Video-stimulated recall in cross-cultural research in education: A case study in Vietnam
Abstract: This paper examines incorporating video-stimulated recall (VSR) as a data collection technique in cross-cultural research. With VSR, participants are invited to watch video-recordings of particular events that they are involved in; they then recall their thoughts in relation to their observations of their behaviour in relation the event. The research draws on a larger PhD project completed at an Australian university that explored Vietnamese lecturers’ beliefs about learner autonomy. In cross-cultural research using the VSR technique provided significant challenges including time constraints of participants, misunderstandings of the VSR protocol and the possibility of participants’ losing face when reflecting on their teaching episodes. Adaptations to the VSR technique were required to meet the cultural challenges specific to this population, indicating a need for flexibility and awareness of the cultural context for research.

Key words: video-stimulated recall, cross-cultural research, Vietnamese context

Introduction

The interest in global education has resulted in a growing area of cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural research can be described as a means to explore patterns of beliefs and behaviours across cultures (Ember and Ember 2001). The current paper comes from a PhD study completed at an Australian university using video-stimulated recall (VSR) as a data collection technique to explore university lecturer’s beliefs about learner autonomy in Vietnamese classrooms. Learner autonomy is defined in the current research as learners’ willingness and ability to take responsibility, to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate their learning with tasks that are constructed in negotiation with and support from the lecturer (Nguyen, Tangen, and Beutel 2014). The research paper explores considerations for utilising VSR in cross-cultural research with particular reference to conducting Australian research in Vietnam. Liamputtong (2010) and McDonald (2000) suggested that researchers engaged in cross-cultural research need to have some cultural knowledge of the population being researched gain some understanding of key values, needs and culturally appropriate communication strategies in order to gain the trust and respect of the population being researched as without such trust, the research is likely to face serious ethical dilemmas. Walther (2014) identified the possibility of a power-distance between Western research techniques and local knowledge and understanding of research where research participants may adopt a view that the researcher is a social superior. It should be noted that Walther’s study included this power struggle not only between Western researchers and Asian participants but also with Australian participants unwilling to approach people in authority positions to gain further understanding of what they should do. This observation
highlights the need to understand local contextual knowledge, behaviour and attitudes. Tobin and Hsueh (2007) suggested that researchers must have a clear intent for conducting video research with some understanding of how the video narratives convey meaning for the participants, for the researcher and for the intended audience. In their research, Tobin and Hsueh allowed participants to share in the editing of teaching sequences so that the video narrative of their classroom interactions conveyed their intent for teaching and learning. Tayeb (2001) suggested a need for researchers to consider their own personal bias in relation to the research and to fully disclose their position to counter such bias to allow the voices of participants to be fully heard. In relation to the current research, the first author is Vietnamese, and taught English in Vietnam for nearly ten years. She undertook a PhD in Australia to explore the concept of learner autonomy in response to a desire to stimulate students’ interest in English, foster their independent learning through peer-teaching and in response to new government directives. Today, it is required in Vietnam that education and training must not only equip students with new scientific and cultural knowledge but also develop their reasoning, creative abilities and team work skills (Pham 2008). These requirements have pushed Vietnamese educational authorities to change their perceptions about teaching and learning philosophies. These new perceptions suggest that the traditional teaching and learning approach, with its emphasis on individual achievement and transmission of information has become inadequate in supporting the development of students’ thinking and learning skills in today’s global society (Dang 2010). Therefore, the importance of learner autonomy has been acknowledged in an educational policy: 43/2007/QD-BGDDT (Moet 2007) issued by the Vietnamese government. The aim of this policy is to develop more autonomous learning with more active and responsible student with a focus on developing lifelong and autonomous learners. According to this new policy, all universities and institutions must adapt their syllabus and teaching and learning processes to a central accreditation-based system, which includes the development of learner autonomy. It follows then that teachers must change their pedagogy to meet the expectations of these new requirements. How teachers perceived the issue of learner autonomy, a largely ‘Western’ concept, and applied it in their instructional practices remained very unclear and, therefore, became the focus for the current cross-cultural research.

McDonald (2000) suggested that researchers need to consider the impact of their own cultural origin in order to address how the impact of their value system perceptions may affect their interpretations of the data. In a similar vein, Sullivan and Cottone (2010) argued
that cross-cultural research should be conducted within the studied culture, and targeted to a specific group within that culture rather than taking a random, convenience sampling which would not capture the nuances of the population being researched. In other words, no population is culturally homogenous; therefore, research needs to be localised and the results of the research need to represent this population and not be globalised to a region or country. This approach is particularly important for international Higher Degree Research (HDR) students completing their degrees in one country while conducting their data collection in their home countries. Honan et al. (2013) described this tension between institutional expectation and the cultural expectations of the population being researched. Their research described how international HDR students completing their degrees in Australia must abide by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (NHMRC 2009) which provides guidelines for research. These are the standards and expectations for conducting ethical research, adhered to by Australian universities. However, when the HDR student returns home to collect data, there may well be a tension between the NHMRC guidelines and local standards. Indeed, imposing the university standards on a local population may require the population to respond in an unnatural way in the research. The HDR student in this paper (the first author) was challenged with the quandary of how to straddle this divide to produce ethical, rigorous research to satisfy her PhD requirements while also using culturally a sensitive research method, which in the current research was the technique of video-stimulated recall.

**Video-stimulated recall (VSR)**

Previous literature has explored the methodological issues in cross-cultural research such as translating qualitative data (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014); translating questionnaires (Thomas 2007), ethical concerns (Honan et al. 2013; Leong and Lyons 2010), and the researcher’s role as an insider or outsider in cultural research contexts (Milligan 2014). Researchers have recognised video-stimulated recall as a valuable technique for exploring teachers’ perceptions, beliefs in decision-making, especially for capturing teacher thought in the classroom (Dempsey 2010; Schmid 2011) and have reported on this technique in cross-cultural research (Li, Remedios, and Clarke 2014; Stevenson 2014).

Since Bloom (1953) first described stimulated recall as a research technique in psychology, it has also been used extensively in teaching and learning research typically to explore teachers’ cognitive processes while reflecting on their teaching following a teaching
episode (Calderhead 1981; Dempsey 2010; Macrland 1984; Rowe 2009; Theobald 2012). While Bloom used audio recordings in his original study, video recordings are now commonly used in research (Lyle 2003; Schmid 2011). Video-stimulated recall (VSR) then is a research technique in which participants view video-recordings of themselves participating in a particular event, e.g. a lesson (Theobald 2012). The video acts as a prompt to help individuals recall their thoughts in relation to their observed actions as much as possible as they occurred during the event observed (Dempsey 2010; Theobald 2012). Video technology provides a form of scaffolding that allows for self-analysis of observed behaviours by providing a graphic stimulus for individuals to measure what they perceived they did to what they observe themselves doing.

Video-simulated recall has been used in a variety of ways. For example, VSR has been used to explore the instructional and organisational practices of elementary school teachers and the beliefs that guide their practices in their classrooms (Hoffman 2003). VSR techniques have also been used for scaffolding student-teachers’ developing practices (Kitsantas and Talleyrand 2005; Rich and Hannafin 2009) and to support classroom teachers’ professional development and teaching practices (Schmid 2011; Stough 2001; Tondeur et al. 2013). For example, Stough (2001) investigated whether VSR could facilitate the reflective thoughts of special education student-teachers in real-world contexts. In this study, Stough compared the effectiveness of VSR on two groups. The intervention group received additional training that would assist them to reflect on classroom interactions or supervision consultations while on school experience placements whereas the control group did not; both groups however engaged in VSR sessions. Stough (2001) found that student-teachers from both groups became comfortable with the VSR technique but those from the intervention group became more quickly familiar and comfortable with the technique, they seldom relied on prompts from the researchers for recall when observing themselves on video, and they readily and prolifically expressed their thoughts concerning the targeted teaching sequences.

While there are benefits to using VSR as a research technique, there are some limitations that need to be considered. Previous research, for example, Gass and Mackey (2000) posited that one cannot assume that research participants’ can articulate their internal processes of an event as these behaviours are observed after the fact. That is, there is a distance of time and place between when the observer recalls their thoughts about their behaviours and the time and place of the actual event. Further, Gass and Mackey suggest that individuals, in their recall, may very well create explanations of their actions whether or not these can be justified.
rather than engage in deep reflection on their actions. Lyle (2003) concurs that an individual may, in fact, be reacting to or describing their feelings to what they currently see or hear instead of recalling the thoughts or feelings they had at the time of an actual episode or interaction. Another concern is whether tacit knowledge can be verbalised (Calderhead 1981). Yinger (1986) posited that the behaviour of effective teachers tends to be smooth and quick. In this, teachers’ behaviour may be automatic and thus difficult to access and explain at a conscious level, particularly after the event. Therefore, it is critical for researchers who would like to incorporate VSR in their research to be aware of how to use this technique in a way that not only best suits their research but also suits the population being researched. The cultural behaviours in relation to using video recordings as a form of recall needs to be a paramount consideration.

**Cultural values in Vietnamese society**

Predominantly, the cultural values of East Asian people have been influenced by Confucian philosophy which assumes that human being exists in relationship to others (Cui 2015; Yum 1988). “Vietnam … the only country in Southeast Asia to be influenced more by China…also exhibits the strong emphasis on social relationships and devotion to the paterfamilias which are the essence of Confucian doctrine” (Yum 1988, 376). Thus, Vietnamese people’ response to other people always depends on the nature of a specific relationship with these people. For example, a student can say “Hi” or “Hello” to greet his friends but (s)he should not use it to greet his/her teacher. Instead, (s)he is expected to say “Good morning” or “Good afternoon” to show their respect. Otherwise, the student can be considered as rude or disrespectful.

A specific cultural concern of Asian participants is the notion of saving ‘face’. Face here refers to self-image and feelings (Ho and Crookall 1995; Oetzel et al. 2001; Wu 2009). The concept of “face” is recognised in all societies, but it assumes a critical value in Chinese culture (Cui 2015) and Vietnamese culture (Nguyen, Tangen, and Beutel 2014). This may be due to the culture’s overarching relational orientation (Wu 2009). Thus, it has been regarded as a useful construct in the analysis of social interactions. “Face” presents one’s pre-established status perceived by other people (Wu 2009); however, face is a psychological status rather than social status. In communicating, it is very important for an Asian person to protect the other person’s self-image and feelings (face). Therefore, consideration needs to be given for using VSR techniques may prove challenging for Vietnamese participants who are expected comment or reflect critically about their own behaviour; one must consider, how do
they do this without losing face? Nhung’s (2014) Vietnamese study explored the notion of face and found that it can be both an individual and collective possession. The study revealed that the Vietnamese desire to act consistently with one’s individual positive qualities and with the qualities of the group took precedence over the desire to act independently. Therefore, the need to protect self-image may over-ride the need to provide an accurate portrayal of thoughts or feelings in relation to watching oneself on a video. Participants may believe it is more important to ‘save face’, and modify their thoughts and views rather than present their true views or feelings.

Liamputtong (2010) suggested that “knowledge of the culture is essential so that the researchers can work more effectively with members of the community” (88). Insensitivity to cultural differences may limit researchers from successfully carrying out their research (Liamputtong, 2010). It was determined in the current research that the first author’s background as a Vietnamese lecturer in Vietnam provided her with credibility as a culturally sensitive researcher. Her educational background until she began her research in Australia was completed solely in Vietnam so she had a perspective of being both a student and teacher in Vietnam. Her social world has been embedded in Vietnamese culture and so she can also be considered as aware of the subtle cultural nuances of what it means to be a Vietnamese lecturer.

The current research project

Although widely used in the broad area of language teaching research, there has been little reported in the literature concerning how VSR technique has been incorporated into Vietnamese contexts or similar contexts, and what methodological issues may arise from using this technique in such contexts. Because it was important to employ transparency within the context of the research it was deemed that using the technique of VSR would allow the teachers to view and comment on their teaching practice rather than simply have them recall episodes of teaching through interviews alone. Four participants at four different universities in Hanoi, Vietnam volunteered to participate in the research. All four participants were female and had been teaching English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) at university for between six to 25 years. All of the participants were Vietnamese and had spent all of their time living and teaching in Vietnam. None had any experience working or teaching abroad. None of the participants had prior experience with VSR technique or procedures but they were happy to join the research as research participants.
Considerations for how to use this data collection technique with this population needed to be taken. O’Brien (1993) suggested the use of a pilot study, or to use his term a ‘dry-run’, to help the researcher and research participants become familiar with the recording process. Having acknowledged the potential methodological challenges of conducting research in a cross-cultural context, we decided to use dry-run sessions, one with each of the participants to serve two purposes: (1) to have the participants become familiar with the recording process; and (2) to explore whether the western-origin technique could work well with the non-western participants before actual data collection for the above-mentioned research project. Therefore we invited the participants to watch the dry-run recordings of their teaching events and recall their thoughts.

To record teaching episodes as they occurred, two cameras were set up in the classroom to gain an overall sense of the behavioural dynamics as they occur from various perspectives. One camera was positioned at the front of the class where the lecturers generally stood to teach the lesson. Camera two was positioned at the back of the class to video the lecturer and any other major instructional resources (such as slides, blackboard, etc.). The first author was the video operator.

The data collection process took place from March to June, 2012. A total of sixteen videotapes (including four dry-run sessions and twelve VSR video recordings- three VSR recordings for each of the four participants) were done. This paper reports on the comparison of the dry-run sessions and the needed adapted version use of VSR interview sessions with the same participants in the same research contexts.

Problems revealed through the dry-run of the VSR technique used

The four dry-run VSR sessions were recorded lessons of between 45 minutes to 90 minutes long. After explaining the procedure of the VSR session to the participants, the researcher turned on the screens and the participants watched the video and were encouraged to talk when they recalled any thoughts about what they were viewing. In the dry-run sessions the researcher did not interfere, interrupt or use any guiding prompts while the participants were viewing the video recording. However, without prompting from the researcher, participants did not always talk about their teaching when they viewed their videos; they talked instead about how they looked on the video or simply did not talk at all. For example, one participant, when observing her teaching, just described her activities without reflection on her teaching so provided little reflective thinking. Another teacher only talked when she
was given questions otherwise she kept silent as she watched her teaching practices. This following extract illustrates this point.

Interviewer: Now, let’s start!

Interviewee: Yes.

(Silence for three minutes and 20 seconds)

Interviewer: Please don’t just watch. Please talk [about] what you recall.

(Silence for four minutes and ten seconds)

Interviewee: Here, I was checking students’ understanding about previous lesson but he couldn’t give me the answer.

(Silence for 5 minutes and 56 seconds)

(Dry-run, Participant 2)

It was found overall that during the dry-run sessions the participants tended to be passive and dependent on the researcher during the viewing with very little reflection on their teaching. Indeed, as illustrated above, there was more silence than reflection during these interview sessions. Furthermore, the VSR interview procedure took doubled the length of time it took to record each session as it did for the participants to view the video recording. Timelines then became a major concern in relation to participants committing to the formal VSR sessions. As a result, it was hard for the researcher and the participants to negotiate the time for the formal data collection sessions. The dry-run sessions helped the researcher explore and clearly identify the challenges of conducting VSR.

In the extract above it can be seen that a basic problem seemed to be participants’ misunderstanding about the VSR interview process. They were polite in simply sitting watching themselves teach, but that was not the purpose of the research. After carefully considering the response of participants during the dry-run sessions, the researcher determined that their behaviour may have happened for two reasons. One, the procedure exposed the teachers to public scrutiny on video (even if only seen between her and the researcher). This perceived exposure may well have made the lecturers feel uncomfortable and possibly fear ‘losing face’ in relation to her teaching. Daniels (2008) cautioned that participants need to be fully informed about how audio/visual tools are used in cross-cultural
research, and that researchers have an obligation to be respectful of participants’ autonomy. Even though the participants signed consent forms to participant and the VSR procedure was explained to them, they did not seem to understand what their involvement meant. This problem may be attributed to the novice researcher learning a new data gathering technique and also understanding the cultural risk the teachers were taking in exposing their teaching on a video recording. The researcher was sensitive to the perceived problem of teachers not wanting to lose face and so wanted to interrupt their viewing as little as possible to allow them to speak freely and openly. However, the researcher was also aware of the need to collect data for her research study and was concerned that the VSR technique was not working as anticipated. In consultation with her PhD supervisors, the researcher developed an adapted version of the VSR interview for these participants, which is presented in the next section.

The adapted VSR technique

The most significant adaptation to the dry-run procedure of data collection was the incorporating the use of an interview protocol for each VSR interview session. Similar to the dry-run session, each VSR session started with video-observation of one observed lesson. Video stimulated recall interviews (VSRI) were conducted one day after the lesson was video-recorded; these were conducted in the participants’ workplace to assist them in feeling more conformable in the interview situation and to minimise the time delay between the event and the recall to increase validity of the data (Gass and Mackey 2000; Lyle 2003). On the day of the VSRI, the researcher reminded the participants about the purpose of the research and the protocol for the interviews. In the VSRI, lecturers watched videos of their teaching practices using video-recordings from both cameras and were asked to discuss their decision-making processes as they carried out their teaching roles.

Findings

This section describes the findings of the research which includes the adaptations to VSR data collection methods as a result of finding from the dry-run sessions with Vietnamese participants. Considerations for future cross-cultural research is then provided. A significant adaptation of the VSR data collection sessions was that instead of viewing the whole lesson, short excerpts from their lessons were played to participants together with the interview protocol. O’Brien (1993) asserted that a time requirement for each VSR session should be at least equal to or more than the length of the video-recording. However, based on the dry-run
sessions for the current research, the researcher deemed that using excerpts from the teaching events was more amiable in allowing participants to fully focus on what they did on the video. While this might seem a risky decision, using selected excerpts from the teaching episodes rather than watching the full session, it is recommended that researchers need to adapt their practices to the local context and the participants in the research (Cleary 2013). Thus, the researcher decided to use targeted excerpts from the videos for the research for the following reasons.

As described above, it was very challenging to arrange time with the participants for VSR sessions as the lecturers in the current research had jobs outside their work at the university to supplement their incomes and so were not always available at their university for interviews. This scenario has been observed in other research conducted in Vietnam. Borgan and Nguyen (1999) found that lecturers were busy teaching “in the morning, afternoon and/or evening” (2) and so were not always available for interviewing. Using extracts of teaching episodes helped overcome time constraints for the participants in the current research. Having shorter episodes to view also kept the participants more focused on viewing their teaching practices and so they were more inclined to reflect on what they observed themselves doing. Keeping participants interested in the video viewing seems to be a common problem with VSR methodology. Li et al. (2014) overcame this by allowing the Chinese students in their study to control what they were watching, for example, fast-forwarding the video to watch what they deemed relevant to comment upon; this process provided more focused stimulated discussions relevant to the students’ perspectives. The participants in the current research taught in a traditional, teacher-centred, didactic manner that is common pedagogy in Vietnamese classrooms, so much of their lessons included students’ completing class activities for several minutes of each class. During seatwork, there was little to no interaction between the teacher and the students and it was these sections of the lesson that were reduced in the SR interview session, although not all were eliminated. Moreover, it was found in the dry-run sessions that participants, viewing this lack of engagement in the class felt disinclined to reflect on this phase of their teaching and became bored and distracted watching in silence for several minutes at a time. For example, in the above-mentioned excerpt, the total silent time was approximately 24 minutes out of 45-minute-long recording. Thus, the researcher was able to manage this aspect of the VSR sessions by using shorter excerpts of pertinent teaching and classroom interactions. As a result of this reduction in viewing time, the
researcher and her participants had more time to discuss events that were watched in more depth.

Another adaptation was the development and use of interview protocols for the VSR sessions as the participants did not recall or reflect as expected during the dry-run (as described above). Using an interview protocol provided a clear structure both for the novice researcher and for the participants. Thus the interviews were focused, as illustrated below:

Interviewer: What were your thoughts when you decided to do this?

Interviewee 1: To help the students realize that there are many different kinds of Pie charts. The students often focus on only one kind. I wanted to show them that there are many different kinds of charts can go together with a pie chart in a writing task. I wanted them to be able to know how to analyse and describe this kind of chart. I thought that the students had already known about this. So I decided just to help them revise.

(SRI 2- Participant 3)

The interview protocol included a series of open-ended probes that would help participants reflect when observing how they included learner autonomy in their teaching practices. Sample interview questions/probes included: What were your thoughts when doing this activity? What were you thinking about when you decided to do this? Why did you decide to do that? Using this process, participants generated deeper reflections on each event and on their behaviour. The current study found that using interview protocols as part of the VSR technique provided guidance and structure for these sessions for both the participants and the researcher. It was found that this structure worked well with these Vietnamese participants as can be demonstrated by the following:

Interviewee: What did you think when you decide to call particular students to give the answer?

Interviewee 1: Because there were few of them volunteer. I had to call them. To save time, I had to call a definite one. This student read a lot but she always gives wrong answers. Their knowledge is not systematic. They thought they knew everything but in fact they understood nothing. I was consolidating for them. I wanted to make it systematic. It would be easier for the students to learn and remember.
Interviewer: What were you thinking when you were showing pictures in the book to your students?

Interviewee 3: I showed them all of these pictures in order to help the students understand the content of the listening lesson. I thought it was good to use all the available pictures in the textbook. There were eight pictures about eight places. Looking at these at these pictures would help them listen better…Some of them were learning, some were not. See, these two students were sitting idly.

These data extracts clearly demonstrate the value of utilising interview questions/probes at the time of recall when participants were viewing their activities. Compared with the recall session in the dry-run, the VSRI provided much more information from participants about what they were doing and why. The above extracts were typical observations by all participants in the research. Participants were able to describe what they did and reasons for the strategies they used but none of the strategies were particularly related to encouraging students to become autonomous learners. Indeed the focus for learning was invariably related to having students pass their exams. As indicated in the first extract, the lecturer focused on revision; the second lecturer focused on students remembering and the third lecturer focused on using the textbook, all three scenarios directly related to the end of semester exams. These data provided valuable information about how lecturers in Vietnam were responding (or not responding) to the government directive to include learner autonomy in teaching and learning. More importantly for the current paper, using interview questions/probes proved a successful strategy to gather deeper, richer data; however, as this research indicates the VSR technique is not without its problems.

Discussion

The findings from the research indicate that incorporating a VSR technique in a cross-cultural setting poses challenges for the researcher. While the participants reflected on their behaviour with the support from the researcher, they were not able to recall the exact thoughts they had at the time the activity took place as is anticipated when using VSR (Dempsey 2010). This finding is aligned with previous studies (see Calderhead [1981]; Lyle [2003]). For example, Lyle (2003) found that an individual may, in fact, be reacting to or describing their feelings to what they currently see or hear.
while watching the video instead of recalling the thoughts or feelings they had at the time of an actual episode or interaction. This behaviour was also conveyed by participants in the current research, particularly during the dry-run sessions where participants needed strong prompting to both speak about what they viewed on the videos and to speak specifically about their teaching rather than engage in more superficial talk about topics such as what their thoughts about what they were wearing on the day. This participant behaviour lead to the researcher making adaptations in the research technique to encourage greater participation. A major adaptation was having participants view short excerpts from their lessons with guided probes to focus attention and reduce the overload of viewing and, therefore, recall on what was being viewed. This research technique has been used in other studies where VSR procedures have been used. For example, Wyatt and Arnold (2012) found that the teachers in Oman whose practice they researched using VSR methods needed to have the videos stopped several times to allow the teachers time to think about what they were observing themselves doing. The teachers were not familiar with the technique, nor how to comment on their thinking at the time of the teaching episode without being given considerable time and support. Wyatt and Arnold found the process of jotting down ideas/questions from viewing the videos that could be discussed in subsequent interviews a more productive procedure with this group of teachers. These studies indicate the need to adapt the VSR procedure to meet the local needs of the participants. One could argue that the participants did not engage in deep reflection without the support of the researcher but there is also the argument that the participants did not have experience with this technique and so were unsure of how to behave as they watched themselves. Stough (2001) suggested that when the participants have more training with VSR, they are more likely to engage in the reflection process and this proved to be the case in the current research.

The participants in the dry-run of the current research were passive and dependent on the researcher. This may have been due to the influence of culture of Confucian thought on the Vietnamese participants. The notion of ‘face keeping” in the interpersonal communications may have prevented the participants from revealing their critical thinking. Nhung (2014) suggested that in Vietnam face is connected with the notion public judgment which results in a tendency to employ indirectness when required to respond to an act such as a request. The position of indirectness allows the individual to act with consistency in relation to their own personal beliefs and the beliefs of the group. The notion of face is a relatively under-explored area of research with Vietnamese lectures; therefore, it is recommended that
more research in this area needs to be done. Participants’ reluctance to engage in describing their teaching on the current research may also have been due to participants showing respect to the researcher who was considered an expert in the field and so wanted to state something that was perceived as being ‘right’ rather than giving their own perception or belief and so save ‘face’ (Ho and Crookall 1995; Oetzel et al. 2001). Participants may have not wanted to embarrass themselves talking about a teaching behaviour that they may have deemed as not good as some idealised teacher they strove to be. Zhang et al. (2005) suggested that it is common for Asian people to present ‘desirable’ opinions rather than their own personal views. As a result of this focus on maintaining the social order, Asian participants may depict the researcher as at a higher position than the participants in the research and so may try to say the “right” thing or what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than expressing their true opinions or beliefs. The first author, when conducting the current research, strove to encourage participants to open up to discussing their teaching by positioning herself more as ‘one of them’ rather than as the ‘outsider’. Being Vietnamese, she could communicate with them in their own language and was familiar with their culture, having lived in worked in Vietnam her whole life; being a Vietnamese lecturer she was socially on the same level; therefore the participants were able to participate more fully once they understood the research protocol. These findings suggest the need for a strong ‘insider’ presence when conducting cross-cultural research, someone who knows the local culture and can help to ease concerns participants may have and lessen the perception of power the researcher may hold. However, it may occur that cross-cultural researchers may not have such as strong local background as was the case in the current research. For example, Stevenson (2014) was challenged with the distribution of authority in using VSR with Inuit teachers in Canada. Himself a non-Inuit Stevenson identified two areas of potentially contested authority in his cross-cultural research. The first was logistical authority, in who controls the design and implementation of research methods. It would seem on the surface that the researcher would control the design but as described in the current research and elsewhere (see Tobin and Hsueh 2007), there must be some room for negotiation with participants to accommodate for culture. Without this flexibility the data and overall rigor of the project can be compromised. The second area of contested authority was epistemological authority, which refers to ownership of the content. For teachers in the research the curriculum they taught was embedded with local Inuit culture which was largely not familiar to Stevenson. Therefore, it was necessary for Stevenson to learn something about the curriculum and how it was taught to ensure that the data was not compromised and to accept that the Inuit were the experts in
control of this content. This knowledge can only come from the people in the local culture. In the current research, the researcher, being Vietnamese, was familiar with the culture of schooling in Vietnam and understood the tension between the government directive about learner autonomy and the reality of pedagogy in Vietnamese classrooms. Being a Vietnamese lecturer, the first author was aware that without thorough training on how to embed learner autonomy in teaching practice the construct would not be high on lecturers’ list of priorities. Therefore, understanding how teachers were utilising learner autonomy in their teaching practice because the focus of the current research. The current research provided important information on utilising cross-cultural research strategies to better understand the place of learner autonomy in Vietnamese education.

**Conclusion**

The present paper adds to the VSR literature by reference to some specific challenges facing the researcher who incorporated VSR as a data collection technique in a Vietnamese context. The research has identified that researchers need to be aware of the cultural concerns when utilising VSR in cross-cultural research. In particular, an adapted version of the technique with the use of short excerpts, interview protocols along with the use of video-recording for the follow-up observations were needed in the current research, stressing the need for flexibility to the local context. The adaptations helped in producing more in-depth data for the research on teachers’ beliefs and behaviour about their viewed teaching episodes. The research highlights that in a cross-cultural setting, VSR can be a valuable research technique which can bring rich source of data for research in teachers’ cognitive process and behaviour.

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