

Chapter 4

The Context of the Study

This chapter provides general background information of the villages regarding geography, economy, and social structure and culture and gives a brief description of each village. It also presents an overview of the structures of both classes where observations were conducted.

4.1 Overview of Research Sites

There are altogether 19 villages included in this research. Out of 19 villages 10 villages are located in Pathein Township, the main area where the researcher conducted the study. The other nine villages are in different townships: five of them are located adjacent to Pathein Township four of them in a township to the north of Pathein Township.

4.1.1 General background information of the villages

4.1.1.1 Geographical location

All villages are located to the east of Pathein Town. There are also Burmese villages among the Sgaw villages but they do not have much contact with each other. It takes 30-45 minutes by motorcycle to reach the villages from the town of Pathein.

4.1.1.2 Economy

The economy of the villages relies heavily on agriculture. However the east part of Pathein is not as fertile as the delta area. Almost all of the villagers are farmers, raising paddy rice, vegetables, and fruits. They work on the farm the whole day taking their children who have not started school to the fields with them. Sometimes the elder siblings who do not go to school anymore take care of their younger siblings or the younger siblings are taken to the school by school-age siblings. There is no electricity in the villages. They use candles or battery power at night. In some villages, a house manages to distribute the electricity by running a generator to the

whole village. Each house can use one 2 foot fluorescent tube from 6pm-9pm and it cost 2,000-2,500 kyats per month. Not all the houses can afford to use it. Both parents earn their daily wage by working in the farm the whole day so that they can support the family. Some live in a little hut in the paddy field with their children. In every village there is a church.

4.1.1.3 Education

Some children, after completing Grade 6, do not go on to middle school which is in another village but they help their parents in the farm. Most of the parents passed Grade 5. Every village has morning chapel for the children. The children have to study Bible and written Sgaw after the service. However sometimes they do not have enough time to study Sgaw.

4.1.1.4 Sociolinguistic background

In the regions, where the research was conducted, Sgaw people are very dominant. The villages are composed of only Sgaw people who are Christians. The neighboring villages are either Sgaw or Burmese villages but the villagers do not have much contact with the neighboring Burmese villages. Only the adults, who go to the town back and forth for their trade, can speak Burmese fluently. The older people and the children know very few Burmese words and can only speak Sgaw. There are some older people who have never been to the town of Pathein.

4.1.2 Organizations

There are several local or international non-government organizations (NGOs) that take part in community development for the villages in partnership with the villages. The main organizations involved in education programs are Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) under Pathein-Myaungmya Association (PMA) and Pestalozzi Children Foundation (PCF).

ECCD classes have been provided by PMA since 2000 in each village. ECCD classes gain technical support from Yinthway Foundation, a local NGO founded in 1999. The teachers lead the class according to the teaching plan provided in their teacher training. The teachers use Sgaw to teach or tell the stories. When they teach vocabulary they show the pictures of the words and say it in Burmese and English with a little explanation. The children repeat after the teacher and memorize the words in three languages at the same time. Most of the songs and poems the

children have to learn are also in three languages. The children have to learn to write the alphabet just at the end of the second year of the class. Each school has a material kit provided by UNICEF. The books are in Burmese. There are also seven learning corners. The teachers, most of whom are Bible School graduates, are appointed by PMA's Christian Education department and trained to be preschool teachers.

There is also a class called morning chapel before the regular school time where the children have to learn the Sgaw Bible, Sgaw songs and Sgaw primer. Learners from Grades 1-4 are all combined in one room for the chapel program and taught by one teacher. This chapel program is lead by a Bible School graduate. In some cases these graduates also work as teachers in the primary school. In some villages where the church is close to the school, the chapel time is held in the church. In some villages it is held in the primary school.

PCF helps primary schools in the ethnic minority communities (in these areas) through training and supporting teachers and encouraging more parental involvement in schools. PCF started working with PMA in 2004. Their project aims to provide teacher training and the salaries for two teachers in each school. They support 32 villages under PMA. They help the teachers to be able to use the resources that can easily be found in the community as their teaching aids. They use the existing curriculum organized by Myanmar Education Ministry and they just add supplemental poems, songs, pictures, and classroom activities to it. In the teacher training the teachers are equipped to teach from kindergarten to fourth standard so they can teach any class in primary school.

Table 1 shows the schools and education programs in each village. Each village and school is given a number and is labeled according to the mother tongue of the Grade 3 teacher. So, for example, the Grade 3 teacher in school B01 is a mother-tongue Burmese speaker whereas the mother tongue of the teacher in S04 is Sgaw.

Table 1 Schools and other education programs in the villages

Village	ECCD	Morning Chapel	PCF	School
B01	√	√	√	primary
B02	√	√	√	middle
B03	√	√	√	middle
S04	√	√	√	primary
B05	√	√	√	primary
S06	√	√	x	primary
B07	√	√	x	middle
S08	√	√	√	primary
B09	√	√	x	primary
S10	√	√	√	primary
S11	√	√	√	primary
S12	√	√	√	middle
B13	√	√	√	primary
S14	√	√	x	high
S15	√	√	√	primary
S16	√	√	√	primary
S17	√	√	√	primary
S18	√	√	√	primary
B19	√	√	√	primary

4.2 Description of Each Village

This section gives a brief description of each village.

There is a primary school and ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There is no electricity in the village. They use the gasoline generators or candles at night time. They use a large 12V battery to watch videos once a week. There are two house shops; one sells some snacks for the children near the school and the other sells snacks and other things for daily use. They don't usually buy the food outside but they make their meals from their farm produce. They also gather other edible plants that can be found everywhere around the village and which are very delicious and good for health. There are two households which own televisions. Most houses have pet dogs.

In rainy season, the whole village and the rice fields around the village are flooded. There were leeches in the water. I had to put on rubber boots to walk to the school. The children go to school by boat if the flood water is high enough to use boats. If not, they walk along the muddy streets frequently wading through the small lakes to the school. Some walk on the long and thin, wet and slippery bamboo bridges with a thin bamboo railing. Some parents took their children to school by boat. One father carried his daughter to school on his shoulders. When the paddy fields are flooded and unable to be farmed, fishing is the main work to earn money. They throw fishing nets or they set those all night or day to catch a huge amount of fish. Some youths who have a motorcycle can run the taxi. The villagers use that creek for fishing and for travelling by rowboat to different villages especially in rainy season. It is only in summer that people can take a motorcycle. They eat rice which they harvested in summer time.

Village: B02

The village is located in Pathein Township. It takes an hour by motorcycle to reach the village. The road was repaired by the time I went. From the main road one goes through a Burmese village and a new Sgaw village (actually a new branch of B02) then across a long narrow footbridge and a 5 minute walk along a path. In rainy season, the road is muddy and very sticky and slippery so it will take 10 minutes to walk to the village instead of 5 minutes. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church as well as a primary school and ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 500 houses in the village. The school is just besides the church and there are rice fields behind them. There is a building for giving nutritious food to young children, pregnant women, and mothers with very babies under 6-months. They provide food three times a day and young children and the mothers come to the building and have food together.

Most households raise some animals like chickens, pigs, ducks, and geese and some have cows. Some of young adults go out to the cities or other countries to earn money to support their family. The Burmese vendors come through the village on their way to other villages and the villagers buy food from them. There is no public electricity in the village. One house takes responsibility to distribute the electricity to other houses. The generator is sponsored by World Vision. Each household has to pay 2,000 kyats per month. People plant paddy rice, vegetables, and other crops, especially corn. In rainy season they fish.

Village: B03

The village is located in Pathein Township. It takes an hour to get there from Pathein town. From the main road it takes 10 min to get the village, going through a Burmese village. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school, and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There is no electricity in the village.

Village: S04

The village is located in Pathein Township. After passing through a Sgaw village on the road side and then rice fields and a Burmese village you arrive at the village. It takes an hour to get there from the town. The village is situated in an area with small hills and plains. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church in the centre of the village, a primary school, and a pre-school ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There are two big house shops. There is a small garden in front of the school. The ECCD class is held beside the church. There is a house for the school principal provided by the villagers. According to the principal the villagers sometimes suffer from malaria. There is no electricity in the village. A few families live in huts out in their fields. Sometimes the learners who live in those huts are late for school. There are 100 children in the school. There are 4 families who own the rice fields and they can pay more money when the village needs something for the whole villages when other families can pay only a small amount of money. There are old people who cannot understand Burmese at all. Some adults have never been to the town.

Village: B05

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning

chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There is no electricity in the village.

Village: S06

The village is located in the south part of Ayeyarwady Division. There are many branches of the Ayeyarwady River which flow through the villages in this area, and most are only accessible by boat. You have to take a ship for 4 hours from Pathein to a town and a motorboat from the town to the villages for a few hours depending on the situation of the villages. We can also take a motorboat directly to the villages. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in the village. Fishing, planting paddy rice are the major types of work to earn money for their living.

Village: B07

The village is located in Pathein Township. It just takes 30 minutes to get there from the town. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in the village. A Burmese village is located just beside this village. Only a long street divides the two villages. There are some Burmese learners in the school. This school also has a middle school.

Village: S08

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There is no electricity in the village.

Village: B09

The village is located in the south part of Ayeyarwady Division. There are many branches of the Ayeyarwady River flowing through the villages in this area, and most are only accessible by boat. You have to take a ship for 4 hours from Pathein to a town and a motorboat from the town to the villages for a few hours depending on the situation of the villages. We can also take a motorboat directly to the villages. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church. There is a primary school and ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 300 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in

the village. The village is situated in the form of circle on the plain. There is no flooding here even in the rainy season. The main job to earn their living is making thatched roofing out of nipa and they plant and harvest a lot of nipa.

Village: S10

The village is located in the south part of Ayeyarwady Division. There are many branches of the Ayeyarwady River flowing through the villages in this area, and most are only accessible by boat. You have to take a ship for 4 hours from Pathein to a town and a motorboat from the town to the villages for a few hours depending on the situation of the villages. We can also take a motorboat directly to the villages. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 400 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in the village.

Village: S11

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in the village.

Village: S12

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are about 200 houses in the village. There are is no electricity in the village. It is far from the main road. It takes one and half hours to get there from the town of Pathein. We need to pass one Burmese village and two Sgaw villages to get there. The school is built of wood.

Village: B13

This village is in Pathein Township. The majority of the villagers are Sgaw Christians. A few Burmese speakers live in the village. There is a church and a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There are is no electricity in the village.

Village: S14

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There is no electricity in the village.

Village: S15

The village is located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There is also a morning chapel for the children to learn Bible and Sgaw. There is no electricity in the village.

Village: S16

The village is located in the south part of Ayeyarwady division. There are many branches of the Ayeyarwady River which flow through the villages in this area, and most are only accessible by boat. We can also take a motorboat directly to the villages. We can also take a motorboat directly to the villages. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class. There are about 400 houses in the village. There is no electricity in the village. The school principal is Sgaw. There are a few families with mix marriages where one spouse is Sgaw and the other is Chinese, Indian, or Pwo Karen. The spouses from other ethnic groups have all learned to speak Sgaw.

Villages: S17, S18, and B19

These villages are located in Pathein Township. All the villagers are Sgaw Christians. There is a church, a primary school and an ECCD class, and a morning chapel in each village. There is no electricity in the villages.

4.3 Case Study Classes

This section describes the two case study Grade 3 classes, in which the researcher did observations and the main source of qualitative data for this study. The description of these two classes is divided into five subsections: schools; classrooms; Grade 3 learners; class teachers; language use in class 1 (Burmese-speaking teacher); language in class 2 (Sgaw-speaking teacher).

4.3.1 Schools

The schools are one story buildings built of brick, the floor and the wall are concrete and the roof is zinc. There are no walls between the classrooms. If one class is noisy reading the lessons out loud, the other ones sometimes have to go out and have a class outside the school. Sometimes the heavy rain makes loud noise on the roof and the learners could not hear each other even though they sit close together and speak loudly. During the lunch break, children play in the classrooms after having lunch since the classrooms are the only place to play.

Schools 1 and 2 are primary schools which include from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The children from the schools move on to the middle school in another village or they stop their education after primary school. The two villages are supported financially by World Vision. The principal in class 1 is a Burmese and she also teaches the Grade 3 class. The principal in class 2 is a Sgaw-speaking teacher who also teaches Grade 1. The classroom teachers teach all subjects. The classes start at 9am and finish at 4pm with an hour lunch break at 12 noon.

4.3.2 Classrooms

Normally, the physical layout of both classrooms was uniform with long desks and benches. There were altogether three or four rows, two desks in a row divided by an aisle. The learners sat in rows facing their teacher. The teacher of the observed class in class 1 usually asked the learners to move the desks aside. She positioned herself sitting in the middle of the circle of the learners who like to sit on the concrete floor while she explained the lessons. Therefore the teacher and the learners could hear each other as the classrooms do not have the walls to partition and block the noise from other classes. The teacher of the observed class in class 2 normally stood in front of the class and sometimes walked through the aisle or around the classroom when she explained the lessons. Though some large moveable board partitions were provided to separate the classrooms the noise carries easily, so the teachers need to speak in a loud voice. The teachers in both schools used blackboards and chalks. The learners use small slates to work on their exercises and use notebooks for homework or lessons notes.

4.3.3 Grade 3 learners

The classroom observations were carried out in two Grade 3 classrooms. When these learners were in Grades 1 and 2, they learned the curriculum subjects with Sgaw-speaking teachers who use Sgaw to explain the lessons. Their main exposure to the new language, Burmese was through the lessons printed in the text books. The learners' primary oral language is only Sgaw, although they had all attended ECCD classes in which they learned songs in Sgaw, Burmese, and English. Since Grade 1 they have attended chapel each morning for learning the Sgaw Bible and the Sgaw alphabet and literacy. In Grade 3, the learners from class 1 were taught the lessons by a Burmese-speaking teacher who can only speak Burmese whereas the learners from class 2 were taught by a Sgaw-speaking teacher who mostly uses Sgaw in teaching. Further information on language use in the two classes will be described in

section 4.3.6 and 4.3.7. There were 23 learners in class 1 class and 24 in class 2 class, which is slightly above the average class size for the other classes in this study (mean = 20.6; median = 23; mode = 24). The ages of the learners ranged from 8 to 10. All of them were from the local village. Most of the children start their schooling at the age of 5, but some parents send their children to school at age 6 or 7 because they thought that their children are still too young to go to school at the age of 5.

4.3.4 Class teachers

The teacher who was teaching in class 1 is a Burmese-speaking teacher. She lives in a Burmese village which is three miles from village 1. She is a university graduate. Previously she was a teacher at a primary school in a Burmese village for three years. She had been working in class 1 as a principal and teacher for four years. She had not received any training from PCF.

The teacher who was teaching in class 2 is a Sgaw-speaking teacher. She is currently a university student taking a major in history by distance education. She is a village community teacher (VCT). The VCTs have been trained by PCF to be teachers in primary school. She had been teaching in this village for four years.

4.3.5 Subjects

Basically, in both of the observed classes, the teachers teach the subjects with the same kind of teaching style. The language used in the textbooks for each subject is Burmese except for in the English subject. The teachers have a teaching plan to teach each topic in the Burmese language subject for five periods in a week. The teaching plan could be divided into three main parts: 1) introducing the topic and its content, 2) reading the text, and 3) practice exercises in the lessons. In every part, the teacher helped the learners gain more understanding of the topic. Every time the teachers did those parts, they provided the learners with an opportunity to talk about the topic relating to their own experiences. At least four lessons in every subject are supposed to be taught in a week. There is a teachers' guide developed by Education Ministry only for the Science subject.

4.3.6 Language use in the observed classes

The national language, Burmese is the official language to use in the class. Sgaw-speaking teachers use the Burmese curriculum but use Sgaw orally to explain in

words the learners can understand. This section describes the use of languages by the teachers and the learners in the observed classes in class 1 and 2.

4.3.6.1 Language use in the observed class in class 1

The entire curricula are organized in Burmese. All the textbooks of the subjects are in Burmese except the English subject. For the class taught by the Burmese-speaking teacher who uses only Burmese, the lessons are taught in Burmese only. The children never use Burmese at home, in fact they do not have regular access to it outside school. Sgaw, the children's home language, is the only one language they use in their daily life. There is a big difference between the languages that children speak at home and the language used in the classroom. The teacher does not speak the language that the children use. The topics of the Burmese, Mathematics, and the General Science lessons are explained only in Burmese.

4.3.6.2 Language use in the observed class in class 2

The Sgaw teachers themselves feel more comfortable to use Sgaw than to use Burmese with the children. First the teacher discussed a topic of the lesson in Sgaw. Later, the teacher introduces the terms from the text in Burmese with explanation in Sgaw. After that, the teacher confirms the meaning of the Burmese words again in Sgaw. Then the teacher leads, reading the whole text line by line with explanation in Sgaw. After reading the text, the teacher asks the learners plenty of questions to check that they understand. The teacher is supposed to use Burmese as she was instructed by the senior teacher. However, every time the teacher uses Burmese she repeats the words in Sgaw. The Sgaw teacher always has to use Sgaw to be able to successfully teach and communicate with the children.