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EDUCATION AS DIACONAL TASK OF THE CHURCH IN VIET NAM: A STUDY OF SELECTED CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS AS AGENCIES OF EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa, famously stated that, "(d)estroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or long- range missiles, but it requires lowering the quality of education and allowing cheating on exams by students" (cited by Prosper, 2017, n.d). This statement is the correct description of education while cheating in exams and "achievement disease" have been an existing reality of education in Viet Nam since 1975. This situation is a challenge for all people in the country and also for the church. It is also an opportunity for the church to take its role and responsibility on education. Therefore, this thesis is undertaken to explore the diaconal work of the Christian church in Viet Nam for empowerment through its educational program. The most important feature of the Christian educational program compared to the educational system of Viet Nam is its foundation on biblical values and its emphasis both on character building and knowledge mastery individually. I present theories relating to education as diaconal task of the church for empowerment. For this thesis, the data was collected from two different Christian schools in two different parts of Viet Nam, one in the North and the other in the South. In order to answer the research question, I chose qualitative research in which I selected ten informants including pastors (founders of Christian schools), Christian teachers, and parents of pupils. In addition data was also collected from one public school. I selected five informants that included three teachers and the parents of two pupils. After analyzing the data, the results revealed that education is a practical diaconal task of the Christian church in Viet Nam for empowerment while it affirms the contribution of the church in the educational sector of Viet Nam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS!

ACE: Accelerated Christian Education

CSM: Church's School Ministry

CEP: Christian educational program

EFE: Education for Empowerment

HTTLTLVN: Vietnamese Presbyterian Church (Hội Thánh Tin Lành Trưởng Lão Việt Nam

MOET: Ministry of Education and Training

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

VE: Vietnamese Education

Table of Content

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

This research is attempting to answer the question: In what ways do selected Christian Schools in Viet Nam function as agencies of empowerment through their educational program? Two Christian schools in Viet Nam from two different parts of the country – one in the North and one in the South were selected for the research. Achieving quality education is listed as Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by 193 member states of the United Nations in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). This reinforces the mandate that "Education for Empowerment" (EFE) should be at the top of the church's mandate to continue its *missio- Dei* to the world. It is one of the key ways for developing sustainable communities and nations socially and economically. EFE is believed to be one of the main ways to wipe out poverty and bring positive changes that ensure better quality of life (UNESCO, 2015)

Empowerment has been understood in different ways according to its complexity. According to Rowland, since the term "empowerment" has its root in the concept of "power", it is essential to be aware of four different forms of power: power over, power to, power with, power from within hfor better understanding of empowerment. By looking at these four forms of power, empowerment can be interpreted as a process in which a person can achieve or increase his or her own capacities or abilities to act subjectively in different contexts (Rowland, 1997:13). Furthermore, from a diaconal perspective empowerment relates to the biblical notion of the *imago Dei* (humankind was created in the image of God), which implies that each human being is bestowed with capacities and abilities to be the subjects of their own destiny (Ham, 2014: 108-109). This understanding is consistent with Nordstokke's interpretation linked to the promise of Pentecost recorded in the book of Acts 1: 8 as a process whereby a person is dignified and becoming the subject of his or her own life in the relation to others and to participate in the society (Nordstokke, 2012: 45). In the view of answering the question in this thesis, empowerment is understood in this way.

This chapter constitutes the introduction to my thesis. Accordingly, in the following discussion I will present general information about the topic, the context which sets the stage for my research, my personal motivation for choosing the topic and the limitation of the research. Concering religious freedom condition in Viet Nam, I would like to present a statement regarding confidentiality before going into more details to the study.

1.2 Statement of confidentiality

Religion is a sensitive issue and the Christian community is still in suspicion in Vietnamese society. According to the principal of Christian school in the South of Viet Nam selected for this study, the educational work of his church can be stopped in a blink of an eye by Vietnamese government. As resulted, he needs to walk in faith and pray for God's protection for the educational ministry of the church to continue. I realize it is important to take ethical issues into consideration regarding this research. According to Bryman, ethical issues relates directly to the integrity of the research which includes how the researcher should treat his or her informants (Bryman, 2012: 130-132). Thus, it is my responsibility as a researcher to guard against negative consequences or harm to my informants and to the work of these two selected Christian schools and to the work of Christian Education as a whole in Viet Nam. Therefore, for the safety of my informants and their work, all their private information should be treated confidentially. To ensure this, the names of the Christian organizations in specific locations are therefore not identified in the publication of the findings. In addition, I decided to anonymize names of all informants involved and use aliases. Concerning the location of each school, I only mention the school in the North and school in the South to distinguish the two. This should be applied to treat other informants at a state school where I have undertaken the research as evident to compare with Christian education. Since the selected state school is located at an island village in Quang Ninh province of the North Viet Nam. I only mention it as a school at an island village to identify it and the names of all teachers and parents who participated in my research would be anonymized and use aliases instead.

1.3 Personal motivation

I started working in church as a Sunday School teacher since 1999. For me, one of the most meaningful aspirations in life is that all children I encounter will grow up to their fullest potential and be able to become whom God created. As a tradition, my church gathered all church's children

in a church leader's house each summer holiday to teach them the words of God and to help them with their studies at schools. The purpose of my church was to create an environment where children in church could both play and learn to live together in a Christian manner and then go out to be witnesses of Christ. As a result, all children look forward to each summer holiday, while they also improved in their studies at schools and gained courage to walk along the street to share gospel to other people with confidence. Since then I realized the importance of Christian Education and the powerful impact of Christian Education is to grow children to their fullest potentials.

The second reason that motivated me to choose this research topic is that as a Vietnamese, I witness many negative issues in the Vietnamese educational sector that appears daily on national media. Scientific professor Quách Đình Liên of Pacific Ocean University at Ho Chi Minh city said that Vietnamese education has not met the demands of developing human resources and society. Prof. Quách explained that it is an ambitious education to convey knowledge and focus on exam results and with current thinking of Vietnamese Education is the cause of negatives consequences such as: countless fraudulences and corruptions in examinations which become a habit and build up people without integrity since they are at schools and later in the work place. Quách believed that, maintaining current education will ruin younger generations from both their morality and their capacity (Quách Đình Liên, 2017). Thus, Vietnamese Education is considered outdated, with inappropriate content which is based on Marxist Leninist socialism and poor quality for international integration.

A statistic of the Ministry of Education and Training shows that in 2016 there were 472.000 high school English exam papers in which only 10 candidates got a score of 10 (a possible maximum score), and 0,05% of the papers got scores of 9- 10. The papers that obtained the scores of 2,4 points pertained to the majority of the candidates. Another statistic showed that more than 90% of the high school and university applicants got under-average scores in English and the average scores was 3, 48 in the scale of grading from 1- 10 (Minh Nhật, 2017).

At the end of 2017, I contacted one of my best friends and learn that she was working at a Christian school in South Viet Nam. When I heard about how the church school ministry started and has been going on until now, it convinced me to undertake this research.

1.4 An overview of the research and its research focus

This thesis utilizes qualitative research in the form of a case study to explore how the school-ministry of churches in Viet Nam functions as agencies of empowerment through their educational program. My case study focuses specially on how empowerment can take place through the educational program in two Christian schools operating respectively in the North and the South of Viet Nam.

In my own view, church school-ministry makes an important contribution together with the National Education Sector to develop the next generation of citizens with superior knowledge, skills and quality labor force for the economic market in the innovation era and the development of Viet Nam. Christian Education is based on Christian values that emphasizes mastering knowledge, skills-development and character building in bilinguals both in Vietnamese and English. Therefore, Christian Education excels in quality when compared with National Education System. As a level 8 pupil has remarked disappointedly in a survey of the Ministry of Education and Training on the general opinions about the project of Education Reformation throughout the country:

> "There is no other words to describe Vietnamese Education (VE), so I must use this word that VE has become too putrid. So, there is nothing to reform VE, but VE must be revolutionized. If you, as Minister of Education don't do it now, I will do it in the future when I become the Minister of Education" (VOA, 2015)

This thesis is undertaken to explore the understanding and practice of Christian forms of education for empowerment through both observing and interviewing those who are involved in promoting this education model (pastors, Christian educators/ teachers) as well as those who experience empowerment. I interviewed those who experienced the empowerment of their children through their studies at Christian schools. Christian Educational Program in Viet Nam are open to all, both Christians and non- Christians, from kindergarten children to high-school pupils.

In addition, I managed to include as part of my study one state school for the comparison between Christian school and state schools in terms of the concept and experience of empowerment that education would contribute. My hope is to create a nuanced view on empowerment through Christian Educational Program and how it is in comparing to state education.

In this study I will explore the nexus between theories of empowerment and education, together with the ecclesiological theories, as theoretical framework for the discussion of my empirical data and the answering of my research question. The question that I am going to answer is:

> *As expression of the diaconal task of the church in Viet Nam, in what ways do the Christian school function as agencies of empowerment through their educational program?*

As this study focuses on how Christian school function as agencies of empowerment through educational program, the research applies a qualitative methodology. Among many Christian denominations in Viet Nam, school church ministry was started by a Baptist pastor (Pastor John) 6 years ago in the South of Viet Nam. Since then a noticeable number of Christian schools were established mainly in the South, while only two were started in the North. Due to the limitations of a one-semester thesis and the similarities among these Christian schools, only two were selected for my case study research. One of them is the Christian school that opened most recently in the North of Viet Nam, existing now for approximately one year.

In addition, I managed to include as part of my study one state school for the comparison between Christian school and state schools in terms of the concept and experience of empowerment that education would contribute. Also, I selected three categories of interviewees. Category 1 consisted of pastors / Christians educational founders. Category 2 consisted of Christian teachers who work for the selected Christian Schools. Category 3 comprised of parents whose children study at the Christian schools. However, Category 1 and 2 were sometimes combined during my writings because they share common in terms of working and advocating for empowerment through educational program. Separate from the members of Category 3 consisted of pupils who were supposed to experience empowerment. Regarding state school, I selected three teachers and two parents as interviewees. My hope is that conducting the interviews and participant observation would help to create a nuanced view on empowerment through Christian Educational Program and how it is in comparing to state education.

1.5 Significance and aim of the study

This thesis deals with the diaconal work of the church in Viet Nam for empowerment through its educational program. As noted, the church as God's people, the community of faith whom God has saved and given the mandate to be the continuity of the *missio Dei* on earth, is tasked with

bringing about divine changes wherever it is present, that is not only through the Gospel in words but also by the Gospel in action. However, it is an undeniable fact that the churches in Viet Nam have put too much emphasis on the "Gospel in words" at the cost of the "Gospel in action". At the same time it needs to be acknowledged that is not easy to be Christian in a country where all religious activities are strictly managed and controlled by the Viet Nam government, based on its mandate to act against those who misuse religions to fight against the communist government and attempt to break the great unity of the nation. A new law on religion was scheduled to be affected on Jan the 1st 2018 that "all religious activities must be registered and approved by Vietnamese authorities" (21/ 2004/ PL- UBTVQH 11 referenced by Đặng Tuấn Cường, 2018). In other words, the authorities have all the right to refuse or approve the legal status of religious programmes or organizations. This seems to be a huge development concerning religious freedom in VN, but in contrary Vietnamese new law aims to take more control on religious practices and activities.

It follows that the above- development became a reasonable excuse for Vietnamese churches to focus only on the Gospel in words. However, I believe that bringing changes and transformation belong to the nature and responsibility of the church where it is located. As the church itself constitutes the extension of God's mission, God has bestowed his power on the church with all its authority from the days of Pentecost (Gohee, 2014: 13- 14%). During the mid-1970s, Loren Cunningham and Bill Bright introduced a God-given strategy to make changes to nations by reaching seven spheres called seven societal influences in which education constitutes one sphere (YWAM, 2016). Education for empowerment is a bottom-up approach for societal transformation and a sustainable future (Ham, 2014: 110). However, this raises the question why Viet Nam society has remained as it is from generation to generation? And why there are still tensions between the church and Vietnamese society? I believe the main reason for this situation between the church and the society is that the church has lost its nature and identity as it should be – a missional church as well as a diaconal church.

I am arguing in this study that all education should serve the goals of empowerment. In this light my study seeks to explore the ways in which Christian school function as agencies of empowerment. As mentioned above, all human beings are created with dignity, capacity and ability and education for empowerment is a process in which people reach to their fullest of potential for being subjects of their own destiny and for their participation in the society. With this

fundamental conviction in mind, my aim is to determine more closely the role, responsibility and the resources of the church in bringing positive changes individually and socially through its empowerment role. Through this understanding, my hope is to serve as some inspiration for church leaders in Viet Nam to take challenges to practice diaconal work to build inclusive and developed communities as well as to add more insights on educational work for empowerment.

1.6 Limitations of the research

Since the two selected Christian schools have started recently and education is a long process to empower people and since the societal influence of the two selected Christian schools are still very humble, so my research did not cover the success rate statistics of the program. Interviews and participant observation served to understand the empowerment in the perspectives of "insiders" (Chambliss & Schutt, 2010). Moreover, I was not be able to get an agreement of state school at the same region with the Christian schools except one school from an island far away from the region of the two selected Christian schools are located. However, the Vietnamese educational system, curriculum, policies and targets are directed synchronously by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to provinces and cities nationwide, so there would not be any big differences. Another limitation I would like to make clear is that the comparison of Christian education with national education is not for any political purpose or with any attempt to fight against the state school. I just want to offer a clear picture on what are the limitations of national education so that Christian churches may understand its role, potential to find the ways to serve the community and the nation through its work of education.

1.7 Definitions of terms

This section provides definitions of key terms related to the main topic of the thesis.

1.7.1 The church

Almost all churches in Viet Nam are in basic agreement about an understanding of the church as not merely a place or building of worship. Instead, the definition of the church is based on the word "ekklesia" used in New Testament Bible which means "the called-out ones" or "group of people are called out of the world by God to worship him" (Evangelical Dictionary of the Bible online). Vietnamese pastor Đặng Ngọc Báu defines the church in a document on Christian basic doctrines which has been used widely in Vietnamese churches. According to this definition that:

7

The Church is a collective of worshipers of God, believing in Christ Jesus, and being united in the Holy Spirit all over the world. That great community of faith is called the universal church. But some people have the same faith, in the same locality and join together worshipping God and follow His teachings, that collective is called the local church. The Church is the sacred body of Christ (Dang Ngoc Bau, 2013).

Thus, the Vietnamese churches define church as the living people of God living out their faith in the world, more than the building itself (HTTLVN, 2012: 40)

The above definition of the church is consistent with the affirmation of the ecclesiological and missiological dimension in the study of the term "diakonia" according to the World Council of Churches in 2012 stated that:

The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in (God's) mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ (Ham, 2012: 105)

The understanding of church as defined above frames my conceptual understanding of the church in this study.

1.7.2 Diakonia

Diakonia is a word derived from Greek, used in New Testament bible with broad meaning but mostly understood as "service" in the Christian family. The *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* defines diakonia as "responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people" (Lossky, 2002: 305). The understanding of diakonia has been shifted over the decades in diaconial approaches of different churches. In 2009, the Lutheran World Federation published a document called *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. The document did not provide a strict definition of diakonia but some fundamental assumptions are maintained as follows:

[….] diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. Another is its practical implication in the sense that diakonia is a call to action, a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation (LWF, 2009: 8)

From this understanding, diakonia is an integral part of church's mission which points to its nature and identity. Diakonia is also seen as a call to response to the needs and suffering of human beings. Therefore, diakonia is an integral part of holistic mission of the church to the world by word and deeds.

1.7.3 Education

As already mentioned, the achievement of quality education has been prioritized by the United Nations as the fourth of 17 determining 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, from the view point of this identification that:

> [Education for Sustainable Development] (ESD) empowers everyone to make informed decisions in favor of environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations. It aims to provide the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to achieve progress on the sustainable development challenges captured in the SDGs. It also helps to develop competencies that are relevant to a variety of different SDGs (United Nations, 2015)

This statement shows that education is a process to empower people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for both present and future generations. Education can also be seen as a path to empowerment individually and nationally.

1.7.4 Empowerment

The word "empowerment" is widely discussed in literature in terms of its meaning and definition. However, in this study a basic understanding of "empowerment" is derived from the work of Carlos E. Ham, which states that:

> [E]mpowerment is a dynamic process that enables and inspires, that enhances people's skills and confidence; it is a movement by which persons are liberated, to take back and develop the power within, in order to unlock their immense potential and to boost their skills, self- confidence and self- assertion. (Ham, 2014: 111)

This definition is also understood as a process of positive change that relates to education in the present study.

1.8   Outline of the thesis

This study is structured into seven chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study.

This chapter introduces the study by providing information about the research and its focus. It includes a statement of confidentiality, the personal motivation, the significance and aim of the study, the limitations of the research. This chapter also seeks to provide key terms, definitions related in the study and the structure of the study.

Chapter 2: Religion, church life and education in contemporary Viet Nam

This chapter serves as a contextual orientation for the rest of the study. The chapter is composed of three different sections. The first section is the description of the religious life in Viet Nam society. The second section offers an understanding about the church in Viet Nam, while the last section is a clear picture of the educational state in the contemporary Viet Nam.

Chapter 3: An overview of related theories

The third chapter serves to introduce the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter is composed of four sections. The first section is the presentation of the theory of education. The second section offers the understanding of ecclesiological theory. The third section is a brief presentation of the theory of diakonia. A theory of empowerment is presented lastly.

Chapter 4: Methodology and the research design.

This chapter deals with the methodology and research design that was adopted for the study. It entails a description of how the research was undertaken, what the methods and procedures were and the reasons for choosing them.

Chapter 5: Presentation of the research findings.

The chapter serves to provide a presentation of the collected data from the interviews. The chapter is composed of two sections. The first section is the presentation of the findings collected from two selected Christian schools. The second section is the presentation of the data collected from state school. In each section, the data was presented accordingly to the sub-titles with expectation

to formulate foundation for answering the research question and to provide a comparison between Christian education and the state education of Viet Nam.

Chapter 6: Interpretation and discussion of the research findings.

This chapter seeks to present the discussion of the findings where the findings are interpreted in the relation with the theories. The discussion of the findings hopes to provide insights for answering the research question by looking at differences and similarities between the findings and the theories.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

This is the conclusion of my thesis with the summary of the analysis and the answers of the research questions

Chapter 2

Religion, church life and education in contemporary Viet Nam

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overall picture of background that prompted for my research. This chapter is comprised of three parts. The first part is an overview of religious life in Viet Nam, what is stated in the institution of Viet Nam concerning religious freedom and how this freedom have been exercised in real life. The second part seeks to present a brief view of the church life in Viet Nam. Last part contains an understanding of Vietnamese education, what is its objectives and achievements and how it operates.

2.2 Overview of religious life in Viet Nam

The total Viet Nam population was estimated more than 97 million people in 2019, according to the newest statistic of National Population Committee (Danso, 2019, n.d). This population composed of 54 ethnic groups who have their own spoken dialects in which 24 ethnic groups have their own written languages. Thus, each of 54 ethnic groups has its own tradition, cultural identities, beliefs and religion that contribute to the religious life in Vietnamese society.

According to the report made by Jeffrey Hays, even Viet Nam claimed itself as an atheistic country, yet it can be considered as a country of multi-religions in which Vietnamese Communism "frowns on religion" (Hays, 2014, n.d). However, according Hays, based on an unofficial statistic, most of the population practice religious rituals in which Chinese style of ancestor worship, Taoism and Confucianism are combined to be considered as Buddhism with 7,6 million followers, Catholic 6 million, Cao Dai 2 million, Hoa Hao 1 million, Protestant 500.000 and Muslim 50.000 (Hays, 2014, n.d). Currently, 42 organizations of 15 religions and beliefs have been granted a certificate of religious activity registration (Nguyen Hong Diep, 2019). When Viet Nam entered the era of innovation and global integration, Vietnamese government included the following statement on freedom of religion and belief in Article 70 of the 1992 Constitution:

> Citizens have the right to freedom of belief and religion and may follow or not follow any religion. The State respects and guarantees citizens' right to belief and religious freedom. Religious dignitaries, priests, monks and people are entitled to all civic rights and have to perform civic

obligations. Citizens, whether they have beliefs or follow religions or not, as well as citizens who have different beliefs or follow different religions must respect one another. All religions are equal before law." (PLVN, 1992: article 70)

The Law of Religion and Belief 2016 for the first time confirms that religious organizations are non-commercial legal entities. The new law brings more positives to religious life of the people in Viet Nam that reduces the period from 23 years to 5 years for the religious organizations to be recognized. It adjusts many procedures from registration to licensing and proposing approval as reported forms. In addition, Criminal Code 2015 stipulates penalties for violating the right to freedom of belief and religion of others (translated from Nguyen Hong Diep, 2019, n-d).

According to a Catholic priest, the new law on religion and belief came into effect in January 2018 in order to improve the law of religion and belief in Viet Nam. However, there are still aspects that concerns the religious practitioners regarding the legislation and approval process and the requirements for religious organizations to be recognized by the government. In order to get approval from the government, the religious organization must be in operation continuously for more than five years and all religious activities must be registered to the authorities 30 days in advance (translated from Nguyễn, Thanh Tịnh, 2018, n.d)

According to religious leaders in Viet Nam, this new law is intended by communist government to take more strict management and control towards religions. Because, religious practitioners are still facing hindrances from the authorities in different forms. In 2018 during my 5 weeks field trip I experienced how the church's meeting was interrupted by local authorities. About 10 local officers came into the church during the meeting of high school students of all churches around Quang Ninh province at 9- 11 o'clock in the morning and stopped the meeting to ask for household registration check. In order to argue for this action, the authorities explained that they needed to assure the public security for the celebration of the National Day (September 2nd). It was such a non-sense explanation of the local authorities in a tourist region in day time where there were a lot of tourists who came without local household registration. Vietnamese Government always justify its preventions towards religions by reasoning to protect the public security and great unity of the nation.

The new law seems to have effect in all the major cities but not to rural areas. This for instance becomes clear from a report issued by World Watch Monitor in December 2018 according to

which more than 30 Christians congregations in Nghe An province was harassed by local authorities, while four Christians H'mong families were attacked by their village chief and villagers at midnight on March the 1st 2018 in a north-east province of Viet Nam. Many Christians and Catholics congregations have been demanded to recant and return to the traditional animistic religion and they have been threatened to death and warned that they would not expect for legal protection if they refused to recant (Anderson, 2018: 122- 127). Therefore, the issue of religious freedom in Viet Nam raises many concerns.

2.3 An overview of Christianity and the church life in Viet Nam.

Dr. Albert Benjamin Simpson (A.B Simpson) known as co-founder of Christian Mission and Alliance, America and some other missionaries made attempts to conduct evangelization work in Viet Nam since 1887. However, it was only in 1911 that the Christian Mission and Alliance became possible to start evangelization work through the pioneer missionary Robert A. Jaffray and since then the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam known as Christian Mission and Alliance church (CMA) was born into being (Hays, 2014). Yet, Protestant Christianity was known as "American Religion", which explained why the Protestant churches faced many difficulties over a long period of 60- 70 years of persecutions. However, after many evangelizing efforts the church expanded and was recognized by Vietnamese Government across the country from the south to the north of Viet Nam (Thành Long, 2019).

After 1980, Pentecostal Movements started to arise in Viet Nam. This was a remarkable period in the development of Protestant Churches in Viet Nam. This coincided with the wave of thousands of Vietnamese returning from Russian and Hong Kong refugee camps following their failures to work, study and seek residence in other countries. They were converted into Christianity and came back to Viet Nam and started "house churches" (known as Hôi Thánh Tư Gia) all over the country. Up to the present there has been no official number of Christian organizations and its followers in Viet Nam, but Christianity has made a great stride. It is not difficult to find small churches (house churches) in all provinces across the country. Since Christianity has been considered as "American religion" and founded by those who returned from abroad, Christian communities in Viet Nam were in suspicion by the government and the society. This may be a reason why all activities of Vietnamese churches have been managed and controlled tightly by the government that limits the contribution of the church to the work of community development. In the situation of Viet Nam,

the local churches always connect tightly to each other and Christians live devoted life in learning the word of God, in prayers and evangelism. But in general, Vietnamese congregations have not been active in the work of community development, except for the work of drug detoxification which have been successfully done by the Full Gospel denomination and United Gospel Outreach Church where many rehabilitation clinics across Viet Nam have released thousand drug users off addiction and has restored them back to normal life.

2.4 Overall picture of education in Viet Nam

Regarding Vietnamese Education, Professor Hồ Ngọc Đại recently has raised two questions that are not only a struggle for professional researchers but also as a concern of all people in the country: What do people think when comparing Vietnamese education with the education of other countries in the contemporary? Why has Vietnamese education had no progress at all? The journey to find the resolutions for Vietnamese Education has become one of the biggest concerns than ever before. According to Nguyễn Quốc Vương- the author of the book: (*Looking for a philosophy of Vietnamese Education – Đi Tìm Triết Lý Giáo Dục Việt Nam)*, issued in 2017 the main cause of a backward and outdated education is a vague educational philosophy (Nguyễn, 2017). This part serves to provide an overview of Vietnamese Education - what are the achievements, its statistics and system and how it operates.

2.4.1 Achievements of Vietnamese education

Vietnamese Education has gained remarkable achievements to supply human resources for the market economy in the innovation and development of the country. In 2016 the literacy in Viet Nam reached 97, 3 percent for those aged 15- 50 (Huyên Nguyễn, 2016, n.d). For the first time in the history of Vietnamese higher education, there are 2 universities named in the list of the top 1000 universities in the world by QS rankings; over 10 Vietnamese higher education institutions listed in SCImago research rankings and 3 higher institutions are certified 3-star according to QS-Stars (Translated from the work of Nguyễn Đình Đức, 2018, n.d). In addition, out of 65 countries, Viet Nam ranked 17th in Math and 19th in reading for primary and secondary education, surpassing the United States and the United Kingdom in 2012 (MAA, 2016, n.d).

2.4.2 Statics related to educational system in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has a synchronous educational system for all cities and provinces nationwide directed by the Ministry of Education and Training. Education in Viet Nam relies both on national budget and tuition fees contributed by learners. According to statistics, there were more than 23 million pupils over the country in school year 2018-2019 with 5.360.000 preschool, 8.359.000 primary school, 5.603.000, high-school 2.578.000. The main language of instruction is Vietnamese (King). There are about 1 million new pupils enter school yearly and the education system is organized according to the table below:

Table 1: System of education in Viet Nam

LEVELS	Numbers of school	Numbers of pupils/ students	Duration	Age enter	Other Notes
Pre-school	15. 256	5. 360.000	5 years	18 months- 5 years old	Optional
Primary-school	14.937	8. 359.000	5 years	6- 10 years old	Compulsory
Secondary school	10. 939	5. 603.000	4 years	11- 14 years old	Compulsory
High-school	2.834	2. 578.000	3 years	15- 18 years old	
Higher Education	236	1.499.200	4 years Bachelor's		Besides specialized courses, an addition of 12 % of total study hours on Marxist-Leninist political science and Ho Chi Minh ideologies
Master's			2 years		
Doctorate's			2 years		

2.4.3 Moral and political education in Vietnamese educational system

Since 1998 Viet Nam implemented a set of laws on education in which the general objective of its education was defined follows:

> The objective of education is to fully develop Vietnamese citizens with morality, knowledge, good health, aesthetic sense, occupation and loyalty to national independence and socialism; who nourish personality and capacity essential to fulfill the mission of building and protecting the country"

(Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, chapter 1, article 2 – translated from Vietnamese version).

Obviously, the main purpose of Vietnamese Education is to produce good citizens for the nation. According to Đoàn Huệ Dung, Viet Nam is a nation influenced by the values and standards of Confucianism and Marxist-Leninist socialist theory (Đoàn, 2005: 451). In order to achieve this goal, the Communist Party of Viet Nam commanded the Ministry of Education and Training to include moral and political education as a main subject at all levels of Vietnamese educational system. This explained the reason why there is always a large red banner hanging at the main entrance of every school with a slogan saying: "Tiên học lễ, hậu học văn" literally meaning "learning to have proper manner in human relations is first and foremost, then learning to get knowledge". Đoàn Huệ Dung explained, Vietnamese moral education takes various forms and definitions. While character and personality building are emphasized in primary education, developing socialist citizen is focused upon in secondary. In higher education, the ideas of inculcating socialist thoughts and principles are focused upon which is considered as important as building intellectual ability (Đoàn, 2005: 451).

Obviously, socialist principles require full commitment of individuals to the success of the socialism, and according to the subjective assessment of most young people in Viet Nam, this notion is no longer relevant to the innovation era of the country. While socialist principle emphasis the elective perspectives, the economic market has gradually impacted on individual perspective about values. In addition, students realize that what they learn about socialist Marxist- Leninist principles and Ho Chi Minh ideology in the schools are contradictory with what they experience in real life. In school they learn that socialist society ensures equality for every citizen, but in fact they experience a big gap between the rich and the poor. While the poor seem to have no opportunities to enjoy good medical, educational and administrative services in the society, yet better social services and more opportunities are available for the rich. In his work, Đoàn Huệ Dung stated that moral education has been replaced by political education and legal teaching which is irrelevant in a growing market economy and merging consumer society. Effectively, it has had very little impact on the development of the personality, character and morality of students (Đoàn, 2005: 451- 463). Therefore, Marxist-Leninist and Ho Chi Minh ideology are not convincing students to study since its content is no longer practical to serve student's academic interests and

useful for their future careers. This leads to fraud when it comes to exams. A former university student told me that all his classmates (including himself) paid the teachers for passing the subject exams on Marxist- Leninist and Ho Chi Minh ideology throughout the four years of university study. That is why Quách Đình Liên, professor and principal of Pacific Ocean University (POU) in Viet Nam has a very objective view on Vietnamese Education. His work was published and posted on the Pacific Ocean University website that can be translated as follow:

> For the ambition of being equipped with knowledge, the educational program is heavy with theories and books, not suitable for physiological and cognitive ability of learners, especially in primary and secondary school age (Quách, 2017, n.d)

According to Quách, Vietnamese education is still backward and mainly focusing on the interaction between teachers and students within the content of textbooks, but lack of interaction with reality and society as well as family. Vietnamese education known to be ambitious of filling pupils with all knowledge, placed too much emphasis on examination results and achievements because of the large amount of knowledge, students must memorize so that they do not have time to develop and expand their thinking and knowledge. He explained that knowledge of humanity are unlimited and changing all the time. Therefore, the ambition to equip people with all knowledge in the educational program is "impossible, unnecessary and ineffective" (Quách, 2017). This is one of the main causes for all negatives such as corruption, fraud and inequality in the education sector of Viet Nam that have been heard and seen through national media every day.

Vietnamese are known as people with a studious tradition, having high respect for education and considering it as the path to success and bringing esteem to their families. But according to the current educational state, it is easy to understand why people across the country have lost their trust in national education that they are really worried about their children's future. Therefore, Christian education becomes a significant contribution to the development of the country.

2.5 Christian educational program in Viet Nam

I have read elsewhere the saying of a Catholic priest that the current state of Vietnamese Education is both a challenge and a new opportunity for Christian church taking its educational role. Because of such recognition, the Christian educational program is implemented by several churches and

individual Christians in Viet Nam recently as a bright spot and an important contribution to the mission of empowering and equipping young people. As presented earlier, there have been existing difficulties for religious practices and activities in Viet Nam, yet Christian education has made initial steps with positive signals. Below is a presentation of the Christian Education in Viet Nam with its historical establishment and an overview of the program.

2.5.1 Christian education in Viet Nam and its history

Pastor John (see chapter 1.2) worked as a pastor for a Baptist Church in his home-country of Philippines. In 2013, he obeyed God's calling to start doing mission in the South of Viet Nam. He moved there with his wife and his two children. Besides missionary work, establishing new churches, he clearly recognized the Lord's calling for himself to the educational ministry even more clearly when he arrived in the South of Viet Nam. Witnessing the urgent needs of his two children and the needs of Vietnamese people in general, he started Christians school in 2013 as home-schooling using the curriculum of Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) from the United States with seven students. By God's grace, the ministry of Christian Education has expanded and developed with the number of students increasing doubling after each year. Up to now, there have been more than 190 students of different levels from kindergarten to high-school education and many more other students applying for study-places at the Christian school in the South. But because of the limited facilities of the school at present, the intake of pupils has been restricted.

In 2017, Pastor John expanded the ministry to one province in the Central part of Viet Nam. Since then, Christian education has become a movement taking place in some regions of Vietnam with very positive signs. Because of the Vietnamese laws on religion as described above, many Christians organizations have not been recognized by the state, with the resultant effect that Christian schools must register as individual business with the government as Foreign Language Learning Centers. Today, more than 15 Christian schools have been opened in Viet Nam, located mainly in the South while only two have been started in the North by different Christian groups. All Christian schools are operating under the School of Tomorrow Asian (SOTA). SOTA is one of five continental divisions of School of Tomorrow that is a Christian fundamentalist school. School of Tomorrow is known to be the largest home-schooling using same curriculum and system of Accelerate Christian Education program founded by Donald and Esther Howard in Garland, Texas in 1970. Their desire was to assist parents, pastors and school staff in educational ministry.

The Accelerated Christian Education curriculum bible- based which are full of self- instructional activities designed to develop thinking skills and mastery learning (AEC, 2017, n.d). The purpose of Accelerated Christian Education is "[To] equip churches and parents in training of their children with a Godly character- building academic curriculum in a Bible-based, individualized system of learning" (ACE, 2017, n.d)

2.5.2 Overview of the program

Christian educational program first reached the pupils through relationships of pastor John with other believers in church who needs schooling for their children. As stated, the number of students enrolling in Christian schools have doubled each year and this showed that the Christian Education Program differs from Vietnamese Educational System in the way that the pupils are not simply placed in an education based on their age. Instead, pupils will go through a diagnostic test to determine the level that the pupils can perform. In Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), there are two kinds of study level: 1. Performing level. 2. Chronical level or aged level (ACE, 2017).

1. Accelerated Christian Education claimed to have "a system that negates to repeat a grade or advance to more difficult material without mastering a subject" (ACE, 2017, n.d). Diagnostic test through which pupils undergo to determine whether they have learning gaps (subject concepts that they missed) need to be strengthened. When weak areas are evident from the tests, the appropriate gap Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACE) are prescribed to strengthen specific weaknesses. After completing the gap PACEs the pupils progresses according to his/ her performance level and when demonstrating mastery at the different levels of testing, he or she will be able to function at his/ her chronological grade level (ACE, 2017, n.d).

The four academic areas tested are:
- Math (Levels 1- 9)
- English (Levels 1- 8)
- Reading comprehension for science, social studies, Bible reading, literature and creative writing (Levels 1- 8)
- Spelling (Levels 2- 9)

2. Chronological level- aged level

Christian education is based on mastery learning principle (pupils need to master the learning), the pupils must take the tests and if they do not obtain 80%, need to take the test again. Before moving to the next level, the teachers need to assure that their pupils really master the learning and knowledge. That is why the responsibility of pupils is to set their own goals of learning, not the teacher. They are free to set goals for their study and learn to manage their study well. This teaching method aims to train pupils to develop their dependent thinking. Accelerate Christian education curriculum is designed for individualized- study style [1]. The class is arranged as individual offices, separated each pupil by the bulkheads to minimize distractions and students have flags symbolize for each choice they need during class. If they need explanation or clarification, they raise flag as a message to his/ her teacher (GDILC, 2013: 10).

2.6   Conclusion

Christian educational program is a church ministry with purpose of providing quality Christian education using bilinguals of Vietnamese and English for instruction through school of Tomorrow curriculum. It is designed to empower child to reach his/ his full potential. It has been recognized internationally and accepted in over 1.500 universities and colleges around the world[2]. Even through, it is not yet, but seeking a local accreditation and recognition" because of its academic excellence and character builder based on biblical teaching (GDILC, 2014: 3). Since, it is a Christian education program, beside of equipping children with academic skills, it emphasizes to train children's personality with Christians values, morality that biblical verses appeared in every page of curriculum content. It aims to reach Child's dreams for Christ's name and empower next generations to be future leaders with integrity. In order to achieve this aim, besides school devotional time is conducted at the beginning day of all school-days with worship, prayers and teaching of 90 biblical character traits, teachers teach their students with love and respect. This creates a safe learning and teaching environment for appropriate development of students as human created in God's image

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[1] *For more details about A.C.E. curriculum, please visit the* *A.C.E. Store*

[2] List of universities and colleges in the world that have accepted accelerated Christian education are available on: https://www.aceministries.com/resources

Chapter 3

Education, church, diakonia and empowerment: an integrated theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter entails a presentation of theoretical perspectives relevant to the topical focus of the thesis and the interpretation of the findings offered in Chapter six. The chapter in this respect firstly draws on the United Nations' understanding of education as a fundamental human right. Education is one of the most important elements mentioned in the 1967 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education is furthermore considered as one of the key elements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to archive their targets by 2030. The global community believes that education for sustainable development is to provide essential knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to achieve progress with respect to sustainable development challenges captured in the SDG agenda. Receiving education also enable people to make decisions and develop their competencies for present and future generations (United Nations, 2015, n.d). As such education could be considered as a fundamental tool to empower people. This idea will guide my construction of the theoretical framework provided in this chapter. In addition, in the subsequent discussion I will also draw on particular understandings of the Christian church and Christian diakonia in the literature in support of my thesis that the promotion of Christian education could be seen as integral to the mission and task of the church. This will be done by specifically also drawing on the concept of empowerment to inform my theoretical framework.

3.2 Education: its objectives and benefits

The right to education is rightly considered by the United Nations in Article 13.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to be one of the most fundamental human rights. The global community agree that education should be directed to the full development of human personality, that values human dignity and respect the fundamental human rights and freedoms. Education must function in a way that enables people to actively participate in the society (United Nations, 1967: 7).

However, as mentioned earlier in my thesis, Viet Nam does not have a clear theoretical vision of education. In this respect Nguyễn Quốc Vương, in the book *Searching a Philosophy for Vietnamese Education* (Engl. Translation of *Đi Tìm Triết Lý Giáo Dục Việt Nam*), observes that it is essential to clarify the future and destination of Vietnamese education by setting up concrete and clear aims and goals (Nguyễn, 2017). In agreement with Nguyễn, Prof. Lê Viết Khuyến in an interview with *Tuổi Trẻ* Magazine recently commented: "The educational philosophy must be short, concise yet specific and clear, if not, it will take a long way around and lead not to achieving the goals and purpose of education" (Engl. Translation Lê Viết Khuyến, 2019, n.d). Prof. Lê importantly contends that Vietnamese education has maintained an orientation of learning for employment that is not directed to the full development of human beings. In substantiation of his argument he further argues that UNESCO has defined the spirit of long-life learning along with four pillars of education – learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together and learn to be – as suitable for many countries (Lê Viết Khuyến, 2019, n.d).

According to the stipulations set out by the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of the Child's in 1989 education shall function to:

- develop the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- develop the child's respect toward his/ her own parents, cultural identity, languages and values. Education is to train a child to respect his/ her own nation in which she/ he is living.
- prepare a child for a responsible life in a society with a spirit of understanding, tolerance, equality of sexes and for the global integration;
- develop a child's respect and protective attitude towards natural environment (United Nations, 1989: 9)

Clearly, the objectives set by the United Nations are concise and specific enough to fully develop children with knowledge and abilities through the process of being educated. Education serves to develop children's personality of respect for human rights, respect for their parents, respect for the cultural values of the country where they live and respect for the natural environment. It also serves to prepare children for responsible living and active participation in the society through a spirit of understanding, peace, justice and equality. In other words, education serves to produce a fully

developed people with knowledge, abilities and personality who are enabled to be responsible for themselves within the family circle, the community, the nation, and global integration. And as mentioned above, in 2015 the United Nations confirmed that education should be regarded as one of the key elements for development and transformation of the world, which is called education for sustainable development. UNESCO declared:

> Education for Sustainable Development empowers learners to take informed decision and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity (2015, n.d).

In summary, the aim of education is to empower children and young people with knowledge and, skills as well as a sense of respect and duty to take responsibility for oneself, one's family, community and nation, and for integration in the global community. In other words, the aim of education is to empower learners to enhance their sense of human dignity, self-worth and autonomy to make decisions and participate in the society. Education is essential to the success of every one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2015). However, to achieve these goals, it requires to educate learners to have a thirst of long-life learning and learning how to learn throughout one's life along with the following four pillars:

- Learning to know: focus on more to master the methods and tools of learning than to obtain the structured knowledge. Learning to know helps to develop independent and critical thinking. It is the development of skills and knowledge needed to be relevant in the 21st century;

- Learning to do: to equip a child with personal competence and specialist skills that can be applicable for the success of professional. In other words, learning to do enables learners to use the knowledge and skills that one has learnt in his/ her work, in daily life and in workforce;

- Learning to live together: This helps to develop the child's self- awareness and understanding so that the child will learn to respect or to appreciate the diversity among other people. Learning to live together is to develop the child's social skills so that enables the child to live in peace as a responsible individual to build an inclusive and justice society.

- Learning to be: Learning to be contributes to the child's mind, body and spirit that develops a child's confidence in who they are. Learning to be enables a child to enhance his/ her

identity and self- respect and self- esteem. It helps to develop his/ her creativity as well as discover his or her own personality, skills and potentials. Learning to be serves to develop a child's independent thinking and critical judgement so that he/ she can make up their own decisions and enable him/ her to deal with their own life- problems (Jacque Delors, 1996).

Jacque Delors, in his report to UNESCO after 15 years of the publication of the four pillars, argued that the reason why he proposed four pillars of education, was because long-life learning pertains to "the concept of educational society that relates to family, social and physical environment of learners, the working world, and economy, and policy on the provision of material resources in the education sector" (Delors, 2011: 321). In other words, it is important to educate learners to stimulate the desire of learning so that education will reach its goals as "Education for Sustainable". As stated by UNESCO, this would in terms of the language of empowerment result in:

- People being empowered to become "global citizens" who are capable to take active responsibility in the society locally and globally to create a just, inclusive and sustainable world. People are trained to develop skills and knowledge to face global challenges and enable to resolve problems. (UNESCO, n.d);

- Learners of any age being empowered in any education setting with a mindset of societal transformation (to transform themselves and the society they live in) (UNESCO, n.d).

According to Global Partnership for Education, education has brought remarkable benefits to human life throughout human history. Education has affected positively to so many areas of the world. In other words, education has dynamic power to change the world to a better place. Education equips people with knowledge and skills to have better jobs and that increase their incomes. That is why members of United Nations believe that education helps to wipe out poverty and improve the quality of life. Another benefit of education is to make people healthier by living a healthy lifestyle of preventing and combating serious illness such as HIV and AIDS. Educated people know how to raise children well and are capable to protect their children against backward customs and tradition such as child marriage. Educated people are trained to have a sense of dignity and self-worth and they learn to respect others, promote peace and justice in the society (World Bank Group, n.d).

In an analysis of quality education of UNICEF, the educational program should encompass the five following elements

- Quality learners: Healthy learners
- Learning outcomes: The outcomes are measurable and appropriate. Outcome is the starting point for the development and implementation of the curriculum.
- Process of education: Includes the quality of teachers, pedagogical competences.
- The content of education: The content of education should be relevant and practical in the society where the learners are living in, so that the learners can study in an investigating and creative way.
- The learning environment: Learning environment is made up as a safe and active environment for the development of the learners. (UNICEF, 2000: 4- 21)

3.3 A theory of the church: its nature, identity and mission

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the church is understood "as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in (God's) mission through its very being, proclamation and service" (Ham, 2012: 105). This definition of the church is consistent with how pastor Đặng Ngọc Báu defines church: "[T]he called-out people who God saved and called into beings to worship God" (Đặng Ngọc Báu, 2013). The church is not a place of worship or a building, but it is a community of baptized people. In other words, the church is a being, a community, a living people with nature and identity which is described throughout Bible from Old to the New Testament (McGrath, 2011: 375- 376).

3.3.1 The nature and identity of the church

In his work, McGrath offers a series of five models for understanding the theological identity of the church from the New Testament view as: the people of God, the community of salvation, the body of Christ, the servant people and the community of the Spirit (McGrath, 2011: 375- 376). McGrath suggests that for a better understanding of the church, it is important to begin with the Old Testament for exploration of the church's historical and theological continuity with the people of Israel (McGrath, 2011: 375).

Thus, the image of the church as the people of God and the church as the servant of God stresses the continuity of the church with Israel. As Israel was inherited the promise that God made to Abraham, through its faith in Jesus Christ, so likewise the church (Romans 4:1-16). It is the continuity between the old and new covenant that God chose and called the people of Israel out of Egypt to serve him, in the same way God chose and called the church out of the world to worship and serve him. God called Israel "my people", in the same way God called the church "a chosen race, a royal priest, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9) (McGrath, 2011: 376).

3.3.2   *The mission of the church*

The analogies of the church as a community of salvation, as the body of Christ and as a community of the Holy Spirit emphasize that the church is called into being in response to the salvific work of God and as a means of proclamation and extension of that work to the world. For the fulfilment of the salvific task, the church is secured by the cooperation into the body of Christ like branches to be attached to the true vine as Jesus Christ (John 15:5). According to McGrath, the presence of the Holy Spirit is not only a "seal" of individual but also an empowerment for the church's mission. The Holy Spirit is not only "a sign of the coming of God's new age" but also the church's distinctive role of bringing about the kingdom of God on earth (McGrath, 011:376).

Bryon D, Klaus presents the mission of the church as three-fold mission: with God, with the world and within itself

- Church's mission to God: To worship him and honour God's glory. Through the act of worship God, he empowers the church by his words and the filling of the Holy Spirit that the church enables to carry God's mission of redemption of human beings.

- Church's mission within itself: By the redemption of God through Jesus Christ to people of all nations into the church as the holy people of God that builds up and strengthens the community of faith with the same nature of righteousness and equality of God. It is a community that characterized by its interdependency and mutuality of gift and vocation. The church is called to build itself through liturgy (worship, sharing communion, fellowship and discipleship)

- Church's mission to the world: The church is called to fulfill Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28: 18-20. It is to evangelize and to reach out to the non-believers and bring them into the kingdom of God. It is also to teach them all that Jesus has taught. To bring about and to expand the kingdom of God is to show God's love and mercy through the witnessing of the Gospel by both deeds and words. It is the church's participation in the continuity of God's mission by Gospel proclamation and diaconal actions (Bryan, 1995: Loc. 71- 74%).

Thus, proclamation and diaconal work are like two sides of the same coin, going along with each other. According to Nordstokke, this is the holistic mission of the church in the world (Nordstokke, 2011: 114)

3.4 Theory of diakonia

Diakonia is understood as a "responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people" (Teresa Joan White, 2002: 305). It is obvious that this notion incorporates several elements. Firstly, diakonia is not only a statement or proclamation in words, but it is an action with accountability. Secondly, diakonia is performed by Christians. And according to the Lutheran World Federation, it does not mean that only Christians are able to perform responsible service, but it is to affirm the distinctive nature of diakonia (LWF, 2009: 40). It is a task or mission of the church towards the world. And thirdly, diakonia has its focus on the needs of people following the example of Jesus' messianic ministry which took deep root in the endless love of God for the world. Therefore, Christian diakonia is unconditional in the response to the needs of people accordingly to the context.

Traditionally, the church has carried out diaconal work that promotes sustainable development for better living conditions. Diakonia contains several aspects such as: developing people's quality of life and promoting education and good health. Furthermore, diaconal acts stand in the service of empowering people, protecting and promoting a justice society and whatever elements that uplift human rights and dignity. In other words, diakonia is "a call to action, a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation" stated Lutheran World Federation (LWF, 2009: 8).

3.4.1 Reinterpretation and theological reflection of diakonia

According to Nordstokke, diakonia refers both to theological reflection and the church-based actions since it was re-interpreted by New Testament scholars. The "reinterpretation of 'diakonia' has reconfirmed its ecclesiological and missiological nature" (Nordstokke, 2014 :57). Traditionally, diakonia was understood as a humble service, waiting at the table or a charity work for the poor and vulnerable. However, the authentic understanding of diakonia has been proved by New Testament scholars after exploring carefully biblical texts of Jesus' Messianic ministry and Apostle Paul in Mark 10:45 and Romans 1:13 (Nordstokke, 2014: 57). It is not merely a charitable and humble service of the Christian church, but it is an honorable task, responsibility and mission given to the church. As the Father sent Jesus, he saved and called the church into being to participate in God's mission to the world. In other words, diakonia is "an integral part of being church" (Nordstokke, 2009:25). Diakonia consists of defending human dignity, inclusion, invitation and the empowerment of people in service of God's mission (Nordstokke, 2009:25- 27). Diakonia is thus to reflect on the identity and nature of Christian church. This paradigm shift in the understanding of diakonia has shaped the practice of diaconal work for the church and diakonia actors. According to Dietrich, diakonia is no longer considered as humble service for people in need as donors and recipients, but it is an act of helping each other for mutuality, for reciprocity (Dietrich, 2014:14). This new understanding made a shift from the notion of diakonia as a humble service, a charity work to the poor and suffering towards a mutual interdependence and empowerment of marginalized those who are in needs. Therefore, the aspect of empowerment has been emphasized in the practice of diakonia among Christian church and agencies.

3.4.2 Diakonia as empowerment

Since there has been a fundamental move in the understanding of diakonia as charity and humble service of donors with recipients to the understanding of diakonia as partnership for mutuality, it helps to approach diaconal practice from the charity model to transformational model (Ham, 2014: 109- 110). This paradigm shift balances the power relationship among people involved in the diaconal work between care-giver and care-receiver. Moreover, the new paradigm helps diaconal practitioners to have adequate attitudes of supporting, assisting others to achieve their autonomy and help them to manage their own life (Dietrich, 2014:20-21). Thus, diakonia plays special emphasis on empowering people and uplifting human value and dignity. Empowering diakonia

shapes the practice of diakonia to balance the power relationship between diaconal users and diaconal practitioners.

This then begs the question: What exactly is the meaning of empowerment?

3.5 Theory of empowerment

The term "empowerment" is widely used in variety of sectors such as business, health, politics and the social sciences more generally speaking. Empowerment is a broad topic that many writers have written on. In the context of African-Americans, Barbara Solomon emphasized empowerment as a method of social work with the oppressed. In turn Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus alluded to empowerment as a way of improving welfare services by mediating social constitutions. Julian Rappaport, on his part, developed "empowerment" as a theoretical concept and presented it as a worldview that includes social policy and an approach to solve social problems caused by powerlessness. Clearly, all these writers mentioned the important connection between individuals and community. In other words, the social situations are important and worth considering for approaching the solutions to the social problems.

In the discussion I will now continue to focus on the theoretical concept of empowerment based on some documents of the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. Let's first look at the definition of empowerment.

3.5.1 Definition of empowerment

According to Nordstokke, empowerment has a deep rootedness in the biblical concept that "all human beings are created in the image of God, with capacities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation" (Norstokke, 2009: 45). The interpretation of Gen 1: 26 and Gen 2: 7 on the notion of "the image of God" proposed by Nordstokke is to indicate the "task of being in charge of all other living beings". Accordingly, Adam and Eve, as the highpoint of God's creation, were empowered for the task of stewardship and the naming all creatures. This indicated that human beings were empowered by God to be his co-workers and partner in his project of creation (Nordstokke, 2012:192). Nordstokke, in this respect, continues to add that, even if empowerment is a process of activating self-esteem and self- realization it is not the end goal of empowerment. For him, the end goal of empowerment is a process of restoring and establishing relationships

when one's self-esteem and self-realization are activated in dignified relations with others. Drawing from that understanding of empowerment, Ham defines it as follow:

> [E]mpowerment is a dynamic process that enables and inspires, that enhances people's skills and confidence; it is a movement by which persons are liberated, to take back and develop the power within, in order to unlock their immense potential and to boost their skills, self- confidence and self-assertion. This process aims at promoting collective resistance, challenge and mobilization against basic power relationship and systemic force that impoverish and exclude the vulnerable (Ham, 2014: 111).

This definition show three different levels of empowerment: Individual level, community level and social level.

3.5.2 Different levels of empowerment

Individual empowerment is a process that enables / inspires / enhances people's skills and confidence. It is a process of developing power within to unlock the immense potential. In other words, this is a process of change from the sense of powerless to power and self-confidence that individuals gain more sense of self-respect. Sadan alludes to such empowerment as psychological construct and empowerment (Sadan, 2002:77- 80). Sadan argues that self- improvement continues to lead to a real improvement of personality, knowledge, skills and abilities that increase people's capacity by which enable individual persons to make decisions, solve their problems and participate in the community (Sadan, 2002:77).

Individual empowerment thus entails an internal change from a passive to an active state that enables individuals to gain control of their lives and participate in the larger society. According to J. Rappaport, empowerment express itself at different levels: at the level of personal feelings, at the level of ideas about self- worth and at the level of being able to make changes in the society (Rappaport, 1985). Dietrich continues to sum up the relevance of empowerment on three levels: personal level, small group level and community level (Dietrich, 2014: 22).

Empowerment at personal level is experience of gaining increasing control and influence in daily and in the participation to the community. Empowerment at small group level in turn involves shared experience, analysis and influence of groups based on their own efforts (Dietrich, 2014:

22). Empowerment is both a process and an outcome. It is a process to help people to gain the feeling of empowerment. It is an outcome as empowerment gained in people's lives.

There is a close relationship between the three levels of empowerment. When empowerment is reached at personal level, people will be more autonomous and responsible for their own lives. Empowerment seeks to empower people of the least to be the first so that they are capable to care for others. The capacity, ability, knowledge and skills will be increased that enable them to access more resources and better quality of life. Empowerment enables people to be responsible for their own lives and to care for others with respect, appreciation in the society. Empowerment affirm human dignity and enables people "to assume responsibility for her or his own life and civic participation" (Nordstokke, 2009: 41). It helps people to be subject of their own life and to be empowered in response to the needs of others in return. This in turn will impact the empowerment at small group and community level. The more people are empowered, the better changes taken place in the society at community level but also the national and even global levels. Empowerment ensures a sustainable world of justice, peace and dignity.

3.6   Conclusion

The theoretical perspectives on education, the church, diakonia and empowerment presented above are interrelated and relevant to the research topic of my thesis. As expectedly, these theoretical perspectives construct the discussion of the empirical data in chapter six and provide important insights to answer my research question: "In what ways, the two selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment?". But before that, let's move on to the next chapter on research design and methodology.

Chapter 4

Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I am presenting a description of the methodological approach that used for my research. I will describe the process and methods used for collecting data and interpreting the research material. I will also explain my choice of methods, research areas and informants for my research. In addition, I will also mention the ethical issues and potential weaknesses of my thesis when these selected methods are applied. The quality, validity and reliability of the research will be clarified in this chapter.

4.2 Choice of method

The research design of a case study is used as a framework for collecting and analyzing the data selected in the thesis. This applies to a qualitative social research strategy as it constitutes "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" in which the process of the research involves open- ended question interviews and participants observation in detail and intensively (Cresswell, 2014: 4, 8, 14).

In order to justify my choice as a researcher, I will discuss the role of the theoretical framework and the philosophical worldview positioning of my research. In this thesis, I am constructing a dialogue between the theoretical framework and the findings. Qualitative research is normally inductive as the researcher begins by observing social interactions or interviewing social actors in depth and then developing an explanation for what has been found (Chambliss, Schutt 2010: 30). But it seems that there are no big differences between inductive and deductive approaches in practice. Because according to Creswell both approaches require an interaction back and forth between theory and the data selected. He states: "[W]hile the process begins inductively deductive thinking also places an important role as the analysis moves forward" (Creswell, 2014: 186). Therefore, my thesis is to establish consistency between the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. It is also expected that there will be deviations from the theoretical framework and the contribution of the findings towards existing theoretical perspectives. Since qualitative

methodology qualifies as interpretative research, so the interpretations of the data selected from the natural setting of participants must rely on the participants' view as much as possible Creswell, 2014: 4, 8).

So, in this thesis, I am interpreting how the participants as Christian educators understand "empowerment and education for empowerment as the diaconal work of the church" in their own situation and through their own perspectives. Since the Christian education program is newly established and it is still in the suspicion of people in Viet Nam, thus, I am also interpreting how the state teachers understand the concept of "education for fully development of human being" to make a comparison between Christian education and Vietnamese education. This also entails that I am interpreting how the students of the Christian educational program experience "empowerment" and the pupils of state school experience full development of human being. It is as such to investigate how social reality of empowerment/ full development of human being through Christian education is dependent on the social actors. It seeks to emphasize the social world as the product of social interactions between Christian educators and their students. Based on the role of the theoretical framework of my research, as well as the interpretative philosophical worldview and constructive ontology discussed above, qualitative research is considered the most suitable approach.

4.3   Choice of research area

I selected two representative Christian schools, one in a province in the North and another in the South of Viet Nam. The Christian school in the South is considered the oldest one and it pioneers the movement of Christian education in Viet Nam organized under the management by a Baptist Church. The school in the South has recently been recognized and certified as an educational center by the Vietnamese government. This makes it a suitable choice as my research site because of its fast growth and contribution to Vietnamese Education that the government can not deny. The other school in the North of Viet Nam is the newest school run by a young Christian couple who have a vision of building future leaders through Christian education. This school can be regarded a good representative sample because it is the first Christian school to be opened in the North. Moreover, it is the only school that I had contact with and was willing to participate in my research.

After making some effort, I was able to undertake the research at a state school in an island village in the North part of Viet Nam. This may bring into question whether this school qualified to generalize about the quality education in all schools in the country. There is no clear answer to this question. However, if the answer is a "No", then there must be an imbalance in the quality education throughout Viet Nam. Because of the Vietnamese educational system, curriculum design, policies and targets are directed synchronously by the Ministry of Education and Training to provinces and cities nationwide. Moreover, this is the only school that the teachers and parents were willing to participate in my research. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of doing research at state school is to make a comparison with Christian education.

Even if the aforementioned two Christian schools are not organized by one church and pastor and are not in the same region, they are using the same educational system, quality control and curriculum under the accreditation of School of Tomorrow Asian. They are using the same educational program of Accelerated Christian Education (A.C.E.).

Additionally, according to Bryman, a cross sectional design is used when a case itself "is not the apparent object of interest and it is more than a location that forms backdrop to the findings" (Bryman, 2012: 69). Accordingly, I opted to selected two Christian schools in two different locations as my case study. This because the location was not the unit of analysis, but instead the Christian educational program in Viet Nam constituted the subject of my inquiry. Instead of focusing on location, the focus thus fell on the educational program offered by the two schools to provide data for detailed and informative analysis. Since these two Christian schools are using the same curriculum, administrative system and accreditation of School of Tomorrow Asia, there may not be much differences. Rather, there may be differences between the educational founders and teachers regarding their perspectives on the understanding of empowerment through education and the role and responsibility of the church in the work of education for empowerment.

As stated above, the Christian educational program offered by the selected schools is unique compared with Vietnamese education because of its combination of providing academic skills, knowledge and biblical teaching for empowerment using individualized and bilingual instruction. Furthermore, as the research is about how the Christians school function as agencies of empowerment through their educational program, the research should be qualitative. This

consequently demands that the experiences and understanding of empowerment in Christian schools must be derived from the perspective of the people involved, i.e. pastors, Christian educators and pupils of Christian schools.

4.4   Choice of informants

Regarding selection of informants, the sampling is purposive to resolve my research problem about how selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment through the work of Christian education. As indicated above, I chose pastors who were founders or leaders of Christian schools as they could provide me with authentic information about the history of these two schools' establishment and development. In addition, as they held direct leadership positions of the Christian schools, they had adequate knowledge about the Christian educational program and its manifesto. However, the founder of the school in the South had been busy opening a new school in another city in Viet Nam at the time of my research, I chose the new Principal and Director of the school who was able to provide me with important information related to my research. Regarding the school in the North, the founder was not a pastor, but he had a burden and vision to build up the next generation of citizens and train future leaders for God through Christian Education.

With respect to the state school, I chose three teachers who have been working in education for more than five years and two parents of pupils as the research subjects.

According to Chambliss and Schutt, "a key informant is an insider who is willing and able to provide a field researcher with superior access and information, including answers to questions that arise in the course of research" (Chambliss & Schutt, 2010: 230). With this in mind, my informants were chosen mainly because of their direct involvement in the Christian educational program and they play important role in the empowerment through Christian Education Since education is a professional sector that requires participants to go through a special training and educating period, these two key informants from two Christian schools assisted me in selecting Christian teachers who had adequate knowledge about Christian educational program and were able to provide me with more insights regarding my topic of investigation. Through these teachers I was introduced to parents whose children were studying at the Christian schools. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, from my friend in Ho Chi Minh city, I got to know the school in the

South. She shared the contacts with me, and I used the opportunity to collect data at the school in the South. She also gave me information about the school in the North. In addition, I also chose snowball sampling for my research strategy in which I relied on the Principal and founder of these two Christian schools to identify and find other informants. This was no different in the state school as my nephew got the contact of a teacher upon whom I relied to select other teachers and parents. Thus, a non-probability sampling was used throughout my research (Bryman, 2012: 201-202).

4.5   Interviews

Conducting interviews was the main method of the research used in my thesis. This method was conducted as face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions designed to explore the views and opinions of the participants (cf. Creswell, 2014:19). In order to obtain a nuanced understanding of the Education for Empowerment concept and the role of the church therein, the participants in the research were divided into three categories: the pastors / Christian educational founders (Category 1), the Christian teachers (Category 2) and the parents of pupils (Category 3). While the participants of state school were divided into two categories of teacher category and parents of pupil category

These three categories of interviewees at Christian schools contributed different perspectives to the research topic. One pastor, two Christian teachers and parents of two pupils were interviewed in each Christian School. Consequently, there were ten interviewees in total. Since the notion of empowerment is a new concept in the Vietnamese context, so instead of questioning how the parents of pupils understand "empowerment" I asked what experience the pupils gained through the Christian educational program. I believe, certain experiences that the pupils experienced through the study at Christian school indicate signals of being empowered.

On the other hand, the insights from Category 1 and 2 were based on indirect experiences that Christian educators are supposed to observe through the experiences of their pupils. Understandings of empowerment was acquired by the third category of interviewees through the personal experiences of their children. Hence, the interviewees of all three categories would express their own opinions in different ways about most important factors contributing to Christian educational program. At the Christian school in the South, I had the opportunity to interview each teacher and parent in a small room for about 20- 30 minutes. Additionally, I conducted semi-

structured interviews with the founder of the school in the North and the Principal of the school in the South. This allowed me to ask additional questions regarding Christian educational program – in accordance with the nature of semi- structured interviews and its potential to provide more insights regarding what the interviewees viewed as important and relevant (Bryman, 2012: 470).

I took a flight straight from Oslo, Norway to the South of Viet Nam and had the opportunity to have a long conversation with the current Principal of the school in the South as well as to interview other participants for one week from August the 2nd to the 9th[t], 2018. After this week of interviewing, I took a 2 hours flight to the North of Viet Nam and thereafter travelled by bus to my hometown where the other Christian school is located. Unfortunately, however, since my family experience personal difficulties, I was not able to interview all the participants. I could only manage to interview the founder of the school and the parents of pupils in the presence of my friend's pastor. For the rest of the teachers at school in the North, I sent a questionnaire that they returned to me in later November 2018 when I was back in Norway.

During my five-week field trip, I was not able to make contact with the state school. However, when I was back in Oslo, I could contact a teacher at the state school through my nephew. As a result, I could send consent forms and interview guide to the teachers through my nephew via email and the informants returned the answers towards the end of 2018. The data collected from state schools provided important insight about the education of Viet Nam, which I have used to compare with Christian education. The purpose of the comparison is to examine whether Christian education is a positive contribution into education sector of Viet Nam.

The overall structure of my interview guide and interview questions was how interviewees understand and experience empowerment through Christian educational program and what are their views on the church's role and responsibility of education for empowerment. Interviews and questionnaire were both in Vietnamese and English. As resulted, the data collected from interviews are open-ended questions which are designed for answering the research question.

4.6   Participant observation

Participant observation is also another method used in this study in combination with interviews. Staying one week in Ho Chi Minh city gave me opportunity to observe how the school is organized, how the educational program runs and what activities the school have for the students and how the

students' respond in all activities. I also had time to see how the teachers reacted to their students in both teaching sections and break time on a daily basis. I was not introduced to all teachers (except for some who participated in my interviewing) and students as a master student who came for doing research. Instead I was introduced as a friend of my friend who visited the school randomly. In this way, I spent time with my interviewees, as well as observing the activities of the school. As part of this endeavor I also joined the morning gatherings of the school before students went back to their class for academic study.

In addition, during the one week I stayed in my friend's house, whose two children were pupils of the Christian school. This offered me a good opportunity to obtain insight into these two pupils lived outside the school. This provided additional insight over and above what the interviewees said before and later and gave me a general knowledge about the Christian program of this school.

I had the same experiences when visiting the school in the North of Viet Nam. I spent time attending morning gatherings and attended some teaching sections in different classes. Since, the school was newly established, the number of students was still small and resulted in the relationships between teachers and students being very closed and friendly. As indicated

earlier, I had no opportunity to observe the state school, but from my personal experiences as a pupil in Viet Nam before, there have not been many opportunities with respect activities teaching and learning methods, daily schedules, or social environment at schools. However, participate observation was not the main research method used for my data collection. Rather, it contributed to establish rapport so that the interviews could go smoothly, efficiently and also provide more insights of the Christian educational program. Therefore, I will not document much of my participant observation in the discussion of my findings part, although the insight that I have gained from my participant observation will reflect in the analysis of my data collection. Since it was of interest for me not only what the interviewees said but also how or in what way they said it (cf. Bryman, 2012: 482).

4.7 Research ethics

Ethical issues in social research are important because it deals with "how the researcher treat the people on whom we conduct research" (Bryman, 2012: 130). Especially, my research was conducted in the Vietnamese context where religion is still a sensitive issue. That is the reason

why in the introduction chapter, I have made a statement of confidentiality in which I referred to use pseudonyms for the research informants instead of their real names to minimize any potential of negative consequences which may occur to informants and to the Christian educational work in Viet Nam (Bryman, 2012: 135). For the respect of the participants' autonomy and right, the informed consent letters were sent in advance to every informant via email before my arrival. I also affirmed that they have all freedom to participate or withdraw at any time without stating reasons both orally and in written form before each interview started.

4.8   Validity and reliability

According to Bryman, "reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and accessing the quality of a social research" (Bryman, 2012:390). External reliability refers to the degree of a study can be replicated. As Bryman stated, external reliability is the most difficult criteria to meet in qualitative research since its possibility of replication requires an initial social setting while it is impossible to "freeze" a social setting (Bryman, 2012: 390). Additionally, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, Christian educational program is Christian value-based which may influence the results. Therefore, the external validity of the Christian education in this case which refers the degree of the findings can be generalized across the social setting and the consistency of the research will be maintained as long as the Christian orientation is maintained (cf. Bryman, 2012: 390).

Furthermore, internal validity is measured whether there is a good match between the observations and theoretical ideas that will be developed (Bryman, 2012: 390). I believe, there is a high level of congruence between the concepts and observations in this study. Internal reliability is reached if there is an agreement about what is observed and heard among a team of researcher (Bryman, 2012: 390). I am confident that other researchers would come to the same conclusion on what I have heard and seen if they would conduct this research in the context of Viet Nam. However, there are certain issues concerning my personal bias as a researcher with Christian faith who have more than 20 years experiencing persecutions because of faith in Viet Nam, which may affect the research. However, I have tried my best to minimize as much as possible my own bias. Thus, to make sure of the accuracy and integrity of the research, I kept record of all conversations and interviews in order to be accurate in my transcription of the interviews. I also took note during my

research observations to enhance the dependability of the research. Thus, the validity and reliability of this research was achieved externally and internally.

4.9   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed and justified my choice of the research design and methods used in this thesis. I have described the process of data collection in Viet Nam. Since the qualitative social research methods are utilized for a case study research to investigate in what ways the two selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment, this offers a basis for maintaining the quality and ethics of the research. In the following chapter, I am going to present the findings which were collected based on the discussed research design and methods.

Chapter 5

Presentation of the research findings

5.1   Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter insights from the participant observation is not included as part of the presentation of the findings from the interviews, but will be integrated in the discussion and interpretation of the collected data in Chapter 6. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a presentation of the empirical data collected from the 10 interviewees at two selected Christian schools and 5 interviewees at a state school under different sub-titles.

The data collected are regarded as foundational to answering the question at the center of this research, namely in what ways selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment from the perspectives of Christian educational founders / Christian teachers and the experiences of pupils at the two mentioned Christian schools. As mentioned in previous chapters, the first category of interviewees consisted of Christian educational founders, the second of Christian teachers and the third of pupils at the respective schools. The first and second category of interviewees were promoting and working towards empowerment while the third category were subjects of receiving and experiencing empowerment through the education they received at Christian schools.

The data collected at the state school aimed to serve as a comparison to the Christian education. Thus, I present the findings collected from the state school in a separate section. Therefore, this chapter is constructed into two sections. The first section contains the presentation of data collected in the two selected Christian schools. The second section contains the presentation of data collected from the state school.

The interviews were conducted as follows:

- School in the South: Interviews with (a) Brother David, the Principal; (b) two teachers, Esther and Anne; and (c) two parents, Sister Ho Tu and Sister Nguyen) between 2 to 9 August 2018;

- School in the North: Interviews with Brother Joshua who is the founder of the school and two parents, Le and Lan, between 20 to 22 of August 2018. In addition, I had conversations with the two teachers, Marry and Helen, at a later time in February 2019 through callings.

- The state school: The consents letters and interview guided were sent at a later time in December 2018 to teachers (a) Hang, Luu and Hoa and two parents (b) Quang and Hoai. The answers were sent back in early March 2019.

5.2   Data from interviews collected from the selected Christian schools

As mentioned, this part of the empirical data is presented according to the sub- titles corresponding to categories of interviewees as follows:

5.2.1   Interviews with Christian educational founders/ leaders

Two persons who hold leadership positions at two selected Christian schools were interviewed, one in the North and one in the South of Viet Nam. Brother David has been the principal of the Christian school in the South for more than two years, but he has been working in the school church ministry for years. While brother Joshua has been an active Christian of the United Outreach Gospel Church in the North Viet Nam. He and his wife have educational background in foreign languages. The state of Vietnamese education motivates Joshua and his wife establishing Christian school in the North which has been newly started for one year.

5.2.1.1   The motivation for establishing a Christian school

The school in the South was established in 2013 soon after David's pastor, Pastor John obeyed God's calling to be a missionary in the South of Viet Nam. Shortly after settling, Pastor John was inspired by the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 as a vision to educate next generation of citizen to walk in God's way. According to brother David, Pastor John believed that he himself or the church could be more effective if the church had a school. As a result, the school was established. The school belonged to the church and was seen as a ministry of the church. The church and school were working together. And by God's grace, the school had been growing very fast. It started with seven pupils but in following years increased respectively to 30 and 80. In 2017 the number of pupils further increased to 130 while presently there are more than 190 pupils enrolled in different levels from kindergarten to high school.

Brother David gave the following explanation why the school was established:

> If, the church alone, the church is unable to send missionaries and Christian teachers to different parts of Viet Nam to share the words of God, but because of the school, the church becomes prospered to send out missionaries to serve the world. However, the most important ministry of the church is to save the lost for Jesus Lord.

In contrast, brother Joshua who is the founder of the Christian school in the North raised his concern about of the poor quality of education of Viet Nam and its consequences for the current generation of young people. He said to me:

> As a Vietnamese, I can't bear to let the young generation to be ruined by an outdated and deceitful education of Marxism and Leninism. As you see, education and medication have been considered the most noble and respectful careers according to our Vietnamese tradition, but what you experience daily in our times now? Many frauds and cheating in examination! How can that education be able to produce good citizens with honest and integrity? That is why I need to do something about the education. I decided to establish this Christian school is to provide good quality education that enables to develop them to be people with dignity, integrity and ability. I want to provide them with an environment where they are treated with respect and dignity.

Brother Joshua went further to comment that Vietnamese education was like a party where all kinds of delicious food were served, but those dishes could not be eaten because it was just draw food. He continued explaining that Ho Chi Minh ideology and Marxist- Leninist socialist theory was like draw food that the Vietnamese Communist Party tries to serve to the country's children through education; yet they never consume that food. He substantiated this reasoning by referring to the reality of Vietnamese society that people promote for socialist theory. Yet they are the same people who hold the power and leadership positions in the country, and they never care for the common good of all people in the country except for themselves. The reality in Vietnamese society is that everything could be dealt with money: jobs, careers, diplomas and even health. Why? Because, if one has money, you could buy good grades to get admission to enter good university and then if you have money, you could buy a diploma and a good job. But if you do not have money, you get sick and kicked out by the hospital. None will pay the medical bills for you. Living in a society like Viet Nam, having money is the most important thing at the cost of building up people with dignity and integrity. He continued to say:

As Christians, we need to change. We may not have the power to change the society, but at least we can change ourselves and change our children by giving them a good education.

When asked about the main goal of Christian education and the role of the church in the work of education Brother David commented that the main purposes of Christian education through the church school ministry was to reach a child's dream for Christ's name. This more specifically entailed:

- Providing quality Christian education to empower each child to reach his / her full potential. Christian education aims to train next generation to be godly leaders in the future.

- Serving families who need a school for their children that will nurture their academic, social, physical, emotional and spiritual journey. Christian education is ministry that aims to serve family and the kids. It aims to empower a child to live properly and build up his / her academic skills and train a child to be a bilingual person who are influent both in English and Vietnamese.

- Raising God fearing individuals who will be responsible, capable and successful leaders.

Brother David continued to add that the main purpose of the work of education is to glorify God and to see life changes. He spoke to me with great joy as he pointed to a high school pupil. He specified that this pupil had changed a lot compared with when he first entered the school. He used to be a very "special" pupil as he displayed uncontrollable temper. At this point in time the pupil could not get along with other pupils in the school, and even most of the teachers seemed to give up on him. However, he had changed a lot, attended class, got along with his fellow pupils, and continued to improve in his studies.

5.2.1.2   *Goals and purpose of Christian education and the role of the church*

When asked about the main goal of Christian education and the role of the church in the work of education Brother David commented that the main purposes of Christian education through the church school ministry was to reach a child's dream for Christ's name. This more specifically entailed:

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Brother David kept expressing their expectation as Christian educators that the pupils would be equipped academically and spiritually so that in the future, they would become good parents and good citizens who actively participate and contribute to the society following the example of Jesus Christ. He pointed out Jesus Christ was all power, but he never isolated himself, but he was going into the world and making changes in the world. David emphasized Jesus' calling Christian today to be with him and continue his work. David said that as Christian educators who should educate young people with an expectation that their lives will be trained, equipped and changed in a way that they also continue reaching the world. He noted that to achieve the goals of Christian education, the educational program should be contented as follows:

- Character building with 90 character- traits (biblical character traits). The curriculum is created in a way that the biblical verses appeared in every pages of the curriculum manual.

- Development of the child's skills, inspiration, abilities and capacity and academic excellence. The curriculum is created in way that equips a child know how to learn and to master the learning. For example: to answer the question on the understanding of a character traits, the pupils are required to read a story or even a book depends on their levels. In that ways they learn to read, learn to write and really understand what they write and read. They need to reach 80% to be considered pass;

- The development of the child's skill in setting goals. The educational style is created as individualization. Each pupil sets his/ her own goals for studying and learn to be responsible and to manage their study performance. They are trained to take active roles in their own matters. And as you see, the word of God in the bible is the source of knowledge and God has trained and enable the church to teach all things that Jesus has commanded in Matthew 28: 18- 20

Brother Joshua expressed a similar opinion on the role of the church in education by referring to Matthew 28:18- 20. He stated that God has saved and equipped the church so that the church is able to fulfill the Great Commission by the evangelism and discipleship. For him, discipleship entailed teaching ministry or educational ministry.

According to Brother Joshua's response it was not surprising to hear his qualification about the main goal to establish the Christian school. He said:

> The main purpose of the educational program of the Christian school is to fully develop a child to his/ her fullest potential. It aims to equip a child to know God and to know his/ her worth as human being. It is to help a child to develop his/ her abilities, capacity and skills. It is to fully develop a child's character to become people with dignity and integrity. The purpose of education is training children first to become the people with good character, the people with dignity before training them to be the person of success. Additionally, the educational program created also to focus training pupils to develop their academical knowledge, ability and capacity. The curriculum is created with expectation to fully develop a child to recognize his/ her own worth as human being and develop his/ her potentials for contribution and participation in the society. Once, they recognize their own worth, they will learn to respect others.

5.2.1.3 *The understanding of good/ high quality education*

Since both Christian educational leaders and founders mentioned the importance of good and high-quality education I asked them about what their understanding of such education more specifically was. Brother David stated:

> According to my personal point of view about what is high / good quality education may different with others, and I am not sure if you agree with me. For me, high quality education does not mean to be expensive. It is not about expenses, but it is about an investment, not only in expenses but it is the investment of the educator with all heart and mind to create an education that fully develop a child with excellence. It is an education that can produce a product that reach the mountains. And you know, I am the product of that education with the curriculum of Accelerated Christian Education (A.C.E). I have seen many products like this from the Christian Education. In 2018, top 1 in civil engineering in Philippines is an A.C.E graduate and 70% of A.C.E graduates pass the national university in Philippines. Some of my former pupils are now taking higher education at master programmes. So, for me, high quality education is an education that fully develop child's capacity and ability.

Brother Joshua in turn had the following to say:

> High quality education is using a simple, effective and productive method to teach pupils to master the learning. It is an education that helps pupils to develop their thinking and extend the knowledge. It is an education that inspires pupils the desire of knowing more and to understand the complicated concepts in a simple way. High quality education is the education that helps to minimize pupils' mistakes but improve their skills of reasoning. It is an education that can be applicable in their social life.

5.2.1.4 *Understanding of empowerment*

To clarify the understanding of the term "empowerment" Brother David Brother David continued by referring to Steve Jobs, a former co- founder of Apple Inc as a person of success but not a person who lived a good life. David explained that, he dared to say so because of Steve Job's words before he died with regret. Steve Jobs urged everyone not to imitate him, but he urged people to enjoy life, cherish others and love others. Because, according to David, empowerment is to equip a child the ability to live on their own in a meaningful way which is not under the pressure or dominion by others. David commented that,

Empowerment is to build the child up in a way that his/ her abilities and skills will be improve that he/ she can be able to use his/ her skills and abilities in life. Empowerment is not just to equip a child to make a living, but to train them how to live.

Since the term "empowerment" is not commonly used in the northern part of Viet Nam, instead of using "empowerment" I used the term "fully development as human being" to ask Brother Joshua about his understanding of empowerment. He answered me in more detailed than I expected. According to him fully development of human being includes nine areas such which can be summarized as three main parts of human being: physical body, soul and spirit. He continued explaining that fully development as human being is the development of the physical body through the physical activities, social interactions and participants; the improvement of the soul (the inner world) is to increase the capacity and ability to sense the natural world, to enjoy music, acknowledgement of visual pace and improvement of reasoning ability and logical mathematic. While the improvement of spirituality is fundamental right of human being by which people will be allowed to exercise their religious beliefs. He finally concluded by saying:

Missing any of the three main areas is not a fully developed human being.

5.2.1.5 *Features of empowerment*

Brother David was excited when I asked about the features of the pupils' empowerment. He was very confidence by saying that, even he had just been working in the school in the North for more than two year as a teacher and a principal, but he could identify quite number of pupils in the school experienced and gained certain levels of empowerment. The first point he fingered out is that most of pupils had transformed in their character. He explained by saying that he often communicated with the parents and verified the transformation of the pupils by parents' affirmation. He affirmed that most parents testified about the positive changes of their children at home by the attitude of more self-discipline in the study, more concern for the family and people around them. David continued by mentioning the improvement of the English- speaking skill by which the parents were very proud of and satisfied with. David stated:

Being the leadership position at the school, I am also in charge of teaching pupils every day and being pleased with the improvement of the pupils at school. They are more capable and responsible to set

appropriate goals for their study and manage their study well. I have seen how confident they are to communicate with the foreigners in English.

Brother Joshua, the founder of the school in the North mentioned several aspects when answering the question of features that indicate the full development of the pupils. He told me that even the school had been established for one year, but he could recognize obvious signals that indicated the improvement of the pupils. He said:

The pupils can master the knowledge that they have learnt, and they are able to reason and extend the knowledge by their independent thinking. They also have a proactive and positive attitude towards life. They are cognitive and be responsible for their own actions that they can set goals and life-reorientation for their future. The second signal relates to character. They are docile, polite and respectful towards others.

5.2.1.6 *The differences between Christian education and the education of state schools*

The fact that questions were answered in a more detail manner than I expected was an exciting feature of the conversation. According to Brother David there were many differences between Christian education and state education. As he said, since the Christian education is Christian value- based, so all teachers are Christians and it means the teachers love their pupils. According to David, the love of the teachers for their pupils is the most important features compares to state schools. He explained that young people are on their way to formulate their personalities and life-and as teachers were responsible in cooperation with the family to teach them in love. He said that there is a principle in his church- school is that teachers were not allowed to hurt the pupils by words, actions or attitude whatever the situation is. There is a wooden hand called "helping hand" used to correct pupils in serious and special circumstances. According to the policy of the school, the person who are responsible to use the stick are parents, not the teachers base on the principle: Rewarding and praising is done in public, but discipline is done in private. He also emphasized the method of teaching as significant feature compared to state school. He said, the curriculum that the church- school is using was created individualization. He explained that all pupils need to undertake the diagnostic test to determine their levels. He continued:

We don't simply put them in a level based on their age. Because, we don't want to give them something that they can't eat. Once, the pupils can't perform his or her study well, they are not interested in

learning. So, in the educational system of the school, there are two level: chronical level which is based on the age and performing level. Some pupils are not at their aged chronical level, but after 1, 2 years they catch the aged- chronical level. In addition, the individualized education allows pupils to set study- goals for themselves and enable them to master the learning and the knowledge that they learnt.

Similar with what brother David had said, brother Joshua added that the Christian educational curriculum was designed to develop independent thinking and the ability of reasoning so that pupils learn to study by him- or herself.

5.2.1.7   An evaluation of the Christian educational program

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, my aim to conduct this research was not to cover the statistics of the success rate of the program, but I wanted to obtain a greater understanding of empowerment by asking Brother David and Brother Joshua on how they evaluate the educational program that they were implementing. They both affirmed their trust and confidence in the educational program and the curriculum that they were using. According to both, since the educational program applied the method of education individually, the pupils were able to study on a level that he or she could perform and be able to master the knowledge. Pupils as such were not pressured to follow the curriculum like in state schools to compete with other pupils. They had the freedom to master their learning with the support of the teachers. Also, they were only granted a pass if they performed at least 80% of the test. If they were unable, they were compelled to study and do the test again until they sufficiently mastered the subject content. Furthermore, both Brother David and Joshua ensured that this was a high-quality educational program to develop intellectual capacity and the personality of each individual. It was an educational program geared towards producing capable leaders with integrity.

5.2.2   Interviews with Christian teachers

Two Christian teachers were selected for interviews at each school. Anne had been teaching at the school in the South for three years, but she had experience working with the same educational program for six years. Esther on her part had been working as a kindergarten teacher at the school in the South for four years. At the school in the North, since it was only recently established, both teachers Hellen and Mary had been teaching for less than one year, although both of them had

experiences of teaching in Christian school for years. Anne, Hellen and Mary are missionaries sent to Viet Nam from a foreign country while Esther grew up in Viet Nam

5.2.2.1   *The motivation for working at Christian school*

Anne, Hellen, Marry and Esther are church's workers and missionaries and had similar stories to tell when asked about their motivation to work at a Christian school. When Anne told me about the story of her early education at state school, she observed that she could learn and improve her knowledge but studying at state school did not help her in spiritual growth. This was an important reason motivating her to serve in the Christian educational ministry. She felt she had been called to the ministry of education, even though she had been educated as an engineer. In addition, however, she received training to be a teacher in the church. She commented that she was there to serve God, not to work, because according to her, working was for a salary, but serving was for the ministry and her motivation was for the ministry. She emphasized that she loves God and loves children that she wants to serve God in the best way that she can.

Hellen and Marry gave a similar account. They told me that through their best friend, they learned that there was a need for missionary work in the North of Viet Nam in the ministry of Christian education. Since it was a Christian school with a biblical base, they decided to work there.

Esther had the same answer to the question about her motivation. She said working at a Christian school was a blessing and good opportunity to serve God. She learned new things to improve herself in knowledge and skills to be a good teacher and good parent at home.

5.2.2.2   *Goals and purpose of Christian education and the role of the church*

The next question that was asked focused on the purpose of Christian education. Anne, Hellen and Marry were trained to be missionaries from the same background theologically and academically. They even had similar working experiences in the Accelerated Christian Education and as a result gave similar answers. For them the task of the task of the church, by following the vision of Accelerated Christian Education, was to reach the world for Christ, one child at a time. The main aim was to provide high quality education and to train children and young people to be devout leaders and enable them to transform the world into a better place. Since it was God who

commanded and equipped the church the essential ability to educate the world could be found in Matthew 28:18-20. Educating people was the responsibility of the church.

In contrast Esther grew up in a free church in the North of Viet Nam. She quoted Proverb 22:6 as giving a guiding principle to teach children to follow God's way throughout their lives. She continued by saying:

> Education is a life- process and we, as Christian are responsible to teach our children. This is a mission that Jesus has commanded the church to do.

5.2.2.3 *Understanding of high- quality education*

Anne, Marry, Hellen and Esther expressed the same understanding of "high quality education". According to them high quality education was a kind of education that produced devout people with capacity, ability and dignity.

5.2.2.4 *Understanding of empowerment*

As mentioned earlier, the term "empowerment" is not widely used in Vietnamese context. Since Esther grew up in Viet Nam I therefore tried to make our conversation more comprehensible by using the term "fully development of human being". According to her, a human person's full development comprised three dimensions: spirit, soul and physical body**.**

However, Anne, Marry and Hellen have other educational and church background than in Viet Nam defined the term "empowerment" more precisely as follows:

> Empowerment is the enablement of all aspects of a person spiritually, physically and emotionally. That is why Christian education doesn't only emphasis equipping pupils with knowledge and skills but also trains them with spiritual disciplines and building character. Empowerment is a process of preparing children so that they can reach their goals, enables them to face life-challenges with confidence and overcome difficulties.

5.2.2.5 *Features indicating pupils' empowerment*

When asking the question about features that signaled pupils' empowerment, or otherwise full development as human beings, the four interviewees all testified that they had heard positive feedback and comments from parents. Parents of their pupils told them that the pupils improved

in their self-discipline, English speaking skills, and attitudes towards life characterized by love and care for the family and people around them. Some parents even mentioned that their children corrected them when they did something wrong at home.

At school, they improved in their learning and managed their own study goals well. They were friendly to friends and respected their teachers. For the interviewees this counted among the features of empowerment.

5.2.2.6 *Differences between Christian education and the education of state schools*

The four interviewees all agreed that there were big differences between Christian schools and state schools. In the Christian school, ethical teaching was based on the Bible and teachers taught their pupils through their life examples. But in state schools of Viet Nam, ethical teaching was based on Marxist and Leninist principles and what pupils and students learned stood in contrast with what they experienced in real life.

In Christian schools, in contrast, the four interviewees sketched the following common picture. Once pupils know how to read and write, they become responsible to set their goals of study while the teacher would guide and help them to master the learning individually. If they do not understand something, they could come to the teachers and ask for guidance and instruction, so that they do not feel ashamed for not understanding or asking for help. The pupils are not forced to be mature, which means that they are not pressured to finish the study program set by school alike in state school, even if they do not understand. Thus, the quality of the knowledge that the pupils gain is better compared with pupils in state school. In additionally, since the learning is individualized, the pupils are enabled to develop their creativity and reasoning ability. In the state school, the teachers master the learning and the knowledge, but in Christian school, the pupils master the learning. In Christian schools, teachers love their pupils and are not allowed to hurt pupils in whatever situations. Teacher are not allowed to made pupils feel ashamed but to treat them in way that they are cognitive with their self- esteem and self-worth.

5.2.2.7 *Evaluation of the Christian educational program*

Esther made her final comment on the evaluation of Christian educational program in a grateful attitude. She observed:

I am very grateful that God has answered my prayers of my children's education. My husband and I prayed for my children's education several years before they reached school-age. As you know about the many negative issues related to Vietnamese education, my husband and I have been worried for our children to be educated in this educational system of Viet Nam. We are very blessed to have a Christian school where we can send out children to without worrying. For commenting on Christian v educational program as parents of students, I can say that this is a perfect education that helps to train our children to be people with knowledge and good character.

Anne, Marry and Hellen were educated in another country, but they also rated the Christian education system and content of curriculum very highly. They believed Christian education can make differences in a child's life and enables to equip pupils to be people who bring about transformation in the world.

5.2.3 Interviews with parents whose children study at the selected Christian schools

Two parents were selected as interviewees in each of the selected Christian schools. In total therefore there were four interviewees, within one of the four being a non-Christian. Ho Tu and Nguyen were representatives of the school in the South. Le and Lan represented the school in the North. Ho Tu, Le Lan are active Christian while Nguyen is a person with different religious belief.

5.2.3.1 *Knowledge of the Christian educational program*

My first question to the parents was aimed at learning in what ways they knew about the program of Christian education. Ho Tu had two children studying at Christian school in the South. Her oldest daughter was at the high school level and her younger son at secondary level. She shared with me that she had the same concern that teacher Esther had when her first daughter reached Level 8 education. She went to church and openly shared her concern about education with other women similar to many other concerns in her life. During this time, a friend in church shared her knowledge of the Christian school to which she was sending her children to. Ho Tu immediately became interested and decided to visit the school. After the visit, she decided to also send her children to the same Christian school. This happened the same with Lan and Le in the North.

Since Nguyen is a non- Christian, I was interested to learnt how she got to know about the Christian school, but unfortunately, she did not share with me how she got to know this.

5.2.3.2 Motivation to send children to a Christian school

The four parents expressed the same opinion and worry about Vietnamese education and they trusted Christian education to at least able to train their children to be people with morality. This was the first and foremost reason why they decided to send their children to Christian school. In addition, they believed that Christian schools trained a child to become a bilingual person, which they saw as an important factor to access more opportunities and have a better quality of life. This strongly influenced their decision to send their children to the selected Christian schools. Moreover, this decision was vindicated by the fact that their children improved more than they expected.

5.2.3.3 Expectations of the Christian educational program

The four interviewees all expressed the expectation that their children would be equipped spiritually and academically so that they could become devout people able and responsible to manage their own lives.

5.2.3.4 The differences between the Christian schools and the state school

The interviewees gave similar answers when they were asked about the differences between the two educational systems of Christian schools and state schools. They were of the opinion that in Christian schools, teachers were friendly, caring and loving pupils, with the result that their children were excited to go to school. In state schools, however, teachers sometimes said hurtful words that effected children emotionally and psychologically. Moreover, in Christian schools, pupils learned to master knowledge and not only learn for good exam results.

5.2.3.5 Features of visible development and quality education

The four parents similarly observed that an obvious indication of their children was the improvement in their children's skills levels to understand and speak English. They all improved fast in this area. Some of them could not speak a word of English, but after a few months could understand English and communicate in English. The second feature related to the children's self-discipline in their studies. Previously, the parents had to remind their children to study and to do home-assignments, but this was now not needed any longer. Thirdly, their children became more caring and loving towards family members and other people around them. The children came home

telling stories about friends, teachers and school with love. They expressed their love and respect towards teachers when they were asked about their school, teachers and friends. This aptly explained why the parents were very satisfied with the quality education at Christian schools.

5.3 Interviews at a state school

Interviews were conducted with three teachers and two parents at state school located in an island village belongs to Quang Ninh province, the North of Viet Nam which is a secondary school. Since it was not face to face interviews, there might have been certain limitations. The most obvious limitation is that all the answers were very short and precise. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the inclusion of a state school did not form part of the main study but was intended to obtain an overall picture of Vietnamese education in comparison with the specific features of Christian education.

5. 3.1 Interview with teachers

The questionnaire was sent to three teachers, Hoa, Luu and Hang. All of them have had more than five years experiences as teachers in state school.

5.3.1.1 *Motivation for teaching in the village school*

According to Luu and Hoa, the primary reason that motivate them to work in this village school was to meet the obligations that were determined by the Department of Education and Training of Quang Ninh Province. In turn teacher Hang indicated that her decision to work there was based on her love for the island village and the school.

5.3.1.2 *Understanding the goals and purpose of state-based education*

Regarding understanding of the goals and purpose of state- based education, all three teachers gave similar answers. Teacher Hang mentioned three area of state education. According to her, state-based education focused in building up pupils to be people with morality. She stated that the purpose of state education is to train pupils in a way that enables the pupils learn how to improve themselves and educate them with knowledge.

While Luu summarized the goals of state- based education as a precise answer. She wrote: "To focus educate pupils with morality, personalities – building and knowledge."

Teacher Hoa indicated that, the main focus of state education is to educate pupils with skills and knowledge according to the curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education and Training.

5.3.1.3 *Understanding of high-quality education*

As I was reading the answers of the state teachers, I learnt that they have similarities to those teachers from Christian education. Hang presented her understanding of high- quality education was an education are measured by the mastering of skills, knowledge, study methods and attitude of the pupils in their studies. In turn Luu observed that for her high- quality education was an education that equipped persons to become fully developed human being with knowledge and personality. Hoa, on her part, stressed that high quality education had to lead to improvement in pupils' knowledge, ability, morality. Any education that equipped people with knowledge, ability, skills and a moral outlook on life was high quality education.

5.3.1.4 *Understanding of fully developed human beings*

Hang defined fully developed human being as an investment in developing people's potential in areas such as education, medication, and working skills so that they can work productively and creatively. According to Hoa, fully development of human being had to be a development based on people- centered principles. Luu in turn stated: "Fully developed human being is a development that focus on the development of human being"

5.3.1.5 *Features of pupils' development*

For Luu, pupils' development featured through their participation in team work and practical experiences. According to Hoa, she based her measurement of pupils' development through their activeness in school activities and based on the results of exams. She said that good results of exams of the pupils indicate that they perceive the knowledge had been taught in the class. While Hang indicated that she strived to contribute to the development of her pupils through the ability of understanding the knowledge that she taught from the curriculum, through the participation of the pupils in the extracurricular and through team-work activities.

5.3.1.6   Evaluation of the educational program

When comes to the evaluation of the educational program of state school. The teachers had similar comments on evaluation of the educational program of this school. According to Luu, the quality education of the school in the quality control of the Ministry of Education and Training of Viet Nam. While Hang mentioned that the facilities of the school is sufficient and the quality education of the school meets the requirements on educational quality set by the Ministry of Education and Training. Hoa commented that this island village school applies the current educational program that directed by the Ministry of education and Training of Viet Nam. They all said that the school ensures the quality education set by the Ministry of Education and Training.

5.3.2   Interviews with parents whose children studied at state schools

Two parents were selected as informants for interview. Quang and Hoai who have their children studying at the selected state school at secondary level.

5.3.2.1   Reasons for sending children to a state school

Quang stated that he chose to send his son to this school because it was near his house and convenient for his son to go to school. Additionally, this was the only high school in the village

Hoai had a similar answer but gave as another reason that she had relatives who worked in this school.

5.3.2.2   Expectation of a state-based school

Quang hoped his son would gain good results in study so that his son could graduate high school and have opportunity to get university admission. Hoai likewise hoped that her children would be able to complete and graduate high school.

5.3.2.3   Visible features of development

Hoai said that through her children's social life and family, she thought that her children developed morally. Yet, she realized that her children were not able to master the knowledge that they learnt at school.

According to Quang, the school was using the curriculum and system directed by the Ministry of Education and Training. This was the only high school in the village and he was not sure whether his son would qualify to get university admission.

5.3.2.4 *Level of satisfaction on quality education of state school*

It seems to me that the parents were hesitated to comment on the level of satisfaction on the quality education of the state school. They were both not confident in the development of their children academically. Hoai said that through her children's social life and family, she thinks that her children develop morally, but she realized her children has not been able to master the knowledge that they learnt at school. While Quang stated, the school is using the curriculum and system directed by the Ministry of Education and Training, and this is the only high school in the village, but he is not sure if his son will be qualified to get university admission.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overall picture of two different educational programmes (Christian education and state education of Viet Nam). The data presented has given the readers a glimpse into the purpose of education, the system of quality control, the curriculum and language of instruction used by the two selected Christian schools. The same data was obtained from the state school serves as a comparison to the Christian education.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the raw empirical data presented here in the light of the conceptual and theoretical framework presented in chapter three. I will apply the theoretical concept of education and Education for Sustainable Development of United Nations (1967, 1989, 1996) and the four pillars of education of UNESCO (1996). I also apply the theoretical perspectives of empowerment in diakonia context to examine whether and how the two selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment.

Chapter 6

Interpretation and discussion of the research findings

6. 1   Introduction

This discussion chapter is constructed by taking account of the theoretical concepts of education and empowerment presented in Chapter 3. The discussion is conducted based on the background information provided (Chapter 2), the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) and the empirical findings presented in Chapter 5. The purpose of the discussion is to gain useful insights for answering the central research question: In what ways selected Christian school function as agencies of empowerment? As mentioned earlier, the participant observation will be included in the analysis and discussion of the data in the relation with the mentioned theories in this study as additional insights.

Since the research question is complex and in order to answer it comprehensively, it is essential to investigate the research topic from different angles and to examine certain elements required to be present in the educational program that implemented by the two selected Christian schools. I will apply the concept of education and Education for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (1967, 1989, 1996) and the four pillars of education of UNESCO (1996) as a ground for my discussion. I will try to connect the main empirical data into the main points drawn from the conceptual and theoretical framework in the discussion. I attempt to present an overview of all aspects involved, putting them together and summing up for answering the research question.

6.2   The review of the theoretical concept of education

As indicated in Chapter 3, education has been the primary concern of the global community. For several decades before the 2000s, the United Nations' concern with education was of a quantitative nature, hence trying to ensure access to education for all. Gradually, however, educational analysts and policy-makers started to realize that this approach did not ensure the quality of education (UNESCO, 2004: 28). While education was agreed to be one of the fundamental human rights by the international community in 1996, the main purpose of education agreed upon by the United Nations is to empower learners to be cognitive, responsible and capable social actors in the society

who will be subjects of their own lives and transformers of the world where they live in (UNESCO, 1966, 1967, 1989, 1996, and 2015). Education had become one of the most indispensable elements for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

To achieve this goal, it is essential to trained learners to stimulate the thirst of long-life learning along with the four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (UNESCO, 1996).

After a period of focusing on achieving universal primary education and elementary education of all nations, the quality of education has been silent, the global community has recognized the poor quality of education which needed to be improved (UNESCO, 2004: 28, 29). Therefore, the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 recognized quality of education as a dominant factor. Goal number two and sixth were relating to the commitment of provision of good quality education among the members of global community (UNESCO, 2004: 29). Because it was stated that: "merely filling spaces called 'school' with children would not address the quantitative objectives if no real education occurred" (UNESCO, 2004: 28). Thus, the quality of education cannot be ignored and accessing to good quality education was strongly emphasized to be the right of every child (Pigozzi, 2004: 4). Because according to the global community, assessing to education of poor quality is tantamount to no education at all" (UNICEF, 2014, n.d). Thus, to be able to achieve the stated above goals of education, the quality of education must be ensured. Additionally, education is a process or a journey where there is a destination to reach to. So, the purpose/ goals of education will be reached requires a process of education. The purpose or main goals of education is the end picture that sets the direction for the process involved and to achieve the goals of education, it requires the education with good quality.

So, what determines the quality of education?

According to the United Nations, to determine the quality of education requires several elements, but within the limitations of my thesis, I would like to focus on four elements, i.e. the purpose of education, the process of education, and the content of education and environment of education (UNESCO, 2004)

6.2.1   The purpose of education

The story of Christian educational program in Viet Nam represented by two selected schools becomes clearer when investigating the purpose of Christian education through individual interviews. Even brother David is not the main person to establish the school in the South, but it was established as his church ministry and as the whole church's vision. He therefore could give the most accurate information about the purpose of the educational ministry of the church. David clearly indicated that the purpose of Christian education was to educate every child "to reach his/ her full potential", "to live properly", and "to be bilingual persons who will be fluent in both Vietnamese and English" (David, 02.08. 2019). In order to offer a comprehension of "full potentials", he explained that the purpose of the educational work of his church is to "quip the pupils to be responsible, capable and successful future leaders. In the explanation of brother David, he mentioned the social, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the pupils as main focuses for empowerment through the educational work of his church.

Brother Joshua was the founder of the Christian school in the North and he had been courageous as pioneer of the Christian education in the North. Therefore, he was not only capable but also eager to share information about the purpose that he set for the educational work. As he stated, the purpose of the Christian education was to "fully develop the child to reach his/ her fullest potentials". Joshua mentioned "the development of the child's fullest potential" by emphasizing the development of a child to be people with dignity and integrity first and foremost. Because, according to him, before becoming a person of success or excellence, it is very important to be a person with good character (a person with morality). However, this does not mean that he underestimated the development of the child's academic skills through the work of education. He explained that to fully develop a child's potentials, meant train him or her to know God and to know his / her worth as human being. The purpose of education is to develop the child's abilities, capacity and skills and fully develop the child's character to become person with dignity and integrity so that the child will be able to participate and contribute to the society.

The purpose was not only set but also clearly communicated among all staffs and teachers who worked at the two selected school. That is the information obtained from interviewing four other

teachers of the two selected school are very similar to Joshua and Davit who are in the leadership and management positions. Even though the two were established and managed by two different groups of Christians. While the school in the North was implemented as a private business and the school in the South as a ministry of the church, the research revealed that the two schools share a similar purpose. Explanation for this similarity is because they are both under the School of Tomorrow Asia and following the same vision, the same purpose, curriculum content and system of accreditation and quality control of Accelerated Christian Education. The purpose of Christian education is to empowers pupils to be people with skills, knowledge and personality to meet the needs of the economic market for local, national and international integration "to train pupils to be bilingual people with skills and knowledge and responsibility personally, nationally and internationally".

Returning to the story of Viet Nam Education, the information obtained from the interviewing of the three state teachers at the selected school mentioned revealed that the purpose of the education in Viet Nam is to fully develop pupils to be people with knowledge, skills and morality. However, to fully understand what these teachers referred to when the term "people with knowledge, skills and morality" was used, one must understand it in the context of Viet Nam. It means that, the morality, personality and knowledge the teachers referred to must be understood based on Marxist and Leninist Socialism. It was recorded in the educational law which was come to effect in 1998 that the purpose of Viet Nam education is "to fully develop Vietnamese citizens with morality, knowledge, good health, […..], loyalty to national independence and socialism" and "personality, capacity essential to fulfill the mission of building and protecting the country" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005, chapter 1, article 2). The purpose of Viet Nam education focuses on the personal development of individual for the nation. As explanation of Dung Huệ Đoàn, the purpose of Viet Nam education is to develop Viet Nam citizens to full commitment to the national independence of Socialism which has been considered inappropriate and irrelevant in modern society where the individual values have gradually displayed (Dung Huệ Đoàn, 2005: 451- 463). And the explanation of Dung Huệ Đoàn is in accordance with Rogers' view that, the education becomes meaningless if it is no connection to the individual existence (Rogers, 1969: 3- 4).

Turning to the parents who decided to send their children to Christian school, they all expressed the deep concern of the current state of the Vietnamese Education that according to them, was not

of a good quality due to certain serious issues of cheating in exams, irrelevant curriculum and an outdated and backward pedagogical method. They indicated that they were introduced to Christian school by friends. After visiting and observation the Christian school, they all believed that the Christian school offered a safer place for the development of their child as well as a better quality education compared to state education. People might think, this judgement of a small number of Christians in Viet Nam is probably their own personal bias or prejudice against the Socialist theory of Viet Nam. But this comment is not truly correct in the context of Viet Nam at this point of time. Because, as given evidences in Chapter 2 on the state of Viet Nam education, the evaluation on Viet Nam education of poor quality is one voice of all people in the country including the educational experts like professor Hồ Ngọc Đại, Lê Viết Khuyến, Nguyễn Quốc Vượng, Quách Đình Liên or Đoàn Huệ Dung and of many others. Even with such impressive purpose of education stated in the educational law of Viet Nam, recently in an article, the Minister of Education and Training, Phùng Xuân Nhạ admitted shortcomings and limitations in the education sector, in which he listed serious issues related to cheating in exams, irrelevant curriculum, and school violence (Đặng Chung, 2018 n.d). While teacher Tô Thụy Diễm Quyên pointed out ten features that made Vietnamese education lagged behind, she admitted ten of many others causes of the current state education in Viet Nam (Tô Thụy Diễm Quyên, 2016 n.d).

As noted, Christian education has its clear purpose to train pupil to be person with knowledge, skills, morality. In other words, the purpose of Christian education is to empower pupils to be person with ability, capacity and dignity from personal level, unlikely with Vietnamese educational ambition to develop people for the nation (national level). Objectively, the purpose of Christian education is adequate because once the development/ empowerment occurs at personal level, it will impact the community level or national level. Because, Vietnamese Government strategic statement "rich citizens strengthen the nation". Planning for community development needs to start at individual (personal) development, as suggested in the book *Empowerment and Community Planning* by Elisheva Sadan (1997).

Education is a long process of training, equipping and empowering a young person to become someone expected. Thus, it is important to have a clear picture of what should be the product of the education. Education without a clear purpose is like a journey without knowing the destination. Education is a long process while the purpose of education is like a destination, to which the

education sector direct. The purpose of education should be directed to a certain kind of product expected to be produced, an outcome that expected to achieve. According to UNICEP, the outcomes of education must be appropriate, measurable and achievable. The purpose of education is the starting point for the development and implementation of the educational content and process of education involved (UNICEP, 2000: 19- 21). Therefore, the purpose of education must be relevant to the society that the learners are living in and must be achievable. The purpose of education must also be directed to the interests and benefits of the learners' cognitive development/ empowerment.

6.2.2 Process of education

In order to achieve the purpose of education two selected Christian schools have identified the process or journey of education. Indicating the process of education, both David and Joshua gave the most details of the process to reach the end destination of education. There are several factors such as pedagogical methods, language instruction and education environment in the process.

6.2.2.1 Pedagogical method: Individualization

The first thing they mentioned is the principle of individualization applied in the process of education. They both explained that in the case of every pupil's enrolment, it was required to take a diagnostic testing to determine his or her level of education. Christian education aims to provide a level of education individually to each pupil that they can perform. In the case of such a system, the pupils are not simply given a chronical education based on the pupil's age. Additionally, the main purpose of individualization is to ensure the pupils mastering the knowledge and the learning. Both David and Joshua stated that the teaching and learning in the two schools is not for rewarding or ranking, but for the mastering of the knowledge. To be considered pass a subject/ ore a course of the study, the pupils need to obtain 80 and above of the test. If not, they need to study again and take the test again before moving forward to the next level. Since the study focuses on the process of individuals, aiming to learning mastering by the pupils and they are given freedom and responsibility to set their own goals of study after they master the numeracy and literacy. They are responsible to set goals under the supervision of the teacher in a certain period (one day, one week or one month) to complete and achieve. This pedagogical method is to expand the knowledge and to develop the independent thinking of the pupils.

Moreover, the teaching is conducted more as an interactive discussion between teacher and pupils than the (traditional method)[3] of teaching. In other words, the teaching method in the educational process should be pupil-centered instead of teacher-centered as suggested by UNICEF (2000: 15). The method of pupil-centeredness is considered to be a qualitative process of education in comparison to traditional teaching methods. According to UNICEF, traditional teaching is characterized by authoritarian teaching styles which only helps to keep order in the classroom (UNICEF, 2000). Based on what I observed during the class section, each pupil had their own "office"[4] and had their individual studies. The teacher was present in the classroom just to give instructions and assistance if the pupils needed help or more explanation. When the pupils need help, they raise symbolic flags to send messages to the teachers. The teachers will approach each individual to give more instructions or whatever the pupils need. After specifying the issue or problem, instead of giving solutions, the teacher asked the pupil to read through the instructions of the assignments. In the process of reading through the instructions, the teachers might ask different questions to expand the independent thinking of the pupils and at the end, the pupils found the solutions or answers by themselves.

6.2.2.2   *Setting goals*

In the Christian school, pupils are required to set their own study goals direct after they master the skills of numeracy and literacy. This trains them to be independent and self-reliant. Moreover, it also helps to train the pupils to make adequate decisions and judgements. This principle of education enables pupils to be responsible and accountable for their actions. According to Rogers, education gives the child opportunities from the early age not only to make his / her own judgments and choices, but also to evaluate the consequences of the choices and judgments that he or she makes. As a result the child will grow up to be independent and self- reliant (Rogers, 1969: 163). However, this way of learning may fail the pupils in setting goals and fail in achieving goals. But it is also good, because through failure, they will really learn. This is what Rogers called "the whole person in both his feeling and cognitive aspects [is] in the learning event" (Rogers, 1969: 5). This education process helps to create the feeling of self- worth and respect as human beings with autonomy and dignity.

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[3] The traditional method means the teacher is mastering the knowledge.
[4] The class is arranged as an office, each pupil has their own table divided and separated by a divider.

According to the educational framework of the United Nations stated as the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child, education should be directed to the development of the child 's talents, personality, mental, and physical abilities to the fullest potentials (United Nations, 1989: 9). In order to achieve this goal, the process of education should be created in a way that requires the involvement and participation of the learners in the process. The process of education should not only include well-educated teachers but also be child-centered and support the learning experience of the pupils as suggested by UNICEF (2000: 15). This learning style is "the insatiable curiosity which drives the adolescent boy to observe everything he can see and hear or read…", a kind of learning "to improve the efficiency" (Rogers, 1969: 3). The learning that allows pupils to discover for themselves. This is what Christian education is implementing through the setting goals and mastering the learning.

In contrast, the Vietnamese state education can be compared to what Rogers (1969:3) has described as "lifeless, sterile, futile and quickly forgotten stuff which is crammed into the mind of the poor helpless individual tied into his seat by the iron clad bonds of conformity" (Rogers, 1969: 3). This pedagogical method is unable to fully develop pupils to his/ her fullest potentials according to the evaluation of fore-mentioned educational experts in Viet Nam.

6.2.2.3 *Language of instruction*

The purpose of Christian education is to train pupils to be bilingual person who will be influent in both English and Vietnamese. Therefore, the language of instruction is used in both English and Vietnamese. Both languages are used in school for instruction also as main subjects of the study program. Languages are used for instruction to have impact on the learning and academic achievement of the pupils (UNICEF, 2000: 17). Using both English and Vietnamese ensure the requirements of developing and maintaining the national value and culture as well as for global integration. Since the United Nations aims to empower people to be "global citizens", a global language such as English is a necessary and adequate language to use in the school (United Nation, n.d). Besides using mother tongue (Vietnamese) as language of instruction, Christian education uses English as a further step towards sustainable development and global integration in comparison to Vietnamese education. Vietnamese education is using Vietnamese as the main language of instruction which is a disadvantage since Vietnamese language is not popular in the world. Even English is also a subject of study in the educational program of Viet Nam, yet as

presented in the background chapter the level of English proficiency has not shown strong improvement in the state schools of Viet Nam.

6.2.2.4 The environment of education

The process of education not only involves the pedagogical method but also includes the environment of education. In the document "Defining Quality in Education", UNICEF shows that the learning environment is an important element that effects the learning outcome. This is because the environment of education is "made up of physical, psychological and service delivery systems" (UNICEF, 2000: 6). A school with good quality and sufficient facilities, a peaceful and safe place will direct effect to the learning outcomes of the learners.

Returning to the two Christian schools and the state school selected for this research, generally the facilities are sufficient and in good quality. However, taking the psychological elements into consideration, the facts are clearly shown that the Christian schools have created a more encouraging environment for effective learning. Based on what brother David and Joshua and other Christian teacher had said, they decided to work in the educational ministry because they loved God and of course they loved the pupils. That is why as teachers, they teach in love. Love is very obvious in what I could feel during my observation. I could easily witness beautiful scenes the small pupils surrounding their teachers during break time, talking, smiling very happily. I could see nice pictures hanging on the walls of each classroom with a slogan that "(t)he best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book". As mentioned, my friend's two children always said good things about their teachers at school. Joshua had emphasized that it is essential to create a safe place where children are treated with love and respect. In addition, the principle individualization, the principle of public rewarding and private punishment/ correction is to create a safe place for better learning effect of the pupils. As brother David said, in whatever situation, the teachers are not allowed to hurt the pupils either by words or actions. In such a safe and encouraging environment, pupils are not afraid to attend school, not being ashamed to ask for help when they have difficulties in the studies. This will help them to gain better learning achievements. But this is not same in state school as I have presented in Chapter 2 about the facts of education in Viet Nam. The violence in schools between teachers, pupils and among pupils themselves is a big concern to all people in the country nowadays.

To summarize, it is clear the that the two selected Christian schools have made their efforts to create a quality process of education in which the pedagogical methods are pupils- centered to best empower pupils with cognitive, knowledge, skills and to build up aa effective learning approach. In addition, Christian school have made an initial step of improvement in using bilingual in the education process which can meet the needs of both respecting and maintaining the national culture and values as well as preparing pupils to become global citizens ready for international integration. Furthermore, Christian schools focus in creating a safe environment that effects positively to the learning outcomes of the pupils which is one of the elements that has almost been forgotten in the state schools in Viet Nam.

6.2.3   The content of education

As presented in Chapter 3 and the beginning of this chapter, according to the Convention of the Rights of a Child of the United Nations, the content of education should reflect the respect for the national values and culture where the child is living. In addition, the content of education should also be gender sensitive and equality to ensure for training the child with adequate academic knowledge and essential life skills which are appropriate in the context where they live in (United Nations, 1989: 9).

In the light of educational content directed by United Nations, the two Christian schools, both in the North and in the South of Viet Nam using the curriculum of Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) in which the core subjects are included as follows:

- Math (Levels K- 12)
- English (Levels K- 12)
- Literature and Creative Writing (Levels 2- 8)
- Social studies (Levels K- 12)
- Science (Levels K- 12)
- Word building (Levels K- 9)
- Bible reading (Levels 1- 6) (ACE, n.d)

Besides core subjects there are also electives and additional instruction program offered in the curriculum of ACE beneficial to the academic growth that pupils can elect according to their interests (ACE, n.d).

The academic content of education at Christian schools is much the same compares to the academic content of state schools. But the distinct feature may fall on the moral content of Christian education which is based on biblical values.

There has been considerable polemic around the content of the ACE curriculum. In the thesis of Lisa, J. L. Kelly on an "Analysis of Accelerated Christian Education and College preparedness Based on American College Tests (ACT) Scores", she brought in some former researches on ACE material based on American College Test (ACT). According to "the ACT scores of the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) graduates were consistently lower than the those of public school" in the American context (Kelly, 2005: 2). According to the researches that Kelly mentioned, the curriculum of ACE were inadequate in certain areas such as social studies, science and competencies required in language art. In her thesis, Kelly referred to those researches and noted that the ACE curricular failed to perform adequate information on history (for social studies) and the repeated condemnation of those who reject the interpretation of the Bible (for science). Furthermore, Kelly showed that according to those mentioned researches, the ACE curriculum only covers two of the five competencies required in language art which is writing and reading (Kelly, 2005: 27- 28). In my role as a researcher of this research, the first two mentioned limitations regarding social studies and science, I don't have any comments since it is beyond my ability and professional regarding the limitation of this thesis. However, Kelly also pointed out the positive areas of ACE material based on the fore-mentioned researches that most of the Packages of Accelerated Christian Education were well written, clearly present the information, practical exercises, systematic reviews and sound principles of pedagogy (Kelly, 2005: 27). And according to Kelly, the researches taken based on American College Tests only would be erroneous and other researches should be taken to strengthen the conclusion that whether Accelerated Christian Education content are adequate or not? (Kelly, 2005: 48-49)

Another highlight critique by Jonny Scaramanga who had done qualitative research on the experiences of former Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) students. After the research he

concluded that the ACE failed to provide an education that meets the new standards. One of the main elements of his criticism rested on the content of the curriculum. As he said, in 2001 Norway banned the ACE curriculum for violating their Gender Quality Act. Scaramanga pointed out some parts of the teaching lessons on the role of the women and men in the family, teaching the way the girls should dress, about the obedience of the children to their parents. He concluded that there were issues related to gender equality. According to Scaramanga, these lessons directly led to abuses of girls and women and this content violates the standards of education (cf. UNICEF 2002).

The content of Christian education has made certain achievement concerning building up pupils academically and morally. However, there are certain issues that need to be taken into more careful consideration as presented in this part.

6.2.4 The outcomes of education

Based on the finding from both Christian schools, brother Joshua, David and four other teachers all testified the positive transformation and development of the pupils at Christian schools. While the parents showed their satisfaction on the positive changes of their children through the Christian education. According to the parents and teachers at the Christian schools, the pupils benefitted from the Christian education in several areas.

6.2.4.1 Development in character

All the parents (including one non-believer) testified that the pupils have been more caring and loving towards other people, especially their family. They have been more self- disciplined than they were in their own studies. Especially, according to Ho Tu, her older daughter became more confident after a period studying at Christian school. Her daughter used to be very shy and afraid of talking in public, but at the point of interview, she became courageous to sing in the church service and at school in front of many people. She even became confident enough to correct the parents at home when the parents did something that was not right. According to United Nations, the role of education is to develop the child's personality and respect for his/ her parents, her language, cultural values, identity of his/ her country and for a civilization difference from his/ her own (United Nations, 1989: 9). Building character or personality of the pupils as amended by United Nations is one of the main focus of selected Christian schools that has made certain impact to the development of pupils' personalities.

6.2.4.2 *The development of skills*

English speaking and writing skills are an obvious evidence of the development of the pupils at Christian schools compared with state schools. During the field trip, I have had opportunity to observe the pupils both in school and in daily life. As I could see the pupils at two selected Christian used English to communicate in a very natural and influent way as they talked to the foreign teachers in the school. But when they came home, they spoke Vietnamese. My period of one week in the South with my friend's family who has two children studying at Christian school in the South, the biggest daughter was at grade 5 and the little son was at grade 3. Since I had my classmate Marjorie, who is a Philippino, accompanying me during my field trip, the two children of my friends easily became friends with Marjorie that they talked and share with her everything in English without any difficulties. Even, in the family devotional time, the two kids took turn to be the translator for Marjorie. The vocabularies that they used were very broad in such a way that surprised me and Marjorie, not only English, but their Vietnamese were also very good. Later, I was even more surprised to find out that, they both had a very good habit of reading books in English and in Vietnamese while reading book is no longer a habit of young people nowadays in Viet Nam. This is contradictory with the researches that Kelly mentioned in her thesis that the curricular of Accelerated Christian Education could only cover two of five competencies of language art which is writing and reading according to the American College Tests of score. Even when I communicated with other pupils at grade 1 and 2 in the North where the Christian school have been started for one years, but they communicated well in English which is only their second language. While in the state school, the pupils can't speak a basic English if they don't take ex-course in other English language training centers where the fees too high for ordinary people to pay for their children.

6.2.4.3 *Academic skills*

According to David, Joshua and other teachers expressed their confidence in the education program providing good academic skills to prepare pupils for higher education. David observed that he was himself a product of Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) and as a result had achieved excellence in his study when he was a pupil of ACE and even later when he was at higher education. And now he is the one who uses the education to train other. Thus, he was sure of the quality of Accelerated Christian Education that his church was implementing. In addition, the

parents seemed very happy with what the Christian schools have done in building up their children both in academic knowledge and character- building through the educational program.

Despite of controversy and criticism of Christian Education providing an inadequate education compares with the education standards in the world, it is undeniable certain positive outcomes that the two selected Christian school have brought to Viet Nam through their educational program. The most obvious features of positive outcomes that we can take into account are the use of bilingual languages which the state schools of Viet Nam failed to do. In addition, Christian schools have provided a good environment of education for the development of the pupils. Furthermore, Christian education is making an impact for the building- character of the pupils.

6. 3   The diaconal work of the church through education for empowerment

The educational work of the school in the South is a church- based ministry. There is no need to argue on why and how this can be a diaconal act of the church. Based on the information obtained from the two teachers and brother David, the current Principal and Director of the school, their motivation to do the work that they were doing was for the ministry. To recall the story of pastor John, the founder of the schools, and bother Joshua, the founder of the school in the North, they saw the needs of the people in Viet Nam and they felt responsible to do something. Even Joshua – the founder of the school in the North decided to do the work of education himself, but he stated that he felt the calling of God to challenge him to respond to the need of education in Viet Nam based on the love for God and for people. According to the theological concept of the church in the context of Viet Nam, the church is the people of God, not the church is a building (Đặng Ngọc Báu, 2013), then Joshua can be a representative of the church in the North and the educational work that he is doing to empower pupils/ children to be people with abilities, capacity and dignity, so that in the future they will become subjects of their own lives and will become transformational makers of the world. And according to theoretical concept, the feeling of responsibility serve people in need is a central heart of diakonia (WCC, 2002: 35 and WLF, 2009: 8, 40). The sense of God's calling to serve the world by both words and deeds is the holistic mission and the integral part of the church, since the church is the people of God who are called to serve God and the world (Nordstokke, 2009: 25). Whatever that promotes for human worth, values and dignity and trikes for inclusion, peace and justice are the heart and motivation of diaconal actions (Nordstokke, 2009: 25- 27). Thus, as presented, the educational work of bother Joshua in the North and the church in

the South who are doing the work of empowering pupils to be active and proactive social actors with dignity, capacity and skills is in the light of theoretical concept of empowerment (Nordstokke, 2009: 41, 45; Ham, 2014: 111; Dietrich, 2014: 21). And as presented, the school- church ministry in the South and the work of a Christian as Joshua in the North are the diaconal work of the church based on the related theories.

6. 4   Conclusion

Confronting the challenge of the Vietnamese education, the church plays an important role to provide an adequate education to empower young generation of citizens to be active, responsible and capable social actors for the development of the country and for the global integration. As acknowledgement, to define the quality of Christian Education that enable empowerments of the pupils requires certain elements such as; purpose of education, process of education, environment of education, the content of education and outcomes. In this chapter, I have interpreted, discussed and made comparison of all the mentioned elements obtained from the investigation of the selected Christian school and a state school of Viet Nam in the light of the related theoretical concepts. The insights drawn out from the interpretation and discussion of the findings is the foundation for answering my main research question. In the next chapter, I will answer the research question and present my recommendations.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and recommendations

7.1   Introduction

The thesis concerned itself with the challenges of education in Viet Nam and the empowering role of selected Christian schools in addressing those challenges. This concluding chapter synthesizes the main argument and offers some recommendations in view of creating a better education for empowering young people in Viet Nam

7.2   Summary of the research and the answer to the research question

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the diaconal work of the Christian church in Viet Nam for empowerment through its educational program. I wanted to gain understanding of how the two selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment. The main focus of my thesis rested on how empowerment was experienced by the pupils and the understanding of the Christians teachers at the two Christian schools both in the North and the South of Viet Nam. Moreover, a state school in an island village of Quang Ninh province was selected for the research as a comparison to Christian educational program. The aim of a comparison between the different school systems – Christian schools and its state counterpart – was to determine whether the Christian education could be positively appreciated as making a contribution to the education sector of Viet Nam.

My research question was:

As an expression of the diaconal task of the church in Viet Nam, in what ways do two selected Christian schools function as agencies of empowerment through their educational program?

Based on the theoretical concept of education for sustainable development directed by the United Nations, answering this question is closely linked to the theoretical perspective that an empowered person is someone who gains the experience of self-worth and self-confidence to make decisions. The empowered is someone who has gained a sense of responsibility with oneself and capable to change the society around him or her. In order to achieve this sense of empowerment requires a process of being empowered through quality education. To define the quality of education, certain

elements must be present that include a relevant and concise purpose, a quality environment, a relevant content curriculum, a quality process and a quality system of education. Based on the findings collected from exploring the Christian educational program in Viet Nam, the two selected schools represented a good starting point of creating a measurable, concrete and concise purpose to adequately empower the young generation in Viet Nam. The two school created a good environment for the development / empowerment of the pupils where they were treated with love, respect and encouragement. Additionally, the two selected Christian schools had an advance step in using bilingual language of instruction which meet the demands of both internationalization and respect/ maintaining the national culture and values. Moreover, the process of education that the two selected Christian schools used to make sure the pupils master the learning content and the learning process is necessary and adequate in the context of Viet Nam. Despite the criticism on the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, the two schools in this study showed positive signs of pupils being empowered with character building, academic knowledge and essential life skills. It is clear that in the area of equipping morality for pupils and using the bilingual language, Christian schools have done a better job than in state schools. However, it is too soon to conclude and compare the area of academic skills of Christian education with the state school. Since the two schools have been recently started and the content of curriculum is still existing certain issue relating to gender sensitive matters. To ensure that the education be most effective in empowering / developing the child requires several factors, such as family, schools, social environment and the learners themselves. However, the scope of my research was limited to the investigation the function of the school in providing an education for empowerment

Thus, to answer the research question, I believe that at least four elements must be present. First of all, the schools need to have a picture of what will be produced as the main purpose of their educational program. The picture of the product needs to be measurable and concise and learner-centered. Secondly, the schools need to create a safe environment where the pupils are treated with respect, love and encouragement. Thirdly, the schools need to have a system of education or a process in which children are trained and equipped with academic knowledge and skills, the morality and essential life skills that they need to survive in the society. Lastly, the content of the education that the schools use should meet the demands of the international community and respect the national culture and value in which the pupils are living as well as it must be gender sensitive.

In my own view, quality education is an important tool for empowerment in this thesis and it is significant for the church to engage in its empowering role through Christian education to build up young generation of citizens in Viet Nam. The underlying knowledge of quality education obtained from this research hopes to provide important insights for the practice of Christian educational program.

7.3   Recommendations

I would like to end my thesis with three recommendations:

Firstly, since the scope of my thesis focused mainly on the educational program of two selected Christian schools, as a researcher, I did not have the opportunity to dig deeper into the content of education, Thus, regarding former researchers, the content of education that the two schools are using was criticized for violating the gender sensitive matters. I therefore suggest that further research should be undertaken to study the content of curriculum from a more critical gender perspective.

Secondly, my recommendation to the two Christian schools is that it is essential to give more consideration to how the content of the educational program can be improved as it is the main and decisive element of the success of educational program that the two Christian schools are implementing. The education that the Christian schools provide should be in line with national and international standards.

Thirdly, my recommendation to the other churches in Viet Nam is that the church should be more courageous to engage itself in diaconal work to respond to the needs of fellow human beings, particularly in the work of education in this very time of need in the society of Viet Nam.

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APPENDIX A: Research Consent Form to be signed by Participants

Dear Participant,

My name is Mui Thi Bui, A Master student in Diakonia Christian Social Practice at VID University in Oslo, Norway. For the fulfillment of my study, I am required to write a thesis paper on a specific subject, which in this case is "Education as Diaconal Task of the Church in Viet Nam for Empowerment". To accomplish this task, I am required to carry out research through the forms of interviews to some key persons in two Christian Education Centre and one national public authorized school in Viet Nam. I will engage in observation to some teaching sessions in those educational institutions. In line with this matter, you are being invited to agree and participate by answering some questions.

If you agree, please be advised that the information you provide will be held with confidentiality and will not be shared in any forums. Additionally, I would like also to ask your permission to record the interviews to ensure the most accurate representation of our conversation. I also would like to note that this is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw all your data will be deleted.

For any further questions concerning the project please contact Mui Thi Bui (+4793948807) or via email smellngoc@gmail.com or you can also contact Mr. Hans Morten Haugen my temporary research supervisor (+4722451797) or contact email: hans.morten.haugen@vid.no.

Consent form signed by participant

I have read the above information about the project. I have received a copy of this form, and I'm willing to participate in this research interview project.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

BB

Thank you

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

Research Interview Questions

To the Pastors/ Christian Teachers

1. How and when this educational school started?
2. What motivates you to establish high quality education?
3. How long have you been working here
4. What does the term "high quality education" mean to you?
5. What motivates you to work in this school?
6. What are the differences can you see between national schools and Christians school?
7. What is your aim/ main goals to achieve for this education program?
8. What do you think of as mentioning empowerment?
9. What do you emphasize in teaching your students?
10. What do you want them to achieve through your education program?
11. How do you evaluate the education system of the school you are working now? Are there any differences with state school?
12. How do you know your students are empowered? What signals indicating that your students are benefit from the education program of the school?
13. How do you evaluate your student's studying results?

Teachers at state school

1. How long has this school been established?
2. How long have you been working here?
3. What does the term "high quality education" mean to you?
4. What motivates you to work in this school?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system of the school?
6. What is the aim/ main goals to achieve of the school?
7. What do you think of as mentioning empowerment?
8. What do you emphasize in teaching your students?
9. What do you want them to achieve through your education program?
10. How do you evaluate the education system of the school you are working now?

11. How do you know your students are empowered? What signals indicating that your students are benefit from the education program of the school?

12. How do you evaluate your student's studying results?

Parents of pupils who attend high quality education of the church

1. How do you know about this high quality education program?
2. Why do you choose to send your children to this education program?
3. What do you expect for your children to gain through this education program?
4. Are you satisfied with the quality of education here?
5. Do you feel your children are empowered? In what way?
6. How do you think about the teaching/ learning environment in this school?
7. What do you see the difference between state schools and this school?

Parents of pupils who are studying at state school

1. Why do you choose to send your children to the school your children are studying now?
2. What do you expect for your children to gain through this education?
3. Are you satisfied with the quality of education here?
4. Do you feel your children are empowered? In what way?
5. How do you think about the teaching/ learning environment in this school?

H ans Morten H augen
PB 184 Vinderen
0319 OSL O

NSD

Vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 31

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 19.06.2018 for prosjektet:

61179	Education as Diakonial Task of the Church in Viet Nm
Behandlingsansvarlig	VID vitenskapelig høgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Hans Morten Haugen
Student	Mui Bui

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er meldepliktig og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av personopplysningsloven § 31. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:
•opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
•vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
•eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Vi forutsetter at du ikke innhenter sensitive personopplysninger.

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke endringer du må melde, samt endringsskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i Meldingsarkivet.

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Ved prosjektslutt 15.05.2019 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

K atrine Utaaker Segadal

Anne-Mette Somby

K ontaktperson: Anne-Mette Somby tlf: 55 58 24 10 / anne-mette.somby@nsd.no

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
K opi: Mui Bui, smellngoc@gmail.com

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

The sample will receive written information about the project, and give their consent to participate. The letter of information is well formulated.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that the researcher follows internal routines of VID vitenskapelig høgskole regarding data security. If personal data is to be stored on a private computer/portable storage devices, the information should be adequately encrypted.

It is stated that personally identifiable information will be published. The Data Protection Official presupposes that the participants give their explicit consent to this. Further, we recommend that participants are given the opportunity to read through their own information and give their approval before publication.

Estimated end date of the project is 15.05.2019. According to the notification form all collected data will be made anonymous by this date.
Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognised. This is done by:
- deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers)
- deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such as residence/work place, age and gender)