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**University teachers' perceptions of their roles in
curriculum decision making:
A case study at Hanoi National University of Education
(Vietnam)**

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the degree

of

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making in the setting of Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam). This is one of the largest teacher training universities in Vietnam. Since research on teachers' curriculum decision making at tertiary institutions has been carried out internationally, it is suggested that these issues should be examined with due consideration within the Vietnamese higher education context.

Information for the research was gathered using a qualitative approach. Individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight teachers at Hanoi National University of Education. These teachers taught different disciplinary subjects and some of them held positions as Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments at the university. The teachers were interviewed in Vietnam through May to June 2009. The interview responses were then analyzed and interpreted using my own approach adapted from literature on qualitative research methods.

From my research findings, it was evident that ways Hanoi National University of Education teachers conceptualized curriculum and curriculum decision making were influenced by the top-down, centralized model of management dominating over Vietnamese education in the last 3 decades (1980s–present). Curriculum was frequently defined by looking at its legality and authority. Meanwhile, curriculum decision making was seen as a function of authoritative agencies rather than the activities of university teachers themselves. My research also found that university teachers possessed a high degree of self-awareness about their responsibilities and professional capacity related to curriculum decision making. Although most university teachers thought they were encouraged to engage in curriculum decision making, they expressed an expectation of being given more roles and involvement in this process. Additionally, a majority of university teachers were worried about the limitations in their professional competence and the lack of professional development opportunities. They, therefore, suggested recommendations for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making.

These recommendations involved educational management and policy changes, professional development for university teachers, and changes in the curriculum perceptions of university teachers themselves.



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Thank you, my friends in New Zealand, whose care and warmth has filled my study journey with serenity and happiness. I am thankful that we met here and have been sharing time together. From all of you who come from international settings, I have learned more thoroughly about the world outside and understand myself more deeply.

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years with his great work and commitment to both family and education sciences–
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PREFACE

I was born in Hanoi, Vietnam, in September 1984. At that time, my father was a lecturer of technology education at Hanoi National Education of Education, so my family and I lived on the campus of the university for several years. From 2002 to 2006, I undertook a Bachelor of Science at the university's Faculty of Philology. It was here I trained as a secondary teacher, specializing in linguistics and literature education. Over the four years, I enjoyed an acquisition of the beauty of Vietnamese linguistics and that of the literature written in other Asian, European and American countries (to name some of them: China, India, Japan, Southeast Asia, England, France, Germany, Russia, Spain, America). I also learned how to teach linguistics and literature education at secondary school. I, therefore, became familiar with educational psychology, pedagogy and forms of teaching essentials like curriculum and textbooks. In years three and four at the university, I spent eight weeks (four weeks each year) on teaching practicum at two secondary schools, grades 10 and 11 with students of 16 and 17 years old respectively.

The practicum time was my only teaching experience, since I did not teach after my graduation. Rather, I continued my engagement with Hanoi National University of Education when, in 2007, I started working at the university's Centre for Quality Assurance and Testing. I was in charge of administrative responsibilities, which has left me with a profound understanding of ways tertiary institutions are operated and managed. My major role at the Centre, however, was as a Research Assistant. I was involved in three research projects on quality assurance: *External Assessment of Hanoi National University of Education (2007)*, *Survey of Graduates from Hanoi National University of Education (2007)*, and *Students' Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (2007–2008)*. These experiences have inspired me to further my academic life.

At the beginning of 2008 this hope was fulfilled when I was awarded the New Zealand Development Scholarship for Masters study at the University of Waikato. Studying and sharing time with people from New Zealand and internationally has transformed my intellect and ways of thinking. Barriers caused by differences in language and culture predictably gave me difficult times.

Notwithstanding, thanks to these differences I have been able to look at education from varying perspectives, therefore gaining a thorough sense of issues such as curriculum, educational policy, leadership and management. The knowledge I have learned about education elsewhere in the world assists me to understand more about my own context and educational experiences. This research derives from my particular passion for curriculum perspectives and educational policy. My long-time engagement with Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE) influenced me to choose it as the research setting. Personal interests and experiences gave rise to the research context: *University Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles in Curriculum Decision Making: A Case Study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam)*.

This Masters thesis reports the process of conducting the research. It has five chapters that describe the five stages of the research process. Each stage is introduced as follows.

- The first stage (Chapter 1) aimed to clarify how my work and study experiences influenced my choice of the research context. I established the research setting by exploring recent international perspectives of curriculum and higher educational management. Features of the Vietnamese education as a product of a socialist political system were also explained. From the research context and settings, I then formed my research questions, which directed the process of conducting the research.

Overarching Research Question:

How do HNUE teachers perceive their roles in curriculum decision making?

Research Sub-Question:

- i. What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?
 - ii. How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?
 - iii. What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?
- In the second stage (Chapter 2), I theorized three key concepts in which the research was nested: curriculum, teachers' perceptions, and curriculum decision making at the higher education sector. This theorization then served as the guidelines for the design and implementation of my research.

- The third stage (Chapter 3) was concerned with designing the research. This involved choosing and applying a qualitative approach to build a sample of research participants and to formulate an Interview Schedule as instrumentation for gathering information.
- In stage four of the research process (Chapter 4), this design was implemented: The university teachers were interviewed and their responses were analyzed and interpreted by myself as researcher. By doing this, I was able to find out possible answers for the research questions raised at the beginning of my research. It is noted I considered ethical issues related to the conduct of cross-cultural research and research on teachers' perceptions when designing and implementing the research.
- In the last stage (Chapter 5), I highlighted the significance of my research in terms of its contributions to curriculum, research methodology and ethical awareness, and the understandings of Vietnamese university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. I then suggested recommendations for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. Finally, I evaluated my research process and outcomes and proposed possibilities for future research.

This research context was initiated from personal work and study experiences, and was conducted to fulfil personal and professional interests. I hope that the research process and its outcomes as presented in the following chapters will be beneficial to preceding research on teachers' curriculum decision making, especially in the settings of the Vietnamese higher education sector.

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CHAPTER 1: INITIATING THE CURRICULUM RESEARCH

Introduction

Chapter 1 describes how I initiated the research. Because this is an interpretive study, I acknowledge the necessity to clarify the personal and contextual factors that have shaped the research process. This chapter, therefore, addresses my motivations to choose the research topic and the influences of my identity on the research approach. In addition, I discuss the research purposes and the issues that I expected to discover by conducting this research. I then introduce the methodology that I intended to use in approaching these issues. This chapter also provides information about the specific context and settings in which my research was conducted so that readers have sufficient understanding to go through the research process reported in the following chapters.

My role as researcher

In this section I position myself within the research and make explicit the ways that my work and study experiences have influenced my research thinking and processes. The reason for this being that my research is qualitative in which “the social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 17).

Work experiences

My interest in higher education and curriculum has stemmed from my work experiences as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Quality Assurance and Testing at Hanoi National University of Education (hereafter called HNUE) in Vietnam, where I have worked since 2007. Over 2007, I was involved in a research project that evaluated the teaching effectiveness of some lecturers at the university. These lecturers were from a range of disciplines that supported pre-service secondary teacher training. To evaluate these lecturers’ teaching effectiveness, questionnaires were used to gather the opinions of the students in

the classes they were teaching. The questionnaire form constituted four groups of criteria, involving curriculum, teaching methods and techniques, relationships with students, and assessment approaches. I noticed that the questions relating to curriculum in practice counted as a significant part of the teacher evaluation. From that observation, I became interested in ways that university teachers practised curriculum differently. My “instinctive” thinking about this was because teachers think differently about curriculum, they may approach it in different ways. This was a remarkable shift from my initial narrow perception of curriculum.

However, at that time (2007) I was not able to track the theoretical foundations that underpinned my assumption of the powerful relationships between teachers’ minds and curriculum practices. Neither did I have an opportunity to satisfy my curiosity about teachers’ thoughts in relation to curriculum before, during, and after their teaching. This may be because the project used close-ended questions as the research instrumentation, which certainly hindered research participants in responding in their own words. Also, the participants in the project were students rather than teachers themselves. I, therefore, looked forward to conducting research to engage my interest and questions about teachers’ curriculum thinking and practices.

Study experiences

Curriculum thinking and practices have been also a significant part of my study experiences since I undertook a Bachelor of Sciences at the Faculty of Philology at HNUE from 2002 to 2006. HNUE is a teacher training university and besides the study of core knowledge about linguistics and literature, courses related to teaching such as psychology and pedagogy counted as a significant proportion of my undergraduate years. In years 3 and 4 of my undergraduate study, I taught literature education at two high schools as a part of my education practicum. The students I taught were grades 10 and 11 aged 16 and 17. During that time, “curriculum” in my perception appeared to “be” the subject that I taught, and the textbooks and supporting materials. My role in curriculum was essentially to develop lesson plans based on instructions prescribed in textbooks and reference books, then to implement the lesson plans in classrooms and assess students’

achievement. Measurements to evaluate students' academic performance were also prescribed in textbooks, though they were somewhat vague to me. I acknowledged that I still had space and freedom to be creative when working with the curriculum. Yet, at that time I felt uneasy when I tried to escape from the guidelines of the textbooks and reference books. This may have been due to my insufficient experiences as a teacher and my rigorous way of thinking about curriculum, teaching, and learning. I thought curriculum was something that I should strictly follow and it was only in that manner that the quality of teaching and learning could be evaluated and possibly be guaranteed.

As mentioned previously, due to my involvement in the research project of teaching evaluation, my perceptions of curriculum became more open and flexible. There was no single way of thinking about curriculum. I realized that individuals may perceive curriculum in a very unique way. Nevertheless, these curriculum thoughts were not theoretically and practically grounded until I came to the University of Waikato (New Zealand) to pursue a Master of Education. My exposure to a multi-cultural environment of living and studying has since broadened my vision of education and curriculum. The paper having the most influence on my curriculum thinking was *Curriculum Possibilities and Development* which I completed in my first year. Nine students from five countries (China, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, and Vietnam) came together to share their own experiences as teachers, researchers, and educational leaders/managers. It gradually became obvious to me how enormously diverse the ways people from different curriculum contexts and settings talked about curriculum. I came to realize that curriculum thinking and practices could not be the same among people as these are perceived personally and historically. There were personal experiences and contextual boundaries that shaped our own perceptions of curriculum and our particular curriculum practices. Some theoretical discussion in chapter 2: Nesting the Curriculum Research lays the foundation to explain those assumptions.

The historical perspective of curriculum thinking then motivated me to undertake a paper in *Educational Policy*, where again the class was constituted by seven students of six nationalities (Cambodia, Chile, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, and Vietnam). In studying this paper, we had access to the

history of New Zealand education over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and we were invited to reflect on our own national education systems. I learned about some major curriculum reforms in New Zealand. Regardless of the differences in the educational contexts in which these reforms emerged, teachers remained the key to success in terms of implementation. For example, controversy in relation to education for citizenship in the 1920s (Caughley, 1928; Coad, 1927; Condliffe, 1923; Mulgan & Mulgan, 1923; Gordon & Openshaw, 1984; Openshaw, 1979, 1980, 1995; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993); the *Thomas Curriculum* 1946 (New Zealand Department of Education, 1959) as a production of “the New Zealand’s most significant post-war education reform” (Ewing, 1970, p. 207); the outcomes model that underpinned the *Curriculum Framework* 1993 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993) as a response to the socio-economic, political, and educational changes from the mid 1980s to the end of the 1990s.

My understanding of teachers being the main force of education and curriculum reforms was strengthened in my third paper, *Educational Leadership: Organization Development*. This paper complemented the previous curriculum and policy papers. From the perspective of educational management, teachers have carried out increasingly important roles in reshaping education in the new millennium (Codd, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1996). It has been claimed that an essential manifestation of teacher empowerment (Noddings, 1990; Pink, 1990) was their participation in the decision making of education (Drummond & Reitsch, 1998; Floyd, 1985; Miller & Vacik, 1998; Yulk, 1989) and curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Eisner, 1992; Kosunen, 1994; McGee, 1997; Pink, 1990). My thinking about this research context was initiated from reading controversial discussions about teachers’ involvement in decision making and how teachers themselves perceived their involvement (Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Hargreaves, 1989; Marton, 1994; Zeichner, 1994).

To summarize, throughout my educational work and study experiences (2002–2010), I have looked at some issues related to teachers and curriculum from three different positions: as a student-teacher, as a researcher and as a (quasi) educational manager/leader. My perceptions therefore, count as a valuable source in this research. Moreover, due to my experiences of differing environments and

lifestyles in Vietnam and New Zealand, I have learned to respect the diversity in people's ways of thinking and doing that constitutes their identity and values. I have also come to recognize there is no truth without equivocation (Patterson, 1997); and that social realities are personally, historically, and culturally constructed (Fairclough, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1992; Locke, 2004) rather than objectively existing from the researcher (Eichelberger, 1989; Usher, 1996) and "driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms" (Guba & Lincoln, 1992, p. 109). These assumptions guide my methodology in conducting this research. This is outlined in chapter 2: Nesting the Curriculum Research.

Research context and settings: University teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making at Hanoi National University of Education

The research context was to find out how teachers at Hanoi National University of Education perceive their roles in curriculum decision making in the Vietnamese educational context. This aimed to recommend solutions to attract university teachers' involvement in curriculum development; thus enhancing curriculum in practice. It is my belief that the ways teachers think about curriculum have a powerful influence on their teaching.

Introducing the research rationale

My rationale for conducting this research was formed from three assumptions about curriculum: The value-laden nature of curriculum, the increasingly important roles of teachers in curriculum decision making, and the interrelationships between teachers' curriculum thinking and practices. Also, I wanted to consider the managerial contexts of Vietnamese higher education. I explain these as follows.

The value-laden nature of curriculum and interrelationships between teachers' curriculum thinking and practices

It has been claimed that curriculum is heavily value-laden (Klein, 1990; Wardekker, 2003) and personal (Foshay, 1990). This means curriculum is shaped

by belief systems involving political, social, economic, philosophical, psychological and other ideologies, which are ever-changing according to the historical and geographical contexts in which curriculum emerges (Apple, 1990; Beyer, 1990; Codd, 2005; Eisner, 1992; McGee, 1997; Walker, 2003). These belief systems influence what schools should aim for, what should be taught at schools, and ways of teaching (Walker, 2003). Teachers—who directly realize these educational goals through interacting with students in classrooms—have particular ways of thinking about curriculum; thus approaching curriculum personally (Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Marton, 1994; Hargreaves, 1989; Zeichner, 1994). Therefore, to investigate teachers' perceptions of curriculum may bring new insights into the ideologies that are governing teachers' daily activities at schools; thus suggesting solutions by which these activities can be improved.

University teachers' increasing roles in curriculum decision making and the managerial context of Vietnamese higher education

There has been a growing trend of broad-based participation in decision making in organizations including higher education institutions (Drummond & Reitsch, 1998; Floyd, 1985; Miller & Vacik, 1998; Yukl, 1981). Following this trend, it has been argued that teacher involvement should count as a significant part of curriculum decision making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Eisner, 1992; Kosunen, 1994; McGee, 1997; Pink, 1990). These arguments have been strengthened by the roles of teachers as curriculum instructors in the post-modern era (Doll, 1990; 1993) and by an increasing emphasis on teachers' empowerment (Noddings, 1990; Pink, 1990), autonomy and accountability (Codd, 1999; Michael, 2004; Olssen et al., 2004) as a key managerial strategy. Teachers' participation in curriculum decision making has attracted more and more research interest internationally. Hence, it is interesting to look at this issue in the context of Vietnamese higher education. The reason, as discussed later in this chapter, is that Vietnam over the last three decades (1975–present) maintains a socialist education system characterized by a strongly centralized, top-down model of management. However, recently higher education reforms have brought about a progressive idea of enhancing teachers' autonomy and reshaping curricular to

meet social demands (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Prime Minister's Office, 2005). Inevitably, in this period, there are controversial issues that I have been eager to investigate. It is my aim that this research may help assist HNUE teachers to reflect on their teaching and help policy-makers and educational leaders/managers in terms of suggesting effective policy and institutional changes in relation to curriculum. These aims are specified in more detail in the following section.

Research aims: Hanoi National University of Education teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making

The aims of my research are outlined as follows:

- i. To provide an opportunity for HNUE teachers to reflect on their curriculum beliefs and practices; thus facilitating professional development related to curriculum
- ii. To provide evidence of HNUE teachers' perspectives on curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making
- iii. To provide evidence that may support policy and institutional changes in order to attract and improve the effectiveness of teachers' participation in curriculum decision making within Vietnamese context

My ultimate expectation of the research has been to empower university teachers by creating a forum that invites communication of their perceptions of curriculum work as teachers and their reasons for curriculum decisions. By doing this, university teachers can be appreciated as curriculum thinkers and professionals rather than as technicians as traditionally believed (Pink, 1990).

The research questions

The overarching research question is: How do HNUE teachers perceive their roles in curriculum decision making? In approaching this question, I sought to find and explain responses through three sub-questions:

- i. What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?
- ii. How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?
- iii. What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?

Research methodology: Overview

I chose an interpretive approach to conduct the research on HNUE teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. This was due to the nature of the contextual focus—curriculum and teachers' perceptions—which I saw as individually, historically, and culturally constructed and varied from teachers' perspectives rather than being prescribed. These assumptions underpin an interpretive approach to guide the research process. This involved spanning the research purposes, formulating the research questions, defining the case, building the sample, and designing the research instrumentation in which interviewing was decided as the method to collect information. The interpretive direction also influenced the ethical issues I had to consider during the research process. This included minimizing potential harm to teacher-participants, resolving conflict of interest, and considering ethical issues related to cross-cultural research.

Research settings: Hanoi National University of Education teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making

This is interpretive research that highlights “individualized accounts of a situation in ways that describe the meaning of events to the participants” and calls for “a thorough knowledge of the backgrounds of the participants and the contexts in which they exist” (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 9). Therefore, it is necessary to draw a brief picture of the socio-political and educational situation from which my research emerged. This involves a discussion of the international, Vietnamese and HNUE contexts and settings of educational management and curriculum.

International context of the research

The international aspects of my research are set in an increasingly complex, uncertain, and unpredictable world resulting from rapid changes in technology, society, economy, and politics (Hargreaves & Fullans, 1998). This profoundly influences worldwide education systems in terms of the emergence of decentralized models in management and trends towards broad-based participation in decision making. Also, there has been a remarkable shift in

curriculum approaches to satisfy the new demands of the changing world. I discuss some of these issues as follows.

To begin with, education management has undergone significant changes for schools to adapt to the ever-changing environments in which they operate. Under market-driven directions of education, there has been a shift from the top-down model of management to a more decentralized model to accommodate schools' autonomy and accountability to stakeholders and parental choices (Alfred & Carter, 1993; Codd, 2005; Fullan, 1998; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Michael, 2004; Olssen et al., 2004; Sergiovanni, 1996). This suggests that individuals within a school, including teachers, become more responsive to decision making at different levels of the educational system. Recently, research has reinforced this idea by demonstrating positive relationships between broad-based participation and successful decision making in organizations, especially higher education institutions (Baldrige & Tierney, 1979; Drummond & Reitsch, 1998; Floyd, 1985; Miller & Vacik, 1998; Yukl, 1981). According to these authors, on the one hand, broad-based participation helps create a forum where all individuals can contribute to the development of the organization to which they belong. On the other hand, broad-based participation is proved to lead to: Greater understanding, acceptance, and commitment to decisions; higher job satisfaction and increased productivity; and benefits from richer input of individual expertise.

These positive effects suggest that further study on individuals' perceptions of their participation in decision making is necessary. This is due to an assumption that people's perceptions reflect their belief systems and influence their practice. Parilla (1993) argues that self-acknowledgement and focus on employees' involvement in institutional operation are characteristics of an adaptive organization in the context of change. Research on individual perceptions is also crucial to the design of professional development programmes for people involved in decision making. Traditional (Tyler, 1971) and postmodern (Freire, 1970; Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992; Doll, 1990, 1993) curriculum experts all agree that curriculum or programmes should be constructed based on learners' needs deriving from their own experiences.

In relation to the field of curriculum, there has been severe criticism of the “myth of prescription” (Goodson, 1994, p. 300) in the way that it takes power from teachers. Rather, some authors claim that the dissemination of a “negotiated curriculum” (Boomer et al., 1992) and a view of curriculum as social construction (McNeil, 2009) brings a greater degree of teachers’ professional autonomy in decision making. Additionally, with the pursuit of education’s accountability to policy-makers and the society, comes the domination of the outcomes model in restructuring curriculum (Lee, O’Neill & McKenzie, 2004; McKenzie, 1997). Despite some criticism that this model has de-professionalized teachers (Codd, 1999; Elley, 2004; Lee, Hill & Lee, 2004), it cannot be denied that the outcomes model facilitates teachers with more freedom and flexibility to be creative and to accommodate a wider range of students’ needs (Jessup, 1991). Also, this trend in curriculum changes may be interpreted as greater roles of teachers in curriculum decision making, for teachers become more authoritative in the development, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum.

Vietnamese education inevitably reflects those international trends in educational management and curriculum restructuring. Nevertheless, it is characterized as a socialist education system with features that largely differ from those mentioned in the international context. For readers to have a good sense of these differences, which are assumed to be vital to understand my research, Vietnamese context is introduced in more detail, as follows.

Vietnamese setting of the research

This section briefly pictures the social, political, and economic situations in Vietnam, which are assumed to influence Vietnamese education. It also describes some features of Vietnamese education including the institution of management and curriculum. By doing this, I want to provide useful background information about teacher training in Vietnam and introduce the setting of HNUE, where my research is conducted.

Social, political, and economic context of Vietnam

The political boundary of Vietnam covers an area of approximately 331,690 square kilometres. It borders China in the North, Laos and Cambodia in the West, and the Pacific Ocean to the East. The Vietnamese population is about 85.5 million (1 April 2009) including 54 ethnic groups. Kinh is the majority group accounting for 90% of the population. Vietnamese, the language of the Kinh group and is widely used as an official written and spoken language. (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008¹). In terms of politics, since the Vietnam-American war ended in 1975, a Socialist Republic system now governs throughout the entire country.

Since 1986, there has been a significant shift in the political strategies of Vietnam, which was to expand diplomatic relations irrespective of different political systems and to adopt a market-oriented economy (Do, 1999). As Wright (2002) observes, 10 years after the Renovation² Vietnam has developed trade relations with more than 100 countries and obtained direct investment from more than 50 countries. Vietnam is now regarded as one of the most rapidly growing economies in Asia (Asian Development Bank, 2008) and is a member of international networks such as Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), Asia Free Trade Area (AFTA), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Although Vietnamese education has experienced reforms since the 1980s due to historical and political changes, it remains a socialist education system. Its socialist characteristics have been discussed in a number of policy documents and academic publications of some Vietnamese authors, as follows. I need to note that these policy documents and publications are mainly in Vietnamese; thus all quotes cited are my translations—except those from the *Educational Law* (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005).

¹ NGUYEN Quang Kinh has served in several capacities in Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training, most recently as General Director of the Ministerial Bureau; NGUYEN Quoc Chi is a member of Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training Mid-Decade Assessment Unit on Education for All.

² The Vietnamese term for *Renovation* is *Doi moi*, which is largely used in government documents and academic publications.

Features and functions of Vietnamese education as a socialist education system (1980s–present)

Education has been claimed to be political in its very nature (Ball, 1990, 2006; Beyer, 1990; Carpenter, 2001; Codd, 2005). This has been strongly manifested in Vietnamese educational thinking within the last decades. Ha³ (2001) shares the same idea when he asserts “Education is a sub-system of the social system, which includes other sub-systems such as economics, politics, culture... in their mutual interactions. Among them, politics—the central manifestation of economics—decides the features and the development directions of education” (p. 13).

Ha discusses several features of Vietnamese socialist education in the 1980s (2001, pp. 207-210). Some principles schools and teachers have been expected to follow are:

- i. Schools act as an instrument of the proletarian dictatorship; their activities are to serve the career of Socialist revolution, the construction and defence of the Socialist Fatherland.
- ii. Schools must propagate the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the policy and stratagem of Vietnamese Community Party, and the revolutionary ethics into the youth.
- iii. Teachers play a major role at schools; they must be the soldiers of the Vietnamese Community in the revolution battle of ideology and culture.
- iv. Schools strictly follow the principle of educating in the community and by means of the community.
- v. Schools strictly follow the institution in which the Community Party leads, the State manages, the People own, and also follow the principle of centralized-democracy in the management of schools.

Hence, the functions of Vietnamese socialist education from the 1980s, according to Ha (2001), were to:

- i. Satisfy the basic needs of all members of the society
- ii. Contribute to the reproduction of labour, including the labour who serves to defend the Communist Fatherland
- iii. Contribute to the transformation of the society towards Scientific Socialism—a classless society

³ Professor HA The Ngu (1929–1990) is regarded as one of the founders of Educational Studies in Vietnam. His research focuses on the philosophy of Vietnamese education, general education, education strategies, reforms and management.

The features and functions mentioned above remain the characteristics and principles of Vietnamese education today, as stated in Article 3 of the *Educational Law* (2005) as follows. It is noted that this is the highest legal document guiding the operation of the Vietnamese education system, which was promulgated by the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

- i. “Vietnamese education is a socialist education with popular, national, scientific, and modern characteristics, based on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh’s Thoughts” (p. 75).
- ii. “Educational activities must be conducted on the principles of learning coupled with practice, education linked to production, theories connected to practicability, and education at school combined with education in the family and in the society” (p. 75).

For the purpose of my research, I focus on three aspects of Vietnamese education: (i) The objectives of education; (ii) The management of education, and (iii) The curriculum. In the following sections I explain the socialist nature of Vietnamese education embedded in these aspects.

Objectives of Vietnamese socialist education

Educational objectives are the outcomes of an educational process visualized in a form of a consciousness model that prescribes basic characteristics of a model of people in a particular historical period (Ha, 2001). Interpreted this way, educational *objectives* share similarities with educational *vision* proposed by the well-known curriculum thinker Wardekker (2003).

As part of the education system, educational objectives (or vision) are characterized by the political and specific historical contexts in which they are introduced. This can be seen in the fact that the model of people described in the educational objectives is always to serve the benefits of a *particular* societal model controlled by a *particular* group of people. The philosophy of the socialist education strongly demonstrates this ideology, as it asserts that “the interrelation and unification between the model of future society and the model of future people is an objective indispensability” (Ha, 2001, p. 93). Ha (2001) also reveals some features of the future model of Socialist people, as follows:

- i. The class nature of the future people: Socialist workforce, communist soldiers
- ii. The development direction of the future people: Comprehensive development. It should be noticed that according to Marxism-Leninism, comprehensive development involves five aspects—moral education, mental education, aesthetic education, physical education, and labour (Ha, 2001, pp. 20-21).
- iii. The social mission of the future people: To succeed the revolution career of the Community Party, and to contribute to the construction and defence of the Socialist Fatherland

Since Independence after the Vietnam-American War (1975), Vietnam has experienced significant changes in economics, politics and culture, especially during the last two decades (Le, 2007; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Wright, 2002). However, Vietnam still preserves the objectives of socialist education. This can be seen in Article 2 of the *Educational Law* (2005):

The goals of education are to educate Vietnamese into comprehensively developed persons who possess ethics, knowledge, physical health, aesthetic sense and profession, loyal to the ideology of national independence and socialism; to shape and cultivate one's dignity, civil qualifications and competence, satisfying the demands of the construction and defence of the Fatherland. (pp. 74-75)

Article 39 of the *Educational Law* (2005) about the goals of higher education also highly complies with the goals of general education:

The objectives of higher education are to educate learners in acquiring political and moral qualities, endeavour to serve the people, professional knowledge and practical skills relevant to the educational level, and physical health, meeting the needs of construction and defence of the Fatherland. (p. 91)

Obviously, the objectives or goals of Vietnamese education in general and Vietnamese higher education in particular manifest the socialist feature of the Vietnamese socio-political context.

The management of Vietnamese socialist education

To guarantee the collective and centralized nature of socialist education, Article 14 of the *Educational Law* (2005) stated:

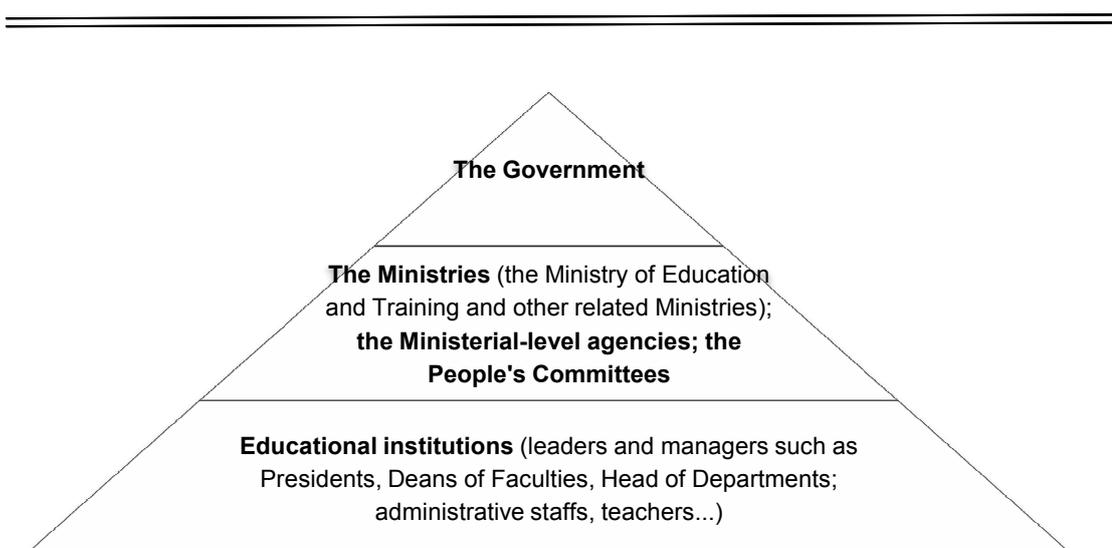
The State shall carry out the unified management of the national educational system in terms of goals, programmes, contents, educational plans, teachers' standards, examination regulations and system of degrees/diplomas; focus on the management of educational quality, exercise decentralization on educational management; strengthen the autonomy and accountabilities of educational institutions. (pp. 79-80)

Article 100 of the *Educational Law* (2005, pp. 122-123) also designated the functions of each institutional level responsible for the State management of education. These authoritative agencies include the Government, the Ministries (the Ministry of Education and Training and other related Ministries and Ministerial-level agencies), and the People's Committees. Their functions as follows:

- i. The Government exercises the unified State management of education.
- ii. The Ministry of Education and Training is accountable to the Government for the implementation of the State management of education.
- iii. Other Ministries and Ministerial-level agencies are responsible for co-operating with the Ministry of Education and Training to exercise the State management of education according to their competency.
- iv. The People's Committees at various levels implement the State management of education according to the Government's delegation and are responsible for ensuring financial conditions, infrastructure, teachers, teaching, teaching equipment for public institutions under their management, meeting the demand of scale expansion, involvement of educational quality and efficiency in their localities.

The institution of educational management in Vietnam, therefore, is highly centralized, as presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1. The Institution of Educational Management in Vietnam



This may be defined as a top-down or hierarchy model of education management, discussed in the work of some authors such as Alfred and Carter (1993); Baldrige and Tierney (1979), Codd (1999), Hargreaves and Fullan (1998), Olssen et al. (2004), Yukl (1981). Kennedy and Lee (2008) also point out that hierarchy is the traditional form of decision making in most Asian societies.

Recently, many education systems have transformed to a more decentralized or bottom up model of management (see the authors cited in the previous paragraph). Driven by this model, schools and teachers have increasingly important roles in decision making. The term decision making here is conceptualized as the participation in any educational activities such as planning educational goals and objectives, designing content or educational programme/curriculum, and deciding on teaching and learning approaches or approaches of evaluating students' academic performance. In Vietnam (discussed further in the following section) it has been argued that the roles of schools and teachers in decision making are hindered by the centralized, top-down model of education management.

Nevertheless, due to the international trends in decentralizing education management and the societal demands of educational accountability, Vietnamese education management has gradually been decentralized. Policy-makers have attempted to enhance the autonomy and accountability of educational institutions,

especially at the tertiary level. This is believed to improve the effectiveness of education management and encourage the whole society to participate in education development. This management change can be seen in some policy documents promulgated by different managerial levels, presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1

Management Change Declared by Different Managerial Levels

Managerial level	Policy documents that declare management change
The National Assembly	– Educational Law (2005), especially Article 60 about ‘the autonomy and self-accountability of professional upper secondary schools, colleges and universities
The Government	– Decree 71/2003/ND-CP (19 June 2003) About the Decentralized Administration in Non-Productive Organizations – Decree 43/2006/ND-CP (25 April 2006) About the Autonomy and Self-Responsibility of Non-Productive Organizations in Operation, Staff and Financial Management – Resolution (2 November 2005) About Innovating Vietnamese Tertiary System from 2006 to 2020
The Ministry of Education and Training	– Regulation About the Working Policy for Tertiary Teachers (Implemented According to Resolution 64/2008/QD-BGD&DT (20 November 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)

One of the manifestations of decentralization in educational management is the roles of higher education institutions in developing curriculum, as explored in the following section.

Curriculum in Vietnamese socialist education

The curriculum is the concretization of educational objectives (or vision) and only by means of the curriculum can the “consciousness model” (Ha, 2001) of educational objectives be realized. Curriculum in Vietnam is also a field in which the influences of a centralized, top-down model on education are most evident. In this section, I introduce some common ways of defining curriculum in Vietnam, involving both academic publications and official documents. Additionally, several features of Vietnamese higher education curriculum will be briefly mentioned. Two major approaches to developing curriculum in Vietnamese higher

education will also be compared. Finally, I describe the process of developing curriculum in Vietnamese higher education.

Some common ways of defining curriculum in Vietnam

Curriculum is a controversial term and has been conceptualized differently from a wide range of perspectives such as Beyer (1990), Carpenter (2001), Doll (1990), Doyle (1992), Eisner (1992), Klein (1990), McGee (1997), O'Neill (2005), Renshaw and van der Linden (2003), Wardekker (2003). Some Vietnamese educators (Nguyen, 2006; Nguyen, V. K., 2009; Tran, 2006) share the idea that curriculum is a system that consists of educational goals/objectives, contents (involving standards of knowledge, skills, scopes and structure of educational contents); methods and forms of operating educational activities; approaches to evaluation educational outcomes. In *Educational Law* (2005), curriculum is also defined in that way (see Article 6 about the educational programmes, p. 76).

Article 6 of the *Educational Law* (2005) also states that:

Requirements on knowledge and skill contents defined in the educational programme must be concretised in textbooks used for general education, in syllabi and teaching materials used for professional education, higher education and continuing education. (p. 76)

It can be suggested that in Vietnam, curriculum is usually understood as constituted by several factors such as goals, objectives, and contents. Also, the term curriculum is often accompanied with terms such as “standards”, “textbooks”, “syllabi”, “teaching materials.” These are concrete and tangible conceptions closely related to the daily teaching activities of Vietnamese teachers. Put differently, it seems that curriculum is interpreted in a concrete, tangible and practical way rather than an abstract and ideal approach. Yet, questions emerge. For example:

- i. Do all Vietnamese teachers perceive curriculum in this particular way?
- ii. What factors influence teachers' perceptions of curriculum?
- iii. What impacts do these perceptions of curriculum have on their teaching?
- iv. How do the current realities of Vietnamese education and curriculum reflect in teachers' perceptions of curriculum?
- v. What could be done to improve the effectiveness of teachers' involvement in curriculum, thus helping enhance the quality of education?

My research aims to explore the issues reflected in these questions, though due to the limitation in timing and scope of the research, they are investigated in varying degrees of adequacy. The research sub-question (i) “What are HNUE teachers’ perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making” was to find some of the ways Vietnamese university teachers envision curriculum and see if every Vietnamese teacher perceives curriculum as a concrete, tangible and practical term. Also, some factors that have influenced teachers’ perceptions of curriculum will be made explicit. The research sub-question (ii) “How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making” was to reveal prevalent features of the current realities of Vietnamese education in which university teachers perceive curriculum and their positions in curriculum decision making. The research question (iii) “What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers’ participation in curriculum decision making?” was to suggest solutions to attract and enhance the effectiveness of university teachers’ involvement in curriculum. However, the question of the impacts that teachers’ perceptions of curriculum have on their teaching exceeds the scope of my research.

Curriculum in Vietnamese higher education

Article 41 of the *Educational Law* (2005) about the educational programme and syllabi of higher education proposes a definition of higher education curriculum. However, this definition mostly repeats the definition of curriculum in general education (see p. 18 this chapter). Therefore, it hardly distinguishes the characteristics of curriculum at tertiary level from curriculum at other levels (primary or high school, for example). Tran (2006), however, points out some features that characterize higher education curriculum as following:

- i. The purpose of higher education curriculum is to facilitate students with knowledge, skills and attitudes of a specific area (sciences or industries).
- ii. Another important purpose of higher education curriculum is to cultivate students’ research competences and encourage them to practise conducting research
- iii. The universities have the autonomy and accountability in developing their own curriculum, textbooks and teaching and learning materials based on the *Curriculum Framework* promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Obviously, tertiary institutions have priority over primary or high schools in terms of autonomy and accountability. University teachers, therefore, are assumed to have more significant roles in curriculum decision making.

Two major approaches to curriculum development in Vietnam

According to Nguyen, V. K. (2009), in Vietnamese education there have been two major approaches to curriculum development: The systematic approach and the participatory approach. The most significant difference between them may be the perceptions of learners' characteristics and their roles in curriculum. More details about these two approaches are presented *Table 2: Two Major Approaches to Curriculum Development in Vietnam*.

Table 2

Two Major Approaches to Curriculum Development in Vietnam

Content of the approach	The systematic approach	The participatory approach
Perceptions of learners' characteristics and their roles in curriculum decision making	<p>Characteristics: All learners (input) have the same level of capacity and learning needs. All graduates (outcomes) will reach the same level of knowledge, skills and attitudes.</p> <p>Roles: Individual capacity and learning needs have minor roles in curriculum decision making.</p>	<p>Characteristics: Recognizes the diversity in learners' capacity and learning needs. All graduates required to reach some standards of knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, the degrees of going beyond these standards to each graduate may differ.</p> <p>Roles: Learners' capacity and learning needs are the basis on which curriculum decisions are made. Additionally, the participation of the whole society is vital, involving policy-makers, leaders/managers at educational institutions, teachers, parents/caregivers, employers.</p>
The process of developing curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The only group that has authority in curriculum decision making involves policy-makers (the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Government, the Ministries and Ministerial-level agencies); leaders/managers at educational institutions (President, Dean of Faculty, Head of Department); experienced educators and scientists. - The outcomes of this process include the <i>Curriculum Framework</i>, textbooks, teaching and learning materials that will be mandatorily applied to any educational unit (province, school, faculty, classroom, learner). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The whole society (learners and other related groups listed in the middle column) has representatives participating in curriculum decision making. - The <i>Curriculum Framework</i> remains. But instead of compulsorily imposing it on any educational unit (as in the systematic approach), the standards of knowledge, skills and attitudes for each educational level are prescribed. On the one hand, the activities of teaching and learning are required to meet these standards. On the other hand, teachers and learners have freedom in the implementation of the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> by being creative in designing the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i>, lesson plans and teaching and learning materials.

Obviously, in the participatory approach, teachers and learners play more important roles in curriculum decision making. As previously stated, in Vietnam, university teachers have priority over school teachers as they benefit from the autonomy and accountability in curriculum decision making. However, a question emerges: Should university teachers be involved in curriculum decision making and to what degree? Nowadays many authors have advocated for teachers' roles in institutional decision making and curriculum decision making in particular (Alfred & Carter, 1993; Archbald & Porter, 1994; Baldrige & Tierney, 1979; Ben-Peretz, 1980; Bower, 1991; Codd, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Jesson, 2008; Kosunen, 1994; Michael, 2004; Sears & Marshall, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1996; Young, 1985). It cannot be denied that teachers who are directly involved in curriculum implementation deserve important roles in curriculum decision making. Nevertheless, in the setting of Vietnam where the quality of teaching staff has suffered from public criticism⁴, whether teachers can fulfil their roles is a critical question. Two aspects of the issue can be interpreted as: (i) Whether policy-makers believe in teachers (by giving them autonomy and self-accountability in decision making), and (ii) Whether teachers are trustworthy, or sufficiently competent enough to make use of the autonomy and accountability given.

Process of developing curriculum in Vietnamese higher education

According to Nguyen, V. K. (2009), the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education includes three stages as follows.

- i. Stage 1: Designing the *Curriculum Framework*, which are mandatorily applied at all higher education institutions
- ii. State 2: Developing the *Detailed Curriculum* for each university/faculty; Writing textbooks and teaching and learning materials

⁴ See Report of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam of Teaching and Managerial Staff in the Education and Vocational Training Sector, 2006; Report of the Minister of Education and Training at the National Conference of Teacher Training Institutions, 2006; Report of the National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum of Surveying Teacher Training Institutions, 2006; Resolution/NQ-BCSD (4 April 2007) About Developing Teacher Training and Teacher Training Institutions From 2007 to 2015.

- iii. Stage 3: Developing lesson plans for each university teacher; Implementing lesson plans in classrooms; Evaluating students' academic performance; Reflecting and proposing necessary changes to the curriculum

I explain this process in detail in *Table 3: Process of Curriculum Development in Vietnamese Higher Education*. The three columns on the right hand side present three stages of the curriculum development process. The left hand column introduces the aspects involved in each stage: Activities involved, who holds the highest authority, who participates, policy, curriculum outcomes, and roles of university teachers.

Table 3

Process of Curriculum Development in Vietnamese Higher Education

		Stages of the process	
Content of the stage	Designing the Curriculum Framework	Developing the Detailed Curriculum; Writing Textbooks and Teaching and Learning Materials	Developing Lesson Plans; Implementing and Evaluating; Reflecting and Proposing Changes
Activities involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing the <i>Curriculum Framework</i>, involving specifying educational goals, time schedule, content, guidelines to use the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> to develop the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i> for each university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i> based on the specific context of each university - Writing textbooks and teaching and learning materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the lesson plans - Implementing the lesson plans in classrooms - Evaluating students' academic performance - Reflecting and proposing necessary changes
Who holds the highest authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Minister of Education and Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The President of university - Deans of Faculties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University teachers
Who participates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The <i>Counsellor Committee for Curriculum Development</i>, involving representatives from the Ministries, universities, related scientific and technology institutions - The <i>Curriculum Framework Appraisal Committee</i>, involving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The <i>Scientific and Training Committee</i> of the university (the President is the Chairman) - The <i>Scientific and Training Committee</i> of the faculty (the Dean is the Chairman). The <i>Committee</i>, however, is established by the President - The <i>Appraisal Committee for the Detailed Curriculum</i>, textbooks and teaching and learning materials. This <i>Committee</i> is established by the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All teachers of the university

<p>representatives from the above agencies</p> <p>– (*) Both these two <i>Committees</i> are established by the Minister of Education and Training.</p>	<p>President, involving representatives from the faculties, departments and scientists outside the university.</p> <p>– (*) In respect of the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i> and textbooks used for a number of universities, the <i>Appraisal Committee</i> is established by the Minister of Education and Training.</p>	
<p>– Article 41 of the Educational Law (2005)</p> <p>– Clauses 6 and 10 of Decree 75/2006/ND-CP (2 August 2006) About Guiding the Implementation of the Educational Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam</p> <p>– Clause 15 of University Charter (Implemented According to Resolution 153/2003/QD-TTg (30 July 2003) by the Prime Minister)</p> <p>– Clause 6 of Regulation About the Standards for Assessing the Educational Quality of Universities (Implemented According to Resolution 65/2007/QD-BGD&DT (1 November 2007) by the Minister of Education and Training)</p> <p>– Regulation About the Standards for Assessing the Educational Quality of the Teacher Training Programme at University Level (implemented according to Resolution 03/2008/QD-BGD&DT (4 February 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)</p>	<p>– Article 41 of the Educational Law (2005)</p> <p>– Clause 6, 9 and 10 of Decree 75/2006/ND-CP (2 August 2006) About Guiding the Implementation of the Educational Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam</p> <p>– Clause 15 of University Charter (Implemented According to Resolution 153/2003/QD-TTg (30 July 2003) by the Prime Minister)</p> <p>– Clause 6 of Regulation About the Standards for Assessing the Educational Quality of Universities (Implemented According to Resolution 65/2007/QD-BGD&DT (1 November 2007) by the Minister of Education and Training)</p> <p>– Regulation About the Standards for Assessing the Educational Quality of the Teacher Training Programme at University Level (implemented according to Resolution 03/2008/QD-BGD&DT (4 February 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)</p>	<p>– Clause 46 of University Charter (implemented according to Resolution 153/2003/QD-TTg (30 July 2003) by the Prime Minister)</p> <p>– Clauses 4, 5, 6, 8 of Regulation About the Working Policy for Tertiary Teachers (Implemented According to Resolution 64/2008/QD-BGD&DT (28 November 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)</p>
<p>Policy</p>		

Curriculum outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcome: The <i>Curriculum Framework</i> - Meaning: The <i>Curriculum Framework</i> for each subject is mandatory at all universities teaching that subject. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcomes: The <i>Detailed Curriculum</i>, textbooks, teaching and learning materials - Meaning: The <i>Detailed Curriculum</i> and textbooks for a subject are compulsory for all classes teaching that subject. They are the basis on which each university teacher develops their own lesson plans for their own classrooms. Teaching and learning materials are optional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcome: Lesson plans - Meaning: Lesson plans (and supporting materials chosen by the university teachers) bear the hallmark of the teachers and serve as an interactive tool between them and learners.
Roles of university teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University teachers hardly participate in this stage. Only leading Professors and Associate Professors are invited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only a minority of university teachers is invited to join this stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All university teachers are required to participate. - University teachers have complete freedom in designing their lesson plans without any approval from Dean of the faculty. - While teaching, if teachers have any proposals for changes to the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i>, they are encouraged to propose these changes to the department/faculty level. Teachers' proposals will be considered and changes may be made to the <i>Detailed Curriculum</i> and the textbooks.

Two observations can be drawn from the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education. On the one hand, the process is highly concentrated and centralized. This is seen in the prevalent roles in curriculum decision making of policy-makers and education leaders/managers that involve the Ministers, the President of a university, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments. This fact is understandable since, as discussed earlier, Vietnamese education is a socialist education system characterized by its highly concentrated and centralized nature. On the other hand, this process has begun to recognize the need to facilitate processes to give university teachers more autonomy and accountability. For example, the roles of teachers in curriculum decision making are most evident in stage 3 (see Table 3, pp. 24-26). Moreover, some experienced teachers (mostly Professors and Associate Professors) are invited to participate in curriculum decision making at higher levels (designing the *Curriculum Framework* and developing the *Detailed Curriculum*). The two observations above manifest the centralized-democratic principle of the education management in Vietnam.

As my research is conducted in the setting of a higher education institution for teacher training, it is also necessary to introduce some features of teacher training in Vietnam and background information of Hanoi National University of Education. These issues are presented in the following sections.

Some features of teacher training in Vietnam

In this section I briefly introduce some features of teacher training in Vietnam, including the teacher training system, the teaching staff at teacher training universities, and the aims of developing teacher training until 2015. The reason for discussing these is because my research involves participants as lecturers at Hanoi National University of Education, a teacher training university. Firstly, in summarizing the *Report of the National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum of Surveying Teacher Training Institutions (2006)*, I found the following information about teacher training in Vietnam.

- i. Until 2006, Vietnam had 117 teacher training institutions. 15 of them are directly under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training, 61 are directly under the management of the provinces. Among 117 institutions, 44 are universities levels; the rest are colleges.

- ii. From the year 2001-2002 to the year 2005-2006, the number of students at all teacher training institutions increased 1.65 times. In particular, the number of students enrolled at teacher training universities increased 1.9 times. This meant an increasing pressure on teacher training institutions while teaching staff is claimed to be insufficient in both quantity and quality.

Secondly, according to *Resolution 08/NQ-BCSD (4 April 2007) About Developing Teacher Training and Teacher Training Institutions From 2007 to 2015*, until 2007 the number of teaching staff at teacher training universities was 5,469. Among them, 5.2% were Professors and Associate Professors, 15.5% were Doctors and Scientific Doctors, and 37.6% held Masters degrees. These proportions were claimed to be lower to those compared with more developed countries in Asia. They are even lower than the average proportions of other universities in Vietnam. This Resolution also points out some shortcomings of teacher training universities. These involve the lack of quantity and quality of university teachers as well as the weakness in developing curriculum and renewing pedagogy and assessment. The *Report of the National Assembly of Teaching and Managerial Staff in the Education and Vocational Training Sector (2006)* and the *Report of the Minister of Education and Training at the National Conference of Teacher Training Institutions (2006)* share the same comment when suggest that university teachers' professional competence, especially the research competence, is significant weaker than those of other countries in the world. This is believed to cause negative impacts on the quality of teacher training. The situation is even more concerning in some teacher training institutions, as according to the *Report of the National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum of Surveying Teacher Training Institutions (2006)*, the quantity and quality of teachers are not equally distributed—the central universities surely attract a significantly larger number of teachers and with higher qualifications.

Thirdly, *Resolution 08/NQ-BCSD (4 April 2007)* also proposes the objectives for developing teacher training and teacher training institutions from 2007 to 2015. Among these objectives, three significant ones are: (i) Renewing the curriculum to improve the quality and effectiveness of teacher training, (ii) Encouraging scientific and educational research to reach international standards,

(iii) Enhancing the professional competences of university teachers. Additionally, all universities and teacher training institutions are in the process of strengthening autonomy and self-accountability under the concentrated management of the State and the supervision of the public (*Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP (2 November 2005) About Innovating Vietnamese Tertiary System From 2006 to 2020*).

It can be suggested that in Vietnam over the last decades, the endeavours to enhance the quantity and quality of university teachers has become central to the innovation of higher education in general and teacher training in particular. This effort can be seen in some policy documents listed in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4

Some Policy Documents About Managerial and Policy Changes to Innovate Vietnamese Higher Education (2005–2006)

Managerial and policy changes	Policy documents
Delegate autonomy and self-accountability to HEIs	– (refer to p. 16)
Encourage university teachers to improve their professional competences and to participate in scientific research	– Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP (2 November 2005) About Innovating Vietnamese Tertiary System From 2006 to 2020 – Resolution 08/NQ-BCSD (4 April 2007) About Developing Teacher Training and Teacher Training Institutions From 2007 to 2015 – Regulation About the Working Policy for Tertiary Teachers (Implemented According to Resolution 64/2008/QD-BGD&DT (28 November 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)
Provide financial support for university teachers	– Regulation About the Working Policy for Tertiary Teachers (Implemented According to Resolution 64/2008/QD-BGD&DT (28 November 2008) by the Minister of Education and Training)

In the following section, I introduce some background information of Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE) where my research is conducted. This involves the faculties, the teaching and managerial staff, and the teacher training programmes. I also review some strengths and shortcomings in the staff and curriculum of the university.

Background information of Hanoi National University of Education

HNUE is regarded as one of the two largest teacher training institutions in Vietnam (together with Ho Chi Minh National University of Education), which attracts most investment of the State. This fact is declared in *Resolution 08/NQ-BCSD (4 April 2007) About Developing Teacher Training and Teacher Training Institutions From 2007 to 2015*.

According to the *Internal Assessment Report* of HNUE (2006), it is a multi-disciplinary teacher training university with 22 faculties covering 22 fields of study (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Agro-Biology, Technology Education, Information Technology, Philology, History, Geography, Political Education, Psychology and Education Studies, Early-childhood Education, Primary Education, Special Education, Physical Education, National Defence Education, Music and Fine Art Education, English Language, French Language, Russian Language, Educational Management, and Vietnamese Studies). There are also two high schools and 23 research institutions that belong to HNUE.

HNUE's *Internal Assessment Report* (2006) also points out that until June 2006, the university had 886 teaching staff (13.31% were Professors and Associate Professors, 25.24% were Doctors and Scientific Doctors, and 25.73% had a Masters degree). Among the 225 managerial staff, 89.3% had at least Masters degrees. These numbers are higher than the average proportions of other teacher training institutions (refer to p. 28). According to the *External Assessment Report of Hanoi National University of Education (Established According to Resolution 2167/2007/QĐ-BGD&ĐT (4 May 2007) by the Minister of Education and Training)*, the HNUE teaching staff are graded as highly experienced while the managerial staff are graded as highly qualified and dynamic.

As reported in the HNUE's *Internal Assessment Report* (2006), the teacher training programmes at HNUE can be seen in Table 5 as follows.

Table 5

Teacher Training Programmes at Hanoi National University of Education

Levels of training	Number of programmes	Number of enrolment (2006–2007)
Graduate	54	61,500
Post Graduate	31 (Master programmes)	2,000
	40 (PhD programmes)	245
College	1	60
Overall	126	63,850

This Report also shows that the university has trained 72,018 graduates, almost 5,000 Masters students, and 538 Doctors. HNUE has also contributed to curriculum development and professional development for high school teachers (about 50% authors of textbooks and teaching and learning materials are HNUE staff).

The *External Assessment Report of Hanoi National University of Education (Established According to Resolution 2167/2007/QĐ-BGD&ĐT (4 May 2007) by the Minister of Education and Training)* also points out several strengths and shortcomings in HNUE's staff and curriculum. According to this Report, the number of highly experienced teaching staff and the diverse training programmes are two remarkable strengths of HNUE. Meanwhile, there are shortcomings such as: The accrediting system has not been implemented; the *Detailed Curriculum* and teaching and learning materials have not been uploaded on the website of HNUE; teaching and learning materials are not diverse and up-to-date; the reform of pedagogy is limited; the workload of university teachers is heavy; feedback from graduates and employers is not frequently up-dated.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how my research was initiated. This explains how my personal experiences and interests in higher education and curriculum led to selecting the research setting and my decisions about the research context. I have also discussed what I aimed to find out about Hanoi National University of

Education teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making; as well as what I expected to contribute to teachers' professional development and curriculum theories and practice. Additionally, I have introduced international and Vietnamese contexts and settings of educational management and curriculum shifts that have shaped the issues raised in my research. The philosophy of Vietnamese education as a socialist educational system was explained to support information that was to be gathered from interviewing HNUE teachers. However, contextual factors may not be enough to understand the research context and its findings. Therefore, in the following chapter—Nesting the Curriculum Research—I reveal the theories underpinning my research, on which I decided to frame the research questions and direct the research approach.

CHAPTER 2: NESTING THE CURRICULUM RESEARCH

Introduction

In this chapter I explore theories underpinning some key concepts that constitute the research context. These include curriculum, teachers' perceptions, and curriculum decision making. The aim is to lay the theoretical basis on which the research questions emerged. To do so, I want to emphasize the significance of conducting the research, and to suggest ideas for the shaping and methodology to approach the research. This chapter begins by exploring the nature of curriculum being that curriculum is heavily value laden (Klein, 1990; McGee, 1997), personal and unique (Foshay, 1990, 2000), and experience-based (Doyle, 1992). Seeing curriculum as possibilities (Beyer, 1990; Berman, 1990; Doll, 1990, 1993; Greene, 1990) rather than trying to capture it in a definite and rigorous definition supports my research focus of exploring the diversity in university teachers' perceptions of curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making. In section two of the chapter, I review recent research on teachers' cognition, teachers' thinking, teachers' beliefs, teachers' perceptions and so forth, as these terms overlap and are used interchangeably (Pajares, 1992). This review guides my research approach as it identifies the theoretical assumptions underpinning research on teachers' perceptions; as well as the methods I have chosen to access, analyze, and interpret these perceptions. These include for example the application of metaphors and metaphorical language (Freeman, 1994). Section three of this chapter examines university teachers' curriculum decision making in the new trend of management at higher education institutions (Floyd, 1985). This is significant in relation to the positions of university teachers in curriculum decision making processes, as well as on ways university teachers perceive their curriculum positions (Floyd, 1985).

Theorizing curriculum perspectives

Why is it important to conceptualize the term curriculum when introducing the research theorizing? The reason, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim, is that our thought is governed by concepts, for they "structure what we perceive, how we

get around in the world, and how we relate to other people” (p. 3). Therefore, how people talk about curriculum tells us much about how they act towards curriculum. However, there seems to be no single way of defining curriculum. According to Beyer (1990) “The educational world and society in general have been created by individuals and groups with particular interests and values” (p. 128). This means education thinking—and curriculum thinking in particular—means different things to different people in different historical contexts. O’Neill (2005), therefore, argues that “the curriculum is best understood as a site of contestation and struggle over diverse and competing interests, world views and the power to enact them” (p. 115). For this reason, as can be seen in curriculum literature, the term “curriculum” is often defined through comparing two or more approaches to it. Differences come from ways of looking at the roles of the society, the curriculum, the learners and the teacher, as well as at the interrelationships among them (Schiro, 2008). Because my research context is university teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making, *Table 6: Some Prevalent Curriculum Perspectives* summarizes some prevalent curriculum perspectives with a focus on teachers’ positions in curriculum development and decision making. The literature is reviewed in a sequence moving backwards from the more contemporary authors, as this literature usually covers earlier curriculum thinking. Table 6 has three columns: The left hand column shows key authors’ names; the middle column introduces their key curriculum perspectives; the right hand column presents my explanation and theorizing based on these key curriculum perspectives.

Table 6

Some Prevalent Curriculum Perspectives

Author(s)	Key curriculum perspectives	Explanations and theorizing
O'Neill, A. M. (2005)	Advocates the "pedagogical" or "authentic" view of curriculum as opposed to the "narrow", "traditional", "syllabus" or "objective" view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The "narrow, traditional, syllabus or objective" view of curriculum refers to "timetabled subjects and their content as part of a prescribed course" (O'Neill, 2005, p. 112). O'Neill (2005) criticises that this approach as de-activating teachers and students in the teaching process as the curriculum is largely assumed and "designed elsewhere" (p. 113). - The "pedagogical or authentic" view of curriculum is more expansive as it sees curriculum as a production of "the teacher and students interacting together in the light of policies and syllabus, within a social and cultural milieu" (p. 114). This is why curriculum is called "a cultural construction" (Grundy, 1987) and is "inevitably the focus of politics" (O'Neill, 2005, p. 115). In this perspective, the teacher is regarded as "an active planner, facilitator and researcher within the interactive process. He or she is a dynamic curriculum developer constructing the curriculum through every act of teaching" (O'Neill, 2005, p. 114). This meets the concept of teacher and curricular empowerment proposed by Schubert (1990): "To become empowered is to become the author of one's own growth, personally and socially" (p. 212). Noddings (1990) shares the same idea when he suggests "teachers who are empowered should have great sense of their own power to affect curriculum, students, and their own mode of teaching" (p. xi).
Renshaw, P. D. & van der Linden, J. (2003)	Propose the notion of a "dialogic curriculum" based on Grundy's distinction between curriculum as a conceptual field and curriculum as cultural practice (1987)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Propose "curriculum as a conceptual field" and perceive curriculum as 'processes of design, planning, dissemination, implementation and evaluation' (Renshaw & van der Linden, 2003, p. 18). This is close to Scott's (2008) definition of curriculum, which consists of four dimensions namely aims or objectives, content or subject matter, methods or procedures, and evaluation or assessment. - "Curriculum as a cultural practice", on the other hand, "is not defined by documents, plans or sets of materials, but by the sets of social relationships and experiences that constitute the interaction between students and teachers" (Renshaw & van der Linden, 2003, p. 18) in particular educational contexts.

Curriculum, therefore, is open-ended and emergent rather than pre-planned and sequential. This approach regards teaching as a cultural practice and sees the teacher and students as co-participants in a dialogic inquiry. Schubert (1990) stated: "Each participant is not merely a receiver of curricular developed by others. Each is an active creator, along with those who have special expertise, of the curriculum that gives increased meaning and direction of an individual's life" (p. 215).

- Wardekker, W. (2003)
- Distinguishes curriculum as cultural differences and curriculum as planning documents
 - **Curriculum as planning documents** simply regards teaching as "no more than implementing the courses of actions prescribed in those documents" (Wardekker, 2003, p. 1).
 - **Curriculum culture**, on the other hand, claims that "differences in outlook, contents, and interaction patterns between schools are related to thinking about education and to planning the curriculum, but they also 'grow' as cultural differences" (Wardekker, 2003, p. 2). Hence, curriculum is placed in a wider context in which its elements are shaped by cultural differences. This may explain Donmoyer's (1990) assertion that to understand curriculum we must first understand the community's culture and its efforts to reproduce itself through educational institutions. This idea is also raised by Beyer (1990) as will be seen later in this Table (p. 39).
 - To discuss curriculum as a cultural practice, it is important to see how cultures are embedded in curriculum. According to Wardekker (2003), cultures can be "made explicit and base themselves on thinking about, and planning of, the curriculum, they normally refer to ideas and concepts developed by educational philosophers, psychologists, and (sometimes) practitioners" (p. 2). Such systems are, as he calls them, ideologies of curriculum. Eisner (1992) provides an excellent review and discussion of six dominated curriculum ideologies in education history, as will be seen later in this Table.
 - Based on the idea that curriculum is underpinned by ideologies and directed by planning, Wardekker (2003) proposes to see **curriculum as vision**. Curriculum vision, according to him, consists of "some notions of goals, of meanings of reaching those goals, and of the qualities of the situation in which learning is going to take place" (p. 2). I understand curriculum vision as a model of the person that a group or individual wants students to become by means of curriculum. This is where the complexity and contestation of curriculum emerges, for society is constituted by different groups of people who hold different interests, including interests in education. Meanwhile, education and curriculum serve as an

instrument to “protect their interests and maintain their social position, and hence their power” (Codd, 2005, p. 29). Or as Wardekker (2003) states, curriculum planning “always is a form of cultural politics depending on a vision, and this implies that education is always a contested area” (p. 3). Thus, Wardekker raises two important questions in understanding curriculum choices: What vision is behind them? and Whose vision is it? In this sense, curriculum seems to be examined under the light of “political power” (Brown, 2006). As I understand it, this means in a particular political system, there are particular individuals and groups who have the power to decide on curriculum choice. This choice is made to protect and maintain these individuals’ and groups’ interests and power.

- Carpenter, V. M. (2001)
- Conceives the “hidden curriculum” and the “null curriculum” as parts of “reproduced” curriculum
 - “**Hidden curriculum**” consists of the practices and outcomes of schoolings which are not explicit in curriculum guides or school policy.
 - “**Null curriculum**” consists of the excluded subjects that are not offered to students.
 - Curriculum then, is “what is taught and what is not taught but is nonetheless learned... Curriculum can be, but is not always documented” (Carpenter, 2001, p. 112). This approach reveals the political nature of curriculum as it reproduces the existing social order by nominating certain knowledge while eliminating the other (Apple, 1982; Codd, 2005). Curriculum as an instrument of social reproduction is also discussed in Beyer (1990) and Doyle (1992). These two authors’ views are explored latter in this Table (pp. 38-39).
- McGee, C. (1997)
- Distinguishes “curriculum as a plan” and “curriculum as the day-to-day interaction” (or a contextualized view of curriculum, which is similar to Eisner’s (1994) distinction between the “intended curriculum” and the “operational curriculum”).
 - At national level, “the curriculum tends to be regarded in terms of what will be taught and what kinds of outcomes are expected” (McGee, 1997, p. 13). Curriculum development at this level, therefore, is

different managerial levels, involving national, school and classroom levels. In accordance with this are three levels of the curriculum development process

- concerned with the design of new or revised syllabuses or handbooks or resources.
- At school level, curriculum is interpreted as agreements about how and what will be taught at the various classes. Curriculum development at this level is to develop school programmes based on the delivery of the national curriculum.
- At classroom level, teachers seem to see curriculum as the “actual experience provided” for students as opposed to the perception curriculum as ‘planning and controlling’ of people beyond classrooms (McGee, 1997, p. 14). Curriculum development at this level is to develop particular class programmes such as lesson plans. In this sense, teachers have limited power in choosing what will be taught, but they still have certain autonomy in modifying the national curriculum statement and deciding the pedagogical approaches to suit individual students.

Doyle, W. (1992) Distinguishes the “institutional” and “experiential” levels of curriculum

- The “**institutional**” curriculum is “a tacitly understood and shared conception or paradigm of schooling” (Doyle, 1992, p. 487). In this sense, the written curriculum such as policy, *Curriculum Framework* or teaching materials is part of, not equivalent to, the institutional curriculum.
- The “**experiential**” curriculum is “what teachers and students experience” (Doyle, 1992, p. 493). Hence, curriculum exists not as a document but is constructed or negotiated (Boomer et al., 1992) through the interactions or dialogue (Renshaw & van der Linden, 2003) between the teacher and students. Foshay (1990, 2000) shares a similar idea of curriculum as experiences, for he asserts that curriculum is unique to each individual and we should not think of curriculum impersonally. In this sense, curriculum becomes “an instrument of self-discovery, of self-realization” (Foshay, 1990, p. 274).

Eisner, E. W. (1992) Categorizes curriculum by examining its underpinning ideologies

- **Curriculum ideologies** are defined as “beliefs about what should be taught, for what ends and for what reasons” (Eisner, 1992, p. 302). The power of curriculum ideologies is that they give direction to practitioners and to the aims of the school.
- Curriculum ideologies can exist in the most explicit form, that is in the manifesto about what should be taught such as policy, *Curriculum Framework*, and teaching material. They can also exist in the most implicit form – the language used to talk about curriculum, both metaphors and metaphorical language.

- As curriculum ideologies are beliefs that belong to a particular group holding power in a particular historical period, they are subjective to changes. Eisner therefore reviews six prominent curriculum ideologies in the American education history, involving religious orthodoxy, rational humanism, progressivism, critical theory, reconceptualism, and cognitive pluralism (1992). These categories are similar to Walker's conceptions, namely academic excellen, social relevance, social change, individual well-being, educational equality, religious training (2003). Schiro, however, proposes four major ideologies underpinning curriculum: scholar academic, social efficiency, learner centred, and social reconstruction (2008).
 - In acknowledging that curriculum ideologies are politically involved, Eisner (1992) points out the differences between the practices of curriculum ideologies in two different political systems: a nation with only one political party, and a democratic and pluralistic society. In the former system, the official ideology is pervasive and has no alternatives. As a result, curriculum under this political system is more likely to be restricted and prescribed. In contrast, "when a society is characterized by value plurality and when the political strength of groups is comparable, the process almost always leads to certain compromises" (Eisner, 1992, p. 304). Consequently, a "pure" form or a single position of ideology is rarely found in national curriculum. **This distinction has a critical meaning in my research, for it is conducted in the Vietnamese Socialist society that is governed under a sole political party.**
 - The **"technical or procedural" approach** treats curriculum decisions as "procedural questions that often taken for granted the ends or aims of education, teachers and others become surrounded by a technical mode of rationality" (Beyer, 1990, p. 124). Two shortcomings of this approach are that it ignores the specific conditions which are varied from one class to another, and that it overlooks the social and political questions that are inevitably embedded in education. Apple (1986, 1990) also argues that teachers face the prospect of being deskilled, and that the intensely ethical and political nature of curriculum and teaching is marginalized because of the technical control over curriculum. Marsh (1992), therefore, criticises the technical view of curriculum in terms of producing disempowered teachers "who teach defensively and control knowledge in order to control students" (p. 45).
 - Given the political and constructed nature of curriculum, Beyer (1990) raises the need to consider the
- Claims that curriculum ideologies are politically involved
- Beyer, L. E. (1990) Points out the shortcomings of the "technical" or "procedural" view of curriculum and call for a new approach to curriculum that is responsive to political, ethical and social issues

philosophy and ideologies underpinning curriculum choices rather than isolating curriculum from the historical context from which it emerges. **In chapter 1 of my research, the Vietnamese socio-political and educational contexts were analyzed in terms of their potential influences on the ways university teachers perceive curriculum and curriculum decision making.**

- Doll Jr. W. E. (1990) Discusses the concept of post-modern curriculum
- Doll (1990) defines post-modernism as “a movement that accepts the universe as complex, self-generating and evolving. It is a universe that is always in the process of Becoming not one that has rigidly set in Being” (p. 46). Hence, the **post-modern curriculum** is seen as “possibilities” (Berman, 1990; Doll, 1990; Greene, 1990). Such a curriculum is believed to enable students to “find their voice, to think about their own thinking, to open themselves to others, to perceive continuities of their experience” (Greene, 1990, p. 78). Another possibility of this approach to curriculum is that it helps learners as post-modern citizens to deal with and adapt to “disequilibrium and dissonance and chaos” (Greene, 1990, p. 78) characterized by post-modern society. Doll (1993) also argues that “perturbation, problem, or disturbance” is the prerequisite for self-organization, the emerging post-modern pedagogy (p. 163).
- Klein, M. F. (1990) Reviews traditional approaches to curriculum theorizing (traditionalist, structuralist, intellectual, technologist, behaviourist, social behaviourist) in comparison with alternative theoretical positions (reconceptualist, experientialist, humanist, generic theorizer, self-actualizer)
- **Traditional approaches** to curriculum are characterized as “scientific, reductionistic, linear and rational” ways of developing curriculum. Hence, teaching is predictable and curriculum consists of prescribed objectives, the pedagogy to achieve them, and the measurements to measure these achievements. A teacher, therefore, is seen as “a conveyor of the curriculum which is planned at a higher level of authority than the classroom” (Klein, 1990, p. 8).
 - **Alternative approaches** to curriculum are different from traditional approaches in terms of their beliefs and values about curriculum, their visions of what schools ought to do, and their own ways of seeing the world. Regardless of their different assumptions about education and teaching, these alternative approaches all criticise the traditional approaches (or the modernist paradigm—in the post-modernism’s way of expression) in terms of their simple, linear, closed nature rooted in Newton’s natural science (Doll, 1990, pp. 40-42). Also these alternative approaches all emphasise that curriculum must be “constructed and evolutionary, not copied or imposed” (Doll, 1990, p. 43) and that teachers are professionals who should play as key curriculum decision makers (Klein, 1990; McGee, 1997).

Reflecting on Table 6, two observations can be drawn from reviewing of some prevalent curriculum perspectives. Firstly, there are severe criticisms on traditional approaches to curriculum. The de-professionalization of teachers is one of the most frequent arguments (Klein, 1990; O'Neill, 2005). Ignorance of the wider socio-political context which partly shapes curriculum is also criticized (Beyer, 1990). Secondly, there is a call for new approaches to curriculum that reject uniformity (Doyle, 1992) and invite possibilities (Doll, 1990). In these approaches, the complexities of the socio-political and cultural nature of curriculum (Renshaw & van der Linden, 2003; Wardekker, 2003) are considered along with its underpinning ideologies (Eisner, 1992) and the post-modern theories of disturbance (Doll, 1993). This construction inevitably operates as top-down policies; yet the teacher carries out significantly more important roles in curriculum development than in traditional curriculum approaches.

The idea of an open curriculum in the post-modern era sounds great. However, in a nation governed by a sole political party (Vietnam, for example), where there seems to be a single position or ideology that directs education, teachers may be unable to align themselves with the image of “curriculum as possibilities.” The reason, as Eisner (1992) points out, is that “in such nations the official ideology is often so pervasive that the absence of competing views may leave its citizens unable to think about alternatives” (p. 303). In this situation, teachers may not perceive curriculum differently from what is prescribed in curriculum policies.

The two observations drawn from Table 6 are very critical for my research, as I aim to find out the ways university teachers view curriculum and their positions in curriculum development processes in the context of Vietnamese higher education. It is suggested that the Socialist political system that governs Vietnamese higher education, and thus its curriculum, constrains HNUE teachers' envisioning of curriculum. This may also influence teachers' self-evaluation of their roles in curriculum decision making. In order to understand research on teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making, the following section considers the context of research in relation to teachers' cognition.

Theorizing teachers' cognition

This section examines ontological assumptions underpinning a cognitivist approach (Marton, 1994) that I have applied to my research. As defined in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007), ontology is concerned with the nature of the social reality investigated by the researcher, for example, whether the social reality is objective to the researcher or a product of the researcher's consciousness. Also, its application to my research on teachers is discussed in terms of exploring the relationships between teachers' thoughts and their teaching activities. As Calderhead (1990) points out, teachers' perceptions as a focus of my research, is a part of teachers' cognition. Therefore, this section theorizes the shaping and methodology of my research in two ways. Firstly, I conceptualize the notion of perception and propose questions to be answered if we aim to reveal the perceptions held by an individual (Bartley, 1958). Secondly, I acknowledge the importance of the roles of language in presenting human beings' perceptions (Marton, 1994). I then acknowledge the linguistic and socio-political nature of language (Fairclough, 1992) as well as their applications to the analysis of language data in research on teachers' perception (Freeman, 1994). Following this, I consider the use of metaphors and metaphorical language as a strategy to analyze data in my research (Carter, 2001; Collin & Green, 2001; Eisner, 1992; Grant, 1992; Munby, 1989; Munby & Russell, 2001; Kliebard, 2001; Tobin, 2001).

Ontological assumptions of cognitivism

A starting point of research on teachers' cognition is that "[an] individual has separated—or distinguished—himself or herself from the rest of the world" (Marton, 1994, p. 28). Between these, there are two major links: human beings make sense of the world through sense organs such as sound, light, smell; and human beings act in the world such as talking, moving, doing things. What directs their doing is claimed to be the hidden entities (for example, knowledge, memory, thoughts, feelings, will, motivation) and processes (for example, solving problems, making decisions, remembering things) that are located in people's heads. Marton (1994), therefore, claims that there are two worlds—"a real world out there and a replica of

that world in people's heads" (p. 29). This view is usually referred to as "cognitivism", which rests on "a dualistic ontology, separating subjects and objects" (Marton, 1994, p. 29). Because of its power to understand human beings' inner worlds, this view of cognitivism is applied to research on teachers' thoughts and behaviours, as follows.

Teachers' thoughts and behaviours: A cognitivist approach

Here I am of the view that teachers' behaviours are led by their thoughts (Clark & Peterson, 1986) and this is a basis for research on teachers' cognition. This approach is highly regarded, for it conceives teachers as thoughtful professionals rather than technicians in a more traditional approach such as the behaviourist (Calderhead, 1996). Drawing from Calderhead (1990), two phases of research on teachers' cognition are reviewed. My research aligns with phase two, which focuses on the perceptions of teachers. Exploring a cognitive approach also recognizes the complexity of research on teachers' cognition in terms of the diverse contexts in which teachers' cognition is shaped (Carlgren, Handal & Vaage, 1994). Hence, the importance of language as an aspect of culture in constructing and presenting teachers' cognition is discussed (Kliebard, 2001). Complexity also comes from the vague conceptualizations of interchangeable terms related to cognition, including perception—the key concept of my research focus (Pajares, 1992).

Marton (1994) supposes that "teachers' acts are affected—if not caused, or controlled—by the thoughts they have arrived at, the decisions they have made, the solution to the problems they have found" (p. 29). In Clark and Peterson's (1986) well-known words: "Teacher behaviour is substantially influenced and even determined by teachers' thought processes" (p. 255). These thought processes in an individual teacher, as these authors conclude from reviewing related literature, are in turn guided by their held systems of "theories, beliefs and values about his or her role and about the dynamics of teaching and learning" (p. 287).

Calderhead (1996) goes further when he examines research on teachers' cognition in comparison with behaviourist approaches to teaching. The latter "sought to describe teaching in terms of sequences of behaviour, and then to

investigate the relationship of that behaviour to children's learning", while the former "far more concerned with how teachers understand their work and the thought process, judgements, and decisions that their work involved" (Calderhead, 1996, p. 709). According to him, this shift in the emphasis of research on teachers and their teaching can be explained as a consequence of three factors: The growing dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of behaviourist studies, the development of cognitive psychology, and the increasing recognition of the centrality of the teacher in educational processes (pp. 709-710). This is close to Isenberg's (1990) comment that the focus on teachers' thoughts means the acknowledgement of teachers as "active, engaging and rational professionals" (p. 322). Nevertheless, Isenberg (1990) also notes that once teachers are seen as "thoughtful professionals", they must be aware of the influences that their thoughts have on their teaching practice.

Research on teachers' cognition, however, can be divided into two phases, according to Calderhead (1990). The first phase endeavours to "explicate the information that teachers use in decision making and to identify how different information influenced the outcome of their decisions" (p. 710). The second phase is broader as it involves a more complex range of teachers' perceptions, attribution, thinking, judgements, reflections, evaluations and routines. This second phase is the focus of my research, as I aim to find out how university teachers conceptualize curriculum and curriculum decision making, and how they evaluate their current roles in that process; thus suggesting ways in which participation in curriculum decision making can be made more attractive to them.

There are at least two issues that contribute to the complexity of research on teachers' cognition, or teachers' perceptions, as far as my literature review can cover. Firstly, Carlgren et al. (1994) argue "What we perceive, learn, think and draw upon as a basis for our actions, it is closely related to the contexts or situations in which it takes place" (p. 2). The significance of the contexts that shape teachers' cognition is also remarked in Calderhead (1996) after he reviews several studies that attempt to "illustrate how teachers' personal and professional life interact, and how past life experiences influence the ways in which teachers make sense of their environment and define their role within it" (p. 718). An aspect of the cultural influences on teachers' cognition can be seen in the fact that

language as a form of culture (Lakoff & Lakoff, 1980) does not simply represent how a person sees the world (Freeman, 1994) but also facilitates herself or himself with “the conceptual categories by which thought and understanding are ordered” (Kliebard, 2001, p. 13). To clarify, it is by means of language that human beings’ thoughts are shaped and manifested. The role of language is very critical in research on teachers’ cognitions or perceptions, especially in my research, as language is translated between two languages—English and Vietnamese. This is discussed later in this chapter (pp. 86-88).

The second issue that makes research on teachers’ cognition more complex is what Pajares (1992) finds out when he tries to construct the notion of teacher beliefs—“definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures” (p. 307). Pajares (1992) then names some popular terms that are usually interchangeably used in literature such as “attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspective, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy” (p. 309). As my research focuses on teachers’ curriculum perceptions, this concept [perception]—as well as approaches to reveal it from an individual’s inner world—is discussed with more detail as follows.

The notion of perception

I examine the significance of perception in relation to individuals’ behaviours and suggest questions to make them explicit and to understand them. These issues, as developed in chapter 3, have critical meaning to the design, the data collection, and the data analysis and interpretation of my research.

Perception can be simply understood as “a phenomenon that emerges from a system of interrelated events, first in the individual’s surround, and then within the neuromuscular system of the individual himself” (Bartley, 1958, p. 37). This means perceptions are products of humans’ responses to the changes and differences in environment surrounding them (Boring, Langfeld & Weld, 1948). As these responses are differential in each individual, Munn (1951) claimed that

one's perceptions told us much about the stimulating properties of their particular context. The importance of perception to an individual is that it leads to behaviours. Boring et al. (1948) and Munn (1951) shared the same idea that perception of objects, situations, or relationships bridges stimulus and reactions. With regard to learning, Bartley (1958) believed perception was "one of the primary steps in providing an account of the learning process" (p. 435).

While research on perception had been conducted, as Bartley (1958) pointed out, there had been no systematic and comprehensive definition. Rather, he claimed, perception had been conceptualised with reference to past and current experiences (p. 5, p. 11), knowledge/thought/knowing of external objects and events (p. 9, p. 40), attitudes (p. 5), awareness of our self and our world (p. 10), and evaluation (p. 32). To understand perception, two questions are crucial: First, who the perceiver is; and second, what he or she has encountered in the past (Bartley, 1958, p. 35). This means researchers need to understand the perceiver within the environment he or she lives and in the web of interrelationships he or she has there. To acknowledge the impacts of culture on individual perceptions is also vital (Bartley, 1958). These notes have practical applications in the design and operation of my research. Individuals in my research are teachers at Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE) in Vietnam. Therefore, the context to be examined is the broader socio-political context of Vietnam, the higher education system, and the teacher training system. Additionally, there is a more specific context, that is, the context of HNUE where these teachers are involved in teaching and/or administration work. What are also important contextual factors are those teachers' personal and professional backgrounds that may have influences on their perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making. However, it is noted with ethical considerations kept in mind, the personal information related to teacher-participants in the research is not referred to when it is not necessary and without their permission.

Teachers' perceptions, as can be seen, are often implicit and invisible to external observations. As Marton (1994) points out, words of a specific language are the means by which teachers' thinking can be made available to researchers' access. For this reason, some issues related to language as the means of thought are discussed as follows.

Language as the means of thought

This part introduces critiques of the view of language as representational (Freeman, 1994) or transparent (Fairclough, 1992), for this ignores the linguistic aspect of and overlooks the socio-political influences on language. Freeman and Fairclough, therefore, call for an alternative that takes into consideration both the linguistic and socio-political natures of language. Freeman (1994) proposes the presentational approach, while Fairclough (1992) suggests a framework for critical discourse analysis. These approaches are believed to strengthen the validity of research, provided that there is mutual understanding shared by people involving in the conversation and that the researcher has extensive knowledge of linguistics and the socio-cultural context in which language data is sought. These ideas serve as guidelines for my research, since language is very much involved in my research, for example in the use of interviews, the translation back and forth between English and Vietnamese and thus the potential conflict caused by cultural differences between these two contexts wherein my research is shaped.

According to Freeman (1994), there have been two contrasting views of language as data in research on teachers' thinking. The representational view assumes that language data is "isomorphic⁵ to participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and feelings" (p. 77). He argues that this view ignores the nature of language in terms of its linguistic nature, form, social dimensions, and its relations to thoughts. Freeman (1994), therefore, calls for the presentational view of language. On the one hand, this view preserves the cognitive and socio-political foundations of research. On the other hand, it recognizes the complex nature of language data as language. In the presentational approach to language data, the presentation "lies in the intralinguistic and interlinguistic relationships in the data and has three basic dimensions" (Freeman, 1994, p. 78). They are: (i) What is said and how it is said (content of data such as interview responses); (ii) What is said

⁵ "Isomorphic" is an adjective form of "isomorphism", which comes from Ancient Greek ("isos" means "equal" and "morphe" means "shape"). As I understand it, the isomorphic relation between a person's thoughts and the language she uses to express her thoughts means language reflects thoughts precisely regardless of differences in the context of speaking (or writing). This context includes aspects such as the cultural and socio-political setting, the background and personality of the speaker (or writer).

to whom and how it may be heard and understood (the roles of the researcher); and (iii) What is said and where it comes from (the historical, cultural, socio-political and educational contexts of the research).

Freeman's (1994) views of language data share some similarities with the advocates of critical discourse analysis. For example, Fairclough (1992) criticizes the tendency to see language as transparent, that is "to believe that the social content of such data can be read off without attention to the language itself" (p. 2). In his theory, "either spoken or written language" or "different types of language used in different sorts of social situations" (p. 3) are defined as discourse. Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis aims to

bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language, in the form of a framework which will be suitable for use in social scientific research, and specifically in the study of social change. (1992, p. 62)

His framework to analyze discourse, therefore, is constituted by three mutual inclusive dimensions namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. Locke (2004, p. 8) interprets Fairclough's (1992) framework as three dimensions of discursive practice, involving its:

- i. manifestation in linguistic form (in the form of "texts");
- ii. instantiation of a social practice (political, ideological, and so on); and
- iii. socially constructed processes of production, distribution and consumption which determine how texts are made, circulated and used.

What is so powerful in Fairclough's (1992) and Freeman's (1994) approaches to language is that they embed both its linguistic and socio-political nature. These approaches help strengthen the validity of the analysis and interpretation of language data (Freeman, 1994). However, Freeman (1994) also notices the fact that words are "the product of social relationship which creates them" (p. 85) and that language may have different meanings to different speech communities and different individuals, even when they speak the same language. The accuracy of data analysis and interpretation, therefore, is likely to "depend, in a large part, on the researcher's life experience" and "not confirmed through a process of triangulation or reference to an external world" (Freeman, 1994, p. 88). Instead,

he claims, this accuracy comes from the mutual understandings shared among the researcher, participants, and readers who have access to the data. This requires the researcher to have extensive knowledge not only of linguistics but of the social and cultural contexts in which language data is sought. This reminder is even more important in my research since it is conducted in the context of a Vietnamese university, which is assumed to be unfamiliar with the majority of readers.

What makes the situation more complex is the fact that the language used in this research is both English and Vietnamese, as will be discussed further in chapter 3: Designing the Curriculum Research. The review of literature and the design of the research (for example, developing the Interviewing Schedule) are conducted in English. These are also translated into Vietnamese. The interviews are carried out in Vietnamese; then the interview responses are translated into English. Finally, the report is written in English. This process suggests that although Fairclough's (1992) and Freeman's (1994) approaches to language data sound great, a rigorous application of them in my research is naive. For this reason, in doing this research, only the principles of Fairclough's (1990) discourse analysis and Freeman's (1994) presentational analysis are kept in mind, such as the linguistic nature of language; the influences of social contexts on ways of talking and the content of the talks; the roles of the researcher in her relationships with teacher-participants and in the analysis and interpretation of interview responses.

In considering the linguistic nature of language, it is worth mentioning some applications of metaphors and metaphorical language in the analysis of language data in teachers' cognition. As Lakoff and Johnson claim in their well-known book, *Metaphors We Live by* (1980), language and human thought processes are largely metaphorical.

Metaphors and metaphorical language

I want to illustrate the idea of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) cited above and look at its manifestation in educational discourses (Collin & Green, 2001) by reviewing some studies that employ metaphors and metaphorical language. These studies

cover a wide range of issues related to curriculum (for example Eisner, 1992) and teachers' perceptions, thinking, beliefs and so forth (for example Grant, 1992; Munby, 1989; Tobin, 2001). This review strengthens the rationale for conducting my research on university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. Also, it suggests ideas that can be applied in my research such as the use of interpretive interview (Grant, 1992), and the awareness about the limitations of metaphors and metaphorical language data (Kliebard, 2001; Carter, 2001).

As cited by Grant (1992), in Aristotle's *Poetics*, metaphor "consists of giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (p. 433). However, more recently, it has been argued that metaphor is not just a matter of language, or mere words. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their well-known book on metaphors assert that "human thought processes are largely metaphorical" (p. 6). Kliebard (2001) shares the same idea: "Far from being mere literary devices or instances of imprecise language requiring literal translation, metaphors represent a fundamental way that human beings have evolved to express and organize their world, especially the world that lies beyond immediate perception" (p. 13). In this sense, metaphors move human thinking from the immediate and sensory into the remote and abstract. Carter (2001) also cites Elliott's (1984) argument that "mental acts, conscious processes, or operations of mental mechanisms below the level of consciousness are describable only by metaphorical means" (p. 112).

With regards to education, Collins and Green (2001) agree that "each way of talking about education is a language that brings with it a particular way of looking at the world (i.e., particular metaphors) and understanding what occurs" (p. 71). Hence, recently there is an increasing number of research on curriculum ideologies (Eisner, 1992); curriculum theories (Kliebard, 2001); and on teachers' perceptions and understandings (Grant, 1992), thinking (Munby, 1989; Carter, 2001), knowledge (Munby & Russell, 2001), beliefs (Tobin, 2001), reflection (Marshall, 2001). According to these researchers, the use of metaphors in curriculum research has a number of strengths. I summarize them in Table 7 as follows.

Table 7

Strengths of Using Metaphors in Curriculum Research

Researchers	Strengths of using metaphors in curriculum research
Grant (1992)	Enhancing understandings of realities by naming, giving meaning, categorizing
Eisner (1992); Kliebard (2001)	Revealing theories and ideologies underpinning curriculum that are otherwise invisible to observation
Munby (1989)	Enabling teacher-participants to speak in their own language rather than in the language of the researcher
Carter (2001)	Inviting the researcher and readers in the constitution of realities
Tobin (2001)	Helping teacher-participants to reflect and change their beliefs in teaching
Marshall (2001)	Uncovering unproductive patterns in teaching and creating possibilities for new modes of teaching
Munby & Russell (2001)	Enhancing ethics in practice by treating teachers as human-participants rather than as subjects

Normally, to extend these strengths, methods such as narrative and interpretive interview (Grant, 1992) are employed. However, some cautions are advised with the use of metaphorical language in research. Firstly, “while it is impossible to think without metaphor, not all structural metaphors are useful to our understanding of reality or our design of social action” (Grant, 1992, p. 434). Secondly, while metaphors facilitate our access to the construction of reality, it may also restrict our thinking (Kliebard, 2001), limit our coming to new perspectives (Grant, 1992), and prevent us from rival alternatives (Carter, 2001). Lastly, metaphors may cause us to deceive ourselves, or may lure and control attitudes of people (Kliebard, 2001). These suggest that regardless of the endeavour to ensure the validity and accuracy of the language data interpretation, it does not mean that there is a single way of understanding these data. Hence, as will be seen in chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes (pp. 112-148), the findings of this research are presented in a way that allows readers to have a sense of what teacher-participants “actually” say, that is, direct quotes. By doing this, readers have the chance to draw their

own comments and conclusions that may be different from those of the researcher. To encourage uniqueness and diversity in data analysis and interpretation is the very nature of interpretive research.

I have discussed some prevalent curriculum perspectives and reviewed some studies on teachers' cognition or teachers' perceptions. The third aspect of my research focus is curriculum decision making and teachers' (especially university teachers') roles in that process. This issue is explored as follows.

Teachers and curriculum decision making

In this section I introduce some views of curriculum decision making from the perspective of educational management, including the way this concept is defined in my research. By doing this, readers have a sense of how I conceptualize the research focus; thus helping them to understand why my research is conducted in this particular way. In addition, the approaches to study teachers' decision making at the classroom level (Calderhead, 1981) and levels beyond that (Ben-Peretz, 1980) are discussed. Some empirical studies on teachers' curriculum decision making are also reviewed, which cover a wide range of issues such as factors that influence teachers' classroom decisions (Shavelson & Stern, 1981); teachers' motivations to join curriculum development at the provincial level (Young, 1985); teachers' perceptions of autonomy and satisfaction under rigorous curriculum control (Archbald & Porter, 1994); experienced teachers' sense of the written curriculum (Kosunen, 1994). These studies serve as guidelines for my research design in terms of suggesting how to choose a good sample; which issues or questions to be asked in interviews; how to analyze and interpret interview responses and to strengthen validity and accuracy of the research findings and discussion. As the conceptualization of curriculum decision making in my research is very much involved in management, in this section I also examine this term in the context of the new trend of management at higher education institutions, especially in a centralized system (Vietnam, for example). The rationale and benefits of university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making and the factors that may hinder this involvement are also explored.

Conceptualization of curriculum decision making and some approaches to study teachers' curriculum decision making

As discussed earlier, curriculum can be defined differently at different managerial levels (see Table 6, pp. 35-40). It is my view that ways of understanding curriculum decision making vary among people of different levels of decision making. For example, at the State/Ministry level, it can be interpreted as policy making process such as designing *Curriculum Framework* and textbooks. At the university/college/school/faculty/department level, it involves the processes of realizing, adapting or supervising the implementation of policy assigned such as developing school programmes and supporting materials. At classroom level, it can be seen in the daily teaching activities of teachers in terms of designing lesson plans, interacting with students, evaluating students' academic performance, and proposing curriculum and policy changes. Therefore, participation in curriculum decision making in my research refers to the involvement of a group or an individual in decision making at different managerial levels and in different areas or processes related to curriculum.

At the classroom level, Calderhead (1981) proposes three approaches to study teachers' decision making. One is concerned with the psychological aspect of teachers' decision making process such as how teachers make decisions and what kind of information teachers use during this process. The second focuses on teachers' decision making as an integral part of curriculum implementation such as teachers' activities to unfold the curriculum plan, or the match/mis-match between curricular objectives and teachers' planning and decision making. The third approach examines teachers' decision making within a societal context to find out the possible connections between society and the classroom, as well as the societal and institutional constraints placed upon teachers' decision making process. In another study on teachers' pedagogical thoughts, judgements, decisions and behaviour, Shavelson and Stern (1981) list some factors that have influences on teachers' classroom decisions such as information about students, the nature of the instructional tasks, the classroom and school environment, teachers' characteristics and cognitive processes, consequences for teaching and students, teachers' evaluation of their teaching.

Many researchers, however, have gone beyond the classroom level of teachers' curriculum decision making. As can be seen in the section on curriculum perspectives of this chapter, the roles of teachers as highly autonomous agents in curriculum development and implementation have been increasingly emphasized in the post-modern era. Indeed, Ben-Peretz (1980) suggests that teachers should play primary roles in curriculum process, starting with locating the curricular problems then moving to curriculum deliberations; that is, teachers should participate in curriculum decision making at all levels. Hence, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) propose to see teachers as curriculum makers instead of the "conduit" metaphor that has been widely used. These authors also re-address the need to study the curriculum from the perspective of teachers. This trend can be seen in Young's (1985) study of teachers' motivations for joining curriculum development committees at the provincial level and the satisfaction and dissatisfaction that they derived from participation; in Archbald and Porter's (1994) study of curriculum control and teachers' perceptions of autonomy and satisfaction; or in Kosunen's (1994) study of how experienced teachers, who have been members of planning teams developing the curriculum, make sense of the written curriculum.

As my research focus is on curriculum perceptions of university teachers in the Vietnamese context, I now examine teachers' curriculum decision making in the tertiary education sector in relation to trends of management in centralized and decentralized systems.

University teachers' curriculum decision making in the new trend of management at higher education institutions

Here I want to emphasize the significance of my research focus since it introduces the trend of broad-based decision making as a principle of the emerging management approach (Alfred & Carter, 1993) and claims the rationale for broad-based decision making at higher education institutions (HEIs) (Floyd, 1985). Moreover, some benefits resulted from and several factors that may hinder this form of decision making at HEIs are listed (Floyd, 1985; Morriss, 1998). The differences of broad-based decision making in centralized and decentralized systems are also discussed. These issues give rise to the questions asked in

interviews with HNUE teacher-participants such as Questions 5, 6, 10, 11 (see Appendix E) and assist the researcher in analyzing and interpreting interview responses (for example, to consider the centralized management of education in Vietnam, the emerging roles of teachers as autonomy agents at Vietnamese HEIs and so forth).

The new trend of management at HEIs refers to a new managerial approach emerging at the end of the 20th century for educational organizations to adapt to “an environment of extreme uncertainty” (Lorenzo, 1993, p. 47). This new managerial approach, as Alfred and Carter (1993) point out, is concerned with “improving quality, enhancing ability to respond to program markets, innovation and responsiveness, and staff development during times of resources constraint need to become the shared concern and issues of the broader college community” (p. 19). It has four principles as listed below:

- i. A departure from management to leadership that means leaders are “more concerned with orchestrating and coordinating than controlling” (p. 16)
- ii. A departure from control to outcome accountability based on an assumption: “If staff believe that their contributions are meaningful, they are more likely to stay involved and encourage others to do so.” (p. 17)
- iii. A departure from complacency to involvement provided that active participation in decision making is more likely to result in a better development of the organization
- iv. A departure from isolation to integration, which brings together “academics” and “administrators”

Obviously, a trend of broad-based participation in decision making can be seen in educational institutions. The context of rapid and radical change is acknowledged (Lorenzo, 1993) and Parilla (1993) raises the need to nurture “an adaptive community college” in which “decentralized decision making and personal empowerment along with shared vision of institutional purpose and accountability” (p. 24). With regards to broad-based decision making at HEIs, its rationale is summarised by Floyd (1985), its benefits are reviewed by Morriss (1998), and its obstacles are discussed by both authors. Table 8 presents these contents, as follows.

Table 8

Broad-based Decision Making at Higher Education Institutions: Rationale, Benefits, and Obstacles

Issues and author(s)	Explanations
Rationale for broad-based decision making at HEIs (Floyd, 1985)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Faculty members have rights to participate due to their expertise, cooperation and effort to create and sustain institutional activities. Also, there is a right to participate by “those whose interests are at stake” (p.6). – Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between faculty participation and faculty satisfaction. However, Floyd (1985) notes that this relationship is not always a positive one. – University leaders are unlikely to possess all of the information necessary to make all decisions because of the high levels of specialization at university. – The fact that faculty members have been concerned about autonomy and participation in decision making. They are more likely to express greater job satisfaction under participatory leadership. Also, they view participation in decision making as a source of professional satisfaction and a sense of professional independence.
Benefits brought by broad-based decision making at HEIs (Morriss, 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A sense of ownership and commitment to the institution – The legitimacy of institutional activities and processes – A larger number of ideas proposed during decision making – More communication between faculty members and administrators – Faculty members’ support for institutional activities and processes – Higher motivation and acceptance to decisions made
Obstacles hindering broad-based decision making at HEIs (Floyd, 1985; Morriss, 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of time, motivation and expertise in the problem areas – High level of specialization at HEIs, which may lead to difficulties in compromising different interests to reach a consensus decision – The fact that faculty members may be unwilling to make hard decisions; yet they refuse to give up the right to make them – The fact that faculty members are perceived by administrators as unreasonable, inflexible and self-serving in the decision making process – The fact that the expectations of the positive result of broad-based participation may be unrealistic

Since my curriculum research is conducted in a Vietnamese setting of educational management as introduced in chapter 1: Initiating the Curriculum Research, it is helpful to explore the differences between two approaches—centralized and decentralized—to decision making so that readers from different managerial contexts may find it easier to interpret the research findings by themselves. Parilla (1993) compares these two approaches to decision making: “In the hierarchical organization... information goes up and a decision comes down... Decentralization distributes authority throughout the institution by delegating responsibility for decision making” (p. 27). According to Floyd (1985), centralized and decentralized systems at HEIs are concerned with different issues with regard to participatory decision making. In a centralized HEI, the possible levels of decision making at which faculty members should participate raise a contested question (and of course, the question that whether faculty members are qualified to participate at higher levels is also a critical one). These two questions were brought out in chapter 1 when introducing the centralized model of Vietnamese educational management and were to be answered in chapter 4 while discussing the research findings. A centralized HEI, however, can be criticized because of its strongly centralized characteristic. Centralized organizations do not fully engage in or benefit from the talents and cooperation of all members. In contrast, a decentralized HEI is highly commended for its recognition and encouragement of faculty participation in decision making. This is because both faculty members and students prefer decisions to be made at a level that they can participate in or have better access to. Nevertheless, Floyd (1985) notices that too much decision making by institutional segments may cause difficulties in achieving institutional coherence due to the possibilities of separating staff in disciplinary structures and the lack of cooperation between them.

I have explored some aspects of decision making in the context of new trends in educational management at HEIs. The trend of broad-based participation in decision making has been increasingly evident in both decentralized and more centralized education systems with both advantages and disadvantages. Recently, researchers have paid growing attention to the ways participants perceive the operation of broad-based decision making as well as their involvement in this process. As Miller, Vacik and Benton (1998) claim “The perceptions of faculty

relative to participatory governance must be understood in order to create a more effective, efficient, and successful organization” (p. 652).

Conclusion

Chapter 2 serves as the theoretical and methodological guidelines for my research. I have reviewed some prevalent curriculum perspectives, from the more traditional views to the views of post-modernism. This uncovers the value-laden nature of curriculum and the fundamental issues needed to be considered if we seek to find out teachers’ perceptions of curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making. These fundamental issues are the ideologies, the aims, the contents, and the processes embedded in curriculum; as well as the views of teachers’ and students’ roles in curriculum development. I have also reviewed some research studies on teachers’ cognition. These explain the philosophical assumptions and key concepts to understand teachers’ perceptions; and suggest the methods to access, analyze, and interpret these perceptions. Those methodological guidelines involve the influences of contexts on perceptions, and the application of language analysis as a means to reveal thoughts. Another issue that I have explored in this chapter is research related to teachers’ curriculum decision making in the context of new trends of management at higher education institutions in centralized and decentralized systems. This provides theoretical and methodological guidelines as well as empirical findings, which I will refer to in my research design (chapter 3: Designing the Curriculum Research, pp. 69-83) and the discussions of research findings (chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes, pp. 112-148). The applications of the theoretical and methodological guidelines emerging from the three issues explored in this chapter are presented in the following chapter—Designing the Curriculum Research.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the design and preparation for my research on Hanoi National University of Education teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. There are three sections introduced as follows.

A qualitative researcher starts with some philosophical assumptions that give direction to the whole process of conducting the research. This involves the research design and implementation as well as the documentation of research outcomes (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). Hence, the first section of this chapter reveals the philosophy and methodology that guide my research. The philosophical assumptions are interpretive ontology, epistemology, and views of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007; Eichelberger, 1989; Usher, 1996). Meanwhile, the methodological direction is a qualitative approach, explored in terms of its key characteristics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006), its limitations (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998), as well as the strengths and problematic issues of qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second section of this chapter explains in detail the stages that I designed my research. These stages involve defining the purposes of undertaking the research, formulating the research questions, defining the case and building a sample, and designing instrumentation for information collection. Thirdly, ethical considerations (Anderson, 1998; Dench, Iphofen & Huws, 2004; Rumball, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001) relating to the design and preparation of my research are raised.

Philosophical assumptions and methodological direction guiding the research

Some authors have argued that the methods employed in research and the types of knowledge they produce depend largely on the researcher's ontology, epistemology, and perceptions of what counts as knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007; Eichelberger, 1989; Usher, 1996). As discussed in chapter 2, my research advocates the view that curriculum and teachers' perceptions—as forms of social reality—are individually, historically, and culturally constructed; and that they are

varied rather than being prescribed. This way of perceiving social reality is close to the interpretive approach to undertaking research and the roles of the researcher in undertaking it. Therefore, interpretive ontology, epistemology, and the views of knowledge that guide my research are discussed as follows. I also explore a qualitative approach as an interpretive methodology and emphasize the rationale for employing it in my research.

Interpretive philosophy underpinning my research

The interpretive philosophy consists of its ontology, epistemology, and views of knowledge. According to Cohen et al. (2007), ontology is concerned with the nature of the social reality investigated, for example, whether it is objective to individuals or a product of individual consciousness. Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge, and how it can be acquired and communicated to human beings. Interpretive researchers share the ontological assumptions that Guba and Lincoln (1992) have referred to as relativist. In their view, “realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1992, p. 111). Meanwhile, the epistemological assumptions shared among interpretive researchers are defined by Guba and Lincoln (1992) as subjectivist and constructivist. Subjectivist means knowledge about social and cultural realities is personal, subjective, and unique (Guba & Lincoln, 1992). Constructivist here means the construction of knowledge about these realities is influenced by the interdependent relationships among research subject and the contexts of knowing (Usher, 1996).

When viewing knowledge, interpretive researchers assert that “the social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 17). The interpretive researcher is concerned “not with generalization, prediction, and control, but with interpretation, meaning and illumination” (Usher, 1996, p. 18). This interpretation, or meaning building, is believed to “come from inside, not the outside” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19); while social reality is believed to be co-

constructed by the researcher and participants (Eichelberger, 1989). To do so, the researcher is required to have “a thorough knowledge of the backgrounds of the participants and the contexts in which they exist” (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 9).

In applying these philosophical assumptions to my research, I conceive the curriculum and the roles of university teachers in curriculum decision making as the social realities being investigated. These realities can be seen as a product of a particular setting involving the specific contexts of Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE), the management of the Vietnamese higher education sector, and the contemporary socio-political situation of Vietnam (see chapter 1, pp. 10-31). These realities can be made understandable to the researcher by accessing reflections of the thinking of “insiders”, that is, the people who are involved with curriculum in these contexts and settings. These people are policy-makers, leaders and managers, HNUE teachers, students, parents/caregivers, and employers. In my research, HNUE teachers are the focus of my inquiry in relation to teachers’ significant roles in curriculum planning and practice (see chapter 2, pp. 33-41). I believe that the backgrounds of individual teachers, their academic and leadership/management experiences for example, profoundly influence their thinking about curriculum and their curriculum decision making. These backgrounds are taken into consideration when I seek to explain particular ways realities are constructed in each individual’s mind. The realities, therefore, are unique among perceivers. The principal goal of my research, therefore, is not to provide a general, rigorous, or definite picture of curriculum decision making processes in Vietnam. Rather, I aim to find out and understand what HNUE teachers perceive as curriculum and what they think about the roles that they are carrying out in curriculum decision making. However, any generalization, if that may be drawn, is regarded as a source for suggesting policy changes to improve the situations of curriculum and curriculum decision making at HNUE, and in other Vietnamese higher education contexts if applicable.

The term interpretive is often interchangeably used with the term qualitative. However, I view that interpretive is more about the philosophical assumptions that orientate the research. Meanwhile qualitative is essentially about the methodological guidelines that work more closely with the research operation. In the following parts of this section I explore some key characteristics of

qualitative approaches; their strengths and limitations; as well as the nature, strengths, and problematic issues of qualitative data.

Key characteristics of qualitative research

The key characteristics of qualitative research are widely discussed. In my review of literature, I have found the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Lodico et al. (2006) to be exceptionally useful. To begin with, a qualitative study is carried out in a naturalistic setting (Lodico et al., 2006) and seeks to interpret phenomena “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This is because the qualitative researcher believes that knowledge is socially constructed, and that there is not a single reality but multiple perspectives to be uncovered. Also, in comparison with the efforts of quantitative researchers to make their studies value-free, qualitative advocates acknowledge the value-laden nature of knowledge and of processes of gaining it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This relates to another feature that distinguishes qualitative from quantitative approaches, that is, the roles of the researchers. The quantitative researcher tries hard to maintain a neutral standpoint from what she is studying. Meanwhile, the qualitative researcher’s bias is considered as inevitable and valuable. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) put it, “research is an interactive process shaped by his or her [the qualitative researcher’s] own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (p. 6). A qualitative study, that is, its choice of inquiry, the methods it chooses to answer research questions, and the way the research is reported—therefore, is unique with the individual researcher’s hallmark on it.

To apply a qualitative approach in my research, three features need to be made clear to the readers. These are:

- i. The context and settings of my research. These involve the Vietnamese socio-political context, its higher education management, and the specific conditions of HNUE.
- ii. My background as both an insider (Research Assistant working at HNUE), and an inquirer (who seeks to find out what is happening at HNUE related to curriculum decision making).

- iii. The background, both academic and leadership/management experiences, of HNUE teachers invited to talk about their perceptions of curriculum and their roles in it.

The first two features were discussed in chapters 1 and 2 to serve as a basis for the emergence of my research inquiry and design. The third feature is introduced later in this chapter. These three features are anticipated to be a valuable source for the analysis and interpretation of the research findings, which will be reported in chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes.

Sampling in qualitative research

In designing a research, deciding on the sample is an important stage. Due to the constraint of time and resources, the researcher usually works with a smaller group or subset chosen from the total population on which the research focuses. This smaller group or subset is called the sample (Cohen et al., 2007). Because generalization is not a priority of qualitative research, it does not look for a large number of informants chosen randomly as in quantitative studies. Rather, qualitative researchers prefer to work with a group of participants who are assumed to have information central to the research questions, that is, a purposive sample (Lodico et al., 2006). As explained in Cohen et al. (2007), a purposive sample means it is built for a specific purpose. These authors criticise this type of sample as “unashamed selective and biased” (p. 115) and therefore it may not be representative and its findings may not be generalizable. Yet, Cohen et al. (2007) note that these are not the primary concerns of qualitative researchers. Instead, the main concern is to “acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it” (p. 115).

Methods of data collection and analysis in qualitative research

Qualitative researchers also believe that realities are socially constructed and re-constructed during the interaction between them and the informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). They seek methods of collecting information that shorten the gap and stimulate dialogues between them and the insiders. Consequently, interviews, narratives, case studies, action research, and observations are widely used. In my

research, eight HNUE teachers—with varied disciplinary knowledge, leadership/management experiences, and levels of participation in curriculum decision making processes—participated in the research. Their participation involved individual, face-to-face interviews with me as the researcher. The interview questions were to be broad, putting no restriction on the interviewees' responses.

More recently, Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) argued that epistemology is not a synonym of method. Thus, the fact that a research is qualitative in nature does not prevent it from employing procedures and techniques more typically associated with quantitative research. Choices of methods for analysis should stem from the research purposes. A major aim of my research was to provide evidence that might support policy and institutional changes and attract and improve the effectiveness of teachers' participation in curriculum decision making in the Vietnamese higher education sector. Therefore, I looked for a device for analysis by which trends, patterns, or themes could be signified. To do so, some strategies for generating meanings of qualitative data from Miles and Huberman (1994) were useful. These included noting themes and patterns; counting; noting relations between variables; and finding intervening variables. I present these in chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes.

The formulation of hypotheses in qualitative research: Applications to my research on university teachers' perception of their roles in curriculum decision making

In discussing key characteristics of qualitative research as compared to quantitative approaches, Lodico et al. (2006) mention another feature: "Hypotheses are formed after the researcher begins data collection and are modified throughout the study as new data is collected and analyzed" (p. 264). At the beginning of this research, I read broadly to develop a theoretical framework for designing the original Interview Schedule (Appendix E) and moved to data collection as early as I could. On reflection, I modified the Interviewing Schedule as I talked to HNUE teachers. This modification included changing the sequence of questions, and using probes to go deeper into the surface information. I report

on these changes in chapter 4. After the first draft of research findings, I reviewed the literature again and worked closely with the parts that related to those findings. Hence, most of my research report, even the research design, was modified after the conversations with HNUE teachers.

However, I did find it particularly important prior to fieldwork to carefully examine the context in which my research would be conducted. This context involved the Vietnamese socio-political situation and its management mode over higher education that largely decided who were involved in curriculum decision making and which roles they would undertake. Also, because the time available for my research was limited and interviews could not be facilitated a second time, I needed to engage with a range of literature before conducting the research. This included both English and Vietnamese literature for the purpose of cultural understandings. I found that I was more confident once I had explored theories and empirical studies relating to my research context.

A qualitative approach: Limitations and solutions

A qualitative approach guides my research because of its potential to reveal “attitudes and preference, beliefs and predictions, behaviours and experiences—both past and present” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 207). However, there are some limitations of this approach that should be queried (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998). There is the issue of whether different researchers get the same findings. Because the researcher’s bias is admitted as inevitable in a qualitative study, the question is how much bias will be considered as acceptable and how much bias will undermine the credibility (which parallels validity in quantitative research) of the research findings.

To solve this problem, Arsenault and Anderson (1998) advise the researcher to keep a rigorous record of the fieldwork. It is noted that the notion of fieldwork here refers to what actually happened when I interviewed HNUE teachers in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Lodico et al. (2006) suggest that the researcher should provide details of how she engages in the field, for example, gaining access to participants, establishing relationships with them, negotiating emerging conflicts during the interviews. These authors also advise that the qualitative

researcher should report precisely the procedures and strategies employed to analyse and interpret data. To strengthen the validity of these analyses and interpretations, Lodico et al. (2006) recommended some strategies. These are triangulation (combining multiple sources of data or using multiple methods of data analysis), negative case analysis (seeking for conflicting information and the reasons for it), and member checks (sending summaries of the researcher's conclusion to participants for review).

Also, because the responses provided by informants are seen as unique and personal, the reliability of that information may be questionable. As Arsenault and Anderson (1998) remark, the informant's particular personality and his or her relationships with the researcher may colour the information provided. For example, the informant may respond in the way that he or she think it will please the researcher, especially when the researcher is in a higher position than the informant (teacher and student, for instance). In my research, however, this was less likely to happen. This was because all the participants were my colleagues and seniors at the workplace, and I presented myself as a learner who was looking forward to learning about their curriculum perspectives. Nevertheless, Arsenault and Anderson's (1998) advice to strengthen the reliability of information obtained have remained in my mind through the research processes. This advice involved developing levels of confidentiality in informants, triangulating data by using multiple methods and strategies for data analysis and interpretation (both qualitative and more like quantitative ones).

Since the researcher's role in qualitative approach is important, a further concern is about the quality of the researcher, that is, his or her research experiences and skills (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998, p. 134). I acknowledge this as a limitation of my research, for I only had a short period working as a Research Assistant at HNUE before I began my Post Graduate study in New Zealand. I have tried to overcome this limitation, however, by engaging with a range of previous studies relating to my research context and settings. I have also developed my understanding as I worked on the research.

Also significant is, "the inability of qualitative research findings to be generalized to other communities" (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998, p. 134). This

could be viewed as a shortcoming of my research because generalization is essential to the recommendation of policy changes, and in turn, to the improvement of current situation. As Lodico et al. (2006) point out, promoting actions and collaboration is a criterion for evaluating the quality of a research. This limitation may be overcome, providing there is more time and resources to conduct a large scale survey using themes/patterns drawing from the analysis/interpretation of interviewing responses. This is a suggestion for further research in the future.

Nature, strengths, and problematic issues of qualitative data

The last aspect of qualitative approach presented here is the qualitative data in terms of its nature and strengths as well as some problematic issues underlying it. All types of data are qualitative in some sense as they present the essence of people, objectives, and situations. However, when talking about qualitative data, we normally refer to data in the form of words gathered from documents, observations, interviews, or narratives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data has some strengths. Firstly, the impacts of contexts on data construction are taken into consideration. This is useful for the researcher if she tries to find explanations for or draw conclusions from information given by informants: The insiders whose lives are shaped by those contexts. Miles and Huberman (1994) remark that qualitative data helps researchers to go beyond the “what” or “how many” question to question “how and why things happen as they do”, that is, the cause and effect relations among phenomenon studied. In my research, for example, the fact that Vietnamese education is governed by one political party has profound effects on how university teachers envision curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making. As Eisner (1992) pointed out, people in institutions dominated by a single political ideology, and thus a sole position of curriculum ideology, may not think of alternative positions around curriculum. This can explain why, as developed in chapter 4, that HNUE teachers share similar ways of conceptualizing curriculum and curriculum decision making.

A further strength of qualitative data is that it provides rich and diverse information that covers the complexity of realities and makes phenomenon

described vivid—as if they are happening in their real contexts. In the writing and reporting of qualitative studies, what informants say is often directly quoted. This leaves a strong impression on readers. Because my research is carried out in a particular setting—that is HNUE in Vietnam, I assume the majority of readers will be unfamiliar with it. The richness of qualitative data can assist readers to understand the situated research better. Due to these strengths, qualitative data is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: Their ‘perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, presuppositions’ (van Manen, 1977) and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

Nevertheless, there are three aspects that may lead to bias in the construction and the quality of qualitative data. The first aspect is the value that a qualitative researcher may embed in the collection and interpretation of qualitative data. Atkinson (1992) points out that qualitative data includes texts constructed by the researcher, thus what may be generated as “data” is affected by what she can treat as “writable” and “readable” (as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second aspect of bias comes from the research informants themselves, for information provided largely depends on how informants want others, including the researcher, to see it. The third aspect is that qualitative data emerges in a particular setting at a specific period of time; hence, these social and historical settings deeply influence how realities are constructed and interpreted by both informants as insiders and the researcher as an outsider. I view these aspects of bias as very likely to occur in my research given my role as Research Assistant at HNUE and my collegueship with all teacher-participants. On the one hand, this fact could be seen as an advantage as I have a thorough knowledge of the research setting and can more easily establish trust and rapport with informants. On the other hand, bias could become an inevitable part of my research and be criticised as a shortcoming.

I have discussed the interpretive assumptions and qualitative direction that guide my research. I now want to report how these guidelines were realized in the stages of designing my research. Although these stages may differ among researchers (Anderson, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994), they generally involve: Defining the purposes of conducting the research,

formulating the research questions, defining the case and building a sample, and designing instrumentation for information collection.

Research design: Hanoi National University of Education teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making

This section has four parts according to four stages of my research design, adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994):

- i. Defining purposes of the research
- ii. Formulating the research questions
- iii. Defining the case and building a sample
- iv. Designing instrumentation for information collection

Defining purposes of the research

The purposes of my research were specified in chapter 1, as follows:

- i. To provide an opportunity for HNUE teachers to reflect on their curriculum beliefs and practices; thus enhancing professional development related to curriculum
- ii. To provide evidence of HNUE teachers' perspective on curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making
- iii. To provide evidence that may support policy and institutional changes in order to attract and improve teachers' participation in curriculum decision making within Vietnamese context

On reflection, I wanted to discover and describe ways HNUE teachers conceptualize curriculum and curriculum decision making as well as how they evaluate their positions in those processes. These purposes were highly personal and called for an approach of data collection that stimulated dialogue between myself and participants and enabled them to express their modes of thinking and talking in their own words and language.

I thought that face-to-face interviews would meet this expectation. On the other hand, I aimed to explain the causality of HNUE teachers' responses and draw some sense of generalization to suggest policy and institutional changes. As Miles and Huberman (1994) remind us, the extent to which the instrumentation is structured depends on what purposes it is designed for. If the emphasis is on the applications of research outcomes, such as promoting actions or policy changes,

an extent of prior instrumentation is advised. For these reasons, interviews in my research were conceived as semi-structured, allowing some extent of the researcher's control and generalization. Prior instrumentation is also helpful for a less experienced researcher like me as I feel more confident if I am well prepared to enter the interviews.

Formulating the research questions

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that research questions require a great deal of consideration as they determine the selection of informants, the building of a conceptual framework, and thus the design of instrumentation for data collection (in the case of my research, this was the Interview Schedule), and even the types of data analysis. My research questions emerged after consulting a number of theoretical and empirical studies on curriculum, curriculum decision making, and teachers' thinking.

To begin with, some authors discuss recent perspectives of curriculum and from this they raise fundamental issue if we want to reveal the particular way that a person thinks of curriculum. These authors include Doll (Teaching a Post-Modern Curriculum, 1990), Eisner (Curriculum Ideologies, 1992), Renshaw (Curriculum as Dialogue, 2003), and Wardekker (Curriculum as Vision, 2003).

Other researchers, however, investigate teachers' thoughts (or beliefs, conceptions, perceptions, knowledge, and so on) around their teaching practice, including curriculum practice. These researchers are concerned with teachers' thought processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986), teachers' beliefs and knowledge (Calderhead, 1996), teachers' thinking and beliefs and classroom practice (Isenberg, 1990), teachers' thinking and practice (Carlgren et al., 1994), student teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice (Calderhad & Robson, 1991), and the use of metaphors in the study of teachers' professional knowledge (Munby, 2001).

Another stream of thinking I found useful to my research is about teachers' roles in curriculum decision making (or curriculum development) and ways teachers perceive their involvement. This context has been studied from various perspectives such as a psychological approach to research on teachers'

classroom decision making (Calderhead, 1981), teachers as curriculum makers and implementers (Clandinin, 1992; Kosunen, 1994), teachers' involvement in curriculum development (Ben-Peretz, 1980; Bower, 1991), teachers and curriculum decision making (McGee, 1997), teachers' teaching and thinking about curriculum (Sears & Marshall, 1990), faculty teachers' participation in decision making and curriculum development (Floyd, 1985; Young, 1985), and teachers' perceptions of autonomy and satisfaction in curriculum control (Archbald & Porter, 1994).

Based on my research purposes and the curriculum based literature that I consulted, I formulated the research questions as an overarching question with three sub-questions:

Overarching Research Question:

How do HNUE teachers perceive their roles in curriculum decision making?

Research Sub-question:

- i. What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?
- ii. How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?
- iii. What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?

I now explain the rationale for the formulation of the three sub-questions. The first sub-question aimed to find out ways HNUE teachers conceptualize curriculum and curriculum decision making. This sub-question was unpacked to indicate cues for respondents and to anticipate a variety of responses. The question cues are listed as follows:

What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?

- i. What do these terms mean to them?
- ii. What do they think are the most significant features that characterize curriculum?
- iii. How do they envision the possibilities of curriculum in the future?
- iv. Who is involved, at which level, and what activities those people carry out in the process of curriculum decision making in Vietnamese higher education?
- v. Within this process, which roles have the participants of this research experienced?
- vi. What are the factors that influence their curriculum decision making?

- vii. What can we know about the situation of the curriculum and curriculum decision making process in Vietnam through HNUE teachers' narratives?

Issues raised in the cues above serve as the basis on which perceptions emerge. As Bartley (1958) pointed out, to understand perceptions, we need to know who the perceiver is; what he or she has encountered in the past; what the specific environment (for example, the socio-economic, political, cultural, institutional contexts) in which he or she lives and interacts with others.

The second sub-question aimed to find out how HNUE teachers evaluate their current roles in the curriculum decision making process. For this purpose, participants would be asked to talk about some topics as follows:

How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?

- i. What activities related to curriculum have they experienced?
- ii. What roles have they carried out in the curriculum decision making process?
- iii. To what extent are they satisfied with their current roles?
- iv. How do they self-evaluate the importance of their contribution in the curriculum decision making process?
- v. To what extent do they think they are encouraged (or not encouraged) to participate in the process?
- vi. Who or which factors encourage (or not encourage) them to re-join the process?
- vii. What curriculum decision making roles do they think Vietnamese university teachers should carry out in the future?

The formulation of these cues is based on Bartley's (1958) point that a person's evaluation of a phenomenon is an aspect of his or her perception. These sources of information to some extent reflect what is happening in curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education. Teachers as curriculum contributors also speak of their satisfactions and/or dissatisfactions with their current positions in the curriculum decision making process, thus proposing the roles that they *prefer* to carry out. To understand teachers' perceptions, therefore, is not only to capture the "Being", but to envision the "Becoming" of teachers—the possibilities of what they want to become in the future. That is the core idea of curriculum in the post-modern era (Doll, 1990).

The third sub-question sought recommendations for possibilities of Vietnamese university teachers' roles in curriculum decision making and the supports needed to realize these possibilities. The solutions for the enhancement

of teachers' participation in curriculum decision making, like any successful reforms in education, are claimed not to be imposed from outside (for example, policy-makers, educational leaders and managers) but should be proposed by teachers as insiders (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Some issues will be explored in the third sub-question as follows:

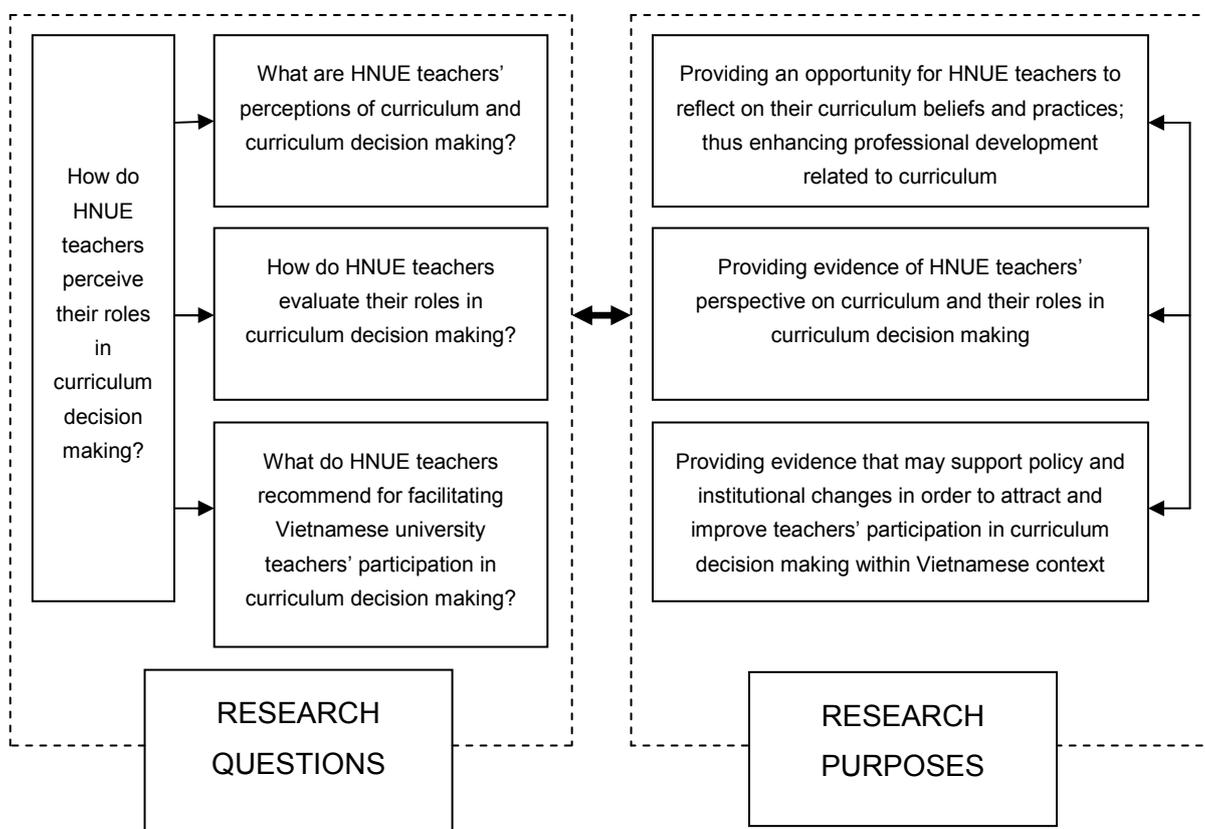
What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?

- i. What do HNUE teachers perceive as interesting when joining the curriculum decision making process?
- ii. What are their motivations to be involved in the process?
- iii. What do they experience as difficulties in their participation?
- iv. What should be done at national, institutional, and personal levels for university teachers to actively and effectively participate?

These serve as empirical materials from which managers, leaders, and policy-makers can recognize the sources of satisfaction or motivations and dissatisfactions or difficulties that HNUE teachers encounter in their involvement in the curriculum decision making process. Solutions to attract and improve the effectiveness of university teachers' participation in this process are also proposed by teachers—the insiders—and thus, are very reliable sources.

Figure 2: Research Questions and Research Purposes illustrates how the overarching question and sub-questions formulated above fit into my research purposes. I want to show the readers how these questions, and thus responses for them, help fulfil the purposes of conducting the research on HNUE teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making.

Figure 2. Research Questions and Research Purposes



Defining the case and building the sample

My research is carried out at Hanoi National University of Education, a teacher training university in Vietnam. To define a case we should examine dimensions such as its conceptual nature, social size, physical location, and temporal extent. A case thus can be a role, an individual, an organization, a settlement, a nation, and so forth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The case in my research is defined within the boundary of Vietnamese socio-political context that influences the management of education. It is also considered in the current situation of teacher training in Vietnam and recent policy changes to enhance the quality of teacher training. Additionally, the setting of HNUE is taken into consideration in terms of its teaching resources (faculties and teaching/administrative staff) and training programmes—both with strengths and shortcomings. I presented these issues in chapter 1. Because qualitative researchers believe that knowledge is not context-

free but socially constructed, information about the research setting helps the interpretation and explanation of participants' responses. For instance, the hierarchical management of education in Vietnam explained why institutional constraints may be perceived by participants as an obstacle in teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making. Another example: Because the quality of teaching staff is a shortcoming of many teacher training universities in Vietnam, we could understand why participants expressed a lack of confidence about their competences when involving in curriculum development, and why professional development opportunities were reported by many participants as a motivation for them to join curriculum decision making.

As previously mentioned, qualitative research often chooses a small group of informants. Although there have been a large number of methods for sampling, I use a purposive sample approach proposed by Maykut and Morehouse (2001). This approach recognizes the complexity of human beings and social phenomena, as well as the limitation of generalization toward these objectives. Hence, it seeks to gain "deep understanding of some phenomenon experienced by a carefully selected group of people" (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001, p. 56). It is worth noting that, if choosing someone to be involved in the research is a purposive action, then to exclude others from the research scale is also heavily value-laden. As Tierney and Dilley (2002) suggest: "If particular groups are excluded from the pool of respondents in a study, this raises the possibility that a prejudicial, or at least perhaps biased, slant exists" (p. 458). For example, if my research had only invited teachers who held managerial positions, this means I may have assumed that teachers at lower levels in the hierarchy are not taken into account in the curriculum decision making process. Maykut and Morehouse (2001) note another principle of the purposive sample method where variability is expanded. This means that variability common in any social phenomenon is represented in the data. Variability can be gained by employing participants of different settings, gender, ages, disciplines, academic experiences, leadership/management experiences, and so forth.

Maykut and Morehouse (2001) advise that the description of a sampling plan should include the selection criteria for people or settings, the problems emerging during the process of employing participants, and subsequent changes

where applicable. Also, it is important to anticipate how the researcher will have access to these potential participants. These issues are described as follows.

The selection criteria

The selection criteria for participants in my research are presented in Table 9, following Maykut and Morehouse's (2001) suggestions of criteria for a purposive sample.

Table 9

Selection Criteria for My Research Participants

Categories of criteria	Suggestions for my sample
The focus of inquiry	Participants are teachers at HNUE
The operational definitions of related terms	Participants should be teachers who have strong experiences related to curriculum
The related literature	People from different disciplines may think differently about curriculum; thus participants should be from different disciplines. Gender may also make differences in studying teachers' minds and actions; thus there should be an equal percentages of male and female participants
The experienced and knowledgeable experts	Before deciding on the sample, I discussed the research topic with some colleagues. They commented that not all teachers have thought much about curriculum decision making and a few of them may even hardly be aware of their involvement in curriculum decision making. This suggests that participants' curriculum experiences are of paramount importance if I aim to capture rich and valid information.
The people involved in curriculum in different ways	This suggests that participants should come from different disciplines with different experiences in both academic and administrative roles.
The potential consumers of the research report	My research report aims at readers who are teachers, educational leaders/managers, and policy-makers. This suggests that participants should be varied in their academic and administrative roles.

Based on the criteria described above, my research sample included eight HNUE teachers with the following characteristics:

- i. Four teachers majored in social sciences (Educational Management, English, Literature, Special Education); while the four others majored in natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Technology Education).
- ii. Four of the teachers were female.
- iii. Four teachers were in their early 30s, one was over 60 and the rest were over 40.
- iv. Their years of experience varied from fewer than 7 to more than 20 years.
- v. Four of the teachers had intensive experience in leadership/management.

Gaining access to potential participants and obtaining their consent to participate in the research

In my role as Research Assistant at HNUE, I knew most of the eight teachers who were going to be invited to join my research. I anticipated that this collegueship would help me more easily gain access to the research setting, obtain consent from the HNUE teachers, and establish trust and rapport with them. However, I understood that my knowledge of the potential participants had the potential to lead to ethical issues regarding voluntariness or conflict of interest. These aspects of the research will be discussed later (p. 85, p. 90).

I sought permission to conduct the research from the President of HNUE, Professor Dr Nguyen. He holds the highest authority over all the staff and the curriculum of HNUE, and his permission was needed to ensure the research would cause no harm to teacher-participants. Information prepared for the President involved an Introductory Letter (Appendix A), an Information Letter (Appendix C), a Participant's Consent Letter (Appendix D), and an Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E). The Introductory Letter and the Information Letter served to introduce me and my research context. These letters indicated how many HNUE teachers would be invited to participate in the research, their names and positions, and the procedures they would be involved in. Professor Dr Nguyen approved the research to be undertaken at HNUE, and signed the President's Consent Letter (Appendix B).

After gaining Professor Dr Nguyen's approval for conducting the research, I contacted the eight HNUE teachers by email, telephone, and personal visit. Information prepared for participants includes the Information Letter (Appendix

C) and the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E). On agreeing to participate in the research, they were to sign in the Participant's Consent Letter (Appendix D). These documents introduce myself, my research context, and the activities in which participants would be involved. These documents also note the possibility of potential harm to participants, such as time required or the risk of being identifiable. Also, HNUE teachers were informed that the research was conducted with the approval of Professor Dr Nguyen; yet, all participation was assured to be voluntary. Participants were also advised that they could withdraw from the research at any time without question or disadvantage. By providing this information, I wanted to make sure the HNUE teachers had sufficient information about the research and understood their rights in joining the research before making any decisions about involvement.

I have discussed what my research aimed to find out and why (defining purposes of the research and formulating the research questions) and who was involved in the research (defining the case and building the sample). I now move to the question of how I planned to access the information, that is, to design research instrumentation for information collection.

Designing research instrumentation for information collection

In this section I discuss characteristics of interviewing as a research approach, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing method. By doing this, I highlight the rationale for using interviews in my research. Also, the preparation of my interview questions is described. Finally, I report the stages to approaching an interview.

Characteristics of interviewing as a research approach

The core idea of interviewing is that it is based on conversation (Kvale, 1996) and its epistemology is more constructivist than positivist (Warren, 2002). This means in an interview, information is not simply being collected but rather co-authored by the interviewer and the interviewee (Miles & Huberman, 1994). So, participants in an interview (the researcher and the informant) speak to each other from varied perspectives, shaped by “the structured and historically grounded

roles and hierarchies of their society, particularly those of gender, race, and class” (Warren, 2002, p. 84). For this reason, Fontana and Frey (2005) claim that interview is “inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound” (p. 695). Because interviewing stimulates co-operative relations between the researcher and participants in searching for knowledge, and because interviewing takes into consideration the contextual influences on the construction of knowledge, I chose interviewing as the method for information collection in my research. By doing this, I could meet the ultimate purpose set up at the beginning of my research, that is, to empower teachers at HNUE by inviting them to present their thinking of what they do as a teacher and why. In this way, teachers can be regarded as professional thinkers. The advantages and disadvantages of interviewing are discussed in more detail as follows.

Advantages and disadvantages of interviewing method

Face-to-face interviewing has a number of advantages (Anderson, 1998). Conversations with open-ended questions assist interviewees to feel more engaged with the topic discussed. Additionally, this enables the interviewer to clarify questions that are vague or misunderstood by the interviewee; or to use probe questions that help the interviewee to more easily express their thinking. This in turn implies that the information gathered from interview should be more complete and deeper than it would be available in the written form, for example, the questionnaire (either the questionnaire with close-ended questions or open-ended questions). Interviewing is also useful if the researcher proceeds to interpret the information obtained. The interviewees’ non-verbal cues (for example, changes in tone, body languages) and the cues from the surrounding context (for example, formal places such as an office or less formal ones such as a cafeteria) are picked up by the interviewer and may be taken into consideration in the stage of data interpretation. Due to its advantages, Silverman (2006) asserts that qualitative interview “is particularly useful as a method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values—things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire” (p. 114). Despite these advantages, Anderson (1998) however lists some shortcomings of interviewing, for example, the difficulty in recording responses, the reliability and validity of responses as they may be

influenced by the appearance of the interviewer, and the context of interviewing as it may cause interruptions or pressure of time constraint.

Prior to the design of my interview questions, I also had to make a decision on how structured the interviews would be, that is, whether they would be an unstructured, structured, or semi-structured interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that this depends on the research purposes. If some extent of generalization or representativeness is sought for the purpose of recommending policy changes, then a lot of prior instrumentation is necessary. In my research at HNUE, I wanted the interviews to be semi-structured in the sense that all the questions would be predetermined and all participants would be asked the same questions. However, I was aware that the sequence of these questions and the stress on some questions rather than on the others might differ among participants. I also wanted to add probe questions to seek clarification, explanation, and examples from interviewees.

In presenting interviewing as a method of data collection, I now describe the formulation of the Interviewing Schedule that involved decisions about the sequence of questions and the use of probes.

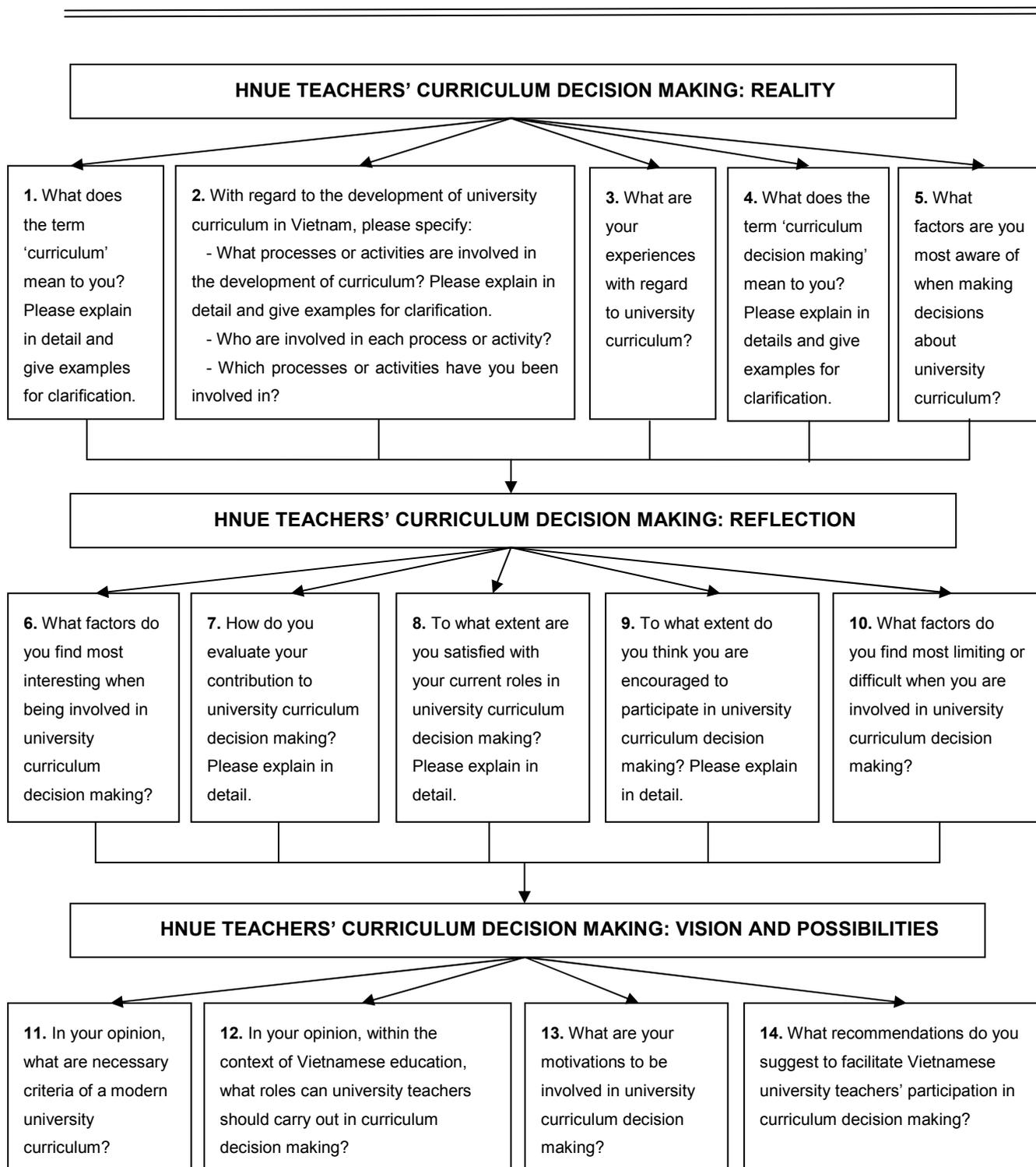
Formulating the Interviewing Schedule

The questions with the cues as outlined earlier (pp. 71-73) were planned as interview questions. However, to make these questions more understandable to both the interviewer and interviewees, I put them in a logical sequence called the Interviewing Schedule (see Appendix E). This sequence moved from *reality* to *reflection*, then on to *visions and possibilities*. This meant the first part of the Interviewing Schedule consisted of five questions focusing on the reality of curriculum decision making in Vietnam and the activities teachers carry out in that process. The second part had five questions which aimed to find out teachers' reflections on their current roles in curriculum decision making. This involved what they perceive as interesting, important, satisfied, encouraged, difficult, or vice versa. The third part of the Interviewing Schedule had four questions that provided an opportunity for teachers to envision the possibilities of curriculum, their preferable roles in curriculum decision making, and the kinds of motivations

that might attract them to participate more actively and effectively in this process.

The sequence of the Interviewing Schedule's questions is shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3: The Sequence of the Interviewing Schedule's Questions



The use of probes in interviews

As mentioned earlier, probe questions were formulated to assist interviewees to respond more fully. Maykut and Morehouse (2001, pp. 95-96) propose three types of probes: The detail-oriented probes to get more detail of an event or a phenomena, the elaboration probes to encourage the interviewee to tell more by expressing that the interviewer desires to know more, and the clarification probes to be used when the interviewer is unsure about a response.

After formulating the Interviewing Schedule, I travelled to Hanoi National University of Education in Vietnam to conduct the interviews in person. Anderson (1998) and Fontana and Frey (2005) provide useful guidelines about approaching an interview.

Approaching an interview

As the researcher, I am an “outsider” who studies the realities of curriculum decision making at HNUE. But I am also an “insider” who has worked at HNUE and have a thorough knowledge of its educational and socio-political settings. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), before interviewing the researcher must understand the language and culture of respondents. This means paying attention to the context in which respondents live, the translation of language, and the use of specific jargon. Because the research was to be conducted in both English and Vietnamese, I aimed to do the translation by myself. I was very cautious about translating specific jargon such as “curriculum decision making” in case the participants did not understand the word-by-word translation of the term in Vietnamese.

Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest that the researcher should find an informant who “acts as a guide and translator of cultural mores and, at times, of jargon or language” (p. 707). In the process of doing this research—even before going to HNUE, I talked to my father and other colleagues at the university. They provided me with useful knowledge about Vietnamese and HNUE contexts of curriculum decision making.

Fontana and Frey (2005) also advise that the researcher needs to decide how to present herself in the interview. In conversations with HNUE teachers, I planned to present myself as a learner with eagerness to learn from the participants' experiences. I thought that because I was a novice in curriculum research, and because all the interviewees would be my seniors, presenting myself as a learner would help me to show respect to the participants and more easily establish rapport with them. I anticipated that the role as learner would also encourage the interviewees to talk more, and that they would feel as if they were teaching a student about curriculum.

I also consulted Anderson's (1998) advice on introducing and closing an interview. Anderson (1998) considers that the introduction should specify who the researcher is and the purposes of the interview. Additionally, introductions should re-emphasize the use of information given by the interviewee and confidentiality. The interviewer can also indicate how long the interview will be and provide an overview of major aspects or themes to be discussed. The interviewer needs to ask permission to record taped interviews and communicate a readiness to clarify any inquiries about the research. In closing an interview, Anderson (1998) proposes that the researcher should thank the interviewee for his or her time and assistance in undertaking the research. The researcher should also confirm any arrangement for following up such as sending a summary of findings or sharing the publication of research results.

In summary, I have reported the processes of my research design. This began with defining the research purposes, formulating the research questions, defining the case and building the sample, then moving to designing instrumentation for information collection, which was the Interviewing Schedule. The interviewing in the field and refinements made to my Interviewing Schedule according to participants' recommendations are described in chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes (pp. 96-98). The criteria to evaluate the quality of the whole process of conducting this research are presented in chapter 5: Significance of the Research on University Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles in Curriculum Decision Making, Recommendations, Evaluation, and Possibilities for Future Research (pp. 165-167).

I have discussed philosophical assumptions underlying my research and the methodological direction that guided my research process. The stages of applying this methodological direction to design the research have also been explained in detail. I now consider some ethical issues that emerged in the preparation of my research and in anticipation of its implementation. Issues related to ethics in practice, that is, what ethical issues *actually* arose when I came to collect data at HNUE, are reported in chapter 4 (pp. 93-98).

Ethical considerations in designing the research

As my research involved teacher-participants, ethical considerations were of paramount importance in the research design. Ethical considerations aim to minimize any potential harm to participants so that the benefits of conducting this curriculum research are not gained at the expense of participants' discomfort and disadvantages. I first raise ethical issues that emerged in the research process. These included potential harm to participants, conflict of interest, and ethics in translation and research on teachers' thinking. Secondly, I discuss approaches that addressed these ethical concerns. These approaches involved gaining informed consent and assuring voluntariness, autonomy, and confidentiality.

Potential harm to participants

No physical harm to participants was anticipated in my research. Nevertheless, as curriculum is a contested field and a political issue by its very nature, I did consider that participants could experience emotional and social discomfort. When discussing curriculum in the context of Vietnamese culture where my research was undertaken, this risk was more likely to occur. This is because in Vietnam, political issues are a sensitive topic and people may feel offended or hesitant when talking about them. Therefore, I understood that being interviewed about curriculum could possibly burden some participants. More importantly, the risk of being identified had the potential to cause harm such as losing face, since the participants in my research were educators and managers with high status. Also, as the research took the form of a case study and the research setting publically known, participants were more readily identifiable.

To mitigate harm, these risks were made transparent to the HNUE teachers from the beginning of my research. Information about participants' identities would not be mentioned where unnecessary or without their permission. Moreover, participants were informed that they could choose not to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with. Also, they could withdraw any piece of information provided before the analysis and interpretation of interview responses, which was before June 30, 2009. Furthermore, the choice of language used in the interviews was to be taken into consideration, for example, avoiding sensitive words or "high risk" questions, that is, asking leading questions or asking participants to give information that might involve other people.

Also, time required for interviews was anticipated as being burdensome. Initially, I considered that each participant would be interviewed once over 45 minutes. To minimize any intrusion in relation to time commitments of participants, the Interview Schedule (Appendix E) were to be sent to participants in advance so they could be flexible in preparing for the interviews. When discussing cross-cultural interviews, Anderson (1998) points out that "Chinese respondents want to receive the questions days in advance, presumably so that they can ponder their response and not be put in an awkward position regarding "face" (p. 195). I assumed that Vietnamese interviewees might perceive this in the same way.

Conflict of interest

I have worked at Hanoi National University of Education as a colleague of the teacher-participants. Also, my father holds a position in this university. I knew that these factors could cause conflicts of interest in terms of collegiality between me and participants, and the authority of my father's role over participants.

Anderson notes that:

Conflict of interest exists when a researcher's personal interests influence the objectives of a study, the ability to make fair judgements or relationships are put at risk. Naturally, many people enjoy doing research in their field where they have both a personal interest and subject expertise. (1998, p. 25)

To minimize any conflicts that may have occurred in my research, I needed to make sure that all teachers' involvement in my research was voluntary. From the beginning of the study, the teachers were informed about their right to choose not to participate and their right to discontinue participation. Also, the contact details of my supervisor were provided for discussions of any concerns emerging from their participation in my research.

Ethical concerns with translation

English is neither an official nor daily language in Vietnam. Therefore, the data collection involved in the use of interviews was designed to be conducted in Vietnamese. Together with the Information Letter (Appendix C), the Consent Letters from the President and university teachers (Appendix B, D), and the Interview Schedules (Appendix E) were translated into Vietnamese. However, both Vietnamese and English versions of these documents were to be sent to participants for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy of information. Participants would respond to the interview questions in Vietnamese. The interviews were to be digitally tape-recorded but not transcribed. Instead, during the process of data analysis, I needed to listen to the recordings and directly draw significant themes and findings from them.

In my research, however, all information sent to participants and the information obtained from them would be translated (in documents actively by myself as researcher) from English to Vietnamese and vice versa. I perceived that this translation could cause ethical concerns in terms of misunderstanding data or misinterpreting it (Rumball, 2001). Here are the reasons for this. Firstly, there are differences between the meanings of technical terms used in English and in Vietnamese due to different ways of thinking and/or different theoretical traditions. Secondly, the translation can hardly capture all the aspects of language data such as cultural, emotional, or philosophical aspects of word choices (Freeman, 1994). Given the fact that curriculum is heavily value-laden; the cultural, emotional, and philosophical aspects of language are of paramount importance if one seeks to understand university teachers' perceptions of

curriculum. Misunderstanding and misinterpreting information, therefore, had the potential to occur.

Spradley (1979) has also emphasised the significance of language translation in ethnographic research. According to Spradley, “language not only functions as a means of communication, it also functions to create and express a cultural reality” (1979, p. 20). Hence, by translation Spradley means not only the linguistic dimension but also contextual aspects. That is, even though people speak the same language, what they really mean needs to be “translated” in a particular context. The researcher, therefore, needs to improve her translation competence, which is “the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture” (Spradley, 1979, p, 19). Spradley then suggests two tasks for the researcher in the translation process. The first task is to acquire intensive knowledge of the culture in which participants live, including the language used. With regard to my research, language has been also understood as academic terms used in the field of curriculum—the jargon where meanings have been shared among educators of a specific context. As Vietnamese is my first language and my undergraduate degree majored in Vietnamese linguistics and literature education, I wanted to use my linguistic and educational knowledge to understand what HNUE teachers think about curriculum, why they think like that, and how they express their thinking and in which context.

A second task of the researcher in the translation process, as Spradley (1979) points out, is “to communicate the cultural meanings you have discovered to readers who are unfamiliar with that culture or cultural scene” (p. 205). In my research, this means communicating a Vietnamese perspective and the perspectives of English-speaker audiences. I employed some strategies to do so. Firstly, because there would be differences between the conceptual system of my research and those that participants were more familiar with, I needed to explain what I mean by the terms used in interviews. Thus, we were to talk in the same language—Vietnamese as the curriculum language. Secondly, participants, however, needed to be encouraged to “speak in the same way they would talk to others in their cultural scene” (Spradley, 1979, p. 59) since the goal of the research was to interpret teachers’ curriculum perceptions in their own terms. Thirdly, in the analysis of interview responses, I intended to translate my

understanding of Vietnamese participants' curriculum perceptions into English. Since English is not my native language, I sought help from my supervisor to communicate with English-speaker audiences.

Ethics in research on teachers' thinking

My research involved university teachers' thinking in terms of inviting them to talk about their perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. In light of the characteristics of teacher-participants from research on teachers' thinking, Sabar (1994) argues that while teachers deserve the rights like participants in other types of research, they cannot be treated in a regular way. This is because teachers have highly professional status. Another reason is that, the very nature of research on teachers' thinking is to understand teachers' insights by an investigation that goes deeply into teachers' personal lives. Thus, there has been a call for the status of teachers as research partners. This partnership relation means teachers play an equal role, and therefore should have an equal right to the research as compared to that right of the researcher.

However, Sabar (1994) finds out that this partnership is limited in the reality of conducting research on teachers' thinking. This is due to the difference in status between a teacher-participant and a researcher, that is, "the teacher, and certainly, the student-teacher, is clearly in a weaker position *vis a vis* the researcher" (Sabar, 1994, p. 116). For example, as Sabar points out, the researcher may have a sense of superiority, or there may be a one-sidedness of questioning, or the researcher may "lie for the good of the research" (1994, p. 116). Also, the status of teacher as a mutual constructor may not be fully recognized by the researcher. Sabar (1994), therefore, has suggested the practice of partnership that includes these following components:

- i. Readiness to share the research objectives with the teacher/informant
- ii. A level of independence and responsibility given to teacher/informant concerning the research design, its implementation and eventual feedback
- iii. Weight and place given to the teacher/informant's interpretation

Additionally, given the fact that teachers' thinking is to be revealed and interpreted in discussion, teachers are placed under potential harm. The first concern is with anonymity. Because of the nature of rich description in research

on teachers' thinking, the teacher-participant is more readily identifiable, especially in relatively small settings, for example, a case study such as my research. Moreover, there may be a conflict between anonymity and teachers' right of ownership to the research outcomes. As Sabar (1994, p. 119) claims: "When the teacher remains anonymous, the story is 'given' to the researcher who adds his or her interpretation, and often the fact that the story basically 'belongs' to the teacher is obscured." It is very likely that sometimes teacher-participants want to give up anonymity so that their thinking is credited in any published findings.

The second concern is with interventions that may be caused for teachers. Because of the reflective nature of research on teachers' thinking (Zeichner, 1994), being interviewed or observed inevitably causes changes in teachers' minds (Sabar, 1994). Researchers, however, hardly have a clear picture of what may happen in the reality of conducting research. Also, participants whilst giving their consent to join the research, "may not fully comprehend what they are consenting to" (Sabar, 1994, p. 121).

In conducting research on teachers' thinking, I needed to pay attention to the ethical issues in general research as well as on the ethical concerns mentioned above. To deal with those ethical considerations, I proposed some solutions such as gaining informed consent and assuring voluntariness, anonymity, and confidentiality, as follows.

Informed consent

Informed consent in my research needed to be sought from Professor Dr Nguyen, the President of Hanoi University of Education, and from eight teachers at the university. Consent from Professor Dr Nguyen was needed for me to access HNUE and the teachers. Consent from HNUE teachers was to confirm that they were provided with sufficient information related to the research, and that they acknowledged the rights and responsibilities involved in the research. The Participant's Consent Letter (Appendix D) indicated that teachers had the right not to participate as all participation was on a voluntary basis and not a requirement. It also indicated that participants had the right to discontinue and

withdraw from the research at anytime (before the data analysis June 30, 2009), without any questions or disadvantages. The information that participants provide would be used only with their permission. Contact details for my supervisor and the Ethics Committee of the School of Education at the University of Waikato were provided for the President and the HNUE teachers. This was in case they had concerns that they felt uncomfortable expressing to me directly.

Voluntariness, anonymity, and confidentiality

In my research, there was no guarantee that “pure” voluntariness would be gained. Voluntariness means consent from participants “is obtained neither by coercion nor by force... Researchers must not manipulate subjects into consenting” (Wilkinson, 2001). Three facts may have influenced HNUE teachers’ voluntariness to participate in my research. Firstly, I had worked at the university and I knew most of the teachers who were invited to join the research. Secondly, my father has held a position at HNUE and had a long collegial relationship with the potential participants. Thirdly, permission to conduct the research at the university was to be sought from the President and the potential participants were to be informed of that permission. University teachers would also be acknowledged that the information of their names and positions was to be made transparent to the President (see Appendix C). I understood that these collegial and authoritative relationships would, in some way, influence teachers’ agreement to join the research. This, in turn, had implications for anonymity.

I considered that anonymity might not be guaranteed in my research. Dench, Iphofen and Huws (2004, p. 71) define: “Anonymity means that respondents could not be identified (including by researchers).” Two facts had the potential to negatively influence the anonymity of the participants in my research. Firstly, the names and positions of the potential participants were known by myself and the President of HNUE. Secondly, my research took place in a small setting and most of the potential participants held high positions at HNUE. I assumed that their positions had impacts on their perceptions of curriculum decision making; thus, this information would be revealed in the interviews. This means that readers of my research report may be able to identify participants if the

participants are familiar to them. Since anonymity could not be guaranteed in my research, this risk was made transparent to the HNUE teacher-participants. This is where the tension between “pure” voluntariness and the need to protect anonymity emerged. On the one hand, HNUE teachers may have been concerned about the risk of being identifiable; hence, they may have not wanted to participate in the research. On the other hand, HNUE teachers may have felt pressure because of collegial and authoritative relationships mentioned above, which could have induced them to give consent to be participants.

Last but certainly far from least, the protection of participants’ confidentiality was an ethical principle that I sought to respect. As Anderson (1998) has pointed out:

Confidentiality information implies that the identity of the individual will remain anonymous. It assumes as well that the reader of the research will not be able to deduce the identity of the individual. Information may be quoted and reported, but the identity of the individual should be protected. (p. 20)

Hence, in my research, the names of participants were not to be revealed in the report of research findings and discussion. Nevertheless, since this is a case study in which the research setting becomes public knowledge, I was aware of the risk of participants being identified. This risk was to be made transparent to participants as indicated in the Information Letter (Appendix C) and the Participant’s Consent Letter (Appendix D) for participants. This was to assure that HNUE teachers acknowledged the risk before giving their consent to join my research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have uncovered the interpretive philosophy underpinning my position that curriculum issues as a form of social realities are contextually and personally constructed. Therefore, I choose to access curriculum by looking at how curriculum is reflected in teachers’ perceptions, as teachers are insiders of particular settings in which curriculum is developed. Also, because the interpretive philosophy profoundly influences the methodological direction of

research, my research is mainly qualitative in nature. Its qualitative nature embedded in the four-stage process to design the research. This process moved from the formulation of the research purposes and the research questions to the contextualization and sample-building. The last stage of research design was the writing of the Interview Schedule as an instrument to collect information. Educational research, however, is not simply technical. Rather, it deals with human beings, and in the case of my research, with highly professional human beings: University teachers. Ethical matters, therefore, needed to be given a great deal of consideration from the beginning of the research (such as voluntariness and informed consent gained from participants) to the stage of interviewing (such as the intervention or emotional discomfort caused for participants). Ethical issues would emerge even at the end of the research process, such as misunderstandings or bias in translating, analyzing, and interpreting interview responses and writing a report of the outcomes. The realization of the research plan designed in this chapter is reported in the following chapter: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTING THE CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND REPORTING RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the implementation and outcomes of the research on HNUE teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section details ethical issues that emerged during the research implementation. In this section I describe my roles as the researcher and report the interviewing process, the problems that occurred, and the amendments I made in relation to the initial Interviewing Schedule. Section two explains the process I designed to analyze and interpret the interview responses. This process consists of three stages: Summarizing, identifying, and categorizing interview responses; communicating categories of trends across interview responses; and generating meanings of trends across interview responses and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these meanings. Each stage is illustrated by selected cases of findings extracted from the information collected. In the light of the research findings, section three discusses the perceptions of Hanoi National University of Education teachers of their roles in curriculum decision making. The discussions cover a range of literature, including views from both Asian and Western perspectives. This section also synthesizes the research findings in response to my research aims.

Ethics in practice

Guillemin & Gillam (2004) claim that there are at least two major dimensions of ethics:

- (a) procedural ethics, which usually involves seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans; and (b) “ethics in practice” or the everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research. (pp. 263)

The authors believe that procedural ethics cannot cover every dimension of ethical issues in research, as unexpected situations arise when conducting research where participants may be vulnerable. Guillemin and Gillam (2004), therefore, suggest

reflexivity as a solution for researchers in facing unforeseen ethical events occurring in practising research. This is because reflexivity focuses not “only on the production of knowledge in research but also on the research process as a whole” (pp. 275). Although “reflexivity” cannot prescribe specific types of responses in specific circumstances, it helps researchers to acknowledge and be “sensitized to the microethical dimensions of research practice and in doing so, being alert to and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that arise” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, pp. 278). Reflecting on the implementation of my research, I was aware of the significant influences that my roles as the researcher had on this process. I was challenged by unforeseen problems that emerged when I began to facilitate the research design. I also learned to make decisions about necessary changes that helped solve those problems.

Ethical concerns in relation to my role as the researcher

I have had a strong attachment to HNUE as a student (from 2002 to 2006) and as a Research Assistant (from 2007 to present). I am quite familiar with its institutional context and my personal experiences are credible sources of information. Nevertheless, this led to ethical concerns in terms of possible bias in the analysis and interpretation of information obtained; thus influencing the objectivity and reliability of the research outcomes. As qualitative research, however, this recognizes subjective influences, and appreciates the originality of the researcher’s approach to an issue. I hope that my way of undertaking this research brings new insights into university teachers’ thinking about curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making in the Vietnamese setting.

My relationships with participants as mentioned in chapter 3 influenced my roles in this research. Those relationships enabled me to more easily gain participants’ informed consent to join the research. Vietnamese culture, however, strongly emphasises the roles of age and social position in conversations—a person who is younger and holds a lower position at the workplace should show respect to the one who is older and holds a higher position. Consequently, there is usually a “distance” maintained between the two. When HNUE teachers were

interviewed, this “distance” had the potential to be broken and raised an ethical concern in terms of cultural intrusion.

Since the interviews were to be conducted in Vietnamese while the rest of this research has been carried out in English, there were ethical issues in relation to the language used. Firstly, some ways of expression in English caused a little offence when being translated into Vietnamese. For example, Question 7 in the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E) “How do you evaluate your contribution to university curriculum decision making?” was considered as an immodest question by a participant. Secondly, due to academic traditions such as the popularity of different authors and theories in Vietnam and other countries, there were differences of terminology and ways these were perceived in Vietnamese and English. For example, as will be seen in the research findings (pp. 119-120), the term curriculum decision making in Vietnamese language and political context was not conceived by teacher-participants as part of their daily activities. Rather, curriculum decision making was defined as the function of authoritative agencies such as the Minister of Education and Training, the President, or the Dean in a tertiary institution. This raised ethical concerns in terms of misunderstanding or misinterpretation between myself and interviewees. Because of these two reasons, the translation of the information given to participants as well as the translation of their interview responses was not word-for-word but flexible according to the context of conversation. The information provided for participants, however, was in both Vietnamese and English for the purpose of checking accuracy.

Ethical issues in the interviewing process

On 4 May 2009 I met with Professor Dr Nguyen, the President of Hanoi National University of Education. He gave his consent to conduct the research at HNUE after being advised of relevant research information as has been mentioned in chapter 3. From May 5 to June 12, 2009 I contacted eight teachers at HNUE and they all gave consent to participate after considering the information provided (refer to chapter 3). Interviews were undertaken during this period. During the interviewing process, however, some unforeseen problems emerged and I made some amendments to my initial research design.

Initially, the Interviewing Schedule consisted of 14 core questions and each participant would attend one face-to-face interview with each interview lasting about 45 minutes. During the interviewing process, the participants commented on the Interview Schedule and suggested amendments that should be made to it. Part Four of the Interviewing Schedule–Participants’ Recommendations–was designed for this purpose. In the light of this feedback, the initial schedule had some shortcomings as follows.

Participants’ comments on the initial Interview Schedule

To begin with, there was a large number of questions and some of them were considered difficult to answer (refer to Appendix E). For example, Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 12 expected interviewees to have intensive experience in curriculum. Thus, time spent for each interview was longer than had been expected–the first interview lasted two hours (one of the reasons obviously was my lack of interviewing experiences). This time extension caused tiredness for participants; also it could have resulted in poor quality of information obtained.

In addition, the Interview Schedule had many open-ended questions. It was suggested that despite their purpose in cultivating creative thinking, open-ended questions in the Vietnamese context are useful in assessment and testing, rather than in interviewing. This is because these questions could cause interviewees to feel as if they are tested rather than consulted. Another reason relates to traditional scientific approaches in Vietnam, which claim to be more familiar with objectivity and accuracy. This clearly contrasts with the aim of open-ended questions, which gives prominence to subjectivity and personality in perceiving social issues. So I thought about the maxim “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” To assure the practicability of information collection in the Vietnamese context, I conducted the interviewing process as follows.

Amendments made to the initial Interviewing Schedule

The 14 questions in the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E) were organized into three groups that focused on three issues raised by three research sub-questions (refer to p. 71). Group 1 aimed to find out the ways HNUE teachers conceptualize

curriculum and curriculum decision making. This group comprised Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 12 (refer to Appendix E). According to feedback from participants and other colleagues at HNUE, these questions were difficult as they expected that teachers had intensive experience in curriculum. Questions in Group 2 were concerned with how HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making. This group comprised Questions 2, 7, 8, 9, and 13. These questions were perceived as quite easy to answer as they asked interviewees to reflect on their daily curriculum experiences. Even if participants had little curriculum experience, they would be able to respond to these questions. Group question 3 focused on supports HNUE teachers suggested to facilitate university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. These comprised Questions 6, 10, 11, and 14. The quality of information gained from this group differed according to respondents' experiences in teaching, research, management, and leadership.

Interviewees were divided into two groups according to the information about their experience that I had sought while developing the research sample. As previously mentioned, this was because different questions anticipated teachers had different levels of experience. Group A consisted of teachers who had intensive experience in curriculum and had held management/leadership positions at different levels of the education system such as the ministry, university, faculty, or department. With this group, I focused more on group questions 1 and 2. Group B consisted of teachers who had less curriculum experience and did not yet hold management/leadership positions. With this group, I focused more on group questions 2 and 3.

Finally, instead of the 45-minute-interview as initially proposed, the participants were interviewed twice with each interview lasting 20 to 25 minutes. All participants were comfortable with this change. This change was also reported to my supervisor and the Ethics Committee of School of Education, the University of Waikato.

In summary, some ethical issues emerged from the information collection and I have discussed the solutions for them. I summarize these as follows:

- i. My familiarity with the setting of HNUE had the potential to lead to bias in the interviewing process and the analysis and interpretation of information obtained
- ii. The relationship between the participants and myself in the role of researcher could have influenced participants' voluntariness to be interviewed
- iii. The "respect principle" in conversations in Vietnamese context had the potential to cause cultural intrusion particularly when interviewing seniors
- iv. The contradictory nature of traditional scientific approaches between those in Vietnam and some other countries called for changes in the interviewing approach and procedure
- v. The changes in the interviewing process compared to the initial proposal approved by the School of Education's Ethics Committee required the researcher to be faithful to the research proposed and the overarching research questions

Analysis and interpretation of interview responses: Approaches

Approaches to the analysis and interpretation of information obtained from informants have been widely discussed in a number of books about qualitative research (Creswell, 2002; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because the stages for information analysis and interpretation differ among these authors, I adapted approaches shared by them and developed my own three-stage-approach to make sense of the interview responses. This approach involved: (i) Summarizing, identifying, and categorizing interview responses; (ii) Communicating categories of trends across interview responses; (iii) Generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these meanings.

Stage 1: Summarizing, identifying, and categorizing interview responses

In this stage, the responses of the eight teachers were collated for each interview question. The length of the responses varied from a sentence to some paragraphs. Then these responses were reduced (Davidson & Tolich, 2003) or coded (Creswell, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This involved reading through all the responses to get a general sense and then dividing them into segments. Segments could be identified based on several categories such as a setting or context, a particular way of thinking about people or objects, a process or activity

or strategy of doing something, a relationship or social structure between people or objects (Creswell, 2002). These segments could be a summary of a response or a quote extracted from a participant's words. These segments may have been a word, a phrase, or a sentence. The act of summarizing segments of information was named by Miles & Huberman (1994) as first level coding.

I proceeded with the process of pattern coding, which “groups summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Sets, themes, or constructs could be identified based on some categories such as a trend that appeared in responses of a number of informants, a cause for an existing problem, an explanation for a particular situation or action, a metaphor or metaphorical language in the words of a respondent, a social network between respondents, or a theoretical-oriented themes or patterns found in previous studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In my research, because the interview questions were specific, I categorized the responses of HNUE teachers according to the purposes of these questions. Readers can find these questions in the Interview Schedule (Appendix E)—for example, *factors* influencing HNUE teachers' curriculum decision making (Question 5), HNUE teachers' *motivations* to join curriculum decision making (Question 10), or *difficulties* experienced by HNUE teachers while participating in curriculum decision making (Question 11).

An example of these processes is illustrated in *Table 10: Example of the Summarizing, Identifying, and Categorizing Process*. The left hand column introduces some information about the teachers, which was useful in understanding their responses. This column also displays the responses from three of the HNUE teachers to Question 10 extracted from the digital interview record. The middle column shows summaries of quotes from each teacher's response. The right hand column presents the categories of themes or pattern that emerged.

Table 10

Example of the Summarizing, Identifying and Categorizing Process

Question 11: What factors do you find most limiting and difficult when you are involved in university curriculum decision making? (CDM)	Teachers' profiles and responses (translated from Vietnamese)	Summaries and/or quotes	Categories
<p>Teacher 1's profile: 10 years of experience, PhD in Social Sciences, has not held any managerial positions</p> <p>Responses:</p> <p><i>I haven't been involved much in university curriculum decision making but I think these difficulties maybe institutional constraints, that is, the hierarchical management in education. In Vietnam, university teachers hardly participate in decision making, they only can take part in the implementation of curriculum, or the assessment of curriculum at department or faculty levels. I think this doesn't deserve the roles of university teachers. I think teachers haven't contributed much to curriculum development because they haven't got chance to do so.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The hierarchical management in education hindered university teachers' participation in CDM. - University teachers' participation in CDM was usually in terms of curriculum implementation and assessment at low levels such as department and faculty. - <i>This doesn't deserve the roles of university teachers... Teachers haven't contributed much to curriculum development because they haven't got chance to do so'</i> 	<p>Difficulty: Hierarchical management in education</p> <p>Explanation: University teachers usually only participate in low levels of CDM</p> <p>Evaluation: This doesn't deserve the roles of university teachers</p>	
<p>Teacher 2's profile: 5 years of experience, MA degree in Natural Sciences, has not held any managerial positions</p> <p>Responses:</p> <p><i>I feel that my experience is insufficient. I haven't got much experience in curriculum implementation and assessment. This profoundly hinders my participation in curriculum decision</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The insufficiency of knowledge and experience of university teachers hindered their participation in CDM. 	<p>Difficulty: Insufficient experience and knowledge</p>	

making. I think new teachers like me should be offered more opportunities to improve our knowledge of curriculum in particular and our professional competences in general. These opportunities now are too rare.

– University teachers had little opportunity to improve their professional competences and curriculum knowledge.

Evaluation: University teachers haven't been offered sufficient professional development

Teacher 3's profile: 25 years of experience, PhD in Natural Sciences, Associate Professor & Senior lecturer, was Dean of Faculty, now Head of Department

Responses:

To participate in curriculum decision making requires a lot of time. Meanwhile I have things to do like teaching. Senior lecturers in Vietnamese universities teach about 320 to 360 sections per academic year, that's overload and I hardly find time to do research or pursue further professional development. I am also holding a managerial position, this costs plenty of time too. You know, meetings and other administrative work.

– Participation in CDM was time consuming.

– The workload for university teachers was heavy and some of them were carrying out teaching, research, and managerial work at the same time.

Difficulty: Time consuming

Explanation: University teachers' work is overloaded with teaching, doing research, and managerial work at the same time.

Stage 2: Communicating categories of trends across interview responses

In the second stage, categories of interview responses were placed in a tabular presentation. This is what Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to as conceptually ordered display, which aims at seeing main trends across the cases, that is, respondents. This stage was also called data organization (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). The task is to identify the main trends emerging from responses for each interview question. These main trends then are built as categories.

The researcher then needs to determine how many respondents possess similar ideas that belong to each category. This is a tactic in data analysis and interpretation referred by Miles and Huberman (1994) as counting. These authors pointed out that counting is advantageous “to see rapidly what you have in a large batch of data, to verify a hunch or hypothesis, and to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias” (p. 253). In fact, the main reason for using this approach of information display in my research is that when reading through all the interview responses, I found a large number of similarities shared by HNUE teachers—as will be seen later. As previously mentioned, this feature can be explained as a consequence of education thinking in a system governed by a single political party, and thus, a single educational ideology or position (Eisner, 1992). If similarities, not differences, have significance in information obtained, it may be more reasonable to employ an approach that emphasizes these similarities for clarity of interpretation.

An example of these processes is illustrated in *Table 11: Example of Displaying Categories of Interview Responses*, using the findings of Question 11 and the categories drawn in Table 10. The left hand column displays categories of the factors that HNUE teachers found limiting or difficult when joining curriculum decision making. The names of categories are built on interviewees’ words extracted from their responses. The right hand column shows the number of interviewees who mentioned those categories in their responses. The categories in the left hand column are placed in an order that moves from most frequent factors shared by interviewees to less frequent ones.

Table 11

Example of Displaying Categories of Interview Responses

Question 11: What factors do you find most limiting or difficult when you are involved in university curriculum decision making?

Categories of limiting and/or difficult factors	Number of respondents
Insufficient experience and knowledge	6
Lack of professional development opportunities	6
Insufficient financial support	4
Time consuming	4
Hierarchical management in education	2

Stage 3: Generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these meanings

This stage has two tasks. Task (a) was to generate and interpret meaning of the trends across the interview responses. This involved noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions. Task (b) was to ensure the accuracy and reliability of those meanings. As follows I provide intensive explanations and illustrations about the approaches and tactics that I used in each task. By doing this, I want readers to understand the strategies I used to analyze and interpret information gathered from interviews with HNUE teachers. Also, I aim to make my analysis and interpretation plausible, as the strategies I used were adapted from reliable literature (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Task (a): Generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses

In order to generate and interpret meaning from the information obtained, I found some very useful strategies from Miles and Huberman (1994). For example, the tactics of clustering, noting patterns/themes, seeing plausibility assist to figure out what pieces of information go with others. Using metaphors is another way of

seeing the integrations among diverse pieces of information. Counting is used to find out trends or most outstanding factors or variables. Establishing contrasts/comparisons and partitioning variables reveal the similarities and differences between cases or factors. The aim of these tactics is to understand what information means. To move to a more abstract level, there are some other helpful strategies such as subsuming particular into the general, factoring, and noting relationships between variables. *Table 12: Strategies for Generating and Interpreting Meaning of Trends Across Interview Responses* explains these strategies and gives examples to illustrate their applications in my research. The left hand column introduces the processes involved in each strategy. The strategies are placed in a sequence that moves from details to more abstract levels of the meaning generated and interpreted. The middle column illustrates the processes in each strategy by some little cases of findings drawn from interview responses. The right hand column cites the interview questions the findings of which are used for illustration in the middle column.

Table 12

Strategies for Generating and Interpreting Meaning of Trends across Interview Responses

Strategies	Illustrations of strategies by selected cases from findings	Interview questions															
<p>Clustering</p> <p>Clustering means to group and then conceptualize pieces of information which have similar patterns or characteristics. By doing this, the researcher can move from desultory pieces of information to higher levels of abstraction. Clustering may involve settings, events, processes, or individuals. The categories or classes used in clustering may be predetermined by research questions or may emerge from the information obtained.</p>	<p>Question 1 found that among 8 participants, there were several features of curriculum repeated. These similar ideas about curriculum were placed into four categories: Elements of curriculum, legality of curriculum, people who have authority over curriculum, and significance of curriculum. This can be seen in Table 13. The left hand column presents the features of curriculum mentioned by eight HINJE teachers. The middle column shows how similar or related features were grouped into categories. The right hand column counts the number of respondents who belonged to each category.</p> <p>Table 13</p> <p><i>Example of Clustering Interview Responses</i></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="863 719 1182 1435"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="863 719 927 1189">Features of curriculum</th> <th data-bbox="863 1189 927 1435">Categories</th> <th data-bbox="863 1435 927 2069">Respondents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="927 719 1023 1189">Training objectives, knowledge and skills, teaching and learning approaches, assessment of learners' academic performance</td> <td data-bbox="927 1189 1023 1435">Elements and processes of curriculum</td> <td data-bbox="927 1435 1023 2069">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1023 719 1118 1189">Legal documents official documents, obligatory to all teachers and learners</td> <td data-bbox="1023 1189 1118 1435">Legality of curriculum</td> <td data-bbox="1023 1435 1118 2069">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1118 719 1214 1189">Promulgated by authoritative agencies such as the State (the Prime Minister), university (the President), faculty (the Dean)</td> <td data-bbox="1118 1189 1214 1435">People who have authority over curriculum</td> <td data-bbox="1118 1435 1214 2069">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1214 719 1310 1189">Key element that determines the unique and status of a university</td> <td data-bbox="1214 1189 1310 1435">Significance of curriculum</td> <td data-bbox="1214 1435 1310 2069">1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Features of curriculum	Categories	Respondents	Training objectives, knowledge and skills, teaching and learning approaches, assessment of learners' academic performance	Elements and processes of curriculum	8	Legal documents official documents, obligatory to all teachers and learners	Legality of curriculum	6	Promulgated by authoritative agencies such as the State (the Prime Minister), university (the President), faculty (the Dean)	People who have authority over curriculum	2	Key element that determines the unique and status of a university	Significance of curriculum	1	<p>Question 1: What does the term "curriculum" mean to you? Please explain in detail and give examples for clarification.</p>
Features of curriculum	Categories	Respondents															
Training objectives, knowledge and skills, teaching and learning approaches, assessment of learners' academic performance	Elements and processes of curriculum	8															
Legal documents official documents, obligatory to all teachers and learners	Legality of curriculum	6															
Promulgated by authoritative agencies such as the State (the Prime Minister), university (the President), faculty (the Dean)	People who have authority over curriculum	2															
Key element that determines the unique and status of a university	Significance of curriculum	1															

Noting patterns and themes

Similar to clustering, the tactic of noting patterns and themes aims to pull together separate pieces of information. Patterns and themes can be drawn from the similarities or differences among categories, or from the connections between them.

Question 6 found that the majority of HNUE teachers perceived having opportunities for cooperation and learning as the most interesting factor in curriculum decision making (seven out of eight respondents). Also, the findings of Question 10 pointed out that the expectation of professional development opportunities was one of the factors most frequently mentioned by HNUE teachers as motivation for them to join curriculum decision making (six out of eight respondents). The responses for Questions 6 and 10 all signified the need for professional development. The theme “need for professional development” was then strengthened in responses to Question 11. This question found that feeling of a lack of competence and experiences and insufficiency of professional development opportunities are the most limiting or difficult factors encountered by HNUE teachers when participating in curriculum development (six out of eight respondents).

Question 6: What factors do you find most interesting when being involved in university curriculum decision making?

Question 10: What are your motivations to be involved in university curriculum decision making?

Question 11: What factors do you find most limiting or difficult when you are involved in university curriculum decision making?

Counting

The strategy of counting was introduced earlier in this chapter (p. 102).

Question 5 revealed that the official documents guiding education and curriculum—such as educational laws and resolutions, *Curriculum Framework*, or textbooks—were mentioned by Seven out of eight HNUE teachers as the factor that they were most aware of when making decisions about curriculum. This number also shows strong impacts of the top-down management on teachers’ perceptions. Another example can be cited from responses for Question 6, in which having opportunities for cooperation and learning was perceived by seven out of eight HNUE teachers as the most interesting factor when they join curriculum decision making. This number of responses may imply that teachers are normally isolated from each other and to participate in curriculum decision making is a way that they feel connected together.

Question 5: What factors are you most aware of when making decisions about university curriculum?

Question 6: What factors do you find most interesting when being involved in university curriculum decision making?

Seeing plausibility

Plausibility is defined as “an initial impression that needed

Before going to the interviews I assumed that the top-down management had hindered teachers’ participation at high levels of curriculum decision making, and that teachers therefore would perceive this as unsatisfactory. The findings of Question 8 confirmed my assumption as they pointed out that

Question 8: To what extent are you satisfied with your current roles in university

further checking through other tactics” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 246).

half of the respondents was not so satisfied with their current roles in curriculum decision making. Three out of these four respondents were young teachers who had fewer than seven years of experience and had not held any positions at HNUJE, and thus had not been involved much in decision making at the university or State level. However, the responses for Question 9 found that six out of eight HNUJE teachers perceived leaders at different levels as encouraging their participation in curriculum decision making, regardless of whether they have participated at higher or lower levels and whether they were in leadership positions such as a Dean of Faculty, a Head of Department or not. The differences between findings of Questions 8 and 9 may imply the distinction between management and leadership. Although the institutional constraints may prevent teachers from high levels of curriculum decision making, effective leaders still can facilitate teachers’ participation and make teachers satisfied with their roles.

curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Question 9: To what extent are you satisfied with your current roles in university curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Establishing contrasts/comparisons
Miles and Huberman (1994) explained this strategy as “we draw a contrast or make a comparison between two sets of things—persons, roles, activities, cases as a whole—that are known to differ in some other important respect” (p. 254).

In Question 7 when comparing the self-evaluation of HNUJE teachers about their contribution in curriculum decision making, it was surprising that there were no signs indicating the dependence of teachers’ self-evaluation on their qualifications, positions, and curriculum experiences. A young teacher who had not held any positions and had less experience in curriculum decision making evaluated his contribution as important. He said that curriculum decision making was a collaborative activity, thus any personal contribution was important. Conversely, a more experienced teacher who had participated in all levels of curriculum decision making did perceive his contribution as not so important. Paradoxically, his reason was similar to the other teacher, that is, curriculum was a social product and hence any personal contribution was modest.

Question 7: How do you evaluate your contribution to university curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Partitioning variables
According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this strategy is useful when “differentiation is more

In responding to Question 10, some HNUJE teachers mentioned the support from the institution of educational management as their motivation to join curriculum decision making. Meanwhile, the support from leaders at different levels was also perceived as motivating HNUJE teachers’ participation in curriculum decision making. At first, these two categories were put together under a category “supportive leadership and management.” However, having acknowledged that leadership has been

Question 10: What are your motivations to be involved in university curriculum decision making?

important than integration” (p. 254).

distinguished from management, as mentioned earlier, this category was partitioned. HNUJ teachers also commented that although they felt constrained because of the top-down management, their seniors were very supportive and had facilitated them to accomplish their current roles in curriculum decision making.

Subsuming particulars into the general and Factoring

These two strategies were introduced by Miles and Huberman (1994) as separate. However, I found they are similar in a sense that they both aim to locate the factors—settings, events, processes, activities, actors and so on—which share some characteristics in common in a more abstractly defined class. In fact, these two tactics are the next steps of the tactic clustering described earlier.

Question 14 found that HNUJ teachers proposed improving working conditions for university teachers as a solution to attract their participation in curriculum decision making. Better working conditions involved reducing working hours (which were said to be overloaded for university teachers), increasing time on research, offering more professional development opportunities for university teachers to study and do research overseas. Meanwhile, other respondents raised the need for better payment so that university teachers could concentrate on their jobs. Two other respondents, however, suggested that there should be regulations about the rights and responsibilities of university teachers in curriculum decision making. In summary, these three categories of solutions were put together into a larger category, that is, “policy changes.”

Question 14: What recommendations do you suggest to facilitate Vietnamese university teachers’ participation in curriculum decision making?

Noting relationships between variables

This tactic is to discover the ways in which two or more concepts or variables relate to each other.

For example, in comparing experiences and positions among HNUJ teachers, the findings of Question 3 revealed that the richer the experiences and the higher the positions they held, the higher levels of curriculum development they could be involved in. Another example is Question 8 which found that there may be connections between teachers’ qualifications, positions, and curriculum experiences and the degrees of satisfaction about their current roles in curriculum decision making. Three out of four HNUJ teachers who replied “not so satisfied” were young teachers with fewer than seven years of experience and held a Masters degree.

Question 3: What are your experiences with regard to university curriculum?

Question 8: To what extent are you satisfied with your current roles in university curriculum decision making?

Please explain in detail.

Using metaphors

The strengths of metaphors and their employment in studies on teachers' perceptions were presented in chapter 2: Nesting the Curriculum Research.

The findings of my research revealed that words such as "legal documents", "official documents", "authoritative agencies", "implement", "prescribe", "obligatory" were mentioned by HNUE teachers with a high frequency (from 5 to 13 times). This was when they were asked to define the terms curriculum (Question 1) and curriculum decision making (Question 4); or to discuss the factors that had impacts on their curriculum decision making (Question 5). The use of this metaphorical language may suggest that HNUE teachers were familiar with the top-down model of educational management and this model has largely influenced the ways they perceive educational issues, for instance, curriculum.

Question 1: What does the term "curriculum" mean to you? Please explain in detail and give examples for clarification.

Question 4: What does the term "curriculum decision making" mean to you? Please explain in detail and give examples for clarification.

Question 5: What factors are you most aware of when making decisions about university curriculum?

I have discussed some strategies that generated meaning of interview responses adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994). These helped me to make sense of the information obtained, to move from desultory pieces of information to higher levels of abstraction, and to trace the causes and explanations for the findings drawn from that information. However, to generate the meaning was only the first task. The second task of analyzing and interpreting interview responses was to make sure that these meanings and the processes of generating them are plausible. This involved ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the analysis and interpretation.

Task (b): Strategies to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the analysis and interpretation of interview responses

In my research, the accuracy of analysis and interpretation of interview responses was enhanced by the careful collection of information previously reported in section 1 of this chapter. The responses for each interview question of every participant were examined in the context of the total interview. This was to determine if my understandings of the responses to a question were supported or contradicted by responses to other questions. The reliability of the analysis and interpretation of interview responses was also taken into consideration. Reliability was defined as “the probability that an observation if repeated at a different time by the same person, or at the same time by another competent observer, will give the same result” (Gorden, 1980, p. 39). In my research, reliability was enhanced by the following techniques.

Firstly, as purposively designed, some questions in the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E) were closely related or mutually inclusive. For example, there could be concurrence in the responses to Question 6 “What factors do you find most interesting when being involved in university curriculum decision making?” and Question 10 “What factors most encourage you to be involved in university curriculum decision making?” Also, there could be close relationships among the responses to Questions 7, 8, and 9 “How do you evaluate your contribution to university curriculum decision making?” (Question 7); “To what extent are you satisfied with your current roles in university curriculum decision making?” (Question 8); “To what extent do you think you are encouraged to

participate in university curriculum decision making?” (Question 9). The aim of this design was to check the reliability of information obtained and to enhance the reliability of the analysis and interpretation of that information.

Secondly, each participant was interviewed twice. Hence, information gathered from the first interview—if it was insufficient, unclear, or consisted of contradictory contents—was clarified and verified in the second interview. This was done by asking the same questions again, asking additional questions, or verifying previous responses while discussing other questions.

Thirdly, the processes of analyzing and interpreting interview responses were repeated three times. The first time was immediately after each interview to embed fresh impressions and ideas emerging when I interacted with the participant. Integrating the information analysis and interpretation into the information collection process also enabled me to reflect on my activities and tailor better questions and interviewing strategies for the next meetings. The second time was after reflection of two or three weeks. The results of these two rounds were then compared. This helped extend the “gap” between myself and the responses so that my interpretations of the information would be less biased by my impressions during the interviews. The third time was three months after the second time. This was done after writing up the first three chapters of the thesis. These chapters cover a variety of literature and my own reflections on the processes of initiating, nesting, designing, and implementing the research. This literature consisted of books, articles, and empirical research on the contexts that were relevant to my research. These contexts included the nature of curriculum and different ways of understanding curriculum, teachers’ thinking and the analysis of metaphorical language as an approach to access and interpret this thinking, the new trend of management at higher education institutions that have influenced university teachers’ participation in curriculum decision making. These served as the theoretical and empirical basis by which the reliability of my research findings could be strengthened. This was done by making connections, comparisons, contradictions, or confirmation; or by tracing out the cause-effect relationships between the findings that I drew from interviewing responses and the findings in related literature and previous research studies. By doing this, my

analysis and interpretation of the participants' responses were built from a plausible basis and therefore, hopefully more reliable.

Research findings and discussions

This section has two purposes. The first purpose is to present my discussions in the light of the findings drawn from the interviews with the eight Hanoi National University of Education teachers. The second purpose is to synthesize these findings to respond to the research questions that I raised in chapter 1. These questions included:

Overarching Research Question:

How do HNUE teachers perceive their roles in curriculum decision making?

Research Sub-question:

- i. What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?
- ii. How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?
- iii. What are the solutions to attract HNUE teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?

Findings and discussions about HNUE teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making

I applied my three-stage approach of analysis and interpretation to the responses of the HNUE teachers for all questions in the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix F). The findings reflected what I intended to find out by conducting this research. Emerging findings are presented in one of the following forms or both of them: as a table-form that shows the categories of trends across respondents; or/and as a narrative-form that illustrates those categories by providing participants' voices and my interpretation and explanations. I want to remind the readers that all the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, and that participants' responses quoted in this section were translated by myself as researcher. For each of the interview questions, I wrote a discussion to compare, contrast, make connections and integrate the findings of my research and those of previous studies such as Archbald and Porter (1994), Baker and Begg (2003), Hudson and Yeh (2006), Kennedy and Lee (2008), Lamie (1998), Shin, Yager, Oh and Lee (2003), Su,

Adam and Miniberg (2000), Young (1985). These findings and discussions are introduced in the sequence of the questions in the Interviewing Schedule.

1. HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum: Findings and discussions

Table 14

Hanoi National University of Education Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum

HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum	Number of responses
Elements and processes of curriculum	8
Legality of curriculum	6
Agencies who have authority over curriculum	2
Curriculum as the soul and the ranking index of a university	1

Table 14 shows that there was a high level of agreement among the HNUE teachers on the meanings of the term curriculum. The most common idea, which was shared by all participants, was about the elements and processes that constituted curriculum. This idea can be seen most clearly in a teacher's words:

Currently, there have been different ways of understanding and defining curriculum. Personally, I suggest that curriculum is an overall plan designed for a learning activity. It provides us with the training objectives, the knowledge and skills that students are expected to obtain, the pedagogy that teachers are advised to use in their classrooms. It also tells us about the approaches to evaluate and assess students' performance so as to reach the training objectives of the university.

This can be interpreted as a theoretical approach of conceptualizing curriculum because this definition has been popularly introduced in literature both nationally (Nguyen, 2002; Nguyen, V. K., 2009; Tran, 2006—refer to chapter 1, pp. 18-20) and internationally (Klein, 1990; McGee, 1997; Scott, 2008—refer to chapter 2, pp. 35-40). This is also the way curriculum is defined in *Educational Law* (2005) of Vietnam (refer to chapter 1, p. 18). The second most prevalent idea about curriculum, which was shared by six out of eight respondents, related to the

legality of curriculum. A frequent beginning phrase of the HNUE teachers' responses was:

Curriculum is a legal document promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training, the university, or the faculty, which prescribes...

Or

Curriculum is an official document implemented by individuals and organizations that have authority, which describes...

It is evident from the responses cited above that some of the HNUE teachers showed interest in the agencies who have authority over the promulgation of curriculum. These involved the Minister of Education and Training, the President of the university, or the Dean of the faculty.

The two ideas above reflect the way in which curriculum has been defined in the Asian context. As Baker and Begg (2003) point out: "The word curriculum is used to describe the national or regional document or the 'official' curriculum" (p. 543). Kennedy and Lee (2008) also comment that: "Different Asian societies have tended to use curriculum documents as key policy tools to indicate directions in the form of objectives, goals, standards, or expected outcomes" (p. 90).

Interestingly, one HNUE teacher mentioned curriculum as having other significant features:

Curriculum is the "soul" and the ranking index of a university.

It is obvious that this way of thinking about curriculum is very different from that of other participants. She explained her concept of curriculum as an outcome of a course that she had recently attended as a visiting scholar at some overseas universities. This may imply the influences of overseas professional development on teachers' beliefs and teaching practices as identified in previous studies conducted in other Asian societies such as China (Hudson & Yeh, 2006), Japan (Lamie, 1998), and Korea (Shin, Yager, Oh & Lee, 2003).

2. HNUE teachers' curriculum experiences: Findings and discussions

Table 15

Hanoi National University of Education Teachers' Curriculum Experiences

HNUE teachers' curriculum experiences	Number of responses
Participate in curriculum development at different levels:	8
– <i>Design Curriculum Framework, or the State curriculum (State/Ministry level)</i>	(4)
– <i>Develop Detailed Curriculum, or the University curriculum (university/faculty level)</i>	(1)
– <i>Develop lesson plans, implement curriculum in classrooms and evaluate curriculum at department or faculty level (individual level)</i>	(3)
Participate in professional development courses related to curriculum:	8
– <i>In Vietnam and overseas</i>	(4)
– <i>In Vietnam only</i>	(4)
Co-ordinator of research projects related to curriculum	4
Director/Consultant for projects related to curriculum (in Vietnam and overseas)	4

Table 15 shows that all participants in my research had been involved in curriculum development at different levels. Among four HNUE teachers who had participated at the State/Ministry level (while still being involved in other levels), three were Associate Professors and one held a PhD. All of them had intensive experience in teaching, research and leadership/management: Three of them were Deans of Faculties and one was a Head of Department at HNUE. Also, they had carried out the roles of co-ordinator, director, or consultant for some research projects related to curriculum both in Vietnam and overseas. The average of their years of experience was about 25. On the other hand, the three teachers who only had participated at the individual level held a Masters degree and had fewer than seven years experience. None of these had been in leadership/management positions. It is suggested that the levels of teachers' participation in curriculum development depend on their status/qualifications (Associate Professor, PhD, or Master); years of experience (ranged from fewer than 7 to over 25 years); and

their leadership/management positions (for example, Dean of Faculty or Head of Department). This fact is understandable in the context of Asian education in which curriculum decision making has been characterized by centralization (Kennedy & Lee, 2008).

Another comment from Table 15 is that all participants in my research had been provided in-service courses for professional development related to curriculum, both in Vietnam and overseas. Nevertheless, they said that these had not yet satisfied their needs and expectations. In particular, the teachers who had not yet participated in any overseas professional development programmes expressed they were very keen to have those chances. However, the problem seemed not to be the lack of opportunities, as a respondent admitted:

The problem lies in ourselves. Every year the Government offers hundreds of scholarships, but we just hardly meet the criteria. The biggest obstacle may be the requirement of language. Even when you pass the scholarship's requirement of language, overseas universities may not accept you because their standards are even higher.

The solutions for improving the effectiveness of university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making, therefore, should come from the effort of teachers themselves to develop their own competency—as shall be seen later.

3. The process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education; individuals and organizations involved: Findings and discussions

According to some respondents, the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education is a continuous circle, which consists of four interactive stages as shown in Table 16. The left hand column describes the stages of curriculum development while the right hand column introduces the individuals and/or organizations involved in each stage.

Table 16

Stages of Curriculum Development and Individuals/Organizations Involved

Stage of curriculum development	Individuals and organizations involved
<p>Stage 1</p> <p>Analyse the situation, which would include an analysis of what a nation wanted its citizens to gain from school so as to meet the needs of society</p>	<p>Stage 1 and the design of <i>Curriculum Framework</i> at stage 2 are the responsibility of the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> Committee. This committee is established by the Minister of Education and Training. Leaders/managers at different levels of the educational system, experienced university teachers and scientists are invited to participate in the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> Committee. Other parts of stage 2 are the responsibility of the Scientific and Training Committee of the faculty, established by the President of a university. This committee involves leaders/managers at different levels of the university and the faculty, experienced faculty teachers and scientists.</p>
<p>Stage 2</p> <p>Design curriculum at different forms (<i>Curriculum Framework/State curriculum, Detailed Curriculum/University curriculum, lesson plans, textbooks, learning materials</i>)</p>	<p>Stages 3 and 4 involve the participation of all faculty teachers. However, the assessment of curriculum is both internal and external. Internal assessment is done by the faculty and the university themselves, but external assessment is done by Vietnamese Bureau of Testing and Quality Assessment (every 5 years).</p>
<p>Stage 3</p> <p>Implement curriculum in classrooms</p>	<p>Assess the effectiveness of curriculum and propose adjustments if necessary</p>
<p>Stage 4</p>	

Obviously, the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education illustrates a centralized, top-down model of educational management. This model was described in more detail in Figure 1 (chapter 1, p. 16). In this model, Vietnamese Government and the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have the highest authority over the management of education, the Ministries and the Ministerial-level agencies follow, and people within educational institutions are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Kennedy and Lee (2008) remark that hierarchy, or centralization, is the traditional form of decision making in most Asian societies. Stages 2, 3 and 4 in the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education were also introduced with full description in Nguyen, V. K. (2009) as explained in Table 3 (chapter 1, pp. 24-26). This table presented activities involved in each stage, the individuals who held the highest authority in each stage, the individuals who participated in

each stage, the policies that governed each stage, the outcomes of each stage and their significance, and the roles of university teachers in each stage.

The involvement of HNUE teachers in curriculum development

All participants in the research had already been involved in the process of curriculum development described above (see also Table 15). Among them, four teachers who held leadership/management positions (Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments) had been involved in all four stages of the process. Two other teachers responded that:

I am not sure about the whole process of curriculum development.

And:

Frankly I had no idea about the answer for this question because I had little experiences in curriculum practice. I hardly participate in the curriculum outside my classrooms. Only few people can, and they are all [either] Dean or Head.

These two respondents were also among the teachers who participated at the lowest level of curriculum development, that is, the individual level (see Table 15). It is understandable that when teachers are not involved much in curriculum development, they may have little knowledge of this process. Additionally, it is not surprising that the degrees of teachers' participation in curriculum development depended on their teaching and research experience. It is noted that the three teachers who experienced the lowest level of curriculum development held Masters degrees and had less experience. The degrees of teacher's participation in curriculum decision making also depended on their leadership or management positions, for example, whether they were Deans of Faculties or Heads of Departments. In short, if university teachers had richer experiences and held higher positions, they were more likely to be involved in higher levels of the process of curriculum development.

4. HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

At first, most respondents expressed their confusion about the phrase "curriculum decision making." In one teacher's words:

I'm not sure about your question. I think there's only the phrase "making a decision to implement a curriculum."

Another teacher stated that:

You may want to distinguish between the notions of "making a decision to implement a curriculum" and "making a decision about curriculum." I think many people may understand your phrase as making a decision to implement a curriculum, which is unquestionably the matter of leaders, not teachers. I meant in the case of Vietnam.

And she was right! Most of the responses focused on who could make curriculum decisions. As six teachers pointed out, curriculum decision making was one of the functions of authoritative agencies at different managerial levels (the Minister of Education and Training, Presidents of universities, Deans of Faculties) according to the levels of curriculum (*Curriculum Framework, Detailed Curriculum, lesson plans*). Among these six respondents, one claimed that:

I'm not a decision maker. Decision makers must be leaders or managers at faculty, university or State levels. My job as a university teacher is only to implement curriculum and to offer suggestions for curriculum changes if necessary.

This conception of curriculum decision making significantly differed from the ways it was usually defined by some Western curriculum policy researchers. In the contemporary context of New Zealand, for example, McGee (1997) believes that all teachers are "key curriculum decision makers" (p. 15) and are even "curriculum leaders" (p. 211). Furthermore, two other respondents in my research assimilated curriculum decision making with the approval to implement a curriculum, which was again associated with the functions of an authoritative agency. In one teacher's words:

Making decisions about curriculum belongs to the functions of an authoritative agency. In Vietnam, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Training or

the President of [the] university. In the case of the *Detailed Curriculum* for a particular subject, it is the responsibility of the Dean of Faculty. It [curriculum decision making] is when the leaders allow a curriculum or a subject to be implemented in reality after considering aspects such as its academic quality and its practicability; and [leaders] also provide necessary facilities for this implementation. Then the curriculum becomes a legislation and is obligatory to its implementers—teachers and others staff.

Teachers, as can be seen, were perceived as curriculum implementers rather than decision makers. The findings presented above confirmed the results of **Finding 1** (see Table 14), in which the HNUE teachers emphasized the legal and authoritative natures of curriculum.

Another significant point is that, half of the respondents suggested curriculum decisions should be made based on the specific conditions of an educational institution or a classroom. By doing this, every level of the higher educational system—regardless of it being the Ministry of Education and Training, university, faculty, department or university teachers—should be responsible for certain roles in the decision making of curriculum. As one teacher explained:

Decisions made to curriculum need to facilitate the development of the society, and they should be based on the specific conditions of each training institution, like its learners or infrastructure. Designing the *Curriculum Framework* is the responsibility of leaders at macro-levels such as the State, the Ministry of Education and Training, or some research institutes. But the development of the *Detailed Curriculum* must be carried out by the institutions themselves, and also by the staff who are directly teaching in classrooms.

This finding may imply a sense of personal agency of the HNUE teachers with regard to curriculum decision making. Participants were aware of their roles in curriculum decision making and felt that they should take responsibility in this process.

5. Factors which HNUE teachers were most aware of in their curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Table 17

Factors Which Hanoi National University of Education Teachers Were Most Aware of in Their Curriculum Decision Making

Factors which HNUE teachers were most aware of in their curriculum decision making	Number of responses
The contexts of the curriculum	8
The official documents that guide education and the curriculum	7
The subjects at high school that their students will teach after graduation	6
Their students' abilities and needs	5
Their own ideologies and experiences about teaching	4
The feedback from colleagues, students, society about their teaching	4
The forms of assessment for the subject that they teach	3

As Table 17 shows, the HNUE teachers perceived the contexts in which the curriculum was shaped and the official documents that guided education and the curriculum as two factors that most influenced their curriculum decisions. A respondent explained the importance of contextual factors to their curriculum thinking:

The socio-economic and political contexts of the State and each province have the most influences on the decisions that I made about curriculum. If the curriculum meets the demands of the society, the society will support and facilitate its implementation. The specific conditions of the educational institution also need to be considered. Like I'm teaching technology and I know it's ideal for my students to have more practical experiences, to work with high-tech technology; but the budget may not allow this.

Another teacher talked about some official documents as guidelines for education in general and curriculum in particular:

What you need to keep in mind is the guidelines from the Ministries, and above is the Government. The educational

laws and resolutions prescribe your responsibilities in relation to the curriculum and what you should do as a teacher. The *Curriculum Framework* and the *Detailed Curriculum* specify what your students should be taught in classrooms. You can also consult some kinds of textbooks and teaching materials when planning your teaching.

This finding confirmed the results of **Finding 4** in which the term curriculum decision making was defined by its authority, that is, making curriculum decisions was the function of authoritative agencies such as the Minister of Education and Training, the President of university or the Dean of Faculty. **Finding 4** also claimed the need for adjusting curriculum to its context, involving the political and socio-economic context and the specific conditions of an educational institution such as its infrastructure, budget, or human resources. According to Table 17, the contextual contexts may also include students' abilities and needs, which significantly differed from a classroom to another. A teacher claimed that:

For the curriculum to suit students' abilities and needs, university teachers, who directly interacted with students, should have authority in curriculum decision making.

Another factor that had important impacts on university teachers' decision making was the subjects at high school that graduates from HNUE would teach. In a teacher's words:

Learners will be employers after their graduation, so it's beneficial for them if they are taught exactly what they will be doing at the workplace.

This showed the dependence of the curriculum on the policy objectives of HNUE, that is, to train high school teachers (see chapter 1). This objective-oriented characteristic was also shown in the responses of the HNUE teachers in **Finding 1** (see Table 14) in which the words "objective" and "training objective" were mentioned 11 times by eight teachers when they conceptualized curriculum.

The correspondence between **Findings 1, 4** and **5** indicates how significantly university teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making have influenced their decision making on curriculum. This manifested the important impacts that university teachers' thinking had on their teaching activities. The findings of previous studies elsewhere in the world about

the relationships between teachers' thinking and their teaching practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Calderhead, 1990; Carlgre et al., 1994, Isenberg, 1990, Marton, 1994) are seen in the context of Vietnam by looking at my research outcomes.

Two other significant factors impacted on the HNUE teachers' curriculum decision making were: (a) Their own ideologies and experiences about teaching and (b) The feedback from colleagues, students, society about their teaching. A teacher talked about factor (a):

By saying this, I meant the sense of personal satisfaction that I gained when seeing my ideas somewhere in the books that I wrote, or their implementation in other classrooms rather than my own. If I can promote my own ideas and experiences when making decisions about curriculum, that's when I have the autonomy over my teaching.

Meanwhile, factor (b) may indicate the effects of external influences on teachers' activities. Recently in Vietnam there has been increased attention paid to quality assurance and assessment in accordance with teacher autonomy and self-accountability (see chapter 1, p. 17; p. 20; p. 29). **Finding 5** showed the influences of this movement to teachers' teaching, and teachers themselves also expressed their awareness of these influences.

6. Factors that HNUE teachers found most interesting when being involved in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Table 18

Factors That Hanoi National University of Education Teachers Found Most Interesting When Being Involved in Curriculum Decision Making

Factors that HNUE teachers found most interesting when being involved in curriculum decision making	Number of responses
Opportunities for professional development	7
Opportunities to contribute	6
The feeling of confidence in their teaching	6
The feeling of professional autonomy in their teaching	5
The feeling that their participation is appreciated by others	4

As Table 18 shows, most of HNUE teachers looked for professional development opportunities while joining curriculum decision making. This may be a characteristic of their occupation, which required teachers to continuously update their professional competence and experiences. In a teacher's words:

Joining curriculum decision making is always a great opportunity for cooperation and learning. You went to some kinds of meetings and workshops. You met other people who were also specialists in the field. You built the network, which was extremely important if you were looking for further development and promotion in your career.

Another said:

It's always helpful when you go beyond the classrooms. To expose yourself, to gain new experiences. You really learn from talking and discussing with people who may not think the same ways as you do. If you just stuck in your classrooms, you may not know what's happening outside and you can't keep up with the new knowledge, new teaching approaches, and even new technology. Our job as a teacher needs to be renewal all the time.

The desire to contribute and to be appreciated by others was also a motivation for many HNUE teachers to participate in curriculum decision making. A teacher put it this way:

After years of teaching I had some experiences and ideas that I think it may be good to share with other teachers. And I think I learn from them either. We all learn from others' experiences and thinking. And it's great to see your ideas flourish throughout many classrooms, not only in your own. Then you have a feeling like pride because you've contributed something and people really care about your input. If your profession is made use of, it's not wasted.

Young's (1985) study also found that interacting with other educators and making a contribution were mentioned by most respondents as sources of the satisfaction they derive from their participation in curriculum development.

To participate in curriculum decision making also helped The HNUE teachers feel more confident and had the feeling of professional autonomy in their

teaching. This finding was especially true of the younger teachers because the four teachers with only a few years of experience mentioned these factors in their responses. Here is one of the teachers' comments:

Being involved in curriculum decision making, you come to be aware of the whole process and you know why your students should learn this but not that. You become more competent, you know even more than the textbook asks you to, and this helps you feel free to talk in class. I believe that this will help improve the effectiveness of my teaching.

Another teacher explained professional autonomy in relation to curriculum decision making as:

When you're involved in decision making, you contribute to the content that you're going to teach at class and also how you're going to teach. In this way, you won't be teaching as others tell you, but you do it on your own. It's like a feeling of control over your work.

In summary, participation in curriculum decision making was considered positively by the HNUE teachers. They tended to have a strong sense of personal agency, professional responsibilities, and morality with regard to their teaching profession in general and curriculum decision making in particular. By morality I mean the self-awareness of their responsibilities as teachers and the desire to contribute to curriculum development and students' learning. In a study on the preparation of urban school principals in Korea, Su, Adam and Miniberg (2000) identify morality as a motivation for some Korean leaders to pursue their principalship. The similarity of this with my research finding may suggest the influences of teachers' moral awareness on education in many Asian societies. In a Western society, for example Canada as in Young's (1985) study on teachers' participation in curriculum development, professional responsibility was among teachers' motivations for going beyond their own classrooms and joining the curriculum committees at the provincial level. A sense of responsibility and morality can also be seen in **Finding 7** as follows.

7. HNUE teachers' evaluation of their contribution in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Three respondents evaluated their contribution in curriculum decision making as “important” with various reasons. A teacher explained:

Because it was me as the Chairwoman of the Committee for Curriculum Development who directly took responsibility for the curriculum under the Ministry of Education and Training.

Another said:

Because my involvement in curriculum decision making has direct impacts on my teaching. I believe that the knowledge that I've gained from participating in this process helps me to do better at [the] classroom.

Another reason stated was:

Curriculum decision making is a collaborative process that requires the collaboration of many related people to develop a curriculum that meets the training objectives of [the] institution. Curriculum decision making needs to be addressed from various aspects of the training objectives, thus the contribution of any member is equally important. In this way, the decisions made about the curriculum would be less biased.

Surprisingly, the idea of curriculum decision making as a collaborative process was perceived in a contradictory way by another teacher:

Curriculum is a social product. It depends on the needs and the agreements of many stakeholders. Thus the proposal of any individuals only plays as an initial orientation.

This teacher, therefore, evaluated his contribution in curriculum decision making as “of little importance.” Three other HNUE teachers shared the same opinion about their contributions. The reasons that they provided were varied. A teacher mentioned his lack of experiences as a barrier of his participation in curriculum decision making:

I'm a young teacher and have had little experiences. The institution of educational management in Vietnam attach

much importance to people who have been teaching for years and have lots of experiences.

Another teacher agreed on the significance of experiences:

My input in curriculum decision making is of little importance because I haven't had as much experience as other teachers who have been teaching for many years. I haven't reached the levels of thinking of an educational manager.

So, what does the thinking of an educational manager look like? A respondent who was a Dean of Faculty suggested that:

I can't deny that teachers' involvement is necessary. But the major roles in curriculum decision making should belong to a group of curriculum experts. In Vietnam we haven't got many curriculum experts with strong competence that can help develop high quality curriculum. This is the weakness of curriculum development in Vietnam, I think.

Interestingly, there were no signs that indicated the dependence of the HNUE teachers' self-evaluation on their positions, qualifications, and curriculum experiences. A younger teacher who had less experience in curriculum and had not held any leadership/management positions evaluated his contribution as important to curriculum decision making. Conversely, a more experienced teacher with higher qualifications and positions, who had participated in all levels of curriculum development, saw his contribution as less important to the decision making of curriculum. This contrary may illustrate the diversity in people's perceptions of a controversial topic like curriculum.

Another interesting finding was that one respondent was reluctant to evaluate her contribution in curriculum decision making:

It is hard to evaluate because I'm not the one who makes decisions. I only join the process of curriculum development as a consultant. That is to do research and suggest recommendations which help leaders to make decisions about the adjustments or the development of a new curriculum.

This affirms **Finding 4** in which most HNUE teachers perceived curriculum decision making as a function of authoritative agencies rather than as the role of a teacher.

8. HNUE teachers' satisfaction of their current roles in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Half of the HNUE teachers responded that they were “satisfied” with their current roles in curriculum decision making. A teacher said:

Because my contribution in decision making helps improve the quality of curriculum. That is, the curriculum meets the training objectives and ensures the practicability when it is implemented.

Another teacher explained:

Because I have participated at a level that satisfies me, that is, the highest level of curriculum decision making: Designing *Curriculum Framework*.

Two other teachers were satisfied with their current roles because of the new experiences that they gained from participating in the curriculum development process:

To participate in curriculum decision making helps me to take active roles in the planning and teaching of the curriculum.

And:

When joining curriculum decision making I learned to work in a team, to defend my own viewpoint, and to respect the opinions from different perspectives.

On the other hand, fifty percent of the HNUE teachers said that they were “not very satisfied” with their current roles in curriculum decision making. Their responses focused on three reasons. The first reason was, in a teacher’s words:

I’m not very satisfied, even with myself. I’m not satisfied with the effectiveness of my participation in the curriculum development process. I should have done it better.

Another reason was shared by two teachers:

Because my voice in curriculum decision making, I would say, is not significant.

And:

I think I should have been involved in all the stages of the curriculum decision making process.

This is not surprising as these two teachers had only few years of experience and had not yet held any positions at HNUE, thus they had not been involved in higher levels of curriculum decision making rather than the department or faculty level.

The third reason was, as a teacher explained:

Because I have little experiences, especially experiences related to curriculum development.

In **Finding 8** there may be connections between the HNUE teachers' satisfaction of their current roles in curriculum decision making and their positions, qualifications, and curriculum experience. Three out of the four teachers who replied "not very satisfied" with their current roles were younger teachers with a Masters degree and not many years of experience, and had not yet held any positions at HNUE. Only one respondent, who was "not very satisfied" with the effectiveness of his participation in curriculum decision making, was an Associate Professor with over 30 years of experience and had held positions at HNUE. Meanwhile, among the four teachers who responded "satisfied" with their current roles, there were two Associate Professors and one with a PhD. The average years of experience among these respondents were 25, except one teacher who held a Masters degree and had fewer than 10 years experience.

There are two factors that may have impacted on the HNUE teachers' satisfaction. The first factor may be their self-evaluation of the effectiveness of their participation in curriculum decision making. HNUE teachers would be "satisfied" if their participation was highly effective and "not very satisfied" if their participation was not as effective as it was expected to be. The second factor may be their expectation of gaining new experience. HNUE teachers were "satisfied" if they learned new experiences and "not very satisfied" with their lack of experiences. These two factors correspond to **Finding 6** (see Table 18).

According to that finding, two of the factors that the HNUE teachers found most interesting when joining curriculum decision making were having opportunities for professional development, and having opportunities to contribute.

9. Whether the HNUE teachers think that they have been encouraged to participate in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Seven out of the eight HNUE teachers said that they had been encouraged to join curriculum decision making. Leaders at the faculty and university levels such as Deans and the President were most frequently mentioned as the supporters of teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. One teacher commented:

In my faculty, leaders are open-minded and all the members of the faculty are encouraged and facilitated to join curriculum decision making. I believe that we all feel motivated to be a part of this process.

Another teacher agreed:

The faculty and the university always encourage and offer opportunities for me to develop and promote my professional capacity.

The HNUE teachers were facilitated to participate in curriculum decision making by a wide range of approaches and activities. Said a teacher:

There are always opportunities to contribute your ideas about the curriculum. You can make suggestions directly in the meetings with the Scientific and Training Committee of the university or that of your faculty. Or you can raise some discussions at the curriculum workshops and seminars operated by the faculty, the university, or even the Ministry.

Another teacher shared his experiences:

Discussions about curriculum are also available online by registering in some academic forums where you can communicate with other teachers and educators elsewhere in Vietnam and overseas. Professional development is also considered as a way by which you're encouraged to join curriculum decision making. Because by having opportunities to study further you learn more about the curriculum, you

learn how to design it and how to implement it effectively at your own classrooms.

The HNUE teachers also explained why leaders at the faculty and the university levels supported their participation in curriculum decision making. A respondent who was a Dean of Faculty said with confidence:

Leaders support because they believe in me. They believe in the prestige of my personality and professional capacity. And also because of my experiences related to curriculum, which I've had chances to learn from many developed countries.

Another teacher emphasized his identity as a teacher:

Leaders support me because along with other teachers who are teaching this subject I have the most thorough knowledge about how to implement the curriculum. We can work on the feedback from students about their levels of knowledge acquirement or their needs and interests. Then we can adapt the curriculum according to that feedback and also according to the conditions of the faculty such as budget and infrastructures.

It is evident that most HNUE teachers possess a strong sense of their values and their roles as teachers. Although they showed appreciation of leaders' support, teachers also believed that they deserved that support.

Interestingly, only one HNUE teacher responded that he felt not very encouraged to facilitate and to participate in curriculum decision making. This teacher explained his opinion:

The curriculums that are currently implemented at my faculty are primarily developed by the Ministry [of Education and Training]. These curriculums are promulgated from the top and teachers who are at the bottom of the system are obligated to follow. Also, I think my senior prefers people with more experiences while I'm still very young and haven't been teaching for a long time.

It is worth noting here that he also evaluated his contribution in curriculum decision making as "of little importance" (**Finding 7**) and said that he was "not very satisfied" with his current roles in curriculum decision making (**Finding 8**).

The reason for both responses was about his lack of experience and knowledge about curriculum development. The correspondence among those responses strengthens the validity of my research outcomes.

Here I drew a remarkable point from **Finding 9**. It has been argued that the top-down model of educational management and the central curriculum control policies are very likely to have negative impacts on teacher empowerment such as de-professionalizing teachers or causing loss of teachers' professional autonomy, as reviewed in Archbald and Porter (1994). However, despite the centralized control of curriculum development in Vietnam, the majority of HNUE teachers in my research (7/8 teachers = 87.5 %) perceived leaders at the faculty and the university levels as supporters of their participation in curriculum decision making. This was regardless of whether or not these teachers had participated at higher (the Ministry or the university) or lower (the classroom, the department, or the faculty) levels. The positions that these teachers held at HNUE made no differences to their responses because whether they were Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments or teachers, they all felt encouraged and accommodated to join in curriculum decision making.

The study of Archbald and Porter (1994) on curriculum control and teachers' perceptions of autonomy and satisfaction also found that there was "little evidence that teachers feel less efficacious or less satisfied in their work because of curriculum policy constraints" (p. 35). These authors proposed two explanations for this finding. Firstly, the curriculum policies may "not be intrusive nor unpopular enough for engender adverse rating of job satisfaction or personal efficiency" (p. 35). Secondly, teachers may be used to relying on prescribed content of these policies such as textbooks, guidelines, and tests so that they are unlikely to feel controlled by these policies. The third reason, as I suggest, is based on Eisner's (1992) point that in a nation that allows only one political party (like Vietnam), people's thinking is shaped in a single pervasive way that they hardly think of alternatives. In my research, for example, due to the familiarity of the HNUE teachers' perceptions with the top-down, centralized model of educational management, words such as "official documents", "legality", "authoritative agencies", "implement", "promulgate", or "prescribe" were found

with a high frequency (from 5 to 13 times) in the responses of most of them to the interview questions.

10. HNUE teachers' motivations to be involved in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Table 19

Hanoi National University of Education Teachers' Motivations to be Involved in Curriculum Decision Making

HNUE teachers' motivations to be involved in curriculum decision making	Number of responses
University teachers' self-expectancy to participate	7
The belief that they will effectively contribute to the curriculum	7
The expectation of having professional development opportunities	6
The feeling of being supported by the institution of educational management	4
The feeling of being supported by leaders	3
The support from colleagues, students and the society	2
Financial support	2

As Table 19 shows, the most prevalent motivations were the self-expectancy of the HNUE teachers to be involved in curriculum decision making and the belief that their participation would be effectively contribute to the curriculum. A teacher expressed her inspiration when joining the Committee for Curriculum Development as a Chairwoman:

Being at this position, I can promote my profession and experiences, which I've had opportunities to learn after years of being a teacher, a researcher and a manager. I've learned interesting ideas from visiting many developed countries that I want to apply at my faculty and elsewhere in our country. I want to share these ideas with others and bring changes to the education. We need to renovate the curriculum.

Another teacher perceived his identity as a teacher as the reason why he believed that he could have valuable input in the curriculum:

I'm responsible for implementing the curriculum in classrooms, so my participation in curriculum decision making helps guarantee the quality of that curriculum in reality.

Another teacher agreed:

I'm the one who directly interacts with students and I understand their strengths and weakness. My contribution would be important to the process of curriculum decision making.

These motivations may indicate a high degree of the HNUE teachers' awareness of their roles and professional responsibilities in curriculum development and implementation. It is evident that most HNUE teachers positively thought about their occupation as teachers, and they appeared to possess a strong sense of morality in relation to teachers' roles (see also **Finding 6**, pp. 123-125). However, it seemed to me that the HNUE teachers' beliefs about their effective contribution to curriculum decision making emerged from the awareness of their roles in the educational system—as curriculum implementers—rather than being developed from the self-confidence about their profession and experiences. Only the Chairwoman mentioned above and two other respondents reflected this confidence and it was not surprising that all these three respondents were Associate Professors. One stated:

Until now I've been involved in many national and international projects related to curriculum. I have ideas and I think my experiences would be useful to our curriculum.

Another prevalent motivation for joining curriculum decision making shared by six HNUE teachers was the expectation of having professional development opportunities. These opportunities could be in various forms. For example, in a teacher's words:

Being involved in the process of curriculum decision making meant you have many opportunities to work with and learn from other colleagues and experts in the field. You

establish collaborative relationships with them and become a part of the network, not only in Vietnam but internationally.

Another teacher agreed:

It would be nice when you're exposed to other people's points of view which are very different from your own. Your mind is open and this helps accumulate your knowledge and experience.

Four of them also talked about the opportunities to participate in in-service courses in Vietnam and overseas. Said a teacher:

You are asked to be involved in curriculum decision making and you are trained for doing it. For example, you have access to materials and you can attend some curriculum workshops and seminars with the financial support from the Government. Or every year, there are summer courses where you learn about the changes in the new curriculums and how you will teach these new curriculums at your classrooms.

Another teacher shared her experiences as being a visiting scholar at many foreign universities:

Seeing how other universities in the world are doing is a very valuable experience. I've recently finished a short course about designing the competence-based curriculum in U.S. and I think it's very interesting. Now I've got some ideas that I want to apply them right away at my faculty.

It seemed that most HNUE teachers very actively sought for learning opportunities to fulfil their expectation of professional development.

The above findings, however, did not surprise me. As found in Finding six, the two factors that most attracted the HNUE teachers' participation in curriculum decision making were having opportunities for professional development and having opportunities to contribute. A conclusion can be drawn from the similarity between the results of **Findings 6** and **10**. That is the factors that teachers found most interesting when joining curriculum decision making did motivate them to be involved in this process. A teacher confirmed this point:

What I found interesting encouraged me to participate.

It is evident that teachers' perceptions had significant influences on their educational activities. If being involved in curriculum development was perceived as interesting by teachers, they were more likely to join the process.

Besides three internal motivations as discussed above, there were four external factors that motivated the HNUE teachers' to participate in curriculum decision making. Among them, the feeling of being supported by the institution of educational management was the most prevalent factor (four of the eight respondents mentioned this point). However, all of them were holding a position at HNUE (three Deans of Faculties and one Head of Department); hence, this finding was hardly a surprise. As a teacher explained:

From my point of view, the institution of educational management is very supportive. Because at the positions of a Dean of Faculty and also the Chairman of the Committee for Curriculum Development, I'm a decision maker who decides on the constitution of the curriculum. And at the same time, I'm a curriculum implementer who launches that curriculum at my faculty.

The feeling of being supported by leaders was another external motivation discussed by three respondents. According to them, in spite of the fact that the top-down model of educational management did prevent them from joining higher levels of curriculum decision making, their seniors were very supportive and have facilitated them to accomplish their current roles. For example:

Leaders at my faculty and at the university have provided managerial and financial support to organize workshops, seminars, or in-service training courses, which are very helpful for us to gain new knowledge and develop our professional competence.

This strengthened the results of **Finding 9** in which 87.5% of the HNUE teachers said that they were encouraged by leaders to participate in curriculum decision making. Two other external motivations found were the support from colleagues, students, the society and financial support. Each was mentioned by two respondents.

Young's (1985) study also found some Canadian teachers' motivations for joining the curriculum committees at the provincial level. She categorized these motivations into nine groups (see Young, 1985, p. 397), which shared many similarities with my findings. For example, Young's (1985) categories of "desire to be involved in decision making" and "sense of importance" are similar to my category of "university teachers' self-expectancy to participate." Similarly, teachers' expectation of the "acquisition of information and ideas" in Young's (1985) study is a part of teachers' expectation of "having professional development opportunities" in my findings. Also, teachers' belief that they will "effectively contribute to the curriculum" in my study is close to teachers' responses in Young's (1985) study that they "had expertise to offer" and that joining the curriculum committees is their "professional responsibility." These similarities may suggest that teachers' motivations to be involved in curriculum development are not significantly different regardless of the social and political contexts. Teachers in Vietnam and elsewhere seem to have positive thinking about their profession. Most of them are proud of their roles as a teacher, and most of them perceive that it is their responsibility as a teacher to participate in decision making beyond their own classrooms.

11. Factors that the HNUE teachers found most limiting and/or difficult when being involved in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

Table 20

Factors That the Hanoi National University of Education Teachers Found Most Limiting and/or Difficult When Being Involved in Curriculum Decision Making

Factors that the HNUE teachers found most limiting and/or difficult when being involved in curriculum decision making	Number of respondents
Insufficient experience and knowledge	6
Lack of professional development opportunities	6
Insufficient financial support	4
Time consuming	4
Hierarchical management in education	2

As Table 20 shows, most HNUE teachers were concerned about their professional competence. They thought that their experience and knowledge was insufficient for them to be involved in curriculum decision making. In a teacher's words:

Though there have been other factors that may hinder curriculum decision making, I think the most difficult thing for me is my knowledge and experience, especially the experiences to organize the implementation and assessment of the curriculum. And I don't think I have enough experiences even in how to be well-behaved. That is, sometimes I don't know what I should do or shouldn't do in a specific situation. I mean to maintain proper relationships with other teachers, with my seniors, and students also.

Another teacher shared his difficulty after years of teaching:

I felt constraint when using a foreign language to access the latest international programmes, while this is very important if I want to create significant changes to our current curriculum. You know, technology [the field he is working on] is changing all the time and if you want a high-quality curriculum for the faculty, you need to update it every day.

Interestingly, not only was this feeling found in the teachers who had fewer years of experience and were holding a Masters degree, it was also a concern of two Associate Professors who had almost 30 years of experience. Therefore, I suggest, that this feeling resulted from the HNUE teachers' high expectancy of their professional competence; and that the limitation of knowledge and experience may not really exist in all the six teachers who discussed this factor.

However, the particular interest of the HNUE teachers in their professional competence was re-addressed in other responses in this **Finding**. 75% of the respondents complained that they were not provided sufficient professional development opportunities when joining curriculum decision making, especially the younger ones (all the four teachers who had fewer years of experience mentioned this factor). According to these respondents, this fact had a negative influence. A teacher said:

The lack of professional development courses lessens the effectiveness of my activities in curriculum decision making.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, most HNUE teachers were not satisfied with their knowledge and experience; thus it was understandable that teachers expected to improve their competence through professional training programmes. Unfortunately, the opportunities available had not met their expectation. In particular, some respondents suggested that:

University teachers should have more access to educational experiences in the world.

This was believed to be:

The best strategy to reduce the gap between Vietnamese education and that of other developed countries in Asia like Singapore or Korea and in the world like the U.S.

This finding corresponds with the results of **Findings 6 and 10** in which the HNUE teachers also raised their need for and expectation of professional development.

Two other prevalent factors that hindered the HNUE teachers' participation in curriculum decision making were finance and time. A teacher stated:

Vietnamese teachers haven't received proper payment for them to concentrate on their work at the university.

Financial constraints also involved:

... poor working conditions, lack of advanced equipment, difficulties in information access for participants.

In addition, as another teacher pointed out:

University teachers usually spend a large percentage of their working time on teaching in classrooms. An average university teacher is required to teach 280 sessions per year and each session usually lasted 45 minutes. That number for an Associate Professor or a Senior Lecturer is 320, and for a Professor or an Advanced Lecturer is 360. Meanwhile, many of them are doing management work at the

same time. And they have other concerns about their personal life too. Time spent on doing research and professional development thus is very restricted.

This may help explain the HNUE teachers' concern about the limitations of their knowledge and experience as well as their expectation for professional development as discussed earlier. Additionally, it may be useful to note that besides their work at HNUE, some teachers were also involved in contract work outside the university such as visiting schools, being consultants for non-governmental and international organizations' projects, or working as visiting scholars at overseas institutions.

Interestingly, there were contradictory opinions about the influences of the institution of educational management on university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making. In this **Finding**, two respondents said that the top-down model of educational management had sometimes annoyed them. As one teacher complained:

I have been told exactly what to do. But sometimes the guidelines don't work and I find my teaching in trouble.

These respondents were young teachers who had few years of experience and had not held any leadership/management positions. This was contradictory to the results of **Finding 10** in which the institution of educational management was perceived by 50% of the respondents as a factor that encouraged them to join curriculum decision making. It was understandable because these 50% respondents had intensive experience in curriculum and were holding positions at HNUE (three Deans of Faculties and one Head of Department). Hence, it is evident that university teachers' experiences and leadership/management positions profoundly influenced the ways they perceived the impacts of the institution of educational management on their participation in curriculum decision making. As a respondent explained:

In Vietnam, qualification and experience are two important conditions for university teachers to hold a leadership/management position. Given the top-down model of educational management, these teachers obviously have more opportunities than others to join curriculum decision making at higher levels.

Interestingly, another respondent insisted:

The involvement of different teachers should not be at the same level. We need a group of experienced curriculum experts that plays major roles in curriculum development. The quality of this group, in Vietnam, has not come up to the expectation.

It seemed that although the HNUE teachers agreed on the importance of university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making, their opinions about how much this involvement should be were varied.

12. HNUE teachers' criteria of a modern curriculum: Findings and discussions

According to five respondents, a modern curriculum needed to attract the participation of all groups in the society. These involved, as a teacher pointed out:

... authoritative agencies such as policy-makers, presidents of university, Deans of Faculties, or Heads of Departments; and also university teachers, students, parents/caregivers, employers... This meant each group of stakeholders had their voice heard in curriculum decision making.

Furthermore, three respondents suggested that a modern curriculum should:

... meet the demands of the political and socio-economic contexts in which it emerged. Also, the development of advanced scientific technology in the world should be taken into consideration.

For this purpose, a teacher recommended:

The modern curriculum should be open to the specific conditions of teaching and students' characteristics. This called for the flexibility in the design and implementation of curriculum's objectives, content, pedagogy and assessment.

A modern curriculum envisioned above can be seen as a progress compared to the way it had traditionally been perceived in Vietnamese context. Firstly, teacher training—a function of HNUE—was required to:

... meet the needs of the labour market. Therefore, feedback from students and employers has played a growing important role in the quality assessment of universities. At HNUE, research on that feedback has been carried out annually since 2005. The Centre for Quality Assurance and Testing is responsible for this.

Secondly, although the top-down model of educational management has still been maintained upon all institutions:

... more freedom and authority has been given to university teachers in developing their own curriculum based on the *Curriculum Framework* and *Detailed Curriculum* according to the specific context of their classrooms. This change can be seen in some recent policies and resolutions promulgated by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education and Training.

However, as a respondent noticed:

If university teachers want to make use of the given autonomy, they need to improve their professional competence and learn new experiences.

Finding 12 shares similarities with **Findings 5** and **7**. For example, the focus on contextual factors such as the socio-political context, teaching environment, or students' needs and abilities was addressed in **Findings 5** and **12**. Other factors emphasized in **Findings 5, 7** and **12** were the teachers' vision of an open curriculum; the roles of all stakeholders in curriculum development; and the importance of educational quality assurance by gaining feedback from those groups.

13. Which roles that university teachers should carry out in curriculum decision making in the context of Vietnamese education: Findings and discussions

All the HNUE teachers agreed that the roles of university teachers in curriculum decision making were of paramount importance. This was because, said a respondent:

University teachers directly implement curriculum and have strong impacts on the training quality. Hence, they should

be encouraged to be more involved in the design of curriculum and the planning of teaching.

Another respondent explained further the impacts of university teachers on the training quality:

University teachers are the ones who interact with students in classrooms; thus they understand students' strengths and weaknesses. They can also gain feedback from students and suggest changes for a better quality of curriculum design and implementation.

On the other hand, university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making was helpful to themselves since it was closely related to their teaching and professional development. In a teacher's words:

University teachers should think of joining curriculum decision making as an opportunity for them to gain new knowledge and experience. Teachers' knowledge and also their responsibilities towards the curriculum that they're teaching are very important if they want to become a good teacher.

Due to those roles of university teachers, a respondent suggested:

University teachers should act as decision makers in all stages of curriculum development; especially the stages of designing the *Detailed Curriculum*, writing textbooks and teaching materials, implementing and assessing curriculum.

It is evident that although all the respondents perceived the roles of university teachers as important, they all recommended that university teachers' participation was only useful in particular stages of curriculum decision making. These particular stages did not include the highest levels, that is, the analysis of situation and design *Curriculum Framework* (refer to p. 117). What the respondents thought university teachers should be involved in were the groundwork of the design of *Detailed Curriculum* (the university/faculty level) and the implementation and assessment of curriculum (the individual classroom and the university/faculty levels). A respondent explained why university teachers should be involved in these stages:

... because these stages are the closest and most related to their daily teaching.

The point drawn above was confirmed in the responses of six HNUE teachers.

One stated:

University teachers are important. But their participation should be limited at certain levels.

Another respondent added:

The degree of participation should not be the same to all university teachers.

These six respondents also provided explanations for their opinions. A teacher said:

Leaders should be consistent with their visions and viewpoints rather than “spoiling” university teachers by trying to satisfy personal opinions.

Some other teachers, on the other hand, were concerned about the limitation of university teachers’ knowledge and experience:

University teachers’ professional competence may not strong enough for them to effectively participate in such as difficult work like curriculum development and decision making.

Instead, a respondent proposed the need to develop a group of curriculum experts:

We need curriculum experts like some companies in the U.S., which design curriculums as ordered from the Ministry [of Education], provinces, and individual schools. There are not many people who have strong understanding and experiences about curriculum development in Vietnam nowadays. More “investment” such as financial aids and professional development programmes should be made in order to improve their competence.

These concerns of the HNUE teachers confirmed previous findings—for example, teachers’ concerns about the limitation of their professional knowledge and experience (**Findings 8, 11**) and teachers’ expectation of professional development opportunities (**Findings 6, 8, 10, 11**).

The HNUE teachers also discussed some solutions to resolve their concerns. A teacher suggested:

University teachers need to be trained to meet occupational standards, especially occupational responsibilities and interests. For this purpose, the teacher training curriculum should equip them with knowledge and skills about curriculum development in general and about the subjects they will teach in particular.

Another teacher proposed:

University teachers need training and practice. It would be better if they can go to study and do research abroad. Additionally, they should have more freedom and be encouraged to be creative in teaching and doing research.

Another idea focused on the efforts of teachers themselves:

If university teachers want to contribute more to curriculum development, they should be aware of self-learning and life-long learning to improve their capacity in order to accomplish the roles committed.

In short, the participants' suggestions focused on both external supports and the effort of university teachers themselves to overcome the difficulties and limiting factors that have hindered their participation in curriculum decision making.

These solutions will be discussed further in **Finding 14** as follows.

14. Recommendations that HNUE teachers suggest to facilitate Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making: Findings and discussions

The suggestions proposed by the HNUE teachers were categorized into three groups. In the first group of suggestions, five respondents focused on educational management and policy changes. A teacher suggested:

There should be regulations about the rights and responsibilities of university teachers in curriculum decision making. Also, participation in curriculum decision making should be considered as a criterion in teacher quality assessment.

In sharing the same idea, another respondent explained it further:

There should be a system to supervise and measure the effectiveness of teachers' curriculum work. Also, teachers' contribution to curriculum development needs to be deservedly rewarded. These will encourage university teachers to join curriculum decision making. They will also make university teachers feel responsible to improve their own capacity in teaching, doing research, and other activities in their institution.

This solution seems to be convincing since mandatory regulations are very likely to have a powerful influence on university teachers in the context of the top down model of educational management in Vietnam. The need for the changes in salary policy for university teachers also attracted the attention of many HNUE teachers.

In a respondent's words:

University teachers deserve a better salary than what they are paid now, so that they can concentrate on their job.

Additionally, better working conditions for university teachers were discussed. The responses addressed issues such as reducing teaching hours, increasing time on research, and offering more professional development opportunities for university teachers to study and research abroad. An Associate Professor shared his experiences:

I have been teaching 320 sections per year and involved in management work at the same time. Hence it becomes difficult to find time for research and personal learning.

In the second group of solutions, all respondents insisted on the need to improve university teachers' professional competence. Another Associate Professor suggested:

Refresher courses should be provided so that university teachers can up-date new knowledge and teaching skills, including knowledge of the subjects they teach and knowledge of curriculum development in general.

To do so, it was recommended that university teachers should:

... be encouraged to participate in national and international workshops, seminars, e-learning, or study and research abroad.

Moreover, for the effectiveness of international cooperation:

... the research and foreign language competence of university teachers should be cultivated.

The interest of all respondents in university teachers' professional development confirmed **Findings 6, 8, 10, 11**.

In the third group of solutions, the need for the changes in university teachers' thinking and teaching activities was addressed by all respondents. This number indicated a high degree of the HNUE teachers' awareness of their teaching profession, which confirmed **Findings 8 and 10**. As a teacher claimed:

University teachers should consider their participation in curriculum decision making as their rights and responsibilities. They should not ignore this participation or feel a complex about their low positions in the educational hierarchy.

Said another:

University teachers should bring into play their autonomy and self-responsibility in the decision making of curriculum. Although the mechanism of educational management in Vietnam has hindered teachers' participation in decision making, university teachers still have priority in this process compared to high school teachers or primary teachers.

Moreover, as some other respondents suggested, university teachers should be aware of self-learning and lifelong learning, be independent and creative in thinking, respect and believe in students.

Synthesis of findings in response to the research aims

I have reported and discussed the findings emerging from interviews with the HNUE teachers. Now I will use these findings to respond to the overarching question of my research. That is: How do HNUE teachers perceive their roles in

curriculum decision making? To answer this, it is necessary to synthesize the responses to the three sub-questions that opened up my research:

- i. What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?
- ii. How do HNUE teachers evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?
- iii. What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?

1. HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making

To begin with, we should acknowledge the process of curriculum development in Vietnamese higher education (see **Finding 3**). This four stage process illustrates a top down management model, characterized by its centralization and control over all educational institutions. The levels of university teachers' participation in this process depended on their qualifications, experiences and leadership/management positions in the education hierarchy.

In the HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum, significant features such as the legality and authority of curriculum emerged (see **Finding 1**). This seemed to manifest as a profound influence of the top-down management on the ways university teachers perceived educational issues.

However, when discussing the possibilities of a future curriculum (see **Finding 12**), the HNUE teachers visualized a curriculum in which all groups of stakeholders in the society—involving policy-makers, educational leaders and managers, teachers, students, parents/caregivers, employers—could have their contributions appreciated in curriculum decision making. Two other characteristics of a future curriculum were proposed. Firstly, the curriculum needed to respond to the context from which it emerged. Secondly, the curriculum needed to be open so that it would be easily adaptable in different conditions of teaching and learning.

The HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum decision making (see **Finding 4**) confirmed those findings. According to most HNUE teachers, curriculum decision making was a function of authoritative agencies depending on the levels of curriculum. The responsibilities of university teachers, as they

perceived, were to implement the curriculum and suggest necessary changes: University teachers were not decision makers. It is very likely that the term ‘decision making’ was perceived in the same way as the promulgation of official/legal documents rather than a daily activity of teachers.

The profound impacts of university teachers’ thinking on their academic activities can be seen in the analysis of the factors that influenced their curriculum decision making (see **Finding 5**). A high level of consensus was found when comparing the results of **Finding 5** with those of **Findings 1** and **4**; thus proving that what university teachers thought does influence their practice as it has been widely claimed in literature and previous empirical studies elsewhere in the world (see chapters 1, 2).

The top-down model of management seems to have a deep impact on the HNUE teachers’ perceptions of two key notions of my research focus, that is, curriculum and curriculum decision making. My research findings also illustrate how significantly teachers’ perceptions influence their teaching, as a large number of previous studies have claimed. In the following part, I proceed to position the HNUE teachers in the process of curriculum decision making and see what teachers themselves think about their roles in this process.

2. HNUE teachers’ evaluations of their roles in curriculum decision making

The eight HNUE teachers participating in my research had already joined the process of curriculum decision making at differing levels depending on their qualifications, experiences and leadership/management positions (see **Finding 2**). These factors may also have influenced the evaluations of the HNUE teachers in relation to their roles in curriculum decision making.

In being asked to discuss the level of satisfaction about their current roles in curriculum decision making (see **Finding 8**), half of the respondents were “satisfied” and the other were “not so satisfied.” The reasons for their answers were remarkably varied. Most of the reasons seemed to focus on the awareness of university teachers about themselves. This involved their self-evaluation of the effectiveness of participation in curriculum, and expectations of professional development opportunities. Also, it was not surprising that three out of four

HNUE teachers who replied “satisfied” with their current roles in curriculum decision making were Associate Professors who had intensive experience in curriculum and who held leadership/management positions at their institutions. On the contrary, three out of four HNUE teachers who replied “not very satisfied” with their current roles were less experienced university teachers who held Masters degrees and had not experienced any leadership/management positions.

However, there seems to be no connection between factors such as qualifications, experiences or leadership/management positions and the HNUE teachers’ self-evaluations of the importance of their contributions in curriculum decision making (see **Finding 7**). This means teachers’ self-evaluations did not depend on whether they had participated at higher or lower levels of decision making. In some cases, it was only based on how respondents perceived curriculum and curriculum decision making. For example, a teacher considered his contribution as “important” because “curriculum decision making is a collaborative process that requires the collaboration of many related people [...] thus the contribution of any member is equally important.” Yet, another teacher considered his contribution as “of little importance” because: “Curriculum is a social product. It depends on the needs and the agreements of many stakeholders. Thus the proposal of any individuals only plays as an initial orientation.” Obviously, the findings of **Finding 7** raised many contradictions in university teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. Since this was a small scale localised research project, the information obtained was limited and thus far I have not found a reasonable explanation for them.

Finding 9 revealed that most HNUE teachers thought that they were encouraged to join curriculum decision making regardless of whether they had participated at higher or lower levels of this process. More significantly, the fact that the leadership factor was discussed by seven out of the eight respondents demonstrated its importance in facilitating university teachers’ participation in curriculum decision making.

In **Finding 13**, all of the eight HNUE teachers suggested that university teachers should carry out important roles in curriculum decision making, especially at the levels that were closely related to their daily teaching activities

such as curriculum implementation and assessment. This was believed to be helpful to curriculum development as well as to the teaching of teachers themselves. Nevertheless, due to the concerns about limitations of university teachers' professional knowledge and experience, most respondents claimed that although university teachers were very important in curriculum decision making, their participation should be limited at certain levels and not every teacher could participate to the same degree. These respondents also pointed out that a weakness of Vietnamese education was the lack of high quality curriculum experts.

It is evident that the HNUE teachers envision themselves—and any other Vietnamese university teachers—as important contributors to the curriculum decision making process. Although most of them thought that they were encouraged to join in the process, they still pointed out the difficulties they experienced and proposed the supports that should be provided to attract and enhance the effectiveness of Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. The following paragraphs outline the supports suggested by the HNUE teachers.

3. Recommendations that HNUE teachers suggest to facilitate Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making

Findings 6 and **10** indicated that the factors which teacher respondents find interesting when participating in curriculum decision making does encourage them to join this process. The two most significant factors are: a) University teachers' desire to contribute, to express themselves, and to be appreciated; b) University teachers' desire to be offered further training so as to improve their experience and professional competence. Teacher respondents are also interested in other factors such as gaining more confidence and autonomy in their teaching. Additionally, some other factors that encouraged university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making are the institution of educational management, leaders' encouragement and support, feedback from all groups of stakeholders in the society, and financial support.

The HNUE teachers' concerns about the limitation in their professional competence and the lack of professional development opportunities are the two

most remarkable factors among the difficulties that hinder their participation in curriculum decision making (see **Finding 11**). The re-emphasis on professional competence in responses to this Finding may suggest a high level of self-awareness among the HNUE teachers about improving their capacity. This could be explained as a characteristic of university teachers' work that requires them to continuously develop their knowledge and experience. This could also be interpreted as a real limitation of university teachers' capacity, which raised a big concern among them when being involved in curriculum decision making. Some other factors that the HNUE teachers find difficult or limiting are insufficient financial support, time consuming requirement and a highly controlled management model.

The HNUE teachers' responses in **Finding 14** focused on three groups of suggestions for the supports of Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. The first group of suggestions addresses changes in management and policy to university teachers such as implementing regulations that define the rights and responsibilities of university teachers; ensuring deserved salaries for university teachers; improving working conditions for university teachers by reducing teaching hours and increasing time and resources for doing research. The second group of solution proposes more professional development opportunities for university teachers such as providing in service courses; sending teachers to study abroad; improving teachers' foreign language and research competence; establishing a system that supervised, assessed and rewarded teachers' effectiveness. The third group of solutions suggests that university teachers themselves need to change their perceptions and their daily teaching activities such as bringing into play teachers' autonomy and self-responsibility; not having a complex about their low positions in the educational hierarchy; developing their professional competence; being independent and creative in their thinking; building respect and belief in students.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have recognized the importance of reflexivity as an approach to ethics in practice, as it helps my awareness of the unforeseen ethical events that

could have occurred during the implementation of my research. Based on my reflexivity of this process, a number of ethical concerns has been taken into consideration regarding my familiarity with the research setting, my relationships with the participants, the impacts of the cultural context on how my conversations with the teacher-participants were to be operated. These resulted in some changes in the interviewing process compared with my initial plan.

My approach to analyze and interpret the interview responses of the HNUE teachers is also described in detail with many illustrations to make the analysis and interpretation process and any conclusions drawn from this plausible for the reader. After consulting a range of literature about qualitative research, I designed my own three-stage approach, which involved summarizing, indentifying, and categorizing interview responses; communicating categories of trends across interview responses; generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these meanings.

Additionally, I have reported my research findings and discussions with reference to previous studies in both Asian and Western contexts. My findings first reveal the *realities* of university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making in Vietnam by looking at their reflections on the HNUE teachers' experiences and perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making. My findings then proceed to describe the HNUE teachers' *evaluation* of their positions in curriculum decision making such as what motivates them to join the process, how they see their contribution to this process, and what satisfactions and/or dissatisfactions they have encountered during this process. My findings also figure out how HNUE teachers envision the *possibilities* of Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making, as well as what they propose as necessary supports to attract and enhance the effectiveness of this participation. My research, therefore, was not to capture the "Being" but goes further, that is, to create the "Becoming" of Vietnamese university teachers in curriculum development.

CHAPTER 5: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH ON UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING, RECOMMENDATIONS, EVALUATION, AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The setting of my research is Vietnam, more specifically, Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE), a teacher training university where I have been working for three years. My research aims to reveal the ways HNUE teachers perceive their roles in curriculum decision making. For this purpose, the HNUE teacher-participants discussed the notions of curriculum and curriculum decision making. They also evaluated the positions they have carried out in the curriculum decision making process. Finally, they recommended the support that they consider necessary to facilitate Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making.

My research started in November 2008 and the interviews with the HNUE teachers were conducted in Vietnam through May to June 2009. The research report was written and edited mostly from August 2009 to January 2010. This chapter serves as a concluding chapter where I highlight the significance of my research process and outcomes drawn from the four previous chapters. By significance I mean my research contributions to the theories and practice of curriculum; research on teachers' perceptions of curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making; and the interpretive/qualitative approaches to educational research. My research contributions are also in terms of the ethical issues I encountered when doing a cross-cultural research in the context of the Vietnamese higher education sector, focusing on university teachers as research participants. More importantly, my research findings open up the interesting world of the thoughts of some Vietnamese (more specifically, HNUE) university teachers about curriculum and about the ways they see themselves in curriculum decision making.

This chapter, however, is more than a summary of my research process and outcomes. It suggests recommendations about policy changes and

professional development for Vietnamese university teachers as the ways to attract and enhance the effectiveness of their participation in curriculum decision making. In this chapter, I also evaluate the quality of my research based on its credibility, dependability, transferability; and its possibilities to promote actions related to curriculum development among university teachers, educational leaders/managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Finally, I reflect on myself as researcher and draw out what I have experienced during the research process. Some possibilities for future research are also proposed.

Significance of the research

This section summarises the feature points of my research process and its outcomes reported in the previous four chapters.

Contributing to the theories and practice of curriculum and research on teachers' thinking of their roles in curriculum decision making

Chapter 1: Initiating the Curriculum Research describes the foundation of my research topic and the context in which it has been stimulated. Given my position as a Vietnamese researcher whose interest focuses on higher education management and policy, I approached this research from the perspective of the new managerial trend in higher education. This trend can be seen both internally (Alfred & Carter, 1993; Floyd, 1985; Morriss, 1998; Parilla, 1993) and nationally (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005; Prime Minister's Office, 2003, 2005). To explore the decision making process embedded in curriculum meant looking at curriculum through the lens of politics and policy analysis. This is, paradoxically, indeed the very nature of curriculum (Apple, 1982, 1990; Ball, 1990, 2006; Codd, 2005). Curriculum is political because it—and education in general—serves as the instrument by which politicians maintain their social position and power (Codd, 2005).

Also, because teachers have been considered as the major force of implementing educational reforms and curriculum changes (Carlgren et al., 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Eisner, 1992; McGee, 1997; Sears & Marshall,

1990), my research focused on university teachers' voices. I asked them to talk about their positions within curriculum in terms of the roles that they had carried out in decision making process and how they perceived their roles. Therefore, curriculum was examined from the decision making aspect and from the university teachers' perspective. This was a significant feature of my research.

In chapter 2: Nesting the Curriculum Research, I aimed to lay the theoretical basis on which the research questions were formed and the research methodology was directed. Because my research focused on university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making, I critically reviewed a range of prevalent curriculum thinking in the last few decades (1990s-2000s) in Western societies, involving both the more traditional approaches and the so-called modern and post-modern approaches to curriculum. Some key authors mentioned in my review were Beyer (1990), Carpenter (2001), Doll (1990), Doyle (1992), Eisner (1992), Klein (1990), McGee (1997), O'Neill (2005), Renshaw and van der Linden (2003), Wardekker (2003).

In chapter 2, I also attempted to apply the theories and empirical findings of research into cognitivism (Calderhead, 1990, 1996; Carlgren et al., 1994; Isenberg, 1990; Marton, 1994) to find out the ways teachers at HNUE perceived curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making in the Vietnamese higher education sector. I also recognized the linguistic and socio-political nature of language (Fairclough, 1992; Freeman's 1994), as well as the potential of metaphors and metaphorical language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1990) in the study of teachers' thinking about curriculum and their teaching (Carter, 2001; Collin & Green, 2001; Eisner, 1992; Grant, 1992; Munby, 1989; Munby & Russell, 2001; Kliebard, 2001; Tobin, 2001). I, therefore, employed those aspects of language when analyzing and interpreting the responses obtained from the interviews with the HNUE teachers.

Contributing to interpretive/qualitative approaches in educational research

In chapter 3: Designing the Curriculum Research, I reported the processes I designed and prepared for my research to be conducted in the context of the

Vietnamese higher education sector. Here I explained why I chose an interpretive/qualitative approach to study university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making. Afterwards, I explored the philosophy underpinning interpretive methodology (Cohen et al., 2007; Eichelberger, 1989; Usher, 1996) and the characteristics of the qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lodico et al., 2006).

The choice of research methodology, however, was shaped by the nature of the research focus (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Thus, I attempted to apply procedures and techniques more typically associated with quantitative in my qualitative research. In chapter 4: Implementing the Curriculum Research and Reporting Research Outcomes, some quantitative tactics were employed when I analyzed and interpreted the interview responses. For example, similar responses were grouped into categories and the number of participants who had similar responses was counted. The differences and relationships between categories were also highlighted and explained.

Furthermore, after consulting a wide range of related literature (Anderson, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2006; Tierney & Dilley, 2002; Warren, 2002), I established my own approaches to designing a qualitative research project (see chapter 3) and to analyze and interpret interview responses as a form of qualitative data (see chapter 4). My approach to research design had four stages: (i) Defining purposes of the research; (ii) Formulating the research questions; (iii) Defining the case and building a sample; (iv) Designing instrumentation for information collection. Meanwhile, my approach to data analysis and interpretation had three stages: (i) Summarizing, identifying, and categorizing interview responses; (ii) Communicating categories of trends across interview responses; (iii) Generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these meanings.

In chapters 1, 3 and 4, I also recognized the significance of my role as the researcher when conducting qualitative research. My work and study experiences in Vietnam and New Zealand initiated my interest in this research and then influenced the whole process of doing it. More importantly, my research setting is

at HNUE where my father and I have worked for several years. As a consequence, my familiarity with the research setting and my relationships with the participants raised a remarkable number of ethical concerns, both in the preparation and the implementation of this research. I, therefore, learned from trying to handle those ethical concerns so as to protect the participants and strengthen the quality of the research outcomes. This led to the third significance of my research, that is, its contributions to ethics in conducting cross-cultural research on teachers' perceptions.

Contributing to ethical thinking: Conducting cross-cultural research on teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making

I view my research contributions to ethics in qualitative research in terms of exploring a variety of ethical issues that emerged in the process of designing and implementing my research (see chapters 3 and 4). These issues were significant because they combined ethical concerns about human beings (HNUE teachers in particular) as research participants, and about the cultural and linguistic barriers between Vietnamese and Western perspectives. These issues are explained in detail as follows.

To begin with, my research saw HNUE teacher-participants as human beings rather than mere research objectives. To understand the HNUE teachers' perceptions means to get inside their minds and communicate with their personal experiences. They are, therefore, very easily vulnerable. This becomes more complex given my role as the researcher, because the HNUE teachers could have been potentially lured or forced to join in the research in spite of their fear or worries about negative effects. To complicate matters further, participants in my research were university teachers who were highly professional possessing a strong sense of their roles and status. This could have led to a conflict between my efforts to protect participants' identities and their choice to give up their anonymity to be acknowledged and to maintain their right to the ownership of the research outcomes.

Moreover, because I am a Vietnamese woman who came back to conduct research in Vietnam, my research is a cross-cultural study. This called for cultural

awareness such as “respect” as a principle of conversation in the Vietnamese society and “objectivity” and “accuracy” as characteristics of the traditional scientific approaches in Vietnam. Moreover, talking about curriculum meant we were politically involved, and in the socio-political context of Vietnamese education, some participants may have felt uncomfortable. The translation process back and forth between Vietnamese and English also counted as a cultural barrier in my research. More specifically, information provided for the President of HNUE and the HNUE teachers were translated from English to Vietnamese, involving the Introductory Letter (Appendix A), the President’s Consent Letter (Appendix B), the Information Letter (Appendix C), the Participant’s Consent Letter (Appendix D), and the Interviewing Schedule (Appendix E). The interviews were undertaken in Vietnamese; then the responses were translated to English. Since language constitutes linguistics and social-political aspects, it was possible that translation could cause offence, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation. Therefore, as the researcher and interpreter, I was aware of my responsibility to keep the translated information transparent to the participants. Thus, they were given both the Vietnamese and English versions of information.

Keeping those considerations in mind I became ethically and culturally sensitive during the research processes. This included designing the research, communicating with the HNUE teachers, and analyzing and interpreting the interview responses. In short, my research is an illustration of how language, culture, and ethics are of paramount importance in a qualitative research project.

Contributions to the understandings of university teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making at Hanoi National University of Education

At the beginning of my research, I raised three sub-questions that covered different aspects of my research context. As I interviewed the HNUE teachers, I found out responses for these questions, which may help understand university teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making in the setting of Vietnamese higher education. Following are the questions and findings from them.

- i. *What are HNUE teachers' perceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision making?* My research found that the ways university teachers conceptualized curriculum and curriculum decision making were influenced by the top-down, centralized model of management which has dominated Vietnamese education in the last three decades (1980s–present). Consequently, curriculum was frequently defined by looking at its legality and authority. Meanwhile, curriculum decision making was seen as functions of authoritative agencies rather than the activities of university teachers themselves.
- ii. *How do HNUE teacher evaluate their roles in curriculum decision making?* From the research findings, it was evident that university teachers possessed a high degree of self-awareness about their responsibilities and professional capacity related to curriculum decision making. However, there seemed to be no connections between factors such as qualifications, curriculum experiences, or leadership/management positions and university teachers' self-evaluation of the importance of their contributions in this process. The research findings also pointed out that although most university teachers thought they were encouraged to join in curriculum decision making, they expressed an expectation of being given more roles in this process.
- iii. *What do HNUE teachers recommend for facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making?* It was obvious from the research findings that when university teachers found participating in curriculum decision making interesting, they were more likely to be motivated to join in the process. Nevertheless, most of them were worried about the limitations in their professional competence and the lack of professional development opportunities. In fact, these were most prevalent among the factors claimed to hinder university teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making. To overcome the difficulties faced by university teachers in curriculum decision making, the HNUE teachers suggested three groups of recommendations: Educational management and policy changes, professional development for university

teachers, and changes in the curriculum perceptions of university teachers themselves.

In short, one of the significant contributions of my research is that it brings about some new insights into the world of curriculum perceptions held by Vietnamese university teachers. This involves how they perceived curriculum and curriculum decision making, how they evaluated their roles in the curriculum decision making process, and how they saw as possibilities for the improvement of university teachers' participation in this process.

Recommendations to support Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making

The recommendations here were suggested by the HNUE teachers who joined in my research. I also propose some ideas in order to attract and improve the effectiveness of Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making.

Policy changes for university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making

Given the top-down culture of educational management in Vietnam, mandatory regulations have power over the way people think and act. In light of this fact, all the teacher-participants in my research suggested that the government and educational policy-makers carried out the most important roles in facilitating Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. More specifically, my research participants recommended policy changes as follows:

- i. That the government and educational policy-makers formulate policies that state the rights and responsibilities of university teachers in decision making (curriculum decision making in particular). Those policies are institutionalized at all tertiary institutions so that university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making becomes a taken for granted activity and a part of the culture of these institutions.

- ii. That the government and educational policy-makers develop a system to supervise and measure the effectiveness of university teachers' curriculum work. Participation in curriculum decision making is considered as a criterion in the evaluation of teacher quality. This system also recognizes and rewards university teachers' contribution to curriculum development and implementation.
- iii. That the government and educational policy-makers consider the increase in payment and the enhancement of working conditions for university teachers such as reducing teaching hours, increasing time on research, and offering more professional development opportunities.

Because professional development received particular interest from most HNUE teacher-participants, it is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Professional development for university teachers

The HNUE teachers who joined my research recommended that professional development of curriculum for university teachers needed to be addressed by the government, educational policy-makers, and university teachers themselves. I suggest that the contributions of academic and managerial leaders at higher education institutions are also important. With the supporting ideas from previous research on professional development for teachers (Garvin, 1993; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, 1998; Michael, 2004; Senge, 1999), the roles of each group are recommended as follows.

The roles of government and educational policy-makers towards professional development of curriculum for university teachers

It is suggested that:

- i. Professional development is a continuous process and calls for a long term investment from the government, not only one-shot workshops or short courses.
- ii. The government and educational policy-makers consider the balance between political-economic purposes and the sustainable growth of

education and professional development so that these activities are not merely means for politics and economy but also for social benefits.

- iii. The government and educational policy-makers “ensure that assessment and accountability measures are not used gratuitously or exploitatively to shame state education and create government pretexts to reorganizing it” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 132). Instead, more attention needs to be paid to how these data can be used for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The roles of academic and managerial leaders at higher education institutions towards professional development for university teachers

It is suggested that:

- i. Academic and managerial leaders focus on building collaborative relationships among staff and cultivating a professional culture within their institutions, because these seem to lead to a better environment for professional development.
- ii. Academic and managerial leaders empower university teachers. New theories in leadership believe that “little significant change can occur if it is driven only from the top” (Senge, 1999, p. 171). This means facilitating university teachers with more freedom and authority to be creative in their teaching practice and responsible for their own professional learning.

The roles of university teachers towards their professional development

It is suggested that:

- i. Any changes in university teachers’ attitudes towards curriculum and their roles in curriculum decision making are important.
- ii. University teachers consider participation in curriculum decision making their right and responsibility so they can bring into play their autonomy in teaching.
- iii. University teachers join professional networks and pursuit life-long learning.

- iv. University teachers try to involve all other university teachers and stakeholders in their teaching practice. This is because peers' observations and conversations, parent partnerships, and especially students' feedback help teachers reflect on what they are doing well and what they need to improve. This self-reflection is of paramount importance in university teachers' professional development process.

Self-evaluating the research processes

The criteria to evaluate qualitative research have been widely discussed (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lodico et al., 2006; Tierney & Dilley, 2002). I evaluate my research processes according to four criteria adapted from Lodico et al. (2006). credibility; dependability; transferability; and possibilities to promote actions related to curriculum development among university teachers, educational leaders/managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research parallels validity in quantitative research. It refers to whether the research represents “what the participants think, feel and do and the processes that influence their thoughts, feelings, and action” (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 273). To strengthen credibility, my research report provided details of the processes by which I decided on the potential participants, gained their consents to participate, and interacted with them during the interviews. The ethical issues emerging in the interview process and the refinements that I made to the initial Interviewing Schedule were also reported. Additionally, the process by which I analyzed and interpreted the interview responses was described so that readers would be able to judge if the outcomes were valid. To do so, I employed a number of strategies. I used triangulation in terms of seeking data from multiple sources; that is, interviewing teachers from different disciplines and with different leadership/management experiences. Another strategy suggested by Lodico et al. (2006)–negative case analysis–was also considered in terms of looking at conflicting information in the teachers' responses and finding out reasons for this.

This strategy was mentioned in the strategies of “seeing plausibility” and “establishing contrasts/comparisons” when generating and interpreting meanings of trends across interview responses (refer to pp. 106-107).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research parallels reliability in quantitative research. It refers to “whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data” (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 274). For this purpose, as previously stated, my research report provided detailed explanations of how the interviews were planned and implemented, and how the interview responses were analyzed and interpreted. Also, beside my own analysis and interpretation, the interview responses were made available for review by readers by the use of direct quotes. To do so, readers would be able to have a clear picture of my research process and thus drawing their own conclusions and evaluation.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the possibility of “replicating” the research process in other settings. In this case, the research process is made clear and provides readers with deep understanding of how it occurred in the research setting. Based on this understanding, the readers can decide whether a similar process will work in their own settings (Lodico et al., 2006). To support transferability, as stated above, my report consisted of rich description regarding the context in which the research was conducted, such as the political and cultural situations, the university’s resources, and the teacher-participants’ characteristics.

Promoting actions related to curriculum development among university teachers and other educational stakeholders

Promoting actions related to curriculum development means researchers stimulate the improvement of curriculum and the empowerment of people living in the research settings. In this sense, not only are policy-makers, leaders/managers, and researchers capable of bringing changes, but also people who join the research can

also become actively involved in reforming education—and curriculum in particular (Lodico et al., 2006; Tierney & Dilley, 2002).

In my research, the participants were empowered in terms of reflecting on what they experienced as university teachers. More specifically, they talked about themselves in relation to curriculum—for example, their conceptualization of curriculum, their current positions in curriculum development process, the supports that they received and the difficulties they encountered during their involvement in curriculum decision making. These teachers spoke with their own voice; and their voice was made public through my research report.

More importantly, not only reflecting on the past and the current situations of Vietnamese curriculum, the teacher-participants in my research had opportunities to envision the possibilities of curriculum in the future. They also proposed the roles that they would like to see themselves within this future curriculum. Along with these proposals, the participants also suggested policy changes and the supports needed to attract and enhance the effectiveness of Vietnamese university teachers' participation in curriculum decision making. Their ideas count as a reliable source if policy makers and leaders/managers at higher education institutions seek to renovate curriculum. By engaging the teacher-participants in these activities, my research aims at promoting action and collaboration among university teachers as well as between them and policy makers and leaders/managers for the purposes of educational improvement and teachers' empowerment.

Possibilities for future research

Providing more time and resources were available, I see possibilities to expand my curriculum research further in Vietnamese settings, as follows.

Firstly, based the findings of this research, a questionnaire could be designed. This questionnaire is able to reach a larger number of teacher-participants rather than limiting the applications of my research design in a small sample. This is because one of my expectations when doing this research was to suggest policy and management changes in order to support university teachers'

involvement in curriculum decision making. For this purpose, the possibilities for generalization are important and the larger number the sample, the better.

Secondly, deeper investigation into the ethical aspects of doing cross-cultural research promises interesting findings. In this research, ethical issues such as relationships, conversations, and translation proved demanding and complex over the processes of designing, implementing, and reporting the research. As I had a chance to explore the notion of respect as an ethical concern in educational research in Vietnam (Nguyen, T. T., 2009), I found that proper consideration had not been placed upon research ethics, and that these topics had not yet been discussed widely in publications. Therefore, I believe that the ethical issues raised in the process of my research design and those emerging during the process of my data collection could serve as a starting point for further research on research ethics in the Vietnamese context.

Thirdly, the process and findings of my research provide a number of possibilities for research to be conducted in other contexts and settings. The participants of my research are teachers who teach at a teacher training university. Future research may want to focus on teachers at primary, secondary, or other tertiary institutions. The differences in the institutional settings are expected to bring new insights into the world of teachers' curriculum perceptions. Also, to extend the number of teachers involving in this kind of research can help strengthen the generalizability of research findings, which has been claimed to be a weakness of qualitative compared to quantitative approach. Last but not least, university teachers are just one of the groups participating in the process of curriculum decision making. Therefore, future research could choose to explore the perceptions of other stakeholders regarding their roles in that process. Although teachers are believed to be the most powerful force of successful curriculum implementation, the roles of policy-makers, leaders and managers at the institutional level—and even those of students, parents/care-givers, and employers—are inevitably important. Their ideas are very likely to contribute to improvement of curriculum and thus educational quality. Their perceptions of curriculum decision making, hence, are worth investigating in further research.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Conducting this research has been a valuable experience for me. Although there were difficulties at times, I did enjoy spending a year working on it.

I have gained new knowledge and ways of thinking, which not only enrich my intellectual life, but also fulfil my personal life by reading books, visiting different places, talking to people, and building a cross-cultural awareness. I benefited from the freedom to be a creative learner, but I also learned much from the constructive advice of teachers, colleagues, and friends. Their advice assisted me to overcome barriers of language and culture that otherwise could have hindered my research progress. What struck me most was the fact that, when I acknowledged these barriers, the understandings about them helped me to examine the research aspects more thoroughly. These involved contextual aspects such as the socio-political and cultural conditions where the Vietnamese higher education sector is operated and managed. Another research aspect that I found particularly interesting was evidence of the profound influence the top-down, centralized model of educational management had on university teachers' perceptions of curriculum, curriculum decision making, and their roles in curriculum decision making processes. I now comprehend that curriculum is inevitably political in its nature. I also realize that ways people conceive and act in relation to curriculum are largely shaped by the political system and the cultural context of the society in which they live and work.

Communicating with Hanoi National University of Education teachers during the research process was extremely interesting and I felt supported and encouraged. The interviews with the teachers showed they took the research seriously. The richness of information they provided helped me to draw possible answers for my research questions around university teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making, particularly within the setting of Vietnamese higher education. The teacher-participants also shared personal stories around their curriculum work, as well as their leadership and management experiences. I really appreciated their trust and the time and the thinking they devoted to my research. This thesis could not have been completed without their participation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

To seek permission to undertake a small curriculum research case study at Hanoi National University of Education from May 2009 to June 2009

Date: _____

Dear: Professor Dr Nguyen Viet Thinh, President of Hanoi National University of Education

INTRODUCTION

My name is Nguyen Thu Trang. In 2006 I graduated from Hanoi National University of Education with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Vietnamese linguistics and Literature education. From 2007, I have worked as a researcher at the Centre for Quality Assurance and Testing of the university.

MY RESEARCH TOPIC

I am currently undertaking a thesis to complete a Master of Education degree at the University of Waikato (New Zealand) under the supervision of Philippa Hunter (Senior lecturer, Department of Policy, Cultural, and Social Studies in Education, School of Education). My research topic is “*University teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making: A case study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam)*” This study aims to investigate the ways university teachers see curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have carried out in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context. I am asking your permission to choose Hanoi National University as a case study in this research. It provides an opportunity for teacher participants to reflect on their curriculum experiences; thus enhancing their professional development in relation to curriculum.

THE ACTIVITIES THAT PARTICIPANTS WILL BE INVOLVED IN

Eight lecturers at Hanoi National University of Education will be invited to participate in the research (their names and positions are in the document attached with this letter). An Information Letter (which is also attached with this Introductory Letter) will be sent to them prior to conducting the research to

explain the nature and aim of the research, what participants will be expected to be involved in, and what they may need to consider before giving consent to participate. If they are willing to volunteer to be participants in the research, they will be asked to sign a Consent Letter (which is also attached with this letter) in order to confirm their involvement and their rights in participating in the research. As indicated in the Information Letter and Consent Letter, it is my responsibility to protect confidentiality and minimize potential harm to the university lecturers as participants in the research.

If you would like to know more about the research before granting permission, please feel free to contact me. I can be contacted at:

Thu Trang Nguyen
School of Education, University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: ttn6@waikato.ac.nz

Should you wish to contact my supervisor regarding this study, she can be contacted at:

Philippa Hunter, Senior Lecturer
Department of Policy, Cultural, and Social Studies in Education
School of Education, University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: phunter@waikato.ac.nz

The proposal for the research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Waikato. Therefore, if you have any concern about the ethical issues of the research, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, Philippa Hunter.

If you are willing to grant for me to go ahead with the research, please sign the enclosed Consent Letter and email it back to me at ttn6@waikato.ac.nz

Thank you very much for your time in reading this information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Thu Trang Nguyen

Please keep this Introductory Letter for further reference. Thank you!

APPENDIX B: PRESIDENT'S CONSENT LETTER

Research topic: University teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making: A case study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam)

Researcher: Thu Trang Nguyen, School of Education, University of Waikato (New Zealand)

Aims of the research: This study aims to investigate the ways university teachers see curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have carried out in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context.

As the President of Hanoi National University of Education, I give my consent to allow Thu Trang Nguyen to undertake her research as proposed within this university.

I acknowledge that it is the responsibility of the researcher, Thu Trang Nguyen, to make every endeavour to protect confidentiality and minimize any potential harm to the university lecturers as participants of the research.

Hanoi, _____ May 2009

Professor Dr Nguyen Viet Think

*Please feel free to make a copy of this Consent Letter for your own record.
Thank you very much for your kind cooperation and prior consent
that enables me to conduct research in the university!*

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

To seek agreement to participate in a small curriculum research case study
at Hanoi National University of Education from May 2009 to June 2009

Date: _____ 2009

Dear: _____

INTRODUCTION

My name is Thu Trang Nguyen. In 2006 I graduated from Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam) with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Literature. From 2007, I have worked as a researcher at the Centre for Quality Assurance and Testing of this university.

I am currently undertaking a thesis to complete a Master of Education degree at the University of Waikato (New Zealand) under the supervision of Philippa Hunter (Senior lecturer, Department of Policy, Cultural, and Social Studies in Education, School of Education, University of Waikato). The title of my research is *“University teachers’ perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making: A case study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam).”*

This letter is to explain the nature and the aim of the research, what the research involves, and what you may need to consider before giving consent to participate. Please find attached a Consent Letter and an Interview Schedule.

RESEARCH TOPIC

I am interested in how university teachers see curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have carried out in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context. It is the researcher’s assumption that what teachers think and what they believe have powerful influences on their practice. The ultimate aim of the research is to understand the nature of curriculum from teachers’ perspectives. It is my belief that teachers are the ‘launching platform’ for any educational reform to be successful. The research also aims to provide an opportunity for teachers as participants to reflect on their curriculum experiences, thus enhancing their professional development in relation to curriculum.

The proposal for the research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Waikato. Also, permission to conduct this research at Hanoi National University of Education has been granted by the President, Professor Dr Nguyen Viet Think. Professor Dr Nguyen has been informed of your name and position at the university. It is advised that the President should know who will be involved in the research as he is the person who is responsible for the university's staff. He, therefore, needs to make sure that participating in the research will cause no harm to the teachers of the university. Your consent, however, is voluntary after considering the following information.

ACTIVITIES PARTICIPANTS WILL BE INVOLVED IN

Eight teachers at Hanoi National University of Education will be invited to participate in the research. As a participant, you will be involved in one individual interview. The interview will be conducted in Vietnamese. The information provided is in English and Vietnamese for the purpose of accuracy of information.

The Interview

The interview will be conducted face-to-face through May to June 2009; time and place will be negotiated to best suit your schedule. The interview will be semi-open (please find the Interview Schedule attached with this Information Letter). The interview will last about 45 minutes and will be digitally tape-recorded with your consent. You may, of course, choose not to answer any question if you do not want to. After the interview, you will receive a copy of the digital interview record so that you can make changes to your responses if you wish. Any suggested changes can be indicated to me by email before June 30, 2009.

DATA ANALYSIS

You can, at any time before June 30, 2009, withdraw information you have already provided before the publication of the research. All the information about your identity and the information you provide will be kept securely. Only I will have access to this.

PUBLICATION OF THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

After marking procedures, the final report of the research will be published electronically on the website of the University of Waikato. The research data will

be used only for the researcher's academic purposes. This will involve a Master's thesis and may include associated publications such as conference proceedings and journal articles. The researcher will make every endeavour to protect confidentiality and minimize potential harm to participants.

ASPECTS TO CONSIDER

Time

I appreciate that the research will take up valuable time in terms of being interviewed. I will attempt to minimize this disruption of your time by sending the Interview Schedule in advance (as attached with the Information Letter). Also, a time and place for the interview will be negotiated to suit your working schedules.

Privacy

As a participant, you will be asked to talk about your curriculum experiences. Information such as your thinking, beliefs, assumptions about curriculum, and your role in curriculum decision making will be revealed during the research process. This will be handled with respect and I will take every approach to work with this information in a sensitive and collegial manner.

Potential Harm

As curriculum is a contested field and a political issue by its very nature, you might feel offended or hesitant when asked to discuss curriculum. More importantly, since this research is a case study in which the research setting will be public knowledge, there might be a risk for you to be identified. I will make every endeavour to protect your identity and minimize harm to you.

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

(a) If you would like to know more about the research before making any kind of decision, please feel free to contact me. I will be happy to address any queries you have. I can be contacted at:

Thu Trang Nguyen
School of Education, University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: ttn6@waikato.ac.nz

(b) Should you wish to contact my supervisor regarding this study, she can be contacted at:

Philippa Hunter, Senior Lecturer
Department of Policy, Cultural and Social Studies in Education
School of Education, University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: phunter@waikato.ac.nz

(c) The proposal for this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Waikato. Therefore, if you have any concern about the ethical issues of the research, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, Philippa Hunter.

(d) If you agree to participate and feel that you are happy with this information, please sign the enclosed Consent Form and email it back to me at the email address ttn6@waikato.ac.nz

Once I receive your consent, I will be in email contact to arrange a time and place for the interview.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Thu Trang Nguyen

*Thank you very much for your time in reading this information!
Please keep this Information Letter for further reference.*

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT LETTER

Research topic: University teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making: A case study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam)

Researcher: Thu Trang Nguyen, School of Education, University of Waikato (New Zealand)

Aims of the research: This study aims to investigate the ways university teachers see curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have carried out in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context.

1. I have read the Information Letter. The nature and the aim of the research as well as the procedures of participating have been explained to me.
2. I acknowledge that the benefit of the research is in terms of its contribution towards curriculum thinking and possible enhancement of professional development in relation to curriculum.
3. I acknowledge that I will be involved in one individual interview with Thu Trang Nguyen, the researcher.
4. I acknowledge that the interview will be face-to-face and digitally tape-recorded and information will be drawn and interpreted from it. The interview responses will only be accessible to the researcher.
5. I acknowledge that participation in the research is voluntary.
6. I acknowledge that I can withdraw from the research process at any time before June 30, 2009 and I can choose not to answer any question if I do not want to.
7. I acknowledge that if I have any concern regarding the research, I can contact: *a*) the researcher (email: ttn6@waikato.ac.nz); *b*) her supervisor (email: phunter@waikato.ac.nz); *c*) the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Waikato.
8. I acknowledge that information I provide will be used only for the researcher's academic purposes. This will involve a Master's thesis and the possibility of associated publications such as conference proceedings and journal articles. The researcher will make every endeavour to protect confidentiality and minimize potential harm to me.

9. I acknowledge that after the marking of the research thesis, a final report will be published as an electronic thesis on the website of the University of Waikato.
10. I decide to participate in the study under the conditions set out on the Introductory Letter, the Information Letter and the Consent Letter.

Signature _____

Name _____

Date _____

*Thank you very much for your kind cooperation!
Please feel free to make a copy of this Consent Letter for your own record.*

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SEMI-STRUCTURED)

Research topic: University teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum decision making: A case study at Hanoi National University of Education (Vietnam)

Researcher: Thu Trang Nguyen, School of Education, University of Waikato (New Zealand)

Aims of the research: This study aims to investigate the ways university teachers see curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have carried out in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context.

Main Topic of the interview: How do university teachers perceive their roles in the decision making of curriculum?

Sub-topics of the interview:

1. Reality: What roles do university teachers are carrying out in curriculum decision making? (Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5);

2. Reflexivity: How do university teachers perceive their current roles in curriculum decision making? (Question 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11);

3. Vision and possibilities: How do university envision curriculum and their future roles in curriculum decision making? (Question 12, 13, 14).

Participants' recommendations: This part aims to invite participants to comment on the content and the operation of the interview so as to help improve the quality of this research.

NOTE: This is a semi-structured interview. The following questions will be the core of the interviewing process; also, participants might be asked to respond unplanned questions (for example, to clarify some aspects of their respond; to give examples to illustrate; to discuss emerging issues that occur during the interviewing process, etc.)

PART 1: CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING REALITY

Question 1:

What does the term “curriculum” mean to you? Please explain in detail and give examples for clarification.

Question 2:

What are your experiences with regard to curriculum? More specifically:

- What courses are you teaching at HNUE and for what levels (*undergraduate, master, doctorate*)?

- What projects (*national and international*) have you been involved in? What activities of curriculum development have you participated? What professional development programmes have you been involved in (*as a teacher and as a learner*)? etc.

Question 3:

With regard to the development of curriculum in Vietnam, please specify:

- What processes or activities are involved in the development of curriculum? Please explain in detail and give examples for clarification.

- Who are involved in each process or activity?

- Which processes or activities have you been involved in?

Question 4:

The researcher understands the term “curriculum decision making” as to take part in the processes or activities of planning, designing, implementation and evaluation curriculum at different levels (*Ministry of Education and Training, university, faculty, department, classroom, etc.*) and with different degrees (*more involved, less involved; more important, less important, etc.*)

What does the term curriculum decision making mean to you? Please explain in details and give examples for clarification.

Question 5:

What factors are you most aware of when making decisions about curriculum?

PART 2: CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING: REFLEXIVITY

Question 6:

What factors do you find most interesting when being involved in curriculum decision making?

Question 7:

How do you evaluate your contribution to curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Question 8:

To what extent are you satisfied with your current roles in curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Question 9:

To what extent do you think you are encouraged to participate in curriculum decision making? Please explain in detail.

Question 10:

What are your motivations to be involved in curriculum decision making?

Question 11:

What factors do you find most limiting and difficult when you are involved in curriculum decision making?

**PART 3: CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING–VISION AND
POSSIBILITIES**

Question 12:

In your opinion, what are necessary criteria of a modern curriculum? (*For instance, criteria of educational aims; content, pedagogy; assessment; the involvement of educational stakeholders, namely Ministry of Education and Training, management staff, university teachers; learners; caregivers; employers, etc.*)

Question 13:

In your opinion, within the context of the Vietnamese education, what roles can university teachers should play in curriculum decision making? (*For example, which processes or activities they should be involved in, etc.*). Please explain in details.

Question 14:

For university teachers to actively and effectively participate in curriculum decision making, what recommendations do you suggest? For example:

- Changes in managerial mechanism, policy and regulations with regard to university teachers;
- Teacher training and professional development opportunities for university teachers;
- Changes in university teachers themselves (thinking and practice);

PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This study aims to investigate the ways university teachers define curriculum and how they perceive the roles that they have been playing in curriculum decision making within the Vietnamese context. With regard to these aims, do you think there is anything else to add or discuss about curriculum and curriculum decision making?
2. Can you make some comments on the questions in the interview and the interview process?

Thank you for your time of responding and suggesting recommendations on this interview!