

The Relationships Between Gender, Students' Achievement and Dropping Out in Rural Vietnam



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Abstract

The theme of the thesis relates to the relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out in lower secondary schools in rural Vietnam. More specifically, the thesis investigates the extent to which gender influences students' achievement and dropping out as well as the extent to which dropping out influences students' achievement and the possibility of students' achievement in predicting dropping out.

The field work was conducted in two lower secondary schools: Hong Chau and Tho Tang which are located in two communes, each at different socio-economic levels of development. Hong Chau is a predominantly agricultural commune whereas Tho Tang is richer and combines agriculture and trading. The scores in two subjects - maths and Vietnamese language - of the randomly-selected sample of students from each school were analysed with the aid of SPSS. Frequency tables, box plots, charts and graphs were used to describe and illustrate the relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out. Analysis of variances (ANOVA), chi-square and logistic regression were employed to test the significance of statistics. In-depth interviews and group discussions were also adopted to complement the quantitative analysis.

Gender is found to have an impact on students' achievement in Vietnamese language in both schools as the mean scores of female students is significantly higher than that of their male counterparts. Dropping out is influenced significantly by gender in both schools; female students are more likely to drop out than male students.

The relationship between dropping out and achievement appears to be different in Hong Chau and Tho Tang. The differences in the scores of both subjects - maths and Vietnamese language - of continuing and dropout students in Hong Chau are not statistically significant while those in Tho Tang are statistically significant. However, in Tho Tang students' achievement in maths can predict dropping out but not Vietnamese language. In Hong Chau achievement cannot predict dropping out either

in maths or Vietnamese language. It is revealed from the qualitative analysis that social mobility, the need for learning and economic levels have an impact on the relationship between achievement and dropping out.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

Dropping out was largely ignored in Vietnam until the rates of dropout students became alarmingly high in the late 1980s, after economic renovation was launched in 1986. During the last 10 years, mainly from 1989 to 1994 many researchers have studied this issue. They attempted to describe the situation of dropping out on a national scale and establish the reasons causing dropping out as well as recommending solutions to deal with the increasing dropout rates.

One noteworthy conclusion from their research is that the dropout rate in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992). Furthermore, as more than 80 percent of the Vietnamese population is now living in rural areas the dropout problem among rural students has become a government priority (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994; Tran Hong Quan, 1997). Also, it was found that dropout rates are more serious for secondary students, especially lower secondary students. It is true that at present and in the near future, secondary school graduate students will play a very important role in making up a key component of the labour force in rural areas in Vietnam. To reduce the socio-economic gap between rural and urban areas and consequent rural-urban migration, these reports suggest an emphasis on training in the rural areas. Needless to say, research on dropping out among Vietnamese rural secondary students is necessary.

Even though the importance of focusing on dropping out in rural Vietnam is apparent to many Vietnamese researchers, they usually only describe the situation and list the factors that are considered to contribute to a student's dropping out (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994). While an attempt is made to list as many factors as possible that influence dropping out, it is very difficult to prioritise them because of

the lack of appropriate research methodology. Thus, a need exists for more in-depth study of this problem.

A curious result reported in a project conducted by Tran Kiem *et al.* (1994:30) is that 67.7 percent of dropout students are not low achieving students. Based on this they argue that dropping out is not only the responsibility of the school and education system but is also the responsibility of society in general. In Vietnam, low achievement is considered the primary factor leading to or triggering students repeating a class, which directly causes dropping out. Focusing on achievement helps to establish that the responsibility and ability to deal with the dropout problem lies with schools in particular and the education system in general. Hence, achievement should be studied more, especially in light of the process of economic renovation currently going on in Vietnam. In this thesis achievement will be examined in the light of these factors. This examination has not been undertaken by other research pertaining to dropping out in Vietnam.

One of the gaps in research on dropping out in particular and on education in general in Vietnam is a consideration of gender. As Vietnam is still influenced by Confucianism, there are many constraints on Vietnamese females compared with males in many respects including education. Nowadays, with the increasing awareness of gender, it is necessary to consider this aspect when studying dropping out. It is especially crucial in the transition period from a command economy to a market economy when many profound socio-economic changes are taking place and may influence males and females differently.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that research on the relationship between gender, students' achievement and dropping out among rural secondary school students in Vietnam is both important and significant.

1.2 Aims of the program

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out.

In order to investigate these relationships the research questions to be answered are:

- 1• To what extent does gender influence achievement in rural secondary schools ?
- 2• To what extent does gender influence dropping out in rural secondary schools ?
- 3• To what extent do achievement and dropping out influence each other in rural secondary schools ?

Outcomes of the research will contribute to prioritising the factors influencing dropping out. Once the causes have been identified it is possible to devise solutions for encouraging both female and male students to continue schooling and so reduce the numbers of dropouts from schools. This is in line with the national strategy of Vietnam for sustainable development. It is also intended to enrich two fields of research by linking education and gender. This constitutes a new approach to research in Vietnam. Furthermore, it is hoped that the methodology employed for this research will make a contribution to the improvement of methodology in educational research in Vietnam.

Chapter 2

Educational Research on Dropping out

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, literature which deals directly with dropping out from school (DS) is reviewed. The aims of this chapter are to describe the situation of research on DS and to critically examine the methodology underpinning this literature. The chapter begins with a definition of DS. The second part reviews research on DS in developed countries. In developed countries, DS has been investigated for many years and the research outcomes have made a great contribution to solving the problems. In spite of the differences in culture and in socio-economic conditions between developed countries and Vietnam, research experience and outcomes in this literature provide a solid foundation for establishing the methodology of the thesis. The following part of this chapter deals with research on DS in developing countries in Asia which is a very important reference, as developing countries in the region share many characteristics including similarities in the educational process. The fourth and major part of this chapter focuses on the situation of and research on DS in Vietnam. Like the two previous parts of the chapter, this part presents the research on DS in Vietnam through three sections: a description of the situation of DS, factors influencing DS and solution to DS. The relationship of achievement levels and gender with respect to DS are given attention in order to establish the need for conducting this research.

2.2 Definition of dropping out from school

There are several terms such as early-school leaving, early school departure and dropping out from school (DS) to categorise the phenomenon of students ceasing to attend school before completing a certain school cycle. Essentially, there is no difference between these terms. However, the word cycle requires clarification. It

may be based on grade divisions such as grade 1, grade 2, it may be based on level divisions such as primary or secondary, or it may even be general education. The length and the role of each of these cycles vary from country to country and from time to time. As a result, the criteria and methods of calculating DS may vary depending on the accepted definition of DS in the country or state.

In the United State (US), the Department of Education defines the term "dropping out" or "early school leaving" as follows:

A dropout is a student who:

- 1. was enrolled in the district at some time during the previous school year*
 - 2. was not enrolled at the beginning of the current regular school year*
 - 3. has not graduated or completed a program of studies by the maximum age established by the State*
 - 4. has not transferred to another public school district, or to a non-public school, or to a state-approved education program*
 - 5. has not left school because of illness or school-approved absence*
- (Federal Register, 1988 quoted in Kronick and Hargis, 1990:62).

According to this definition, a student who leaves school after completion of a compulsory program and does not go on to the next cycle of education cannot be considered as a dropout or "early" school leaver or as an "early" school departure. However, it was argued that using this definition may cause difficulty as a universal definition. For example, in most developed countries compulsory education includes secondary education, while in some countries like Vietnam it is only primary education. In spite of this argument, the US definition noted above has been largely recognised by international educators and researchers. As secondary education is compulsory in America and most other developed countries, every one who leaves school before completing secondary school is considered a dropout.

In Vietnam, compulsory education is only for primary education but the government tends to encourage students to continue their learning as long as they can, so as to prepare a highly trained labour force. Thus it is a requirement for all schools to attempt to retain all students who enrol in a certain cycle until this cycle is finished. This means if students enrol in grade 1 they need to remain in school until they complete grade 5, if not they will be considered dropouts. As lower secondary

education in Vietnam is from grade 6 to grade 9, those who enrol in grade 6 but do not remain in school until they complete grade 9 will be considered as dropouts from lower secondary schools. Similarly, as from grade 10 to grade 12 is the high school cycle, those who enrol in grade 10 but leave school before finishing grade 12 will be considered dropouts from high school. In Vietnam when referring to dropping out, it is necessary to specify the name of the cycle from which students drop out.

In spite of the fact that this definition is largely recognised in the US and other developed countries as well as in Vietnam, even within one country researchers still often have to deal with a lack of uniformity in the term dropout and in measuring dropout rates. Thus, sometimes, it is very difficult to compare dropout rates between countries. Nevertheless, in this review of literature, dropout rates from various countries are still referred to in order to describe the situation of dropping out.

2.3 Research on dropping out in developed countries

In developed countries, there is a relatively high student dropout rate from high school; 15 per cent of Danish high school students and over 15 per cent of Swedish upper secondary school students (Dohn, 1991), and over 25 per cent in the USA (Mann, 1986 cited in Dohn, 1991:416). In Australia, it is reported that in 1994 the estimated year 12 completion rate is 71 per cent for urban areas, 64 per cent for rural areas and 58 per cent for remote areas (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1996:2). As a consequence, much research focuses on DS. It is estimated that during the 10 year period - from 1980 to 1990 - there were 32 research studies on DS from high school conducted in the US alone. Among them 17 were local studies, two were state studies and 13 were national studies (Deschampa, 1992). As Deschampa's research examines the empirical research from 1980 to 1992 pertaining to characteristics of high school dropouts in the US and synthesises the information from these studies into an integrative review, her research is used as the main reference for this thesis when reviewing research addressing DS in the US.

The focus of research on DS is to describe the current situation in numerical terms, and to document the causes, consequences and measures taken to prevent students from dropping out. However, it is noted that DS criteria and methods of calculating dropout rates vary from country to country (Dohn, 1991: 416). Deschampa points out that there is no precise uniform definition of the term *dropout* among American researchers and as a consequence, there is an inaccuracy in the statistics to measure the local, state and national dropout rates (Deschampa, 1992:143). This is why a direct comparison of dropout rates from different countries is of limited use.

Nevertheless, when addressing characteristics of the dropouts, the causes, the factors influencing students to leave school prematurely and the consequences of dropping out of school, there appears to be some commonality among studies from various countries. Causal characteristics of dropouts identified by American researchers can be grouped into several major categories: demographic factors, social and family factors, school-related factors, economic factors and individual factors (Deschampa, 1992:63).

According to Deschampa (1992:97), demographic factors include age, grade, gender, ethnicity, geographic region and community type. Social and family factors include parent's marital status, parent's educational and occupational level, family support to children, economic status, peer group influence, family size and sibling dropout status. Self-concept, motivation, attitude, pregnancy, having children, dating, employment status and discipline issues are individual factors. Grade retention, school grades, academic achievement, achievement test scores, extra-curricular participation, special education status, and poor relationship with teachers are grouped in school-related factors.

Analysing the finding of all studies carried out in the 10 year period from 1980 to 1990, Deschampa concludes that common characteristics of dropouts are: ethnicity, low socio-economic status, coming from a single-parent family, high rate of

absenteeism, involvement in discipline incidents, grade retention, low academic performance, and poor achievement test scores (Deschampa, 1992:155).

Based on characteristics describing dropouts, a profile of typical American high school dropouts emerges. The dropouts are minority students, from a low socio-economic background, with one parent at home. They skip school often and, when they do attend, are involved in disciplinary incidents. They are generally one or two years behind other students in age and perform poorly in classes and on achievement tests (Kronick and Hargis, 1990:65-67).

Similarly, Canadian researchers group factors influencing dropouts into eight dimensions: family, characteristics, sense of isolation, academic projects, self-confidence, absenteeism, necessity of teacher support and interest in school (Beauchemin, 1991:2). Based on these dimensions, a survey with 52 questions was developed to identify the students most at risk of DS. Investigating characteristics differentiating high school students who had dropped out of school from those who remained, Dohn (1991) focuses on three clusters: the effect of family background factors, the effect of motivation, achievement and ability, and the effect of social factors in educational milieu.

Employing a survey method with the sample of 2,170 students, Dohn concludes that the lack of motivation, achievement and potential ability is the most important factors associated with dropping out. She also mentions that although the effects of family background and social factors in educational milieu are not significant, the importance of these factors cannot be neglected (Dohn, 1991:426). It seems that researchers are only successful in identifying and describing factors influencing DS. They do not consider how and in which circumstances a particular factor becomes a cause for dropping out. Nevertheless, it is clear from these studies that the dropout process is a complex one with numerous causes. Taken along with other characteristics, no single factor emerges as the sole cause for dropping out (Deschampa, 1992:159).

One of the innovative points of studies on retention in developed countries is the focus on prevention of dropping out. A range of instruments was developed to predict potential dropouts (Beauchemin, 1991; Frazer, 1990; Gabriel and Anderson, 1987; Isenhardt and Bechard, 1987). It is noted by Beauchemin that after many trials during three years of research, a questionnaire developed by the Ministry of Education in Quebec has achieved 74 per cent accuracy in predicting dropouts (Beauchemin, 1991:8).

Measures taken to prevent dropping out are also addressed by researchers. Germaine (1995), while addressing the dropout problem among American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) students, argues,

Cultural discontinuity is one of the obstacles AI/AN students face in completing high school education, but it is certainly not the only one. Addressing cultural discontinuity by adjusting the curriculum, while helpful, can not address large socioeconomic issues affecting students (Germain, 1995:3).

Kronick and Hargis (1990) suggest that the curriculum of high school needs to be profoundly changed to encourage students to complete high school instead of leaving school prematurely. They see the causes of dropping out as a weakness in the education system namely the curriculum but not in the students' characteristics.

Among studies pertaining to DS, gender is considered as an influential factor for DS (Deschampa, 1992). Further, Deschampa points out that among 32 research projects carried out in USA from 1980 to 1990, gender is addressed by 18 projects and found to be an important factor in the dropout process by 11 projects and not important by 7 (Deschampa, 1992:104). All of the studies that find gender an important factor associated with the dropout process state that dropouts are more likely to be males than females. Studies that confirm gender as not an important factor associated with the dropout process find that males and females drop out at an equal rate relative to the total proportion of these population in the school. Although many studies find that males had higher dropout rates than females, for some particular ethnic groups,

grades and achievement levels, females are more likely to drop out than males (Deschampa, 1992).

In most studies, the significance of gender as a factor influencing dropping out was only determined by the differences between male and female dropout rates. Very few studies go further than this simple statistical comparison. Nevertheless, some studies attempt to place DS issues within a gender context, that is to show how males and females are influenced differently by a range of factors (Baca *et al.*, 1989; Poole and Low, 1982).

It was found by Baca *et al.* (1989) that while some factors such as socio-economic status, ethnic background and level of parent education, affected males and females equally, the number of siblings had a greater effect on females than on males (Baca, *et al.*, 1989 cited in Deschampa, 1992:117). Poole and Low (1982) established that female dropouts achieved good grades and tended to be more conforming and influenced by teachers. In contrast, male dropouts achieved poorly, were not influenced by their teachers, and were not conventional and conforming in their attitudes toward school. Nevertheless, they also found that females were less confident in achieving success than males (Poole and Low, 1982 cited in Deschampa, 1992:117-118).

Generally speaking, in all the research on DS addressing gender, no definite conclusion can be drawn on whether females or males tend to drop out more consistently. This depends on other factors such as age group, ethnicity and level of education. That is gender, as a factor influencing dropping out, is also influenced by other factors. Among the few studies that considered DS from a gender perspective, it was concluded that males and females were influenced by factors leading to dropping out to varying extents.

Achievement was addressed in studies concerning DS as one of the in-school factors. Deschampa (1992) describes separately academic performance and achievement test scores. Academic performance was measured by the grade point average of the

student found in their school records. Among 32 studies, academic performance was addressed by 23 and was found as an important factor by 21 studies. Achievement test scores were considered by 11 studies and found to be an important factor by 10 studies (Deschampa, 1992:110). The majority of studies that addressed academic performance found it to be an important factor associated with the dropout process (Deschampa, 1992:159). Furthermore, Rumberger *et al.* (1990) found a direct correlation between family influences and academic achievement of dropouts (Rumberger *et al.*, 1990 cited in Deschampa, 1992). In relation to achievement test scores, Rice *et al.* (1988) found that students with low scores had dropout potential from 40 to 65 per cent (Rice *et al.*, 1988 cited in Deschampa, 1992). Barrington and Hendricks (1989) found that the dropouts perform poorly on achievement tests with their scores falling below their classmates and below the expected level given their academic grades.

In conclusion, the dropout problem faced by developed countries occurs mostly in high school and it is a problem which has received great attention in education research. To some extent, studies on school retention were successful in identifying characteristics of dropout students, determining factors influencing dropping out and finding the consequences of dropping out. However, there is a need for further research to identify how various factors and characteristics combine and in which circumstances they directly cause dropping out. Gender is addressed mainly in the context of a comparison between male and female dropout rates which vary according to age group and ethnicity. Very few researchers address how male and female students are affected by different factors such as family status, student-teacher relation and socio-economic background. Achievement was addressed and found to be an important factor associated with dropping out. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, there is a need for further studies on the way achievement interacts with other factors to cause dropping out.

2.4 Research on dropping out in Asian countries

Unlike developed countries, developing countries in Asia have to deal with dropping out from primary education. The situation of dropping out and repetition in Asian countries during the 1980s was addressed by UNESCO in 1992 (UNESCO, 1992). This document was based on reports of the World Conference on Education for All from various countries in Asia. According to UNESCO, the problem of DS is very serious in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Laos and Myanmar. During the 1980s, it was estimated that the average rates of dropouts in the region were around 15 per cent (UNESCO, 1992:137). The dropout rates in Asian countries is reported in Table 2.1.

It is interesting that in terms of literacy rates, Vietnam and Myanmar were ranked as Category A for countries with over 80 per cent literacy rates but the rates of dropout students from primary schools in these countries were relatively high: 15.4 per cent in Myanmar in 1986 and 9.4 percent and 12.2 percent in Vietnam in 1987-1988, 1988-1989 academic years respectively (Ministry of Education and Training, 1996). While in Vietnam at the end of the 1980s the dropout rate increased (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994), in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand there was slow progress in the reduction of dropout rates (UNESCO, 1992:138). Also, "These countries have been able to contain the problem of drop-out to a very low level of about 2 per cent" (UNESCO, 1992:138).

The report also shows that the highest dropout rate was among students from grade 1 of the primary level, amounting to more than one fifth of grade 1 enrolment. In addition, students may tend to drop out at the final year of primary level. For example in Bhutan, the rate of dropout students from grade 6 was 29 per cent in 1988 (UNESCO, 1992:138). The dropout rate is considered by UNESCO as wastage and inefficiency in education. This wastage is apparent when estimating the rate of students staying in school from grade 1 until grade 5.

Table 2.1: Dropout rates in Asian countries

Countries	academic year	average rate (%)
Bangladesh	1988	17.7
Bhutan	1988	7.8
China	1989	4.8
India	1984	15.5
Indonesia	1979	7.3
	1989	5.0
Laos	1988	14.1
Malaysia	1979	0.9
	1987	0.8
Myanmar	1982	14.6
	1986	15.4
Philippines	1980	3.0
	1988	1.7
Sri Lanka	1988	1.6
Thailand	1988	0.9

Source: National study reports on wastage in education, 1990 - cited in UNESCO, 1992:138.

It was estimated that only half of children enrolled in grade 1 in India and Pakistan, in 1985 will reach grade 5. The corresponding figures for Bangladesh and Laos were 38.6 per cent and 32.7 per cent respectively (UNESCO, 1992:142).

Thus, as distinct from the dropout situation in developed countries which occurs mainly in high school, developing countries in Asia are faced with high dropout rates from primary schools even in grade 1.

In common with research from developed countries, identifying factors influencing DS, determining consequences of drop out and finding solutions to reduce dropout rates are the focus of research studies in Asian countries. It is concluded that factors influence dropping out to varying degrees and no single factor can act as single cause for dropping out. For example, in China, the survey findings show that external socio-economic and environment factors strongly affect dropping out (UNESCO, 1992:139-140).

Researchers from Asian countries group factors into five subgroups: individual factors, parents and family-related factors, school-related factors, teacher-related factors, community and environment-related factors (UNESCO, 1992:147). Direct or indirect interactions between two or more factors are addressed but it is concluded that there is no model for these interactions. They vary, according to geographic areas and characteristics of a particular period of time.

Regarding the recommendations to reduce dropout rates, it is suggested by researchers that improving the quality of education and the training process, optimising education resources, reinforcing the continuing assessment process, mobilising parents and educators in preventing children from dropping out, building up new schools as well as standardising old schools should be put in effect.

It is important to note that in the Asian region the dropout rate in rural areas is much higher than that in urban areas (UNESCO, 1992:139). This fact is related to the low socio-economic level in the rural areas in comparison with urban areas. Research shows that 47.5 per cent of Chinese students who dropped out from primary school

worked on farms, 5.2 per cent were temporary employees, 2.3 per cent were involved in miscellaneous jobs and 37.3 per cent stayed at home (UNESCO, 1992:139). Furthermore, it is very common in Asian countries that children from poor homes have to look after their younger brothers and sisters and to attend to household chores such as cooking, washing and cleaning. It is also common in urban areas that children of school-going age work as assistants in restaurants and shops, and as domestic help in private homes because of economic need.

In relation to gender, it is impossible to generalise about whether males or females are more likely to drop out as it varies from country to country. Even in one country it varies depending on which grade a student attends. For example, in Sri Lanka male students are more likely to drop out than female students (2.1 per cent versus 1.7 per cent). Also, this difference is seen to be consistent across the grades. By contrast, in Malaysia and Bangladesh, females were more likely to drop out than males in primary school; particularly at grade 3, 4 and 5; in China, females were more likely to drop out from primary schools and males were more likely to drop out from secondary and high schools (UNESCO, 1992:139). The explanation of the diversity may lie in the cultural and socio-economic differences; however, as most studies address DS and gender statistically and not qualitatively, it is difficult to draw such conclusions.

Regarding achievement it was stated that,

The incidence of low learning achievement among dropouts can be clearly demonstrated. In China, it was found that 44.3 per cent of primary school dropouts did not pass the Chinese language and mathematics examination, and 29.3 per cent failed in one of these subjects. Among the junior secondary dropouts, 47.9 per cent were under-achievers, 30 per cent failed more than two subjects, and only 3 per cent passed all subjects. It was stated that under-achievement alone may not necessary lead to dropping out, but it easily becomes a "catalyst" when linked to other factors (UNESCO, 1992:144).

Thus, the report shows that achievement is a factor leading to dropping out but stresses the possibility of achievement interacting with other factors.

In summary, most countries in Asia have to deal with dropping out from primary schools. The rates of dropout students vary among countries in Asia and it is very serious in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Laos and Myanmar. For Asian countries dropping out is considered a factor causing wastage in education. Therefore finding the solution to reduce dropout rates is the concern of all countries in the region. Based on statistics in each country, it is concluded that the impact of gender on dropout varies from country to country and within a country it sometimes is inconsistent across the grades. Low learning achievement is clearly demonstrated among dropout students. However, it is concluded that low achievement alone may not necessarily cause dropping out but it is an important factor when linked with other factors.

2.5 Research on dropping out in Vietnam

2.5.1 Education in Vietnam

In Vietnam, like other countries in the region influenced by Confucianism, the traditional love for learning is so strong that circulating among the population are such sayings as "Without teachers, one can not be successful in doing anything", "Learning makes one a man", and "Respect your teacher and practice ethics". However, formerly under the French rule, due to the French policy of obscurantism, over 90 per cent of the population was illiterate. Immediately after the August 1945 Revolution, a plan for educational development was put into practice. In July 1950, the plan for educational reform was adopted to transform the feudal colonial educational system to the national democratic educational system. Nine years of a school system with a new curriculum was established. In 1956 the latter was reformed to become a 10 year school system, which consisted of three levels: level 1 (4 years), level 2 (3 years), level 3 (3 years).

After the country was reunified in 1976, a plan for reforming the educational system was drawn up. In 1981, profound education reform was initiated in Vietnam. As a result, the current 12 year school system replaced the 10 year school system. At first, the new curriculum consisted of two stages: basic (9 years) and secondary (3 years).

The intention was to make the basic stage of education compulsory. At that time, level 1 schools and level 2 schools were amalgamated into the basic educational level. These changes actually caused much administrative disruption and did not prove to be effective. Also, the idea of making basic education compulsory soon became an illusion. It was decided to universalise primary education first. Thus, since the 1986-1987 academic year, basic education has been divided into two stages: primary education (5 years) and lower secondary education (3 years). After finishing lower secondary education, students can go either to upper secondary school or professional and vocational school. From these schools they can go to universities or colleges.

For nearly five decades, abolition of illiteracy and the promotion of universal primary education as well as improving the quality of education have been the focus of the Vietnamese education system. It was proudly stated by the Ministry of Education and Training in 1990 that after 45 years, 90 per cent of Vietnamese population are literate instead of 90 per cent illiterate in 1945 (Ministry of Education and Training, 1990). Moreover it was also confirmed in the same document that: "The development of the educational system helps to reduce inequality between sexes, peoples and classes" (Ministry of Education and Training, 1990). In fact, compared to other developing countries Vietnam can be proud of its achievement in enhancing public knowledge and universalising primary education (Pham Minh Hac *et al.*, 1994). This is clear when comparing the literacy rate of Vietnam to that of other countries (see Table 2.2).

It is the target of Vietnam to become an industrial country by the year 2020 (Do Muoi, 1996:3). Education and training must play a decisive role in the creation of "Industrialisation and Modernisation" of the country (Tran Hong Quan, 1997:1). One of the priorities of the education strategy now is the development of lower secondary education. Vietnam plans to universalise lower secondary education in the early 21st Century. In the near future, lower secondary education will become the minimum level of education in Vietnam (Tran Hong Quan, 1997:5).

Lower secondary education is of vital significance for an agricultural country like Vietnam on its way to industrialise. For rural and remote areas, secondary education

Table 2.2: Literacy rate of countries in Asia and Pacific region

Category	Countries	Literacy rate
A: Countries with over 80% literacy rate	Republic of Korea	99.7
	Japan	99.6
	Australia	99.2
	New Zealand	99.2
	Thailand	93.3
	Maldives	93.0
	Viet Nam	90.0
	Philippines	89.9
	Sri Lanka	89.6
	Fiji	87.1
	Myanmar	80.6
B: Countries with 50 to 80% literacy rate	Malaysia	78.1
	Indonesia	77.1
	China	73.5
	Laos	60.0
	Iran	54.0
	Papua New Guinea	52.0
C: Countries with less than 50% literacy rate	India	49.3
	Bhutan	38.4
	Bangladesh	35.3
	Pakistan	34.9
	Afghanistan	29.4
	Nepal	25.6

Source: UNESCO, 1990:20

plays a very important role as it helps to prepare the potentially skilled labour force as well as to abolish illiteracy and to promote primary education universalisation. Graduate students from lower and upper secondary school are expected to be pioneers in the renovation process and create innovation in the localities. Furthermore, it is hoped that some of them can continue to further education to become doctors, teachers and economists. These skills are necessary for the development of rural areas and are currently in shortage in Vietnam's rural and remote areas. Thus, lower secondary education is crucial for preparing the labour force for new directions and making effective contributions to the development of rural and remote areas and narrowing the gap between rural and urban areas.

In summary, Vietnamese people traditionally highly appreciate the role of education in individual and national development. Nowadays, education is expected to be the key factor for the success of Modernisation and Industrialisation. For this period, lower secondary education is very important as it closely relates to the development of rural and remote areas.

2.5.2 Education research on dropping out in Vietnam

DS issues were largely ignored until dropout rates became unusually high in the 1988-1989 academic year. The situation was especially serious for lower secondary school, where the enrolment sharply declined and the rates of DS were the highest compared to that at other times. The average rate of lower secondary school students DS in Vietnam was 29.9 per cent in the 1988-1989 academic year; in some places this rate was even higher, for example, in Dak Lak: it was 53.84 per cent (Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994:25). The increase of dropout rates happened while Vietnam was undertaking the first stage of socio-economic renovation which attracted the attention of the whole society.

In Vietnam, as in other Asian countries, it is thought that "repetition leads to dropping out" (UNESCO, 1992:137). There were two consecutive national projects on DS and repetition. Concerning DS, the main problems addressed by these projects were a

description of the situation and an analysis of the reasons for DS in Vietnam. Unlike developed countries such as Canada, where different methods of predicting DS were developed and prevention measures were implemented (Beauchemin, 1991), in Vietnam no method for prediction was developed.

Many studies describe dropping out in Vietnam (Dang Vu Hoat, 1992; Nguyen Sinh Huy, 1992; Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994). The situation of dropping out in Vietnam can be summarised as follows: first, the dropping out phenomenon has periodic characteristics. Table 2.3 shows that dropout problems were very serious in the period from 1987-88 to 1992-93 academic years. Second, it is concluded by Thai Duy Tuyen (1992:7) and Tran Kiem (1994:10) that lower secondary school students were more likely to drop out than those of other levels. Third, students from the southern part of the country are more likely to dropout from school than their peers in the north (Tran Kiem, 1994). The Mekong Delta and the West Plateau (*Tay Nguyen*) had remarkably high dropout rates (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992:7). Fourth, in the comparison of urban and rural areas, Vietnam is like other Asian countries: the rates of students dropping out from rural areas are much higher than those of urban areas (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992:6; Vo Tan Quang, 1994:23). Rural areas, mountainous areas in the north and areas with high rates of Christianity had exceptionally high dropout figures (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992:7).

In spite of success in describing how alarming the situation of dropping out in Vietnam is, the previous research has some shortcomings. The picture of dropping out in Vietnam is described only quantitatively; there is a lack of detailed understanding of the process. Moreover, the statistics used to describe the situation of dropping out at the national level as well as in particular provinces, were usually obtained from the Department of Planning and Accounting - Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). These data are based on annual provincial reports, which are synthesised from reports of district education offices. The latter originates from annual school reports. These data are not always sufficient for the research purpose and may not be completely reliable due to carelessness in data collection or even misreporting. For example, the national dropout rates of 1989-1990 are not the same

Table 2.3: Dropout rates in Vietnam (per cent)

years	Level 1(primary) %	Level 2 (lower secondary) %	Level 3 (upper secondary) %
1981-1982*	10.0	19.6	15.3
1982-1983*	11.0	18.8	12.0
1983-1984*	11.5	13.9	9.8
1984-1985*	11.1	11.3	7.4
1985-1986*	8.3	12.3	9.0
1986-1987*	8.4	12.9	10.0
1987-1988*	9.4	24.2	22.6
1988-1989*	12.2	29.9	21.0
1989-1990*	11.4	25.9	18.9
1990-1991*	12.3	21.2	11.0
1991-1992	9.24	21.57	28
1992-1993	9.4	16.1	14.4
1993-1994	6.58	2.52	4.14
1994-1995	6.93	7.38	5.95
1995-1996	7.16	9.42	...

Source: Management and Information Centre, MOET, 1996

* Data is cited in and used for analysis of Tran Kiem *et al.* project, 1994

from Table 2.3 and Table 2.4. The data in Table 2.3 are from the administrative office of MOET while the data in Table 2.4 are the results of a research project coordinated by Thai Duy Tuyen in 1991.

The statistics of the Management and Information Centre, MOET, 1996 indicate that the dropout rates have fallen progressively since 1992-1993. In the 1993-1994 academic year, the dropout rate at secondary school was only 2.52. This reduction, on one hand, may be explained by the success of campaigns against dropping out, but on the other hand, it may be due to misreporting caused by the pressure of these campaigns and the fact that every school wants to show their success in retaining students at school. Thus, due to the unreliability of statistics there is a need for detailed surveys in the form of case studies to provide checks on administrative statistics.

Table 2.4: Dropout rates by education levels and province: Academic year 1989-1990

(%)

	Location / Province	Level 1 Primary	Level 2 Lower secondary	Level 3 Upper secondary
1	Ha Noi	5.05	12.96	8.09
2	Nghe Tinh	12.15	24.09	16.58
3	Ha Tuyen			12.50
4	Gialai-Kontum	19.44	40.16	57.92
5	Tay Ninh	21.47	38.73	37.50
6	Minh Hai	30.27	39.04	32.04
7	HoChiMinh	6.65	23.88	18.86
	National	12.78	27.0	19.45

Source : Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992:7

Identifying reasons for DS is considered the key for determining solutions to reduce dropout rates (Le Duc Phuc, 1992; Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994).

Le Duc Phuc (1992) and Thai Duy Tuyen (1992) developed a model which suggests that there are four categories of factors influencing DS: social, school, family and individual (student). Later, this model was expanded by Tran Kiem (1994), however, the definition of these categories varied according to the researcher (see Table 2.5).

In spite of these differences, there is much in common among the research findings relating to the reasons causing DS. The influence of transition to a market mechanism was mentioned as the main factor which changes students' and their parents' attitudes toward school. Unlike the situation some years ago, under the current market mechanism "making money" and "becoming rich" are encouraged by the State (To Xuan Dan, 1994:109). The negative effect of this is that it was understood by many people in the society that making money and becoming rich are the ultimate targets. It was noted by researchers that these value orientations both directly and indirectly affected DS (Dang Thanh Hung, 1992:38-39; To Xuan Dan, 1994:109). Consequently, it appears that the rates of DS varied depending on the level of economic development and more importantly on the speed of the transition to the new economic mechanism in each locality (To Xuan Dan, 1994:107; Vo Tan Quang, 1992:23). This conclusion also applied to family spheres. Children from families, who are busy operating their own business often drop out even when their economic status is relatively high (Vu Ngoc Moi, 1994:49). This characteristic of dropping out in Vietnam is quite unlike that of developed countries and developing countries in Asia, where dropping out was associated with needy economic conditions.

The influence of economic transition on DS seems to be more serious when the educational goals proposed by the Ministry of Education and Training do not match the needs and desires of students for education as well as the requirements of the society (Nguyen Thi Kim Cuc, 1992:21). The shortcomings in the education system, such as the deterioration in school buildings and facilities, the lack of teachers in rural areas, and the irrelevance of teachers' qualifications and professional skills as well as education administrative procedures during the past decade were blamed for the increase in dropout rates (Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994:32-34).

Table 2.5: Factors influencing dropping out identified by different researchers

	Social-related factors	School-related factors	Family-related factors	Individual-related factors
* Le Duc Phuc	-social and economic conditions -policy and administrative mechanism -potential and qualification of education system -microcosmic environment	-teaching and educating quality -school tradition -teacher-student relation -peer relation	-family economy -the distance from home to school -family reasons -unforeseen occurrence -value orientations	-achievement -repetition -conduct -diseases -self value orientation
** Thai Duy Tuyen	-peer relations -relatives' relations -neighbour relations -local traditions, customs -socio-economic conditions in the localities	-the goals and objectives of education -content of education -teaching methods -school aids -class size -teaching staffs -assessment methods	-family size -parents' education status -parents' occupations -family economic status -family supports to children -family relations -special circumstances (divorced parents, orphaned children) -family tradition -religion -ethnicity	-learning motivation -learning attitudes and aptitudes -peer relations -relations to teachers -health status
*** Tran Kiem	-impacts of socio-economic changes on schools, families and students as individuals (family economic status, school fees, number of children in families and the order of dropout students in families)	-factors influencing teachers' teaching -inappropriateness of teaching and educating contents -shortcomings of education administration	-interaction between families and school -parents' perceptions of children's learning	-achievement -students' perceptions of the jobs suitable to their own abilities -students' objectives of learning

Source: * Le Duc Phuc, 1992:10

** Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992:7-9

*** Tran Kiem, 1993:23

Students' achievement was addressed by all researchers investigating DS. Achievement in Vietnamese schools is measured by scores obtained through a continuous assessment process during the academic year and examinations at the end of each semester. In secondary schools, achievement scores are given for each subject studied such as maths, language, physics, chemistry and arts for each year. Based on achievement scores, students are ranked in one of four levels: excellent, well-done, average and below average (*gioi, kha, trung binh, kem*). Maths and language have been considered the two main subjects. At the end of each semester, students and their parents are informed of the children's achievement scores for each subject as well as their rank. According to these achievement scores and ranked levels students can be rewarded or forced to repeat the previous grade. Achievement scores and ranked levels are considered as the students' "faces". This term is used because this record or "face" will be kept for a long period, and sometimes for the whole life as a record of each student's performance. It will be kept together with employment records when the student goes to work in a government office. Recently, the Department of General Education proposed a method of calculating a single score as the average score of all scores in other subjects studied in school. However, the debates of how to rank or to record students' achievement in general based on the scores of different subjects, are still going on and require further research. For research purposes, so far in Vietnam, the scores of each subject are used rather than the average scores of all subjects.

Attributing DS to low achievement meant placing the responsibility for DS on schools. However, from the research it is difficult to determine the significance of students' achievement in causing DS as its role was considered differently by each researcher. It was found by Thai Duy Tuyen (1992:10) that low achievement scores and the lack of systematic knowledge from previous grades as well as grade repetition were important reasons for DS. Also, while for primary school students these are the primary characteristics of DS, secondary students were found to leave school due to a lack of need for knowledge and a loss of interest in school. Dang Thanh Hung (1992:38-40) found low achievement scores to be only one of the reasons causing DS as he argued that low achievement scores are the result of losing interest and needs in learning. Furthermore, the relationship between achievement and dropping out is not clear.

Moreover, the data gathered and the conclusions made by different researchers are sometimes contradictory. For example, it was stated by Tran Kiem that "DS is mainly due to low achievement" (Tran Kiem, 1994:25). In contrast, Nguyen Tien Doan *et al.* (1994:47) while examining DS in Ha Tay province found that only 16 per cent of DS students had low achievement scores; 61 per cent had average scores and 23 per cent above average scores (Good and Distinction).

Unlike achievement, gender is not formally addressed by any research relating to DS. It is mentioned twice in Tran Kiem's project and once in Dang Thanh Hung's article. Addressing the reasons which cause DS Dang Thanh Hung stressed that

Students are influenced by the wrong point of view, materialism, shallow and backward opinions such as paternalism and other old fashioned ideas especially for girls (Dang Thanh Hung, 1992 :39).

Describing the situation of DS in Vietnam, Tran Kiem *et al.* (1994) provide the data presented in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Dropout rates by gender and localities (1991-1992)

Localities	Male (%)	Female(%)
Dak Lak	50.1	49.9
An Giang	55.5	44.5
Hai Hung	48.8	51.2
Ung Hoa	51.8	48.2
Thuy Nguyen	55.0	44.9
Total	51.6	48.4

Source: Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994:29

This is the only data regarding gender in DS. Based on these data Tran Kiem *et al.* (1994:29) conclude that males are generally likely to leave school earlier than females. But this conclusion must be drawn tentatively because the localities listed in Table 2.6

are not of the same scale as there are some provinces (Dak Lak, An Giang and Hai Hung) and some districts (Ung Hoa and Thuy Nguyen). Also there is no evidence that these locations are representative for Vietnam. Thus, in statistical terms, generalising national DS rates for male and female students from these data is not possible. As indicated earlier, the DS rates of males and females may depend on their age, grade or the school level that they attend. For a more thorough analysis, it is necessary to examine the issue separately for primary, lower secondary and high school. Also it is inappropriate to compare male and female rates as the absolute number of male and female students may differ greatly. Furthermore it is not enough to examine the gender issue by simple comparison of the DS rates. It is proposed that every factor relating to dropping out must be studied from a gender perspective.

In conclusion, research on DS in Vietnam aims to identify the key causes in order to find measures to reduce DS. Many of their conclusions are based on the findings of education-sociological surveys which are conducted with the aid of questionnaires as well as statistics available from MOET. There are a number of shortcomings of the research based on these data and there is a need for more thorough research based on reliable methods.

Published articles pertaining to DS are mainly descriptive and subjective rather than based on research findings. Even though these ideas are interesting, there is still a lack of scientific validity. An examination of the methodology and research instruments such as questionnaires and protocols for focus discussions expose their limitations. There have been occasions in which the data presented are not consistent with the conclusions drawn by the researchers. Furthermore, the evidence provided by researchers is sometimes not conclusive because the research has not included remaining students as a control group. From the numerous causes of DS identified by researchers, it is difficult to determine the relative strength in causality. In other words, existing studies have not investigated the extent to which each factor contributes to the process of DS and the interaction of factors.

As the rates of DS in rural areas are much higher than that of urban areas and more than 80 per cent of the Vietnamese population lives in rural areas, appropriately most research has focused on rural areas. Nevertheless, the samples are not representative for Vietnamese rural areas as mountainous and remote areas were rarely included.

2.6 Conclusions

DS has been widely studied around the world. Although it has become a concern for Vietnamese researchers only over the past decade, it has received attention by researchers from developed countries since the 1960s. Therefore, researchers from developed countries are more advanced in the study of this problem. For example, being able to predict potential dropout students is an area that was emphasised in research on DS in developed but is quite new among developing countries. Nevertheless, comparative research on DS on an international scale is difficult partly due to the lack of uniform definitions.

The situation of DS in Vietnam is quite different from that of developed and other developing countries in Asia. Increasing dropout rates in Vietnam has a temporary character and is closely related with socio-economic changes taking place during the past decade. Also, while in developed countries research on DS mainly focuses on urban areas, rural areas are the focus of research on DS in Vietnam as more than 80 per cent of the population is living in these areas and the rates of DS are much higher in rural areas.

Thus, on one hand it is useful to refer to and learn from the experience of international researchers who devote their attention and efforts to studying DS, but on the other hand the pattern in Vietnam appears unique and solutions therefore should be specifically addressed to the situation in Vietnam. Regarding gender and achievement, while achievement was paid attention on an international scale, gender was paid more attention by researchers from developed countries than from their counterparts in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the relationship between gender, achievement and dropping out has not been investigated thus far in Vietnam.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the methodology and methods adopted to conduct this research. Considering advantages and disadvantages of the previous research relating to dropping out from school in Vietnam and overseas, as well as personal experiences and local conditions, it is proposed that a case study approach is the most suitable for conducting this research. Within each case study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques is used. The second part of this chapter describes how Hong Chau and Tho Tang secondary schools were selected to be the sites for the field work. The third part describes the quantitative and qualitative techniques of data collection. The last part of this chapter provides the socio-economic context of the sites selected. This background is relevant, for as the literature review suggests, socio-economic factors influence dropping out.

3.2 Research method

3.2.1 Choosing the research methodology

The research design of this study was selected based on a review of a range of factors: methods employed for previous research on DS both overseas and in Vietnam; research methods in social sciences; and other conditions such as time, funding and the particular obstacles in doing research in Vietnam.

From the literature review, it is clear that survey and case study methods are the two main methods employed internationally for research pertaining to DS. When a case study approach is used the methods used are mostly qualitative rather than quantitative research techniques.

In Vietnam the survey method is more commonly adopted. For example, each of the two projects on dropping out undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Psycho-Pedagogical Association employed survey methods (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994). These projects were highly quantitative and data were mainly collected from the north.

Over the past few years, the dependence on quantitative methods has slightly changed with the influence of western research methods. However these changes are more obvious within other social sciences such as sociology and psychology rather than in education. The reason may be because in the field of social sciences there are many collaborative projects between international and Vietnamese researchers while there are not as many international projects in education research. As a consequence, qualitative methods such as interviews and observations are used as research instruments for many projects within social sciences. For example, the project "Family well-being in Vietnam" conducted by four groups including the Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development, Research Centre for Women Studies, Research Centre of Vietnamese Women Union and a group of Thai researchers and the project: "The situation of disadvantaged girl children in Vietnam" conducted by the Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development both employed qualitative techniques.

Every method has its own advantages and disadvantages as summarised by McClintock *et al.* (1979),

Qualitative methods are described as "thick" (Geertz, 1973:6), "deep" (Sieber, 1973), and "holistic" (Rist, 1977:44). By contrast quantitative methods can be characterised as "thin" (Geertz, 1973:6), "narrow" (Rist, 1977:47) but generalisable (Sieber, 1973) (McClintock et al., 1979 :149).

Also, these distinctions which are based on fundamentally different epistemologies often result in the mutual denial of validity to the data of other approaches (McClintock *et al.*, 1979:149). However, research design has to take account of the aims of the study, the resources available and the general feasibility of the study area as well as the strengths or attributes the researcher (Johnson, 1984:20).

The focus of this thesis is on the relationships between gender, achievement and dropping out in lower secondary schools in rural Vietnam. More specifically the thesis sets out to examine the relationship between pairs of these three aspects: gender, achievement and dropping out. The relationships between gender and both students' achievement and dropping out are one-way relationships: gender impacts on achievement and dropping out. However, the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out may be a two-way relationship. It is assumed that, on the one hand, the intention of dropping out may affect students' achievement, and on the other hand, the achievement level may impact on the decision to drop out.

This problem requires in-depth explanations of such events and facts that are in themselves embedded in the social, economic and cultural context of Vietnam. Thus, the issue studied must be approached from various aspects while the wholeness of these aspects must be emphasised. Time and funding for the study were limited as the researcher is studying in Australia while the field work is conducted in Vietnam. In this particular situation, it is realistic to employ case study method as,

A case study approach is particularly appropriate for an individual researcher, because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in depth within a limited time scale (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:72).

Thus, a case study approach was employed for answering the research questions of this thesis.

3.2.2 Definition of case study approach

While the term *case study* is familiar to most researchers in western countries (Merriam, 1991:1), this term is not as popular for researchers in Vietnam. However, even in western countries, there seems to be little agreement about what is a *case study* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:214; Merriam, 1991:1). There are various definitions of *case study* such as the definition adopted in the 1976 Cambridge conference on *case study*: "case study is an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on an inquiry around an instance" (Adelman *et al.*, 1977:139-150 cited

in Nisbet and Watt, 1984:74; Adelman *et al.*, 1984:94) or "the study of an instance in action" (Macdonald *et al.*, 1977:181) and "the study of a bounded system" (Smith, 1978 quoted in Stake, 1991:236). Many researchers tend to define and describe case study research from the perspective of the qualitative or naturalistic research paradigm (Lancy, 1993; Merriam, 1991, Stake, 1988, 1991; Yin, 1984).

It is more specifically and comprehensively stated by Merriam that a *case study* is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, as well as philosophical perspectives on the nature of research itself (Merriam, 1991:2). Similarly, it is argued by Hamel that "Case studies are an approach within which there are various methods. It is not a method itself" (Hamel, 1993:1). Thus, "a case study can test theory or build theory, incorporate random or purposive sampling, and include quantitative and qualitative data" (Merriam, 1991:2).

In summary, definitions of *case study* vary widely and there is little precision in the term *case study*. Though most researchers are more likely to consider and use it as a qualitative method, it is agreed that *case study* is not a method itself. It is a comprehensive strategy or an approach within which various methods are employed to investigate "an instance". Such a definition is accepted within this thesis.

3.3 Selecting the sites for case studies

In the previous part, it was suggested that to investigate deeply the relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out within a limited time scale, *case study* is the most appropriate method as *case study* allows one "to explain why things happen as they do" and "develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity" (Sturman, 1997:61). This part explains the reason for selecting Hong Chau and Tho Tang as the sites for the *case study*.

3.3.1 Geographical administration in Vietnam

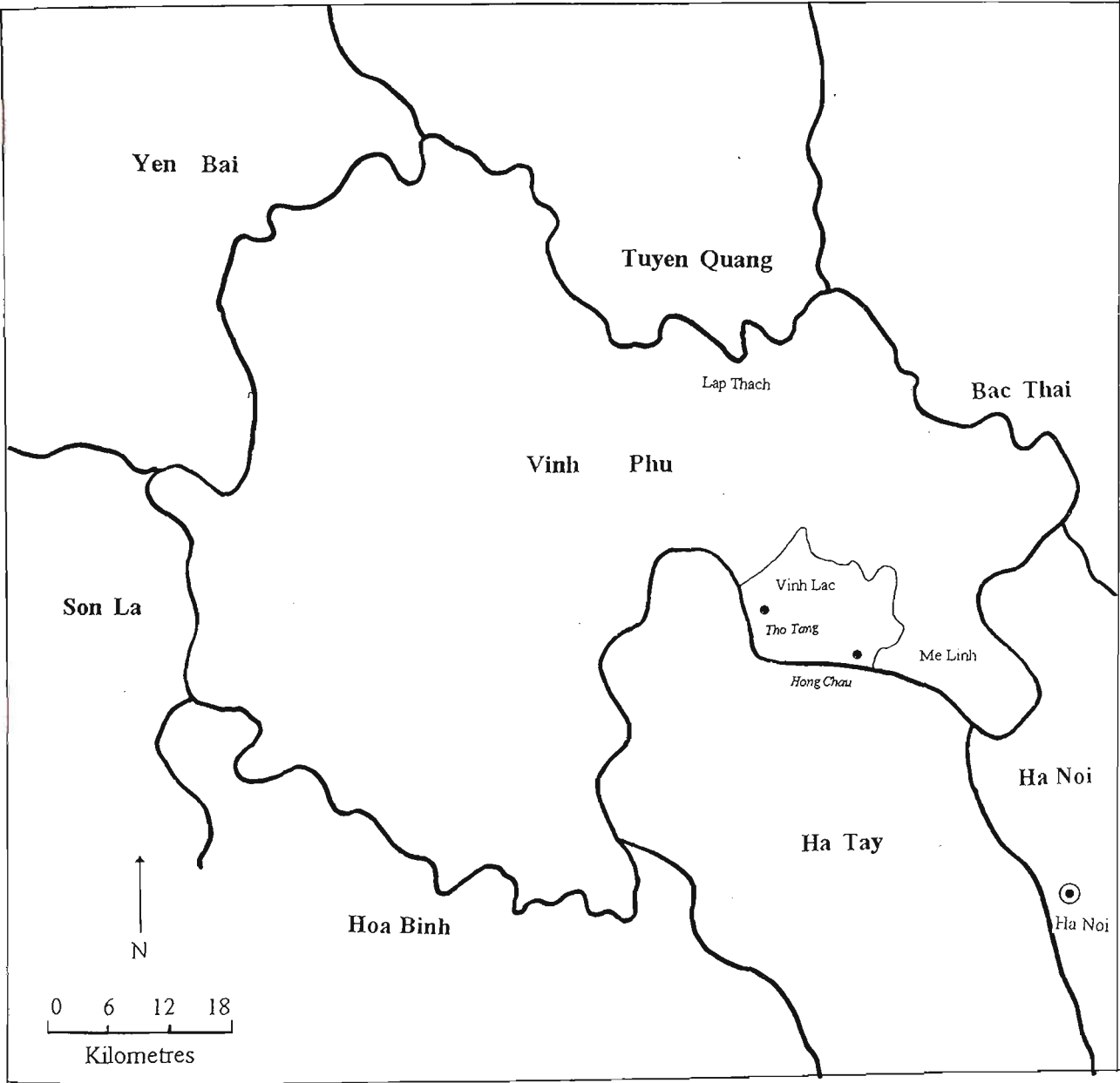
Vietnam is divided into 61 provinces. Each province, in turn, consists of cities, towns and districts; districts encompass a district town centre and communes; communes consist of villages; villages consist of groups of households. Each province has its central city and normally this city is the biggest city in the province. Similarly, each district has its own town centre which is normally the biggest; it contains trading activities, shops and markets.

3.3.2 Reasons for selecting Hong Chau and Tho Tang

Considering all related circumstances such as time, funding and the purposes of the study, it was considered appropriate to select case study sites from the sites researched in a previous project entitled "The situation of dropping out and repetition in Vietnam". This project was funded by Radda Barnen - a Swedish non-government children's fund and was conducted by the National Research Institute for Education Sciences and the Psycho-Pedagogical Association in 1991. I was involved in this project as a researcher.

In this Swedish project, the dropout and repetition rates were obtained from the Department of Planning, MOET. A questionnaire survey was also conducted in Vinh Phu. According to Thai Duy Tuyen, (1992) Vinh Phu province was typical in terms of geographical features and the level of socio-economic development and education. Therefore, Vinh Phu was considered to be representative of other regions in the north. Vinh Lac district which belonged to the former Vinh Phu province (Figure 3.1) was chosen to be representative of Vinh Phu. Hong Chau and Tho Tang were selected as the sites for the survey as Hong Chau and Tho Tang were considered to be representative of agricultural and trading areas in the district respectively (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992). As a result of the separation of provinces and districts in late 1996 (according to the determination of the 10th conference of the 9th Assembly 6/11/1996), Vinh Phu province was divided into two provinces: Phu Tho and Vinh Phuc; Vinh Lac was divided into two districts: Vinh Tuong and Yen Lac; now Vinh Tuong and Yen Lac

Figure 3.1: Location of Hong Chau and Tho Tang in Vinh Lac district, Vinh Phu province in 1991 (before the provincial separation in 1996)







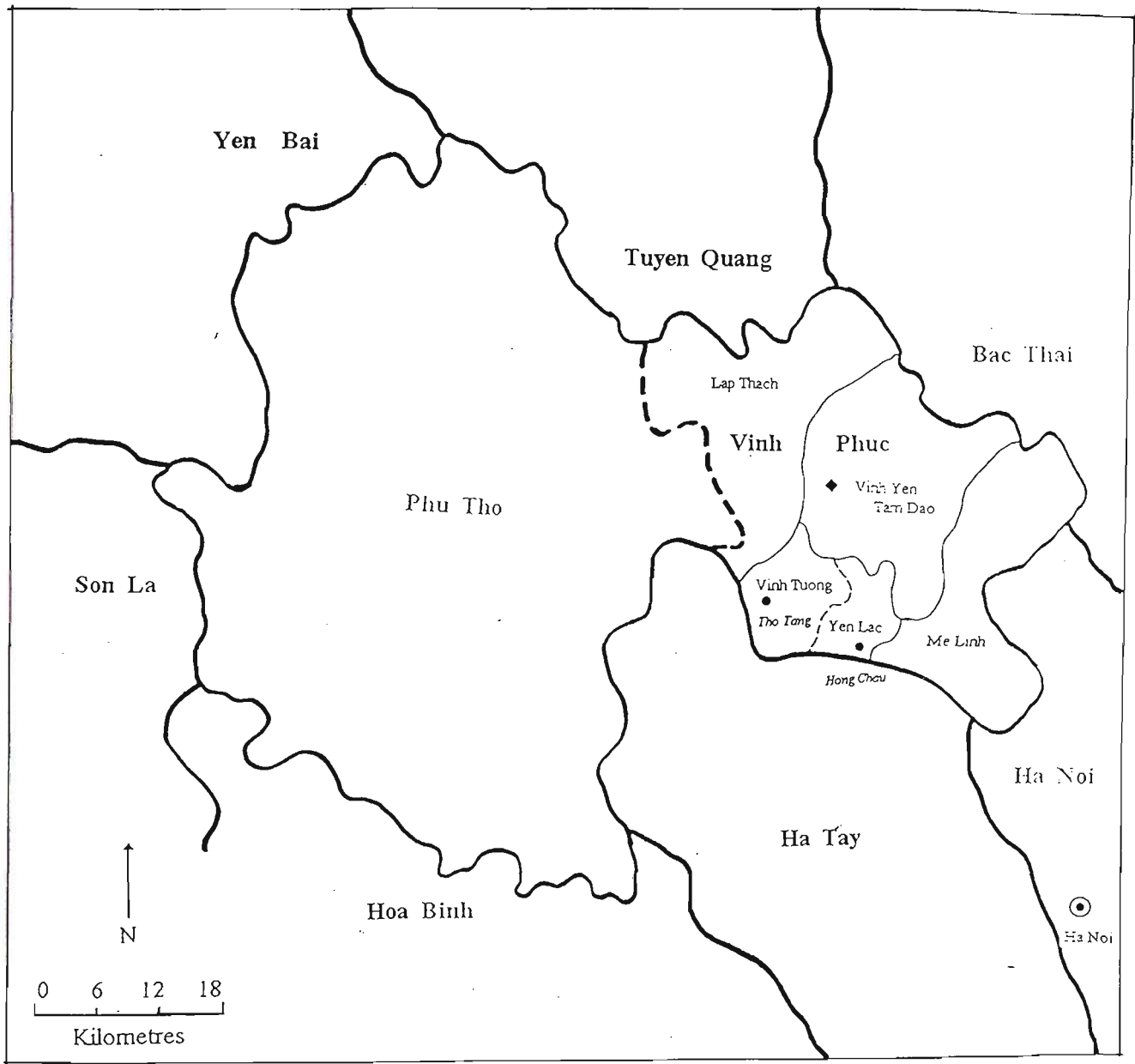







- Legend:
-  District boundary
 -  Provincial boundary
 -  City
 -  Commune

Figure 3.2: Location of Hong Chau and Tho Tang in Vinh Tuong district, Vinh Phuc province in 1997 (after the provincial separation in 1996)



Legend:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|---------------------|
|  | New district boundary |  | District boundary |
|  | New provincial boundary |  | Provincial boundary |
|  | City |  | Town |
|  | Commune | | |

belong to Vinh Phuc province; Hong Chau and Tho Tang belong to Yen Lac and Vinh Tuong respectively (Figure 3.2).

The assumption of the importance of socio-economic factors is demonstrated in the selection criteria for the representative samples in this Swedish project. Such a method for selecting of the representative samples is appropriate. In terms of income there is not much geographical diversity either between provinces or geographical economic areas (see Table 3.1). This is shown by the results of the Vietnam Living Standard Survey 1992-1993 (State Planning Committee, 1994). In this survey, Vietnam was grouped by geographically economic region (seven regions) and expenditure group (five expenditure quintiles) as shown in Table 3.1. From this table it is clear that the differences in income between regions is much lower than that between expenditure quintiles.

Selecting Hong Chau and Tho Tang for this investigation facilitates the opportunity to take advantage of the previous research experience and outcomes. One of the important factors is the personal relationship already established by the researcher during the previous project. The situation in Vietnam is that the success of research depends not only on professional but also on personal relationships. If researchers were unable to set up cordial relationships with local officials or indeed if they offended them, their research may face constraints and obstacles. Local authorities have been known to exercise their power and authority through causing trouble rather than taking responsibility for decision making. As a result, the research may fail to be conducted in the intended manner. Most of the problems caused by local officials are due to the ambiguous nature of their responsibility and fear of making a mistake and losing face. Once conflicts arise, it is almost impossible for the researcher to solve the problem or find out who is the initiator. Everywhere in Vietnam, it is very important to find a way not to cause tension in relationships with people while working because people may prevent you from successfully carrying out your tasks. Sometimes obstruction may be due only to the very simple reason that they do not like you.

Table 3.1: Per capita income by expenditure quintile and region (Mean)

Region	Expenditure Quintile					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	443.1	665.8	932.6	1143.6	1644.8	800.9
2	553.9	815.7	1036.7	1267.9	2240.6	1095.8
3	447.1	631.0	1136.7	845.6	1656.4	762.9
4	400.1	452.7	687.9	777.9	1677.7	853.4
5	502.6	550.1	752.4	903.8	1538.4	851.9
6	612.2	708.6	1004.6	1436.6	2803.0	1892.3
7	586.2	779.1	928.9	1381.6	2032.9	1265.7
Mean	493.9	694.3	956.0	1190.9	2190.0	1105.1

Source: State Planning Committee, 1994:223

Regions

- Region 1: Northern Mountainous
- Region 2: Red River Delta
- Region 3: North Central
- Region 4: Central Coast
- Region 5: Central Highlands
- Region 6: Southeast
- Region 7: Mekong Delta

Expenditure quintiles (range of per capita consumption)

- Expenditure Quintile 1: from 99.69 thousand VND to 651.28 thousand VND
- Expenditure Quintile 2: from 651.32 thousand VND to 867.17 thousand VND
- Expenditure Quintile 3: from 867.60 thousand VND to 1125.20 thousand VND
- Expenditure Quintile 4: from 1125.20 thousand VND to 1625.91 thousand VND
- Expenditure Quintile 5: from 1626.01 thousand VND to 14002.25 thousand VND
- (State Planning Committee, 1994:13-14)

In summary, Hong Chau and Tho Tang communes were selected as sites for this thesis because they were included in the previously conducted project entitled "The situation of dropping out and repetition in Vietnam". Such a selection facilitates a longitudinal approach in the current project as well as taking advantage of the experience in administrative arrangements for the field work. Selecting Hong Chau and Tho Tang also facilitates the examination of the proposed research questions in rural communes of different socio-economic levels in Vietnam.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques

As case studies can be qualitative, quantitative or a combination of these two methods (Stake, 1991:245) and both qualitative and quantitative techniques have their advantages and disadvantages (McClintock *et al.*, 1979:150), it was decided that this research would incorporate these two methods in a way that complement each other or as Jick argues "the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another" (Jick, 1979:138). That is, to answer the research questions, data were collected and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

One of the characteristics of the previous studies in this field in Vietnam is that while examining the dropout problem they focused on dropout students only (Dohn, 1991; Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992; Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994). The question raised here is that the characteristics found in dropout students may be shared by remaining students. To overcome these shortcomings, in this research it is necessary to examine both dropout and remaining students.

Quantitative data within each school was collected using the survey method: samples of students' scores were selected through a systematic random selection from school assessment reports available in each school. These scores were analysed with the aid of a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The data are presented with the aid of

frequency tables and are illustrated by box-plots, charts and graphs. To examine the impact of gender and retention status on students' achievement, two-way ANOVA was adopted as there are two independent variables which have two values: 0 and 1 (male and female; dropout and continuing) and one dependent variable: achievement which is a continuous variable. To test the influence of gender on retention status, chi-square is adopted as both dependent and independent variables have two value: 0 and 1. To test the influence of achievement on dropping out or the possibility of achievement scores in predicting dropping out, logistic regression is employed as the independent variable - achievement is a continuous variable and the dependent variable - retention status has two values: 0 and 1.

Although employing quantitative research methods is very popular in Vietnam, using SPSS for analysing data is not common as there is a lack of relevant knowledge and skills in using such packages. Commonly, the percentages are calculated and compared but no test is applied to ascertain if a certain difference is statistically significant. As a consequence, there are limitations in the data analysis in research in Vietnam. This study also employs quantitative methods but uses more sophisticated statistical analysis techniques.

Qualitative techniques employed for this study include in-depth interviews and group discussions. Employing qualitative techniques for this thesis illustrates the benefits of qualitative techniques in dealing with education problems in general and with DS in particular.

In summary, it is proposed that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques is adopted for this case study. This combination will eliminate as far as possible the disadvantages and maintain the advantages of these methods by using them to complement each other. Students' scores will be analysed using the ANOVA, chi-square and logistic regression. Furthermore, both male and female dropout and continuing students, as well as parents, teachers and education officials will be the subjects of in-depth interviews and group discussions.

3.4.2 Quantitative data collection

Among many subjects taught in Vietnamese schools, maths and Vietnamese language are considered the two main subjects by both teachers and students as well as their parents. For the time being, only the scores of maths and Vietnamese can reflect the status of students regarding their learning. Therefore, scores in maths and Vietnamese language are used for this investigation as representative of students' performance.

A systematic sampling technique was used to select samples of students' scores in each school. Assessment reports of all grades 6, 7 and 8 in the 1995-1996 academic year held at each school were photocopied. From these assessment records, from a random starting point, every third student was selected to be included in the sample. As a result, 211 students' from Hong Chau school and 224 students from Tho Tang school were selected. These students were aged from 13 to 17 years. Of the selected students, teachers were asked to identify students' gender, and whether they continue to go to school or had dropped out. These data were analysed using SPSS (ANOVA, chi-square and logistic regression).

There were minor obstacles regarding the collection of these data, for example, some class teachers had taken class assessment reports home even though the school regulation is that all class assessment reports were to be kept in schools. However, it was fortunate that it only took 2 days until all assessment reports were collected. As there are very few telephones in Hong Chau, the only way to contact teachers and students in Hong Chau is to go to their houses, which are located in different villages. This can sometimes take an hour by bicycle or 30 minutes by motor-cycle. In some cases, teachers had left these schools to go to work at other schools, so the only way to know about students' situations was to find other teachers who also worked with the classes. Apart from photocopying class assessment reports, other documents from Hong Chau and Tho Tang schools and district education departments such as annual school and district reports for the 1995-1996 academic year were copied also.

In summary, in each school random samples of students' scores in maths and Vietnamese language scores were drawn. These were the scores of 211 and 224

students of Hong Chau and Tho Tang secondary schools respectively. The data collected were analysed with the aid of ANOVA, chi-square and logistic regression.

3.4.3 Qualitative data collection

General description of the process

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and group discussions. The interviewees were students and their family as well as teachers and other officials. In-depth interviews with students and their families involved 16 students; 8 from each school. These students comprise dropout and remaining, male and female, high achieving and low achieving. They were selected in the following manner: from the list of selected students for collecting quantitative data, students of each school were divided into 8 groups such as female dropouts with below-pass score (in Vietnam, pass-score is 5.0) in both subjects, male dropouts with below-pass score in both subjects as presented in Table 3.2. One student from each list was randomly selected by pulling their names from a hat.

Table 3.2: Selecting students for case studies

	Dropout		Remaining	
	Below pass- score	Above pass score	Below pass-score	Above pass score
Female	1	1	1	1
Male	1	1	1	1

Permission for conducting in-depth interviews with these students was obtained from their parents. Students were the key informants but interviews were also conducted with their parents and class teachers to clarify details and to obtain supplementary information.

Interviews with dropout students took place in their own homes. Usually, it took about 10 to 15 minutes to have tea and chat with the family. Students' grandparents who traditionally live together with the parents and their children were involved in the discussions over tea. Sometimes the discussions also involved neighbours. After general conversation, the researcher asked for permission to talk with the student in private. The conversations were often conducted in the front yard or at the side of the house, away from the living room. In some cases the interviews were very informal and students continued to do their jobs and talk to the researcher. After each interview it was necessary to sit for a second cup of tea with the students' family and friends to chat and to say good bye. Additional information also was gathered through these conversations.

There was one case in which a girl who dropped out from class 6 in the 1995-1996 academic year, left for another province to work. For this case the student's sister, who was 2 years older than her and was also a dropout student was interviewed instead. There were also two cases in which the researcher could only meet the student after visiting the house three times. In the first case, the young boy, Manh, went to the grandparents' house in another village to attend a wedding ceremony which took 3 days. In the second case, Ly a female dropout student in Hong Chau was away all day for her itinerant trading in Ha Noi. For continuing students, interviews were conducted in school, after school hours. Two continuing students' houses were visited by the researcher as these houses were close to other dropout students' houses which the researcher visited.

Also, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven local and education managers as key informants. These were the director of Vinh Phuc Education Department, the heads of the two District Education Departments, the chairman of the People's Committee in Hong Chau and Tho Tang communes and the principals of Tho Tang and Hong Chau secondary schools. There was one telephone interview with the head of Vinh Tuong Education Department as he was away for a conference in Ha Noi. The acting deputy head was new and declined to be interviewed. Two group discussions were conducted with teachers - one in each school.

The interviews were taped with permission. It is easy to obtain consent for recording from students as well as their parents. However, in some cases, it appears that the interviewees were embarrassed and confused; for example Ms H. from Tho Tang school changed her voice and became very self-conscious while talking. In this case it was necessary to turn off the recorder and change the topic of conversation for a while; the original topics were returned to later. To make the conversation natural and smooth, it was decided not to take notes during interviews. Nevertheless, after each interview, detailed notes of the interview were taken. None of the interviews were analysed statistically but some statistics given by key informants were used for analysis and describing the general education situation within the locality.

Interview techniques and problems

As students interviewed were rural teenagers they are often more open and honest but a bit shy compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Also, interviews are not very common in Vietnam so when someone is invited for a interview they assume that something special (may be good or bad) will happen to them; for example, they may be rewarded or fined. Among the 16 students interviewed, 8 were dropout and 4 were low achieving students. It was anticipated that these respondents might feel sensitive to criticism. Thus it was necessary to inform them that they were selected randomly for the purpose of the research. Though the method of random selection was made clear before the interviews, some parents of dropout students still thought the purposes of the visit was to convince the dropout students to go to school. However, no one refused to be interviewed as it is not usual for Vietnamese people to openly refuse requests especially if it concerns their children's education.

In rural Vietnam, when visitors from outside visit someone's home, they always attract the neighbours' attention. The presence of a local teacher who accompanied the researcher is very helpful in terms of explaining the purpose of the visit to local people and to reduce their curiosity. It is quite common for curious adults and children to accompany the visitors everywhere.

To begin a conversation with children in Vietnam, particularly in rural areas, it is better to ask about the family as it generates interest. There are two purposes in asking these questions: first, they are "warm up questions" to make the interviewee comfortable; secondly, the interviewer can gain information about family-related matters. However, in the first few minutes, it is better not to touch on sensitive problems for Vietnamese such as the divorce of their parents, although it can be asked later on.

It is preferable not to begin a conversation by asking direct questions relating to school experience as students are reluctant to talk about their achievements or difficulties in relationships with teachers. These questions can be asked when the interviewer feels there is mutual understanding and trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, it would be better to avoid asking about negative relationships between teachers and students or between children and their parents as it is a moral norm in Vietnam that students should respect teachers and children should respect parents. These norms make it difficult to express negative feelings about their teachers or parents. Such information can be obtained through oblique questions.

Also, it is often difficult for young people and even adults to answer questions about dates, plans and income. First, it is not usual for people in rural areas to have long term plans; second, levels of income are subject to sudden changes. For instance, they may unexpectedly receive financial assistance from relatives or gain money from intermittent trading activities; third, the income of rural people often consists of many sources such as two or three rice crops, cattle breeding and tofu production; they cannot usually estimate all of them at once. The researcher's experience from involvement in other projects is that people tend to underestimate their income, and expenditures reported by them are sometimes much higher than income. A similar notion was also highlighted by the State Planning Committee (1994) that the income calculated in the Vietnam Living Standards Survey conducted in 1992-1993 "has a tendency to be underestimated" (State Planning Committee, 1994:215). People tend to keep secret the sources of their income rather than simply forget. This is partly due to the influence of socialist ideology that prefers equality in income and doubts the honesty of rich people. As a consequence,

people pretend to be humble in terms of their own economic status and try to show that they are not richer than the others.

Practical methods of assessing income is to itemise the sources of income such as rice production, number of pigs, vegetable production and ask them how much they get from each. Neighbours are also useful sources of information about the interviewee's income. In Vietnam, it is acceptable to ask about things and events that happen to the interviewee's friends, neighbours and relatives; it is not considered too personal as it is in western countries. Vietnamese people may prefer to speak about others rather than themselves.

In fact, in Vietnam, it is much easier to assess relative rather than absolute income based on observations and responses from interviewees. It was concluded in the Vietnam Living Standards Survey (State Planning Committee, 1994) that the income data collection methods adopted for the survey "do not yield household income in its proper meaning" (State Planning Committee, 1994:215). However, it is important to note that expenditure patterns do not only depend on level of income but also on the customs in the village. Also, as mentioned above, Vietnamese people, especially rural people, do not want to distinguish themselves from the others.

3.5 Constraints on the field work

There were some constraints and obstacles confronting the research, for example, access to the archives was refused due to administrative reorganisation. The field work was conducted in March 1997, four months after the formal division of the province and the district described earlier. Vinh Phuc Education Department moved to a new building. Furthermore, there were changes in the personnel structure both in the provincial education department as well as at the district level as the separation had also taken place in the district level. Vinh Tuong and Yen Lac districts had just been established from the former Yen Lac district.

These changes created constraints for doing research as it closed the access to archive documents. In Vietnam, computers have not been used to a large extent in offices; data and information are kept as paper documents. When changes occur such as moving offices or changing personnel structures, these stored documents and papers are often temporarily inaccessible. Thus, there are feasible reasons for refusing the request for searching for stored data and documents.

In Vietnam, administrative structures are extremely hierarchical. In order to gain permission to conduct research in a particular school and commune, the most appropriate procedure, though not the shortest, is to seek permission from the provincial level, then the district and then commune level. One can directly approach the school if the relationship with the head master is close. The decision as to whether it is necessary to seek permission from a provincial authority is up to the local officers (eg. head master), which in turn often depends on the relationship between the local officers and the higher levels. Nevertheless, it is valuable to have support from the provincial level (for example, direct verbal introductions from the director of the provincial education department) to district and commune levels. Even though personal relationships have been previously established, the field work procedure for this thesis followed all formal administrative procedures. As a consequence, the field work was strongly supported by all administrative levels.

Going to rural areas in Vietnam may be very difficult if the weather is inclement. For example, when it is rainy in many areas the unsealed roads become impassable. The only way to travel is walking along muddy tracks. However, the field work was conducted in March and April which are not part of the rainy season in Vietnam.

In summary, apart from the limitation of time for field work (two months) there were some constraints to the field work due to the separation of education departments at both the provincial and district levels. However, the field work took advantage of previously established experience and relationships; also, permission to conduct research followed official protocol.

3.6 Background of the sites

3.6.1 Vinh Phuc province

Vinh Phuc is a province that was separated from Vinh Phu province in late 1996. Vinh Phuc is adjacent to Ha Noi province in the North and is located in the so called economic triangle Ha Noi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh. The central city of Vinh Phuc province is Vinh Yen which is 50 km from Ha Noi city (Figure 3.2). In terms of geography, Vinh Phuc consists of delta, middle and highland. The area is 1,400 km² and the population of Vinh Phuc is 1.1 million (Interview with Mr. Hoang Truong Ky, 14/4/1997).

There are six districts in Vinh Phuc: Lap Thach, Tam Dao, Me Linh, Vinh Tuong, Yen Lac and also an administrative district for the town of Vinh Yen. Me Linh, Vinh Tuong and Lap Thach are the three delta districts in Vinh Phuc. According to the interview conducted with Mr Hoang Truong Ky, the director of Vinh Phuc Education Department in late March 1997, the annual income in Vinh Phuc is estimated at 190 US dollars (USD) per person. The lowest income areas are two highland districts: Tam Dao and Lap Thach, with an estimated income of 150 USD per person annually. The government tax collected from Vinh Phuc is 90 billion Vietnamese Dong but the provincial expenditure is 200 billion annually, so Vinh Phuc is subsidised by the central government.

Vinh Phuc has the potential to develop industry and tourism. Until January 1997, foreign investment in Vinh Phuc was 300 million USD while that of Phu Tho province (which is the other separation from Vinh Phu) is only 70 million USD. Also, in terms of tourism there are a number of attractive landscapes in Vinh Phuc such as Dai Lai Lake and Da Huong Lake. In addition, there is on-going construction of a golf course and it is anticipated that the tourism in Vinh Phuc will develop.

Compared to other provinces, the educational achievement in Vinh Phuc is average. It is reported that in 1991, 98 per cent of the Vinh Phuc population within the age range of 11 to 60 completed primary education and are literate. Consequently, according to

the national standards, Vinh Phuc has completed the task of "universalising" primary education; also, one fourth of the number of communes has completed universalisation of lower secondary education. It is planned that by the year 2000, Vinh Phuc will complete universalisation of lower secondary education (Interview with Mr. Hoang Truong Ky, 14/4/1997).

In summary, Vinh Phuc is predominantly an agricultural province but perceived as rather poor. It is commonly referred to as where "buffalo eat stones and chicken eat gravel" (*trau an da, ga an soi*). However, potential development in industry and tourism is attracting foreign investment. In terms of levels of education, Vinh Phuc is considered to be average (Interview with Mr. Hoang Truong Ky, 14/4/1997).

3.6.2 Vinh Tuong district and Tho Tang commune

Vinh Tuong district is one of the richest districts of Vinh Phuc province with an area of 140.3 km² of which 8,715 ha is cultivated. The population of Vinh Tuong is 189,000. According to reports of the District People's Committee in March 1997, the average productivity in Vinh Tuong is 350-400 kg per ha of paddy annually which is the same as the average productivity in Vietnam. The average income in cash is reported as 200 USD annually. There is one central town in Vinh Tuong: Vu Di.

Tho Tang is a trading commune, which contributes significantly to the tax income for the district. Tho Tang is not in the central district but it is busier and richer than the central town of the district itself. While all the administrative offices are located in Vu Di, all the shops and markets are in Tho Tang. All trading activities take place in Tho Tang as well.

Tho Tang is a commune located in the delta area of district with a population of 12,650 coming from 2,380 households. The cultivated area covers 302 ha (0.02 ha/person). The residential area of 308 ha is larger than the cultivated area. Traditionally, people of Tho Tang grow mulberries for breeding silkworms and combine agriculturally-based production and trading. The villages in Tho Tang look ancient and are similar to ancient communes around Ha Noi with narrow cobble-stone roads and old style of

brick houses with three areas and tiled roofs (*nha ba gian*) which are indicators of the wealth of the commune from the past.

Now Tho Tang is one of the richest communes in the province, as well as nationwide. There is 7.6 per cent of households who have multi-level houses, 88.8 per cent of households have brick houses with tiled roofs. However, there are still 3.6 per cent of households who have provisional, wooden or bamboo houses with tiled roofs. There are 29 private cars (ie. 1.2 per cent of the households) and 279 motor-bikes (ie. 11.5 per cent of the households) in the commune. The number of televisions is 1,163 and mainly colour televisions (ie. 48.8 per cent of the households have a TV at home). According to the statistics of State Planning Committee (1994:265) the number of colour televisions per 100 household is 9.23; that of moto-bikes is 12.31 and that of car is 0.15. Thus the proportions of households that own the above goods in Tho Tang are relatively high. Moreover, there are 192 telephones in the commune which actively contribute to the trading activities of Tho Tang people with other provinces and internationally, mainly with China. The number of telephones in Tho Tang is relatively high compared to that of the national statistics. In 1991 in Tho Tang there were 15 telephones for every 1000 people compared to 3 telephones for every 1000 people in Vietnam (UNDP Ha Noi, 1995:10).

It is reported that the average income of Tho Tang people is nearly the same as Vinh Phuc Province - 200 USD annually, which is probably inaccurate as the government statistics are sometimes generalised and business people tend not to disclose their true income. Also as the average national income per head was announced at 200 USD, it is common for people to report that in their locality the income is similar even though it may be, in fact, higher or lower. The number of poor households defined as having income less than 20 kg paddy per head each month (5 USD per head each month), amounts to 115 which constitutes 5.45 per cent of the number of households. Compared to the average of 20 per cent of poor households in the whole country (UNDP Ha Noi, 1994:22), the rate of poor households in Tho Tang is rather small (Interview with Mr. Tran Huu Dien, Vice President of the Tho Tang People's Committee 2/4/1997).

The standard of people's lives in Tho Tang is improved because the People's Committee in Tho Tang pays close attention to improving the conditions of schools, clinics and electricity. Tho Tang is one of the first two communes to have a two storey secondary school in the former Vinh Phu Province. The commune has one car that takes sick people to hospitals in Ha Noi every day. The electricity centre supplies sufficient electricity for people in Tho Tang.

Traditionally, Tho Tang people tend to arrange marriages within the commune. There are 30 family lines (*dong ho*) in Tho Tang and up until now people from these 30 family lines have married with each other. Because of the Tho Tang business emphasis, and a desire to keep their business secret, Tho Tang people do not want to marry people from outside the commune. Also, Tho Tang is different from other Vietnamese communes in that people do not want to migrate elsewhere, even to the capital. In the period of war when young men in the other areas voluntarily went to the front, Tho Tang youths were considered "backward" and unpatriotic as they were forced to go to the front and they looked for any opportunity to go back to Tho Tang. The divorce rate in Tho Tang is the highest in the district. People in Tho Tang tend to marry early, at an average age of 18 for females and 20 for males which are the legal minimum age for getting married. If they were below the minimum legal age of marriage they would pay to change their birth certificates to an older age (*mua tuoi*) or just break the law.

In summary, Tho Tang is a trading commune which is also involved in some agricultural activities. Because of this, Tho Tang's socio-economic development has different characteristics from other predominantly agricultural communes. People are not involved in agricultural production but rent out their land to people from neighbouring areas. Their income is not based mainly on agricultural production. Although Tho Tang is wealthy, Tho Tang is not an advanced commune in terms of contributions in the war as well as in education and cultural life (*doi song van hoa*). Nowadays, development of culture, education and improving other conditions for a better life is the focus of the Tho Tang People's Committee.

3.6.3 Yen Lac district and Hong Chau commune

Yen Lac district consists of 17 communes. Among them five communes are located on sand banks and these communes are poor. Every year they suffer from floods. The Yen Lac economy relies mainly on the production of rice, corn, cabbage and kohlrabi. There are a few *lang nghe* (occupation villages in which the local people not only undertake farming but are involved in other paid activities such as craft work, carpentry, building and so on). The average annual income of Yen Lac people is reported to be 200 USD (Interview with Nguyen Huu Ban, Yen Lac Education Department, 27/3/1997).

Over the last few years, after the land reform (Decree 10) had taken effect, Yen Lac's economy improved remarkably. Before, Yen Lac did not have enough food but now, even though they have just enough rice to eat and meat and eggs are still expensive for them, they are not hungry as they were before (Interview with Hoang Minh Quan, Director of Yen Lac Education Department, 27/3/97).

However, Yen Lac now appears to have a surplus in the labour force and a shortage of land. Surplus labour now migrates to the cities and to the south to find jobs. During the co-operative period, even though every farmer was employed, there was a range of difficulties: the responsibility of every one was ambiguous; people did not have incentives to try their best; they did not work hard for the co-operatives as they were encouraged by the popular slogan of socialism: "work according to your ability and benefit according to your need".

Hong Chau is a commune that is located on the sand banks of the Red River. Hong Chau is 577.61 ha with a cultivated area of 452.52 ha or 0.06 ha/per person which is three times greater than Tho Tang. Hong Chau consists of four villages with a population of 7,796 people coming from 1,559 households. Agricultural production is not stable as it depends on the weather and water supply, which has not as yet been controlled by Hong Chau people. Hong Chau suffers from floods every year. Even so, there is always a lack of water for watering corn (Interview with Nguyen Van Huong, chairman of the Hong Chau People's Committee, 30/3/1997).

As Hong Chau is engaged in predominantly agricultural production, the income of the people is based mainly on agricultural activities in the distributed lands. The Hong Chau economy relies on the production of sugar-cane, corn and vegetables only. People in Hong Chau often exchange their production for rice. Nowadays, hunger is eradicated in Hong Chau and there are few straw houses with thatch roofs; brick houses with tiled roofs are common but there are very few two storey houses. In Vietnam, especially in rural areas, the status and conditions of the housing is an indicator of the economic status of the owners. This is supported by the results of the Vietnam Living Standards Survey (1992-1993) which shows that the overall per capita average area in use increases and the percentage of temporary houses decreases from the lowest in quintile 1 (quintile with the lowest income) to the highest in quintile 5 (quintile with the highest income) (State Planning Committee, 1994).

However, like in Tho Tang, over the last few years after Decree 10 the Hong Chau's economy improved remarkably. It is reported that before *Doi Moi*, 30 per cent of the households was poor, now that figure is 15 per cent; also, before *Doi Moi* 10 per cent of the households was rich, now that figure is 15 per cent. The perception of who is rich, differs slightly from area to area. A same family may be considered rich in Hong Chau but not in Tho Tang. According to Hong Chau people, rich means those who own a brick house with a tiled roof, a TV, an ox cart, a motor-bike and refrigerator. Poor households are those who own bamboo houses with wooden pillars, or even thatch houses; these poor households rarely own the means necessary for farm production such as an ox cart or cows. For some households, who can not repay the loan borrowed from the co-operative, they are not given land so they have to rent land from other families. This makes the gap between the rich and the poor in rural areas wider (Interview with Nguyen Van Huong, chairman of the Hong Chau People's Committee, 30/3/1997).

However, the gap within Hong Chau is not as wide as in Tho Tang where many households which are very successful are richer than their neighbours who are small traders. In Hong Chau, 55 per cent of households has a TV and they are mainly black and white televisions; 35 per cent has a radio. Nevertheless, in Vietnam, every one can

have access to information provided on TV as it is a custom to share the TV with other relatives and neighbours who do not have a TV. In contrast to Tho Tang people, residents of Hong Chau are not as familiar with using telephones as there are only a few telephones in the local People's Committee and other government offices. As part of the Yen Lac District, Hong Chau also faces the problem of a surplus of labour force (Interview with Nguyen Van Huong, chairman of the Hong Chau People's Committee, 30/3/1997).

In Hong Chau, social welfare infrastructure, such as clinics and schools are not as well developed as in Tho Tang. Hong Chau secondary school is the last remaining one-storey building in the district. The school is in poor condition and every year the school suffers from floods. Even last year, the opening ceremony of the school academic year took place on boats.

In conclusion, in comparison to Tho Tang, Hong Chau is a poor agricultural commune on the sand banks of the Red River. The Hong Chau economy relies on corn, sugar cane and vegetables, which are very cheap in Vietnam. Also, Hong Chau's production still largely depends on natural phenomenon such as weather, water, and floods.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, it is suggested that a case study approach is the most appropriate for conducting this research. This case study approach combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. Such a combination maximises the strengths of these two methods and minimises their weaknesses. Also such a research design is supported by the conclusions of the literature review.

The relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out are analysed through quantitative analysis of students' scores in mathematics and Vietnamese as well as qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with students and education and administrative officials.

Hong Chau and Tho Tang secondary schools, which were included in the project titled "The situation of dropping out and repetition in Vietnam" in 1991 were selected as case studies for this research. This selection permits taking advantage of not only academic outcomes and experience but also administrative experience. Hong Chau is a relatively poor and a predominantly agricultural commune whereas Tho Tang is an agricultural and trading commune with greater wealth. Thus the selection of these two communes as the sites ensures that the relationship between gender, achievement and dropping out were investigated from different levels of socio-economic development of rural Vietnam.

Chapter 4

The Relationship Between Gender and Achievement

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the relationship between gender and students' achievement. As mentioned earlier, the scope of this thesis is limited to lower secondary education and in a rural area. The score of two subjects - maths and Vietnamese language - was chosen for quantitative analysis. In Vietnam, maths is considered to be representative of abilities relating to science subjects whereas Vietnamese language is considered to be representative of humanities subjects. Furthermore, maths is considered by many people to be the most important subject in school, which appears to be rooted in the government policy to industrialise an agricultural country. It is believed that in order to be successful in modernisation and industrialisation, a good knowledge of science is most important (Tran Hong Quan, 1997:1-7).

This chapter is divided into three parts: in the first two parts, the relationship between gender and students' achievement in two secondary schools: one in Hong Chau and the other in Tho Tang is examined. The third part deals with the general analysis or comparison between Tho Tang and Hong Chau. Both tables and graphs are drawn to illustrate each part as the tables provide absolute statistics while it is easy and clear to follow the trends with the graphs. The next chapter will examine the relationship between gender and dropping out.

4.2 Gender and students' achievement in Hong Chau

4.2.1 Gender and achievement in maths

In Hong Chau, which is the agricultural commune, it is clear that females outperform males in maths (Table 4.1 and Chart 4.1). The difference in mean scores of male and female students' scores is 0.1899 (Table 4.1). Also, it is noted that the student with the lowest maths score is a male with a score of 3.7 while the student with the highest maths score is a female with a score of 8.8. It can be seen from Chart 4.2 that the lowest score in maths belongs to a male continuing student. Moreover, the proportion of male students who score below the pass score of 5.0 is 34.7 per cent while that of females is only 18.3 per cent. That is, the number of male students with poor achievement, rates nearly twice as high as that of female students. However, in the population (for all Hong Chau lower secondary school students), it can not be concluded that females always perform better than males in maths as the result of the two-ways ANOVA shows this difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.313 > 0.05$).

4.2.2 Gender and achievement in Vietnamese language

Similar to the situation for maths, Table 4.2 and Chart 4.3 both clearly show that Hong Chau females do much better than males in Vietnamese language. There is only 2.1 per cent of females with scores below the standard pass score of 5.0 and for males it is 32.3 per cent. That is, the number of males whose scores are below the pass score is 15 times higher than that of females. Also, as in maths, the students with exceptionally low scores were males and those with exceptionally high scores were females. It is clear from Chart 4.4 that the lowest score in language belongs to a male continuing student. The difference in the male and female mean scores of Vietnamese language is approximately 0.5989, which is three times higher than that of maths. Furthermore, the ANOVA shows that the difference in language scores is statistically significant

Table 4.1: Hong Chau - Cumulative frequency distributions for males and females on maths scores

Scores	Male cumulative percentage	Female cumulative percentage
Below 4.0	3.2	0.0
Below 4.4	10.5	4.3
Below 4.9	34.7	18.3
Below 5.4	55.8	47.3
From 5.5 to 5.9	77.9	73.1
Below 6.4	83.2	88.2
Below 6.9	89.5	93.5
Below 7.4	95.8	94.6
Below 7.9	97.9	97.8
Below 8.4	100.0	97.8
Below 8.9		100.0
Mean	5.4505	5.6247
Median	5.3000	5.500
Standard Deviation	0.9801	0.8478
Min	3.700	4.2
Max	8.500	8.8

Source: Hong Chau school assessment report 1995-1996

Chart 4.1: Hong Chau - Distribution of Maths scores by gender

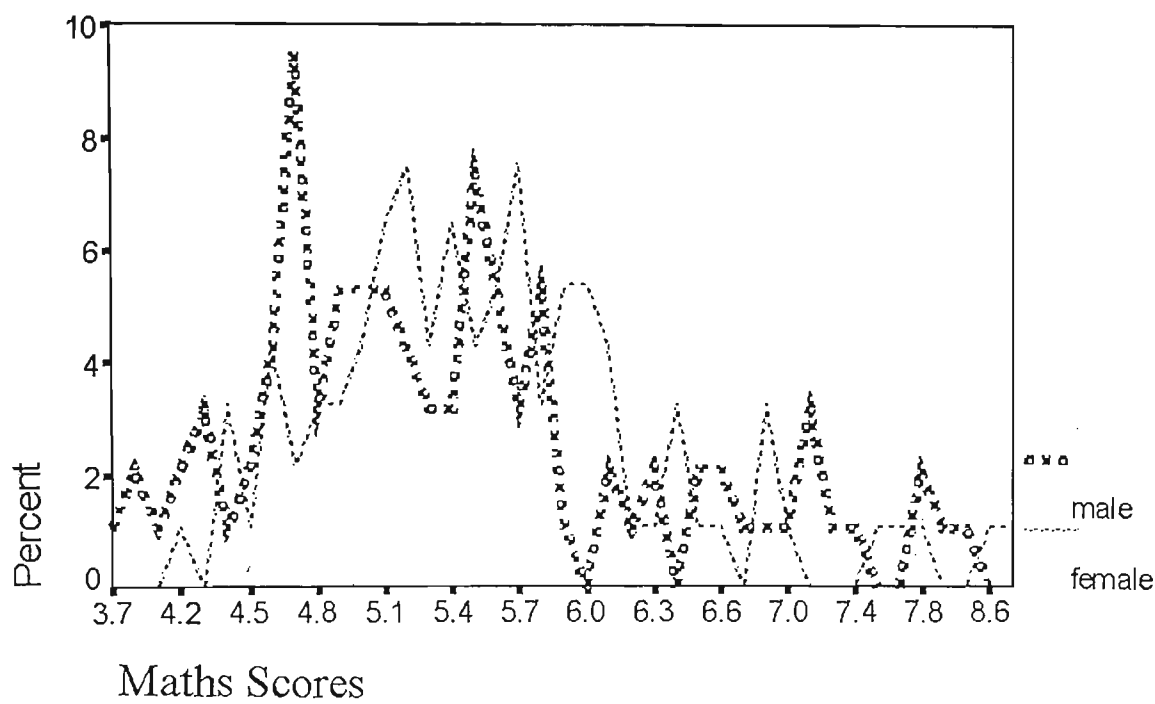


Chart 4.2: Hong Chau - Box plot of maths scores by gender and retention status

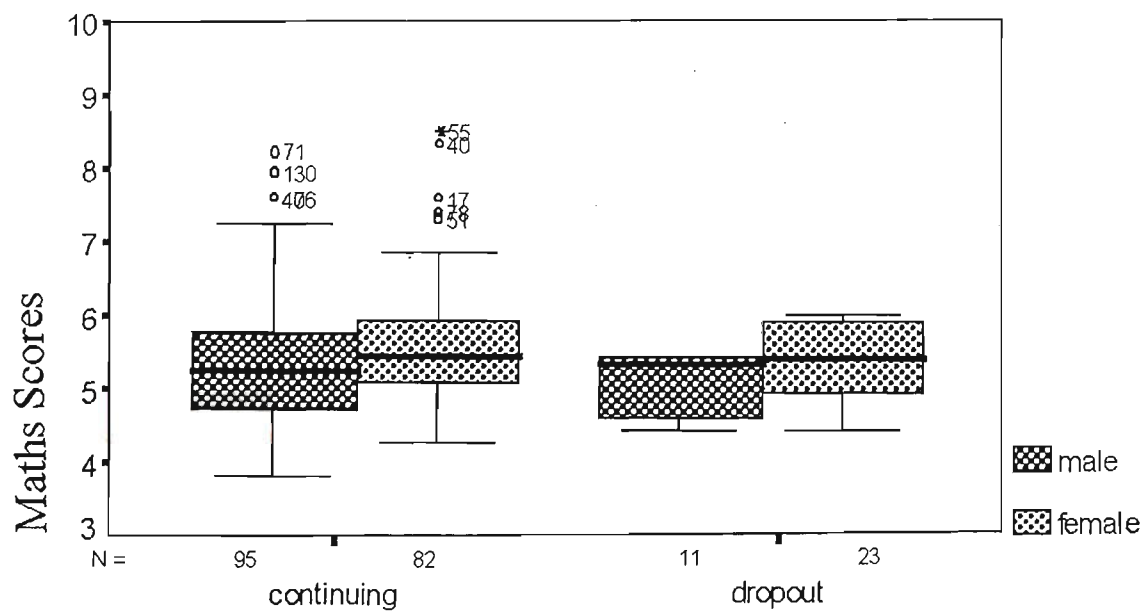


Table 4.2: Hong Chau - Cumulative frequency distributions for males and females on language scores

Scores	Male cumulative percentage	Female cumulative percentage
Below 4.0	3.1	0.0
Below 4.4	7.3	0.0
Below 4.9	32.3	2.1
Below 5.4	69.8	21.3
Below 5.9	91.7	74.5
Below 6.4	100.	93.6
Below 6.9		100
Mean	5.1750	5.7691
Median	5.2000	5.7500
Standard Deviation	0.5506	0.4022
Min	3.700	4.9
Max	6.4	6.8

Source: Hong Chau school assessment report 1995-1996

Chart 4.3: Hong Chau - Distribution of language scores by gender

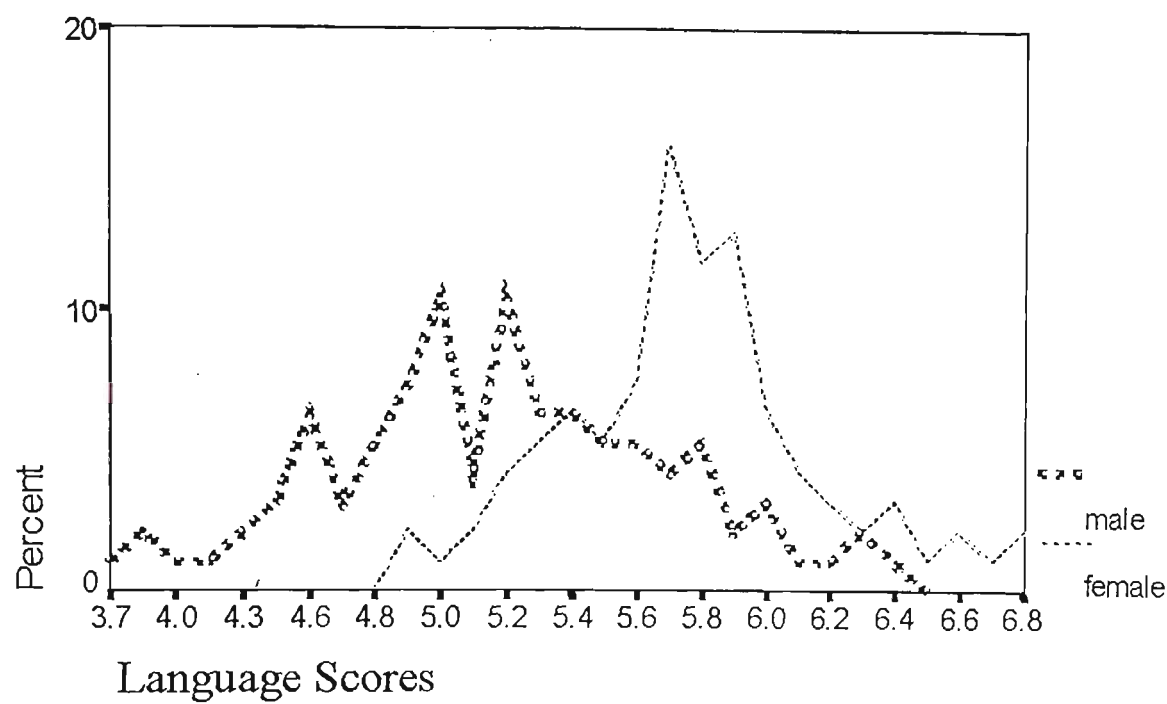
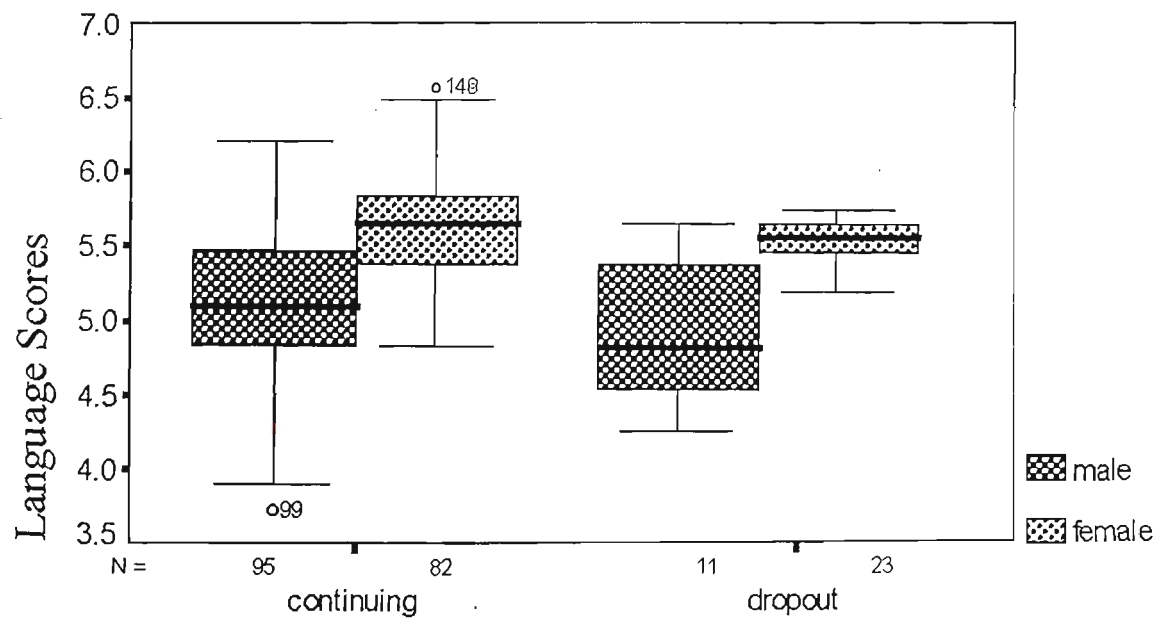


Chart 4.4: Hong Chau - Box plot of language scores by gender and retention status



($F=25.490$ and $p=0.00 < 0.05$). This means that generally females in Hong Chau lower secondary school are more successful in Vietnamese language studies than males.

In summary, the mean difference between male and female students' scores in Vietnamese language is larger than that in maths (the difference is 0.5989 for Vietnamese language and 0.1899 for maths) and while the first is statistically significant the latter is not. That is, it can only be concluded that in Hong Chau female students do better than males in Vietnamese language but not necessarily for maths. Also, when Charts 4.1 and 4.3 are compared, it is clear that the difference in the ranges of male and female scores is more obvious for Vietnamese language than for maths.

4.3 Gender and students' achievement in Tho Tang

4.3.1 Gender and students' achievement in maths

In Tho Tang, which is primarily a trading commune, it can be seen that, as in Hong Chau, the mean scores of female students are higher than that of male students (Table 4.3). In fact, the maths scores of males and females appear to have a large variation: from 3.0 to 8.3. However, Levene's test for equality of variances shows that variances are equal ($F=0.198$, $p=0.657$). Also, similar to the situation in Hong Chau, the number of male students having maths scores lower than 5.0 is higher than that of females: 40.3 per cent for males versus 30.4 per cent for females. Furthermore, the lowest score in maths belong to a male continuing student (Chart 4.5). Thus, similar to the situation in Hong Chau, in maths, female students in Tho Tang perform better than male students though the difference in the mean scores is quite small (0.1636). The difference in the mean scores of male and female students in Tho Tang is slightly lower than that in Hong Chau. The ANOVA results show that this difference is not statistically significant ($F=0.814$; $p=0.368 > 0.05$). That is, it can only be said that in Tho Tang, as in Hong Chau, from the research samples, female students' mean scores in maths is higher than that of male students but it can not be generalised to the whole

Table 4.3: Tho Tang - Cumulative frequency distributions for males and females
on maths scores

Scores	Male cumulative percentage	Female cumulative percentage
Below 4.0	13.7	11.4
Below 4.4	28.8	22.8
Below 4.9	40.3	30.4
Below 5.4	61.2	59.5
Below 5.9	73.4	70.9
Below 6.4	83.5	79.7
Below 6.9	93.5	91.1
Below 7.4	95.7	96.2
Below 7.9	99.3	98.7
Below 8.4	100.0	100.0
Mean	5.2237	5.3873
Median	5.2000	5.4000
Standard Deviation	1.1463	1.1174
Min	3.000	3.1
Max	8.300	8.2

Source: Tho Tang school assessment report 1995-1996

Chart 4.5: Tho Tang - Box plot of maths score by gender and retention status

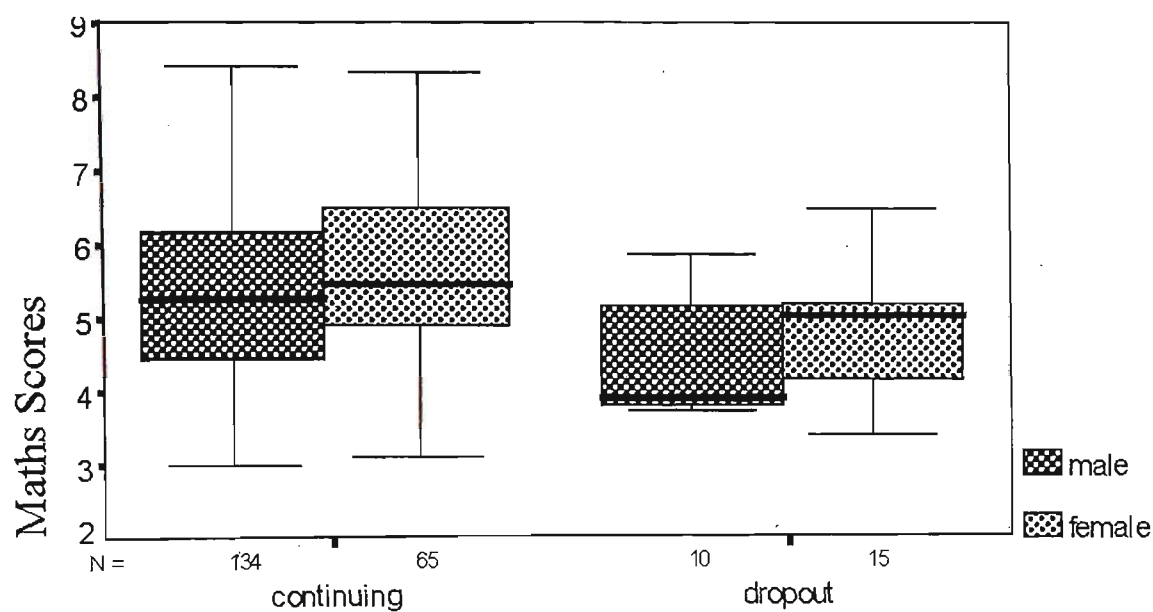
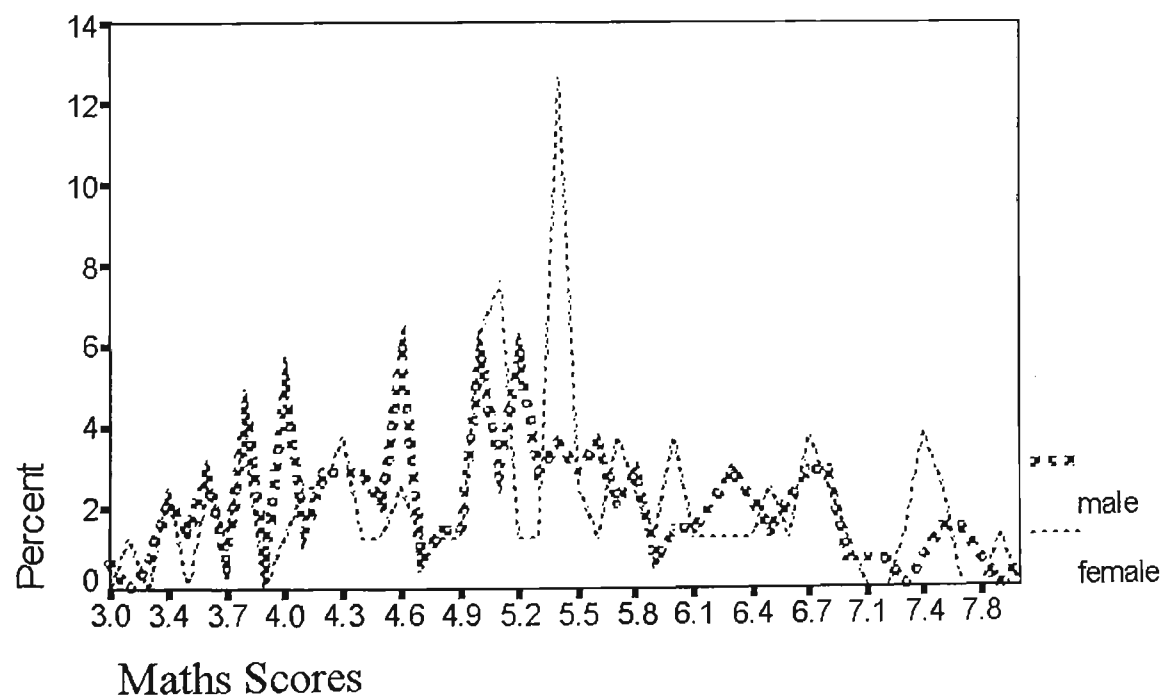


Chart 4.6: Tho Tang - Distribution of Maths scores by gender



population of all lower secondary students in these two schools that females perform better than males in maths.

Both Table 4.3 and Chart 4.6 show that while the number of male students with scores lower than 5.0 is higher than that of female students, the number of female students having scores higher than 6.5 (good achievement or *kha*) outweighs that number of male students. That is, among the students under the pass score (*duoi trung binh*), there were more male students than female ones. Furthermore, among good achievement students, there were more female students than their male counterparts. Also, it is important to note that in Tho Tang the mean maths scores of both females and males are lower than those in Hong Chau (see Chart 4.9).

4.3.2 Gender and achievement in Vietnamese language

The cumulative frequency distribution for Tho Tang males and females on Vietnamese language scores is presented in Table 4.4. It is clear from Chart 4.7 that the language scores of Tho Tang students vary from 3.3 to 7.9. While for males the range is from 3.3 to 7.9, that of females is from 4.4 to 7.5. Thus it is clear that the lowest score in language in Tho Tang also belongs to a male continuing student (Chart 4.8). However, the Levene's test shows that male and female scores have equal variances ($F=2.444$, $p=0.119$).

However, as is the situation for language in Hong Chau, female students in Tho Tang do much better than male students. While 49.6 per cent of male scores are under the average score of 5.0, only one fifth of that of female students (10.1 per cent) is under 5.0. In addition, while only 8.65 per cent of males' scores is higher than the standard good score of 6.5, that of females' scores is more than three times as high (27.7 per cent). That is, in Tho Tang lower secondary school, female students are much more successful in studying language than male students as the ANOVA shows that the difference in female and male students' scores in language is statistically significant: $F=5.233$ at $p=0.023<0.05$. Nevertheless, the top student in language is a male. Also, as in Hong Chau, in Tho Tang the difference in the mean scores of male and female

Table 4.4: Tho Tang - cumulative frequency distributions for males and females on language scores

Scores	Male cumulative percentage	Female cumulative percentage
Below 4.0	6.5	0.0
Below 4.4	20.1	0.0
Below 4.9	49.6	10.1
Below 5.4	69.8	44.3
Below 5.9	82.7	64.6
Below 6.4	91.4	82.3
Below 6.9	95.7	94.9
Below 7.4	98.6	98.7
Below 7.9	100.0	100.0
Mean	5.1332	5.7089
Median	5.0000	5.6000
Standard Deviation	0.8920	0.7124
Min	3.300	4.500
Max	7.900	7.500

Source: Tho Tang school assessment report 1995-1996

Chart 4.7: Tho Tang - Distribution of Vietnamese language scores by gender

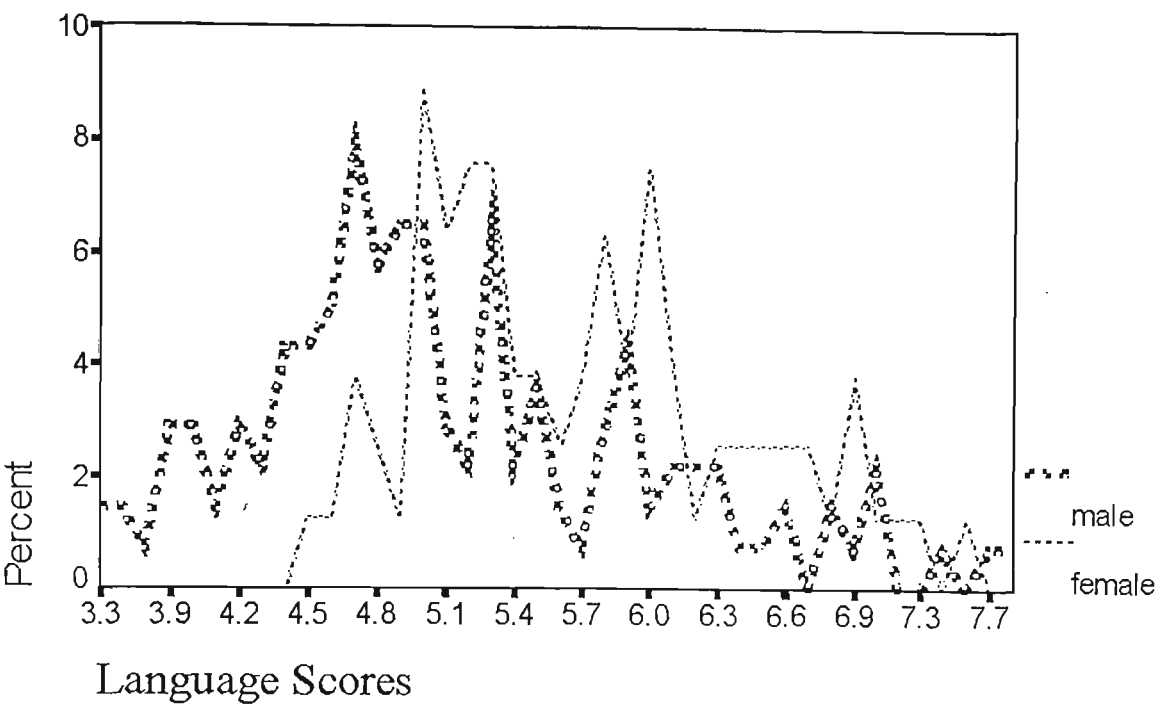
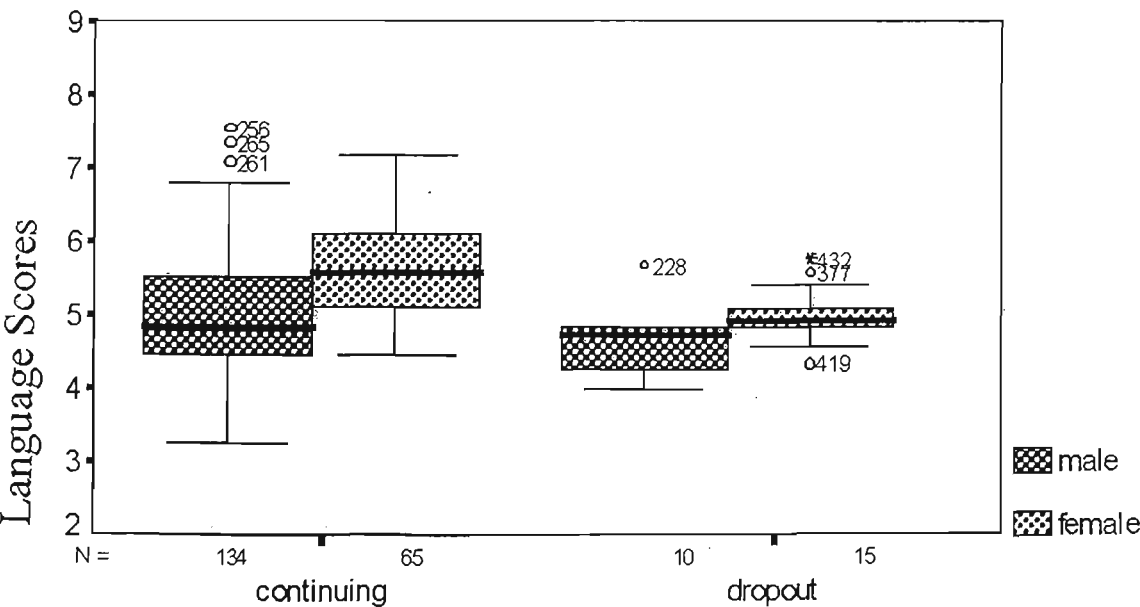


Chart 4.8: Tho Tang - Box plot of language scores by gender and retention status



students in Vietnamese language is larger than that in maths. Furthermore, it is clear from Charts 4.6 and 4.7 that the gender difference in students' achievement is more obvious for Vietnamese language.

In summary, similar to the situation in Hong Chau, the difference in the ranges of male and female scores is greater for Vietnamese language than for maths. Also, the mean difference between male and female students' scores in Vietnamese language is larger than that in maths (the difference is 0.5757 for Vietnamese language and 0.1636 for maths) but while the first is statistically significant the latter is not. That is, it can only be concluded that in Tho Tang, female students do better than their male counterparts in Vietnamese language.

4.4 General analysis

4.4.1 Similarities

As concluded above, gender differences in students' achievement in Tho Tang is similar to that in Hong Chau: females outperform males in both subjects. While the difference in the mean scores of female and male students in maths is not statistically significant, the difference in the mean scores of female and male students in Vietnamese language is not only larger than that in maths but also statistically significant.

In Vietnam, it is commonly believed that female students are more competent in humanities subjects such as language and history while male students are more competent in maths and science. However, so far, there is no research or statistics that support this belief. In fact, this study is the first to analyse gender characteristics and achievement quantitatively.

Teachers' and education officials' evaluations on whether males or females achieve higher, vary. According to education officials from Yen Lac Education Department, "female students are not as successful in studying as males" (Interview with Mr Lan, Ban and Quan from Yen Lac Education Department 27/3/1997). According to

teachers from Hong Chau secondary school, in language females do better than males. That means, those who are not involved in the classroom assume that male students are more successful than their female counterparts. By contrast, class teachers conclude that female students do better than males but their ratings are not as high as those found through quantitative analysis.

4.4.2 Difference

It is clear from Charts 4.9 and 4.10 that in both maths and Vietnamese language, the mean scores of Tho Tang students are lower than those of Hong Chau students. However, the variations of the scores of Tho Tang students are larger than that of Hong Chau students. As a consequence, it is not surprising that not only the student with the lowest score, but also the student with highest score in both subjects were Tho Tang students.

The difference in the mean scores of Tho Tang and Hong Chau can be explained by the difference in the expectation and motivation of people from these two communes towards schooling. Hong Chau people traditionally have been characterised by effort and success in learning and examination because it was seen as a mechanism for social mobility. Their learning is motivated both socially and economically. Tho Tang people, on the contrary, traditionally pursue trading; making money is most important for them. Thus, traditionally, schooling is motivated by social mobility for Hong Chau people but for Tho Tang people the significance of learning is functional in the sense of ensuring people's literacy.

It is argued here that the difference in variation of Tho Tang and Hong Chau students' scores is related to the difference in socio-economic characteristics of Hong Chau and Tho Tang outlined in Chapter 3. As described earlier, Hong Chau is a commune engaged in predominantly agricultural production. The income of the people is based mainly on agricultural activities in the distributed lands. The difference in economic status depends mainly on the access to land, and the number, the health status and

Chart 4.9: Tho Tang and Hong Chau - Box plot of maths scores by gender

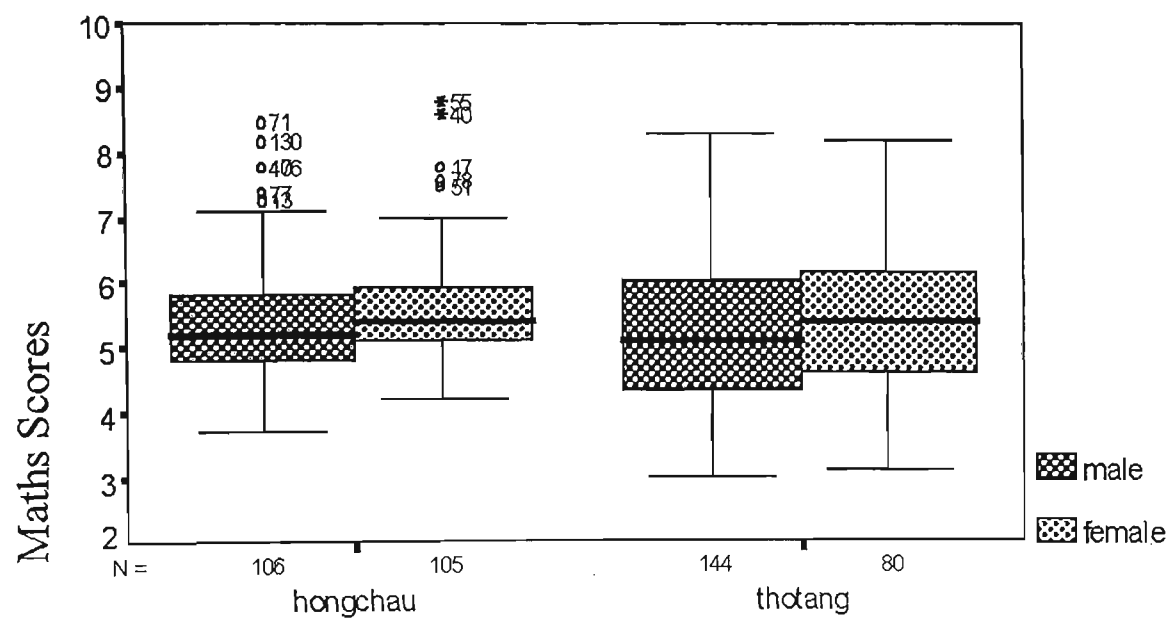
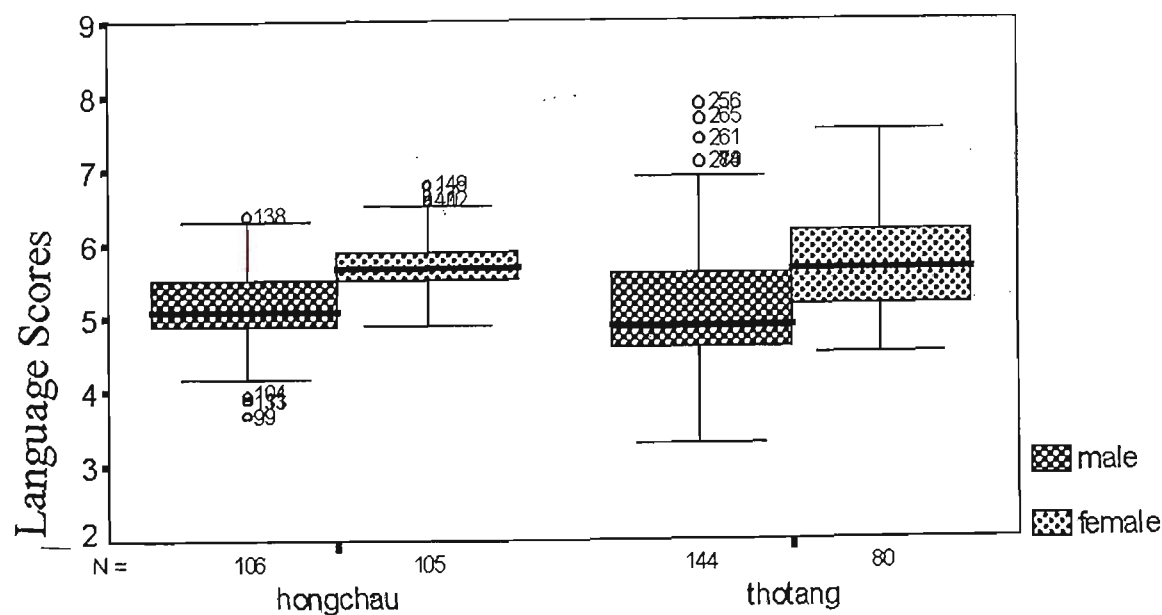


Chart 4.10: Tho Tang and Hong Chau - Box plot of language scores by gender



skills in agricultural activities of labourers in the family. Thus, the life styles do not differ much from family to family. In addition, in Hong Chau from household to household there is not much difference in the material conditions of children's lives and parental expectations of children of the same gender. For examples, all girls have to be involved in household chores as well as income-generating activities such as working in the fields and taking care of buffalos. Also, in general, very few parents dare to have a desire for their children to have access to higher education as they cannot afford tuition fees. Even if their children are successful in the entrance examination and obtain scholarships, each scholarship is still very small while other expenditures for a student studying in Ha Noi is always more than what they can afford (Group discussion with teachers from Hong Chau secondary school 24/3/1997).

In contrast, in Tho Tang the income of the people is mainly based on trading activities. The extent of trading differs from family to family and depends on their capital and trading skills as well as opportunities. It is a custom in Tho Tang that people rent out their agricultural lands to people from neighbouring communes. There are few families who still work on their fields as farmers. As the extent of family trading business differs, their income varies greatly. As a consequence, in Tho Tang villages, there are many types of houses: traditional three room brick houses and different styles of very modern houses with many storeys. The life styles and expectations are also quite different between families. In the past few years, Tho Tang people adopted the idea of investing in children's education. Some children are offered very good conditions for their study like a private studying room and individual tutorials from experienced teachers. Some families can even afford to support their children's schooling in Ha Noi from high school age with a wish that their children can enter universities more easily. While many children are not involved in household chores or income-generating activities, others are involved in trading from the age of 10 or 11 (Group discussion with teachers from Tho Tang secondary school, 12/4/1997).

It is argued here that there is no difference in the relationships between gender and students' achievement across areas (Tho Tang and Hong Chau). Also, it is suggested that due to the differences in expectations and motivation towards learning in school,

the scores of Hong Chau students are higher than that of Tho Tang people. Furthermore, the diversity in income in Tho Tang is responsible for the diversity in students' achievement scores and also responsible for consistency in Hong Chau.

4.5 Conclusions

Data from both areas show that the mean scores of female students are higher than that of male students in both subjects: maths and Vietnamese language. Also, the difference in Vietnamese language is larger and more obvious. The ANOVA shows that, in both areas, the differences between male and female students in Vietnamese language favour female students and are statistically significant whereas those in maths are not statistically significant. Thus, it can be concluded that in both schools, female students do better than male students in language only. This is in accordance with people's assumption that females tend to do better than males in humanities subjects. Regarding maths, it is too early to draw any general conclusions but in our samples, female students outscore the male counterparts in both schools.

Gender characteristics in the students' achievement in Tho Tang and Hong Chau are similar except for the fact that the mean scores of Tho Tang students in both subjects are lower than that of Hong Chau students and the ranges of Tho Tang students' scores are larger than that of Hong Chau students' scores. It is suggested here that the first is related to the difference in Hong Chau and Tho Tang people's expectation and motivation towards schooling; the latter is a reflection of the different level of socio-economic diversity in these two communes.

Chapter 5

The Relationship Between Gender and Dropping Out

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 it was shown that females outscore their male counterparts in both locations in both maths and Vietnamese language. This chapter focuses on the relationship between gender and dropping out. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first deals with quantitative analysis in which the differences between the rates of male and female dropouts and continuing students are analysed. The second part is based on qualitative analysis which clarifies the findings of the quantitative analysis. Similarities and differences between the two locations are emphasised.

5.2 Quantitative analysis

It is clear from Table 5.1 that in both schools the rate of female dropout students in lower secondary school is higher than that of their male counterparts. Also the rates of female continuing students are lower than that of continuing male students. However, in Hong Chau, the rate of female dropout students is more than twice as high as that of their male counterparts (67.6% vs 32.4%) while in Tho Tang, this proportion is only 1.5 (60% vs 40%).

Furthermore, the result of comparing the number of dropout students of each gender to the total number of students of their own gender indicates that while one in five female students in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang is a dropout; one in ten and one in seven male students in Hong Chau and Tho Tang respectively is a dropout. (Table 5.2) The rate of female dropout students in Hong Chau is only slightly higher than that in Tho Tang (21.7 % vs 19%).

Table 5.1: The rate of students by retention status and gender

Retention status		Hong Chau		Tho Tang	
	Gender	Number	Percentage %	Number	Percentage %
Dropout students	Male	11	32.4	10	40
	Female	23	67.6	15	60
Continuing students	Male	95	53.4	134	67.7
	Female	82	46.6	65	32.3

Source: Hong Chau and Tho Tang school assessment reports 1995-1996

Table 5.2: The rate of dropout students compared to their own gender (%)

	Hong Chau	Tho Tang
Male	10.4	6.9
Female	21.7	19

Source: Hong Chau and Tho Tang school assessment reports 1995-1996

Table 5.3 shows the result of Chi-Square to test the statistical significance of the influence of gender on dropping out. It was found that gender statistically influences dropout rates.

Table 5.3: Significance of the differences in retention rate by gender

	Chi-square value (Pearson)	Significance
Hong Chau	5.04428	0.02471*
Tho Tang	7.43278	0.00640*

* statistically significant at p=0.005

In both schools gender influences dropping out, although the extent of the difference varies from Hong Chau to Tho Tang. Furthermore, in Hong Chau, the rate of continuing male students is only slightly higher than that of female students but in Tho Tang, the rate of continuing male students is more than twice as high as that of female students. Also, the dropout rate of the Hong Chau lower secondary school is higher than that of the Tho Tang lower secondary school (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: The Rate of dropout students by gender (%)

	Hong Chau		Tho Tang	
	N	%	N	%
Male	11	5.2	10	4.5
Female	23	10.8	15	6.7
Total	34	16	25	11.2

Source: Hong Chau and Tho Tang school assessment reports 1995-1996

There are three points to be summarised here. First, in both schools, the rates of female dropout students are greater than those of male students. In contrast, for continuing students, the rate of male students is higher than that of female ones.

Hence, the difference in retention rate by gender is statistically significant. Second, the incidence of male and female dropout students in Hong Chau is higher than that of Tho Tang. Third, the rate of female students enrolling in Tho Tang lower secondary school in 1995-1996 academic year is very low and that accounts for less than a half of that of their male counterparts (32.3% vs 67.7%). However, it is necessary to note that the outcome is contrary to the only finding and conclusion regarding gender by Tran Kiem *et al.* (1994) mentioned in the literature review.

5.3 Qualitative analysis

5.3.1 Gender relationships in Hong Chau and Tho Tang

In Vietnam, inequality between males and females still exists despite the socialist slogan “males and females are equal” (*nam nu binh dang*). In rural areas, discrimination against females is more obvious and open than in urban areas. Males are given the responsibility of external affairs such as involvement in commune and national business (*việc làng, việc nước*), which is considered important and females are given the responsibility of internal affairs such as household chores (*việc nhà*) and taking care of children, which is considered less important by both males and females.

In Hong Chau and Tho Tang, females are expected to be responsible, caring and strong. In Hong Chau, females must be skilful at agricultural activities as well as household chores and taking care of family members, who traditionally consist of people from different generations. Apart from being skilled in agricultural production, able-bodied females in Hong Chau are also involved in additional production such as making tofu. Ms Hanh, a 40 year old teacher from Hong Chau school said,

Hong Chau females as females in other rural areas have to tolerate a very hard life. Since childhood we have to learn and to be involve in all agricultural jobs such as planting rice, corn and sugar cane. As Hong Chau is on the sand bank of the Red river, it is very hard to water our field. When it is not production season, we have to find other jobs to do. At home we always have to look after pigs, buffalo, cows, birds and silkworms. If they are sick, all our wealth is gone. Some families make tofu, which is very hard work as they have to get up at 3 or 4 am and it requires strong people. As the price of bean is high, soybean residue from making tofu is used to

feed pigs. And of course we have to take care of children and parents of both families. For my case, I do not visit my mother so often as my mother-in-law who has been sick for two years (Translated by the researcher).

Similarly, in Tho Tang, females must be able in doing agricultural jobs, trading and traditional duties of Vietnamese females such as arranging household chores and taking care of family members. The traditional Tho Tang female has been described as very busy in a humorous Tho Tang proverb: "Tho Tang women can only be there for half the dinner time and spend half the night with their husband" (*Phu nu Tho Tang chi an voi chong nua bua, ngu voi chong nua dem*). Therefore, it is curious that even though females are expected to be very responsible, they are considered inferior to males in terms of power and position as well as benefits.

Gender relations in the two areas were illustrated in the work place and also in wife-husband relationship in solving family problems. The following exemplify the low position of females. The first example stems from observation made by the researcher. The staff of Hong Chau and Tho Tang Education Departments consist of mainly males. Where women are employed they are in charge of typing and book keeping only. In staff meetings or tea breaks, these female staff are expected to prepare tea or meals for other male colleagues as it is considered that females "naturally" are inclined to fulfil this role (*thien chuc cua phu nu*). It would make a female feel uncomfortable or defined as not being feminine if she does not get involved in such tasks.

The second example is drawn from the story of Mr Ban, Vice Director of Hong Chau Education Department, of how he persuaded parents to encourage their children to continue to go to school. The parents of a dropout female student were invited to the school. The father went to the school and explained that the student's mother did not want her to continue her education. Mr Ban asked the student's father,

Why do you allow your wife - a woman - the right to decide a family matter? The decision must belong to you as the man in the family. Please go home and tell her that your daughter should continue to go to school (Translated by the researcher).

The inferior role of females in society and at home, in Hong Chau and Tho Tang, is so accepted that everyone including females themselves do not consider it an issue. This idea of respecting males and disregarding females (*trong nam, khinh nu*) directly prevents females from having equal access to education with their male counterparts. It also indirectly influences the high dropout rate among female students over males through labour distribution between brothers and sisters in the family and marriage customs.

5.3.2 Labour distribution between sisters and brothers in the families

Labour distribution between the mother and father influences the daughters' and sons' image about their future role in the family which indirectly influences their motivation to study. The labour distribution between sisters and brothers also directly influences their time for studying. As an agricultural country it is tradition in Vietnam, that the whole family including children must be involved in work in the field and taking care of pigs and buffaloes as well as sharing household chores. The type of jobs and the workload distributed to children depends on their age and gender as well as certain conditions in each location and each family. In this sense Hong Chau is a very typical agricultural commune, which is reflected in Mr Nam's notion,

It is tradition in Hong Chau that children help their parents from the age of 7 or 8. Children often look after their younger brothers and sisters or feed buffaloes, pigs, water corn and cabbages and work in the rice fields. Even though both daughters and sons contribute to family work, unlike daughters, sons are in charge of jobs that do not require long hours and continuing patience; for example, girls do cooking, feeding the animals, taking care of young babies, while boys are in charge of taking buffaloes to the fields to graze (Translated by the researcher).

The fact that daughters have to work longer hours and be more responsible than sons is indicated by Mr Ban, giving his own family as an example of the gender relationships in rural families,

After school hours, while my daughters have to do household chores or work in the field, my sons can go somewhere to play football with their friends (Translated by the researcher).

Mrs Lan, a mother of three sons complained,

I do not care what people say "You cannot be rich if you have three sons" (tam nam bat phu - old proverb). However, it is really hard with only sons as they are not as hard working as daughters. Also, as males they have to show their faces outside so we accept that they do not help us (Translated by the researcher).

Oanh, a 14 year old female dropout student from Hong Chau and is currently working as a maid in Hanoi espoused,

In my village, boys do not have to do much. They just go to school or go around but we-girls have to help our parents (Translated by the researcher).

In Tho Tang, as people often rent out their land and very few people work as farmers, children do not have to do agricultural work in the field. Thus, according to those interviewed in Hong Chau and Tho Tang, the life style of Tho Tang children today is similar to that of urban children apart from the fact that academic performance of Tho Tang students is not as high as in urban areas. What is unusual here is that apart from taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, as well as doing house work such as cleaning and cooking, Tho Tang children also help their parents in trading or trade by themselves. As both taking care of younger sisters and brothers, doing household chores and being involved in trading are considered female jobs, female children are more likely to do these jobs than their male counterparts. Mrs Nhung, a teacher from Tho Tang school said,

Female children in Tho Tang from the age of 8 or 9 can go to the markets to sell small produce such as onions, vegetables or groceries. They can trade and make profits, while their male counterparts just enjoy playing children games (Translated by the researcher).

In summary, though the types of jobs that children in Hong Chau and Tho Tang do are different, in both locations, children of both genders have to participate in income generating activities and taking care of their younger brothers and sisters. The labour distribution is based on age and gender: male children have more free time and are expected to be less responsible than their sisters.

Heavier workloads and responsibility for female children influence female education and indirectly causes higher dropout rate among female students over their male counterparts. The difference in labour distribution between daughters and sons in the family in rural Vietnam stems from the expectation of female roles as wives and daughters-in-law in the husband's family. This difference is one of the factors contributing to the difference of male and female dropout rate.

5.3.3 Rural female children's childhood

In both Hong Chau and Tho Tang, finding a husband and a wife is considered the most important task for young people and their families. It is considered an obligation of parents and only after all children in the family get married, is parental obligation complete. The role of males and females in marriage gives rise to the difference in the way parents treat their daughters and sons (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1996:286). Males have a pro-active role in finding a wife and remain living in their parents' house while females have a passive role and have to move to live in their husbands' family.

Thus, the importance of having a husband for females has a different character from finding a wife for males. Giving daughters in marriage is one of parents' anxious concerns. Mr Quan, a father of two dropout daughters, told the story of his neighbour,

My neighbour's family is one of the rich families in the village. However he has one daughter who 27 years old but remains single. She lives with her parents and her younger brother's family. She is like a thorn in her parents' side and as they want her to have a husband soon, they promise to give her and her future husband a lot of valuable assets. Nevertheless, in our village at such an age, she might never have a chance to have a husband. How can parents be happy, having such a single daughter in the family? (Translated by the researcher).

In Vietnam, especially, in the rural areas, single females have a relatively hard life spiritually and materially. The income of single women in rural Vietnam is the lowest compared to other people (Tran Thi Van Anh *et al.*, 1996:126). In Vietnamese culture, it is still very hard or nearly impossible for them to have a baby without getting

married though there have been many voices raised to protest against this opinion (Le Nham, 1994). In addition, it is assumed that in old age these single women will be lonely and insecure as in Vietnam old people generally only have support from their children and relatives rather than social welfare as in Australia. Moreover, it is assumed that being a single woman means being unhappy and having no future. These people worry about having no one to take care of their funeral and the ensuing annual death ceremony. Thus being a single woman holds great fear in rural Vietnam, including Hong Chau and Tho Tang.

Nguyen Huu Minh (1996) argues that the number of years young people spend in school influences their age of getting married. In rural Vietnam, it is more likely that marriage influences the number of years female students study in school. Many villagers in the study expressed the following opinion of Mr Nam from Hong Chau school about the appropriate time for females to get married,

Our grandparents said "Females have their own period of youth and the right moment for getting married; if they miss it, they will miss their opportunity for ever" (con gai co thi). For rural girls now after 20, it is difficult for them to marry, after 22 it is nearly impossible to have a husband (Translated by the researcher).

The girl who cannot have a husband is called "unwanted" (*bi e*). In the markets, the items that cannot be sold are called *bi e*, so when the word *bi e* is used to describe the failure of females in marriage, to a certain extent, it reflects the inferior position of females in Vietnamese society.

The fact that many rural females cannot find husbands results from the shortage of males in Vietnam. As a country which suffered from wars for long periods, the rate of males within marriage age, compared to that of females is 94.2 per cent, one of the lowest rates in the world (National Statistics Department, 1991:14 cited in Nguyen Huu Minh, 1996:277). The shortage of males in the rural areas is more serious as rural males are likely to leave their villages to migrate to cities or to areas where they can work for government enterprises. They tend to find wives in the places where they live and work rather than go back to their home village to marry female farmers.

According to the law on marriage and family in Vietnam, females can marry from the age of 18. But according to the village custom they should marry before 20. Hence, females have only a very limited period available for marriage: 2 years. One of the reasons for accepting early marriage proposals, for example at the age of 16 for females, is the fear of becoming “unwanted” and can be understood as a way of lengthening the period of preparing for getting married among rural females. Regarding early marriages, a local People's Committee member in Hong Chau stated that,

We have to act by laws and of course we do not have early marriages; if these are to happen, the family must to work with local policemen to change birth certificates before marriage (Translated by the researcher).

Thus, changing birth certificate is a solution to the illegality of early marriage. This also implies that, in Hong Chau and Tho Tang early marriages now are informally accepted.

The family attitude toward education of female children, thus, is different from that for males because females are educated to meet the standards of a good bride, wife and daughter-in-law. The philosophy of educating female children in the family is reflected in Mr. Nam's notion,

The purpose of forcing children to work is not simply due to economic benefits but also as a way of educating and disciplining the children. If we do not educate our daughters, when they get married, people will curse and insult us. Everyone including government officials and farmers have to do that. When there is a girl aged 16 or 17 in the family, all neighbours will look at the way she behaves, stands, moves, speaks and works. As rumour in rural Vietnam is very important, the number of love proposals a girl has depends on the judgement of neighbours and friends (Translated by the researcher).

Depending on customs and socio-economic characteristics of each location, the qualities for a "good girl" are slightly different. As a consequence, the way people prepare and educate their daughters, varies. In Hong Chau as in other predominantly agricultural communes, agricultural skills are emphasised. In Tho Tang, “knowing how to work” (*biet lam an*) means knowing how to trade. Thus, commercial skills are considered the most important in Tho Tang. Females from age 8 are asked by their

parents to go to the market to sell small produce. Also, females from age 12 start to wear gold jewellery such as rings, earrings and bracelets in order to show, first, their abilities in earning money, and second, the wealth of their families. In the future they are expected to earn money to support the whole family but under the control of their husbands.

Many school age females in Tho Tang have to leave school to go with their parents to the northern provinces near the border with China such as Ha Giang and Lang Son to help their parents in trading. The parents only let their daughters go back to Tho Tang as an indication that they are looking for a husband.

The importance of the family to show their daughters' competence in trading is espoused by Mrs Hang, a teacher of Tho Tang secondary school,

In some cases, even though the daughters cannot gain benefits from their small trading, the parents still ask them to go to the markets to continue trading. The parents also boast about the talents in trading of their daughters even when in fact the jewellery and money their daughters hold are from the parents (Translated by the researcher).

Thus, in Hong Chau as well as in Tho Tang, "knowing how to work" is the most vital and almost decisive criteria on which female teenagers are to be selected as daughters-in-law and wives. Such ideas are deeply held by female dropout students and their parents. One girl expressed,

Being a rural female, I have to learn how to work well. If not we may be "unwanted" (Translated by the researcher).

In some cases, the female teenagers drop out from school in order to materially prepare for their wedding. It is a tradition in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang that the wedding party is very big. All the village members are invited to a wedding party. For the family relatives, there might be a three or four day party. Relatives have to contribute to all preparations and other hospitality procedures. It is also the tradition not to give gifts or money to the bride's family. The bride's family traditionally has economic assistance from the groom's family as a gift to cover the wedding party. This

gift from the groom's family consists of pork, betel (*trau*), areca nut (*cau*), tea and tobacco. The bride's parents also traditionally give her new clothes and gold rings for her to bring to the husband's family.

Organising a wedding is still a burden for many families. Nguyet and Dung are sisters whose mother died and left a burden for their family as they have to borrow money to cover the fee for their mother's three months stay in the hospital. The father's only wish for his daughters is that they soon get married as he thought by doing this he can complete his obligation of a father for his daughters. He planned to save money for his daughters' weddings. Nguyet aged 16 and Dung aged 14 both had to drop out of school to work in the field and to go to Ha Noi to sell vegetables even though they are both bright and were high achievers. The father argues,

Finally, my daughters will have to get married. If the parents can not arrange for their daughters to have their own family, the parents feel guilty for not having completed their parental duties. In my case, as I'm a "widower with children" (ga trong nuoi con), my daughters must actively prepare for their future. They have to earn some money so they can have something to take with them to their husbands' families (Translated by the researcher).

Apart from a fear of being unwanted, the new law on land distribution also motivates people to arrange their marriage early. Early marriage after *Doi Moi* is motivated by the rush for forming new households in order to be distributed land and to live a stable life (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1996). Also now, labour in the household has become more important. Many families find arrangements for their sons' marriages as a way to solve the shortage in labour which may exist. As a consequence of this early marriage movement, female children suffer most as their childhood and time for school education is too short.

In short, in both locations, for female children, preparing to get married is the most important task and having a good husband is the first priority of parents and their daughters. Also, to different extents and by different ways, female students must be involved in income-generating activities which are considered material preparation for their wedding.

5.3.4 Access to education

In the previous part, it was suggested that having a husband is the most crucial task for females and their family. The Vietnamese traditional opinion assumes that females must be inferior to their husbands in all aspects. Consequently, as a way to reach the goal to have a husband and maintain family happiness, females' education is necessary to a lesser extent than males'. In fact, to some extent, a high level of school education may potentially pose a threat to the females' marriage prospects. In marriage, females' education traditionally must be lower than that of their male counterparts. Mrs Thu, a mother of Ly, a dropout student said,

Females who have a high education level may find it difficult to find a husband. In our village we need people who know how to work and how to treat their husbands' family well but not people with high education. My daughter cannot learn this in school so as long as my daughter does not need to sign by her finger, it is enough for her (Translated by the researcher).

Thus, according to parents, school education does not educate females to have many love proposals and to be good wives in the future, which is considered the most important task for them. People only see its role in providing them with reading, writing and simple calculating skills, or in other words, to be literate. It was found from those interviewed that for many rural parents, current secondary education is not necessary for their daughters as it can not provide them with knowledge to fulfil two important tasks: having a good husband and earning a good income. The latter is applicable for male children also. However, while the benefit of secondary education is not very clear to many parents, they still hope and expect that good education will bring a good future for their children. They give the priority to learn to their sons or to the child with better achievement in school.

Mr Tan, an official of Hong Chau Education Department, comparing the conditions and opportunities offered for male and female students in families, indicated,

The general situation in Vietnam is that female students try to complete primary education, then work for a few years and hurry to get married. On the contrary,

males can keep studying until they do not want to. Actually, if a family is in a needy situation, they might let their sons leave school early. However, in general, every family tries its best to feed (nuoi an) their sons so they can keep studying (Translated by the researcher).

Here Mr Tan used the word *feed (nuoi)* instead of materially support. In Hong Chau as well as in other rural areas in Vietnam, the struggle with hunger is still the problem facing many families; therefore earning enough food for the whole family is a crucial task that even children aged more than 7 must be involved in. In Tho Tang, even though economic conditions of most people are much better than in Hong Chau, female students still drop out in order to assist their families. Mr Dat, a Tho Tang teacher, who has been working in Tho Tang secondary school for more than 20 years explained,

It is a very common thought here in Tho Tang that in the families, daughters have to drop out from school to deal with all economic problems in the families so that sons can go to school without concerns about it. This phenomenon is more likely to occur in farmers' families than the government officials' families (gia dinh can bo) (Translated by the researcher).

In Tho Tang, where the economic status is much better than in Hong Chau and the dropout rate is lower than that in Hong Chau, there is no improvement for females. The female dropout rate compared to that of males is much higher than that in Hong Chau. Regarding the need for lower secondary education, Mrs Van, the principal of Tho Tang secondary school said,

Women in Tho Tang must be good at everything: commerce, agriculture and arranging household chores. They always have to work far from home, or leave home very early in the morning at 2 or 3 am; even with limited knowledge and education such as completion of primary education, many of them are very successful in making money, which is considered to be the most important thing in Tho Tang now. For young girls it is important for them to find a husband. Thus, even if people see the importance of education in trading and running their business, for females as long as they obtain general literacy and numeracy skills, they decide that is enough and they drop out from school (Translated by the researcher).

Due to the difference in opinion regarding the importance of education for males and females in the family, female children always have to stay at home and help their parents in income-generating activities to support the need for education of their brothers. In Hong Chau and in Tho Tang the thought that female children should

sacrifice for their brothers is very popular as mentioned before. This sacrificing is understood and realised by females as a norm. Lan, a dropout student in Tho Tang said,

We need someone to help my parents in running the noodle shop in Tho Tang market. I'm a girl so I have to stay at home to help them. My brothers have to study, they can not help. I need to go to school but it does not matter if I drop out (Translated by the researcher).

In some places in rural areas in Vietnam in the early 1990s, dropping out, especially among female children became a kind of a "mass movement" that one or two families could not resist. Oanh declared her reason for dropping out,

I dropped out because all other girls in my class dropped out too. My parents forced me to go to school. They even beat me and I cried a lot but I did not go because, in my class there were only boys going to school (Translated by the researcher).

In accordance with this old proverb "the village regulations are more powerful than the government laws" (*phep vua thua le lang*), there have been many different movements, the spirit of which is not written anywhere but it is understood and everyone follows it. In both Hong Chau and Tho Tang, the disadvantages for females attending school is one such *village law or village norm (le lang)*. Thus, this norm prevents females from having equal opportunity for education as males.

When students are asked about the year of schooling one thinks he or she should complete, male students tend to give more years for their gender than for females. Parents and students of both genders rarely have a wish to have higher education. They either state they want to finish general education or give a very ambiguous answer that they want to learn "to the end".

In summary, while in labour distribution, the advantages of male children over their female sisters is hidden behind the category *gender characteristics*, in terms of access to education, giving priority to male children is clearly stated by everyone including highly educated people. This is closely linked with the philosophy that males must be superior or cleverer than females, as mentioned above, to keep their leadership role.

Also the expectation for males is to join the society and for females it is to please males. Due to the people's expectation for education for female children, the current school education is significant and necessary only in a sense of providing female primary literacy and numeracy skills.

5.3.5 Changes in gender relationship since *Doi Moi*

The above factors influencing the high dropout rates of female students over their male counterparts in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang stem from the traditional concept of the role of males and females in the Vietnamese society. This part, however, focuses on new factors that have emerged since *Doi Moi* and negatively impact on female retention.

The possibilities of rural people in getting jobs outside the commune under *Doi Moi* is one such factor. Since *Doi Moi*, people's opinions of and opportunities for employment have changed, consequently, it seems that more initiative is taken. It can be said that for a long time Hong Chau people have been confined economically behind the commune "bamboo fence", however it seems that they are leaving this behind. For instance, Hong Chau males go to the provinces in the south such as Lam Dong and Dong Nai to engage in carpentry and building. Females travel to Ha Noi to sell vegetables or to work as maids or cleaners in the hotels and small popular restaurants (*quan pho hoac com binh dan*). Males pursue employment in areas such as building and carpentry which require a good level of health, experience and skills. Female jobs such as helpers and cleaners do not require as much training as the positions taken up by males. Also, it seems that it is easier for female teenagers to gain employment than their male counterparts. Markets in Vietnam are considered the place for females. Also, casual jobs in cities are regarded as more suited to females than males. As Hong Chau is an agricultural commune, people are involved in the national flow of rural job hunters and sellers in the towns and cities.

Nguyet and her sister Dung are both dropout students. Dung was sent to Ha Giang to work as a maid for a family of distant relatives. Nguyet went to Ha Noi to trade while

she was still enrolled at school. Undoubtedly, it is very difficult for rural female teenagers to earn a living in Ha Noi because the work is labour intensive and the rate of pay is low. However, the income earned by a family of two adults and two teenagers in agricultural production is approximately 600.000 VND (60 USD) for 6 months. Thus, the income earned in cities is still higher than that in the village. Nguyet explained,

We have to leave our house at 3 a clock in the morning. It takes two hours to go to Ha Noi. In Ha Noi, I go around streets selling vegetables. The income varies daily from 2000 Vietnamese Dong (VND) to 8000 VND (from 0.20 USD to 0.80 USD). Sometimes, I meet stingy ladies who keep bargaining for long time; I told them that my village was in flood and I could not earn so much and I could not give them discounts. They yelled at me and even swore at me; at home when I remember it, I cry. It is also very dangerous for me; once, I was selling things to a man in a very quiet street and the man attempted to sexually abuse me. But as I was warned by my friends about how to act in similar situations, I successfully managed to run away
(Translated by the researcher).

Female children can earn from 100, 000 to 200,000 VND per month (10 to 20 USD) working as helpers or cleaners in Ha Noi. Meals and clothing are also provided by employers. Similar to street selling, there are numerous negative aspects of working as a helper or cleaner in the big cities but the income is still better than that earned in rural areas or remaining unemployed in rural areas. Both in Hong Chau and Tho Tang female teenagers who work far from home only go back to their commune in order to look for a husband. For the few male students who went out to work as carpenters, their income was not as good as their female counterparts as they were considered apprentices for a long time which was so disillusioning and discouraging that they returned home.

Doi Moi created favourable conditions for Tho Tang traders to continue their traditional jobs. Children of well established traders drop out from school to go with their parents to the Vietnam-China border to trade. Other children undertake petty trading in Tho Tang markets. Working as sellers in Tho Tang however, involves mainly females. In Hong Chau only a few females work as sellers whereas 90 per cent of Tho Tang females are employed as such (Interview with Mr Dien from Tho Tang People's Committee 2/4/1997).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter examines the extent to which gender impacts on dropping out in Hong Chau and Tho Tang. In both schools, female students are more likely to drop out than their male counterparts. This results from the contradictory and traditional tendency towards placing heavy responsibilities and expectations on females and considering females inferior to males in many respects. This philosophy underlies many social relations: labour distribution between and treatment of male and female children; the low importance of female education; marriage customs and traditional roles in a marriage all contribute to the disadvantaged positions of female students in having equal access to and opportunity for education compared to males.

This thesis also highlights the difference in male and female opportunities in gaining employment in non-agricultural jobs under *Doi Moi*, which in turn, influence the dropping out of female students to a larger extent than that of males. While gender influences on dropout rates are statistically significant in both areas, differences in labour distribution between males and females in Tho Tang is more obvious than that in Hong Chau. The rate of females studying in Tho Tang lower secondary school, thus, is lower than that in Hong Chau while the rate of males studying in Tho Tang is higher than that in Hong Chau.

Chapter 6

The Relationship Between Students' Achievement and Dropping Out

6.1 Introduction

In the early 1990s, there were high achievement students among dropout students as shown in Chapter 2. Even though the percentage of these high achievement dropout students is not as significant as the percentage of low achievement dropout students, this phenomenon is considered unusual in Vietnam as low achievement and grade repetition are defined by educators and teachers as the major reasons causing dropping out (Tran Kiem *et al.*, 1994).

In this chapter the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out in the 1995-1996 academic year in the two case study areas is examined. This chapter consists of two parts: the first part is a quantitative analysis which indicates the extent to which continuing students' achievement differs from dropout students' achievement in both maths and Vietnamese language in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang as well as other characteristics of dropout students' achievement; the potential for achievement in the two subjects - maths and Vietnamese language - to predict dropping out is also established using logistic regression; in the second part qualitative data are analysed in order to supplement the quantitative findings.

6.2 Quantitative analysis

6.2.1 Achievement and dropping out in Hong Chau

Difference between continuing and dropout students

Table 6.1 presents the difference in the mean scores of continuing and dropout students in maths and Vietnamese language as well as the result of ANOVA on the impact of dropping out on achievement. It is clear from Table 6.1 that in Hong Chau, for both subjects, maths and Vietnamese language, continuing students achieve only slightly better in their studies than dropout students. However, these differences are not statistically significant at $p=0.05$.

Table 6.1: The difference in scores of continuing and dropout students in Hong Chau

	Continuing students	Dropout students	Difference	F value	p
Maths	5.4708	5.4526	0.0181	1.582	0.210 (ns)
Language	5.5591	5.3118	0.2473	1.555	0.214 (ns)

The gap in maths and language scores between dropout and continuing students is elaborated by Charts 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, 6.4 respectively.

Dropping out and maths' achievement

Charts 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate the difference in achievement scores of dropout and continuing students in maths. The box plots in Chart 6.1 show the range of scores of dropout and continuing students in maths. The graph provides precise statistics such as scores and frequency of each score of both dropout and continuing students. It can be seen from Chart 6.1 that the scores of continuing students vary to a larger extent than that of their dropout counterparts. Not only do the highest scores belong to

Chart 6.1: Hong Chau - Box plot of maths scores by retention status

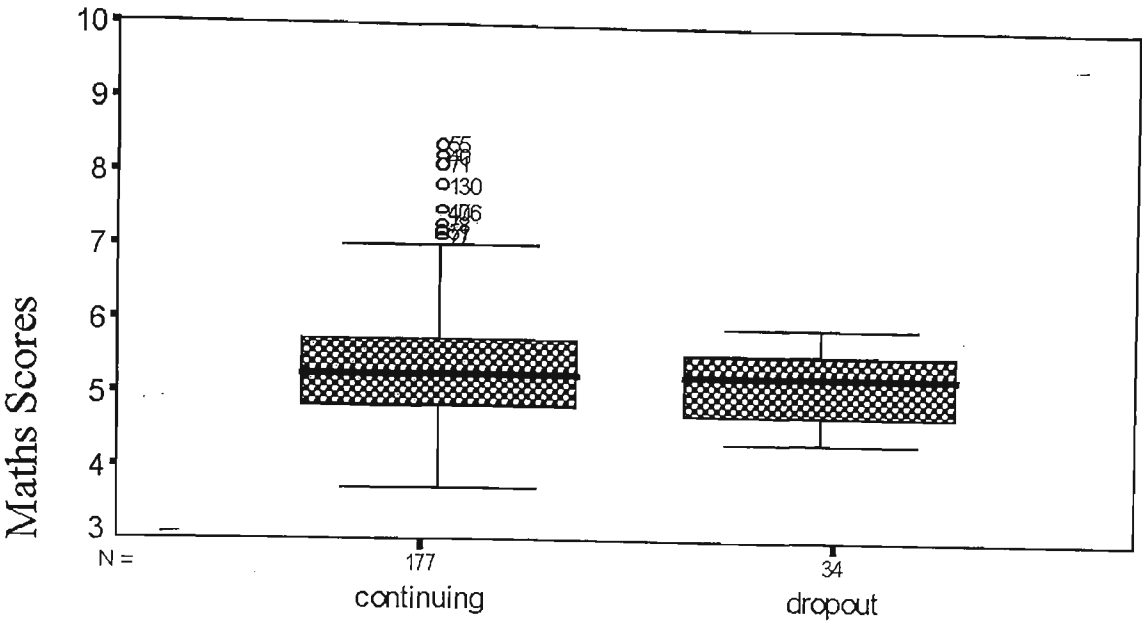


Chart 6.2: Hong Chau - Distribution of maths scores by retention status

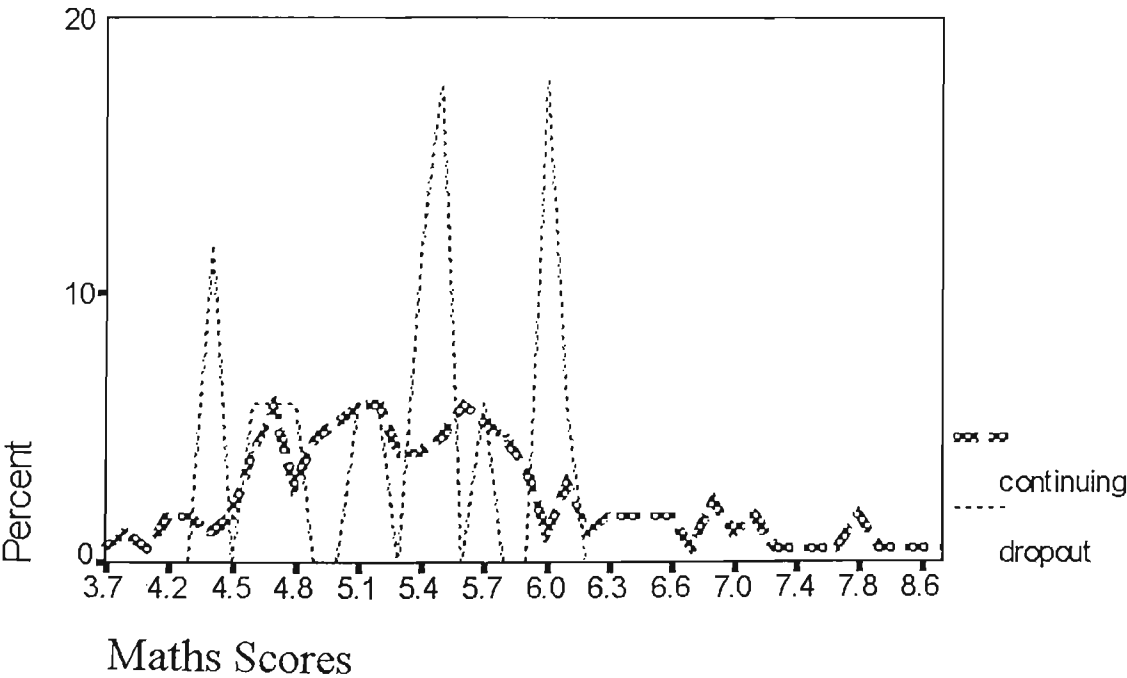


Chart 6.3: Hong Chau - Box plot of language scores by retention status

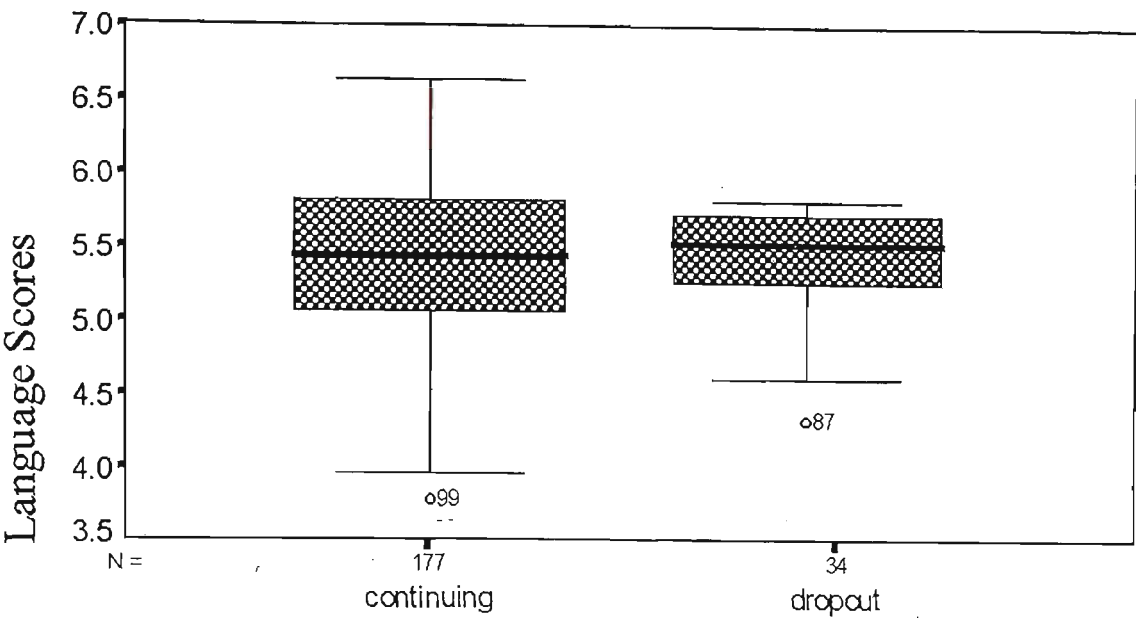
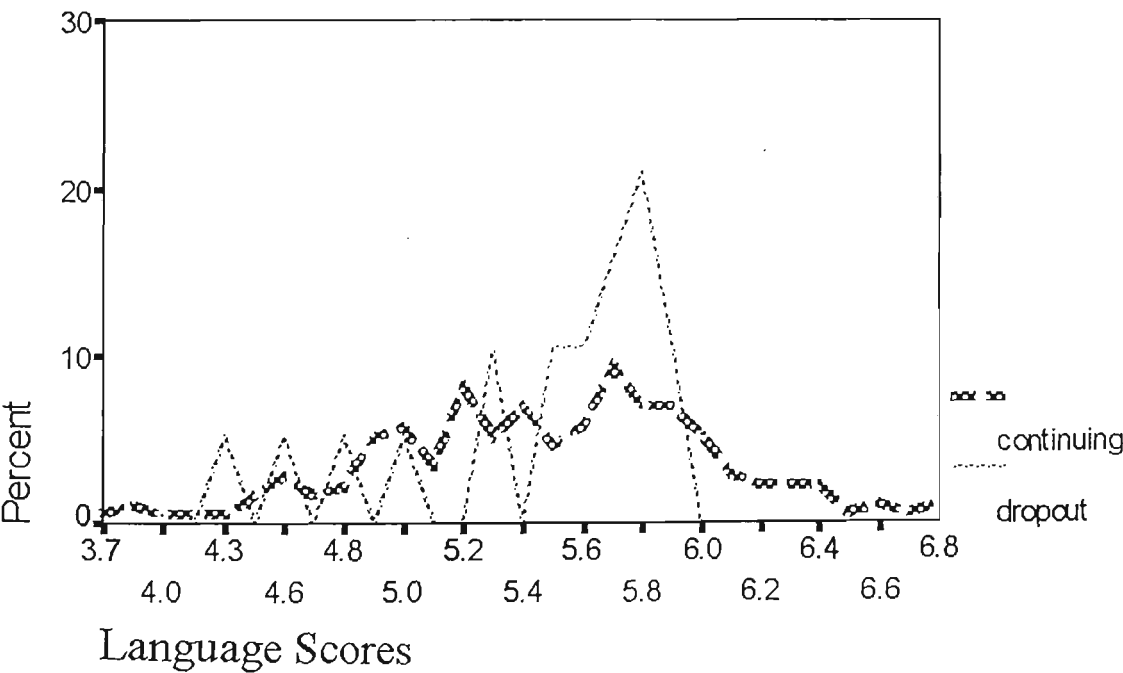


Chart 6.4: Hong Chau - Distribution of language scores by retention status



continuing students but also the lowest scores. The scores of 3.7 and 4.2 are achieved by continuing students while the lowest score in maths of dropout students is 4.3. The highest scores of dropout and continuing students are 6.0 and 8.6 respectively. It can be summarised here that in maths there are continuing students whose scores are very low (lower than 4.0); among dropout students no one has good or excellent scores (over 6.5).

Dropping out and language achievement

Like the situation in maths, the range of continuing students' scores in language vary to a larger extent than that of dropout students. The lowest scores of 3.7 and 3.9 belong to continuing students. The lowest score of dropout students is 4.3. The highest scores of dropout and continuing students are 5.8 and 6.8 respectively. That is, there is no dropout student with good or excellent scores in language. Thus, the lowest scores in both subjects are not achieved by dropout students but by continuing students. Also most dropout students are grouped at 5.8 in language and in maths their scores are clustered at 5.4 and 6.0.

Together with the fact that the students' scores in Hong Chau do not vary greatly (see Chapter 4), the predominance of dropout students with relatively high scores in both subjects and the low scores of many continuing students lead to the conclusions of non-significance of the differences between continuing students' and dropout students' scores.

In summary, in Hong Chau, continuing students' scores are slightly higher than that of their dropout counterparts in both subjects, maths and language, but the difference is not statistically significant. Also, continuing students' scores vary to a larger extent than that of dropout students. The lowest scores in both subjects are achieved by continuing students but not dropout students. There are no dropout students whose scores are ranked good and excellent as the highest scores of dropout students in maths and language are 6.0 and 5.8 respectively.

The potential of achievement scores to predict dropping out in Hong Chau

As it was argued in Chapter 3, logistic regression was adopted to measure the extent to which dropout status depends on students' scores. The result of logistic regression is presented in Table 6.2. Based on this result, it can be concluded that in Hong Chau, neither achievement scores in maths nor in Vietnamese language can predict dropping out as dropout status does not depend on achievement scores in both subjects - maths and Vietnamese language.

Table 6.2: The significance of the dependence of dropout status on students achievement (Hong Chau)

Variables	Significant value
Maths	0.1942 (ns)
Vietnamese language	0.3938 (ns)
Constant	0.4144 (ns)

Summary

In Hong Chau, even though the mean scores of dropout students are slightly lower than that of their continuing counterparts, the difference between continuing students' scores and dropout students' scores is not statistically significant. Also, retention status does not depend on students achievement scores in both maths and Vietnamese language. In other words, the scores of students in maths and Vietnamese language in Hong Chau cannot predict dropping out

6.2.2 Achievement and dropout in Tho Tang

The differences in achievement and their significance

The differences between continuing and dropout students' scores are described by Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: The difference in scores of continuing and dropout students in Tho Tang

	Continuing students	Dropout students	Difference	F value	p
Maths	5.3470	4.6500	0.6970*	7.195	0.008**
Language	5.3662	5.1000	0.2662*	4.500	0.035*

* significant at 0.05

** significant at 0.01

The table shows that dropout students' scores in Tho Tang are much lower than that of continuing students. According to the ANOVA test result, these differences in maths and language are statistically significant at 0.05 and 0.01 respectively.

Achievement in maths and dropping out

As in the case of Hong Chau, the range of continuing students' scores in maths vary to a larger extent than that of dropout students (see Charts 6.5 and 6.6). There are continuing students whose scores are much lower than that of the dropout students with the lowest scores. The lowest score of continuing and dropout students are 3.0 and 3.4 respectively, which are lower than that achieved in Hong Chau. The highest scores are 6.4 and 7.8 respectively, which are higher than that in Hong Chau. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the range of students' scores in Tho Tang is larger than that in Hong Chau. However, as in Hong Chau, in Tho Tang there is no dropout student with good or excellent scores in maths.

Unlike Hong Chau, the median of dropout students in Tho Tang is lower than that of continuing students. Dropout students' scores are clustered at lower value: 3.4, 4.3 and 5.2. These explain why the difference between continuing and dropout students in Tho Tang in maths is statistically significant.

Chart 6.5: Tho Tang -- Box plot of maths scores by retention status

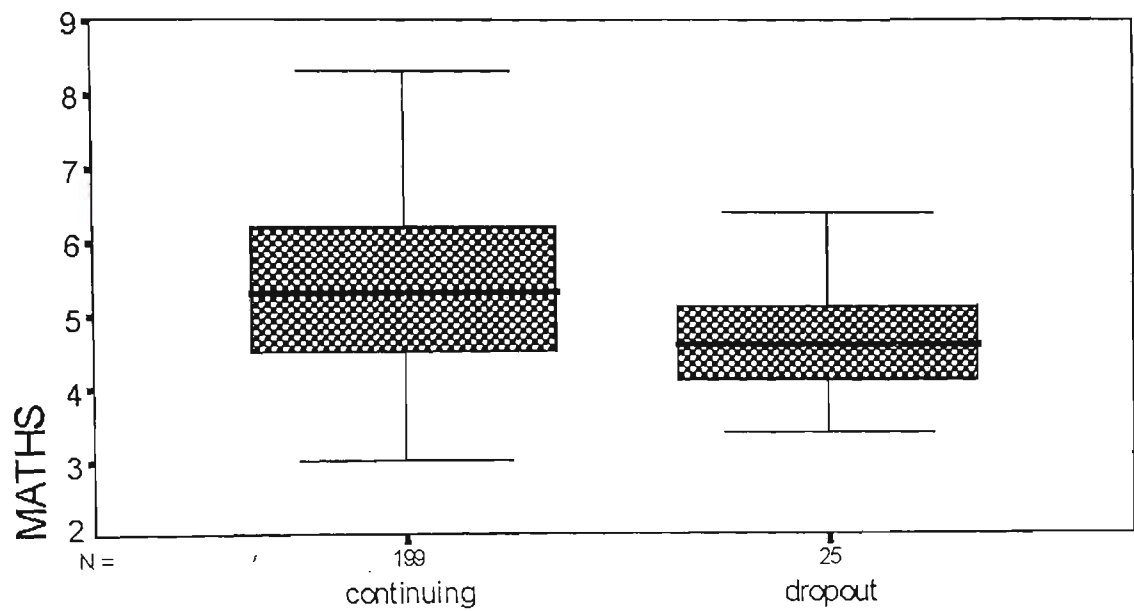
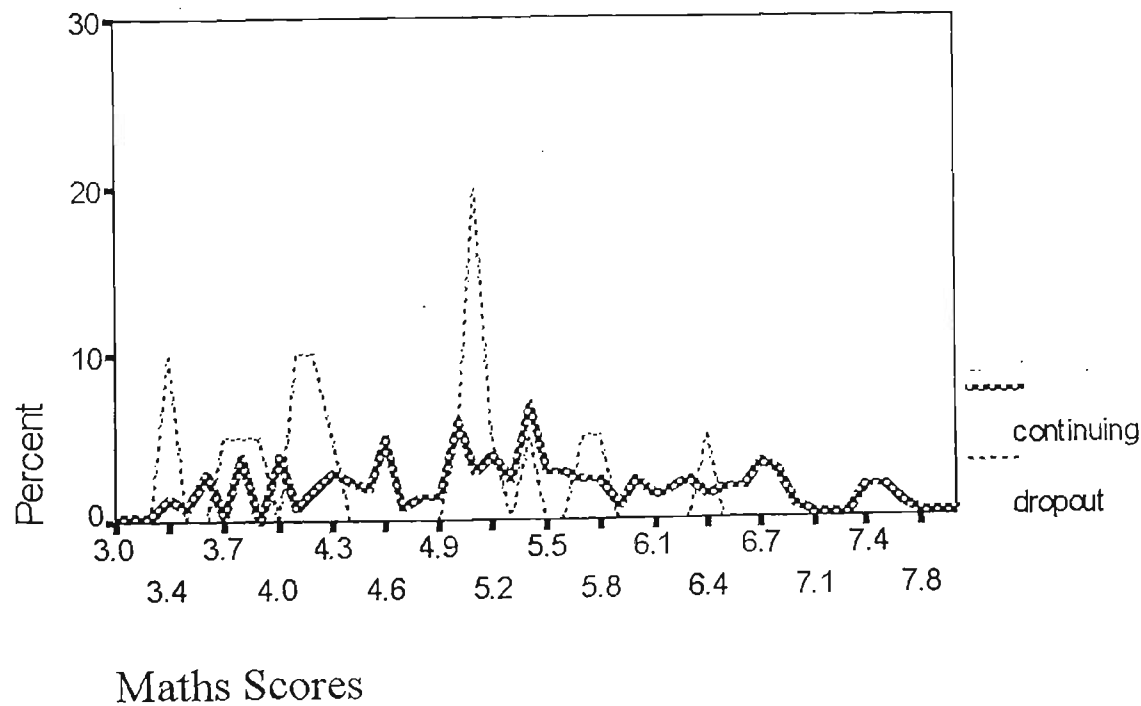


Chart 6.6: Tho Tang - Distribution of maths scores by retention status



Dropping out and language achievement

It is clear from Charts 6.7 and 6.8 that the lowest scores in language (from 3.3 to 4.0) belong to continuing students only. However, dropout students in Tho Tang do not score as high as dropout students in Hong Chau. Tho Tang dropout students' scores clustered at 5.1 in language. This, in addition to the large variation of Tho Tang students' scores mentioned in the Chapter 4, explains why the differences in scores between dropout and continuing students in Tho Tang is statistically significant while those of Hong Chau are not. No one among dropout students scored 6.5 or higher in language.

The potential of achievement scores to predict dropping out

As in Hong Chau, in Tho Tang logistic regression was adopted to measure the extent to which dropout status depends on students' scores. The result of logistic regression is presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: The significance of the dependence of dropout status on students achievement (Tho Tang)

Variables	Significant value
Maths	0.0202 *
Vietnamese language	0.7808 (ns)
Constant	0.7740 (ns)

* significant at $p=0.05$

It is clear from the table that while maths can predict dropping out in Tho Tang Vietnamese language cannot predict dropping out as there is no dependence of retention status on students' scores.

Chart 6.7: Tho Tang - Box plot of language scores by retention status

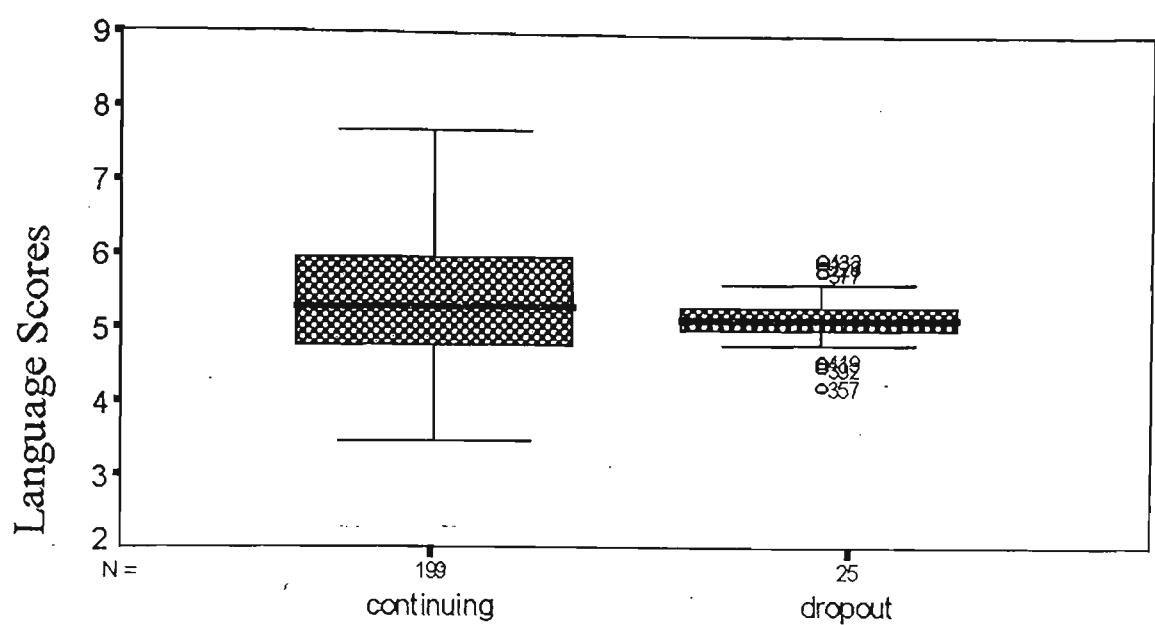
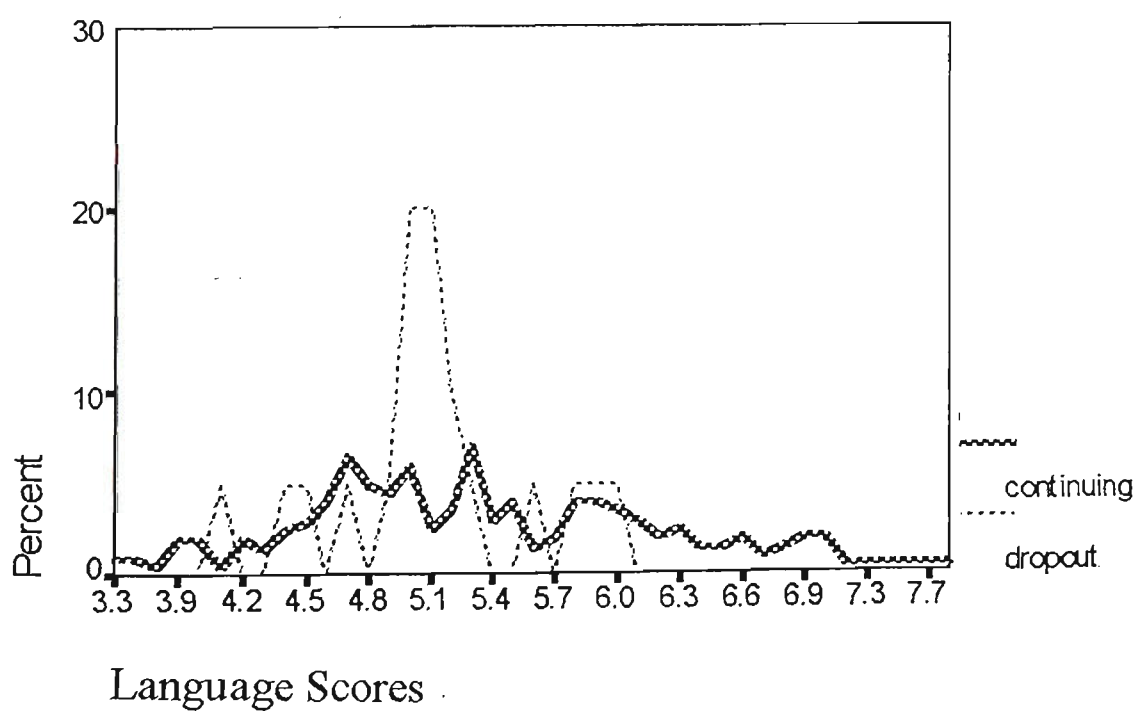


Chart 6.8: Tho Tang - Distribution of language scores by retention status



Summary

In Tho Tang as in Hong Chau, continuing students' scores vary to a larger extent than that of dropout students. In both schools, the lowest scores in both subjects are achieved by male continuing students. Also, there is no one among dropout students whose scores are ranked good and excellent. The mean scores of continuing students are higher than that of dropout students in both maths and language. Unlike Hong Chau, in Tho Tang the differences between continuing and dropout students in both subjects are statistically significant. However, in Tho Tang, only the scores of maths can predict dropping out.

6.3 Qualitative analysis

6.3.1 Dropping out of those who are not low achievement students

Unlike the situation in the early 1990s when it was concluded by Thai Duy Tuyen (1992) and Tran Kiem *et al.* (1994) that there were dropout students who were classified as "good" and "excellent", the result of quantitative analysis of this research found that there are no "good" and "excellent" students among dropout students in Hong Chau and Tho Tang in 1995-1996 academic year. The absence of high achievement students among dropouts is due to what is called the pre-dropout process that is noted by Mrs Thanh from Hong Chau school,

In the late 1990s, dropping out did not occur as suddenly as in the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, suddenly one day nearly 10 students including high achievement students stayed at home and only when we came to their houses to work out the reason we realised that they decided to leave school. Over the past two years I could foresee the symptoms of dropping out such as gradually decreasing achievement scores and irregular attendance at school. In general, here is a clear pre-dropout process which I perceive as a class teacher (Translated by the researcher).

Examples of the decline in students' achievement are illustrated by the academic history of these dropout students (Table 6.5). Dung is a 14 year old female student from Hong Chau. Dat is a 14 year old male who left Tho Tang school when he was in grade 7. Quynh is a 16 year old male student who is also from Hong Chau.

Table 6.5: Examples of declining in students' achievement

	Dat*		Dung**		Quynh**	
	Maths	Language	Maths	Language	Maths	Language
First semester	5.8	5.3	6.8	6.6	6.8	5.9
Second semester	5.4	5.0	5.3	6.5	5.5	5.0

Source: * Tho Tang School Assessment Report 1995-1996

**Hong Chau School Assessment Report 1995-1996

The reasons leading to the dropping out of these students are various. Dung's dropping out related to the misfortune which occurred in her family and to the perception of a girl's fate and future as discussed in Chapter 5. Dung was one of the top students in her class but when her mother suffered from cancer and went to the hospital in town, she took turns with her father and sister to stay at the bedside. She had to ask permission from school to be absent. After three months, her mother died and Dung returned to class but found it too difficult. More importantly, her contribution in earning a living for the family became vital. Her father perceives his obligation to consist of ensuring his daughters a good future through a stable marriage and a good income. Even though the father is proud of Dung and her sister's achievement in school, this seems not to affect his decision for his daughters to leave school. Dung's father said,

I know that my children are bright kids but their lives are not bettered by continuing to go to school. They need to help me in making money, which will be spent on their weddings. They need to show that they are capable of being good wives and good

daughters-in-law in order to have many marriage proposals (Translated by the researcher).

Dung left school despite being close to finishing her grade 6. A few months later, her father sent her to town to work as a maid. Thus, in Dung's case her high achievement in school does not play any role in her dropping out but other factors such as gender, family condition and the perception of her father about the significance of education in ensuring her stable and happy life affect her dropping out.

Dat's dropping out also is another example resulting from the misfortune of the family. The misfortune of Dat's family is a result of socio-economic disorder which began on the first day of the market economy.

Dat used to be a capable student and a son of a wealthy family in Tho Tang. His parents were involved in the private loan system (ie. they borrowed money and lent it to others at a higher interest and by doing that they made profits - choi hui). They quickly became rich and built a very big house. But this loan system fell (vo hui) because people who borrowed money did not pay it back. Dat's family suffered due to bankruptcy. His father was put in jail. His mother became superstitious and does not do anything but go to the pagoda to pray. She has neglected taking care of her own children. Dat, the eldest son in the family has to take responsibility for his four siblings. Their house and furniture was taken over by people who had loaned money to his parents. Dat and his siblings have to live in the small kitchen, and with the help of their relatives, Dat and his siblings have been allowed to keep one buffalo. After the incident, Dat continued to go to class for one month. His scores decreased sharply. He finally decided to leave school to support his siblings and his father in prison (Interview with Dat's teacher 7/4/1997, translated by the researcher).

The misfortune in Dat's family is indicative of a new phenomenon that occurred during the period of transition to the new economic mechanism. As in Dung's case, except for the decline in achievement scores before dropping out, Dat's case does not relate to his achievement status.

Quynh is a 16 year old male student who left school when he was in grade 8. His family is a wealthy family in Hong Chau; his father is a carpenter and can earn much more than farmers in the village. He told his story,

My father said it will take me too long to finish high school. Actually, he can afford to support me to go to the city or the town to study at a technical college. But then it is not easy to find a job in government enterprises, not only in the cities but even in

rural areas. Many workers were dismissed (*giam bien che*). We heard that, in order to have a job, people have to have a lot of money to "bribe" (*chay*). We do not have that much money so it is better for me to take my father's job. In fact my father did not talk directly to me, he discussed the matter with his friends and I heard about it. I do not remember when I started to think of dropping out but it seems that I did not find school and all the subjects as interesting as before. When my father asked me if I'd like to go with him to Phu Tho to help him in his work for two weeks, I felt so happy and immediately agreed. After that I did not go back to school. My class teacher and some of my friends tried to convince me to go to school again but I'm busy with my job now so I can not go to school (Translated by the researcher).

As with many other parents, Quynh's father perceives education as a passport to leave the village and to be employed in a government office or at least to have a non-agricultural job. If this is not valued, then education is not valued. Rural people spend the money that they have saved for a long time for their children's education if they can ensure that their children will have good jobs. Good jobs for rural people are considered to be non-agricultural jobs or physical work, and of course rendering a good salary. After the introduction of *Doi Moi*, many government factories either closed or reduced the number of employees. Thus, it seems that it is difficult to get a non-agricultural job now. Also, for those who still have a government salary, this is insufficient. In addition, after the introduction of *Doi Moi*, there seems to be more opportunities for people with a trade, such as carpentry, to make money and to find employment. Therefore, people want their children to follow some sort of skilled work. Quynh's father told,

With my job I 'm busy all year around. Before, I mainly worked in the commune, now I can travel a lot for work: not only in the North but in the South as well. It is easier than before because once you have money you can buy food and rent a place to stay over night. In fact I want my son to learn a lot. He is a clever boy, but as I travel a lot and work in many different places, I know that the old proverb that our grandparents say is still right "the child of the king will be the king, the child of a watchman in the Buddhist temple will be a watchman" (con vua thi lai lam vua, con sai o chua lai quet la da), so it is better for my son to take over my business and become a carpenter. Being a carpenter is not easy or cushy but is better than being a farmer. If I could stay and work in the village, my son could go to school but also help me and learn how to be a carpenter. But he has to travel with me so it is a pity that he has to give up going to school. School is important but more important for young people is to learn how to earn a living that is not taught in school. I left school at the same age my son is now. So I think it is all right (Translated by the researcher).

The father's story reveals that parents expect school to provide their children with a better future: to obtain a "cushy job" rather than working as a farmer or at least to acquire a skilled job. Even though parents acknowledge the role of schools in forming a child's outlook and personality, they seem reluctant to support their children to attend school only. In Quynh's case, his father also acknowledges the level of his son's achievement but this achievement does not provide Quynh with a "good" future, and a high income-earning job as working as a carpenter ensures. In fact, Quynh's dropping out stems from the lack of personal incentive to study, which was found to be an important factor contributing to Hong Chau and Tho Tang secondary school students when dropping out in 1991 (Nguyen Thi Kim Cuc, 1992:21; Tran Duc Xuoc, 1992:36).

Thus, Dung, Dat and Quynh's stories reveal even though there is a decline in scholarly achievement before dropping out, various reasons contribute to the decision to drop out for these above-pass score students.

6.3.2 Dropping out of low achievement students

As mentioned in the literature review, low achievement is considered a cause for dropping out by research undertaken both in Vietnam and overseas. Thai Duy Tuyen (1992) suggests a causal relationship between low achievement, repetition and dropping out. However, in the late 1990s, in order to encourage students to stay in school as prescribed by the ministry, every school was obliged to help their poorer performing students during summer holidays so students could transfer to the next grade. So students with low achievement scores can transfer to the next class rather than being forced to repeat a class as was the case previously.

Though the difference in scores between continuing and dropout students in Hong Chau are not statistically significant, not only in Tho Tang but also in Hong Chau there are low achievement dropout students. Manh is a 15 year old male dropout student from Hong Chau school. His father has been sick for many years and cannot work in the field. His mother has to do both agricultural work in the field and go to Hong

Chau to sell vegetables. As they could not repay their loan from the co-operative they were not given a piece of land to cultivate. They rent land from others. Manh's father said,

Because he is a son and he learns very well, we really want him to go to school but last year we had a chance to send him to the south to work as a bricklayer with his uncle. He worked very well and earned 700.000VND (70 USD) for four months but then there was no more work so he returned home. With his money we bought a new cow. Maybe next year we will send him to school again because, as a boy, he has to learn (Translated by the researcher).

Even though Manh's father stressed the importance of learning for male children, he seemed not to know or pay attention to how Manh performs in school and still believes Manh learns well while Manh's achievement in fact is very low. Manh explained,

I dropped out some weeks before I went to the south to work. One day the teacher asked us to pay school fees. I'm in B group (group of low achievement students) so I had to pay more than A group students. As my parents did not give me money, I felt ashamed when I went to school so I stopped going. But my parents seemed not to know about it (Translated by the researcher).

In Vietnam, the amount of money required for school fees depends on students' achievement. Depending on the number of government paid teachers, every school is allocated a certain number of students classified as A group. The rest of the students are classified as B and then C depending on how many students in the school. "A group" students pay a fee of 74.400 VND (6.4 USD) a year, the fee for B and C students is defined by the school but ranges from 94.000 VND to 120.000 VND (from 9.4 to 12 USD). The fee is collected once a semester (Interview with Mr Ban from Hong Chau Education Department, 27/3/1997). MOET encourages students to go to school by letting them go to the next grade even when their performances are poor. However, such a schedule for payment discourages low achievement students from continuing schooling.

According to Mr Anh, a teacher from Hong Chau school, Manh's parents are typical rural parents who consider themselves as people who believe in the importance of

studying but put all the responsibility onto the school. They treat school as a kindergarten in which children can leave and return at any time. Manh's father asks him to leave school whenever he gets a job and sends him to school when he can not get a job. Also, as mentioned before he is not familiar with Manh's performance at school. It appears that Manh's dropping out stems from the lack of parental attention to education and placing the opportunity to make money over the opportunity for education.

Toan, is a 16 year old female dropout student from Hong Chau. According to her, the reason for her dropping out is related to low achievement,

Because I'm a low achievement student, I dropped out. If I continue to study I could not understand anything. There are a lot of jobs to do at home. So it was better to leave school. I can still meet my friends at night when I finish all my work. I can go to someone's house to watch television and meet my peers there (Translated by the researcher).

Her low achievement in secondary school is exacerbated by the lack of "investment" - *dau tu* - for studying in terms of time, parental help and other material conditions. She explained,

My mother always wakes me up at 5 or 5.30 am. I help her cook breakfast and feed the pigs, birds and chickens. I leave home for school at 6.45 am. I finish school at 11.30am. After lunch, I go to the field to work. I return home at about 4 pm to feed pigs and pick vegetables in the garden. Then I cook dinner for my family. After dinner I can study or watch TV. We have a colour T.V. so our neighbours, about 10 people, often come to our house to watch T.V. I go to sleep at 10 or 10.30 pm (Translated by the researcher).

Toan's story reveals that she has about 2 hours every day for watching T.V. and studying. In the rural areas, people go to each other's house to share the T.V. or radio. The house is like one big room so it is very difficult for children to concentrate on studying. Thus, Toan's low achievement, which is perceived by her as a reason to dropping out, is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate attention and priority for children's education in rural families.

Students in Tho Tang do not work as hard as their counterparts in Hong Chau because their parents often rent out their land. However, they still have to take care of household chores and help their parents in selling goods. Thu is a 16 year old girl and she is considered "valuable" (*co gia*) by parents who are looking for a daughter-in-law, and by young males as she is beautiful and shows her capabilities in making money as well as dealing with household chores and has been in school for some time. She told her story,

My parents bought a shop in Tho Tang market last year. At first I went to the market in the morning only; in the afternoon I went to school. But sometimes my parents had to go to Lao Cai to buy materials so I had to stay in the market to replace my parents. Also, I was in charge of preparing dinner for my siblings. They are boys so they are not as skilful as me. When my parents were back, I went to school again. But finally my mum told me to stay at home to help her because she was very busy. I do not mind dropping out. But if my parents would let me I'd like to complete my learning (Translated by the researcher).

Focusing on household chores and working in the market as well as regular absence from class before she actually left school lead to the difficulty in learning, which in turn influences her achievement scores. Gradually the link with school became lax. Even though she reveals in her story that she has a wish for further study, it is not strong so she easily follows her parents' arrangement to drop out from school as her mother related,

My daughter is very graceful and lucky in trading. She voluntarily assists us. Here in Tho Tang, we can rent out our land but we still hesitate to hire people to work for us in the shop. So it is a pity that she dropped out of school; we have no other way but to have her leave school; she has learned lots of good things in school (Translated by the researcher).

The last sentence in her mother's interview also suggests that what she has learned in school is enough for her to run her business and to live as a Tho Tang female. According to Mr. Bien from Tho Tang People's Committee, Thu's case is very common for female students in Tho Tang. In terms of schooling matter, she is not an incompetent girl but her acceptance of the village norm, according to which females are expected to devote time to household chores and gain a good reputation, prevents her from success in school.

In addition to heavy work loads and the lack of time spent on studies at home, rural students can not seek academic help from their parents according to Mr Lan, a teacher from Hong Chau, who states that "*due to the low level of education, most farmers are academically unable to help their children in learning*". Extra lessons or after school lessons are not popular in either Tho Tang or Hong Chau. In some wealthy families in Tho Tang, the parents hire someone for extra tutoring for their children but most other students do not have extra classes. In Hong Chau, only year 9 students go to extra lessons organised once a week at the school.

Since the introduction of *Doi Moi*, children have to work harder as they often replace their parents in the fields so their parents can go out to seek other jobs. Even though to a lesser extent than in the early 1990s, the changes in value orientation and opportunities for work outside the village impact on students' efforts in learning which, in turn, influence students' achievement.

In summary, among the cases mentioned above, except for Toan's case, low achievement is not perceived by dropout students as the direct reason causing their dropping out. They state other factors such as economic difficulty which results in inability to pay school fees, job opportunities and the necessity to help parents. In most cases including Toan's, low achievement is exacerbated by the lack of time spent on learning after school, the gap in knowledge from lower classes and the lack of appropriate parental attention and support to schooling matters. Thus, even for low achievement students, achievement is not seen as an important factor contributing to their dropping out. In general, there is no pattern emerging that attests to the theories that high achievement students remain at school while low achievement students drop out as a direct result of their performance. This argument is supported in the next part.

6.3.3 Low achievement continuing students

In order to encourage students to remain in school MOET withdrew the regulation of forcing unsatisfactory students to repeat a grade. Therefore, low achievement students have been able to graduate from a lower grade to a higher grade. Among low achievement students who continue to study in school, though not all of them are at

risk of dropping out, there are some at risk students. Lan is 14 years old and in grade 7. She is the fourth child among seven children in the family. All her older brothers and sisters dropped out from school. She told her story,

My mother died. We shared the house with my eldest brother's family. He is 23 years old. My other older brother and sister are still single. This second brother does not do anything, just goes around. My father wants him to get married soon. My third sister goes to Ha Noi every day from early morning to midnight to sell agricultural produce. This year, during the agricultural season I have to stay at home to do agricultural jobs with my father. After the season I go back to school but it is very difficult for me to catch up with others, especially in maths. My brothers sometime try to convince me to leave school. My father said going to school or not is up to me. If my father allows I want to finish high school (Translated by the researcher).

According to Lan's class teacher, she is unlikely to finish secondary school education despite her desire to graduate. From the group of low achievement continuing students, females are more likely to be at risk.

Low achievement continuing students who are not defined by the teacher as at risk students are those who are strongly encouraged by their parents. Thu is also a 14 year old female student in grade 8. Her parents are both electricians in Tho Tang. She is the eldest and has a younger brother. Her parents want her to become an electrician too. In order to be enrolled in the technical college she must have a high school certificate. She and her parents do not consider her dropping out from school. However she does not try hard and does not pay attention to her achievement scores. Thu said,

I think I'm all right. Other children are like me. I like school because I can make friends here. My parents are working in the electrical centre in Tho Tang. They said after school I will go to technical college and I will become a worker like my parents (Translated by the researcher).

Thu is a low achievement student in a rural school. In rural Vietnam, becoming a skilled worker is usually a strong ambition but the way she talked about her ambition and her confidence are unusual. Electricians, for the time being, are very powerful as they can decide to provide or to cut electricity in a certain area. Thus, even though Thu is a low achievement student, because her parents are electricians she might have more of a chance to be accepted in the technical college and to find a job over others

whose parents are farmers. The belief in reaching this aim encourages Thu to stay at school.

Van is a 15 year old boy and is in grade 8 in Hong Chau secondary school. His parents are public servants. The mother is a kindergarten teacher and the father is a local policeman. However, like Thu his achievement is very low. Also, like Thu, Van's parents do not want him to be a farmer. They want him at least to be a public servant in the locality like them. In rural areas, public servants have material and social advantages. Farmers often respect them as they are considered more knowledgeable. They receive a salary which is relatively high compared to the income of farmers. Also they are given land like other farmers. Usually, children from public servants' families have better conditions for studying than that of children from farmers' families.

Apart from public servants' families, in general, sons are more likely than daughters to be encouraged by the parents to keep studying in school. Hung is a son in a six children family in Tho Tang. His sisters are all dropout students and are all married. His parents provide good conditions for his studying as the father said,

We have our new house built now. We are very busy. But our son has everything he needs; even urban children may not have such good conditions. He does not have to be involved in any household chores except for helping with scaling rice and paddy when we have customers. He is a quick and clever boy. In the future we will leave everything including the shop and our house and a piece of land to him. He can learn to the end in order to get a high school certificate (Translated by the researcher).

For this man, "the end" of education for his son is getting a high school certification. He does not care about his son's achievement in school. Being in school and gaining certification is assumed to be automatic by his parents. His son Hung does not show any interest in school,

My parents want me to go to school so I go. I do not like any subject. The teacher does not seem to pay attention to me. But sometimes, there is lots of fun in school. I do not think of dropping out from school (Translated by the researcher).

These examples show the influence of parents in convincing children to stay in school. The parents who encourage children to go to school are often public servants in rural

areas who guide their children towards gaining a job other than being a farmer or people with good economic conditions compared to others in the areas. This means the motivation for parental encouragement is often a wish for their children to have a "cushy" and a non-agricultural job. However, sons in the family are more likely to be encouraged to study than daughters. This explains why the lowest scores in both subjects in both schools belong to male continuing students. Thus for many students, in spite of low achievement, they remained in school. They or their parents are motivated by the expectation of a better future through education or at least to gain social status in addition to their wealth.

6.3.4 Regional differences

This research demonstrates that in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang the mean scores of dropout students are lower than that of continuing students in both subjects. The differences are statistically significant in Tho Tang only. Also, while for Tho Tang achievement in maths can forecast dropping out, it is not applicable to Hong Chau in either maths or Vietnamese language. In fact, the difference in the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out, between Hong Chau and Tho Tang, stem from historical precedents.

As residents in a predominantly agricultural commune which suffers from flood every year, Hong Chau people look for opportunities to leave their agriculturally-based commune. From long ago, success in scholastic examinations represents the only avenue open to people in Hong Chau to attain at least a better position in their commune. Thus for Hong Chau people education is considered a way to change their life and plight. However, Mr Quan from Hong Chau Educational Department indicates,

After the introduction of Doi Moi, the decrease in government funding and subsidies for higher education resulted in the cutting of students' scholarships. Now only top students can get a university scholarship. Accommodation for university students is not free as it was before. It is now very difficult for rural families to support one child to study in higher education in the city. Also, as a result of the process of reducing government staff and privatising government enterprises, it seems that young graduates have little opportunity to get a job. These factors impact profoundly

on Hong Chau parents and students who expect to have higher education and to get a job in the government sector. It makes people seek other ways to have a good future. Some see dropping out as a solution (Translated by the researcher).

Also, even though the income in Hong Chau is now higher than before, Hong Chau people are still poor. Tho Tang has been an agricultural and trading commune for a long time and people know how to gain profits from trading. Their life is not as hard and they do not depend on environmental conditions, as in Hong Chau. Furthermore, it appears that Tho Tang people do not have a traditional love for academic learning; they do not view education as a means for a better life; they rely on trade. The market economy provides an expanded opportunity for Tho Tang people to make profits. As Mr Dien from Tho Tang People's Committee reported, in general, Tho Tang people quickly become wealthy. They are satisfied with their success in the economy. However, the opinion of Tho Tang people of education has gradually changed. Over the last few years, the Tho Tang People's Committee has realised that the education level of Tho Tang people has not increased in direct relation to their wealth. Thus, they encouraged young people in Tho Tang to attend universities by giving scholarships for those who are accepted to any university. Very wealthy people in Tho Tang have also adopted the idea of investing in children's education. They provide children with convenient desks, a learning room and private tutors as in Ha Noi. However, it may take time for these plans to succeed and the success in children's education may require more than material support. Not all children from wealthy families are successful in learning. In general, Tho Tang people are happy to stay in their commune and pursue trading jobs; they do not see education as an important way to change their life as in Hong Chau. This partly explains why Tho Tang students do not try hard in school even though they have more favourable material conditions than their Hong Chau counterparts. Nevertheless, the attitude of Tho Tang people towards education is now changing gradually and at least economically they can support their children pursuing school education.

Regarding dropping out, even though Hong Chau students are more hard working in school compared to their counterparts in Tho Tang, their parents cannot economically

support their school studies as well as Tho Tang parents. Mrs Ha, a teacher from Hong Chau school explained,

In Hong Chau, whenever we announce the deadline for school fees we always notice that many students stay at home. Some students may come back when their parents sell some agricultural produce and give them money. Some drop out and never come back to school. Some may come back to school after a few days but without money. If we mention school fees again they may drop out. Thus collecting school fees is a very sensitive problem. It is very difficult for us to be asked to keep the retention rate high on one hand and to collect school fees on the other (Translated by the researcher).

For Hong Chau people whose income comes from agricultural produce, when they need cash they have to go to the market to sell their produce which is very cheap. Thus, the fee is relatively high for them. By contrast, in Tho Tang, very few families have problems in paying school fees.

The regional difference is also reflected in the differences in dropout rates between Tho Tang and Hong Chau over time (see Table 6.6).

Table 6.6: The rates of dropout students in Hong Chau and Tho Tang
in 1990-1991 and 1995-1996 academic years
(%)

	Hong Chau	Tho Tang
1990-1991	20.00*	25.00**
1995-1996	16.00	11.20

Source : * Nguyen Thi Kim Cuc, 1992

* * Tran Duc Xuoc, 1992

It is clear from the table that in the first days of the market mechanism, the rate of dropping out in Tho Tang was very high compared to Hong Chau. However, after the initial stage to set up their official businesses, the dropout rate fell to a level which is lower than that of Hong Chau. Here economic conditions act as an intervening factor between students' achievement and dropping out. Difficulties in economy and the gap

between people's expectations of education and the possibility of meeting these expectations are important factors causing dropping out in Hong Chau. This explains why Hong Chau dropout students' mean scores are only slightly lower than that of continuing students and are much higher than that of their dropout counterparts in Tho Tang.

6.3.5 Summary of qualitative analysis

In this part, it is suggested that the level of achievement plays a small role in the students' dropping out. More significant factors which contribute to dropping out are gender, economic status, parental expectations of children's education and the possibilities of reaching these expectations. From the interviews it is clear that people wish to pursue a stable life, which means a happy marriage and good income. The value of education depends on the extent to which education ensures this "stable life". However, in order to have a more profound conclusion, this suggestion must be tested quantitatively in a further study.

Factors other than achievement status explain the difference in the rate of dropout students between Hong Chau and Tho Tang during the late 1980s to mid 1990s. Nowadays, Hong Chau people's expectations of education, as a way to obtain a better future, are not as high as before. This is due to the high level of competition for positions after a long and difficult process of study; thus expectations that education will lead to a promising future are seen as unreliable. However, the tendency of underestimating the role of education which leads to the phenomenon of a "mass movement" in dropping out, which was especially serious in Tho Tang in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Thai Duy Tuyen, 1992), has decreased. It was argued that the decision to drop out depends on the extent of matching people's expectations of children's education and the possibilities of realising these expectations. In Tho Tang, people's expectation of education traditionally is lower than that in Hong Chau but they are more economically able to ensure a stable life than in Hong Chau. Thus, ten years after the introduction of *Doi Moi*, the rate of dropping out has declined but to a greater extent in Tho Tang than in Hong Chau.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, it is suggested that in Hong Chau the difference between continuing students' scores and dropout students' scores in both subjects are not statistically significant. Also, the achievement scores in both subjects can not predict the retention status of students or in other words there is not a dependent relation between achievement scores and retention status.

In Tho Tang, there were significant differences between continuing students' scores and dropout students' scores in both subjects, maths and Vietnamese language. Furthermore, the scores in maths can predict dropping out as the dependent relation between retention status and students' scores was able to be established.

It was argued that in Hong Chau, while there is both the traditional love of learning and the perception of education as a means for a better life, difficulties in daily life and the gap between people's expectation and the possibilities of reaching this goal cause the high rate of dropout students over their Tho Tang counterparts.

It is also argued in this chapter that, unlike the situation of dropping out in the early 1990s, when dropping out had a characteristics of a "mass movement", now the rates of dropout students in both Tho Tang and Hong Chau are not as high as before. In addition, there is not the phenomenon of "good" and "excellent" students dropping out as in the early 1990s; now it is possible to identify a period of a pre-dropout process which is characterised by a decline in students' achievement scores. It means, on one hand that the phenomenon of dropping out of good and excellent students exists but it takes a longer time than before so the phenomenon is not as apparent as previously. On the other hand, the decline in the achievement scores of above-pass score students

can be interpreted as a symptom of dropping out. However, the latter needs further investigation. More definite conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of longitudinal data of individual students' achievement to see the changes in students' scores at different stages, before actual dropping out occurs.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This thesis sets out to investigate the relationships between gender, students' achievement and dropping out. The relationships between three pairs of these aspects were examined. The relationship between gender and both students' achievement and dropping out are considered one-way relationships while the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out is a two-way relationship. In other words, to investigate the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out, both the influence of retention status on students' achievement and the potential of achievement scores in predicting dropping out were examined.

This study is concerned with the problem of education and gender which in themselves are highly influenced by socio-economic factors. Thus, it is essential to this study that the three aspects should be placed within the broader socio-economic context. Therefore it was considered that a case study approach was the most appropriate for this study. Indeed, within a limited time scale and for an individual researcher a case study approach is the most realistic (Chapter 3).

The study was conducted in two secondary schools in Hong Chau and Tho Tang communes. As Vietnam is a country of diversity in terms of geography as well as socio-economic levels of development, the results of these two case studies cannot be generalised to Vietnam. Nevertheless, the two case studies represent distinctive areas in that Hong Chau is a relatively poor and predominantly agricultural commune while Tho Tang is relatively rich and combines trading and agriculture.

Within each case, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used. As statistical data in Vietnam is considered of "poor quality" (McCarty, 1991), analysis of raw quantitative data for this study collected from the school assessment reports is very important. Furthermore, the use of SPSS for data analysis is new for research in

the field of education in Vietnam, so data collected and analysed in this study provide a good crosscheck for existing statistical data. The results obtained from employing qualitative data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews and group discussions show the necessity for such techniques in this study. These reveal information on the social pressure for females' dropping out (eg. pressure to arrange early marriages and a secure future for daughters) and the different processes of dropping out experienced by particular groups of students. This type of information is often hidden when using quantitative techniques alone.

There are three main findings of this thesis. First, regarding the influence of gender on students' achievement, it was found that female students in both schools outperform their male counterparts in both language and maths. While the differences in the mean scores of females and males in Vietnamese language in both Hong Chau and Tho Tang are statistically significant, for maths even though the mean scores of female students in both schools are higher than that of their male counterparts, the differences are not statistically significant. The finding of this research thus supports the assumption made by teachers and parents in Vietnam that females are more likely to outperform males in language and humanities subjects. It is interesting that in both schools and for both subjects the lowest scores belong to male continuing students. Even though the influence of gender on achievement is not the sole aim of this thesis, this is the first research to address the influence of gender on students' achievement in Vietnam. However, as the scope of this study is limited to lower secondary schools and the study was conducted in only two rural schools, the results are not conclusive and there is a need for further studies of other levels of education and with a representative sample of the whole country.

The second finding relates to the influence of gender on dropping out (Chapter 5). In spite of the fact that female students do not lag behind their male counterparts in terms of achievement scores, it was found that in both schools female students are more likely to drop out from school than male students. This is the first research in Vietnam to test the statistical significance in the differences in male and female dropout rates. Like the influence of gender on students' achievement, there is no difference in the

influence of gender on dropping out in Hong Chau and Tho Tang even though the two areas are at different socio-economic levels of development. The impact of gender on dropping out was argued to be rooted in the traditional ideology of considering females subordinate to males and the custom of providing opportunities for male access to education. This study also found that this opinion is profoundly embedded in the minds of the people of Hong Chau and Tho Tang.

The third finding concerns the relationship between achievement and dropping out (Chapter 6). It was found through quantitative analysis that in Hong Chau there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of dropout and continuing students in both subject, maths and language. In contrast, in Tho Tang there is a statistically significant difference in the scores of dropout and continuing students, with continuing students having higher scores. Also, in Hong Chau the logistic regression shows that achievement scores in both subjects cannot predict dropping out whereas it was found that in Tho Tang maths scores can predict dropping out. The potential of achievement scores to predict dropping out is worthy of the attention of teachers and education researchers as it opens the door for a new area of research in the prediction and evaluation in education.

The empirical findings of the qualitative methods applied in this research however reveal that in both schools there is no pattern emerging that attests to the assumptions that high achievement students remain at school while low achievement students drop out. Thus for Hong Chau, it is clear that achievement scores do not contribute to dropping out and moreover this is supported by the perception of students. The situation for Tho Tang is more complex. While the quantitative data show the significant impact of achievement scores on dropping out, qualitative data show that this is not perceived by students.

It is revealed from this research that the relationship between students' achievement and dropping out is not simple and achievement does not always relate to the propensity of dropping out. Achievement seems to be influenced by other factors such as gender, economic status, expectations of education and the possibilities of

reaching these expectations. However, qualitative findings from this study with respect to the influence of economic well-being and people's expectation of education needs further quantitative investigation in order to be conclusive. The interactions of achievement with other factors such as income, number of dependants, stages of the life cycle, level of education of parents, attitudes toward education and perception of the benefits of education should be measured and examined quantitatively in further studies. Also, in order to have more conclusive results for Vietnam in general, a survey based on a representative sample of Vietnam should be conducted.

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