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## Introduction

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2018) claimed Nelson Mandela at the launch of Mindset Network in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July in 2003 (cf. Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2018).

Good education seeks to qualify students to become autonomous human beings who can think for themselves rather than just knowing facts without any connection to context and purpose. In order to achieve this goal, it is of great importance that teachers imply parameters of autonomy, sensitivity, and openness in their own style of teaching. Hence, they need to practise what they are preaching. That means teachers should design their lessons in the most purposeful and student-centred way possible.

Having the aspiration to change the world with the means of education demands a change of thinking that goes beyond one’s own horizon. A critique that can be made of existing methods are that they are mostly developed by western theorists that have very little to no practical experience in the field of teaching. How should they know the nuances of working with individual learners within a unique classroom situation that differ not only from day to day, but also from year to year?

Critics amongst them, Prof. Dr. B. Kumaravadivelu, examined this problem and developed a pedagogy that overcomes the boundaries of methods tied to colonial and mass-defined purposes.

When looking at language learning more closely, it is striking that it is always connected to culture that it influences people and their learning. Thus, education, especially language learning needs to be deeply connected to the cultural and social context of the ones being taught.

This thesis with the title *From intercultural differences in ESL teaching to transcultural understanding through encounters and communication: Creating an e-book with Lao teachers in tandem-teaching* examines how intercultural differences between Lao teachers and German culture in the English learning classroom can be overcome. The creation of an eBook functions as a bridge between the Lao and German intercultural differences; aiming

transcultural understanding through the focus on similarities rather than differences and combinations of cultural-specific learning aspects. It seeks to create a transcultural learning space for students of English in different places.

Important factors that need to be considered when looking at creating a product that pursues to overcome cultural differences are other approaches that in contrast to common methods see the individuality of each person, his or her (cultural-) circumstances and the associated classroom situation.

The focus of this thesis lies primarily on the research questions *What does the English-online-lessons at the Sunshine School in Laos look like?* and *considering the postmethod pedagogy, how can the online lessons be expanded in terms of a deeper understanding for the simple present?*

The thesis consists of two main parts, the theoretical and empirical parts.

The first section is concerned with the circumstances of the Lao English classroom and shows an alternative to popular methods. Additionally, it presents the background that forms the theoretical basis.

The opening chapter provides comprehensive definitions of terms, with the intention to eliminate ambiguity and promote accuracy. The terms will deal with culture, interculturality, transculturality, communication, tandem-teaching, method, and eBook.

It is of great importance that anyone interested in creating material for the Lao classroom or teaching within it gains convenient knowledge about the Lao culture and its contexts first. Thus, the following chapter gives background information about the history of Laos regarding the educational systems and the Lao culture that frame the teaching situation. The portrayal of historical and cultural characteristics supports the western understanding of differences between the Lao and German cultures and the rationale that intercultural barriers ought to be hurdled to ensure effective teaching. As it would go beyond the constraints of this thesis, not all aspects of Lao culture can be described. This chapter is concentrating on the ones that are most important regarding the teaching practise<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that due to the COVID-19-situation, that information could not be life-experienced, like intended, but are based on research and experiences from former volunteers of the Teaching in Laos project.

The third chapter studies the postmethod method, a concept proposed by Kumaravadivelu to foster the decolonisation of language learning and teaching. Its primal features will be outlined and analysed. To provide a more inclusive awareness of the possibilities of a postmethod pedagogy, three pedagogic frameworks will be introduced.

To ground a science-based approach for the following research, the next chapter caters to the used research methodology. It illustrates the type of the chosen research approach and research design about research in a foreign language, and the data collection and evaluation.

The second unit focuses on the results of the research based on the theory gathered in the previous chapters. It is subdivided into the evaluation of the interviews which will be the instrument of research; as well as the presentation of the eBook that was created in tandem-work. First the results of the interviews will be expounded and afterwards analysed regarding the theory of postmethod pedagogy and transculturality.

The eBook does not only function as a bridge between the two cultures; but also as an attempt to put the postmethod pedagogy into practise. To promote a complete understanding of why the eBook was created the way it is, a rationalisation of different aspects such as the layout and design, structure, choice of topics, variety of conceptual formulations and possible difficulties will follow.

With the aim to provide a more comprehensive overview and to structure the most important findings will be presented in the conclusion that will be the last part of the thesis.

Nonetheless, to come back to the quote from the beginning, it is essential to acknowledge that a change of perspective and associated prosocial behaviour can be fostered through (language) education that seeks to achieve transcultural understanding

# 1. Elucidation of Terms

The number of terms regarding the diversity of cultural comprehension can be tiresome and this may complicate clarity over the different terms and their meanings. Hence to phase out over-complication or misunderstanding and enhance accuracy, the following terms will be revised: culture, interculturality, transculturality, communication, tandem-teaching, method, and eBook.

## 1.1 Culture

The term culture is not easy to define. It is claimed that it would not even be worth trying to find a universal definition (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.9). Nevertheless, as it is a term used in countless “distinct intellectual disciplines and several distinct and incompatible systems of thought” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.9), several social scientists attempted to define it. From a sociocultural applied linguistic approach, culture is seen as „the shared activity or practice of a community“ (Jackson, 2020, p.64). Such activities are art, dance, music, and literature. Clifford Geertz’s explanation is more precise, it stands for norms, beliefs, and values which carry out the practice of everyday life. One difficulty is the use of culture as a noun when it is more a “dynamic process of meaning-making” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.10).

Experts claim that the real importance lays in what culture *does* rather than what it *is*. It *does* maintain and transform order in society. More specifically, culture has a crucial role that caters for individuals and groups of individuals with psychological frameworks that lead various facets of their life. It guides human beings in their intellectual, metaphysical, and aesthetic growth and provides them with a measurement with which they can evaluate it. Further, culture provides them with a logical principle for their behaviour as well as a prism through which they can see it. Hence, culture plays an encompassing and dominant role in the development of each person (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.10).

Culture influences the way information is processed; hence the learning process of people is influenced by it. Cultural differences influence the way people are thinking, interacting and reacting in explicit situations (cf. House, 2004, p.15).

## 1.2 Interculturality

Interculturality is the umbrella term for all intercultural phenomena, beginning with the real cultural encounter (pragmatism) to intercultural education and trainings (method) to enhance the intercultural coping abilities of people up to the reflection on the base of intercultural competence (reflection) and its meta-reflection by scientists. (Allolio-Näcke, 2014, p.974)



Being culturally competent means that one can reflect on one's cultural behaviour, communication, expectations and prejudices. Hence those thoughtful acts of reflection help situations of misunderstanding marked by cultural differences will not be seen as problematic. As those attitudes can be learned, experts are developing theoretical models to embellish trainings and practices in order to achieve effective understanding and cultural communication (cf. Allolio-Näcke, 2014, p.976).

Inter-culturalism is a cultural principle whose core statement is "reciprocity, equal and full-fledged exchange, expansion and connectivity among different cultures in a society" (Rabensteiner, 2014, p.61). Thus, it is crucial to note that in contrast to multiculturalism, interculturalism is a form of cultural life marked by a multinational and multicultural environment (cf. Rabensteiner, 2014, p.61).

Therefore, it encourages dialogue among groups (cf. Jackson, 2020, p.71).

Further, interculturality can be described as "a situationally emergent and co-constructed phenomenon that relies both on relatively definable cultural norms and models as well as situationally evolving features" (Jackson, 2020, p.140). Critics remark that this term still assumes that national cultures are separate entities rather than seeing "the hybrid interlocking interdependence of cultures in the age of globalization" (Antor and Ahrens, 2010, p.11f.).

### **1.3 Transculturality**

The term transculturality is to be demarcated from the concepts of interculturality as well as multiculturalism (cf. Gernalzick and Pizarz-Ramirez, 2013, p.xii). Due to globalization, we find ourselves in societies that are no longer monolithic and homogeneous; but shaped by a multitude of individuals. Hence, we cannot retain the concepts of multiculturalism nor interculturality as those concepts created borders and boundaries in the past. Transculturality on the contrary focuses on the interaction of people while crossing those borders and boundaries. The concept does not only analyse how relationships of power are structured and constructed in terms of language and history and how meaning is distributed by social groups; but enlarges the potential of intercultural encounters by focussing on cultural phenomena and issues (cf. Antor and Ahrens, 2010, p.iii).

Transculturality, therefore "reflect[s] the dynamic nature of cultures as well as their power to change" (Antor and Ahrens, 2010, p.iii).

Its conceptual history reaches back to 1940 when it was developed as a neologism of the term "transculturation" by Fernando Ortíz. By inventing a new term of culture, the intention was to offer an alternative perspective of a cultural context. As the prefix *trans* was not a feasible

perception in a time of a rather nationalist and racist environment, it had to be reintroduced in 1982, 1991, and 1992 by Ángel Rama, Wolfgang Welsch and Mary Louise Pratt. The ambiguity of the prefix denotes transcendence, processuality, and provisionality. The term expresses the different phases of transition from one culture to another. It emphasises not only the acquisition of another culture but also the uprooting of a previous culture. Thus, it indicates the consequent creation of new culture as a permanent process of change (cf. Gernalzick and Pisarz-Ramirez, 2013, pp.xii–xxiii). Furthermore, the concept with its understanding of cultures facilitates enriching, peaceful, mutual, and productive encounters of people from various backgrounds (cf. Antor and Ahrens, 2010, p.12).

#### **1.4 Communication**

As communication plays an essential role in this thesis and to guard against misunderstandings, the following will give a short definition of the term<sup>2</sup>. When it comes to defining the term, it is convenient to describe it utilizing many different metaphors like transport/information transmission, the use of signs/symbols acts on a stage, or (symbolic) capital. The perception of “communication” in Western modernity discourse is found in individualism, instrumentalism, and rationalism. Accordingly, it remains to be contingently ambiguous and does not contribute to a clear (cultural) transferability (cf. Halpern & Tinsman, 1966, p.502).

*Intercultural communication* is therefore often described as “communication among individuals who are agents of different cultures” (Teo, 2014, p.38).

Both, the *identity management theory* (IMT; Imahori and Cupach 2005) and the *identity negotiation theory* (INT; Ting-Toomey 2005) underline reciprocity of flexible and negotiable intercultural communication. To ensure a balanced and mutual feeling of recognition, respect, and understanding, the counterparts should be aware of their own identity. Furthermore, one should be able to understand the communication partner in his/her surrounding world and also focus on cultural and relative identities (cf. Jackson, 2020, p.60).

Globalization and rapid changes and developments of technology are playing a huge role in contributing to intercultural communication and encounters of people with different heritages. Those situations of interchange are not only taking place between members of groups who share a historical background of exchange but also between people who are less acquainted with the individual and standardized expectations regarding language as a productive tool of the communication process. Thus, the participants have to get familiar with the concepts of verbal and

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<sup>2</sup> The following thesis will refer to this definition

nonverbal communication systems of the counterpart to aim for an anticipated or rather satisfying outcome for both participants (cf. Jackson, 2020, p.55).

## 1.5 Tandem teaching

Tandem means:

Originally it was planned that the creation of the eBook would take place under the understanding of tandem-teaching from the Lao-German Education Project under the direction of Professor Doctor Isabel Martin. The concept foresees that one German student is working together with two Lao teachers. The relationship between the partner would be determined by the following tiers:

- language skills development through regular English lessons (one hour a day)
- development of teaching skills (methodology and didactics) through job-shadowing, sitting in on classes, tandem-teaching, feedback, and joint lesson preparation (one hour a day)
- customized workshops on relevant topics and practical help through new material, the introduction of new teaching equipment & digital media, modernisation of libraries and laboratories,
- model-teaching in “Activity time” for pupils and students and in various new “English clubs”, which focus on oral communication (one hour a day) (cf. Martin, 2018).

Due to the COVID-19 situation, As already mentioned in the introduction, it was not possible to conduct this thesis in the field. Accordingly, the tandem teaching must be adapted to online interactions between the Laos partners and the German students. It is composed of online meetings via video platforms and regular exchange of information, suggestions, and talks via messengers and Emails. It should be emphasised that the exchange on both sides is still one of the most important criteria of this sort of tandem teaching. By communicating with each other, approaches, teaching styles, methodological experiences, and knowledge, as well as cultural norms and values, can be interchanged. Due to the circumstances, it might be appropriate to rephrase the term tandem-teaching to *tandem-conceptualising* as the tandem aspect is still present but instead of teaching (which only takes place from one side), there is a shift to constructing a product together.

## 1.6 Method

In education, the concept of method is referred to as “a set of core teaching and learning principles together with a body of classroom practices that are derived from them” (Richards and Rodgers, 2011, p.viii).

The American linguist Edward Anthony states, “Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach” (Anthony in: Richards and Rodgers, 2011, p.19).

The arrangement of approach, method and technique is hierarchical in the way that techniques implement a method that is coherent with an approach. Approaches are axiomatic whereas methods are procedural and techniques implementational (cf. Anthony in: Richards and Rodgers, 2011, p.19).

Thus, methods put the theory into practice. Thus, method is the point where the teacher decides the content and order in which it is taught; as well as what kind of skills ought to be taught (cf. Richards and Rodgers, 2011, p.19). To give more sufficient attention to the nature of method, Richards and Rogers extend the description to “method is theoretically related to an approach, is organizationally determined by a design, and is practically realized in procedure” (Richards and Rodgers, 2011, p.20).

The *Total Physical Response (TPR)*, *the silent way* and *the direct method* are some of the most generally known methods used in the language learning classroom.

As every method takes different views on the nature of (second) language learning as well as the goals, the syllabus, the roles of teachers and students, the activities that are practiced, and objectives, there are various attempts to conceptualise better and new methods (cf. Richards and Schmidt, 2010, p.363).

This thesis dedicates itself to look at three alternative frameworks to the common concepts in chapter three.

## 1.7 EBook

The term eBook is the abbreviation of an *electronic book*. It can be a digital publication from any book that can be read on an e-reader, computer, or another electronic device. There are various types of eBooks such as novels, dictionaries, or other publications. The majority of eBook formats support images, pictures, chapters, and bookmarkers (cf. Christensson, 2013).

When using the term eBook in this thesis the technological-methodical organisational form of an educational trail<sup>3</sup> is understood. Depending on various factors such as the goal, expertise, and experience of the creator, time, and technical possibilities such an educational trail realised as an eBook can look very different. There are numerous technological platforms like learning management systems, apps, or websites from which the creator can choose. Digital learning tools such as etherpads, survey tools, and Audience Response Systems can be integrated into the eBook according to its purpose. Additionally, it needs to be decided what kind of methodical-mediadidactical form of organisation will be used. There are diversified options like the Flipped Classroom, WebQuests, and dynamic knowledge bases. Another decision the creator of the eBook needs to consider is whether those tools should be embedded into the eBook or stand alone as additional gadgets (cf. Kerber&Martin, 2021).

## 2. Laos

This chapter seeks to provide a succinct overview of the history of Laos, particularly concerning the two educational systems, the country, its cultures, and people.

The proper name of Laos is *Lao People's Democratic Republic* (PDR). It is situated in Southeast Asia and borders China and Myanmar to the north, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, and Thailand to the west and is subdivided into 18 provinces (cf. BBC news, 2018). It is the only country in Asia that does not border any seas and is one of the few communist countries of the world. With its 236.800km<sup>2</sup> it is two-thirds the size of Germany (cf. Stuart-Fox, 2001, p.1).

The capital city of Laos is Vientiane which lays at its western border to Thailand at the river Mekong. Most of the population lives in the cities along the Mekong. Around the capital, the population density is quite high (200 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>), but in the rest of the country, the population density is the lowest in all of Southeast Asia (24 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>). As agriculture is the greatest sector of Laos, more than half of Laos population is earning their living by farming the land (cf. Timman, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> An educational trail is a sequential arrangement of educational steps that lead to a certain achievement of goals. Depending on the designed educational trail, the order of steps are of more or less importance. Every step has a conceptual formulation as well as unrestricted quantity of documents and links (cf. Kerber&Martin, 2021).

## 2.1 The historical background

As Laos is a Buddhist country and religious believes play a crucial role in the life of its citizens, education took place in the so-called 'pagoga' schools in temples and monasteries (cf. Schultze, 2013, p.77) until the French colonial rulers formalized a countrywide public education system in 1915. Due to its low strategic value to the French, they did not put much of an effort into education. The outcome of it was that education and human resources were on a low level. Because their idea of education did not meet the needs of the population, there was only a small percentage who went to school. The ones going to school were mostly established in urban areas and some district centres but not in the countryside, where most of the population was working in the agricultural sector. It follows from the above that a small urban elite was formed, mainly from the royal family and other bourgeois households (cf. Schultze, 2013, p.134ff.).

During the 60 years of French ruling, students could only attend primary school until the first and only secondary school in the country was established in 1924. Until 1954, 120 students per year (subdivided into four classes) were able to receive secondary education in Vientiane. The curriculum was based on the French system which resulted in learning about French history, culture, and language. As there was no possibility of higher education after graduating from secondary school, some Lao students went to Cambodia, Vietnam, and even France to study at a college or university (cf. Zeck, 2017a)

The influence of the French was minimal which explains that according to a governmental report in 1963, more than 75% of the Lao population has never been to a formal school (cf. Halpern & Tinsman, 1966, p.502). The number of Lao students who graduated from secondary school in 1945 added up to 10 students, three of them were part of the royal family (cf. Schultze, 2013, p.136).

Due to the military and political circumstances between the time of Laos' declaration of independence from France in 1954 and the Pathet Lao communist coup in 1975, two parallel education systems were established. On the one hand, there was the school system established by the communist party "Pathet Lao" which can be translated as "Lao Nation" or "Land of the Lao", who were supported by the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, and the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, there was the right-winged Royal Lao Government Party (short RLG), supported by the United States of America<sup>4</sup>(cf. Zeck, 2017a).

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<sup>4</sup> The war against the communists in Laos is one of the proxy wars between East and West, with its great representatives, the USA and the Soviet Union during the cold war. Because the American Nation did not know anything about the war in Laos at first, it is also known as America's Secret War nowadays (Schultze, Michael 2013, 240).

The Pathet Lao mostly controlled rural areas and mountains, populated by a third of the Lao population, mainly ethnic minorities. Due to the free schooling programme of the communist party for everybody, there was a great improvement in the education sector controlled by the Pathet Lao. In comparison to the 11. 400 pupils from Laos who went to primary school during the French occupation in 1945, 36.200 children attended primary school in the area controlled by the Pathet Lao in 1964 (cf. Halpern & Tinsman, 1966, p.501ff.).

Their aim was to build up a basic education for everybody, wherein students can fall in love with their own country and feel the strength of unity, by introducing Lao as the first language of the citizens. The communist party formed two three-year education plans. The first one from 1967 focused on improving primary education and literacy for children and adults. Non-formal learning centres were established - primary schools in every second village and lower secondary schools in each province.

The second project targeted the further improvement of the former plan. To take those matters further, higher education was set into focus. Even though the textbooks were translated from Vietnamese textbooks, the higher education system was reorganised and available in Laos for the first time.

The influence of Vietnam and the Soviet Union was not only visible in politics but also in the education of the Lao citizens. For communication with the supporters, Vietnamese and Russian was spoken as a second language in school. Some pupils even studied in communist states like China or Eastern European countries (cf. Zeck, 2017a).

All the efforts for a better educated Laos declined in 1971, due to the bombing of the US forces to stop the supply lines of the Vietnamese forces on the Ho-Chi Minh trail. 50.000 civilians were killed<sup>5</sup>, thousands of people were turned into refugees (cf. Boland, 2017) and education had to take place in safer regions such as caves. Lessons could only be held from early in the morning until 9 o'clock for four hours a day until the students and teachers had to seek shelter again (cf. Zeck, 2017b).

This barbarous routine continued for nine years from 1964 until 1973. The US forces dropped bombs every eight minutes on average for this duration of time which made Laos the most heavily bombed country per capita in history (cf. Boland, 2017).

Despite everything, the achievement of the Pathet Lao was remarkable. Basic education was offered to all ethnic minorities who were excluded from the French education system as well

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<sup>5</sup> and because 80 million of the 270 million cluster munition bomblets did not explode yet, around 300 citizens per year, with a 40 percentage of children, are still getting badly injured or killed since 1973 (cf. Boland, Rosita 2017).

as the RLG. Lower secondary and higher education were available and the literacy rate increased (cf. Zeck, 2017a).

In the first years after the declaration of Lao independence, the education system of the Royal Lao Government looked nearly the same as the French system. Most of the secondary teachers came from France, French was still the first language and the French culture held good for the elite of Laos. Only in 1962 did the education system of the RLG adapt its programme to an education fitting the needs of its population, at least on paper. Unfortunately, most of the educated children were still part of the Lao elite (cf. Chomsky, 1972, p.94f.).

Due to the concentration on a “Laoization”, French textbooks were translated into Lao and their biggest supporter and financier, USAID (the official development agency of the USA) in cooperation with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), decided to abolish the French elite system. From now on the education did not rely on the French, and the influence of the USA grew (cf. Halpern & Tinsman, 1966, p.503).

With the financial help of the USAID, 4.700 classrooms were built until 1973, the adult literacy rate increased, a new secondary school system was established, and the numbers of students doubled from 15% to 30%. Inspired by the Pathet Lao, the RLG aimed to create a basic education for everybody fitting the lifestyle and needs of its citizens (cf. Zeck, 2017a).

All in all, both education plans helped to decrease the illiterate rate and let the number of school-attending children grow. The Pathet Lao in particular made education reachable and profitable for ethnic minorities and therefore gain the support of the majority of the Lao citizens. The RLG on the other hand lost its stronghold, trust, and support in the country because the USAID stopped providing money and goods after they left the country entirely in 1975 so that the RLG could not continue the way they had before. In that same year, Laos and with it the education system was reunited by a peaceful coup of the Pathet Lao and the proclamation of the "People's Democratic Republic" (cf. Zeck, 2017b).

## 2.2 Current Education

The status of education nowadays has increased but there are still a lot of disparities. The literacy rate is increasing. In 2000 the literacy rate was 60%, 74% of men, and only 48% of women. There is also a high inequality between urban and rural people<sup>6</sup> and a huge difference according to the ethnic groups of Laos<sup>7</sup> (cf. Sisouphanthong and Taillard, 2000, p.60) . In comparison to

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<sup>6</sup> 85% of town dwellers in comparison with 55% of rural dwellers.

<sup>7</sup> 86% of the Lao, 60% of the Khmu, 46% of the Hmong. Those are only the most advantaged of the three main ethnolinguistic families.



that, according to studies of UNESCO, the literary rate of 2015 for Laos as a whole increased to 84,66%<sup>8</sup> (cf. WorldBank, 2019) of which 89,96% were literate men and 79,39% were women (cf. Countryeconomy.com, 2015).

In 2000 the percentage of people who finished primary school in the whole country of Laos was 11%, 4% have completed junior secondary school, 2% senior secondary school and 2% of the population reached higher education<sup>9</sup>. One of the reasons for this alarming progress were the consequences of war. Many of the most educated people fled the country in 1975 to live a life without having to fear for their life because of the massive US bombings from 1964 to 1973. Whereas most of the population did not have the financial means to leave the country.

The isolation of many ethnic groups in the mountains, due to a delay of upgrading road networks, is part of the low education rate of Laos (cf. Sisouphanthong and Taillard, 2000, p.60). The lack of financial resources makes it even more difficult to enable affordable access to education for both, boys and girls, children from rural and urban areas, and rich and poor. It is therefore not surprising that the gaps of education between those sections are widening.

To make matters worse, the literacy rate of past years shows that there are fewer literate women than men. The reasons for this trend are diverse. Some ethnic groups do not consider education for girls essential or profitable. Factors like poverty, costs for school uniforms, books, and other school implements, traditional beliefs, the burden of household chores, and early marriage and pregnancy are the most significant to mention (cf. Hays, Jeffrey, 2008).

The forecast that “the number of primary school-aged children is expected to continue growing at a rapid rate” (UNICEF Lao PDR & Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015, p.4) can be added to the list of very fortunate developments in education.

All in all, there are still a lot of challenges to face such as poverty, the insufficient extension of universal primary schools, the low level of literacy and numeracy, and teacher quality caused by different circumstances (cf. UNICEF Lao PDR & Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015, p.6f.)

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<sup>8</sup> The numbers are based on the following: “Adult (15+) literacy rate (%). Total is the percentage of the population age 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy', the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. This indicator is calculated by dividing the number of literates aged 15 years and over by the corresponding age group population and multiplying the result by 100” (World Bank 2019).

## 2.3 Ethnic groups, cultures, and language

As Laos has officially about 49 different ethnic groups<sup>10</sup>, the cultural diversity is huge. Thus, it is not possible to speak of one single Lao culture<sup>11</sup>. After the government failed to sort the various cultures into categories they make an effort to treat the values, norms, and cultural traditions of the ethnic groups more warily (cf. Schultze, 2013). Although the variety of ethnic groups in Laos is much more complex and multifarious, it can be divided roughly in three broad groups. “The Lao Lum speak Tai language [...]; the Lao Thoeng speak Austroasiatic languages [...]; [and] the Lao Sūng speak Hmong-Mien or Tibeto-Burman languages“ (Stuart-Fox, 2001, p.3).

Due to the vast variety of ethnic groups and linked languages, most students speak different mother tongues. For some, the Lao language is their second and English their third language (cf. Stuart-Fox, 2001, p.4).

As already mentioned in chapter one, culture influences the way people are conceiving information. It must therefore be taken into account when teaching is considered in a particular context.

As parts of culture are expressed throughout customs, interaction and activities it is interesting to look at the practices of the people living in Laos. Family plays an important role in the lives of Lao people. Therefore, their well-being and in many cases, survival is their first priority. This means that the people spend most of their time guaranteeing that the above is given. Hence, in contrast to western society, sports and hobbies do not play an important not to say no role in the Lao community as they simply do not have the time to carry out extra activities. Usually, children and their parents do not have a lot of spare time in which they do not help with tasks like cooking, cleaning, feeding the chicken or helping their parents with their work. Besides, most of the work Laotians are carrying out is physically accentuated so that they do not need to do extra sports to stay fit and healthy (cf. Schultze, 2013).

In comparison to German culture, in Laon culture there is a much higher power distance, uncertainty prevention, and femininity also has a higher value. Further, Laon people are used to collectivism rather than individualism that is often reflected in teaching practices (cf. Dörnyei, 2011).

When it comes to the point where they do not work or manage domestic chores, they spend their free time with their families and friends. They invite them over or visit them. It needs to

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<sup>10</sup> Although it is estimated that over 200 different ethnic groups are living in Laos (Schultze 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Yet, as the cultures play an essential role in the context of this thesis and creation of the eBook and due to space and time related factors the cultures are not treated separately but referred to as Lao culture.

be mentioned that great differences can be made out between rural and urban areas. As the people in urban areas have defined work hours, they are more likely to pursue extracurricular activities in their free time. Likewise, the mindset of the concept of travelling is rather unfamiliar for most Laotian people. Most citizens have not been outside their country. Mostly, if they travel at all, they are visiting relatives who do not live nearby (Schultze, 2013).

When families and friends get together, they often share their dishes with each other. Lao people are very proud of their traditional kitchen and love to eat in company of their dearest. Whereas most Western cooking consists of a menu subdivided by several courses, in Laos all the food is served in the middle of the table at once. That way everybody can choose what and how much they want to eat. Another difference is that Lao people usually do not use plates or western cutlery but take the food from the middle of the table and eat it with their fingers, Chinese soup spoons or chopsticks. The host is also not offended when there are left overs as this does not mean that it did not taste good rather the contrary, it shows that he or she is wealthy enough to provide more food than was needed (Hays, Jeffrey, 2008; Schultze, 2013).

Classic Lao cooking contains dishes like fish, a special meat salad that is called laap or spicy papaya salad with sticky rice or steamed rice as sides that is served in small bamboo containers. Sweet potato, corn, and different kinds of vegetables are also very popular as sides. In addition to poultry that is eaten a lot, pork, buffalo, and beef are dished up on special occasions. Other delicacies are chicken feet and fried crickets. As a western influence, milk products are recently added to the traditional cuisine but were originally not featured in it. All in all, Lao people love to cook with spicy spices or chili salt and enjoy sour food such as green mangos (Hays, Jeffrey, 2008).

The most popular drink in Laos is the BeerLao which is a lager brewed from a mixture of rice and malt. Lao people are also drinking a lot of coffee and tea (Schultze, 2013).

## **2.4 English Language Curriculum for Lower and Upper Secondary School**

Since Laos is part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) the English language in Laos is more important than ever. As English is used as lingua franca it functions as the language of communication between human beings who do not speak the same language - thus the view of teaching English has changed. The following curriculum shows that not only language skills, but intercultural competence is important to become acknowledged international speakers of the English language.

The curriculum foresees three hours of English per week which makes 99 hours per year for lower and upper secondary schools.

The Lao Ministry of Education proposed objectives of foreign language teaching and learning for schools and teachers to follow. Those are based on their belief that secondary students who need to cope in a globalized and competitive world in which English is the language in which most of the intercultural communication takes place, need to be able to express themselves in this language. The Ministry sees the successful use of English as an essential skill that will function as a bridge between different countries. Furthermore, the hopes are high that English will be the impelling force in developing Laos further and forming a trust base between other countries and cultures throughout the world.

Next to the communication skills, the government wants to encourage the students' interests in the English language, train their accuracy and fluency, and expose them to various educational experiences. Moreover, the English lessons should provide vast intercultural understanding. The aim is to make students familiar with foreign cultures, develop an international appreciation, and establish “a cooperative spirit as a civilized citizen” (Ministry of Education and Sports in Laos, n.d., p.162).

The Ministry of Education subdivided the curriculum into five categories: objectives, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

Under the first category, one will find the objective of understanding the urgency to learn to communicate in the English language. Further, this kind of communication should be effective and related to real-life situations and ordinary topics. Like in actual communication the users of the language should not only be able to talk but also listen and understand the counterpart and act accordingly. As culture plays an important role in (language-) learning, appreciation of other cultures and one's own culture is an essential point of intercultural English lessons.

Those objectives correlate with the knowledge students should acquire during their English practices. It says that students should be able to communicate with others in the target language (in an international context), use it for further studies, filter information from written and oral forms, and express one's ideas in those forms.

The listed skills are more specific, students should be capable of introducing themselves, others, and their own country. In addition to that, learners should be able to describe objects, occasions, and cultural activities. They should give information about the family, the environment and daily life. Furthermore, students are supposed to compare situations, people, things, and other things. Moreover, their reading skills should be trained to find information in written texts. To make this point further, students should be able to write a summary of their main points.

The third category deals with the attitudes of the students and says that they should be open to the idea of using English in communicative and educational situations as well as researching information written in English.

Related to those attitudes, there are the values that say that the children should be self-confident and appreciate their own culture while understanding others.

#### **2.4.1 Excuse compulsory coursebook**

To get an overall impression of the classroom situation with the use of course books, a brief analysis of a compulsory coursebook is illustrated here. This helps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how lessons are held and what is expected of the students.

When looking at the compulsory coursebooks for primary school it is noticeable that the conceptual format of drills is used very often. The students are asked to 'look, listen and repeat', to 'look and say', or to 'look and write'. The aims of those conceptual formulations are mechanical practises of the English sounds and words without thinking too much about what they mean while focussing on accuracy rather than fluency. Those repetitions are intended to make the students learn and speak a few words without having to learn about coherences before they are communicating. As they are simply repeating after the teacher without any knowledge about the phonemes and graphemes of the English language, the teacher has the important role of pronouncing the words correctly. Furthermore, he or she should feel obliged to impart the correlations between written and spoken language. Otherwise, the point of drills fails their intention of preparing the students for real communication by practising their accuracy in pronunciation. With the upstream of pages, the number of other formulations goes up as well. Tasks, exercises, and activities can be found as well as a few songs. This trend could be interpreted as a steady growth from learning the letters towards actual communication. As communication is one of the main goals the teachers, government, and the authors of the eBook want to accomplish, it is important to sustain the tendency to fluency rather than accuracy.

### **3. From Methods to Postmethod**

As this thesis concentrates on teaching English in Southeast Asia and more specifically in Laos, it seems to be presumptuous to use methods that are developed by western people who are not familiar with the local knowledge of this country. Hence, we need an adapted approach of

methods to ensure that Lao teachers are confident, secure, and content about the way they are teaching a foreign language with respect to their own culture, norms, and values.

It should be an alternative that enhances the understanding of language teaching and favour one's environment (cf. Canagarajah, 1999, p.2).

The following chapter provides insights of a critical approach of the common methods and seeks to offer an alternative.

### **3.1 The concept of Methods**

Chapter one already provided an insight of the term method. Moreover, as the following is showing, the concept of methods, in general, should be challenged.

During their studies, every teacher-to-be comes across theories and practices of methods. Methods promise to be the fundamental tool of the development of elemental knowledge and skills for a teacher.

The term methods, as currently used in the literature on second and foreign language (L2) teaching, does not refer to what teachers actually do in the classroom; rather, it refers to established methods conceptualized and constructed by experts in the field. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.24).

The exact number of methods is unclear and it should be pointed out that there is an overlap in most theoretical and practical approaches to second language learning and teaching. To gain a better understanding and to analyse the method, it is helpful to round them up regarding specific identifiable features. Kumaravadivelu uses the following three subcategories:

- (1) language-centered methods
- (2) learner-centered methods
- (3) learning-centered methods

Kumaravadivelu states that “all the established methods are based on the theoretical insights derived almost exclusively from a Western knowledge base” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.166). Pennycook goes even further in saying that “the concept [of method] reflects a particular view of the world and is articulated in the interests of unequal power relationships” (Pennycook, 1989, p.589).

### **3.2 Limitations of the concept**

Consequently, limitations are conjoined with the concept of methods itself. The concept is based on idealized contexts which include standardized language learning and teaching needs,

wants, and situations that look very different in every classroom, with every teacher and conditional to the cultural contexts, needs, teacher cognition, and how the participants feel on a particular day. Hence, language learning situations are unique everywhere around the world and every single day. Idealised methods can therefore not provide suggestions that are adjusted for the everyday practices of teachers (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.28f.).

Even the authors of well-known books on methods do not recommend using the methods without adaption to the individual needs of the certain teacher and classroom. They encourage their readers to get interested in becoming informed about the “nature, strengths and weaknesses” (Richards and Rodgers in: Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.28) of each method and to investigate the existing choices (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.28).

Another limitation, that will not be further discussed, is the hierarchical gender division of the workforce. Men should not be the only ones who conceptualize ideas that women practise (cf. Penycook 1989, 610f.). Furthermore, learners should be seen as an active part of language learning rather than just passive observers (cf. Richards & Rodgers 2001, 247).

As methods are typically generated through a top-down process and do not concede that teachers initiate their own experience and expertise (cf. Richards & Rodgers 2001, 247) a different approach is inevitable.

### **3.3 Postmethod Condition**

The desire for an alternative that is a product of bottom-up processes to yet another method is huge (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.29ff.). This alternative needs to entitle and empower practitioners to develop individual theories of actual practise. Together with the two following attributes, it shapes the so-called postmethod condition (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.32f.).

The second attribute acknowledges the teacher’s autonomy. Whereas conventional concepts neglect the range of knowledge and experience of teachers as they have been students before, the postmethod condition honours this potential. Further, it advocates the capability of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation to reflect and adapt one’s teaching practise (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.33).

Thirdly, principled pragmatism needs to be pointed out. It is based on the pragmatics of pedagogy that is to say on an understanding that theory and practise are interconnected with the actual application. Ideas and actualisation can only be realised through the process of teaching itself (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.33). On the whole, principled pragmatism concentrates “on how classroom learning can be shaped and reshaped by teachers as a result of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.33).

### 3.4 Rationale of Postmethod

Consequently, for the reasons given above, Kumaravadivelu developed the so-called *post-method*. The linked postmethod pedagogy consists of three pedagogic parameters, particularity, practicality, and possibility, that will be explained further. Those parameters intertwine and interact with each other mutually. Accordingly, one cannot see each parameter separately but in its entirety.

#### *Particularity*

This parameter says that postmethod pedagogy “must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio-cultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.538).

If it is looked at from a pedagogical point of view, it is at once both - a goal and a process. More precise, when engaging with this approach one is working “*for* and *through* particularity at the same time” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.35).

It is the capability to be sensitive to cultural, social, local, and institutional circumstances in which the language teaching happens. To achieve this goal certain steps are beneficial.

Practicing teachers, either individually or collectively, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what doesn't. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.35)

Hereby it is important to see the individual circumstances, such as the location, not as a limitation one would like to eliminate; but rather as a situation one would like to meet (Howatt, Widdowson 2004). The development of a context-sensitive theory and practise of pedagogics requires this kind of ongoing process. As the particular is tightly enclosed in practical actions, it is an implication that particularity and practicality are attendant on one another (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.35).

#### *Practicality*

The principle of practicality is widely related to the intersection between theory and practice. Kumaravadivelu claims that the aim is to break the division established between the teacher and the theorist. More precisely between who produces and who consumes knowledge. To develop a useful and usable theory of practice, teachers should gain pedagogical knowledge from daily purposeful teaching practice and should be able to theorize about their practice.



Accordingly, the teacher will be able to “understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative that is then subjected to further critical appraisal” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.35). Self-evidently, a theory that is based on practise requires reflection and action continuously. The skill of unexplained sometimes even unexplainable awareness of what constructs good teaching derives from continuous encounters and practise. It delineates a necessity that needs to be enlarged throughout learning processes on how to handle challenges regarding content and character of personal beliefs, learner expectations, and professional preparation, just to name a few (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.36). One should be aware teacher’s natural sense-making is constructed and reconstructed “by the pedagogic factors governing the microcosm of the classroom as well as by the sociopolitical forces emanating from outside” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.36). Hence, “teaching becomes understood as a process of transforming learners in and out of the classroom“ (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.36). In this respect, the principle of practicality is closely linked with the principle of possibility.

### *Possibility*

Kumaravadivelu sees the principle of possibility as a derivation from critical pedagogy. It says that discourses and practices can serve as instruments to create or sustain social inequalities. The philosophical foundation of this pedagogy lies in the empowerment and professionalization of teachers with the ambition of socioeconomic mobility of apprentices (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.37f.).

When arguing from the perspective of critical pedagogy one sees the classroom as “a constructed and historically determined reality and, consequently, a context to combat the social and historical forces that maintain unequal and unjust power structures” (Caiado da Costa Ferreira, 2020).

The logical consequence adds up to a necessity of a pedagogy that empowers the thirst for critically appropriate knowledge that lays beyond their proximate experience. The pedagogy of possibility emphasizes the importance of individual identity. It implies that learners get the chance to adapt their English learning process to their own needs, values, and beliefs in contrast to method as a construct of marginality (cf. Kumaravadivelu 2003b,544). As second language learning and teaching offer contact between cultures and language, there might be situations in which this instance causes identity conflicts. This shows that teachers should contemplate the individual backgrounds and bear in mind that socio-cultural reality influences identity formation within the classroom. Dependent on those circumstances, educators should choose their

teaching approaches accordingly. The third parameter emphasizes that teachers should be sensitive to the fact that the linguistic and social needs of the learners are related to one another.

Overall, it can be said that the three dimensions, particularity, practicality, and possibility shape and are shaped by one another. Together they aim to entitle everyone within the classroom to think critically and adapt their teaching and learning according to their needs. The will and enthusiasm of the teachers together with their key role in the classroom are considered as the main points of education (Clarke, 1994). Hence, to say it in Kumaravadivelu's words, "teachers' autonomy can be seen as the heart of post-method pedagogy" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 548). Particularity encourages the true understanding of socio-cultural, political particularity, and local linguistic. Practicality grants the teachers' ability to establish a theory based on their practical experience which they can adapt by actual and individual practise. Possibility is concerned with the learners' and teachers' biography and individual needs, values, and identities that they transfer to everyday classroom situations.

### **3.5 Postmethod Pedagogy**

The awareness of an alternative to common methods has led to various attempts to develop a pedagogy that relies on the post-method-condition (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.185). Not only Kumaravadivelu but Stern and Allwright are well-known representatives for a non-marginalising alternate. All three originated post-method perspectives are based on a different guiding framework that seeks to offer structure to the teacher. This helps to evolve teaching styles and practices based on reflection and rationalisation (cf. Can, 2010).

#### **3.5.1 The Three-Dimensional Framework**

In 1992 Stern proposed the three-dimensional framework for language teaching. Kumaravadivelu considers this construct of postmethod pedagogy the first pursue of a coherent and wide-ranging design. The concept comprehends teaching and learning strategies entrenched on three dimensions (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.186f.):

- (a) the L1-L2 connection, concerning the use or nonuse of the first language in learning the second
- (b) the code-communication dilemma, concerning the structure-message relationship
- (c) the explicit-implicit option, concerning the basic approach to language learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.187).

The striking point is that each element subsists “of two strategies plotted at two ends of a continuum” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.187). Each component is briefly considered in the following subchapters.

### **3.5.1.1 The Intralingual-Crosslingual Dimension**

The first principle delves into the relationship between the native language (L1) as well as culture (C1) and the target language (L2) with its culture (C2) in foreign language learning.

On the one side of the scope is the intralingual strategy that adheres to coordinate bilingualism whereas the cross-lingual strategy compounds bilingualism. Where the intralingual strategy detaches the L2- acquisition from the learners L1, the cross-lingual strategy combines features of both languages to gain a broader understanding (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.187). Contrary to traditional methods this dimension empowers teachers to make autonomous decisions regarding the use of L1 in the language learning classroom (cf.Can Daşkın 2019, n.p.).

### **3.5.1.2 The Analytic-Experiential Dimension**

The second dimension deals with the role of the form (code) and message (communication) in language teaching. The analytic end of the continuum focuses on the formal components of language like grammar, vocabulary, and notions and functions. On the other end stands the experiential strategy that concentrates on message-oriented interactions and communication employing providing students with purposeful activities. Sterns clarifies that it is the combination of those two approaches that enables efficient teaching rather than using just one (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.189f.).

### **3.5.1.3 The Explicit-Implicit Dimension**

The last strategic continuum explores whether learning an L2 counts as implicit or explicit knowledge. The consequence shows that language learning can be either conceptualised explicitly or implicitly. Stern believes that some aspects of language are learned explicitly and some implicit and they interact with one another. Explicit strategies support the focus on the characteristics of language thus a conscious and conceptual knowledge can be acquired. Implicit strategies on the other hand acknowledge some language constructs to be subconsciously acquired and therefore implicitly taught. To develop an instructional policy, Stern states that

we want to bear both strategies in mind and treat the explicit and implicit options as opposite ends of a continuum. In practise, we expect the two strategies to be combined, but the mix will be varied according

to the language topic, the course objectives, the characteristics of the students, and the needs of the teaching situation. (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.192)

In conclusion, Stern's framework provides a basic foundation to enable teachers to create their post-method pedagogy adapted to their teaching context and needs.

### **3.5.2 The Exploratory Practice Framework**

After having declared the concept of method as "dead" Allwright evolved an alternative to common methods for almost ten years and completed the Exploratory Practice framework in the year 2000. The following will demonstrate the concept briefly.

#### **The Principle of Exploratory Practice (EP)**

Allwright wants the practitioners that are teachers and learners together "to contribute to teaching and learning themselves as well as professional development, both individual and collective" (Allwright 2003a, 127ff). To reach this goal, they have to achieve understanding not only for trying out new ideas but also to learn as much as possible from exploring already existing strategies and ideas. Therefore, he derived seven general principles that ought to develop an awareness and understanding of classroom life:

Principle 1 – Put "quality of life" first.

Principle 2 – Work primarily to understand language classroom life.

Principle 3 – Involve everybody.

Principle 4 – Work to bring people together.

Principle 5 – Work also for mutual development.

Principle 6 – Integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice.

Principle 7 – Make the work a continuous enterprise (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.196).

One of the key factors of those Principles is collegiality not only between teachers but between teachers and learners, teachers and training/development people, and teachers and academic researchers "because of the mutual benefit and the mutual dependence that any form of EP practice demands" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.196).

### 3.5.2.1 The practice of Exploratory Practice

In contrast to standard academic research, Exploratory Practice differs from the approach of looking at and solving classroom problems<sup>12</sup>. Seven practical steps that are flexible and adaptable due to experience are drawn to make it more reachable. They are concerned with *identifying* puzzles from the perspective of why they occur rather than how do they appear. After that, it is eminent to comprehend the puzzle and *reflect* upon it. *Monitoring* the puzzling situation to understand its origin better is another step to take. *Taking direct action to generate data* by using classroom activities like group work is essential. *Making sure to consider the outcomes reached so far and deciding what to do next* by deciding if the observations are enough to take further steps or if another set of data is needed. *Moving on* implies choosing from various options like adjusting expectations or the actual action to do something to ease the situation. Lastly, *going public* means that the puzzle with its improvements to classroom life should be shared so that others can benefit from it and feedback can be given. This can be realised through workshops, publications, or presentations (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.197).

Allwright emphasises that even though global principles for general guidance are needed, they must be acted out and thought of locally.

Also based on the postmethod condition and consisting of the three mentioned parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, Kumaravadivelu's guiding framework will be addressed.

### 3.5.3 The Macrostrategic Framework

“*Macrostrategies* are general plans derived from currently available theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning and teaching” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.201). They function as broad guidelines for educators in order to “generate their own location-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom procedures” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.201). Macrostrategies are considered both, theory-neutral and method-neutral. The framework includes ten macrostrategies that will be illustrated shortly:

1. Maximize learning opportunities: As teachers are seen as creators of learning opportunities as well as utilisers of learning opportunities that are created by students, they need to find a balance between those two roles. The realisation that creation and utilisation

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<sup>12</sup> The following prefers to use the word puzzle as in finding something puzzling in a teaching or learning situation rather than using the negative connotated word of problem (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.196).

of learning occasions may be limited by thinking that they are bound by teachers' agenda, teaching materials and syllabus specifications is a step to overcome pre-determinations. Thus, it is sometimes of great value to change the course of one's lesson plan as it may offer unexpected classroom interactions in which the students generate language input alongside the teacher. As material from coursebooks is by nature produced for general use and not geared to individual classroom situations, it should be seen as springboard to initiate interactive procedures within the classroom. Similar to the coursebook, syllabi are planned and given to teachers. By treating it as pre-syllabus and negotiating it through the interactions of the classroom it will offer a much wider range of learning opportunities (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, pp.44–47).

2. Facilitate negotiated interaction: Teachers should provide opportunities for negotiated interaction so that learners can concentrate on the relationship of form and meaning and the overall means of communication. To achieve this goal, the cooperation between teachers and learners is essential to create a conducive atmosphere that fosters negotiated interaction. Involved should be interpersonal, ideational, and textual facets of language use (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.130).
3. Minimize perceptual mismatches: Due to likely mismatches of communication, it is important that the teacher is aware of perceptual mismatches that can be caused by the following sources: cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, attitudinal. Those mismatches can occur between teaching objectives and learning outcomes and also between the "instruction that makes sense to teachers and instruction that makes sense to learners" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.80). That is why researchers in this field recommend to explore the learner's perception to construct lessons the way it is most perceptible for the students (cf. *ibid.* 2003, p.77ff.)
4. Activate intuitive heuristics: By providing enough textual data for the students, they can themselves conclude rules of form and functions of language. In other words, the active training of activation of the learner's instinctive heuristics is a worthy goal to pursue. To support the learner's will of self-discovery, teachers should ensure that grammar is seen as a logical, dynamic system that includes structures characterised by the three aspects: form, meaning and use (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.203)
5. Foster language awareness: This macrostrategy aims to promote the development of learners' general and critical language awareness in such a way as to enable them to cultivate social and political power structures. That kind of awareness provides the

students structures to foster an understanding of the correct use of a foreign language, broader understanding and it eliminates confusion. It is also a way that connects the curriculum with individual learning purposes (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.156ff.)

6. Contextualize linguistic input: The teacher should make sure to provide meaning-making contexts within the L2 classroom. The development of communicative competence can be seen as a part of it as it promotes the ability to create appropriate context in a certain social situation. To gain language ability, all aspects of language like pragmatics, syntax, and semantics need to be integrated into language learning (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.223).
7. Integrate language skills: Not only linguistic components but language skills like writing, listening, speaking, and reading, are important to acquire a language completely. Integration of language skills seems natural when it comes to language communication. Those skills should be learned and practiced simultaneously and with varying combinations. Teachers should therefore conduct their lessons due to an all-embracing approach (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.238).
8. Promote learner autonomy: As learning a language is mostly an autonomous process, promoting the learner's autonomy is crucial. This aim can be realised through different measurements like providing students with learning opportunities that nurture the ability to become self-directed learners. The degree of autonomy depends on factors like context, time, goals, and culture and needs to be determined in cooperation of teachers and learners. It must be considered that a shift of control in areas like selection of tasks and material, assessment of learning outcomes, and curricular objectives and aims takes place (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.155).
9. Ensure social relevance: As every classroom is influenced by the social environment, learning a language is only fully effective when it is embedded in social and political contexts. The educators should address socially relevant L2 learning environments by choosing socially relevant and appropriate material and input for their specific language learning classroom. Teachers must help the students to keep the balance between the maintenance of their L1 and the associated linguistic identity and the acquisition of a socio-political and economic imperative-relevant language. (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, pp.225 & 266).
10. Raise cultural consciousness: In days of globalisation, it is important to treat learners as cultural informants. That will support the engagement of the participation process enlarging their power and knowledge. Raising critical cultural consciousness among the

students offers various, and meaningful possibilities to delve into cultural practises. It requires persistent and steady self-reflection that is based on the norms and values of one's culture. An interaction between the heritage culture and the learned culture is desirable so that a mutual enrichment can be attained (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.284f.).

To sum up the macrostrategies are general guiding principles that help teachers to conduct context-sensitive teaching based on the three parameters that were explained before. Kumaravadivelu visualises the concept as the pedagogic wheel (Figure 1) that portrays that the three parameters, particularity, practicality, and possibility, are interwoven and deeply connected. The ten macrostrategies support each other as stabilising spokes of the wheel. The rim that surrounds the macrostrategies stands for all of the teaching and learning operations (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.40f.).

Microstrategies are needed to implement the macrostrategies in the classroom (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.208).

“Microstrategies are classroom procedures that are designed to realize the objectives of a particular macrostrategy” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.208).

The number and type of microstrategy of macrostrategy depend on the local teaching and learning condition. When designing them learners' needs, lacks, wants, and current abilities need to be considered (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.209).

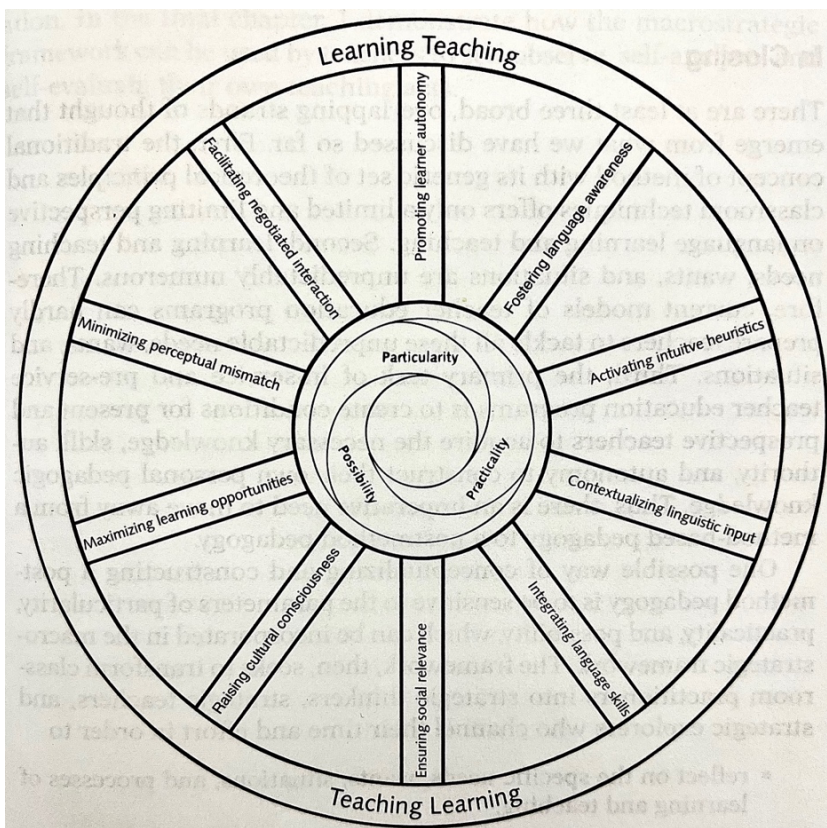


Figure 1: Pedagogic wheel from Kumaravadivelu (2006)



## **4. Methodology**

As chapter two contained information about the history, culture, and educational system of Laos it is interesting to look at the current situation of English lessons in Laos.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, a few areas are under lockdown which means that schools are being closed and lessons are held online. As the number of infected people in the Vientiane region is rising, the Sunshine School cannot provide lessons in presence. This means that the students are staying at home and are taught via online lessons and exercises that they must do at home. Utilizing the qualitative research, the research question of what the current online situation at the Sunshine School looks like will be answered in the following chapter.

To make it explicit, an exemplification of the research design is indispensable. The layout of the research design is composed of the following components: the contention of cognitive interest, the methodological positioning, the identification of the research area, the choice of sampling, the steps of generalisation and theory building as well as the basic theoretical inclusion in research.

Further, the research methodology is adapted to the postmethod condition that was discussed in the previous chapter. As Kumaravadivelu states that “[L]anguage pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.538) it seems inevitable to adjust the research accordingly.

### **4.1 Access to research - qualitative research**

As the thesis is concentrating on the research question of how the current situation of online lessons at the Sunshine School in Laos looks like, the next chapter seeks to answer it.

Accordingly, it is decisive to choose a research methodology that is structured in an open style that allows the researcher to focus on the individual statements of each interview partner and therefore gain additional knowledge. Qualitative social research offers that very open approach to data. Further, as the previous chapter showed, it is of great importance for the purpose of this thesis to balance the power relations of the global north and south in a more decolonized way. The methodology is adapted to this aim.

Utilizing interviews and their evaluation the following thesis contains qualitative data such as recorded interviews which are transcribed to textual forms and written interview questions.

It is characterized by different sequences of qualitative research. A huge appeal for applying qualitative research is “this systematic, individual proof nature, governed by precise rules and regulations, thus approximating the regularity of the natural sciences” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.28).

With its flexible and extremely ‘context-sensitive’ way, it accomplishes a micro-perspective of the diverse and ordinary life in the world.

To make the above more tangible, the following paragraph will provide more details.

Using categories and codes, researchers manage to reduce and structure the information. Qualitative research and its counterpart, quantitative research, are very different in their nature of categories and process of categorization (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.26). In pursuance of Bazeley: “Codes - the way they are generated, what they stand for, and the way they are used - lie at the heart of differences between quantitative and qualitative data and analysis tools” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.26).

The coding of qualitative research appears different in the aspect of being verbal, not numerical, which means that they use brief textual labels instead of numbers. It is also not pinned to a certain succession but left open and flexible as long as possible to further the flow and subtle nuances of meaning at the time of the study (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.26).

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research is not as clear-cut. The lack of own theory, paradigm, set of methods, and practises make it hard to define it clearly. Despite the rather impervious methodology, well-known qualitative researchers came to the understanding that the qualitative approach has core attributes that universally characterize a properly conducted study (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.36f.).

As interviews are dependent on individual human beings one should bear in mind that the final picture of the research will be a result of the people one selected for the data gathering of the specific research and is therefore not universally valid. The realisation of a rather individual insight of an online classroom is reflected in Kumaravadivelu’s perception of personalised classroom activities and qualifies therefore as a research approach for this thesis.

The following is looking at this kind of data collection from a qualitative view. To portray the individual stories rather than present an overall, average description, qualitative researchers see the true value of interviews in the views, perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of individuals. The fact that there are various meanings to detect is of greater importance than believing in a higher-level meaning for representatives of qualitative research (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.27).

Qualitative research pursues to look at social phenomena from the perspectives of the participants that is to say the insiders. This view is based on a fundamental qualitative principle that assumes that “human behaviour is based upon meanings which people attribute to and bring to

situations and it is only the actual participants themselves who can reveal the meanings and interpretations of their experiences and actions” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38).

In addition to that, the qualitative approach is essentially interpretive because of the researcher’s subjective interpretations of the collected data. To quote Miles and Huberman: “the researcher is essentially the main measurement device in the study” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38).

When looking at the focus on individuals of qualitative research, the integration of a postmethod methodology corresponds very well with it. The parameter of possibility addresses the inequality of social power constructions that need to be overcome if the construct of postmethod methodology wants to be applied to the research itself.

It is important that the interviewer is aware of the fact that it’s role as the interrogator itself implies a certain power related understanding of one’s own role. As the interview as well as language teaching offers contact between cultures, the interviewer should consider the social and individual backgrounds of her interview partner. This is realised by several conversations before the interviews were taking place.

By making the interviewee the center of attention and showing that his or her answers and statements are of great value and significance for the research, it balances the power relations of the two counterparts in a more equal way. The questions should be designed to answer the research questions but also in unison to the circumstances and in respect to the samples and their culture. As the resulting product, the eBook, is depending on the cooperation and communication between the interviewer and interviewee it is essential to make this clear. Both parties are interdependent which also helps to equal the power relations.

Further, the parameter of particularity is integrated in the process of data gathering as the focus is laid on the individuality of the Sunshine school, its English teachers, and English lessons in particular. During the interviews it is essential to be sensitive to cultural, social, local, and institutional circumstances. As particularity and practicality are depended on self-reflection and self-evaluation, specific questions on teaching contemplation should be asked. Theory and practise of teaching should be analysed to reach the individual goals. Therefore, it is important that the teachers have access to different approaches and techniques. Having those at hand, they can gain knowledge that they, together with daily practise, use to identify problems, consider alternatives, and adapt the theory to the needs of themselves and of their students. The Lao-Teaching Project offered several workshops and interactive lessons to provide the teachers with different possibilities for language teaching that will be integrated in the eBook.

Due to its high labour intensity, its scope of samples of participants is smaller in comparison to the ones in quantitative research (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.38).

Sampling in qualitative research has the main goal to „find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.126) rather than demonstrating the most common experience.

It concentrates on portraying, understanding, and analyzing the experiences of individuals (cf. ibid. 2007).

The interview partners are chosen purposefully and regarding the research question to gain meaningful answers. The selection of respondents follows a sampling plan with the following parameters:

- participants
- settings
- events
- processes

The interviews of this research are dated in November and December 2021. The selected samplings are English teachers of the Sunshine School in Laos and are named with the abbreviations T1 to T4 according to the ascending order of interview dates while the T is short for teacher. Two of the English teachers are from the Philippines and are living in Laos for more than ten years now. The other two teachers are born in Laos.

On the whole, qualitative research concentrates on an “in-depth understanding of the ‘meaning in the particular’” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.27) and has a unique design of emergent research (cf. ibid. 2007, p.37).

Interconnected with the above, qualitative research stands out with the researcher’s subjective sensitivity, training, and experience. With qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research, the outcome is conditional on the individual respondents and the individual researchers (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.28f.).

## **4.2 Research design**

The following chapter contains the theoretical background as well as the explanation of the methodological decision of data collection, data analyzing, and data evaluation. Considering that the interviewer and the samples are not speaking the same mother tongue, the interviews will be held in English. The following provides an overview of this special situation.

Further, the succeeding visualises the research design of the methodological procedure:

- data collection with the help of a directory interview
- data analyzing by use of content-semantic transcription

- data evaluation based on qualitative content analysis

#### **4.2.1 Qualitative research in a foreign language**

When it comes to translation from one language into another and especially when the target language you are communicating in is not your mother tongue it is important to keep in mind that language and its perception are ambiguous. One should be sensitive to the fact that an accurate word-to-word translation cannot always carry the intended pragmatic meaning of the speaker. Thus, it can lead to further misunderstanding, incomprehension, or even discomfort. The right form of translation and understanding is based upon an (inter-/trans-) cultural understanding. Every language and use of language conceive the meaning of a word differently. It is also common that the perception of words differs regarding a subculture, social environment, and generation. Facial expressions, gestures and intonation can help to interpret the intention of the speaker (cf. Kruse et al., 2012, p.10).

This means that even in everyday conversation we can only assume that the things we think to understand are the same as what our counterpart intended to say. Hence, understanding is always closely connected to a process of translation. To guard against misunderstandings or more realistic to minimize misunderstandings, it is of importance to follow a methodology fitting the purpose of your intention (cf. Kruse et al., 2012, p.11).

Given that language is always closely linked to culture and a certain sense of perception it is helpful to get to know the habits, environment, and culture of the people one is interviewing. As language mirrors and produces cultural experience, experiencing the social graces and regional particularities through personal encounters and everyday situations will help to gain an understanding that cannot be learned through theory alone. It is therefore recommended to live at least a short time in the area of your field of study (cf. Kruse et al., 2012, p.55).

Taking cultural differences into account implies diverse understandings of time and rules of communication. Flexibility, room for cultural encounters, and willingness to question one's implicitness are inevitable for communication on eye level (cf. Kruse et al., 2012, p.55f.).

Originally the author of this thesis was meant to stay in Laos for four months to gain a broad set of cultural experiences for her work but unfortunately due to the COVID-19 situation it had to be cancelled. This is the reason why she decided to do online interviews with the people involved in the project.

#### 4.2.2 Qualitative data collection – guided interview

Due to the epistemological interest of this thesis, it is important to choose a qualitative and open research methodology that displays subject-orientated views. It is essential to keep in mind that

qualitative research is *by definition* less systematic and standardized in its data collection approach than quantitative research and that the messiness of rich data that we are aiming for is often merely a reflection of the complex real-life situations that the data concerns. (Dörnyei, 2007, p.125)

Thus, the design does not oblige a detailed and fully planned outline right from the beginning but rather profits from the flexibility and the openness of its approach. The verbal approach of qualitative research is of great importance as it offers access to subjective meanings. Thus, the subjects who are seen as experts of their semantic content come up for discussion (cf. Mayring, 2016, p.66).

The qualitative method of inquiry of this thesis is interviews. Owing to limitation of time and the fact that the interviewer and the interviewees know each other from previous online meetings and conversations via E-mail and WhatsApp, the interviews are held in single sessions. Further, they follow the pattern of a semi-structured interview that combines the advantages of both, the structured- and unstructured interview. Despite a set of pre-prepared questions, it also has an open-end format and encourages the interviewee to particularise certain affairs in a delving form. The structured part of this interview type is taken by the interviewer as he or she is providing guidance and direction. Yet, he or she is eager to leave certain freedom to the interviewee to elaborate on the raised issues and find out about striking facts and developments. In pursuance of achieving depth and breadth of the statements of the interviewee together with broad questions around the research subject, the interviewer finds a suitable method in this approach. This is best achieved by an interview guide which needs to be developed before the interview takes place. The questions do not need to be asked in the same order or wording. They do not even all be asked and can be adapted, amplified, and extended to the specific needs of the interviews (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.136).

When designing an interview guide it is important to consider that careful planning and piloting will be required. The questions should encourage the flow of the conversation and induce to gain sufficiently rich data (cf. Dörnyei, 2007, p.136). Using guiding questions also has the benefit of comparability among the interviews. To achieve the goal of purposeful growth of knowledge in the topic area, broad attainments on the part of the interviewer are required (cf. Bohnsack, 2011, p.114).

Taking the three parameters, particularity, practicality and possibility, of Kumaravadivelu into account means that it is not only possible to change the order or even leave out and add questions during the interview but feel desirable as each interview partner, her or his background, and interview situation is unique. Thus, an individual guide is required.

The gained insights need to be reflected, shared in the form of chapter five, the presentation of results as well as analysed in the subsequent chapter that represents the results in view of the theory. Hereby, the second parameter, practicality, is addressed.

Dörnyei (2007) states that the interview guide should help the interviewer in the following areas:

- by ensuring that the domain is properly covered and nothing important is left out by accident
- by suggesting appropriate question wordings
- by offering a list of useful probe questions to be used if needed
- by offering a template for the opening statement
- by listing some comments to bear in mind

The procedure of the interviews will be framed with the help of a guide. This guide is distinguished by invitations to talk, pre-formulated questions and notes for open formulated questions. Helfferich (2019) sums up the drawing up of the guide: as open as possible, as structured as needed (cf. Helfferich in: Baur and Blasius, 2014, p.670).

It is structured in a three-staged concept of invitation to talk, follow-up questions and conclusory questions. The combination of the attributes that are openness, clarity and the preserving of narrative continuity, allows the accomplishment of requirements of the guide's purpose. The procedure of designing the guide is subdivided by drawing up the product itself as well as the implementation and reflection of the research interest. In the process, the four steps of collecting, examining, arranging and subsuming<sup>13</sup> are helping (cf. Helfferich in: Baur and Blasius, 2014, p.677).

The substrate interview guide is often declared as a half-standardised tool of data acquisition as a question catalogue is settled but no specific answers are prescribed. Hence, the standardisation consists of contextual comparability of the interview guide as given question formulations can and should be adapted according to the individual interview situation. Nevertheless, the guide is of great importance as it forms the scaffold that ensures comparability (cf. Bortz and Döring, 2016, p.372).

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<sup>13</sup> In German: sammeln, prüfen, sortieren, subsumieren (SPSS)

### 4.2.3 Transcription

After the interviews are held, it is important to ensure reflexivity and intersubjective transparency. The first step is the recordings of the interviews which can be types of video or audio data. To represent the statements and narrations of the interviews, it needs to be written down. It is necessary to identify and overcome the discrepancy of a realistic and oral situation and the compromise of its written form in the most possible form (cf. Dresing/Pehl 2018, 16).

The transcript of the records cannot be seen as an autonomic text but as a linkage to its original form. It, therefore, offers the readers comprehensibility of the analysis based on the relevant data (cf. Bohnsack, 2011, p.159).

Furthermore, this procedure has another advantage of making it easier to reproduce and analyse the rather elusive oral information. The recordings which can be seen as a kind of interstage product are still helpful as they are, depending on video or audio recording, providing facial expressions, gestures, and emphasis on certain words. If the original soundtrack of the interview is required one can come back to it (Kuckartz/Rädiker 2019, 448).

It is essential to determine the role of intonation, sound intensity, dialect, para verbal utterances, and other descriptions (cf. Bohnsack, 2011, p.159). As a detailed transcript based on an extensive set of regulations does not seem necessary in this context, the author relinquishes this form of data preparation. Thus, more attention can be paid to the content and context of the conversations. Therefore, the oral interviews will be written down irrespective of pauses, non-verbal utterances, and dialects or grammatically incorrect forms of words.

### 4.2.4 Evaluation of qualitative research data

When faced with the chosen open survey methodology and in consideration of the integration of an adapted postmethod methodology it is called for an interpretive approach for evaluation. This method should detect structures of meaning which involve hermeneutic, descriptive, critical, exploratory, and narrative rudiments. Nevertheless, extensive instructions for evaluation of complex and linguistic material from which you can deduce clear rules of interpretation, are non-existing (cf. Mayring, 2015, p.11).

The aim of this method is to apply techniques that are „systematisch, intersubjektiv überprüfbar, gleichzeitig aber der Komplexität, der Bedeutungsfülle, der ‚Interpretationsbedürftigkeit‘ sprachlichen Materials angemessen“ (Mayring, 2015, p.10). The following evaluation is oriented on the qualitative content analysis of Mayring (2015). Communication is here seen as an object of interpretation to which not only language but music, pictures or the like are counted. That means the first aspect of Mayring is *communication analysis*. Furthermore, the analysis is



working with symbolic material like videos or pictures as well. He describes this kind of minuted form of communication as fixed communication which leads to his second aspect, *analysing fixed communication* (cf. Mayring, 2015, p.12). As the analysis is based on a theoretical declared research question and the results will be analysed in regard to this theoretical foundation, it is a theory-driven procedure. The content analysis does not intend to analyse just for the sake of itself but as part of a communication process. Part of it is to draw inferences from statements of the analysed material about certain aspects of communication, to *draw conclusions* (cf. Mayring, 2015, p.13).

The qualitative content analysis stresses the linking of the specific matter that lies in the heart of the analysis. Thus, the analysis does not only follow mere techniques but is influenced by various choices of the approach. Therefore, it can be seen as an interpretive form of analysis. The scientific goal of the analysis is the informal transcript (cf. Mayring, 2015, p.52).

## **5. Presentation of results**

As an outcome of the resumed history, the curriculum above and based on interviews with Lao teachers of English, the following will demonstrate how ESL teaching at the Sunshine School in Laos looks like during the lockdown situation. The interviews were held with four of the English teachers at the Sunshine School in Laos.

### **5.1 General (technical-) circumstances**

Since the new term that started in September 2020, the school with its face-to-face learning is closed. To provide the students with knowledge, the teachers are teaching online. The realisation of the term online teaching is incumbent upon the teachers to construe. For example, teacher two and four are holding zoom-meetings of 40 minutes per session and the other two teachers are doing one per class and week. The teachers said that the number of real-time lessons was dependent on the individual class.

Originally, each grade has three English online sessions per week but within the online lessons, the amount is one hour short for each class.

The students are equipped with a workbook named “let’s go” by the Oxford University Press and every child has a mobile device or computer from which he or she is attending the zoom meetings as well as being able to do their homework on. Every household has access to WIFI to take part in the online lessons. T2 remarked that the internet connection was not always great and that this technical issue makes it hard to keep up the flow of the lesson.

## **5.2 Parent-Teacher twinning**

Some parents do not want their children to attend the zoom sessions or cannot equip their children with mobile devices for each zoom meeting, therefore the teachers are providing not only zoom meetings but extra lessons for those students who cannot attend those meetings. For those lessons, the teachers prepare YouTube Videos and exercises with which the students can acquire new knowledge and practise.

T1 said that the language barrier was an additional obstacle to form a good relationship, it was difficult for her to communicate with the parents as she did not speak Lao. She remarked that it was a lot easier when T3 was there to translate.

The teachers said that they understood the concern from the parents and put a lot of effort in building a good relationship with the parents. They claimed that if they could motivate and won them over, it would be more likely that the children attended the online meetings daily.

To make the lessons more transparent the teachers are making voice messages in which they explain what they are doing, what the tasks are and where to find the videos, further information, and topic-related websites. Those messages can also be listened to by the parents so that they get a better overview on what their children are doing in the lessons and what they are supposed to do at home. Sometimes the parents are also attending their children's lessons and T1 said: "they are also learning" English.

T4 added that the parents were worried that their children would not attend the lessons or that they would not learn because they were not really in front of the teacher. That is why she reports to them weekly and sometimes sends pictures or videos from their children talking to her in the online meeting so that the parents do not need to be concerned.

T1 told the interviewer that she had more contact over the phone with the students rather than with the parents. Still, she is in contact with the parents and unlike the face-to-face teaching when the English teachers only had to report to the homeroom teacher, she now needs to monitor the attendance, regularity of homework given in, and quality of homework and informs the parents about unusual or conspicuous behaviour related to their children. T4 explained that they had several WhatsApp groups from which one was with the parents. In the group she gives clear instructions on the homework the children are supposed to do until the next English lesson.

## **5.4 Preparation**

Since none of the teachers taught online before, the school provided workshops on how to use the internet and online meeting platforms for the online lessons. Before they started to teach online the teachers attended workshops on how to use zoom and its features for their lessons. It

was stated that a lot of the teachers had never used this kind of programme or any technique related gadget. The workshops started from the bottom with know how's on how and when to use voice messages. "Little by little we are able to provide zoom classes for every grade now" remarked T3. Of great help were the IT-teachers when it came to creating lessons for kindergarten and primary school. As they are so little, they still want to play a lot and therefore the lessons must be designed accordingly. T4 stated that the conversion of face-to-face to online teaching was okay for her as she was learning new things as well. Moreover, she was grateful that the school provided help as she had not been familiar with all the features of zoom.

As T4 pointed out, the preparation for the online lessons was similar to the preparation of face-to-face lessons as she wanted to rehash the subject material as comprehensible as possible for the children.

Though it differs in other points. She therefore must think of how and with which material to present the content as well as to keep the time and different circumstances in mind. She said that she adapted the lessons to the circumstances of the students that means that she had to be informed about the situation at home. She exemplified that some families did not have enough phones so that she had to do some lessons during the time the parents were at home so that the child could use their phone or had to coordinate the lessons with her colleagues as some families had more than one child who was going to school and therefore the lessons had to be arranged the way that every child had the chance to use a mobile device and could attend the lessons.

### **5.3 Course of action and material**

In addition to zoom meetings, the teachers prepare homework from the student's book "let's go" which each student got at the beginning of the term but also YouTube videos, songs, and links from websites. Those websites provide eighter explanations, games, further information, videos, or stories. T1 and T3 use demonstration videos to explain the tasks, games, and exercises. Depending on the grade they also use additional material like flashcards "to make [the lesson] special" and catch the students' attention and interest. T4 declared that she liked to use a black board at home to visualise the content as the handling was easy. Sometimes her children were also filming her so that she could send videos of explanations to the students beforehand. That means that they can watch it over and over again and that she does not need to spend a lot of time on explaining within the lesson.

T1 said that it was not easy to reorganise the teaching from face-to-face teaching to online lessons as they had not used the technology, "it is a new era", she pointed out.

She said that it was important to “go with the flow of the children” because if the teacher kept on like they did they would not use new technical gadgets, it would not have been interesting for the students. “You have to have magic, how you teach the kids, how to give impact, you have to be creative as teacher”.

T1 said: “As a teacher you have to make sure that you know what the students like and how they get interested in learning” new things. Using new approaches in an online situation is a daily challenge for the teachers. T2 said “we have to find our own way to teach because in each class we have different situations”. Therefore, they are adapting their classes accordingly. The lessons for the primary school kids and secondary school kids look very different not only by their content but the methods and approaches are very different as well.

### **5.5.1 Primary School**

In addition to zoom classes, they use puppets, stories, videos, games, and songs to keep the interest of the children on a high level. T2 said that it was not only challenging for themselves but for the parents and grandparents as well as they sometimes had to sit down with their children and grandchildren to figure out how to find one’s self around this new situation of online lessons.

T3 demonstrates with the help of videos that she and T1 sent video sequences from the students’ book that the students watched and practiced before they film themselves while they are reading. Afterwards they send the videos to their teachers who can view and evaluate the reading progress. It also helps them to attain an impression on what the students got out of the lessons and homework. With the videos and recordings at hand they can assess if the students are working on their own or if they need the help of their parents. It gives them some indication of the extend of guidance the students still need or not need at all. T3 made the experience that seeing their faces and expressions on the videos helped them a lot. Hereinafter, the teachers can react accordingly and can provide more exercises and individual guidance and explanations.

Another way of tracking the progress, growth and improvement of the children are test papers that the educators handed out to the students but as T3 said “it’s actually not the most important thing” as they do want to score the continuous not momentary progress of the children.

In contrast to the secondary school students, the primary school children are neither embarrassed nor shy to ask questions if they have some. They are very straightforward in asking the teacher everything and T2 thought that they were happy to have those interaction parts of the zoom meetings even though not all the students were attending them on a regular basis.

### **5.5.2 Secondary School**

The lessons with the older children are constructed in a different way. As the older children in contrast to the primary school children are used to work with computers and smartphones, the teachers can provide a guide that leads the children through different approaches of data gathering and learning. In this manner, the students are enabled to “explore the internet” and find out where to find what kind of information. The teachers see great potential in this open format of online teaching when it comes to teach the pupils to think for themselves. T2 and T4 even said that some of the older children were finding their way around the world wide web better than some teachers. T2 said that she wanted to give the students various options on how to gather information and organise their learning the way they feel is best for them.

She exemplified her statements with the project she was doing with her grade six. It’s about presenting the individual interests of the children. In smaller groups created through break-out sessions within the zoom meetings, the students have the task to gather information about the topics they are interested in and later on they will present it to their fellow students.

T2 said that they were free to use every possible way of presentation. She gave suggestions like drawing, doing a power point presentation or creating one’s own video. She likes the fact that the students are left to be creative and are not constrained in their originality.

To motivate the students to talk she likes to subdivide the class into smaller groups, the breakout sessions. She feels that having those makes it easier to communicate. If they are too shy to talk to her, she does not want to force them and therefore gives them the chance to talk to their friends.

Still, she tries to encourage them to ask questions if they did not understand certain content. Mostly, they do not ask because they are embarrassed to address the teacher and admit that they did not follow certain aspects. And if they were asked by the teacher, they mostly replied that they understood. However, the results of the homework often show that there are uncertainties which must be resolved in the following lessons.

T4 summed up that every teacher had her own techniques and that one had to adapt them according to the individual class.

### **5.6 Challenges**

As great as this chance of online lessons may be, all teachers find it hard not being able to see their students face-to-face. They agreed that not seeing the reaction and facial expressions on certain topics, and comments during this whole time was very hard for them. As teachers they said that they wanted to provide useful input but at the same time would like to see if the

students process and understand what is being said. They claimed that they constantly had to remind the older children to turn on their microphones and cameras as they did not always get answers or responses of any nature from the learners. The teachers seek to explain this reserved behaviour in the age of the children. Some do not want to show their face or home due to age-related insecurity, shyness, and embarrassment. Even talking, if it's related to questions of the teacher or when they were asked to tell the class about certain topics or statements, is challenging for them. Not because they do not understand but because of the reasons given above.

T2 said that it was harder to keep up the flow with the older children even though they understood English better than the smaller children.

Aiming to monitor the learning progress of the students the teachers review and revise the lessons together with the students who are asked to raise questions if there were unclarities. The educators also try to let the learners speak individually to listen to individual opinions, questions, and suggestions. T3 claimed that it was sometimes hard to find the easiest way of presenting the subject material to the students so that they could understand fully. She said that learning online makes it more complicated for everybody, the students, teachers and parents and that she as a teacher had to adapt her expectations according to the special situation. She said that despite the obstacles she liked online teaching as she was also learning a lot.

### **5.7 Further teaching**

Nobody knows for how long the lockdown will continue, it is uncertain how long the online lessons are going to last and the schools can open for face-to-face teaching again. Until the eagerly awaited contact teaching will take place again, the teachers said that they would keep on "finding a positive way" throughout this time that demands patience, creativity, and flexibility.

T2 said that it would help a great deal if they had something that promote the students to really understand the English grammar. She said that they spent a lot of time on finding good websites, games, and additional material to support the students understanding that helped them to learn. She would like to have good suggestions at hand so that she could just copy those links and forward them to her students. Teacher 1 agreed and said that instructions for teaching the structure of grammar were missing to achieve "deep learning".

Having a guide at hand, they would have time to focus more on the input itself and could concentrate on how the students can get the most out of the lesson. The four teachers agreed on the point that the exchange of information, ideas, and suggestions among each other is of great value for succeeding and overcoming the deviances of online teaching.

## **6. Discussion of results**

This chapter serves the purpose to look at the research question of this thesis in consideration of the interviews and the theory in more detail. To maintain the structure of the interview results the following discussion will be designed the same way.

### **6.1 General (technical-) circumstances**

When it comes to teaching online, it is important that certain technical schemes function successfully. First, it is indispensable that each participant of the lessons is provided with a functional mobile or technical device such as a mobile phone, tablet, laptop, or computer to be able to attend the lessons and do their homework. It should be made sure that the device is equipped with a microphone and preferably a camera. Further, to take part in zoom meetings, access learning platforms, and watch additional videos, those devices should have a stable WIFI connection. This is of great importance when it comes to preserving a straight course of action.

Fortunately, every child from the Sunshine School is provided with both, a mobile or technical device and WIFI connection. This lays the foundation for participating in online lessons.

Even though one teacher reported that the connection was not always great and that some children did not always have a mobile device since a few children are using the phones of their parents who need to take the phones to work, the teachers “are lucky [that the students] have them”.

This is not self-evident and at the same time a necessity to teach online, students need to be provided with technical devices to ensure not only the ongoing of subject matters but to get as close to face-to-face teaching as possible under the circumstances and pandemic situation.

The students do not only have online-sessions but need to do homework as well. Depending on the grade they have different tasks. Some of them are on websites, YouTube or in the students’ book. That means that the teachers need to be familiar with certain technical features such as dealing with zoom and how to find target-aimed extra material.

### **6.2 Parent-teacher twinning**

Having a good parent-teacher twinning is important for a good learning atmosphere and cooperation, especially when family and keeping face plays such an important culture-bound role in Lao community. The detailed answers and explanations of the teachers show how great the importance of a respectful and steady relationship between parents, teachers and students is. Anyhow, it will not be analysed in more detail as this thesis does not address theory concerning the parent-teacher relationship in particular.

Despite all that, the ~~point~~ of language barrier will be looked at briefly.

Especially T1, originally from the Philippines, said that the language barrier was an additional obstacle to form a good relationship, it was difficult for her to communicate with the parents as she did not speak Lao. She said that it was a lot easier when her colleague was there to translate. The three-dimensional-framework from Stern with its Intralingual-Crosslingual Dimension can be employed here. The first principle delves into the relationship between the native language (L1) as well as culture (C1) and the target language (L2) with its culture (C2) in foreign language learning.

Even though this dimension was actually composed for classroom activities, it can be extended over the boundaries of the classroom to form a stable partnership between parents and teachers. The applied cross-lingual strategy combines the English language that is spoken by the English teacher as second language (L2) with the mother tongue of the parents (L1) that is spoken by the other Philippine teacher<sup>14</sup> in the presence of the latter, the parents and English teacher. The decision to make use of a translator when it comes to certain parents who do not understand all the English explanations, empowers the teachers and parents to make autonomous decisions and broadens the understanding of both languages (cf. chapter 3.5.1.1).

The teachers say that they understand the concern from the parents and put a lot of effort in building a good relationship with the parents. They said that if they can motivate and win them over, it was more likely that the children attended the online meetings on a daily basis. That means that the adapted crosslingual principal has direct impact on the classroom situation.

Being able to see and understand the concerns of the other side (the parents and students) and the matter-of-course receptiveness to adapt the teaching accordingly is an indicator that the English teachers follow the Principle of Explanatory Practice of Allwright (cf. chapter 3.5.2) not only in connection with the parent-teacher twinning but also in consideration of the following criteria.

They include the following principles in their life as an online teacher of English:

Principle 1 - as the teachers are trying to make learning as easy for the students as possible.

Principle 2 - as they are constantly adapting their ways of teaching according to the online situation and the individuality of the class.

Principle 3 - as the educators are involving their colleagues, students and parents in their teaching.

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<sup>14</sup> Teacher 3 is originally from the Philippines as well but is speaking Lao and therefore helps T1 to translate to the students and parents as well.



Principle 4 - as the teachers do not only try to deepen the connection between them and the students but also between them and the parents and students among themselves.

Principle 5 - as the adaption to the online lesson requires new acquisition of technical knowledge on behalf of the teacher and students, the teachers said that they are learning from the students as well. Hence, the development becomes apparently mutual.

Principle 6 – as the English teachers impart the knowledge they are gaining through conversations with colleagues, practical experience, and their revision into the next lessons, they foster their and their students understanding of the content within the lessons.

Principle 7 - as the teachers see their lessons as something that needs to be adapted, changed and improved by ideas and suggestions from other teachers, the individuality of the results from the students, the comprehension that the process of the students is monitored best when its looked at from the beginning and the integration of the parents' involvement in teaching, the work of the teachers can be seen as a “continuous enterprise” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.196). Given the explanations above, one can say that the key factor, collegiality, is considered to a great extent.

## **6.4 Preparation**

As the teachers emphasised above, again, the individual backgrounds of the students play a crucial role when it comes to preparing and planning the lessons. As one can see, the parameter of particularity is of great importance for the English teachers of the Sunshine School. The same factors concerning the parameters of postmethod methodology, that were already explained in detail in the previous chapters, can be applied to the preparation and will therefore not be examined again.

In contrast to face-to-face teaching, preparation of online lessons needs to take other components into account. After ensuring that every child is equipped with a technical device with a WIFI connection that allows the learner to access the zoom meetings as well as links, videos, games and websites, the teachers must get familiar with the technology themselves. Moreover, they need to make sure that their devices are working and that they can assist their students if problems occur. The teachers at the Sunshine School reported that their knowledge about the use of technology increased due to their daily use of it and the workshops the school offered at the beginning of the online teaching.

Once the technical circumstances are covered, the teachers need to familiarise themselves with online tools that foster learning accretion of their students. Due to the immense number of websites, the time spent on finding appropriate material can be exhausting and even frustrating. The

close relationship between the English colleagues has the advantage of content exchange. Thus, time can be saved because once a helpful website or tool is found by one of the teachers, they can share it with their colleagues. Exchange like this could, again, be extended beyond the walls of the individual schools through a community of English teachers all over the globe who can share their findings and ideas via well-organised platforms.

Furthermore, teachers of online lessons must find a way to overview the learning progress of each child. Creativity and patience are required on behalf of the parties concerned. As a lot of time is spent on formalities of organisational nature like checking the attendance list and homework or the assurance of a technical flow, the time for actual English content is limited. Hence, the remaining time must be used wisely. This puts a lot of pressure on the teachers and can be limited by the use of effective material that enhances the student's autonomy as this enables self-organised learning without being dependent on the teacher the whole time.

### **6.3 Course of action/ Material**

The teachers said that they orient themselves by the curriculum. When it comes to teaching in most South East Asian countries, the “textbook often takes on a quasi-mystical role of authority” (Williams, 2017, p.80).

That is why it is of great interest that the interviewed teachers are keen to embed additional material into the work with the coursebook that functions as a base and guide. At the Sunshine School they use the British course book titled “let's go” published by the Oxford University Press. The students have an additional student's book at home.

One teacher said that the workbook was of great help especially for the smaller children as they are not able to write full sentences in the English language yet. With the support of the student's book they can fill in gaps and do not have to construct full sentences. One teacher also said that a great advantage of this course book was that the children have easy access to a recording of the book on YouTube. If they cannot attend the online lesson or to consolidate the learned subject matter, they can watch the video, speak and sing along and do the exercises and see if they did them correctly.

Even though it might be of great help for some topics, T4 remarked that the contents were not always explained in a way their students understood. Thus, the teachers themselves have to develop material for a better comprehension.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, one teacher expressed that they had to find their way of teaching to meet the individual needs of the students. Even though the teachers did not name the explicit term, this is exactly what Kumaravadivelu's three principles intend, teachers

should realise that every classroom situation is different, one should collect experiences, evaluate them and apply one's teaching accordingly.

Depending on the class and their individual needs and wishes, the teachers use different material and apply different approaches. For some classes they feel it is meaningful to hold zoom meetings for each English lesson and for some they concluded that this would not be target-aimed and only offer one live lesson per week.

To foster the student's understanding and in addition to the coursebook they use flashcards, songs, videos, games, websites, puppets, and stories.

### **6.5.1 Primary School**

Following the previous chapter, the choice of material and conceptual formulations is adapted to the circumstances of each class and grade. As the primary school children are playful, energetic and do not hesitate to enquire about the topics and contents they are interested in, the impartation of content must be purposefully adapted. Again, the pillars of Kumaravadivelu's three-dimensional system can be detected here. To create lessons that meet the needs of the addressee shows that the teachers interpret the specific context in a holistic way. The English teachers of the Sunshine School explained that they are constantly adapting and changing their lessons correspondingly to the students reactions, performance ratings, familial cases and personal judgement of the classroom situation. They said that they rated the exchange between the teachers very highly and that they were happy to apply suggestions and ideas from their colleagues into their language learning classroom. The teachers described that they were continually trying out the ideas of the other educators but that, depending on the class, they did not always work like they intended them to. Therefore, they have to adapt those ideas accordingly or need another approach that meets the needs of their individual class more reasonably.

This is the constant process of reflection that Kumaravadivelu describes in his parameters, particularity, practicality, and possibility. To extend the already present practises of the English teachers, they could write down their observations, adaptations, and proposals for improvement and share their findings not only with their colleagues of the Sunshine School but with teachers from other schools as well.

Taking this step would lead to the seventh step of Allwright's Exploratory Practice. *Going public* means that the individual findings are important and should be shared with others so that they can benefit from them as well. This can also help the authors as it leads to further communication and exchange of experiences and suggestions. Which in turn goes back to the transcultural understanding throughout encounters that would not take place under every-day situations.

Those situations implicate a greater variety of approaches, ideas and techniques to involve in one's lessons as well as a change of perspective.

### **6.5.2 Secondary School**

Acknowledging that the learners can identify themselves better with the internet than some teachers and that they can learn certain features from the students shows that enabling students to make use of their abilities in order to learn something new, is a step that goes towards a pedagogy of postmethod. Giving various options and being open to new suggestions shows that the English teachers want to maximise the learning opportunities in the classroom<sup>15</sup>.

Implementing meaningful learner involvement is obviously the best way to maximise the learning output of the students as the learners are responsible for their learning to a great extent. The important role of the teacher is to provide the most favourable environment for the students to find their individual learning path (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.48).

By creating open lessons that provide guidance rather than strict follow ups, the English teacher of the Sunshine School give the students the opportunity to choose from collections of techniques, approaches, topics and material and choose their own ways or to combine those.

After the learner's input that can be uttered as presentations, suggestions or simply as contributions to certain contents, the teacher must really listen to what the students are saying and value it as a learning opportunity for themselves and the whole class.

Another opportunity to create meaningful learning spaces, are the questions asked by the teacher that need to trigger meaningful interaction (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.49f.).

As Teacher two is doing the small project with grade six for which the students decide on a topic they are interested in, the teacher can expand the research options to an outside the classroom learning opportunity. Connecting with the local or global community to find out certain issues would be another step to generate learning opportunities (cf. *ibid.* 2003, p.58ff.).

## **6.6 Challenges**

The teachers say that on top of learning new techniques, methods, and approaches, it is especially challenging for them to keep up the motivation of the older students. They claim that they constantly must invite them to answer and talk.

Part of the postmethod methodology is the realisation of what is working for certain students and what is not and to adapt the way of teaching accordingly. The English teachers at the

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<sup>15</sup> When using the term classroom, the virtual/online classroom is included in it.

Sunshine School are going through exactly this process of experiencing, observing, reflecting and adapting.

By coming to the realisation that the challenges named in the previous chapter exist and searching for alternatives shows that they are adapting, without even knowing, the postmethod pedagogy in their lessons to a certain extent<sup>16</sup>.

That the teachers are adapting their expectations because they see the difficulties their students have when it comes to online learning as well as their willingness to optimise the learning outcome, can be seen as part of the third parameter possibility.

### **6.7 Further teaching**

The uncertainty of how long the online teaching will continue encourages the teacher's willingness to make the best out of this situation. As illustrated above, the teachers are eager to expand their lessons with additional material and work on different techniques to increase the student's motivation, interest and learning achievements.

To find an approach that motivates the students to participate to a greater extent it is unobtainable to stay persistent in observing and reflecting on their teaching to identify problems and find solutions. This process is described in the parameter particularity developed by Kumaravadivelu (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.544).

With particularity, the second parameter *practicality* arises. It intends for teachers to become reflective people that develop their own theories for the use within their classroom. That means that the English teachers at the Sunshine School should see themselves and should be seen by others as capable of practising what they find out and theorising about their practices.

The third pillar of Kumaravadivelu's post method methodology, possibility, is implemented and of great importance for the English teachers at the Sunshine School. They say that they are considering not only the level of English of their students, other abilities, and interests of the learners, but social circumstances as they are shifting their lessons around to ensure that every student can participate. When thinking of further teaching it is rather beneficial to look at the three parameters as a complete system that consists of the intertwined criteria (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.545).

The English teachers expressed the wish for tools to deepen the students' understanding of grammar and helpful websites to show to the students so that the teachers can develop their skills regarding new methods and approaches in online-teaching further. As they would save

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<sup>16</sup> The following subchapter is analysing the postmethod regarding the challenges and teaching in the future.

time searching for additional websites they could really concentrate on their didactical ongoing development.

To accomplish the goal of students' grammar comprehension, it is helpful to foster their language awareness. Language awareness activities facilitate "the development of advanced skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing", (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.175) therefore they support grammar learning and teaching. As language awareness promotes progress of awareness or conscientiousness-raising it is feasible that the learner's intuitive heuristics are activated. As a result the students feel enhanced in "their state of readiness to internalize the grammatical system of their L2" (cf. *ibid.* 2003).

Fostering language awareness is closely linked to activating intuitive heuristics. That means, by trying to uncover rules and patterns of linguistic systems, students and teachers can expand their language awareness and vice versa. Since language is rule-governed and systematic, it invites learners to discover linguistic systems by themselves. The key factor for a successful development of intuitive heuristics is a rich linguistic environment in the classroom created by the teacher.

Here, one can see that the desire to adapt to the situation and therefore individual classes goes hand in hand with the declarative view of situational understanding. Kumaravadivelu suggests that a pedagogy is only productive when its basis contains of a holistic interpretation of specific contexts (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.538). What this kind of pedagogy looks like is dependent on the specific context, hence the needs and circumstances of the students within a class.

Taking microstrategies and exploratory projects into account helps to see grammar as a dynamic system that has numerous dimensions. Concomitant with postmethod pedagogy this thesis does not seek to make suggestions about how and if the online teaching can be further improved but offers additional material that can be used to enhance the variety and understanding of English. Trying to meet the needs, wishes and suggestions of the English teachers, the attached eBook is based on several conversations, interviews, and consultations with the interviewed teachers. The following chapter provides explanations of the creation of the eBook that includes the layout and design, structure, choice of topics, choice of conceptual formations, choice of methods, and possible difficulties.

## **7. Discussion of eBook creation**

As one aim of this thesis is to overcome cultural barriers, the eBook is there to do its part as a bridge between cultures. In order to be adequate, effective and of help, the product needs to fit the local needs and circumstances. Thus, a close cooperation between local people and foreign

creators who become acquainted with the target culture, society and needs is inevitable (cf. Kim, Joeng, 2013, p.174). Kim and Joeng share the same point of view as Kumuravadivelu regarding the individuality and effectiveness of education and stated that

education is unable to set up universal standard across the world. External standards of donor countries that may accompany the aid are hard to generalize across the educational systems of individual recipient countries that are, in turn, restricted by their own histories and cultures. (Kim, Joeng, 2013, p.175f.)

The creators of educational material must be aware of their perspective of the world and should question their perception by means of the needs, values and circumstances of the target society. The attached eBook is created by the author of this thesis in cooperation with Cathy Lee, Bouthsaba Chouthathay, Grace S. Masangcay, and Tarani Castro. This book aims to deepen the understanding of the present simple and help students to use this tense correctly. The English teachers at the Sunshine School in Vientiane concluded that the eBook should encourage the students to talk and be confident in using the English language in the classroom. The teachers agreed on the point that there should be more interaction among the students and between the students and teachers. They believe that learning English should happen in a fun and effective way in which the students can engage and practise what they have learned to internalise the latter. The teachers expressed the wish for a teacher guide with examples, methods, and comments which they can try out, adapt, and improve for the need of their lessons. Due to limitations of time this cannot be realised in written form but in conversations orally. It should be mentioned that this eBook is rather seen as a source of inspiration and additional material for the online lessons concerning the Present Simple. It does not claim for integrity and the author is aware that it might need adaptations.

## **7.1 Layout and Design**

The layout has the role to foster the accessibility and understanding of the content and context of the book. To accomplish this goal, the layout and design should be held simple, clear, and appealing for the students. A familiar font allows the students to process the content more easily. As the Lao script is very different in its nature, probably the most difficult issue of learning English for Lao students is the Latin alphabet. It is not only the different sounds of the English phonics which are very hard to pronounce if they are not existent in the language(s) you are speaking but the very different script of Latin letters. This is aggravated by the fact that there are small and capital letters and block letters and cursive handwriting to distinguish from. The script of the whole book is written in block letters. Which might be easier for the students to copy, at least that is what one from the Western countries would think. Regarding the script of

the Lao language in comparison to the English language, one can perceive more similarities with the cursive handwriting of a letter than the block letters. Looking at the Lao script one could even say that the cursive handwriting might be easier to get used to for Lao children.

Comparing the two scripts, it is probably very hard for the students to identify the Latin letters and copy them. As they are used to a different typeface, the students' writing progress is more reminiscent of drawing the letters rather than writing them.

Even if they get the hang of it, they must learn that there is a small and a capital version of each letter and the students must be shown when to use which version. One could say that the rules in English for using capital letters are quite easy, but those children are not used to capital letters at all. On top of it, the actual writing of the letters requires a high motoric and sensible skill from the children, leaving alone the recognition and correct use of each letter.

As this eBook is conceptualized for secondary school students, they have had a few years of English and are used to the different script. The teachers also assured that their students are quite fit in writing and reading the Latin letters. Nevertheless, the script formats are held simple and clear to foster the fluency of reading.

Another point to consider is the use of images, drawings, and pictures. Working with pictures helps visual learners to make connections

between the read and heard content and the meaning of it by creating visual cues for subject matters. The use of it balances or anchors the page format.

Moreover, it is a useful tool when wanting to draw attention to a certain issue as it draws the eye automatically towards it. With this benefit comes the challenge of using the right number of pictures, drawings, and images as well as deliberately handling them. Hence, the right balance between text and picture is important to foster the success of learning.

In the example of Figure 2, the picture right on top of the page is the famous *Brandenburgertor* that is well known as one of Berlin most famous sights. The other picture on this page shows

GERMANY



**BERLIN**

**THE CAPITAL CITY OF GERMANY**

Berlin is the capital city of Germany since the 13th century with an interruption of 29 years during the separation of Germany in West and East from 1961 until the reunification in 1990. Berlin is also one of the 16 federal states and is situated in the northeast of Germany. It lays at the river, Spree, that flows into the Havel.

During World War II the capital city was the most heavily bombed city in history and was subdivided into four sectors by the Alliers after the end of the war. Now, Berlin is a world city of culture, media, science and politics. The city offers various restaurants, cafes, parks, lakes, museums, galleries, sporting events, concerts, and several historical landmarks.



Figure 2: the use of pictures to support the students understanding



the *Berlin wall* that separated East and West during the time of 1961 and 1989 that is described in the text.

On top of every page is a marker that guides the student's orientation as it shows them what chapter they are on.

## 7.2 Structure

The table of content at the beginning of the book facilitates transparency and clarity for the users of the eBook. Moreover, the first page of the eBook explains the handling and intention of the book. This is further supported by the symbols that assist the easy handling of this book. Take, for example the symbol of the pencil which means that the students have to write something down, the two people with the speech bubble mean that the next task is a communicative one and will take place in tandem work. Those symbols support the meaning of written instruction visually and make it easier for the students to comprehend and connect the symbolic level with the written level.

As rituals and recurrent appearances ensure security and a feelgood factor, the students' learning process is accompanied by Kham and Haimi, a Laotian boy and girl that are visualized through clipart pictures. They give tips, clues, and further tasks to foster the understanding of grammatical structures, the language and content.

The eBook consists of 33 pages containing of four chapters.

As already mentioned, the constituent chapters are marked with a keyword that is related to the topic on the top of each page to help the learners find their way around the sections of the book more easily.

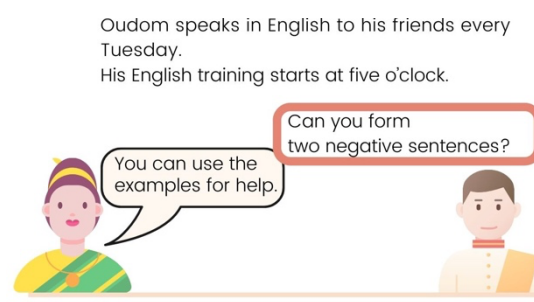


Figure 3: visualisation of Kham and Haimi

### 7.3 Grammar

Considering the macrostrategies of post-method methodology and the concern that deductive grammar teaching bears limitations especially when it comes to activate learners' intuitive heuristics, an inductive approach is chosen. Nevertheless, in respect to teaching methods in Laos, a deductive approach is also represented. This leaves the teacher and students to decide which approach fits their needs and it might differ from class to class or even learner to learner within one class.

The advantages of a deductive approach are that it carries explicit descriptions and instructions for rules of grammar that can be analysed to understand the linguistic system. It can also be used for explicit language prac-

GRAMMAR SECTION

### WORD ORDER

subject	predicate	object	place	time
I	help	my parents	in the kitchen	every day.
She	does not sing	for her friends	in public places	on the weekend.

### EXAMPLES

DRAW ATTENTION TO SOMEONE  
ARRIVING OR LEAVING

Bounmy leaves the room.  
Sengphet arrives at home.

Figure 4: deductive grammar task in eBook

GRAMMAR SECTION

### DICTOGLOSS - GRAMMAR TASK

EXPLORATORY TASK:

The following task is presented to you by your teacher.


 You will be asked to take notes, so make sure that you have a pencil and paper at hand to start writing after your teacher explained the task to you.

Figure 5: inductive grammar task in eBook

tice and error correction and might even help to figure out similarities and differences between the learners L1 and L2 (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.182ff.).

Figure 4 shows an example of how the Present Simple can be realised in a deductive way. It presents the grammar and its rules that the students learn and then apply.

In contrary to the more conservative method, the advantages of an inductive teaching approach are that it encourages teacher-learner interaction as well as learner-learner interaction that is needed for self-discovery. Inductive teaching provides learners with an opportunity to face grammatical structures or language expressions over and over again in contexts in which its

connection to language design may be inspected, and it's meaning inductively captured from its practise in differing situations. Hence, a more comprehensive and intuitive heuristic activated understanding of grammar can be achieved by applying inductive teaching (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.185f.).

Figure 5 shows the instruction of an inductive approach for grammar learning for the students. Figure 6 explains the task to the teachers as they are the ones to instruct their students in this specific exercise. This task fosters the inductive heuristic understanding of grammar and is an alternative to common methods.

#### 7.4 Choice of topics

As already declared in chapter two, the free time activities from Lao people look very different to the understanding of western extracurricular activities. To embed elements of the post method methodology it is important to incorporate aspects of the students' environment in the learning progress.

As coursebooks from other countries do not put any emphasis or very little on the culture of the country the English language is learned in, this eBook has the aspiration to be more sensitive towards cultures and wants to take the Lao cultures into account. In order to overcome cultural barriers not only the topics are selected dependent on the learners interests and cultures but also names, and illustrations are chosen to

GRAMMAR SECTION

## DICTOGLOSS - GRAMMAR TASK

**SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TASK:**

The goal of this task is to activate the students intuitive heuristics by letting them explore grammatical structures, forms and rules. Therefore, it is suggested that you take a short text that deals with the grammar topic that you want to discuss with a level that is either the level of your students or slightly above it.

Explain to the students exactly what you want them to do. Then you read out the text in normal pace for two times. The students need to listen and need to take notes as fast as many as they can.

Now, separate them into small groups in which they reconstruct the text with their notes. They are welcome to think aloud. They are allowed to talk about the content as well as grammatical features. At the end of the group work they need to have one final version of the text.

Make the original text visible for all of the students and ask them once again to compare and analyse their version with the original.

Ask each group to share their findings in terms of the message as well as grammatical features they got right.

Then ask about what they did not get right and what message they missed.

Open a class discussion in which you focus on the understanding of the message. After that, focus on the grammatical features and highlight what you need to highlight regarding their success or failure in noticing what they were supposed to notice.

At the end, ask the students what they have learned from the process of doing this kind of task. You can support them by asking guiding questions. They should find out if the task achieved to raise their language awareness and if it helped them to notice their difficulties.

Enjoy

Figure 6: suggestion from teachers guide for inductive grammar task

GERMANY

## YOUR QUESTIONS

ABOUT GERMANY



### WHAT IS THE NATIONAL FLOWER OF GERMANY?

The cornflower is the nearest to a national flower of Germany. Its height differs from 20 centimeters up to 100 centimeters. The petals can also be white, purple or pink. They can bloom from spring to autumn or the other way round.

**ORIGIN OF NAME**

As it grows at the edges of corn fields it is named cornflower

Figure 7: example of answer to a question from Lao students

fit the needs of the Lao students (cf. Dengler, 2017, p.65f.).

Hence, the topics of the eBook are chosen according to what the students are interested in and related to the country and its people. The teachers were asked to collect ideas for topics and this is how the selection of topics were predestined. Those selection contains Lao food, Lao animals, Lao activities, talking about oneself, explicit grammar, and what they wanted to know about Germany.



Figure 7 and 8 present two of the nine questions that were raised by secondary school children of the Sunshine School in Laos.

Figure 7 shows one of the questions Lao students raised when they were asked what they were interested to know about Germany. Figure 8 demonstrates a question of different nature. As part of the transcultural understanding is individuality and overcoming stereotypes this kind of question is answered by three German citizens and shows that being German is not the same for everybody. Each person recorded their answer so that the students can click on the specific photo and will listen to the vocal explanation.

Figure 8: another example of answer to a question from Lao students

### 7.5 Choice of exercises

“Competence in the foreign language is not achieved by instructing the children about the new language, but by doing tasks and activities in it” (Legutke et al., 2012, p.114).

When learning a new language, active communication is the most natural and very likely method, leading to success.

As there are not only communication activities but different types of conceptual formulations, the following is going to look at them in more detail.

First, I want to define the four most common kinds of conceptual formulations in course books.

### 7.5.1. Tasks

“Tasks can be defined as classroom activities [...but] not all activities that take place in a classroom will qualify as 'tasks'” (Legutke et al., 2012, p.33). According to Cameron’s concept of learner- and learning-centeredness good tasks are characterized by having coherence and unity for learners (topic, activity, and/or outcome), meaning and purpose for learners, and clear language learning goals. Furthermore, they should have a beginning and end as well as invite the students to get involved actively. Another important aspect of a good task is to encourage students to deal with challenging tasks without being afraid of making mistakes build up their confidence in active language learning without losing sight of their limited foreign language skills. The active, playful, and creative participation of the learners is an important criterion of tasks (cf. Legutke et al., 2012, p.33).

### 7.5.2 Drills

#### Drills

are more or less mechanical exercises in which the students practise the sounds or grammar of the language, without having to think much, until (in theory) the language becomes automatic. A drill helps the learner to master some of the basic forms of the language with a reasonable degree of accuracy, before using it to communicate. The most obvious example of a drill is simple repetition (Grant, 1992, p.35).

### 7.5.3 Exercises

The Cambridge Dictionary defines **Exercises** as “an action or actions intended to improve something or make something happen“ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2014). Concerning course-books, it says that it’s “a short piece of written work that you do to practise something you are learning“ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2014).

### 7.5.4 Activities

Nunan defines **Activities** as something “which is in some way derived from the input and which sets out what the learners are to do concerning the input” (Legutke et al., 2012, p.35).

A subcategory of this term is communicative activities. They are essential for new language learners and follow the principle of 'learning to communicate by communicating'. Those activities focus on the actual use of a language which means fluency is more important than accuracy. The role of the teacher during such activities differs from the one they take within the drills; the teacher is facilitating the communication of the students by holding back even though there will be students making mistakes. The important point is that the children will gain confidence and competence in using the language independently (cf. Grant, 1992, p.37).

As this eBook seeks to fit the needs of preferably all students it offers a range of different conceptual formulations. Further, as already mentioned deductive as well as inductive approaches for grammar acquisition are chosen. That increases the chance of a comprehensive and most students reaching understanding and offers variety and motivation.

Figure 9 demonstrates an exercise that was designed with the Belgium *Bookwidgets interactive learning* tool.

This particular exercise is composed of words that need to be put in the correct order to form a proper English sentence. It is constructed to practise the word order of sentences in the present simple that were introduced before. If the students have difficulties, they can click on the button *show hint* and will get a tip.

## 7.6 Possible difficulties

Even though the books of primary schools cover the learning and writing of the Latin letters of English, one must keep in mind that the Latin script is very different from the Lao. Hence, it is important to be aware of the difficulties that can still occur when it comes to writing and reading English texts. To foster the process of understanding the written texts, on most pages, there is a button on which the students can click to listen to the text while reading it. It can also help if they just want to make sure how to pronounce a certain word. They can pause the recording at any time and listen to it over and over again.

To increase the probability of high-quality teaching and successful learning of grammar, it is essential that the coursebook supports

a clear framework and a wide range of methodological options that cater for different learner types and profiles, present effective and innovative approaches to grammar instruction, and thus facilitate the development of foreign language proficiency (Summer, 2011, p.87).

To sum up, the author and partners of the eBook intended to offer a comprehensive and multifarious additional material for the English teachers at the Sunshine School in Laos. It is adapted for the needs of the Lao students that were discussed with the teachers before and during the process. The Principles of Explanatory Practise from Allwright as well as the postmethod pedagogy from Kumaravadivelu are always considered during the creation of the eBook.

### QUESTION 1

Put the words in the right order.



Show hint

Figure 9: example of an exercise

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to give an insight of the current online English lessons of the Sunshine School in Laos that take place at home. Based on a qualitative analysis of data gathered by interviews with samples of English teachers from the school named above, it can be concluded that those lessons are based on an English textbook designed in Great Britain and that the teachers are constantly enriching the content with additional material. The results indicate that individuality and the students learning outcome build the centre of the lessons.

Attempting a rethinking of English teaching practises towards a decolonised approach that empowers both, students and teachers to self-autonomy, the thesis delved into the postmethod pedagogy developed by Prof. Dr. B. Kumaravadivelu. With its aim of promoting an individual and culture-related meaning-centred learning it highlights new challenges and aspirations that teachers, and learners are faced with. The postmethod pedagogy observes the concept of methods in a critical way and equips teachers with guiding frameworks that they can impart in their context-specific lesson plan that leaves space for spontaneous utterances from students as part of their learning processes. This means that teachers as well as learners must learn to let go of plans that make learners fit into methods and approaches that are composed for masses and not individual classrooms.

To make the postmethod method more tangible the thesis employed parts of the theory on the methodology of qualitative research as well as on the discussion of interview results. This includes a brief analysis of the online class situation in relation to the postmethod method as well as suggestions on how the English teachers could design their lessons to foster teacher and learner independency and regard their students as active participants to an even greater extend. In an effort to decolonise one's lessons, it is of great importance to be aware that it is a progress that requires time and endurance as it claims continuous planning, reflection, evaluation and adaptation of teaching practises and classroom circumstances.

The creation of an eBook as additional material for the online English lessons for secondary school at the Sunshine School in Laos is a pilot experiment in close partnership with English teachers at the school that needs to be tested, adapted, and might be further developed. The intention of a bridge building element between Lao and German cultures is based on a trans-cultural understanding between those two cultures. It might be reasonable to emphasise that neither the thesis nor the eBook claim to have overcome cultural differences completely. It should rather be seen as attempt and encouragement that – in consideration of a close

partnership and other culture-sensitive aspects – a valuable product that promotes intercultural competence and learning can be developed.

The cooperation between the Lao teachers and the author of this thesis as tandem conceptualising went beyond the exchange of information for the eBook but resulted in communication via zoom and WhatsApp messages also about private topics in a more familiar relationship.

The process of developing a product that ought to overcome cultural barriers helped the author to see the bigger picture and reflect on her own perceptions, ways of thinking and talking, as well as trying to see things from another perspective. She also concluded that when only staying in one's familiar surroundings the way of changing one's perspective is more difficult as one can only read about other surroundings in books and the internet. Therefore, talking to people of the target language makes the change of perception easier.

Based on the conclusions, it is of great interest to document the practise of the eBook in the English lessons of the Sunshine School. During the process of using it, the need of changes, adaptations, and extensions might occur and should be pursued.

To better understand the implications of these results and the postmethod pedagogy, future studies could address pedagogues to inform themselves about different possibilities of methods and approaches, to try them out, and to exchange their findings with colleagues in order to develop an all-embracing pedagogy.

Endurance of further cooperation and exchange between Lao and German educators is needed to determine the relationship and transcultural understanding of Lao and German cultures that can be extended to other cultures from different countries.

To revisit the quote by Nelson Mandela from the beginning of the thesis and in consideration of the findings of the interviews, the postmethod method, and process of creating the eBook, it can be registered that (language-) education must be composed of certain criteria to meet the requirements of being able to change the world. Self-reflection on behalf of the teacher regarding her or his teaching methods, choice of material, and attitude towards fostering students' autonomy is required. If teachers have the aspiration to make a difference by adapting one's lessons to the needs of their students and to educate them to become culturally competent, self-reflective, agency, and autonomous human beings, education contributes to a change of perspective, empathy, and autonomous thinking. Hence, to say it in Mandela's words: "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world".



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## Appendix

### Interview guide

1. Greeting
2. Acknowledement for participating
3. Explanation about the course of action
4. Guarantee for anonymity and protection of data privacy
5. Giving the possibility of call back
6. Asking about demographic data

*Start the recording*

Guiding question/ Invitation to talk	Checklist	Presise call back	Maintenance of flow
<p><b><u>General</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you please tell me something about current online schooling?</li> </ul>	<p>Background information of duration of online teaching, experience, help,and preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For how long is this learning at home already going on?</li> <li>- Did you have time to prepare yourself and the students for it?</li> <li>- Did the government offer any help? Are there any guidelines for the new</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> </ul>

		<p>situation or suggestions?</p> <p>Tutorials for e-learning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you do anything like it before?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Situation at home</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you please demonstrate what you do in an English online lesson?</li> </ul>	<p>Overview of the teaching situation at home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How often do they have English at the moment?</li> <li>- What topics are they learning about?</li> <li>- Do you have online meetings?</li> <li>- Do you have an example of an exercise the students are doing?</li> <li>- Do the students always work on their own?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> <li>- Could you please refer to examples?</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Material and methods</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does the material look like that the students get?</li> </ul>	<p>Kind of material/ platforms/mobile devices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of material do they get?</li> <li>- What kind of mobile device do they use?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you create lessons? Is it online via live chat or do you give them worksheets/books, songs, videos or other material?</li> <li>- Do you use certain methods?</li> <li>- Do they all have access to wifi?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you please refer to examples?</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Progress</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you keep in touch with the students?</li> </ul>	<p>Is the progress rated somehow? If so, how?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you talk about what they learned? How?</li> <li>- How do you get an overview about what they learn?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> <li>- Could you please refer to examples?</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Reflection</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you feel about the online teaching - situation?</li> </ul>	<p>Impressions and thoughts about online situation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think about the learning at home situation?</li> <li>- What do you like about it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> <li>- Could you please refer to examples for both, what</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there anything that can be improved?</li> <li>- Would you like any help?</li> <li>- What should the help look like?</li> </ul>	<p>you like and don't you like?</p>
<p><b><u>Conclusion 1</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there anything else you would like to add?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-verbal maintenance</li> <li>- Could you tell me more about ...?</li> <li>- Could you please refer to examples?</li> </ul>

7. General Conclusion

*Stopp the recording*

8. Acknowledement for participating

9. Goodbye

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