diverse groups think about small group learning; what the students perceive of the specific characteristics – such as benefits and difficulties, group composition, and productive group-work – of small group learning when using this method.

In terms of students' preferences for learning in small groups and cooperation, most studies show that primary pupils advocate for learning via this method compared to other types of learning environments. For example, Johnson (2006) surveyed 212 multi-ethnical fifth-graders across urban, suburban, and rural geographic areas in Mid-Atlantic region of the USA about their preferences for four learning environments:

cooperation, competition, individual and communal interdependence. The results showed that American children regardless of their ethnicity, gender, and geographical areas preferred cooperative learning to the three other types of learning environment. Similarly, Hood (2008), in his pilot project of students' perceptions of their identity as learners, described that mainly the students preferred working with partners to working by themselves. Mostly this was because they enjoy being helped by friends and having fun when working with others.

In terms of the perspectives on different learning environments of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Boykin & Bailey (2000) showed that African American children preferred cooperative learning to individualistic or competitive learning. They preferred to participate in communal rather than individualistic activities and indicate a greater preference for variability rather than routine.

In the same trend, Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, and Dillihunt (2005) conducted interviews with American elementary students of diverse ethnicities. The students preferred cooperative learning to competitive and individualistic learning. Furthermore, the African students' preferences for cooperative learning were significantly higher than their non-African counterparts.

Ghaith, Shaaban, and Harkous (2007) studied pupils' views about the teachers' roles in supporting students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds during group work. They found that teachers could scaffold academic achievement and social skills for students with diversity in language and culture by using cooperative teaching.

The attention to learning outcomes was discussed by Florez and McCaslin (2008). Among the benefits of learning in small groups, these primary students reported 92% of the stories about achievement, while the social relationship was presented in fewer than half of the stories. More interestingly, achievement was identified accompanied by group-work's benefits, whereas affiliation was described as a characteristic of a productive group-work.

Views of the outcomes of cooperative learning in three domains (e.g. academic, social, and attitude) are also studied by comparisons between students and their teachers.

Mulryan (1994) showed a mis-match when comparing teachers' and students' views on the purpose and benefits of cooperative small group work in learning mathematics at the primary level. These teachers thought that problem-solving tasks could enhance the students' cognitive processes, while the social aspects of cooperation were most important for students. On the other hand, McManus and Gettinger (1996) showed a different mis-match when comparing the primary teachers' and students' views of these outcomes of cooperative learning; while the teachers thought the social aspects of cooperation were most important, the students rated academic benefits highest.

In another study discussing the perceptions of both teachers and learners, Veenman, Kenter, and Post (2000) showed a strong match between both groups about cooperative learning in Dutch primary classrooms. Both teachers and students reported the social benefits of cooperative learning as the most important features of this method. Interestingly, this outcome was seen in up to 93% of students' answer, compared to 84% for the learning outcome. Both teachers and students in this study identified that cooperation increased self-esteem and positive attitudes towards school subjects. Only 2% of students reported that they confronted some problems when working together in groups.

Florez and McCaslin (2008) examined 183 year 3 to 5 students in the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) about small group learning through writing their own stories. Overall, their picture of students engaging in small groups was overwhelmingly positive and optimistic. Over 90% of participants, when asked to present obstacles encountered in group-work, responded that none exist. Fewer than 5% of stories mentioned "small, transient, surmountable problems" (p.2444). Rarely do respondents reported rejection, ignorance or giving up, but far more often belonging and togetherness.

Putnam, Markovchick, Johnson, and Johnson (1996) examined the relationship between "normal" students and students with learning difficulties in two kinds of learning environment: collaboration and competition. This research illustrated that the collaborative situation changed the typical students' point of view towards their peers with learning difficulties. Similarly, the Greek and Cypriot students in Kaldi,

Filippatou, and Onoufriou's study (2009) clearly acknowledged the positive effects of cooperative learning on their typical students' attitudes to peers with learning difficulties or those from different ethnic backgrounds. The students therefore preferred working in groups to working on their own.

However, students in McManus and Gettinger's study (1996) viewed the impact on social relationships as the factor least benefitted by cooperation. Up to 45% of students' responsed relate occurrences of social conflict during discussion in groups. More than two fifths of the students preferred to work alone when completing assignments although the majority prefers to work in groups. This result seemed to contradict to the teachers' view of the outcomes of cooperation whereby 91% of the responses rated social benefits as the most important. This may be explained as a part of the research sampling of this study. All the participants in this study are third-year students who seemingly pay more attention to the outcomes of learning performance than to social relationships.

In Veenman et al.'s study, although both teachers and students advocated for using cooperative teaching and learning, the observable results showed that the quality of the cooperation was not rated highly. Students did not cooperate and participate equally. Despite a high time-on-task level, cooperation did not last for long.

In terms of their perceptions of group composition, some students feel they are put in a wrong set when being classified in within-ability group. Devine (1993), for example, explored pupils' experiences of within-ability groups for reading. The results showed that most students desired to be put in higher level group than they were in, because it made them felt more confident and superior. The students from the lowest group, moreover, felt dissatisfied with the teaching methods adopted for their groups. As a result, they preferred to learn reading in whole-class environment to individual or group work. This result showed that students were aware that different kinds of teaching and activities went on in different groups.

Lyle (1999) explored elementary students' perspectives about learning reading and writing cooperatively in mixed-ability and mixed-gender groups. The students

perceived that they gained more social benefits and higher academic and cognitive achievement from this method. These findings were confirmed by the research of Hallam, Ireson, and Davies (2004). Students were aware of the benefits of working in groups especially when they felt they could support the lower-achieving students. Hallam et al. proposed that stigmatisation was less likely to appear in mixed-ability cooperative groups.

Student participants in Mulryan's study (1994) indicated that the social dimension of cooperative small group work was the most important characteristic of an effective cooperative group. More than one third of the students considered sharing and less defensive attitudes among group members as the first feature of good cooperation. Interestingly, more higher-achievers than lower-achievers mentioned social factors as important to work cooperatively; and the female students perceived this dimension more often than males. This demonstrates differences in perceptions between participants of different genders and learning achievements.

2.3. SUMMARY

As McManus and Gettinger (1996), Veenman, Kenter, and Post (2000), and Florenz and McCaslin (2008) asserted, though there were a number of studies on small group learning and cooperative learning, little information regarding students' perceptions of this method was illustrated. Elliott (1988) emphasised that the degree to which teachers and students deemed cooperation to be beneficial might relate to how this method was implemented in classrooms. It means that a study focusing on students' perceptions of learning in small groups is a useful next step.

It is noticeable that the studies presented above either use quantitative or qualitative approaches. According to Creswell (2009), to gain a triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of a study as well as to neutralise and cancel the biases of other methods, a wide range of methodologies must be used. Research data, therefore, should come from various sources and a variety of participants' perspectives.

Moreover, although some experiments examine the effects of cooperative small-group teaching and learning in Asian contexts (for example, see Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Zelniker, 1995; Sugie, 1995), it seems that there are fewer studies focusing on Asian primary students' perceptions of small group learning. In addition, the social, cultural and epistemological factors have a strong influence on how effective a new teaching method is to students. For example, for Asian education systems following Confucianism, like the Vietnamese, sitting silently in class, listening, and repeating precisely what teachers say are how students show respect to the teacher (Phelps & Graham, 2010; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005). To them, discussing or questioning is considered to be impolite behaviours. As a result, adapting to the criteria of an effective cooperative small-group discussion may challenge both teachers and students' teaching and learning norms. Student perspectives of small group learning in these contexts, therefore, may be different to their Western counterparts.

Furthermore, Veenman et al.'s study (2000) asserted that, at the primary level, cooperative teaching and learning were implemented intensely in mathematics (with more than 80% teacher responses), but just moderately in literacy (61% for spelling and 45% for reading). The studies of primary student perceptions of cooperative small-group learning also centre on mathematics or sciences (for examples, Mulryan, 1992, 1994). Statistics from reviews of cooperative learning also show a tendency to implement this method in nature science subjects rather than in language ones. For example, in Slavin's synthesis (1990), 38 studies of 65 reported, or 58%, focus on mathematics or science subjects rather than on literacy.

To sum up, it can be seen clearly that the students' perceptions of cooperative small group learning will provide an insightful perspective into small group learning in primary schools. As a consequence, teachers, educators and administrators can understand in-depth how the teaching and learning processes are deployed in classrooms.

Hence, this research concentrates on the perception of Vietnamese upper primary students being taught in small groups when learning their mother tongue. The research results will thus contribute to the current literature of cooperative small group learning and learning.

Chapter 3: **METHODOLOGY**

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological framework and research methods through which the data for this study are generated, interpreted and evaluated. The first section introduces the research questions followed by a general overview of the methodology that is appropriate to answering these questions. The second section begins with a description of the research design for this case study, including the setting, participants, and instruments for data gathering. This is followed by information about the main study including management of data and the framework for analysis.

3.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was:

What are the perceptions of Vietnamese upper primary students of working in small groups when learning Vietnamese language?

The following sub-questions provided a focus on specific areas for the investigation.

1. What benefits do these students perceive they get from small group learning in learning Vietnamese language compared to traditional methods?

2. What difficulties do they perceive about learning in small groups in learning Vietnamese language compared to traditional methods?

3. What perceptions do they hold of the characteristics of group types when learning in small groups?

3.1. What do they think about group size?

3.2. What do they think about group composition?

4. How do they perceive their individual accountability when they are in small-group discussion?

5. How do they perceive the assessment types of small group learning?

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.3.1. Research paradigms

The study explored what Vietnamese students thought about small group teaching; therefore, the underpinning theoretical perspective of this study is interpretivism. According to Weber (1968), the term interpretivism "may refer to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors" (p. 21). This implies an epistemology that reality is socially constructed. Individuals develop their understanding based on their experiences. Interpretive researchers emphasise on finding the meaning or nature of a human action by studying and conveying the language that people use to describe the "reality", with the belief that the meanings of language lie behind their actions. As a result, the meaning interpreted may be varied and multiple from subject to subject, even in relation to the same phenomenon. There is no objective reality to be discovered by the researcher and replicated by others, as in the case of positivist sciences (Creswell, 2009). The study, therefore, attempts to understand and explain phenomena through accessing the assigned meaning of participants. The study aims to explore and explain the phenomenon of small group learning of upper primary students learning Vietnamese language; hence, the research was primarily exploratory.

Under the philosophical perspective of interpretivism, phenomenology was adopted as the research methodology of this study. Phenomenology, according to Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997, cited in Barnacle, 2001), is "a determinate method of inquiry attaining a rigorous and significant description of the world of everyday human experience as it is lived and described by specific individuals in specific circumstances" (p. vi). From the phenomenological perspectives, the "objective world" only exists and becomes real through people's consciousness. Phenomenology research aims at understanding how people experience a phenomenon as well as at understanding how they perceive, describe, feel, judge, make sense and talk about that phenomenon with

others (Giorgi, 1997; Patton, 2002; Gray, 2009). For this research, an exploration of how Vietnamese upper primary students perceive small group learning when learning Vietnamese language as a phenomenon of their school-life was investigated.

3.3.2. A two-phase research design

As Gray (2009) and Miles & Huberman (1994) point out, phenomenological research design is best suited to complex issues and aims to produce "thick descriptions" [5] of people's experiences or perspectives within their settings based upon quite small case studies. Therefore, a case study design was appropriate for the research. Case study "involves systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions" (Berg, 2004, p.251). Accordingly, a case could be a person, a group, an organisation, or an event in which people experience the same phenomenon.

The case study design was appropriate for this study for the following reasons.

Firstly, as Burns (2000) suggests, the case study approach is a method of discovery rather than confirmation. Yin (2009) agrees, stating the suitability of the case study approach to answering how and why questions to gain "a better and deep understanding of real-life events" (p.5). The purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon of how Vietnamese upper primary students perceived small group learning rather than investigating the nature of small group learning itself. Moreover, the case study approach also examines events in a specific context including the limits of time and space as well as the influences of individual's own social and cultural backgrounds (Creswell, 2005; Lichtman, 2010). Thus the case study approach appropriately acknowledges the specific context of Vietnamese students' Confucianism backgrounds.

Secondly, small group learning has been officially implemented in all primary schools for about one year. Therefore, a case study design allowed the researcher to explore in a

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[5] "Thick descriptions" is the word used by Geertz (1973).

deep and holistic way how students perceived, discussed, and judged this teaching method.

Lastly, small group learning as applied in these schools is not an intervention provided for one or some specific students. Hence, a case study design was the best way to provide a better understanding, and perhaps better theorising, for a larger collection of cases, as according to Stake (2000). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), a case study can still make a generalised hypothesis as long as it provides enough appropriate, valuable, and rich information to explore and explain the phenomenon.

For this case study research, both quantitative and qualitative research methodological instruments were used for the following reasons. Firstly, solely qualitative or quantitative research could not provide a whole picture of the phenomenon. A variety of sources provided a basis for triangulating data to ensure interpretation was supported by different data sources (Creswell, 2005). Secondly, employing a quantitative study increases the generalisability of qualitative research (Hesse-Biber, 2010). In this study, using an interview instrument alone was unlikely to explore the perspectives of all individuals drawn on in the case study. Thirdly, using quantitative methods as a follow-up or even parallel study increases the validity and reliability of the qualitative findings (Hesse-Biber, 2010). This was reinforced because similar questions were asked in both studies. Furthermore, quantitative study allowed extrapolation of the results to a larger population.

As Patton (2002) states, there are two problems in exploring the nature of people's everyday experiences which confuse researchers when using qualitative methods. The first problem is how to know what people experienced and how they interpreted the world. The second is how the researcher can reflect the experience of a phenomenon as directly as possible. Patton suggests using participant observations and in-depth interviewing as methodological instruments for the latter. The study's data, therefore, were qualitatively collected from class observation and individual semi-structured interviews with some selected children of varying learning achievement levels and gender.

Furthermore, to enhance the validity of the qualitative results, the principals and teachers of four case classes were interviewed. This step was used to provide background information about small group teaching and learning drawn from the perspectives of teachers and principals in charge of teaching methods. Therefore, the data from these interviews did not affect the result of the research in terms of a phenomenological study of students' perceptions.

In addition to these qualitative instruments, a quantitative questionnaire sheet was used for students to evaluate the small group learning process. This questionnaire used a five-point Likert-scale to discover what the students in these classes thought about learning and teaching in small groups. The questions were based on five main categories that are contained in the research questions: benefits, difficulties of small group work, group size and composition, individual accountability, and individual and group assessment. The questionnaires were translated from English to Vietnamese, and the translations were double-checked by two professionals in the Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy (for checking forms, see appendix H).

The observations captured the context within which students interact. This interaction could not be described precisely by either individual interview or questionnaires. In addition, some studies have illustrated that there is a mis-match between participants' answers in the questionnaires and the interviews respectively, and what they are actually doing during the observation time (for example, see McManus & Gettinger, 1996). Group work was observed by using observation checklists. The questionnaires provided an overall picture of upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning, whereas the interviews gave a more focused perspective, helping to discover and investigate the emerging issues of the research. Furthermore, individual interviews with students of different genders and levels of academic achievement allowed a comparison and contrast of study data.

The following diagram describes the research design for the study:

1st phase	2nd phase

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┌──────────┐     ┌──────────┐     ┌──────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│  QUAN    │ ──▶ │ 1st phase│ ──▶ │  QUAL    │ ──▶ │Phenomenology │
│ methods  │     │ results  │     │ method   │     │              │
└──────────┘     └──────────┘     └──────────┘     └──────────────┘
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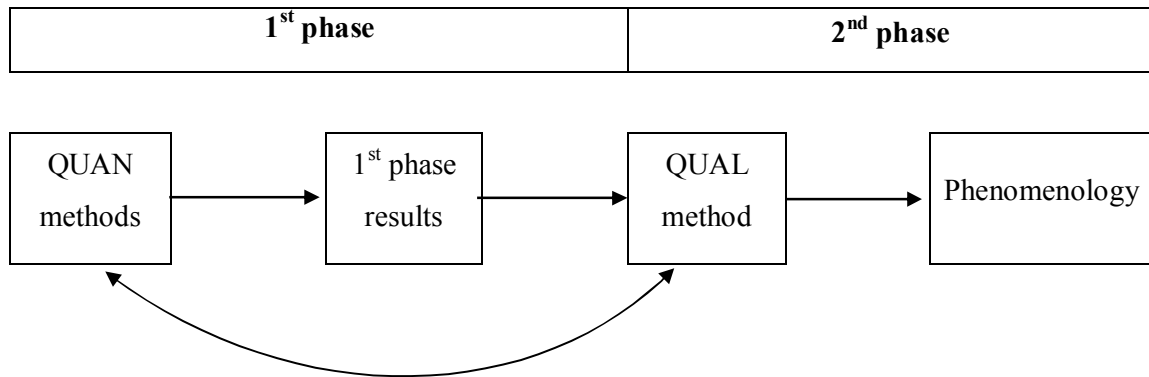
Figure 3.1.: Research design

In the first phase, each class was observed in one period of Vietnamese language. Students' activities during group work were recorded and evaluated using an observation sheet. A separate observation sheet was used to examine each group in a class. Then, all students in the class were required to complete a questionnaire about what they thought of learning in groups during the Vietnamese period.

Results obtained from the observation and the survey were used to select participants from each class for the interview in the second phase. These students were chosen based on their differences in gender and learning achievement. During this phase, the participants were asked in depth to talk about their feelings about learning in small groups.

Although the results from the first phase were used to select the participants for the second phase, the results from the qualitative method were not necessarily regarded as more important than those from the quantitative methods. As mentioned above, a mixed research design was chosen in order to provide a triangulation of the research. The quantitative data and results provided a general picture of the research problem. Then, through qualitative data collection and analysis, this general image was refined, extended, and explained. Hence, both quantitative and qualitative methods were carried out to answer five sub-questions of the study. These five questions were also used in the interview of teachers and vice-principal.

3.3.3. Research procedures

3.3.3.1. Changes in the research procedures

The research had been explained and discussed by the researcher and the principal of school X between November of 2010 and February of 2011. According to the proposal, data would be collected from only two classes in school X in March, 2011. Because of a sudden change in the view of school X's principal, the project did not take place as proposed. The observation session was not taken over two continuous weeks, but in only one teaching period. Furthermore, the teachers sent requests to the principal asking not to be videoed and audio recorded. The reasons were that they were not comfortable with being filmed, and that the camera and recorder might affect the students' concentration. As a result, only an observation sheet was used to record what the students did during the period. However, the researcher was not allowed to move around the class to see what was really going on during group work. She had to remain seated at the edge of the class which restricted the observation angle. Hence, her judgment of the group work was not precise enough to be used as a research instrument.

These changes in the research procedures also led to a change in case selection. Instead of only two classes of school X, there were two more classes from two other schools added. The sample selection will be described in details in the next section of this chapter (see section 3.4.2.).

A pilot study for the questionnaire did not take place as planned because the principal of school X did not grant the permission. Therefore, amendments to the questionnaire were carried out after the first class's data collection. These amendments will be described in details in section 3.5.1.4. of this chapter.

3.3.3.2. Procedures in action

The following research procedures were applied in the current study:

_ *Discussed proposal and research questions with colleagues in Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy for feedbacks.*

_ *Meeting the managers of Training and Education Services of Ho Chi Minh City and District 3 and 1 (PETS and DETS) for the allowance of conducting fieldwork in schools.*

_ ***Initial meeting with principals and class teachers.***

_ *Discussed and explained the purpose, procedure, ethics of the research.*

_ *Meeting with classes to explain project.*

_ ***Attended class for one period per class to do the observation.***

_ ***Required students in class to do the questionnaire.***

_ *Initial analysis of the questionnaire and observation data to choose participants for the interviews.*

_ *Meeting teachers of each class again to set up the schedule for the interview.*

_ ***Individual interviews with students, teachers and vice principal.***

_ *Transcribing and translating data.*

_ *Analysis of data according to framework of analysis.*

_ *Feedback to school staff on data and seeking of further data on school practices.*

Table 3.1.: Summary of the current research procedures

1. The research took place during two months, from 15 March to 5 May, 2011. Because of school X's changes to the arranged schedule, some meetings with the managers of Training and Education Services of Ho Chi Minh City (PETS) and two District 3 and 1 (DETS) were carried out to gain permission to conduct fieldwork in two other schools (for the letters, see Appendix B). In addition, the questionnaires for the survey and interview questions were sent to two professionals in Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy for advice about the cognition, language and translation suitability to children. The confirmation letters are attached in Appendix H.

2. After permission was granted by the PETS and DETS, the researcher contacted the principal of each school to arrange an initial meeting to explain and discuss the data

collection. Three public primary schools, namely school X, School Y (in District 3) and school Z (in District 1) allowed the researcher to collect data directly in their schools. Based on the principal's recommendations, four classes were chosen as multi-cases. They were re-coded as X4, X5 (in school X), Y4 (in School Y), and Z4 (in school Z). The teacher and students of each class had an initial meeting with the researcher to discuss the research purposes, procedures, methods of collecting data, and ethics. The letters and consent forms to teachers, students and parents were directly given to each of the participants in the research in this meeting. The information letters and consent forms are attached in Appendix C and D.

All the data collection, including observations, surveys and interviews took place in the school context.

3. The researcher conducted the observations and surveys. Questionnaires were given directly to each student of each class immediately after the observation session. Instructions were given to the students before the survey. To ensure that all students were fully confident of what and how they were doing, instructions were also given whenever participants raised questions during the survey. The questionnaires were collected by the researcher alone. The class teacher was not allowed to provide explanation to the students, but helped to control the class.

4. After data were collected, categorised and processed, the initial findings indicated suitable participants for the qualitative study based on their gender, and learning achievement. The interviews were conducted on the school site in the following week. In addition to the student interviews, the teachers of the four classes and the principals of the schools were invited to an interview where they were asked about the perceived benefits and difficulties when teaching and learning in small groups. Only the vice-principal of school X attended this interview. The other two principals declined to be interviewed due to time constraints.

This procedure is shown as follows:

1. Selection of schools

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┌─────────────────────┐
│      Agency of      │
│ Training and Education │
└─────────────────────┘
```

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┌──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
│ School X │ School Y │ School Z │
└──────────┴──────────┴──────────┘
```

2. Selection of classes

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┌──────────────────┐
│  Class selection │
└──────────────────┘
```

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┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│  Observation │        │ Questionnaire │
└──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
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3.   Selections   of
participants

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┌──────────────────────────┐
│    Students Interview     │
├──────────────────────────┤
│  VP and Teachers Interview │
└──────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────┐
│  Students' perceptions │
└──────────────────────┘
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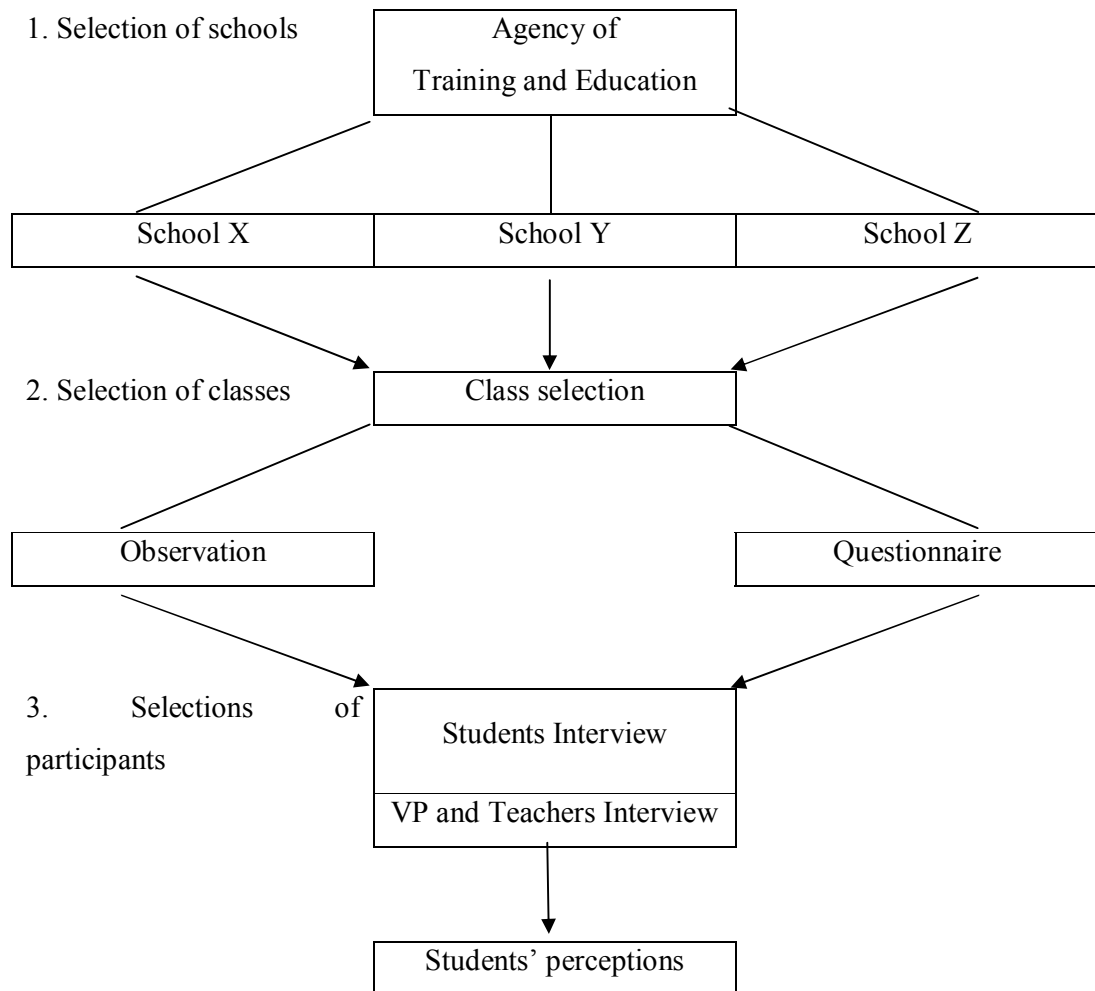
Figure 3.2.: The research procedures

5. After all the data were collected; the data analysis was carried out. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software. For the qualitative data, transcription and translation were completed by assistants. Then, coding and memoing were used to screen the materials, and data display and data reduction were used to identify the pattern of students' perceptions of small group learning.

3.4. CASES DESCRIPTION

3.4.1. Setting

The research took place in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the biggest cities in Vietnam. This city is named as the city of opportunities and change. This is not only true of the economics but also its education system. Ho Chi Minh City was one of the first provinces to advocate for the Ministry of Education's campaign of revolution in teaching and learning. One of these campaigns includes the method of teaching and learning in small groups inspired by school X's model.

The research project was based in three schools in District 1 and 3. These are some of the most well-established districts in Ho Chi Minh City where many people from different social classes live together. In this area there is a large gap between the rich and the poor. This social-economic diversity was reflected in the chosen classes.

3.4.2. Cases selection and description

3.4.2.1. Schools

Three primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City were chosen because of their diversity in their application of small group teaching. School X is the case mentioned in the proposal. The other schools are School Y and School Z.

School X and Y are located in District 3. School X receives more attention from teachers, educators, and education agents because of its well-known and successful application of small group teaching. In this school, students learn in small groups for all periods, including extra-activities and extra-subjects such as Art, Physical, and Music. This model was implemented as a trial for two years and has been applied to the whole-school since the school-year of 2009 - 2010. This means that its upper-year students have learnt this method for at least one year, and have had two to three years being taught in the traditional methods. As a result, they are able to compare the effects of small group teaching and traditional methods.

School Y is a smaller school in the same district. It only has 10 classes, which is a quarter the size of school X. However, the principal is a young and progressive person who encourages the teaching staff to use innovative teaching methods. Although School Y has not received as much attention from the Training and Education Services as school X, it also has a fund for helping and coaching teaching staff with new teaching techniques. There is also an official requirement for teachers, who want to be rewarded as "Merit teacher of the year", that new methods such as small group teaching must be used during their teaching periods. Hence, in spite of not being taught in small groups in all periods as in school X, students in School Y are still familiar with small group working.

School Z is a large newly-established school located in District 1. The teaching staff are not required to use small group teaching unless there are external observers. Moreover, the classroom conditions and the number of students per class do not allow teachers to deploy small group teaching frequently and easily. According to the principal, although the teaching staff have been trained to teach in small groups, there are not many opportunities for them to practise.

3.4.2.2. Classes

Qualitative researchers have to decide whom or what they want to study; therefore, purposeful sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2008b) will be the most frequent choice. The research focused on schools in Ho Chi Minh City in which small group learning was implemented. The participants were the upper primary students who ranged from 10 to 11 years-old. The upper-year students were chosen because their cognitive and social development was advanced enough to enable them to compare the effects of small group learning and traditional methods. Christensen and James (2008), O'Kane (2008), and Scott (2008) indicated that most children over 10 were fully able to articulate their perceptions, opinions and beliefs in surveys designed for adolescents and adults.

In this study, the goal is to explore how upper primary students experience the small group learning method. Therefore, four upper primary classes, in which three were year 4 classes and one year 5 were selected as part of multi-case study. Multi-cases are used to develop in-depth understanding of student perceptions of small group learning. In addition, a multi-case study provides a means for replication, which improves the external validity of the study (Creswell, 2005, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008a; Yin, 2003). Fourth-year students were chosen to avoid interfering with the fifth-year students' study. According to the principals, the fifth-year students had to focus on their study as a transition to secondary school. As a result, only school X allowed the researcher to work with one fifth-year class. This class has been very familiar with having observers in their class.

To select the four cases, the principals' recommendations were used with a consideration of the following criteria. First, classes had to be upper-year and used to being taught in small groups in Vietnamese language periods. This meant that they were able to compare the benefits and difficulties of learning in small groups to traditional methods. Second, students in these classes had to be varied in gender and Vietnamese achievement to examine the effect of these variables on their perceptions. And third, the respective achievement level of students in these classes should be as similar as possible to preclude any effect of achievement on the way students perceive a teaching method.

However, for the fifth-year class all students were high achievers in Vietnamese language. According to the vice-principal, it was too difficult to choose another class because everything was planned and the school staff had been notified about the research.

3.4.2.3. Participants

Because the research sought to know in-depth the differing perceptions of students diverse in both gender and learning achievement in Vietnamese language, a case within the case sample was selected (Stake, 2000). Twenty four students, six from each class,

were stratified based on their differences in gender and achievement (high, average and low). Suitable subjects were purposively selected to be the participants of the individual interview session (Johnson & Christensen, 2008a). Merriam (1988) described purposive sampling as "based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p.48). The selection was based on the observation and initial questionnaire analysis. Participants varied in their roles in groups. Such roles included leaders, vice-leaders and members. They also varied in their personalities, showing active or passive, or shy or talkative, tendencies during the group work. This criterion was used to decrease the influence of individual roles in groups on participants' attitudes to small group learning. In addition, it also provided further insight into learning in groups from students with different perspectives.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1. The first phase of study

The purpose of conducting a quantitative study in this phase was to build up a general picture of students' activities during group work in Vietnamese period, and of their attitude to learning in small groups compared to learning via a traditional method (such as studying individually with all students looking straight toward to the blackboard). Two instruments were used, namely an observation sheet and a questionnaire. The study also aimed to explore how the students' gender and learning achievement related to their thinking about small group learning. As a result, six students varying in gender and achievement from each class were purposively selected for the interview in the second phase.

3.5.1.1. Population

The population of this study was students from four classes chosen from three primary public schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The population is described in following table:

Class	X4	X5	Y4	Z4	Total
Number of students	34	32	24	39	129

Table 3.2.: Population of the survey

3.5.1.2. Instrument

3.5.1.2.1. Instrument description

Two quantitative instruments were used in the first phase of the study. The first one was the observation sheet designed to examine the interactive behaviours during group work. Each group in class was assessed using one sheet during one teaching period. To assess the quality of group cooperation, eight variables including seven adopted from Veenman et al.'s (2000) study were used. They are:

(1) Argumentation: referring to the degree to which students generate and discuss ideas for completing a task.

(2) Division of work: referring to the degree to which students divide their task equally.

(3) Listening: referring to the degree to which students listen to each other and absorb other's ideas (e.g. nod or shake their heads, look at the talker).

(4) Cognitive stimulation: referring to the degree to which students stimulate others to carry out their work and provide opinions about the work (e.g. content-relate helping).

(5) Social stimulation: referring to the degree to which students encourage/ stimulate others when encountering a (difficult) task and support them when discussing.

(6) Climate: referring to the degree to which students behave in a relaxed/ friendly manner, express their feeling/ opinions and give feedback with consideration to others' feelings.

(7) Decision making: referring to the degree to which students make decision in a democratic way.

(8) Time-on-task: referring to the degree to which each member of the group focuses on group discussion. This student will be randomly selected to observe time on task.

These variables were rated by a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (low) to five (high) every 10 minutes during the teaching period.

For the full text, see Appendix E.

The second instrument was the questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed based on the internal dynamic dimensions proposed by Johnson and Johnson (1985). It consisted of two parts. The first part required the participants to provide some general information about themselves and their experience of small group learning. The second part focused on their perception of small group work. It featured 25 items designed on a five-point Likert scale (always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never). These items were categorised into five main factors of students' perceptions of small group learning mentioned in the research questions: benefits, difficulties of small group work, group types (including group size, and group composition), individual accountability, and assessment types.

Factors	*Benefits*	*Difficulties*	*Group types*	*Accountability*	*Assessment*
Number of items	7	6	3	5	3

Table 3.3. The five main factors of the questionnaire

One item was used to discover whether the participants preferred learning in small group to learning in a traditional method (e.g. item number 2). This item is discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

For the full text, see Appendix F.

3.5.1.2.2. Instrument tested for reliability

The questionnaire in this research was translated and adapted for the Vietnamese primary educational context by the researcher and then sent to two professionals in the Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy for advice on the cognition, language and translation suitability to children (see appendix H). The results indicate a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of Multifactor Students' perceptions of small group learning for the questionnaire of 0.7608. Nunnally (1978) and Johnson and Christensen (2008c) indicate that 0.7 is an acceptable reliability coefficient. The result of this instrument was above the acceptable reliability coefficient; therefore, it was accepted as reliable.

3.5.1.3. Data collection

The observation data were assessed by the researcher. Each group was observed using one observation sheet every 10 minutes during the teaching period which lasted from 35 to 40 minutes. This meant that students' group work was assessed at least three times. After that, all of the students of the observed class were asked to complete the questionnaire. The survey lasted 30 minutes which included time for the researcher to explain and instruct, and for the participants to complete the questionnaire. Students were required to individually complete their own questionnaire without asking help from other classmates. If there were any obstacles, the researcher assisted individually.

3.5.1.4. Limitations

The first limitation relates to the language suitability of the questionnaire. In spite of being checked by two experts in children's language who knew both English and Vietnamese, after conducting the questionnaire in the first class (i.g. X4), the researcher realised some of the words in the questionnaire might be too difficult and/ or confusing to Vietnamese upper primary students. For example, in item 23 (*"I ……… prefer being assessed individually"*) students were confused by the word "danh gia" (assessed). For them, "assessed" was interpreted as "score" from examinations, rather than "comments or judgments" pertaining to what they did during and/or after an exercise. This word confusion was corrected after the first class survey. However, because no pilot study was conducted, this limitation might have influenced the quantitative results of X4. As a result, the answers of these students were translated as zero or no answer in the data analysis (See chapter 4 for more information).

The second limitation of the study was the observation. As mentioned in section 3.3.3.1, the observation was not carried out as proposed. The researcher could not observe the whole class which had more than six groups. She was locked in the arranged place at a corner of the class from which only one or two groups could be observed. Furthermore, without permission to use video and audio recording, it was impossible for the researcher to assess all group members' activities during the period. In addition, observation in only one teaching period could not provide a precise picture of what was going on in the class. As a result, the observation sheet could not be accounted as a valid instrument.

In order to minimise these obstacles, a journal was written after each day of conducting the research. However, the journal was just a recall of the phenomenology, and therefore not a precise record. The journal entries reflected the researcher's subjective opinion. Hence, they were used only as a qualitative instrument.

3.5.2. The second phase of study

A qualitative research method was used in this study to provide a fuller picture of what and how Vietnamese upper primary students perceived of learning in small groups in comparison to learning according to traditional models. In detail, the researcher sought to understand how students from different models of small group teaching perceived the benefits, difficulties, and characteristics of the small-group model in contrast with the traditional one in which they had been learning for years.

3.5.2.1. Population

A purposive sampling method was applied to select the participating students. Twenty-four students differing in gender and learning achievement in Vietnamese language were sampled equally from classes. As well, four teachers of classes and one vice-principal from school X were included in this interview session. Their opinions provided information about students' perceptions of small group learning.

3.5.2.2. Instrument description

The participants were given a written copy of interview questions which included some probes for the answer (see Appendix G). The questions focused on five factors mentioned in the research questions, including benefits, difficulties of small group work, group size and composition, individual accountability, and individual and group-work assessment. This question sheet was translated into Vietnamese with consideration of language suitability to children.

This interview sheet encouraged the participants to talk freely and openly about what they perceived to be significant. It also allowed for comparison among participants who were different in gender and learning achievement, and who had experienced different models of small group learning.

3.5.2.3. Data collection

The interview was conducted face-to-face with individual students. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. The teacher and vice-principal interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed for data analysis with the permission of the participants.

Before being interviewed, the purpose of the conversation was explained to the participants to make sure they knew what they were talking about. The interview was carried out as a conversation to enrich the data quality.

3.5.2.4. Minimising the threats to validity

Mayall (2008) indicates that a research conversation aimed at exploring children's experiences is only successful if the child talks confidently. Candies were given before the interview and some questions about the child's personal information were asked to make the participant comfortable with the session. Whenever the student showed tiredness, the interview would be interrupted to allow for his/ her refreshment.

To ensure the validity of the transcriptions, the interviewees were asked to check their own transcribed interview and to sign if correct. These transcriptions were sent to participants through email or mail. Since the interviews were recorded in Vietnamese, it was necessary to translate into English. These translations were done by assistants chosen by the researcher.

The transcription and translation procedures were carried out as follows. At first, the assistants were instructed in how to use the suitable software for transcribing. The software was Audacity 3.2. which could be downloaded free online. Requirements of how to transcribe the recorded files were written and sent to each assistant. Each file after being transcribed would be checked by another assistant and then double-checked by the researcher to ensure the validity.

The translation was carried out in a similar procedure with an addition. The translated files were re-read by two professionals from the Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy.

3.5.2.5. Limitations

The first limitation of the second phase lies in the condition of the interview session. Mayall (2008) concurs with Greig, Taylor, and MacKay (2007), Scott (2008), and Kellett (2010) when comparing the pros and cons of different settings to children's responses. Accordingly, interviewing children in a school setting is less time consuming than interviewing them at home. However, this relies on the school-schedule which can cause some difficulties such as learning interruption, influence from classmates and noise. Because in these schools there was no private place to conduct the interview without being distracted by other students, some interviews were interrupted. In addition, the interviews only took place during the break to avoid affecting the students' study. It also caused some distractions for the interviewees which might affect the data validity.

The second limitation was the topic of the study. Asking young children about an academic construct such as a teaching and learning model was not easy. Although the researcher had tried to break down and simplify the questions for some children, terms such as "individual assessment", "individual contribution" or "group composition" were still too abstract. In addition, Vietnamese students are likely to have difficulties offering explanations of learning process or strategies they engaged in. Phelps and Graham (2010) state that meta-cognitive reflections are something rarely done in Vietnamese society and educational system. As a result, many answers of "I don't know" or "I don't have things to say" were happened frequently in the study. Furthermore, as Scott (2008) indicates in an Australian study of children of primary school age, asking questions that are relevant to children's own experience do not guarantee the relevant answers from them; some children's responses were unclear about whether they liked learning in small groups.

Moreover, the same child could be outspoken and boisterous at home but shy and reserved at school, especially with a stranger like the researcher. Scott (2008) and Kellett (2010) argue that a good relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee could strengthen the data validity. However, because the schools did not allow the researcher to contact the class more often in order to minimise the effect on their study, it was impossible for the researcher to become more familiar and make friends with the participants. Furthermore, as Phelps and Graham (2010) observed, Vietnamese children tend to view the interviewers as "teacher". As a result, although the interviewer in this study tried to be friendly and personable, many students showed distance and hesitation to her.

The last limitation related to the technology issue. Some children were not familiar with a digital recorder. As a result, they were distracted by it. Sometimes, they were so distracted that instead of answering the questions, they turned to ask how to use the recorder and whether they could hear what they spoke.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

3.6.1. The survey data

After the questionnaires were collected, each questionnaire was coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 15.0). Composite variables for the students' perceptions of small group learning were created. Accordingly, the students' attitudes were analysed by totaling five subscales relating to five main issues in the research questions. The data were compared and contrasted among four classes to get a general picture of how different students from different models of learning perceived the small group learning in Vietnamese language periods.

3.6.2. The interview data

Data analysis in a qualitative study is a dynamic, intuitive, and creative process of thinking and theorising (Basit, 2003).

Interview data, after being transcribed and double-checked were organised and interpreted by three concurrent flows of activities: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction refers to the process in which the researcher decides which data chunks to be coded, or ignored, which one to be summarised, simplified, abstracted, and transformed. Data display is a process of organising, compressing and assembling information that permits conclusion drawing and verification in the next step. Displaying data includes many types of matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. The conclusion drawing appears when data collection is over and data reduction and data display are completed.

These procedures were applied during the qualitative data analysis of the research. The data reduction began with reading the interview transcriptions while the research questions were kept in mind. Then the analysis moved on to specific parts of the whole texts categorised by each question. Moreover, adapting Charmaz (2006) and Merriam (2009), the data reduction was carried out by line by line coding to build up all possible ideas. Incident and incident coding was also conducted to figure out the routine, familiar, ordinary, or dissimilar issues building up a deeper conceptual analysis. From these codes, themes and sub-themes were classified and categorised.

Data display followed the data reduction after which the researcher attempted to organise coded units relevant to building up a framework and forming a model for Vietnamese students' perceptions of small group learning.

Transcripts were coded in Vietnamese for time efficiency. When the data analysis was completed, the coded transcripts to be included in the findings were then translated into English.

3.7. TRUSTWORTHINESS

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research, triangulation was used. Triangulation is "the systematic comparison of findings on the same research topic generated by different research methods. Such comparisons are often portrayed as a procedure of validation by replication, but the portrayal is misleading (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p.170).

The purpose of using this triangulation was to collect information from different perspectives and to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the topic construct (Richards, 2005). According to Miles and Huberman (1994) and Denzin (1997), there are many kinds of triangulation, such as data, research methods, researchers, theories, and member checks.

In this research, triangulation was carried out by drawing upon multiple sources of data, including different participants (e.g. students, teachers, and school authorities), a variety of research methods (e.g. survey, observation, and interview), data analysis (e.g. quantitative and qualitative data), and member checks. Triangulation by theory was employed in this study through the literature review, which informed the research design and the interpretation of findings. Triangulation by members' checking was also obtained through the researcher herself, and through the participants' feedback.

For the summary sheets for the participants' feedback, see Appendix I.

3.8. SUMMARY

This chapter provided an account of the rationale for the choice of methods used to collect data in this study. Data were collected through a survey, observation, and individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The recruitment of participants along with the process of data collection and analysis were described. Triangulation and trustworthiness with limitations of the study were also discussed in this chapter.

The following chapter will present the data analysis and findings that have been drawn from five research questions.

Chapter 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a presentation and analysis of the data collected to explore Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in Vietnamese language in comparison to traditional methods. In addition, the relationships between students' learning achievements and gender to students' perceptions of their experience of a new learning method are described.

To explore how Vietnamese students in their upper years thought of small group learning, the research questions outlined in chapter 3 were used.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the above questions. For collecting quantitative data, the researcher used a multifactor questionnaire which was adapted from Johnson and Johnson (1985) (see chapter 3 for detailed information). For qualitative data, the five research questions above were interpreted and simplified to be suitable for participants in an at-school face-to-face individual interview.

4.2. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.2.1. Sample profile

The following table, 4.1., describes the sample profile (gender, Vietnamese learning achievement, and experience of learning in small groups) of the participants in this phase of the study:

		CLASS				Total	Percentage (%)
		Y4	X4	Z4	X5		
GENDER	girl	14	23	17	17	71	55.04
	boy	10	11	22	15	58	44.96
	missing	0	0	0	0	0	
	Total	24	34	39	32	129	
ACHIEVEMENT	below average	2	4	3	0	9	6.98
	average	15	8	7	0	30	23.26
	high	6	20	27	32	85	65.89
	missing	1	2	2	0	5	3.86
	Total	24	34	39	32	129	
YEAR OF LEARNING IN SMALL GROUP	1	1	8	15	2	26	20.16
	2	2	11	10	29	52	40.31
	3	8	3	6	1	18	13.95
	4	13	12	8	0	33	25.58
	missing	0	0	0	0	0	
	Total	24	34	39	32	129	

Table 4.1. Demographic data of student participants in the questionnaire (n=129)

The table 4.1. indicates that there were 71 female participants (55.04%) and 58 male participants (44.96%) in total. The ratio between boys and girls taking part in this study was quite similar in each class group, except for X4, where the number of schoolgirls was more than twice that of schoolboys, being 23 and 11 respectively.

In regards to Vietnamese learning achievement, table 4.1 shows that the majority of participants demonstrated high achievement, 85 students (65.89%), whereas about one third of that number, 30 students (23.26%), showed average achievement in Vietnamese language. Nine students showed the lowest achievement. In a total of 129 participants, five students did not provide information about their Vietnamese capacity.

More than half of participants have learned in small groups for two to three school-years, comprising 70 students or 54.26%. A significant number of students, 33, or 25.58%, reported that they had been taught in small group for four years, while the others, 26 students, or 20.16%, indicated that they had learned in small groups only in

the current school-year. However, these indexes might be unreliable for the two following reasons. Firstly, some students thought pair-work was not group-work. Hence, they might think pair reading was not a type of small group learning though they have done this since year one. Secondly, many students in School X thought they were taught in small group two years previously. They were actually describing the situation whereby the tables and chairs had been arranged into groups for all subjects. Prior to that, small group teaching had been introduced in some subjects although the students still sat in the traditional way, facing the blackboard.

Detailed demographic data of each case can be found in Appendix J.

4.2.2. Students' preference for small group learning

Although the research did not focus on the question of whether upper primary Vietnamese students preferred learning in small groups to the traditional methods when learning Vietnamese language, the participants were asked about this in both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. Item number two in the questionnaire was designed to answer this question. The scale ranged from minimum one (meaning "never like small group learning more than individual learning") to maximum five (meaning "always like learning in small group more than in individual learning").

The following table illustrates the mean scores of students' preferences for small group learning in comparison to individual learning (e.g. traditional method) in Vietnamese language:

CLASS	Mean	Std. Deviation
Y4	3.67	.963
X4	3.79	1.250
Z4	3.41	1.568
X5	4.84	.515
Total	3.91	1.293

Table 4.2. Students' preference for small group learning in Vietnamese language mean scores and standard deviation measured by the item number two in the questionnaire for each class (n=129)

The overall score for the students' preferences for learning in small groups in Vietnamese language was 3.91 with the standard deviation 1.293. This implies that upper primary students preferred learning Vietnamese in the new method, small groups, more than the traditional method, individual learning. Noticeably, students in X5 obtained almost the maximum level of interest in small group learning, 4.84. The other class in school X (X4) also shows a higher preference for small group learning than the other two classes (Y4 and Z4): 3.79 in comparison with 3.67 and 3.41 respectively). This shows that students in school X preferred learning in groups more than those in schools Y and Z.

A noticeable finding at this point lies in the standard deviation among the four cases. The class that gave the highest score (X5) had the least standard deviation with .515, while the class that gave the lowest score (Z4) had the highest standard deviation with 1.568 (three times higher than X5). The other two classes also showed a very high standard deviation with .963 for class Y4 and 1.250 for class X4.

4.2.3. Students' perceptions of small group learning

To answer the question "*What are the perceptions of Vietnamese upper primary students about working in small groups when learning Vietnamese language?*" the researcher employed a survey to measure the existing perceptions among upper primary students of four classes. The number of respondents was 129; however, there were some students who made mistakes in ticking (see chapter 3 for more details). As a result, there were only 123 valid responses (95.35% of the total participants). The questionnaire was designed based on the assumption that students liked small group learning, and that small group learning was the better method for them than the individual learning (the traditional method). The scale ranged from a minimum of one (meaning "never = bad") to maximum of five (meaning "always = good"). There were also some questions designed with a reversed scale range (where, for example, one means "good" and five means "bad") to avoid the participants' merely ticking same

column. They are items 10, 17 and 21. All these were converted similarly to other items of the survey when being analysed by using SPSS 15.0.

The questionnaire included 25 items, of which one item was considered basic exploring the extent to which the students liked learning in small groups more than individually (e.g. item two, see section 4.2.2. above). The other 24 items were divided into five factors:

- Factor 1 (Benefits) included seven items exploring the benefits the students perceived when learning in small group (e.g. benefits for students' learning, communication, self-esteem);

- Factor 2 (Difficulties) included six items exploring the difficulties the students encountered when learning in small group (e.g. being listening, equality in group, stress in group…);

- Factor 3 (Group types) included three items asking about what students thought about their group size, group composition (e.g. mixed or same gender, mixed or same learning achievement);

- Factor 4 (Individual accountability) included five items exploring how the students perceived their individual accountability in small group working (e.g. group roles, individual contribution to group work, group skills);

- Factor 5 (Assessment) included three items asking about what types of assessment students preferred to have when learning in group (e.g. group assessment, individual assessment,…).

The full text of the survey is attached in Appendix F.

Below is the table of mean scores and standard deviation of students' perceptions of SGL in each factor.

CLASS		F1 benefit	F2 difficulty	F3 group types	F4 individual account	F5 assessment	Total
Y4	Mean	3.56	2.83	3.61	3.93	3.65	**3.4**
	SD	.533	.480	.717	.958	.639	.371
X4	Mean	3.90	2.74	3.97	3.41	3.24	**3.42**
	SD	.631	.411	.663	.999	.775	.436
Z4	Mean	3.33	2.53	3.54	3.29	3.19	**3.12**
	SD	.760	.507	.682	.896	.838	.468
X5	Mean	4.53	2.48	3.43	3.98	4.15	**3.72**
	SD	.401	.395	.879	.771	.589	.256
Total	Mean	**3.81**	**2.63**	**3.64**	**3.61**	**3.52**	**3.39**
	SD	.761	.467	.757	.948	.822	.454

Table 4.3. Overall mean scores and standard deviation of students' perceptions of small group learning in each factor.

* The scale ranges from 1 (never) to 5 (always)

The overall score for students' perceptions of small group learning was 3.39 with a standard deviation of .454. The mean for factor one (benefits of small group learning in learning Vietnamese) was 3.81 with a standard deviation of .761; for factor two (difficulties of learning in small group in Vietnamese language) was 2.63 with standard deviation of .467; for factor three (students' choice of group types) was 3.64 with standard deviation of .757; for factor four (students' perceptions of individual accountability in group) was 3.61 with a standard deviation of .968; and for factor five (students' choice of assessment types) was 3.52 with a standard deviation of .822.

The table makes a comparison among four cases as well. The total mean score of class X4 was 3.42 with a standard deviation of .436; the overall mean of class X5 was 3.72 with a standard deviation of .256; the total mean of class Y4 was 3.4 with a standard

deviation of .371; and the total mean score of class Z4 was 3.12 with a standard deviation of .468.

A higher-than-average index level for benefits and a lower-than-average index level for difficulties when learning in small group show that Vietnamese upper primary students preferred learning in small groups to in traditional methods.

The table also shows some interesting points.

Firstly, there is an essential link between the students' preference for small group learning and their perceptions of benefits from this method. The benefits column in the table illustrates that class X5 gave the highest mean score and had the lowest standard deviation with 4.53 and .401 respectively; while it was reversed with class Z4, who scored a mean of 3.33 with a standard deviation of .760.

Secondly, for the second research question, the table indicates that, compared to the benefits, Vietnamese upper primary students perceived less difficulties when learning in small groups. The overall mean score of total participants (2.63) and of each class were all below the average; in which class Y4 perceived most difficulties scoring 2.83 with a standard deviation of .480; and class X5 perceived least difficulties, scoring 2.48 with a standard deviation of .395. This result consolidates the students' preferences for small group learning to traditional methods. The less difficulty the students perceived, the more preference they had for the new method.

Thirdly, the items for factor group types in the questionnaire were based on an assumption that students preferred working in groups of more than six members, and in groups of heterogeneous achievement and gender. The results showed that Vietnamese upper primary students did not feel annoyed with large groups and preferred working with members with differences. However, the standard deviation of these results was quite high (the lowest was .771 and the highest was .999). It shows that the students' preferences of group types still fluctuated. This finding was interesting because all these participants were taught in similar group types (large mixed groups in achievement and gender). These students, then, might prefer studying in large and mixed groups because of their lack of experience of other types of grouping.

4.2.4. The relationship between students' learning achievement, gender and their perceptions of small group learning

To respond to the questions "*Is there a significant relationship between students' gender and their perceptions of small group learning?*" and "*Is there a significant relationship between students' Vietnamese achievement and their perceptions of small group learning?*" the researcher employed the Spearman's rho correlation (see Appendix K) to measure the association between gender, achievement and mean score of factors of upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The Spearman's rho correlation was chosen because it could reflect the relationship between one ranked variable and one ordinal variable, or between one nominal variable and one ordinal variable (Hoang & Chu, 2008).

The correlation is illustrated in the following table:

			Overall mean score	ACHIEVE	GENDER
Spearman's rho	**Overall mean score**	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.320(**)	-.241(**)
		Sig.	.	.001	.010
		N	115	110	115
	ACHIEVE	Correlation Coefficient	.320(**)	1.000	-.107
		Sig.	.001	.	.236
		N	110	124	124
	GENDER	Correlation Coefficient	-.241(**)	-.107	1.000
		Sig.	.010	.236	.
		N	115	124	129

Table 4.4. Spearman rho correlation between gender, achievement and overall mean score of students' perceptions of small group learning.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results indicated that there was a correlation between students' gender and their overall perceptions of small group learning with $r = -.241$, $p < 0.05$. It can be implied

that there was a negative correlation between students' gender and what they thought of small group learning. There was a relationship between students' Vietnamese achievement and their opinions of small group learning as well with r = .320, p< 0.01. Thus, there was a positive relation between learning achievement and students' perception of learning Vietnamese in small groups. However, the strength of these relationships is not so significant. Therefore, these relationships are not sufficiently significant to generalise. The table also showed that there was no association between students' gender and their Vietnamese achievement.

However, the main purpose of this research was not to study how deep these relationships were, but to explore how Vietnamese upper primary students perceived the characteristics of small group learning. Therefore, the next section of this chapter will illustrate the data analysis and findings of qualitative approaches.

4.3. QUALTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.3.1. Introduction

The second phase of the study was carried out using a qualitative approach. The intention was to explore in-depth the perceptions of selected upper primary students regarding learning in small groups in comparison to traditional methods. A range of what, how, and why questions relating to five factors of small group learning (benefits, difficulties, group types, individual accountability, and assessment) were asked to enrich the information.

In this phase, a qualitative approach was chosen for how it is able to allow a set of deep indications and investigations in a natural setting (Patton, 2002). It allowed the researcher:

- To be concerned with the process rather than with the outcomes of a product;

- To be interested in the meaning of how people make sense of their lives, experience, and their structure of the world;

- To be involved in fieldwork with face-to-face contact with participants in their natural settings;

- To build hypotheses, concepts, abstractions and theory from details (Merriam, 1988).

The inquiry methods in the qualitative part of the study include observations, recorded in journals due to the limitation placed on observations during the fieldwork (see chapter 3 for more details), and interviews. Observations were carried out in each Vietnamese teaching period in each class. The purpose was to gather basic information as to how small group learning naturally took place in class. The interviews of the 24 participating students were conducted as the main source of data analysis. All participants were interviewed within the school setting one or two weeks after the observation and quantitative data collection. Each interview lasted from 10 to 15 minutes.

The following section presents a summary of findings collected from the above methods.

4.3.2. Summary of findings

4.3.2.1. Observations

4.3.2.1.1. Basic information from observing periods

The observation was carried out in one teaching period at each class. The time for observation, the sub-subject and the lesson were chosen by the class teachers based on school principals' suggestions. Each teaching period lasted from 35 to 40 minutes.

X4 was the first class observed on Wednesday, 23 March, 2011. The lesson was a Practice of Lexis and Sentence period. The day after, X5 was observed during a Reading period. On 5 April, 2011, the researcher attended another Practice of Lexis and Sentence period, this time for class Y4, and one week later was with class Z4 for a Practice of Lexis and Sentence period.

Class X4 had 34 students and was divided into six groups sitting along the classroom. Each group had both girls and boys. The students sat in their group at all times. In general, they knew how to work in a group. Their positions in the group were rotated at the beginning of each teaching period. After the teacher asked the initiating question for an activity, the whole group gathered to give opinions. The group secretary would write down all the answers. After discussion, the leader hung the group-board on the wall near the group and then presented the group's answers. These steps were repeated for all teaching-and-learning activities during the period.

Some students were inattentive during group discussions. Two were selected for the individual interview. One read something while his group was gathering for the group discussion. The other boy sat firmly in group, saying and doing nothing. He kept looking outside the class. At the last activity, he left his group and ran to another group to sit with two boys in the later group. The teacher had to command him to come back.

Class X5 had 46 students; however due to the limited space for an in-class observation, only 32 students attended the observation session. They were divided into four groups of both boys and girls. Like class X4, all students sat in their groups at all times and the positions in each group were rotated at the beginning of the period.

The teaching period started with individual reading activity, then changed into pair-reading. The whole group discussion only took place for the Comprehension activity. Immediately after the teacher gave a command for group discussion, the group leaders stood up and said "Now, please raise your hand to give your opinion". Each member in the group would raise their hand, and give their answer when invited by the leader. After each answer, the leader asked "Now, are there any different ideas?" or "Do you have any comments for [the member's name] answer?" If there were, other members would raise their hands. After discussing, the group secretary wrote down all the answers which had been agreed by all members. The leader then hung the group-board on the wall near the group, and presented the group's answers for the teacher and other

groups. When representing the group, the leaders said "Miss and friends, I represent my group to present our group's answer"; after the presentation the leader said "Thank you Miss and friends for listening".

The last activity was an expressive reading of the text (e.g. a poem). The teacher asked the students to come to the platform and present the reading in front of class. Two female students volunteered. They read the poem without looking at the textbook, and used their body language to express their feelings about the character of the poem.

In general, all the students concentrated on their group-work. Some of them even reminded the leader to offer some introducing sentences as they had been trained to.

Class Y4 had only 24 students divided into four groups. The class was quite small with a high platform for the teacher. The principal of the school attended the observation as well. However, he left soon due to an administration meeting.

When the researcher came to class to be introduced for the first time, the students sat in the traditional way, facing the blackboard and teacher. However, on the day the observation took place, the students' tables and chairs were rearranged into groups. The group leaders were also the team leaders. The group began discussion after the teacher gave questions. The leader did not give any commands for group discussion. Whenever a student expressed an opinion, the group secretary wrote this down on the group-board. After finishing discussion, the leader hung the group-board on the main blackboard. The teacher asked the groups to nominate one student to present the group's answers. This student could be the leader, or just a normal member, or even a low achievement member.

Between activities three and four, the teacher used the "mixing pieces" [6] technique to rearrange four groups into three groups. The change was smooth if time-consuming.

Some students were inattentive during group-work. They mostly sat near the teacher's table, and far from the observer's table. They chatted to each other, and left the other

_____

[6] "Mixing pieces" is a Vietnamese term for "Jigsaw I" technique developed by Aronson, Blanley, Sikes, and Snapp (1978)

members to work with their jobs. Three of these students (both boys and girls) were chosen for the individual interview.

Z4 was the most crowded class with 39 students divided into six groups, of which one group had nine members. These groups were assigned at the beginning of the teaching period based on the students' seating arrangements. It took about 10 minutes to settle the groups because the students ran around the class continuously to join the group that they wanted. There was no rearrangement of tables and chairs for group-work. The observation session took place in a different location with the technological facilities to allow the teacher to teach using power-point software.

Like class Y4, students in class Z4 started their group discussion at the teacher's request. The group secretary wrote down answers right as they were given. After the discussion, the leader hung the group-board on the blackboard. Then each group would nominate one student to present the group's answer. Some students could not speak fluently in front of the class. Therefore, the teacher had to explicitly encourage them.

In general, some groups did not work in an orderly way. Some leaders did not have the commands necessary to control their group. During the discussion, some students shouted at others to recure the answers. One girl shouted at another group's member "Shut up or I will beat you!" when that person had given a wrong idea. The students often quarreled during the discussion until the leaders or the teacher intervened. It was difficult for the teacher to approach each group because of the cramped space between the groups. However, the students were very interested in the teaching period, showing their eagerness for learning.

4.3.2.2. In-depth interviews

4.3.2.2.1. Interviewees' profile

Twenty four students varying in gender and learning achievement were selected for semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews. These students were chosen based

on their answers in the questionnaire and on the researcher's observations during the teaching period. They also varied in positions within groups to guarantee a different perspective on group composition and individual accountability. Their detailed profiles can be viewed in Appendix L.

Each interview was coded exactly as in the questionnaire. For example, while the reference coded (y41, A_17, p.1) refers to a student of School Y, year 4 class, code number 1, tape number 17, in page 1 of the respective transcription, y41 is also the code for that student's answer in the questionnaire.

4.3.2.2.2. Perceived benefits of small group learning

According to the interviews, small group learning was preferred to individual learning which the students have been learning for a long time. Of 24 participants, 22 expressed that they preferred learning in small groups and 20 liked small group learning in Vietnamese language. Here are some of the students' views:

*INV: If you have to compare studying in group with individual studying, which one do you like more?
*STU: Well, studying in group. (y41, A_17, p.1)

Another student emphasised:

*INV: Do you like studying in group?
*STU: Yes, I do.
*INV: Really? To what extent do you like it?
*STU: Extremely like it. (y416, A_16, p.1)

According to the teacher of class X5, the students were so interested in small group learning that they would be sad if they had to change to traditional seating arrangements, facing the blackboard, and with no chance to talk to others. She said:

*TEA: They like it [small group arrangement] pretty much. Well, when working in groups, they will sit like this [in groups], but in the exams, the chairs have to be rearranged traditionally. This will ensure the objectivity in

examination**.** The exam lasts for two days, the students seem sad because of this arrangement of the tables and chairs. They are sad because they have to look facing the blackboard, and each time they want to ask something or discuss with their friends, they will have to turn around and this may sometimes cause them some difficulties. When they sit like this, right now, they're happy, very happy. (Tx5, A_02, p.4)

On the contrary, some students in the School Y and Z responded they did not know what to say about small group learning being so rarely taught according to this method. Here is one typical answer expressing such a view:

*STU: I don't know. I don't study in groups too much.

*INV: You don't study in groups too much, do you? How often do you study in groups a week?

*STU: We learn in groups rarely.

*INV: Rarely? When do you study in groups frequently?

*STU: On periods for visitors. (z425, A_12, p.3)

And yet, according to the interviews, students preferred small group regards to their recognition of many benefits from small group learning in comparison to traditional methods. The first benefit was an increase in students' engagement in learning. Many comments supporting the idea that learning was more enjoyable were given by both high and low achievement students, boys and girls:

*STU: Very joyful/ interesting. (x433, A_35, p.1)

*STU: Because it's a lot of fun, miss. (x434, A_36, p.1)

*STU: Because it is happier. (y44, A_20, p.1)

Achieving higher results, better learning and active thinking not only in Vietnamese language but also in other subjects was recognised:

*STU: I can finish my homework better when I work in a group. (x421, A_39, p.1)

*STU: Because when studying in group, we will make our own opinions, speak out, and I will have paper to write them [opinions] in so that I can read them later. (y415, A_19, p.3)

*STU3: Well, I can answer more concisely. (x519, A_43, p.5)

Students received help from friends more easily. It was also easier for them to ask for help:

*STU: Because if I don't know, they will instruct me.

*INV: When you study on your own and you don't understand, do you have anyone to help you?

*STU: No, I don't.

*INV: No, really? Have you ever asked somebody for help?

*STU: No, I haven't. (y416, A_16, p.1)

This help could take the form of sharing ideas or peer corrections:

*STU: Because when we work in groups, there are so many good ideas which we can get to answer teacher's questions in the best way. (z414, A_10, p.1)

*STU: After that, we will have peer correction. We will discuss with each other to get the right answers. Individual study doesn't, we cannot do things in that way and it's harder to understand the lessons. (x52, A_40, p.1)

*STU1: Because I was wrong, sometimes I was right, but if they correct my answer, and then I can have experience. (x520, A_43, p.6)

Small group learning also helped students engage in communication. Many students felt more confident and bold when speaking in front of a crowd – while they rarely expressed such confidence beforehand. Here is one comment:

*STU: Yes, I have been much more confident and bolder in communicating with my friends. And, I can also say what I think in front of the crowd easily. (x53, A_42, p.1)

Therefore, making friends became easier. Students felt less lonely when studying in class.

> *STU: Since I have studied in groups I can talk to my friends more easily. They oh...can get familiar with each other more easily and no one has to stay alone. (x53, A_40, p.8)
>
> *STU: When I am studying in a group, having more friends makes me feel confident. If I study alone, I will be sad. (y44, A_20, p.3)

Students' more active engagement in communication led to another benefit of learning in small groups – the improvement of in-class-relationships. Some students reported that they had better friendships since learning in the new method:

> STU: I see my friends can… express their thinking and can… our friendship is smoother. (z416, A_7, p.1)

As a result, this improved solidarity in class:

> *STU: Because... we can stay together, it's more fun. (x423, A_38, p.1)

There was a significant benefit raised by some students who did not like small group learning in general, but realised that it was extremely suitable for learning Vietnamese language:

> *STU: Because there are too many difficult aspects on this subject [Vietnamese language learning] which we should try hard to find out. (z425, A_12, p.2)
>
> *STU: Yes! Because in Vietnamese, we can write more easily than Math; and in Math, it's harder for us to discuss. (z416, A_7, p.1)
>
> *STU: Because in Vietnamese, I and my friends can pay more attention and complete our exercises better. Moreover, we are closer. (x421, A_39, p.2)

4.3.2.2.3. Perceived the difficulties of small group learning

Besides many benefits of learning in small groups, the participants also admitted that small group learning presented some obstacles. The most common and annoying difficulty was the lack of group skills, especially in listening, debating and motivating others during group-work. Of 17 participants reporting difficulties in small groups, nine mentioned a lack of listening skills, four had troubles with debating skills and three directly reported not being motivated by other members when giving opinions. Below is one of the responses:

> *STU: He thought that his answer was right and the others' ideas were wrong, he didn't want to listen.
>
> *INV: Oh really? Did you tell him to listen to the others when he was in your group?
>
> *STU: I did but he just kept shouting and didn't listen to me. (x423, A_38, p.5)

Another comment:

> *STU: Uhm, they… sometimes when I give my ideas, they are angry with me.
>
> *STU: Because at that time, I gave wrong ideas. (y44, A_20, p.5)

Here, another interviewee reflected on both low-achieving and high-achieving students regarded for other members in the group:

> *INV: Do they [low-achieving students in the group] often object to other's ideas? I mean they object so severely.
>
> *STU: No, they don't.
>
> *INV: No, really? Why do they get angry?
>
> *STU: They get angry because they can't learn.
>
> *INV: They can't understand so they get angry. Is it right?
>
> *STU: Yes.
>
> *INV: What about the other members? What about the best ones in your group?

*STU: Uhm, they… they always keep giving their ideas.

*INV: They keep giving their ideas, and they don't let anyone do so. Is it right?

*STU: They also give up answers but rarely. (y416, A_16, p.5)

It can be seen that the lack of group skills caused difficulties for not only lower-ability students, but also for high-ability ones.

The lack of time for group skill training was another difficulty mentioned by student participants as well. Students from Schools Y and Z often reported that rarely did they have a chance to learn in groups. According to common responses, they only studied in small groups when there were observers.

*STU: We learn in groups rarely. (y42, A_15, p.1)

*STU: On periods for visitors. (z425, A_12, p.3)

However, both teachers of two classes reported that they taught in small groups at least twice a week.

Another problem relating to the time management for learning in small groups was the time allowed by the teacher. One student mentioned that studying in groups took a long time and this affected her own self-learning.

*STU: Because studying in groups takes a long time. (y42, A_15, p.1)

She also reported that sometimes it was too rushed for her group to discuss in groups because the teacher forced them to work under the pressure of time.

*STU: Well, because our teacher doesn't give us enough time to finish our group's task. (y42, A_15, p.1)

Some students, especially the mischievous or low achievers felt they were marginalised in their group. Here is a comment from a marginalised student:

*STU: No one in my group wants to play with me.

*STU: Because I always play the mischief with them.

*STU: Although I have changed my behaviours, my friends still don't want to play with me. (z425, A_12, p.1)

Z425 used to learn in an international school [7] in which he was familiar with working in groups. Since moving to school Z, he felt that small group learning was not interesting anymore because of the isolation from his group members. When asked why he did not ask to be moved to other groups where he might be listened to and helped, he answered:

*STU: I dare not speak to my teacher.

*INV: Why? Because you're afraid that your teacher won't permit it?

*STU: I will sit in the seat that my mother has arranged [in class for me], [that seat is] in the first line.

*INV: You mean that you will take part in the group only as determined by your mother's seating arrangement?

%com[8]: STU nodded. (z425, A_12, p.2)

It is clear that the marginalisation would be continued because of the inflexibility of the teacher in arranging groups.

Another student felt isolated due to the changing groups. X432 had been moved to another group one week before the interview. He felt more pressure working in the new group compared to the previous one; he was unfamiliar with the new group, did not like to talk with them, and felt that nobody listened to him:

*INV: Don't you talk to your new friends in your new group?

*STU: Sometimes, or not.

*INV: In your new group, do your friends listen to you?

*STU: Uhm < no> [9].

---

[7] International school in Ho Chi Minh City is a private school whose teaching model is a mixture of an international curriculum (usually adopted from America or Australia) and the Vietnamese curriculum. Students can be taught by both foreign and Vietnamese teachers (the frequency of learning with foreign teachers depends on the level of student fees).

[8] %com noted the action of interviewee.

*INV: <no> really?

*INV: Do they talk to you first?

*STU: When I was in Duc's group [his previous group], they did, but there are only few people who do in the new group. (x432, A_37, p.3)

Furthermore, he could not find help from new group members whereas in the previous group he always received help.

*INV: How did they help you [in your previous group]?

*STU: I asked, and they were pleased to help.

*INV: How about the new group?

*STU: I only play with Long.

*INV: Have you ever asked Long? I mean for help.

*STU: Yes, I have. (x432, A_37, p.9)

As a result, he often left his current group to move to his favourite one, even making noise in class to attract attention from his close friend, who was in a different group from his:

*STU: <I> sit on this side and call Duc.

*INV: Ah.

*STU: Shouting. (x432, A_37, p.3)

Some students were also marginalised on account of their low academic achievement by members in the group who had achieved higher academically. Below is an observation of a high-ability student considering the ignorance of her group members in regard to a lower-ability student.

*STU: Oh, no, it depends on who you're talking to. For example, T [a lower achievement student] sometimes doesn't listen to what the others say, and when he contributes some good ideas, they don't want to listen to him.

---

[9] < > means two articulators spoke at the same time.

> *STU: Well, because T hadn't had a good performance on this subject before, so they were afraid that he could contribute some wrong ideas. That was the reason why they didn't listen to him. (y41, A_17, p.2)

The marginalisation became more serious when both these factors – changing groups and lower-achiever ignorance – combined. The following is a student's observation of this dynamic:

> *STU: Yes. Sometimes, if a group only has four members, my teacher will allow us to move to create a bigger group. In this situation, pupils having lower abilities cannot find close friends. (x421, A_39, p.4)

Clearly the marginalisation did not only influence the students' achievement but their social relationships as well. Some participants mentioned the group pressure as the root of the marginalisation. Accordingly, some students were afraid of going against their group's opinion:

> *STU: Yes, I dare not talk to them because if I talk to them, they think that I am talkative. (x421, A_39, p.4)

X421 reported that she wanted to defend a student who was marginalised because of his low-achievement. She realised that that student sometimes answered the questions correctly, but was ignored due to the group's prejudice about his ability. However, she was afraid of being judged as well.

The group pressure also strongly and negatively affected to the leaders and the high-status students.

> *STU: Because my friends would not like me if I behaved as a leader [commanding, requiring, condescending], so I couldn't do [like that]. (z41, A_11, p.3)

There was a specific difficulty for the leaders in groups in that the leadership was onerous. Feeling tired and overwhelmed by duties were some examples of leadership problems cited by both leaders and non-leaders of groups, for example:

*STU: I find it really tiring being a leader. (y417, A_18, p.2)

However, although students often did not want to be leaders, teachers forced them to:

*STU: But my teacher totally forced me to be a leader. (z414, A_10, p.2)

4.3.2.2.4. Students' perceptions and preferences for group types

The general information section of the questionnaire showed that in the four classes, groups were formed directly and purposively by the teachers. Each group comprised six to nine students of differing academic achievement in Vietnamese language and gender. Therefore, the students' perceptions of group types, according to both quantitative and qualitative data, focused mostly around two aspects: group size and group composition. By group composition can be understood, for example, whether the individuals in the group are mainly of mixed or one gender, or of mixed or similar learning abilities.

Familiarity with large groups is an interesting feature of the perceptions of Vietnamese upper primary students about small group learning. When asked if their group was too large, almost all the interviewees considered a group of six or more normal.

*INV: Do you think it's [group of six] too crowded?
*CHI: Well, no I don't think so.
*INV: You think it's enough huh?
*CHI: Yes, it's enough.
*INV: So according to you how many people does it take for a group to feel crowded?
*CHI: Ten or more. (y415, A_19, p.1)

Another comment:

*STU: No, I think eight is ok. A group of six members is too few and a group of ten members is too crowded. (x52, A_40, p.4)

Usually group of ten or more was considered crowded, while group of four was too small to allow effective discussion.

Some students in class X5 even thought that the more members in group, the more fun they had.

> *STU2: Because ... oh... we have had fewer members than that, we won't have common meetings at the end of week; and there were not many activities that we could do together. Oh... having many best friends is interesting, we can work together, if there are many people to discuss and to play, we would have our own spaces. (x51, A_43, p.1)

In terms of ability grouping, most of the interviewees preferred groups to comprise students of mixed academic ability. According to some respondents, the difference in learning ability made it easier to be friends:

> *STU: Because if we have the same [learning] capacity and gender… well… we… ah… won't more chances to… understand our friends… or about… personal understanding… (x53, A_42, p.3)

They also reported that mixed-ability formats provided more help to lower achievement students from the higher achievers as well as more opportunities to work together. This finding once again emphasises the high level of awareness among Vietnamese students for the need to aspire to better and higher learning. This need was apparent to both low- and high-ability students. Here are two responses from students of differing abilities:

> *STU: Yes, when I study with friends whose capacities are better, they will help me when I don't know something. (y415, A_19, p.3)

and:

> *STU: I prefer different level members in a group so that we can explain things to each other. (x423, A_38, p.6)

For some high-ability students, learning in small groups gave them more opportunity to help others:

*STU: With this method of studying in the group I will be able to help my friends to study better and to overcome their disadvantages. (x51, A_43, p.3)

To them, a group composed of similarly achieving students would be disadvantageous. Here is an interviewee's comparison of two groups formed from students of the same ability:

*STU: So, when the teacher explains something, that group [the lower achievement] will not understand at all. And then [therefore] will not be confident to raise their hands to answer. The more like that [less confident], the more their achievement will be decreased. (x52, A_40, p.3)

Students also showed obvious concern for the lower-achieving students in class, believing that similar-ability grouping would have a strong negative effect on the lower-ability students in both achievement and self-esteem.

On the other hand, most upper primary students preferred to study in groups of the same gender. The first reason was the gender dichotomy between boys and girls. One female student admitted that:

*STU: I only like playing with the girls. I don't like playing with the boys. (z41, A_11, p.2)

While a male participant said:

*STU: The boys are so strong, the girls are weak. (z425, A_12, p.4)

This gender boundary was enforced by hobby-sharing:

*STU1: Because they [boys] can play soccer. (x520, A_43, p.3)

Another reason is the suitability of the respective genders' characteristics to small group learning. Mostly, boys were considered as unsuitable for learning in groups

because of their naughtiness, non-concentration and unconcern for others' feelings. Here is a comment from a girl:

> *STU: Because sometimes boys are naughty. Moreover, when they don't agree with other members in group, they often speak loudly and don't listen to us. (x421, A_39, p.2)

4.3.2.2.5. Perceived individual accountability in groups

Most interviewees, including the high-, average- and low-achievers, confirmed that they expressed a lot of opinions during group discussion.

> *STU: No. I contribute my ideas at a reasonable amount, not regularly. (x421, A_39, p.2)
> *INV: Do you give ideas or just have a personal conversation?
> *STU: Giving ideas. (y423, A_9, p.1)

Some participants admitted that they would continue giving ideas regardless of not being listened to or being marginalised. Here is a typical response:

> *INV: So, when your friends disagree with you, do you feel sad?
> *STU: xxx [10] sad.
> *INV: You feel sad, and then what would you do?
> *STU: I have to think.
> *INV: Uhm, to find another answer, right?
> *STU: Yes. (x434, A_36, p.4)

All the students in school X knew the duties for each position in the group having experienced all the positions.

> *STU: Well, the leader assigned the duty… well… just like… this one… well… just like that… the whole group's members have to join together…

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[10] xxx means the transcipter cannot recognize what the interviewee said.

like… the leader won't assign the work specially for anyone… all of the group's members show opinions and make the final conclusion. (x53, A_42, p.2)

*STU: Yes. I [when being a leader] often invite other members who raise their hand for presenting their ideas. Then, I suspend board and continue reading parts [on behalf] of my group.

*STU: When I am a member, I think about the lesson and raise my hand to present my opinion. Then, I write it. Moreover, I can become secretary and do something. xxx. (x421, A_39, p.3)

Leadership was considered as different as two sides of a paper. All the leaders and even non-leaders perceived leadership as a heavy duty. This was accompanied with the onerous nature of leadership mentioned in section 4.3.2.2.3. above. Following is a comparison of a student who had been both a leader and a non-leader member of the group:

*STU: Because the leader has to think so much to get ideas, and that is so tiring.

*STU: Yes, because when you are a normal member, you don't have to do those things. (y42, A_15, p.5)

They felt the responsibility for their group in all activities, even the final result for group work.

*STU: Because when I am a leader, if they write wrongly, they often shift responsibility onto me. (x421, A_39, p.3)

On the contrary, the lower achieving and/or marginalised students preferred to be a leader to obtain power. Here is one perception:

*STU: If he or she could not answer, he or she would have to ah...um... be punished by writing lines. (x434, A_36, p.4)

They could also receive more attention from other members if they were in more powerful positions in groups.

> *STU: Well... because... because, I want to be group leader so that when I'm talking, my friends who don't listen to me will have to pay more attention. (y415, A_19, p.4)

4.3.2.2.6. Students' choices of group assessment

Most participants confirmed their preference for being assessed as a whole group over individual assessment. There were four main reasons for this choice. The first was to guarantee the fairness among group members. One student thought it was unacceptable if her group members were assessed differently.

> *STU: If I get good marks while my friends get lower results, on the contrary, if they get good marks when I get bad results, it is unacceptable. (z414, A_10, p.5)

This idea was elucidated by another participant:

> *STU: No. I think they also contribute their ideas to group. Thus, I think they're deserved. (x421, A_39, p.5)

The second reason was to increase the group's solidarity:

> *STU: Because I think you can't make sure that your own ideas are definitely right, but when all of the members gather in group, it creates solidarity of spirit, when every member adds up all the ideas, we will work much better. (x53, A_42, p.5)

Further, students with high achievement in Vietnamese language learning supposed that whole group assessment would avoid the division between higher- and lower-achieving members of a group.

> *STU: I like it [whole-group assessment]. Because if I scored ten and the others scored eight. For example, this one has ten, the other has eight, it is

like this one is higher than the other, like this one is better than the other. So, they will feel uncomfortable and don't want to hang out with me anymore. Then ends a friendship. I think it is not good. (x52, A_40, p.6)

They were also afraid of jealousy which might create a division among friends:

*STU: I don't want my friends to be jealous. (x423, A_38, p.7)

*STU: And it's not happy when I am alone. (y41, A_17, p.6)

Most participants, then, were concerned for others' feelings. Individual assessment would make students feel unhappy:

*STU: If individual work is assessed, it will make my friends sad. Yes, of course, assessing the work of the whole group makes them happy. (y44, A_20, p.4)

4.3.2.3. Vice-principal and teachers' interviews

4.3.2.3.1. Profile description

Teachers of four classes and the vice-principal of one school were invited for semi-structured interviews to provide a triangulation of small group learning. There were four main questions asked in interview (See Appendix G for the full text). These questions were divided into two main issues:

(1) how small group learning affects their students (the benefits and difficulties experienced during learning in small groups);

(2) how they feel about using small groups in teaching (the benefits and difficulties when using small group teaching in comparison with those experienced when using traditional methods).

All four teachers were female and had a range of teaching experience including familiarity with small group teaching. Both teachers of school X were experienced in teaching and using small group teaching. The teacher of School Y had long experience in teaching, but had been trained to apply small group teaching for only one year.

School Z teacher, on the other hand, did not have much experience in either teaching or using small groups. The vice-principal of school X was a male who has been in this position for nearly ten years. For the teachers and principal's profile, see Appendix M.

The reference was coded as follows. The reference (Tx4, A_1, p.2) refers to the interview of the teacher in school X, class 4, in the tape number 1, page number 2 of the respective transcription. The vice-principal of school X was coded as VPx.

The next part of this section presents the teachers' and vice-principal's comments about small group learning.

4.3.2.3.2. Perceptions of students' learning in small groups

Clearly the students' perceptions of the benefits of small group learning were confirmed by teachers. More engagement in learning and communication were two noticeable improvements that all the teachers and vice-principal recognised in their students after applying this method of teaching. Students became more independent and active in learning and expressing their ideas. One teacher commented:

> *TEA: Organisation. They know how to organise and assign tasks to other members of the group. Those are the two best things that they have achieved from this method. Besides, they now can acquire skills and knowledge more actively. (Tx4, A_1, p.2)

And:

> *TEA: (…) they will discover words themselves; they discover words in… in what they are finding, in their life. And… then… ah… they… they will… will… will, ah, teachers are no longer the ones who provide them vocabulary. (Tx5, A_2, p.6)

> *TEA: They love reporting, they will be very satisfied if they could be the representative of their group. (Ty4, A_6, p.2)

> *TEA: Yes, they do, they really like it because when they work in groups, they can talk more than usual. (Tz4, A_13, p.3)

Both the teachers and the vice-principal realised the role of friends to their students in group learning:

> *TEA: Things would be different when you keep talking by yourself in front of class. Kids will not hear you but sit sleepy or drowsy, even if you require them to repeat what you have just said, they cannot say anything. In groups kids will feel like they are in a competition, when one group screams out loud that they finished, the others will try their best to do the task faster, because motivation makes them feel more excited. (Ty4, A_6, p.3)

The high importance students place on friends' help rather than teacher's help in regard to their learning might come from the distance between teachers and students. According to the vice-principal, it was easier for students to ask their friends for help than to ask the teacher.

> *VP: Sometimes pupils have a few problems, they didn't understand the lesson clearly at class but they didn't dare to ask the teacher to explain it again. But they feel free to ask their friends for help. (VPx, A_45, p.2)

Besides the noticeable benefits of small group learning, some limitations of this method were mentioned by some teachers. A conflict between students' personalities and the requirement of being active in group work was one of the first obstacles mentioned by teachers.

> *TEA: For example, in class there would be students who are extremely good at eloquent speaking and leadership. Some students are very good at organising activities. This is good for group work when they are leaders. However, there are also some students who become more timid when joining a group. Therefore, the teacher need sensibility to recognise these students, then, should assign them into suitable groups. For example, if s/he is a low-achiever but the teacher assigns him/her into a group of excellent students, s/he will find it easier to keep silent, or talk less. (Tx4, A_1, p.2)

*TEA: Some kids have good writing skills, they can write or speak fast, they can report or read. But some weaker students can't do that stuff, they cannot report because they are very slow and just repeat after their friends. (Ty4, A_6, p.5)

Lack of group skills was another difficulty.

*TEA: In some groups, only one or two pupils work, the others just play. (Tx4, A_1, p.2)

Some students felt obligated to help friends:

*TEA: They help each other quite mandatory in order not to…
%com: The teacher laughed lightly.
*TEA: They are children. Sometimes, they scored ten and their friend who copied their results also scored ten, then they don't feel satisfied with that. (Tz4, A_13, p.6)

4.3.2.3.3. Small group teaching and the reflections

Although their students' high level of engagement in learning was confirmed as a benefit of small group learning, the teachers had different perceptions of the benefits and difficulties this method brought to them. The teacher Tx5 reported that she did not encounter any difficulties when using small group teaching:

*TEA: There's no difficulty. In the first year, the teacher had some difficulties; they were not familiar with it and were confused a little bit. But once they grabbed the… the content and the form of organisation, the teachers, in the second year, had no difficulty. On the contrary, they felt very easy, easy when teaching, they didn't have to talk much, and we had to find ways to organise activities, and games for the students. The teachers had to spend some effort on it. (Tx5, A_2, p. 12)

And that she felt very confident with this teaching method:

*TEA: I feel confident, very confident. I and other teachers, feel very confident, and easy, and happy because of the achievements of the… of the students (Tx5, A_2, p.8)

These benefits were confirmed by the other school X teacher:

*TEA: In this method of group-teaching, in some lessons, teachers don't need to say anything, we only say when we work out the total and summarise the lesson. During the process, instead of saying loudly for all pupils in class to listen, I only have to explain queries to groups that have questions and these groups must explain queries to the other groups. (Tx4, A_1, p.5)

The other teachers thought that it cost time and a lot of effort for an effective teaching period using small group teaching:

*TEA: The most difficult thing is timing. In some periods, I'm sure you will not have enough time to use this method: It can't help you keep up with the lesson's process because if you race against time, your lesson can not have a good effect. For example, if pupils haven't solved the problem yet, you must give them more time to do it. You can't fix the time inflexibly. (Tx4, A_1, p.5)

Another teacher's comment:

*TEA: It would be more interesting than usual to study in groups, but it's so tiring, it takes time and I have to get the time from other periods to compensate for the lack of time. (Tz4, A_13, p.2)

*TEA: It takes more time to arrange work for group leaders in Vietnamese language learning. Besides, we must assign the tasks to the group to prepare at home the day before. It's like... when they have prepared everything at home, the group work in the day after would be … would be done more quickly and that's an advantage for us. (Tz4, A_13, p.4)

She supposed that her students had not had enough time for group-skill training as well as an environment of learning in small groups. Therefore, they had not gotten the spirit of group work:

> *TEA: It has not been called… yet…
>
> *INV: < not have had group spirit yet>
>
> *TEA: <generally>, yes, they haven't had the spirit.
>
> *INV: Do you yourself and other teachers teach pupils group work skills?
>
> *TEA: We guide just a little, uhm, there are some teachers who teach their students how to work in groups, what a group's leader needs to do and other stuff. Yes, they did.
>
> %com: the teacher laughed lightly.
>
> *TEA: But we don't have the things such as the environment for group working… it's not as usual as needed. For example with Art or other subjects in which no need to use this method, it's just… it's not… My students were not trained these skills while we xxx know what must studying in groups be like. (Tz4, A_13, p.4)

Noticeably, one teacher perceived small group teaching was quite difficult for her specific class:

> *TEA: The method of group-study is kinda difficult. Such as when I teach writing, it's not good if kids ask or even copy their friends' xxx. But students who are weak sometimes even cannot write a full sentence, when studying in groups they may copy their friends' words, so I think in that case we should let them study individually to promote their writing skill. The method of group-study we just use when it's possible, it's not necessary to apply it all the time. (Ty4, A_6, p.5)

When making a comparison with individual learning, she also mentioned the gap between students' learning capacity and personality and the requirement of effective small group learning. It affected her assessment.

*TEA: Maybe studying individually can also help my students feel more confident. Besides, being in a group, kids may ask their friends for help. After that, they will speak or write out all the things their friends said without considering if they're true or false. In individual study, kids have to read the question to answer it on their own, so there would be a little brainstorming. In groups may be this girl finishes tasks on her own but that boy just asks friends. That makes my assessment lack balance. (Ty4, A_6, p.3)

There was no comment about difficulties relating to current Vietnamese language curriculum and textbook use. However, three teachers admitted there were some lessons in which they could not use small group teaching due to the timing:

*TEA: Well, generally I will use this method when there is an observed period or when I see that the content of the lesson is too long with too many tasks for kids to do, not just use this method when it is required. Sometimes I apply this method in simplified exercises to let students get acquainted with this kind of activity because if they don't, we will waste our time while there are so many things to do with that lesson. (Ty4, A_6, p.5)

In summary, it can be concluded that generally there was a match between students' and teachers' views of the main benefits and difficulties that small group learning brought to the class. These findings will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. The chapter will present a theoretical framework for the upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. It will also try to explain these findings with reference to Vietnamese culture and education curriculum.

Chapter 5: **DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter is divided into five parts.

The Summary of the study recalls the research questions of what will be discussed within this chapter.

The main part of the chapter is Discussion and Implications, discussing and explaining how Vietnamese upper primary students perceived learning in small groups when learning Vietnamese language. All the findings mentioned in the previous chapter are summarised and explored in-depth to gain an overview of the topic. Implications will be included for each finding of the discussion.

A theoretical framework is proposed to summarise and synthesise all the findings, and therefore to provide a model of Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language.

Teachers' perceptions about teaching in small groups are also discussed in this chapter as a supplement to the student participants' points of view.

Last are Conclusion and Recommendations.

5.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In the following section, the findings for each research question will be discussed:

1. What benefits do upper primary students perceive they get from small group learning in learning Vietnamese language compared to traditional methods?

2. What difficulties do they perceive about learning in small groups in learning Vietnamese language compared to traditional methods?

3. What perceptions do they hold of the characteristics of group types when learning in small groups?

3.1. What do they think about group size?

3.2. What do they think about group composition?

4. How do they perceive their individual accountability when they are in small-group discussion?

5. How do they perceive the assessment types of small group learning?

This will be followed by an interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data of the research.

5.3. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.3.1. Introduction

As stated in the research, although the results from the first phase were used to select participants for the second phase, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to answer the five sub-questions of the research. Therefore, each research approach had its own value in exploring the students' perceptions of small group learning. The quantitative data brought broader data while the qualitative provided deeper data. As a result, instead of discussing quantitative and qualitative data separately, in this chapter the data will be analysed, combined, and explained together. Moreover, as stated in the methodology, students' perceptions were explored in a triangulation with teachers and school's administrators to get a more holistic picture. Hence, the findings on student participants will be discussed in line with their adults' points of view.

Cooperative small group learning and students' perceptions about this method have been explored internationally for many years. It is inevitable to have similar findings with the literature base in these fields. As a result, instead of discussing in-depth in all

findings of the research, the chapter is re-structured into two main parts: a general discussion of the findings similar to the existing literature, and a detailed and explanatory discussion of how this research differs from other studies within the field.

Furthermore, an exploration of students' perceptions of the learning environment is central to making a change in the adults' perceptions of what is going on at school. Therefore, implications for teachers, education institutes, parents and communities about small group learning will be discussed within this part of the chapter as well.

5.3.2. Explanation of the construct

A number of researchers have investigated students' perceptions of small group learning and/or cooperative learning (for examples, Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997; Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Lyle, 1999; McManus & Gettinger, 1996; Mulryan, 1994; Veenman et al., 2000; etc). In general, students' evaluations of small group learning in these studies were categorised into four main features: academic outcomes, social and attitude outcomes, group composition, and characteristics of good cooperation. The last feature might vary depending on each study's purpose. Some examined the group interaction (Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Mulryan, 1994; Veenman, et al., 2000), while others studied motivation during group working (Florez & McCaslin, 2008), or group skills (Elbaum et al., 1997; Mulryan, 1994).

In this study, the students' perceptions were structured into five main categories: benefits, difficulties, group types, group roles, and group assessment for the following reasons:

Firstly, the participants in most of the above research had learned in cooperative contexts for a long time; Vietnamese students, on the other hand, have been introduced tentatively and officially into this method for one or two years at the most. This means that both teachers and students in Vietnamese primary schools may not have sufficient experience to have a whole understanding of this learning method. As a result, the research only intended to explore the students' perceptions of learning in small groups at a general level.

Secondly, as Cohen (1994) and Brown and Thomson (2000) pointed out, small group learning may not be cooperative learning. It is unclear if the model of learning in small groups in Vietnam was truly cooperative. Therefore, an examination of the characteristics of effective cooperative learning was impossible to carry out in this study.

Thirdly, the researcher recognised that the main features used to investigate the students' perceptions reported in previous research could be categorised in a more abstract way. For example, academic, social and attitude outcomes could be described as the benefits and/or difficulties of small group learning. Moreover, using these general terms such as "benefit" or "difficulty" made it easier for the participants to understand the questions. It also avoided the researcher-purposive-question bias; therefore the participants would feel free to express their thinking.

Furthermore, some terms should be expanded to get a larger image of the construct. For example, group composition cannot involve other relative features of grouping such as group size, and group forming which were mentioned by the students. Two interesting findings of the research were the familiarity with large groups and the students' subjective preference of group composition being influenced by the teacher's firm assignment. Therefore, "group types" was used as a more suitable term for this research. Analogically, individual accountability cannot cover all the findings relating to the student's thinking of their roles and contributions in group; whereas the perception of leadership was a very significant finding. Hence, "group roles" was replaced.

And lastly, the changing from traditional methods to small group learning may have led to a change in assessing students' achievement. The students might approach and struggle with a new method of evaluating their learning procedure and capacity such as individual reward for individual contribution, group reward for group work, and group reward for individual contribution (also called as "interdependent reward"). Hence, it was necessary to add assessment to the topic construction.

5.3.3. Findings which concur with literature of students' perceptions of small group learning

5.3.3.1. Students' preference for small group learning

Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that Vietnamese upper primary students preferred learning in small groups to learning as individuals. This concurs with many studies (Elbaum et al., 1997; Hallam et al., 2003; Hood, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Kaldi et al., 2009; McManus & Gettinger, 1996; Mulryan, 1994; Veenman et al., 2000; etc).

The quantitative results show that students of school X expressed higher preference for learning in small groups than students from the other two schools. This finding suggests that the model of small group learning implemented in each school influences students' preference or otherwise for this method. According to Brown and Thomson (2000), the way a teacher organises teaching periods and classes influences how students think about the teaching method. By interacting more often in small groups, students in school X had more chances to learn about the new method; therefore they expressed a higher preference for this method than the students of the other two schools. Kaldi, Filippatou and Onoufriou (2009) also share the idea with Race and Powell (2000) that the pupils' views of group work are influenced by teachers' views. This was confirmed by the findings in qualitative data. The only two interviewees who claimed not to like learning in small groups belonged to class Z4; another two students who stated less preference for small group learning belonged to class Y4. All the interviewees of X5 and X4 indicated a high preference for the method.

Another noticeable finding here is the a greater standard deviation among the four cases; the class with the highest mean score in favour of small group learning had the lowest standard deviation, and conversely the class with the lowest mean score had the highest standard deviation. These findings suggest three things.

First, there was a fluctuation across the participants when comparing their preference between small group learning and traditional learning. Standard deviation is an index of how far the participants' responses are from the average among participants of research

(Johnson & Christensen, 2008c; Clark & Randal, 2004). The larger this index, the further the difference appears between participants. The large standard deviation of students' preference for a learning method was also present in Veenman et al.'s (2000), and Kaldi et al.'s (2009) studies. However, this was not discussed in these articles.

Second, the reverse indexes between X5 and Z4 suggest a link between standard deviation in students' preference for learning in small groups and the model of applying this method in each class. The contradiction of teaching reality between these two classes might prove this link. According to the observation (see chapter 4 for more details), it seemed that class X5 possessed group skills and group spirit while the class Z4 did not. The response from the Z4 teacher confirmed this finding:

> *TEA: It has not been called… yet
>
> *INV: < not have had group spirit yet>.
>
> *TEA: <generally>. Yes, they haven't had the spirit. (Tz4, A_13, p.4)

On the contrary, students in X5 often mentioned the class solidarity as a factor of preferring learning in groups:

> *STU: Because I think you can't make sure that your own ideas are definitely right, but when all of the members gather in group, it creates solidarity of spirit, when every member adds up all the ideas, we will work much better. (x53, A_42, p.5)

And finally, the difference between class X5 and Z4 the other classes in both mean and standard deviation might be explained by the students' achievement and their preference for learning in small groups. As stated in the previous chapters, X5 students had attained the highest achievement level. All were high achieving students; whereas the percentage of high achieving students in the other cases ranged from 25% to 69% of total number of students. Devine's study (1993) shows that higher-ability students express more satisfaction with group teaching than their lower-ability peers. As a result, they might find it easier to accept and prefer the small group model to the traditional methods.

5.3.3.2. Students' perceptions of benefits of small group learning

Relating to the research question number one, many researchers advocate small group learning and cooperative learning for the high positive impacts on students' outcomes in all aspects: academic, social, and attitude (Johnson & Johnson, 1985, 1991; Slavin, 1991, 1995; Stevens & Slavin, 1995). Research into students' perceptions also provided numerous benefits for this method (Hood, 2008; Kaldi et al., 2009; McManus & Gettinger, 1996; Mulryan, 1994; Veenman et al., 2000). Findings from quantitative data of this study again confirmed the benefits of small group learning for Vietnamese upper primary students' learning and social outcomes.

Talking in detail about the benefits of small group learning, the interviewees perceived four main features: increasing engagement in learning, increasing engagement in communication, better in-class-relationships, and suitability for Vietnamese language learning; the last benefit will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

"Engagement is not conceptualised as an attribute of the student, but rather as a state of being that is highly influenced by contextual factors, such as policies and practices of the school and family or peer interactions" (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr & Anderson, 2003, p.31). Ladd, Herald-Brown and Kochel (2009) summarise that the three forms of school engagement determining learning and achievement are cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement. Cognitive engagement is the level of processing intellectual effort needed to master learning tasks. Behavioural engagement happens when students exhibit constructive and cooperative participant, persistence, and attention in the classroom. Emotional engagement is traditionally defined as the students' attitudes toward school, peers, teachers, schoolwork or any affective reactions in the classroom and larger school context. These three forms are reciprocal to each other. Theories and experiments indicate that peer-mediated activities promote these forms of school engagement, hence increasing the classroom learning and achievement (Bauser, Lozano & Rivara, 2007; Schumpf, Crawford & Bodie, 1997; Scales & Taccogna, 2000).

Vietnamese upper primary students reported better and higher learning most often as the benefits of learning in groups. Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn's study (1997) demonstrates that upper primary students prefer to work in small groups typically because there is more available help from other students than in whole-class instruction and individual learning. This is applicable to students having learning difficulties as seen in the previous study of Elbaum, Moody, Schumm, and Vaughn (1996). The study of American primary students by Johnson (2006) also shows that students increase their enthusiasm for learning, and that they become more active in engaging with teachers and the learning process.

Besides the benefits from learning, Vietnamese upper primary students also indicated their preference for small group learning due to their engagement in communication. Compared to traditional methods, Vietnamese students perceived that they had more opportunities and permission to talk during learning periods. This phenomenon was also authenticated by both teachers and the school's vice-principal. The finding is shared by student participants in Veenman et al.'s study (2000), in which cheerful interaction with peers is raised as the most important benefit cooperative learning brings to them. It can be seen clearly that this is the most significant feature that small group learning brings to Vietnamese students.

Through interactions, Slavin (1991, 1995) argues that the relationships between a group's members become strengthened. Interestingly, students in school X reported that the relationships and friendships among them are not only strengthened in the group activities but also in the wider class area. This again indicates the role of small group learning in increasing the students' social interactions and social relationships which are considered as features of cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Cohen, 1994).

Talking about why primary students prefer learning in cooperation to learning as an individual, Hood (2008), in a pilot project investigating eight to nine year-old students' perceptions of their identity as learners, interprets responses into three main categories:

social, equal collaborative, and negative self-view. The social preference occurs when students find working with others fun and enjoyable. The equal collaborative attitude connects closely with a willingness to share and help others, while having help from others is interpreted as a negative self-view. It can be seen that these interpretations also appear in Vietnamese students' perceptions of small group learning. However, if having help from others is interpreted as a negative self-reflection in Hood's research, to Vietnamese primary students, it was perceived conversely as an indication of friendship and/or class solidarity (see responses of interviewees in classes X5, X4, and Y4). These help perceptions are also different from Webb's findings (1985, 1995) whereby group learning benefits high-ability students through cognitive elaboration for lower-ability peers. Many Vietnamese high-ability students asserted that they felt very happy to help and be helped from even their lower-ability group-mates because they knew they might be wrong, and that even the very-low-ability members could have surprising ideas for the lesson, especially for an abstract subject like Vietnamese language.

This phenomenon might be explained by two reasons. On one hand, Vietnamese high-achievement-status students truly perceived that their less-able counterparts also had positive and effective opinions for their own group performance. On the other hand, these responses might be a characteristic of Vietnamese people. Tran (1998) argues that one of the most recognised characteristics of Vietnamese is humility. Vietnamese have a tendency to behave in a lower status than their listeners, utterers, or articulators, and also express themselves in a lesser capacity than they actually have. Vietnamese have many idioms to express this concept, such as "Mot lan khiem ton bang bon lan tu cao" ("Once being modest is equivalent to four times showing off/ being arrogant"), or "Cuoi nguoi cho voi cuoi lau/ Cuoi nguoi hom truoc, hom sau nguoi cuoi" ("Do not laugh at others/ You may be laughed at one day"). In all Vietnamese primary schools, there is a panel display of Ho Chi Minh's [11] five recommendations for children (known as "Nam dieu Bac Ho day"), the last of which emphasises being humble: "Khiem ton,

---

[11] Ho Chi Minh: Vietnamese revolutionary leader who liberated Vietnam from French colonism and united Vietnam from American occupation.

that tha, dung cam" ("Humble, honest, and brave"). The answer given by y417, the highest-ability student in Y4 class, is an example:

*STU: Because there are some good students will help me.

*INV: Are there some students who study better than you?

*STU: Yes, there are.

*INV: I thought you have already been the best.

*STU: The members better than me will help me. (y417, A_18, p.4)

However, the research interview data are not sufficient to ascertain the exact reason for these Vietnamese students' precise perceptions about giving and receiving help.

Recent studies (for examples, Johnson (2006); Veenman et al. (2000); Florez and McCaslin (2008); Baessa et al. (2010); and Kaldi et al. (2009)) still affirm that small group learning is preferable for many primary students, in comparison to competitive and individual learning. These studies were implemented across the world, from the USA to England, Holland to Guatemala. This shows the impacts of small group learning on students' outcomes.

In addition, as Skinner, Kindermann, Connell and Wellborn's (2009) suggest, children's academic achievement and engagement in school depend on the extent to which the teachers and schools, along with parents and communities, make the learning environment a welcoming place where students want to come, present and are willing and able to learn. The students' engagement focuses on relationships and social interactions between students with students, teachers, staff, in the schooling environment.

However, in Perreault and Issacson's study (1995), the students reflected that although small groups and cooperative learning can make the learning more enjoyable and beneficial, a regular utilisation of these techniques is quite unusual and overwhelming. As a result, a good teaching model for using small groups in teaching is a moderate

application of this method. Hence, the students would be immersed in a variety of types of learning, and avoid the routine which causes boredom in learning.

5.3.3.3. Students' perceptions of difficulties in small group learning

For the research question number two, table 4.3. (see chapter 4) indicates that compared to the benefits, Vietnamese upper primary students perceived having fewer difficulties when learning in small groups. This finding is interesting because although other research mentions students' perceptions of difficulties of learning in groups, rarely do they make a comparison between the mean score of benefits and that of difficulties. In the qualitative data, Vietnamese upper primary students thought that there were five main obstacles encountered when learning in small groups: lack of group skills, time for learning in groups, marginalisation, group pressure, and leadership burden.

From the data analysis, it can be seen that the lack of discussion skills not only happened in lower-ability or mischievous students but in the higher-ability as well, and not only in the classes having had less time in training in small group skills but also in the one where this method was supposed to be familiar. In other words, the students had not been trained well enough to know how to have good discussions in a group.

Cohen (1994) and Brown and Thomson (2000) argue that small group learning is not cooperative learning if there are no productive interactions. If the teacher wants to teach students in cooperative learning, it takes time to train them. It can be seen in the case description that students in classes X5 and X4 had more training to work cooperatively than classes Y4 and Z4 (see chapter 3). Both teachers of Y4 and Z4 admitted that they had not had enough opportunities to use small group learning; hence, their students still had not yet developed the group ethos.

Johnson (2003) asserts that students not only must be taught the inter-personal and small group skills for successful cooperation but also must be motivated to use them. According to his research, these skills facilitate both the students' positive relationship

and achievement. Therefore, fewer difficulties have been experienced in developing trusting relationships, effective communications and better conflict resolutions.

Talking about this finding, Kaldi, Filippatou, and Onoufriou (2009) in a comparative study of Greek and Cypriot primary students, found that the differences in approaching a more organised group-work and a clearer view of roles and responsibilities was due to the difference in training in small groups as well as the different level of teachers' enthusiasm and confidence about using this method. A comparison of teachers' views of using small group learning among four classes (see section 4.3.2.3.2) consolidates this finding. The teachers of schools Y and Z showed more concern for a suitable implement action for small group learning, while the two teachers of school X seemed to be very confident with this method. They also talked more about the lack of group skills and the necessary time for training and familiarisation for their students than their school X peers.

Gilles and Ashman (1996, 1998, as cited in Gillies, 2007) and Gilles and Boyle (2010) find that students who work in groups after being trained to cooperate, demonstrate more on-task behaviour, give more detailed explanations and assistance to each other, and obtain higher learning outcomes than their untrained peers. If they are not taught how to have appropriate interaction with their group-mates, they tend to encounter more conflict and obstacles when cooperating in small groups. As a result, it is necessary for Vietnamese teachers to acknowledge the role of group skills in their small group teaching, and to have suitable teaching strategies to promote and improve group skills among their students.

The lack of time for group skills training as a difficulty was mentioned by both student and teacher participants in this study. Rarely learning in small groups, time management by the teacher, and being under-time-pressure are the three main obstacles reported by the student interviewees of schools Y and Z. This shows that small group learning in these classes had not been managed well enough. Gillies (2007) and Baines and his colleagues (2009) assert that time management is a group skill which the

teacher must be well-versed in to produce good group-work. Veenman et al. (2000) also observed that the teachers spend little time teaching teamwork skills.

Furthermore, the study of Veenman et al. also shows that teachers report that lacking extra time for room arrangement and off-task behaviour management for cooperative work are the two main issues which constituted up to 90% of the problems of a small group teaching period. This applies to Vietnamese teachers as well. Under the constraints of a teaching period and the content knowledge which they had to transfer to students, it seemed impossible for the teachers to spend more time on teaching teamwork skills as well as giving the learners more time to finish their work.

The mis-match between the students' reflection of time required for learning in small groups and their teachers' reports shows the teaching-learning reality in schools Y and Z. Though small group learning is becoming a required teaching method for all primary teachers in Ho Chi Minh City, this does not mean that it will be implemented regularly in all primary schools. On the other hand, the research findings on students' preferences for – and perceptions of benefits in – learning in small groups in comparison to the traditional methods show the need for primary schools to use this method more frequently.

Brown and Thomson (2000) emphasise that trust and safety need to be developed in a class to achieve cooperation. If these feelings are created, the class will become more unified; if not students in class may encounter isolation, especially when being changed to other groups. It can be seen that some Vietnamese students disliked learning in small groups because of this isolation.

It is clear that the marginalisation will keep happening given the inflexibility of the teacher in arranging groups. The finding also indicates that parents were seen as one means of facilitating change. The English primary students in the study of Hallam, Ireson, and Davies (2004) also perceived this parental factor. However in this study, it seems that parents play a positive role in moving between two sets of lower and higher achievement groups; whereas the response of interviewee z425 (see chapter 4) shows a

negative effect of the parental factor. It implies that parents should pay more attention to their child's desire for working in small groups.

The study by Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1997) illustrates that elementary students report stability if they are kept in the same group instead of changed. Though most Vietnamese interviewees did not mention group changing as a difficulty, some of them perceived this movement as the main cause of the isolation and marginalisation they encountered when learning in different groups. However, this phenomenon needs to be considered within specific circumstances. Most students thought group changing was normal because they had been moved to another group frequently; whereas those perceiving this as an obstacle had rarely changed before, or had to move after sitting firmly in a group for a long time. Gillies (2007) and Killen (2007) also suggest that teachers need to be aware of students' smooth transition from group to group to avoid marginalisation and isolation. They suggest that groups should not work together for longer than four to six weeks. This ideal length of time should be considered by Vietnamese primary teachers to avoid the negative experiences of transition for some group learners.

Besides the group changes, some students were marginalised because of their lower learning achievement than other members in the group. Contrary to Slavin's illustration (1990), this was not observed in this study to produce a "free-rider" effect whereby the lower-ability students rely on their higher-ability peers (p.16). Rather, the lower-achievement students were ignored because of their potential affect to group performance. This occured because the teacher let groups compete with each other (see Ty4's responses); hence, to protect the group, the lower-ability students were neither listened to nor even invited to contribute. Therefore, under group pressure, the lower-ability students became lower, more quiet and introverted. Talking about this phenomenon, Cohen (1994) claims that competition will magnify the problem of status-within-the-group; accordingly low-achieving children will be seen as harmful to the group's chances of winning. When comparing cooperative learning to competitive learning, Brown and Thomson (2000) also emphasise this. Competition only gets results for the winners; therefore, the low-status students are likely to become more

resentful and aggressive. Moreover, this finding also shows that the group did not develop group skills qualified enough to solve the problem when the lower achievers might contribute wrong ideas. If the group was well-trained, they would know what to do with wrong answers by making a discussion. However, due to the time constraint in competition, it was impossible for them to carry out a true discussion among members.

Peer rejection affects children's attitudes and beliefs about themselves and, in turn, impacts on engagement and achievement (Ladd et al., 2009). It is also clear that the extent of peer group rejection is associated with specific aspects of children's social cognition. Studies by Buhs and Ladd (2001) and Buhs, Ladd and Herald-Brown (2006) also describe that the peer group rejection and victimisation are shown to have a strong connection with the students' academic disengagement. To minimise these threats to students' learning and social outcomes from working in groups much depends on the teacher's teaching skills and his/ her sensitivity to students' feelings about group-work and group-pressure.

5.3.3.4. Students' perceptions and preferences of group types

There are many ways to form a group for learning, such as teacher-selected or student-selected or both-structured-based grouping, ability or gender grouping, friendship or random-based grouping. Among these, researchers give more attention to the effectiveness of ability and/or gender groupings to students' outcomes, as well as to the students' preferences for these types of groupings. This issue is still under-debate (Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Lee, 1993; Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chamers & d'Apollonia, 1996; Slavin, 1987; Wilkinson & Fung, 2002).

In terms of the preference for ability grouping, most of the interviewees preferred a heterogeneous achievement group. The mixed-ability formats were claimed to provide more chances for both lower and higher achievement students to work together and to give and receive help. This has been advocated by some studies (for example, see Elbaum et al., 1997; Hallam et al., 2004; Lyle, 1999).

Studies have proved that cooperative small group learning is not only beneficial for lower achievement students who need help from other members but also for the higher achievement ones, who, through explaining and helping others will have in-depth knowledge of the lessons (Webb, 1985). In comparison to a traditional method where they have hardly any help from friends, Vietnamese upper primary students acknowledged this benefit, and advocated for heterogeneous ability groups. High achievers reported that learning in small groups would give them more opportunities to help others, and therefore prevent more disadvantage in learning for their lower-achievement peers.

It is clear that Vietnamese students not only expressed their desire for better learning but also showed their concern for lower-status students in class when choosing the grouping types for study. Accordingly, similar-ability groups would cause a strong negative effect on the lower-status students in both achievement and self-esteem. The data also showed that the students acknowledged the obvious link between these two outcomes. This finding concurred with studies of Elbaum et al. (1997), Thorkildsen (1993), and Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos and Gordon (1993) in which higher-achieving students were sensitive to the needs of lower achievers.

It is noticeable that there were three students (12.5%) from class Z4 who preferred to work in same-ability groups. They reported that in a mixed-ability group, the better learning students would be frustrated by the slower ones. For example, one student, who was current group leader, asserted that:

> *STU: I feel a little tired… Because I have to explain more for someone who doesn't have the same capacity to me so that they could understand what I say. (z414, A_10, p.4)

Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn in their study (1997) find that to some higher-achievement students, same-ability groups might be a preferable choice for their lower-status peers. It is noticeable that this perception of the fourth-grade participants in Elbaum et al.'s research occurs because of their concern for the slower group-mates being under-pressure from their higher-ability peers. However, Z4 participants who

preferred learning in same-ability groups seemed to care more for their own learning than for other members' in the group. In addition, Elbaum et al. report that the majority of students perceive that same-ability grouping is desirable only for students who cannot read. The students in the research, on the contrary, showed that lower-ability students should learn in mixed-ability groups where they could get more help; only the higher-achievement interviewees reported that they liked working in same-ability groups to avoid tiredness brought about by helping lower-achieving counterparts. This finding demonstrates that grouping in Z4 is not truly a cooperative learning where students acknowledge the achievement and social inter-dependences between themselves and other members in the group.

In terms of gender grouping, instead of choosing to learn in a heterogeneous group, Vietnamese students preferred same-sex groups. This is not a surprising finding because most of studies about gender-group-types find that favouring similar-sex-grouping is a normal tendency in all children (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Wilkinson & Fung, 2002). Strough, Swenson and Cheng (2001, as cited in Gillies and Boyle, 2010) find that students working in same-gender pairs express a greater sense of affiliation, influence and enjoyment than those in mixed-gender ones.

Reasons for the interest in same-gender groupings of Vietnamese primary students are also advocated by gender researchers. For example, Skelton and Francis (2003) concur with Clark (1990) and Francis (1998a) that gender dichotomy is very common in all children.

Noticeably, the reasons for prefering gender-based groups differed according to each gender. Boys perceived hobbies and visual appearance as criteria for a same-gender grouping, while girls paid more attention to the behaviour suitable for group work. It means that girls possessed more attentive perceptions and awareness about what they choose than boys. This shows the differences in perceptions between genders about the mentioned topic. Belotti's observation (1975, as cited in Francis, 1998c) demonstrates

that girls aim to be viewed as mature, well-behaved, and sensible to get the teachers' attention; whereas boys are the reverse.

One interesting finding about group composition in this study is that Vietnamese participants have not been seated according to same-ability and same-gender due to the teachers' group arrangement. It means that the students' perceptions of group types are quite subjective.

Ladd et al. (2009) propose that youth develop preferences for particular classmates, and sometimes these associations develop into friendships. Friendships differ from children's peer group relations because they occur in dyads, which are created by mutual consent, and exist as long as both participants choose to be in that relationship. Abrami, Chambers, Poulsen, De Simone and Howden (1995, as cited in Gillies & Boyle, 2010) reckon that a group formed by friendship promotes more interactions among group members, increases more responsibility and motivates students more to achieve their group goals than groups whose members are not friends. The responses of x432 showed this impact of friendship on a student's accountability and self-view. It implies that teachers should pay more attention to the use of various kinds of group composition to promote their students' learning in small groups.

5.3.3.5. Students' perceptions of their roles in groups

Individual accountability relates to how each member of a group perceives and accepts his or her responsibility for a personal contribution to help attain the group's goal. Johnson (2003) suggests that with a well-structured interdependence in groups, members will feel more personal responsibility for contributing and less likely be a "free-rider" on others. Individual accountability includes not only being responsible for completing one's own task but also ensuring others complete theirs.

Most Vietnamese students confirmed that they contributed a lot to their group discussion. Some participants of the study even supposed that they would continue giving ideas regardless of not being listened to or marginalised. Results from the survey

support this finding. The total mean score for perceptions of individual accountability was 3.61, in which X5 consistently gave the highest mean score with 3.98.

However, looking in-depth into interviewees' responses, as discussed in section 5.3.3.3., many participants admitted that they would do nothing to get attention from friends if they were not listened to. Although the students had a perception of their responsibility to complete their group's goal, in reality they did not behave as consistently as they thought. Barry and King (2003a) describe that lower-ability students tend to pay more attention to what other people think about their achievement rather than to their own learning during class. In other words, they might perceive themselves as having a higher ability or contributing more greatly when asked about their qualities in these respects. Steven and Slavin (1995) also argue that lower-achievement students may perceive their ability as being higher during competition in learning. It is considered a way to avoid being humiliated and judged by outsiders.

Knowing the duties for each position in each group had been perceived as important by all participants of school X. Confirmation from teachers showed that in X4 and X5, students alternated positions every week, every day or even every learning period to guarantee the responsibilities were distributed equally amongst the group. Barry and King (2003b) and Jolliffe (2007) argue that the teacher should let the students benefit from the duties and responsibilities of the various roles in group. One of the strategies to make the lower-ability students become more expert in learning is to let them become leaders. It means that positions in groups may influence the students' achievement and perceptions of their achievement. Chen, Chang and He's (2003) study on the effectiveness of leadership on Chinese primary students' achievement confirms this. However, roles in groups were perceived differently by Vietnamese students. This issue will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter (see section 5.3.4.3.).

5.3.4. Findings which differ from the literature of students' perceptions of small group learning

5.3.4.1. The suitability of small groups for learning Vietnamese language

In terms of the suitability of small groups for teaching and learning specific subjects, it can be seen clearly that most studies focus only on the teacher participants' perceptions instead of those of the students' (for example, see Mulryan, 1994; Veenman et al., 2000). Therefore, this research provided another point of view, that of the learners to examine the suitability of this method to content areas.

Three teachers in the research reported that they felt more comfortable and prefer to use this method in teaching Science and Mathematics subjects compared to other subjects. Teacher participants in Veenman et al.'s study (2000) share this opinion when asserting that cooperative learning is used up to 81% for math activities while only from 45% to 62% for language activities. However, the students' interviews exhibited a different perception. Twenty interviewees of 24 reported that they liked learning in small groups in the Vietnamese language subject; in particular ten preferred learning in small groups in Practice of Lexis and Sentence [12]. Furthermore, two students who usually favoured individual learning emphasised that they wanted to learn Vietnamese in groups especially for Practice of Lexis and Sentence.

A benefit of cooperative learning discussed in Brown and Thomson (2000) is the improvement of intrinsic motivation. Students develop their cognition better, and become more motivated about what they learn, through cooperative group learning. Vietnamese participants showed a strong acknowledgement of what was better for their learning when preferring small group learning for Vietnamese language to other subjects. This finding differs somewhat from Slavin's argument (1991, 1995) of group learning's extrinsic motivation theory (e.g. group/team rewards). Accordingly, as well as the reward or applause from teachers and friends for their contributions, students also preferred working in groups because they recognised the benefits of this method to their

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[12] Practice of Lexis and Sentence is equivalent to Grammar and Vocabulary in English curriculum. Each lesson is composed of many small exercises requiring the students to fill in blanks, find out and make a new sentence with a specific content, or find out the mistakes, etc.

own learning, especially in subjects requiring the collaboration between members of a group such as Vietnamese language.

It is clearly seen that even if they did not prefer small group learning, these students still considered this method a more suitable learning method for an abstract subject that required more conceptual and verbal ability from many people to learn. Contrary to Cohen (1994), Slavin (1990) supposed that cooperative learning is still effective for low-level tasks if the problem is expressed in words or requiring imagery and discussion to choose the best solutions for the task. Compared to Mathematics, Vietnamese language requires more ideas from the group participants to discuss and solve learning problems; hence the students have to pay more attention and make more effort to complete tasks in groups rather than on their own. In other words, even for those preferring individual learning to small group ones, it was more preferable to learn Vietnamese in groups in order to achieve better results. This finding once again emphasises the motivation of Vietnamese students for improved learning.

5.3.4.2. Familiarity with large groups

Some studies have examined the effects of group size on students' perceptions and the outcomes of cooperative small group learning (Bossert, Barnett & Filby, 1984; Imai, Anderson, Wilkinson & Yi, 1992; Lou et al., 1996; Peterson, Janicki, & Swing, 1981). A significant negative relation between the group size and students' reading achievement is found. Accordingly, in both mechanistic grouping structures (tasks in which no differentiation of dependence between group members is significant) and organic structure (cooperative or collaborative group tasks), interactions and learning outcomes are more likely in small groups than in large groups. Webb (1984) and Webb, Ender and Lewis (1986) evidence that students' work in pairs, or even in a group of four which can be divided into pairs, is more interactive than a group of three.

To the contrary, the results here showed that students were familiar with large groups. To them, group size seemed to be not so influential on their learning outcomes.

Conversely, it was accompanied with group spirit and group solidarity. This phenomenon was explained by the number of students in class:

> *TEA: It's better with six. But you know in reality school has a great number of students. So one thing is that it's also based on the situation of the class. It depends on the condition of each class, for example. Well, I really like six students in a group, and then we can divide more in each group, but due to the space of class, we, we have to divide the same as now: groups in groups. (Tx5, A_02, p.10)

With a situation that each class usually has over thirty or even more than forty students, it may be inevitable that teachers have to form large groups. In addition, due to a limit of infrastructure, classrooms in Vietnamese primary schools are not wide enough to construct many small groups with the classroom. The observation of class Z4 showed that the teacher could hardly move along the path among groups to approach each group. As a result, it was normal for the students to learn in a large group.

However, by looking carefully into each interviewee's answers, it can be seen that the crowdedness did have negative effects on students' learning. Not being listened to, and quarrelling discussed in section 5.3.3.3. can be viewed as examples. It seems that quarrels and not listening to others are due mainly to the lack of group skills which the teacher should pay more attention to. These obstacles would be reduced if the group had fewer members than it did currently.

Moreover, as Webb observed (1989, as cited in Wilkinson & Fung, 2002), students in small groups are less likely to ignore or depend on other members. In pairs, it would be difficult to ignore the other's questions. The teachers in Gilles and Boyle's (2010) research report that their students work brilliantly in a group of four instead of six. To them, changing to group of four is the most positive thing that happened to their teaching in cooperative learning. Hence, students have more interactions and learning involvements together in small groups than in large ones. It also lessened the chances to shift responsibilities to the higher-achieving members. The report of student x421 (see section 4.3.2.2.5.) showed that this shift of duties happened in class and as part of the

problem of a large group. In other words, although familiarity with crowdedness is an interesting finding of Vietnamese students' perceptions of small group learning it caused inevitable problems for productive group-work.

Moreover, the teachers of these classes also admitted that it would be easier for them to control and use small group teaching in smaller groups. This is supported by teacher participants in the research of Gillies and Boyle (2010). It implies that to conduct a more productive group work, Vietnamese primary teachers should try to break down the number of students in the current groups in their class. The policies of Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2000) about class size [13] are not easily and rapidly implemented. However, the study showed that such a policy is strongly desirable to encourage small group teaching.

5.3.4.3. Two sides of student's leadership in group work

Taking different roles in group work – especially being the leader – is considered a strategy to promote the effectiveness of small group learning (Baines et al., 2009). However, looking solely at Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of leadership in small group learning, there was a contradiction among interviewees. On one hand, leadership was burdensome because of the amount of duties and responsibilities as well as the decrease in opportunities for learning. On the other hand, it was considered a means of getting attention and showing power to other members. Interestingly, the later perception was seen in lower-achieving and/or marginalised students.

Elbaum et al. (1997) express a concern that in small group learning students cannot refer to their teacher for help when experiencing difficulties in learning. This is considered a reasonable explanation for the students in this study, paying more attention to grouping format than to other types of working format in class. However, they argue that in small group learning, it is likely that the class becomes less teacher-

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[13] Since 2000, a standardise class size in primary level is from 30 to 35 students per class. However, in some schools, due to the limits of infrastructure, the class size may be more than 40 students per class.

directed; therefore, a heavy duty is laid on the higher-achievement students to help the lower ones; similarly the lower-achievement students must rely more on their group-mates than on their teachers. This circumstance might encourage students to be more willing to help their friends, but also might make them more tired by the extra duty. Vietnamese higher-ability students who were current leaders also shared this view reporting the onerous nature of leadership. Having to repeatedly explain and teach lower-achievement members in the group, and being responsible for group performance to get the good marks despite other members not working cooperatively were two things bothering these students.

Moreover, these students also reported their own learning was affected because of the leader role in a group. This finding somewhat contradicts previous experimental research stating that leadership is aligned with students' achievement (Chen, Chang, & He, 2003; Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005). Student leadership in group learning is advocated because of its provision of opportunities for students to become more self-efficient (Barry & King, 2003b; Marzano, 2003; Owen, 2007), therefore having a strong impact on improving their academic achievement. Nonetheless, Vietnamese students felt that leadership gave them a lot of unexpected responsibilities as well as forced them to pay more time to group management. Hence, two leader-high-ability interviewees expressed their preference for individual learning to avoid the leadership burden (see responses of y417 and z416). This phenomenon can be explained by the two following reasons.

Firstly, often the highest ability, most confident students in the class and/ or group will be assigned to be the leaders in order to easily get respect and attention from other classmates and/ or group-mates (Owen, 2007). However, one of the current assignments of leadership in Vietnamese schools is that once being chosen as a leader it is difficult for the student to be displaced or expelled unless s/he makes a serious mistake (see responses of z414). The assignment often happens at the beginning of a school-year by looking through the class ranking of learning performance and achievement. Although the MoET has changed the document of assessment types for the primary school system from number score to letter score, from ranking to

performance (MoET, 2000), it is not difficult for a teacher to find out who is the best in class. As a result, once being nominated as a leader, the student will be a leader for the following years. It means that the leadership burden will be maintained from one year to the next.

Secondly, the observations (see chapter 4) showed that the group-role implementation in small group learning in each school had not been well-understood. Barry and King (2003b) assume that students must be assigned into different positions in groups to understand and fulfill the duties and responsibilities of various group roles and from then to improve small group effectiveness. However, only classes X4 and X5 applied this rotation. Positions in groups in Y4 and Z4 were kept constant. In addition, the responses of participants in X4 and X5 regarding their duties in each position in groups illustrated that the leadership meant controlling in an overview of the group work, but rarely participating directly in group discussion. The discussion of a group was mainly laid on members. In other words, being a leader on a learning period was equivalent to giving requests or commands and managing the group work, but not fully discussing it; therefore the leader students might feel like they were "respectfully" marginalised.

Responses of z41 illustrated this feeling. Vietnamese leader students rejected their positions in the group due to the group pressure and to their perceptions of a leader's characteristics. Ten-year-old participants in Owen's study (2007) list confidence, patience, concern for others, intellect and encouragement as the most important features of leadership; and being arrogant, bossy, having too many rules, and disagreement as those which destroyed the faith of members in group leaders. Vietnamese students also realised these features. However, if these lists in Owen's research only mean to show what students think of leadership's characteristics, Vietnamese students perceived them as inevitable problems that might become obstacles. This might even see leaders being victimised by prejudice from other members. This feeling was more exaggerated when contrasted with the group member position, which was considered as not being under the pressures of duty and the victimisation of leadership.

Meanwhile, to the lower-ability and/ or marginalised students, leadership was perceived differently. To them, leadership was defined as authoritarian leadership from which

students got the power to gain attention as well as to reward and to punish other members. Children from Owen's (2007) study describe leadership as a feeling of being respected and proud of themselves. The leadership is also perceived as a double-sided activity regarding to children's psychological development. Young students regard leaders as "bossy, older, bigger, better, clever than me (…) they teach people, tell people what to do" (p.39). However, to older ones, a distinction between leader and leadership is clarified with the latter being "not bossy, good, helpful, and polite" (p.70). It infers that leadership is perceived as power to children who identify themselves as the lower-status; whereas being responsible is defaulted to leadership from the higher-status students' view points. This argument is applicable precisely to lower-achievement and/ or marginalised Vietnamese students. In other words, academic achievement status plays an important role in how these students perceived their roles in group learning.

It can be seen that the two-sides of leadership in Vietnamese small group learning is caused by many aspects, such as teachers' assignments without considering the leader's desire, the traditional perceptions of choosing a leader in Vietnamese schools, the transferring of power and responsibilities from a leader to his/her group or class, the tolerance of the group, and teacher pressure during group-work in competition with other groups.

5.3.4.4. Students' views of group assessment

Talking about assessment for cooperative small group learning, researchers focus mainly on the teachers' and/or educators' points of view (Gillies, 2007; Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Webb, 1995; Webb, Nemer, Chizhik, & Surgue, 1998). Very few studies examine what and how learners, especially young ones, think about the way they are evaluated and assessed in groups for personal work and their group work.

One point that needs to be made clear in this research is that assessment does not mean formal assessment by examinations which are regularly used to evaluate and assess

students' achievement for further academic transitions. Vietnamese students' official achievements are assessed only through examinations three times per trimester. These are individual assessments, and do not bear any relationship to group work. Johnson and Johnson (2004) argue that assessment should be parallel with learning procedures. If students learn in groups, there is no reason not to conduct their assessment as a group performance. However, this issue has not been considered in Vietnamese primary schools due to the extant national curriculum and policies.

Interestingly, most Vietnamese students expressed their preference for whole-group assessment in order to guarantee fairness, increase groups' solidarity, and avoid isolation and jealousy among individuals of the group. All respondents showed a higher concern for his or her group-mates' feelings rather than the interviewee's own per se. It can be assumed that the preference for whole-group assessment is mainly due to a concern for fellow group-mates' feelings about assessment.

Moreover, the chosen type of group assessment shows the collective cultural context which distinguishes Vietnamese people from Western ones. Tran (1998) describes the tendency of Vietnamese to live closely together and thus they perceive the benefits of living as a community to be more important. "Song chet co nhau" ("Live and die together"), or "Co phuoc cung huong, co hoa cung chiu" ("Sharing luck and disasters/ miseries") are popular idioms among Vietnamese when talking about this collective culture. The results showed that Vietnamese students had a willingness to share in both good and bad assessments of their group performance despite the individual effort each member had made to that performance.

This can be seen as a lack of individual accountability in group work because there were some "hitch-hikers". Teachers in Gillies and Boyle's research (2010) also reflect the difficulties with assessment of students' group work due to potentially uneven levels of contribution amongst those of the group. However, most Vietnamese students did not express any negative feelings about this issue. On the contrary, they cared more about the potential isolation and division that might be created due to the unequal assessment between members of different learning abilities in the group.

It needs to be recognised that there were different perspectives on the relationship between assessment types and students' achievement status. To higher-status interviewees, the feelings of lower-status students in the group when being assessed were more important than the assessment results themselves. Meanwhile, to lower-achievement students, whole-group assessment was advocated because of the need for higher results as well as of the maintenance of the group as a community. However, when asked about the unfairness to those who had worked harder and contributed more to group work, lower-achievement interviewees expresses a willingness to be assessed lower than their higher-contributors.

Another issue in Vietnamese primary schools is that the teachers in the study did not use inter-dependent reward structures in assessing group-work. This phenomenon is also reported in studies by McManus and Gettinger (1996) and Veenman et al. (2000). Slavin (1991, 1995) and Johnson and Johnson (2004) argue that group rewards based on group product or individual contributions may provide little or no incentive for students to help each other and hence, cooperation may not be promoted between individual members of a group. Inter-dependent reward structures reinforce praise and encouragement among the group because students know that their group only earns rewards by each member's task-related efforts. If group rewards are based only on a group product, it is likely that the highest-ability students might assume control of the group, and the lower one may not have the chance to participate in order to protect to the group's results. If group rewards are based on the performance of each member in the group, students tend to be inclined to help each other. In other words, if an inter-dependent reward is not implemented, it is likely that some students will become "free-riders" on other students when completing a group task. The observations of Vietnamese students showed that these hitch-hikers existed in classes X4, Y4 and Z4. However, the research data from both students and teachers did not mention this perception of assessment.

5.3.5. Relationship between students' gender, achievement and perceptions of small group learning

The data analysis shows that although there are correlations between students' gender and learning achievement in Vietnamese language and their perceptions of small group learning, overall these correlations are not strong enough to make a generalisation. This finding was shared with some previous literature. Studies of Veenman et al. (2000), Tewel, Gillies, van den Eeden and Hoek (2001), and Johnson (2006) also state no significant differences between boys and girls and their preferences and perceptions of small groups' benefits and effective interactions. Meanwhile, a study of Elbaum and colleagues (1997) reveals no significant differences in students' reading abilities and their perceptions of grouping formats.

To each factor of the construct of students' perception, the statistic also showed a weak correlation with gender and achievement. However, the qualitative data from interviews provided some noticeable insights. For example, the choice of group types was mostly based on students' gender dichotomy and achievement, whereas the students' perceptions of leadership were mainly based on their learning capacity. Neither gender nor Vietnamese ability influenced these participants' preferences for group assessment. Remarkably, as Terwel et al. (2001) illustrate, the higher-ability students expressed more solicited and higher quality explanations. The interview data of the research illustrated this judgment. Compared to lower-achievement counterparts, Vietnamese high-achievement participants contributed more detailed responses for the researcher's questions. These students showed higher quality perceptions and expressions about small group learning.

5.3.6. Proposed theoretical framework of students' perceptions of small group learning

It is clear in the research findings and discussion that all the insights into small group learning in students' perceptions are related strongly to each other. This is understandable because classroom teaching and learning activities are a synthesis of

innumerable features. Students' perceptions of the benefits, difficulties, and the characteristics of current versus their desired groups also point out how complicated these connections are.

Accordingly, Vietnamese upper primary students perceived that small group learning yielded both learning and social benefits from insider perspective only. For example, when identifying benefits associated with the method, such as help, happiness, and enjoyment, they expressed their thinking more in first person pronouns such as "I" and "we". On the other hand, they described their difficulties originated from outsiders: from teachers, friends or group-mates, and from the method per se. For example, marginalisation and isolation resulted from friends' behaviours and the teacher's chosen seating arrangements. Time for small group learning was an obstacle to their own learning because of the teacher's inflexibility in controlling group-work-timing. Mostly third person pronouns such as "they" and "s/he" were used when describing difficulties encountered.

When learning in small groups, group types, roles in the group, and types of assessment were associated with both benefits and difficulties. For example, when asked about the preference for heterogeneous-ability groups, most interviewees stated that was receiving help from other members, which was one of the benefits of small group learning. While the attention associated with leadership appealed to lower-ability, marginalised students, high-achievement participants and the leaders themselves wanted to be normal members in the group, and thus avoid the onerous nature of leadership. Due to group solidarity, and in order to guarantee in-group-relationships, whole-group assessment was the primary choice of most Vietnamese students.

As discussed in previous sections, gender and achievement in Vietnamese language had a correlation to how Vietnamese students perceived small group learning. In addition, the discussion also proposed that Vietnamese students' perceptions of small group learning were influenced by three other main factors: the need of better/higher learning, consideration for others' feelings, and the collective cultural context.

Therefore, the following is the proposed theoretical framework to describe and summarise the research results:
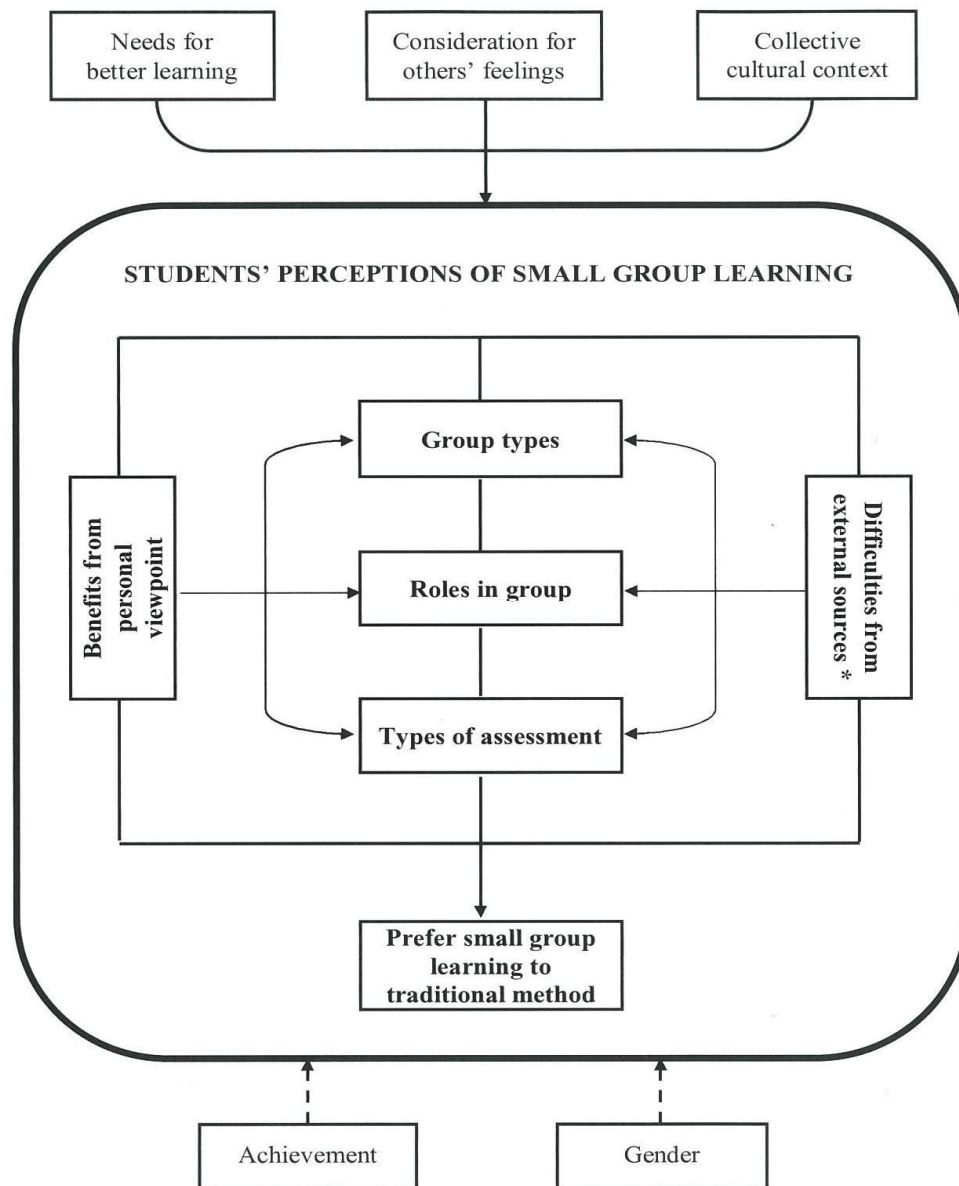
Figure 5.1.: Proposed theoretical framework of Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language.

*External sources: teacher, friends, and small group model

The diagram comprises two layers. Outside are factors influencing the students' thinking about small group learning. It includes the need for better/ higher learning, consideration for others' feelings, the collective cultural context, and the students' gender and level of achievement. The three former factors have a strong relationship to each other and to the construct of students' perceptions. The two latter factors not only have weak correlations to the construct but do not have any relationship with each other as well.

The inside layer represent the main focus of the research: the students' perceptions of small group learning. This layer contains factors forming Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of learning in groups, including the students' perceptions of benefits, difficulties, group types, roles in groups, and types of group assessment. These factors are equal and influence each other, comprising the construct of students' perceptions and preferences for small group learning over the traditional method. The benefits and difficulties impact on the other three factors, and determine what Vietnamese students' perceptions of the types of group, their roles in groups, and the types of group assessment.

5.4. SMALL GROUPS WITH TEACHERS

Positive reports from teachers and the school's administrator show that small group teaching is a potentially more effective and acceptable teaching method for Vietnamese primary schools. This finding is aligned with some previous studies (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Kaldi et al., 2009; McManus & Gettinger, 1996; Mulryan, 1994; Veenman et al., 2000).

Teaching skills in small groups is the most important emergent issue for teachers in the study. Time management, teaching group skills for students, noise control, and maintaining the spirit of a small group were mentioned as obstacles. These are also discussed by teacher participants in some research (Kaldi et al., 2009; Veenman et al., 2000). The two teachers of schools Y and Z respectively have not had many opportunities to be trained in teaching in small groups or in how to implement this

method regularly in their class. As the principal of school X reported, a professional development course had been proposed by the Training and Education Services of Ho Chi Minh City and of Districts (PETS and DETS) where the schools are located. Due to many obstacles, this training session was not easily implemented. As a result, primary teachers in Ho Chi Minh City had to develop their teaching practice by themselves. The question of peer coaching was raised for these teacher interviewees as well; however, only teachers of school X had peer professional development by rotating peer-observations.

Cohen (1994) argues that cooperative learning only becomes effective if students learn with complex conceptual materials. It is not advantageous for activities such as completing merely factual or computational tasks where the fastest workers know the answers and share with the rest of the group. Within a textbook-centred national curriculum like the Vietnamese one, small group teaching – teaching all children regardless of their learning ability, ethnicity, social-economic and geographic status – is still rarely applied method. Moreover, though only one teacher discussed the unsuitability of this method due to the timing issue, this comment showed a conflict exists between the content-requirements of the curriculum and the time demands of small groups teaching and learning. Therefore, schools need a more suitable, flexible and adaptable curriculum designed to allow an effective application of this method.

5.5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The focal point of this study is Vietnamese upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The study finds that overall Vietnamese upper primary students and their teachers favoured learning and teaching in small groups to traditional models despite the differences between each school's implementation. The results showed a positive correlation with previous literature in that the three main benefits to students' outcomes related to academic achievement, social skills, and attitudes, while the difficulties when using this method for learning

were associated with time management, isolation, and a lack of group skills. The students' preferences for the group to be comprised of students of heterogeneous ability but homogeneous gender also reflected those accepted as representative of current international students' preferences.

On the other hand, the research also presented some interesting points specifically unique to Vietnamese circumstances which might enrich the current literature of students' perceptions of small group learning. They were the preference for large group sizes, the dual nature of leadership, the preference for whole-group assessment and the suitability of this method for learning Vietnamese language rather than just other subjects such as mathematics.

The research also presented the underlying influences of the need for higher/ better achievement, the consideration for others' feelings and the collective cultural context's influences on Vietnamese upper primary students' views of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The influence of gender and achievement to students' perceptions of small group learning were also mentioned and described though the relationship was not strong enough to make a generalisation.

Recommendations for future research:

1. The research produced insufficient data to support a full discussion of the research questions. The research procedures were also limited due to obstacles such as the time permitted for observations and young students' inability to express fully their ideas about the topic. It is recommended that these research questions could be studied in greater depth in future.

2. A broader view of students' perceptions of this learning model in different subjects is needed to make a comparison with this research.

3. This study was focused on exploring upper primary students' perceptions of small group learning to develop a conceptual model of small group teaching and learning. However, due to the limitations of an explorative study, many aspects of small group

learning have not been researched, such as those factors which participants thought made an effective group, as well as the desired characteristics of group leadership. The relationship between small group method and students having difficulties in learning and the use of small group teaching in a range of ethnicities, races, social economics, and geographical areas have not been mentioned either. Further research to examine these aspects of students' perceptions of small group learning could be useful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Research ethics application approved by Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

FACULTY OF EDUCATION TE WHĀNAU O AKO PAI

DONALD STREET PO Box 17310, Karori 6147, Wellington, New Zealand
Phone +64-4-463 9500 **Fax** +64-4-463 9649 **Website** www.vuw.ac.nz/education

7 March 2011

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu
MEd Student
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education
C/- School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy
Donald Street
Wellington

Dear Nhu

RE: Ethics application SEPP/2011/07: RM 18299

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application '*Fifth-year student perception of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language*', with requested amendments, 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 Judith Loveridge

Co-Convener
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

Appendix B:

Letters to Ho Chi Minh City and District 1 and 3 Training and Education Services (PETS and DETS), and to Principals of schools

Letter to the Director of Ho Chi Minh City Education and Training Service

Subject: *Asking for permission to conduct research*

Dear ………………………………………………

I am a master student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. I write this letter to ask for your permission in order to implement my research in school A under your Education and Training Service from 21st of March to 9th of April, 2011.
My research is aimed at exploring the fifth-year student perception of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The research process will be undertaken in the following manner:

__ Visiting the school: I will visit the school to have a meeting with the principal and the teacher staff to provide the background information of the research.
__ Selecting participants: I will invite the principal, two fifth-year teachers and classes to participate in the research. Prior to the selection, all the participants will be fully provided necessary information about the research for their consideration to participation. Their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantages of any kind.
__ Collecting data: I will make several class observations, conducting interview and questionnaire to the principal, fifth-year teachers and students.

This research has been assessed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

For more information about the process and procedures of my data collection, please find the Research Information sheet.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

I would be grateful if you could provide me a recommendation letter to conduct the research. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Letter to the Director of District 1 Education and Training Service

Subject: *Asking for permission to conduct research*

Dear ………………………………………………

I am a master student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. I write this letter to ask for your permission in order to implement my research in school Luong The Vinh under your Education and Training Service from 21st of March to 29th of April, 2011.

My research is aimed at exploring the fifth-year student perception of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The research process will be undertaken in the following manner:

__ Visiting the school: I will visit the school to have a meeting with the principal and the teacher staff to provide the background information of the research.

__ Selecting participants: I will invite the principal, two fifth-year teachers and classes to participate in the research. Prior to the selection, all the participants will be fully provided necessary information about the research for their consideration to participation. Their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantages of any kind.

__ Collecting data: I will make several class observations, conducting interview and questionnaire to the principal, fifth-year teachers and students.

This research has been assessed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

For more information about the process and procedures of my data collection, please find the Research Information sheet.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

I would be grateful if you could provide me a recommendation letter to conduct the research. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Letter to the Director of District 3 Education and Training Service

Subject: *Asking for permission to conduct research*

Dear ……………………………………………

I am a master student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. I write this letter to ask for your permission in order to implement my research in school Nguyen Son Ha and Luong Dinh Cua under your Education and Training Service from 21st of March to 29th of April, 2011.

My research is aimed at exploring the fifth-year student perception of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The research process will be undertaken in the following manner:

__ Visiting the school: I will visit the school to have a meeting with the principal and the teacher staff to provide the background information of the research.

__ Selecting participants: I will invite the principal, two fifth-year teachers and classes to participate in the research. Prior to the selection, all the participants will be fully provided necessary information about the research for their consideration to participation. Their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantages of any kind.

__ Collecting data: I will make several class observations, conducting interview and questionnaire to the principal, fifth-year teachers and students.

This research has been assessed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

For more information about the process and procedures of my data collection, please find the Research Information sheet.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

I would be grateful if you could provide me a recommendation letter to conduct the research. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Letter to the Principal

Subject: *Asking for permission to conduct research*

Dear ………………………………………………

I am a Master In Education at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. I write this letter to ask for your permission in order to implement my research in your school from 21st of March to 29th of April, 2011.

My research is aimed at exploring upper-primary students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language. The research process will be undertaken in the following manner:

__ Visiting the school: I will visit your school to have a meeting with you and your teacher staff to provide the background information of the research.

__ Selecting participants: I will invite you (the principal), two teachers and students in these classes to participate in the research. Prior to the selection, all the participants will be fully provided necessary information about the research for their consideration to participation. Their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantages of any kind.

__ Collecting data: I will make several observations with video records of Vietnamese language teaching periods during two continuous weeks. The videos will only be used to record lessons and they will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor. After that, students in two classes will be asked to complete a questionnaire which takes up to 30 minutes. From the third week, six students from each class will be invited for the individual interview. Each interview session will take up to 30 minutes and will be audio recorded. You and the teachers will be also invited for a 30 minute interview.

This research has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. I would like to assure that all the identities relating to the participants will be protected. However, there is a possibility that the school and the principal would be identified. Because the school is the only one in Vietnam implementing small groups, it is impossible to protect the school's and the principal's identity though pseudonyms will be used. This possibility will be presented in the information sheet. All the information will be kept confidential. No information obtained in the study will be discussed with anyone other than my supervisor and me and the participants without their written permission.

For more information about the process and procedures of my data collection, please find the Research Information sheet. The Recommendation Letter from Education and Training Service of Ho Chi Minh City and The Third District are attached for your consideration.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

I would be very grateful if you could grant me permission to conduct the research. I hope that you will be willing to help me to conduct the research successfully.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Appendix C:

Research information sheet to the principals, teachers, students, and parents

 VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

<div style="border:1px solid black">Principal</div>

Research information sheet

Dear ……………………………………..

I am a Master in Education at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. My research is aimed at exploring fifth-year students' perceptions of small group teaching in learning Vietnamese language.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I really appreciate your participation and believe that your cooperation will be valuable for my research.

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be invited to be available for one audio-recorded individual interview to provide basic information about small group teaching and learning in your school. It is envisaged that interview will take you thirty minutes. The detailed schedule of the research will be discussed in an initial meeting.

Please aware that there is a possibility that the school and your identity would be identified. Because the school is the only one in Ho Chi Minh City implementing small group teaching, it is impossible to protect the school's and the principal's identity though pseudonyms will be used. No information obtained from you will be discussed with anyone other than my supervisor. All data will be stored securely in locked cabinet or password protected computer file and it will be destroyed after 5 years. During your participation, if you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantage of any kind.

I would like to assure that the study will strictly adhere to the Human Ethics Policy promulgated by Victoria University of Wellington. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please read this information sheet carefully before signing the consent form enclosed. Please aware that you may decide not to take part in the study without and disadvantages to yourself of any kind.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Research information sheet

Dear ....

I am a Master in Education at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. My research is aimed at exploring fifth-year students' perceptions of small group teaching in learning Vietnamese language.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I really appreciate your participation and believe that your cooperation will be valuable for my research.

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be invited to be available for one audio-recorded individual interview, and being video recorded during Vietnamese teaching periods during two weeks. The videos will only be used to record lessons and they will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor. It is envisaged that interview will take thirty minutes. The detailed schedule of the research will be discussed in an initial meeting.

Your identity will be protected at all stages of the research unless prior written consent has been obtained from you for it to be disclosed. All the research information will be kept confidential. No information obtained from the participants will be discussed with anyone other than my supervisor. The responses to the questionnaire should be return anonymously. All data will be stored securely in locked cabinet or password protected computer file and it will be destroyed after 5 years. During your participation, if you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantage of any kind.

I would like to assure that the study will strictly adhere to the Human Ethics Policy promulgated by Victoria University of Wellington. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please read this information sheet carefully before signing the consent form enclosed. Please aware that you may decide not to take part in the study without and disadvantages to yourself of any kind.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Research information sheet

Dear ....

I am a Master in Education at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. My research is aimed at exploring fifth-year students' perceptions of small group teaching in learning Vietnamese language.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I really appreciate your participation and believe that your cooperation will be valuable for my research.

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be invited to be available for:

_ One audio-recorded individual interview which will take you thirty minutes;

_ A questionnaire, which will take about twenty to thirty minutes to complete;

_ And being video recorded during Vietnamese teaching periods during two weeks. The videos will only be used to record lessons and they will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor.

The detailed schedule of the research will be discussed in an initial meeting.

Your identity will be protected at all stages of the research unless prior written consent has been obtained from you for it to be disclosed. All the research information will be kept confidential. No information obtained from the participants will be discussed with anyone outside my supervisor. The responses to the questionnaire should be return anonymously. All data will be stored securely in locked cabinet or password protected computer file and it will be destroyed after 5 years. During your participation, if you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may withdraw from the research at any time without any disadvantage of any kind.

I would like to assure that the study will strictly adhere to the Human Ethics Policy promulgated by Victoria University of Wellington. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please read this information sheet carefully before signing the consent form enclosed. Please aware that you may decide not to take part in the study without and disadvantages to yourself of any kind.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Research information sheet

Dear …………………………………

I am a Master in Education at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of this degree, I am required to undertake a research leading to a thesis. My research is aimed at exploring fifth-year students' perceptions of small group teaching in learning Vietnamese language.

I would like to invite your child to participate in this study. I really appreciate your child's participation and believe that his/ her cooperation will be valuable for my research.

If you agree to let him/her participate in this project, s/he will be invited to be available for one audio-recorded individual interview, and complete a questionnaire, and be video recorded during Vietnamese teaching periods during two weeks. The videos will only be used to record lessons and they will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor. It is envisaged that interview will take thirty minutes. The questionnaire will take about twenty to thirty minutes to complete. The detailed schedule of the research will be discussed in an initial meeting.

Your child's identity will be protected at all stages of the research unless prior written consent has been obtained from you for it to be disclosed. All the research information will be kept confidential. No information obtained from the participants will be discussed with anyone other than my supervisor. The responses to the questionnaire will be remained confidential. All data will be stored securely in locked cabinet or password protected computer file and it will be destroyed after 5 years. During your child's participation, if s/he feels hesitant or uncomfortable, s/he may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may withdraw from the research at any time.

I would like to assure that the study will strictly adhere to the Human Ethics Policy promulgated by Victoria University of Wellington. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to let your child take part in this research, please read this information sheet carefully before signing the consent form enclosed. Please aware that you may decide not to take part in the study without and disadvantages to yourself of any kind.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at Primary Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. My cellphone number is (0084) 985156810 or (0064) 2102498845; my email: nlhainhu97@gmail.com or nguyenluon@vuw.ac.nz; or you can contact my supervisor: Douglas Ferry at Doug.Ferry@vuw.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Appendix D:

Consent forms to the principals, teachers, students, and parents

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Principal

Principal's Consent Form

Project Title:

FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT PERCEPTION OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING

IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

Researcher: Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Tick the boxes below to show that you agree with each statement.

☐ I have been given and have understood an explanation of the research objectives.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I also understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any stage without disadvantage at any kind.

☐ I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential and will not be linked to my name.

☐ I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research and that any further use will require my written consent.

☐ I understand that the notes and recordings made for the project will be destroyed five years after the conclusion of the research.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

    Email:

    Address:

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____   Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____   Date: _____

(This subject will be given a copy of this consent to keep after signing)

Teacher's Consent Form

Project Title:

FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT PERCEPTION OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING

IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

Researcher: Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Tick the boxes below to show that you agree with each statement.

☐ I have been given and have understood an explanation of the research objectives.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I also understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any stage without disadvantage at any kind.

☐ I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential and will not be linked to my name.

☐ I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research and that any further use will require my written consent.

☐ I understand that the notes and recordings made for the project will be destroyed five years after the conclusion of the research.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

  Email:

  Address:

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____ Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

(This subject will be given a copy of this consent to keep after signing)

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Student's Consent Form

Project Title:

FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT PERCEPTION OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING

IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

Researcher: Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Tick the boxes below to show that you agree with each statement.

❑ I have been given and have understood an explanation of the research objectives.

❑ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

❑ I also understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any stage without disadvantage at any kind.

❑ I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential and will not be linked to my name.

❑ I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research and that any further use will require my written consent.

❑ I understand that the notes and recordings made for the project will be destroyed five years after the conclusion of the research.

❑ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

     Email:

     Address:

❑ I agree to take part in this research.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____ Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

(This subject will be given a copy of this consent to keep after signing)

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Parents' Consent Form

Project Title:

FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT PERCEPTION OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING

IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

Researcher: Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Tick the boxes below to show that you agree with each statement.

☐ I have been given and have understood an explanation of the research objectives.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her participation from this project at any stage without disadvantage at any kind.

☐ I understand that any information s/he provides will be kept confidential and will not be linked to his/ her name.

☐ I understand that the information s/he has provided will be used only for this research and that any further use will require my written consent.

☐ I understand that the notes and recordings made for the project will be destroyed five years after the conclusion of the research.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

    Email:

    Address:

☐ I agree to let my child take part in this research.

Name of participant: _____ Name of parents: _____

Signature: _____ Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

(This subject will be given a copy of this consent to keep after signing)

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Appendix E: Observation instrument

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

OBSERVATION SHEET

Class: Group:

Student for time-on-task check (pseudonym):

Subject:

Date:

Moment	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 : first 10 mins	Argumentation					
	Division work					
	Listening					
	Cognitive stimulation					
	Social stimulation					
	Climate					
	Decision making					
	Time on task (student A)					
2 : second 10 mins	Argumentation					
	Division work					
	Listening					
	Cognitive stimulation					
	Social stimulation					
	Climate					
	Decision making					
	Time on task (student A)					
3 : last 10 mins	Argumentation					
	Division work					
	Listening					
	Cognitive stimulation					
	Social stimulation					
	Climate					
	Decision making					
	Time on task (student A)					
Min 35'	Time on task (student A)					

Appendix F: Questionnaire instrument

![Victoria University of Wellington logo]

QUESTIONNAIRE SHEET

PART A:

This part will ask you some general information about your work when learning in small group. Please tick to provide your information.

Name: …………………………………………….. Class: …………………….

1. Sex: Male Female

2. Your average score of Vietnamese language: …………………………………………...

3. How long have you been taught in small group?

a. 1 year b. 2 years c. 3 years d. 4 years

4. How many students per group do you often work with?

a. just me b. 2 – 4 c. 4 – 6 d. more than 6

5. What type of group do you usually work with?

a. same level b. mix level c. same gender d. mix gender

6. Who usually decide your group type?

a. my teacher b. my classmates and I

c. both (teacher and us) d. others (please provide)

7. Do you often speak loudly when working in group?

a. yes b. no

8. Do you feel annoyed if someone talking too loudly that affects to your group discussion?

a. yes b. no

9. Has your teacher taught you not to speak too loudly when working in group?

a. yes b. no

PART B:

On the scale below, please indicate your feelings about your small group work in learning Vietnamese language. Tick the column that best represents your feelings as this scale:

Always   Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

No.	Statements	Always	Often	Some times	Rarely	Never
1	I ……….. complete the task better when learning in group.					
2	I………. like working in group more than individually when learning Vietnamese.					
3	In group, I …………. feel stressed, overwhelmed when other students work faster than I do.					
4	I ……….... feel Vietnamese lessons are more interesting when learning them in group.					
5	I ……….. feel it is easier to talk to others when learning in group.					
6	I ……… understand/ know others better when learning with them in a group.					
7	I …….. feel more confident after working in group.					
8	I ……….. tell other kids that they did something well.					
9	I………. listen to what other members talk when we are working in group.					
10	It's ……… boring to work in group.					
11	I ………….. help friends who have difficulties in learning when we work in group.					
12	I am ………… the person who makes useful contribution during group discussion.					

13	My group-mates ………. ignore me or my ideas during discussion.					
14	We ……… divide tasks equally.					
15	Other members in group ………. listen to me.					
16	I ……… do my best when working in group.					
17	My group size is ………. too big for an effective group work.					
18	I ……………prefer working with same-level groupmates.					
19	I ………… prefer working with same-gender groupmates.					
20	When in group, we ……… talk about things that have nothing to do with the task.					
21	I ………. prefer having direct-instruction from the teacher to learning from my groupmates.					
22	I ………. understand the teacher's instructions for a group task.					
23	I ……… prefer being assessed individually.					
24	I ……………prefer my group rewarded for whole group performance.					
25	I…………… prefer my group rewarded for each individual's contribution.					

Thank you for your participation ! ☺

Appendix G: Interview instruments for the students, teachers, and principals

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

1. In your own experience, how do you feel about learning in small groups during the Vietnamese teaching periods?

Probing: like/ dislike; working in group, learn more from friends; do not know what to follow…

2. What type of grouping do you often work with? What do you feel about that type? Which type do you prefer to learn in?

Probing: same level groups in achievement/ gender; teacher selected groups; student selected groups…

3. How many students are usually there in your group? What do you feel about it?

Probing: small/ large group

4. What do you think about your role in your group, especially during task time?

Probing: leader, contributor, nothing…

5. What do you think about the assessment for your work in a group? If you can choose the current assessment, what will you choose?

Probing: reward group for individual work, reward group for group work, reward individual for individual work…

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QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

1. In your own experience, how do your students like about learning Vietnamese in small groups?

Probing: more active, discussing, problem-solving…

2. Which benefits of small group learning do you think your students get most?

Probing: academic achievement, social communication skills…

3. How do you often help the groups to work effectively?

Probing: teaching small group skills, classify groups, different kinds of supporting…

4. What kind of problems have you had when teaching Vietnamese in group? What do you do to minimize them?

Probing: group works ineffectively, students talk more than discuss…

5. What kinds of assessment do you apply for your classroom when teaching Vietnamese? Do you think it works effectively?

Probing: reward group for individual work, reward group for group work, reward individual for individual work…

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

1. In what ways, have you introduced small group teaching and learning to promote your students' academic achievement and social skills?

Probing: cooperation, competition…

2. In your opinion, how do students in your school like about learning Vietnamese when studying in groups?

Probing: academic achievement, leaderships, social skills…

3. What are some challenges you see when using small group teaching and learning?

Probing: non-cooperation among students, teacher staff's experience of teaching this method, financial issues, the suitability of current national curriculum to the teaching model, parents' reaction…

4. What are some changes you would consider in the future to use this model of teaching regarding to the challenges you have just mentioned above?

Probing: peer coaching among teacher staff, encouragement to use additional materials for teaching…

Appendix H: Confirmation letter of language appropriate to student participants

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12 March 2011

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Med Student

Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education

C/- School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy

Donald Street

Wellington

Dear Ms. Nhu,

RE: **Confirmation letter of language appropriation for the Questionnaire to Vietnamese Upper-primary Students**

This is to confirm that the Questionnaire and the translation to Vietnamese language that will be used in your survey is language appropriate to Vietnamese students from age 9 to 10.

Best wishes for your research.

Yours sincerely,

Association Professor Dr. Nguyen Thi Ly Kha

Dean of Primary Department

Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy

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12 March 2011

Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Med Student

Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education

C/- School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy

Donald Street

Wellington

Dear Nhu,

RE: **Confirmation letter of language appropriation for the Questionnaire to Vietnamese Fifth-year Students**

This is to confirm you that your Questionnaire and its translation to Vietnamese language for the survey of *"Fifth-year students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language"*, with request amendments, is language appropriate to Vietnamese upper-primary students.

Best wishes for your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hoang Thi Tuyet

Chairman of Research Committee

Primary Department

Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy

Appendix I: Summary sheet

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

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UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

SUMMARY SHEET FORM

Project Title:

FIFTH-YEAR STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SMALL GROUP LEARNING

IN LEARNING VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

Researcher: Nguyen Luong Hai Nhu

Name of participant:

Research methodologies	Observation	Questionnaire	Interview
Main findings			

Appendix J: Demographic data of student participants in the survey

1. Students' gender

GENDER	CLASS								Total	Per cen tage (%)
	Y4	%	X4	%	Z4	%	X5	%		
girl	14	*58.33*	23	*67.65*	17	*43.59*	17	*53.13*	**71**	*55.04*
boy	10	*41.67*	11	*32.35*	22	*56.41*	15	*46.87*	**58**	*44.96*
missing	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	**0**	*0*
Total	24	*100*	34	*100*	39	*100*	32	*100*	**129**	*100*

Most classes had more female students than male, except Z4. The percentage of female to male among classes was quite similar to each other, except X4 with the number of girls was twice of boys. There was no missing answer for gender.

2. Students' achievement

ACHIEVEMENT	CLASS								Total	Per cen tage (%)
	Y4	%	X4	%	Z4	%	X5	%		
below average	2	*8.33*	4	*11.76*	3	*7.69*	0	*0*	**9**	*6.98*
average	15	*62.5*	8	*23.53*	7	*17.95*	0	*0*	**30**	*23.26*
high	6	*25.0*	20	*58.82*	27	*69.23*	32	*100*	**85**	*65.89*
missing	1	*4.17*	2	*5.88*	2	*5.13*	0	*0*	**5**	*3.86*
Total	24	*100*	34	*100*	39	*100*	32	*100*	**129**	*100*

Most of participants were high achievement level with nearly two third of the total number of participants (65.89%). Y4 had least high-achieving students (6 in total of 24), X5 was reversely with 100% participants. The other two classes had similar percentage of achievement levels. There were 5 respondents (3.86%) who did not state their achievement status.

3. Years of studying in small groups

YEAR OF LEARNING IN SMALL GROUP	CLASS								Total	*Per cen tage (%)*
	Y4	*%*	**X4**	*%*	**Z4**	*%*	**X5**	*%*		
1	1	*4.17*	8	*23.53*	15	*38.46*	2	*6.25*	**26**	*20.16*
2	2	*8.33*	11	*32.35*	10	*25.64*	29	*90.63*	**52**	*40.31*
3	8	*33.33*	3	*8.82*	6	*15.38*	1	*3.13*	**18**	*13.95*
4	13	*54.17*	12	*35.29*	8	*20.51*	0	*0*	**33**	*25.58*
missing	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	**0**	*0*
Total	24	*100*	34	*100*	39	*100*	32	*100*	**129**	*100*

Most of participants stated that they have learnt in small groups for two school-years (40.31%) in which X5 showed the highest percentage with 90.63% respondents. More than half of students in Y4 reported of learning in groups for four years (54.17%); whereas a great number of Z4 students stated of one year learning in small groups (38.46%). There was no missing answer.

Appendix K: Correlations between students' gender and learning achievement and each factor of students' perceptions of small group learning in learning Vietnamese language

			GENDER	ACHIEVE	F5	F4	F2	F3	F1	N
S p e a r m a n' s r h o	GENDER	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.107	-.070	-.175	.053	.026	-.255 (**)	-.146
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.236	.431	.052	.556	.771	.004	.118
		N	129	124	129	123	128	123	128	115
	ACHIEVE M	Correlation Coefficient	-.107	1.000	.019	.241 (**)	-.265 (**)	.030	.352 (**)	.202 (*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.236	.	.833	.009	.003	.745	.000	.034
		N	124	124	124	118	123	118	123	110
	F5	Correlation Coefficient	-.070	.019	1.000	.406 (**)	.209 (*)	.222 (*)	.321 (**)	.651 (**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.431	.833	.	.000	.018	.014	.000	.000
		N	129	124	129	123	128	123	128	115
	F4	Correlation Coefficient	-.175	.241(**)	.406 (**)	1.000	.003	.025	.611 (**)	.792 (**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	.009	.000	.	.972	.790	.000	.000
		N	123	118	123	123	122	117	122	115
	F2	Correlation Coefficient	.053	-.265 (**)	.209 (*)	.003	1.000	.029	-.200 (*)	.260 (**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.556	.003	.018	.972	.	.751	.024	.005
		N	128	123	128	122	128	122	127	115
	F3	Correlation Coefficient	.026	.030	.222 (*)	.025	.029	1.000	.153	.356 (**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.771	.745	.014	.790	.751	.	.091	.000
		N	123	118	123	117	122	123	122	115
	F1	Correlation Coefficient	-.255 (**)	.352 (**)	.321 (**)	.611 (**)	-.200 (*)	.153	1.000	.755 (**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	.000	.024	.091	.	.000
		N	128	123	128	122	127	122	128	115
	N	Correlation Coefficient	-.146	.202 (*)	.651 (**)	.792 (**)	.260 (**)	.356 (**)	.755 (**)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	.034	.000	.000	.005	.000	.000	.
		N	115	110	115	115	115	115	115	115

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The table showed that there were correlations but not significant between students' gender and achievement and their overall perceptions as well as each factor.

Appendix L: Students' profile for the interview session

TAPE CODE	NAME CODE	GEN DER	ACHIEVE MENT	PERSONALITY	CONDITION of interview
A_07	z416	F	High	High achievement, confident	on stairway during studying time
A_08	z424	M	High	High achievement, very shy, talkless	first at teacher room but being curious by a female teacher; therefore changed to stairway
A_09	z423	M	Below average	Low achievement, shy	on stairway during studying time, distracted by some workers
A_10	z414	F	Average	Average achievement, leader	id
A_11	z41	F	Below average	Low achievement, very shy	id
A_12	z425	M	Average	Average achievement	id
A_15	y42	F	High	High achievement, shy, many times cannot give reasons for her choice	on stairway during studying time, not be distracted by people, but still noisy from class
A_16	y416	M	Below average	Low achievement	id
A_17	y41	F	Below average	Low achievement, confident, talkative	id
A_18	y417	M	High	High achievement, confident	id
A_19	y415	M	Average	Average achievement	id
A_20	y44	F	Average	Average achievement	id
A_34	x422	F	Average	shy, don't remember time	at the hall during the break-time. There were a lot of students around us

A_35	x433	M	High	shy, talkless	id
A_36	x434	M	Average	Average achievement	id
A_37	x432	M	Below average	Chinese Vietnamese, low Vietnamese capacity (according to the Teacher)	id
A_38	x423	F	High	high achievement, confident	id
A_39	x421	F	Below average	low achievement, confident	id
A_40	x52	F	High	High achievement, very confident	in the library, not been affected by crossing pupils
A_41	x518	M	High	High achievement, shy, many times cannot give reasons for his choice	id
A_42	x53	F	High	High achievement, quite confident	id
A_43	x520	M	High	High achievement, talkless	group interview in the library because lack of time
A_43	x51	F	High	High achievement, very confident	id
A_43	x519	M	High	High achievement, a little bit shy	id

Note: F = female, M = male

Appendix M: Teachers and principals' profile for the interview session

TAPE CODE	NAME CODE	GENDER	AGE	YEARS OF TEACHING	YEARS OF TRAINING IN SMALL GROUP TEACHING
A_01	Tx4	F	40+	20+	1
A_02 + 03	Tx5	F	45+	25+	4
A_06	Ty4	F	40+	20+	4
A_13	Tz4	F	25+	4	1
A_45	VPx	M	50+	25+	4