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**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A VIETNAMESE
UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT:
AN INQUIRY-DRIVEN APPROACH**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the engagement in an inquiry process of six EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers from two Vietnamese universities, and how the inquiry process shaped the teachers' professional learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge. Student-centred approaches relevant to English language learners were used as a content focus of teacher learning, and teacher inquiry was used as a tool to drive reflection and co-construction of new learning. In particular, the study investigated the process of enactment and reflection as the teachers applied student-centred approaches (SCA) while working to develop their pedagogical knowledge, improve their teaching practices, and engage in professional learning practice.

The study lay within an interpretive paradigm and was predominantly qualitative, using a small amount of quantitative data from the questionnaire administered at the beginning of the study. Data were collected via a four-phase process comprising five data collection instruments. In Phase 1, an online questionnaire was sent out to a wider group of teachers from the two universities and was analysed descriptively to gather initial information about the teachers' reported beliefs and practices to inform me as a researcher how to proceed the next stage of the study. Qualitative data were collected in Phases 2, 3 and 4 of the study. After the six teachers engaged in the inquiries, their classroom practices were observed to explore how they interpreted and enacted SCA. Most observed teaching sessions were followed by a debrief in which the teachers were asked questions to reflect on certain moments of their practice and to elicit the elaborative reasoning underpinning their classroom practices. The teachers then took part in group discussions, which gave them opportunities to present individual reflections on their practice and knowledge and at the same time established an understanding of how the teachers learned, developed their professional knowledge, and improved their professional practice. Finally, semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with the six teachers to gain insights into their learning experience after engaging in the inquiry process and interactive professional discussions with other teachers. The interviews also explored the teachers' reported changes in cognition and practice, along with their concerns. The qualitative data were then analysed via an inductive thematic coding process and the use of vignettes. It was not my intention to triangulate data from these sources. Rather, the use of multiple data collection instruments added to the comprehensiveness, rigour, and saturation of the

study and the teachers' learning process. In this learning process, I sought to capture what the teachers communicated across the data collection instruments, each of which was designed to serve a particular purpose, rather than comparing them or integrating them.

In brief, this study suggested that an inquiry-driven, practice-based, and interactive approach facilitated teacher learning both individually and collectively, and stimulated professional growth. Engaging in the process of inquiry fostered the teachers' reflection on and self-evaluation of their practice and developed self-awareness of their classroom decisions. Interactive opportunities and collegial dialogues in the group (a learning community) helped the teachers to learn from each other, problem solve together, recognise different ways of doing things, negotiate different views, reconsider their beliefs and practices, shift perspectives and recognise the value of multiple positions. In both individual and collective learning endeavours, the process of learning placed an emphasis on the active and agentic engagement of the teachers and their reflective practice, embedding cognition, enactment and other aspects such as personal, contextual and socio-cultural factors. All of these were in line with constructivist and situative perspectives of learning.

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*I know that you have always been around to give me the strength and
perseverance to keep going.*

*I know that you are happy and proud seeing that I made it through this process
and achieved my academic goal.*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CFG	Critical Friend Groups
CHC	Confucian heritage cultures
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EF	Education First
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English language teaching
EPI	English Proficiency Index
ESL	English as a second language
ESP	English for specific purposes
GE	General English
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NFLP 2020	National Foreign Language Project 2020 (Project 2020)
PLC	Professional learning community
SCA	Student-centred approaches
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
ToT	Training of trainers
VSTEP	Vietnamese Standardised Test of English Proficiency
WTO	World Trade Organisation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Motivation for the study	2
1.3 Rationale and significance of the study	3
1.4 Aims of research and research questions	10
1.5 Structure of the thesis	11
CHAPTER 2: SCENE SETTING	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Vietnamese historical and political influences on language education policy	13
2.3 Vietnamese socio-cultural, economic and educational context.....	17
2.4 English language teacher education in Vietnam.....	22
2.5 Vietnamese EFL higher education context.....	26
2.6 Context of Vietnam’s education reforms and English language policy	28
2.7 Challenges to reaching the reform targets	36
2.8 Chapter summary.....	41
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	42
3.1 Introduction	42
3.2 Student-centred approaches	42
3.2.1 Predominant pedagogical approaches to teaching English in Vietnam.....	45
3.2.2 Implementation of SCA in Vietnam.....	47
3.3 Teachers’ cognition	50
3.3.1 Teachers’ beliefs.....	50
3.3.2 Teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ practices	52
3.3.3 Teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ knowledge.....	54
3.3.4 Studies on EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices in Vietnam	57
3.4 Teacher professional learning.....	61
3.4.1 Concept of professional learning.....	62
3.4.2 Stages of teacher learning.....	66
3.4.3 Self-directed and collective teacher learning activities	70
3.4.4 Paradigm shift in professional learning.....	71
3.4.5 Theoretical perspectives on teacher learning	73

3.4.6 Teacher inquiry.....	75
3.4.7 Professional learning of tertiary teachers in Vietnam	82
3.5 Chapter summary.....	87
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	89
4.1 Introduction	89
4.2 Interpretive paradigm	90
4.3 A predominantly qualitative research design	92
4.4 Participants and data collection procedure	94
4.4.1 Participants	94
4.4.2 Research sites	95
4.4.3 Data collection procedure.....	96
4.4.4 Instruments	99
4.5 Data analysis.....	107
4.5.1 Data analysis: Questionnaire	109
4.5.2 Data analysis: Observations and debriefs.....	110
4.5.3 Data analysis: Group discussions and individual interviews	111
4.6 Ensuring research quality	114
4.6.1 Research rigour.....	114
4.6.2 Trustworthiness and reflexivity.....	116
4.6.3 Ethical considerations.....	118
4.7 Chapter summary.....	121
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS.....	123
5.1 Introduction	123
5.2 Questionnaire findings.....	124
5.2.1 Likert scale statements	125
5.2.2 Open-ended questions	132
5.3 Observation and debrief findings	134
5.3.1 Routine classroom pedagogy.....	135
5.3.2 Toward SCA classroom pedagogy	140
5.3.3 Expansion in teaching practices beyond the inquiries.....	144
5.3.4 Summary of observation and debrief findings	149
5.4 Group discussion and individual interview findings	149
5.4.1 How did the teachers learn?	150
5.4.2 Summary of interview and group discussion findings	165
5.5 Chapter summary.....	166
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	168
6.1 Introduction	168

6.2 An overview of the findings	170
6.3 Teachers' beliefs and practices of SCA.....	171
6.3.1 Prior to participation in the study	171
6.3.2 After participation in the study.....	173
6.4 Teachers' professional learning.....	181
6.4.1 Teachers' beliefs should play a vital role in the design and delivery of teacher learning.....	182
6.4.2 Teacher learning activities should include opportunities for enactment, reflection, and sharing.....	184
6.4.3 Teacher learning opportunities should acknowledge individual differences but create a common ground.....	186
6.4.4 Teacher learning is a mediating process.....	190
6.4.5 Teacher learning reconceptualises change as a process of growth.....	196
6.4.6 Towards an inquiry approach to teacher professional learning.....	204
6.5 Contributions and implications of the present study	206
6.5.1 Theory.....	206
6.5.2 Methodology.....	208
6.5.3 Practice	210
6.6 Limitations.....	212
6.7 Recommendations for future research.....	213
6.8 Final reflective thoughts	214
REFERENCES	217
APPENDICES.....	245
Appendix A: Inquiry framework	245
Appendix B: Copy of Inquiry 1	246
Appendix C: Copy of ethical approval	249
Appendix D: Copy of information letter	250
Appendix E: Copy of consent form.....	252
Appendix F: Copy of questionnaire.....	253
Appendix G: Sample of observational protocol	258
Appendix H: Sample of observational notes	259
Appendix I: Sample of discussion prompts.....	262
Appendix J: Prompt questions in interviews	266
Appendix K: Example of attitudes, attributes and identity table.....	267
Appendix L: List of a teacher's role and a student's role.....	268

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Political influences and language education policies.....	14
Figure 2.2 The Vietnamese National Education System (Ho Chi Minh University of Technology - Vietnam’s National University, n.d.).....	23
Figure 2.3 EF EPI ranking of Asian countries and regions (Education First, 2019).....	35
Figure 4.1 Collected data organisation in NVivo	108
Figure 4.2 Illustration of pattern codes for interview data	112
Figure 5.1 Word cloud for a teacher’s role.....	133
Figure 5.2 Word cloud for a learner’s role	133
Figure 6.1 Recommended framework for teacher professional learning	205

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 English proficiency requirement for teachers in the Vietnamese educational system	31
Table 2.2 English proficiency requirement for students in Vietnamese educational system	33
Table 4.1 Participant demographics.....	94
Table 4.2 Data collection phases	97
Table 4.3 Data collection instruments in relation to research questions	99
Table 4.4 Data collected through different sources	100
Table 4.5 Example of a time plan for Phase 2 and Phase 3	104
Table 4.6 Group discussion topics and participants involved	105
Table 4.7 Transcription and reference conventions used in the study.....	111
Table 5.1 Demographic information of questionnaire respondents (N = 20).....	125
Table 5.2 Participants' perceptions of a teacher's role and effective teaching.....	126
Table 5.3 Participants' perceptions of a student's role and effective teaching and learning	127
Table 5.4 Participants' perceptions of students' engagement in teaching and learning	128
Table 5.5 Participants' perceptions of the role of a syllabus and textbooks.....	129
Table 5.6 Participants' perceptions of a learning environment	130
Table 5.7 Participants' reported practice of SCA	131
Table 5.8 Summary of the teachers' routine classroom pedagogy	135
Table 5.9 Summary of the teachers' enactment of SCA activities	141
Table 5.10 Summary of the teachers' expansion beyond inquiries	144

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study investigated the engagement in an inquiry process of six EFL teachers in a Vietnamese tertiary education context. Overall, the study investigated how this process of inquiry shaped the teachers' professional learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge. In particular, the study investigated the process of enactment and reflection of the teachers who applied student-centred approaches (SCA) while working to develop their pedagogical knowledge, improve their teaching practices, and engage in professional learning. By *enactment*, I mean the translation and transformation of a new idea, a belief or a pedagogical approach into practice, where each action represents the enactment of something a teacher knows, believes or has experienced.

The challenges inherent in the field of English language teaching (ELT) in Vietnam are exacerbated by the curriculum focus on English proficiency and general knowledge for pre-service English teachers, the lack of pedagogical knowledge, and the imbalance between theoretical knowledge and teaching practicum. Furthermore, once they start their teaching careers, English language teachers in Vietnam tend to experience top-down and one-shot professional development activities, which aim to enhance teachers' knowledge and practices. However, this approach to teacher professional development has been found ineffective in many ways, as discussed in section 1.3. In the absence of sufficient training and effective professional learning and development, teachers' ongoing practice-based learning takes on a critical role for English language teachers in Vietnam.

Professional learning and development has evolved in different professional fields for a number of decades. In the field of education, professional learning and development is an integral part of teachers' professional practice. The terms *professional development* (Guan & Huang, 2013; Sithamparam, 2015), *professional learning* (Cameron, Mulholland, & Branson, 2013), *professional growth* (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), *informal learning* (Eraut, 2004), *in-service education*, *continuous professional development* (Kelchtermans, 2004), *continuing education*, and *lifelong learning* (Finsterwald, Wagner, Schober, Lüftenegger, & Spiel, 2013) have overlapping meanings;

however, they are defined slightly differently (Bolam & McMahon, 2004) or implicitly (Boylan, Coldwell, Maxwell, & Jordan, 2018) by different researchers.

In this study, I use the terms *professional learning* and *teacher learning* interchangeably to refer to the inquiry process that the teachers were involved in, rather than *professional development* or *professional training*, for two reasons. First, the approach to learning taken in this study, as explained in the literature review chapter, considers a learning process of ongoing initiatives involving teachers taking an active role in their own learning. Second, although some scholars may use the two terms interchangeably, the term *development* may cause unnecessary cultural confusion with *teacher training* or *staff development* programmes in Vietnam – the old deficit approach to teacher professional development and training, which implies a deficit in teacher skills and knowledge (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Sithamparam, 2015; Van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz, Herman, & Farmer, 2015), and is often associated with short-term professional development activities, such as one-off workshops aiming at teacher mastery of prescribed skills and knowledge (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Some examples of teacher training and staff development in Vietnam include summer training (*tập huấn hè/bồi dưỡng hè*), qualification improvement training (*bồi dưỡng để nâng cao trình độ*), demo lesson training (*tập huấn thông qua dạy demo*), and in-school training (*đào tạo và bồi dưỡng giáo viên tại trường*). However, given the context and the focus of the present investigation, both *learning* and *development* are at times used generically to refer to wider opportunities for teacher learning and development or when the researchers I am citing used these terms in the literature.

This chapter first presents the motivation and rationale for the study. Next, it discusses how teacher professional learning is viewed and provided in the Vietnamese tertiary context in response to education reforms and the government's initiatives, which is then discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Finally, the chapter ends with an introduction to the aims of the study, research questions, and an outline of the thesis structure.

1.2 Motivation for the study

I have been interested in professional development and learning since I started my teaching career. When I began teaching, the transition from pre-service training into the profession of teaching was abrupt, and there was very little preparation for the new teaching position. I remember having no induction programmes, no coaching plans, and

Chapter 1: Introduction

no transition steps during my first year of service. I knew practically nothing because back in those days there were no practicum requirements in the curriculum in which I had enrolled. I had to recall how I was taught in English lessons, who my favourite teacher was and what made that teacher special and her lessons memorable. Ultimately, I adopted the same approach in my teaching. I spent most of my time in class explaining grammar rules, lexical meanings and the pronunciation of words. My teaching philosophy was to be passionate, enthusiastic and engaging every time I was in class with my students. I wanted to channel a spirit of enthusiasm for learning English to my students and I wanted them to enjoy and understand the lessons so that they could do well in the examinations.

My first experience with Western knowledge of teaching and learning was in 2008 when I did my Master's degree in Education at Monash University. It was a valuable time for me not only to learn in my subject area specialisation, but also to acquire a broader knowledge of education and English language teaching. During that time, I read extensively about language teaching methodologies, learning theories, and language acquisition. This was when I had opportunities to learn English teaching theories such as the Grammar-Translation method and the Communicative Language Teaching approach. I realised that there was much to learn. As a result, my knowledge of language pedagogies improved considerably.

When I returned to Vietnam after my studies, I adopted new approaches, ideas, and activities I learnt in Australia. Not all of them were as successful as I thought; they did not work for my students. I began wondering why, reflecting on my practice, and adjusting my teaching practice to accommodate the needs, learning preferences and proficiency levels of my students, and the teaching contexts. The experience changed my fundamental thinking about teaching methodology and theories. I saw the value of learning in practice, reflecting on experience, and adapting the theory to suit contexts. These practice-based professional learning strategies have been helpful for my teaching practices. My own experience prompted me to investigate how this inquiry approach to teacher professional learning, focusing on cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge, might work in a wider context.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

Teaching is a lifelong learning profession, including initial education, induction and ongoing in-service professional learning (Pitsoe & Maila, 2012). In the academic

Chapter 1: Introduction

literature, teacher professional learning and development has been primarily investigated in Western settings (Deni & Malakolunthu, 2013; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). In her doctoral research, Tran (2016) conducted a literature review on professional learning and development for teachers and teacher educators in Vietnam and concluded that teacher professional learning and development has not been widely investigated in Asia generally and Vietnam particularly. This claim is consistent with that made by Nguyen, Phan, and Le (2020). In terms of terminology, in the context of my study, a *teacher educator* refers to a teacher or a lecturer who teaches prospective teachers enrolled in pre-service teacher education programmes. A *teacher* is used to refer to a teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL), who teaches English to English major students or English non-major students. Furthermore, the concept of teacher professional learning has recently widened, using the constructs of constructivist and situative learning. Such new ways of looking at teacher professional learning emphasise the active and agentic role of teachers and learning ‘in situ’ and through social interaction (Evans, 2019); however, these approaches to teacher professional learning, especially in English language education in Vietnam, are still under-researched (Evans, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020).

A number of scholars have recently reviewed the current state of professional learning and development and the challenges faced by teachers in Vietnam (Hamano, 2008; Le, 2002; Pham, 2002; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). Vo and Nguyen (2010) claim that most teacher professional learning and development in Vietnam has been conducted using traditional transmission forms such as seminars, workshops, and conferences. This view is confirmed in Tran’s (2016) doctoral research on professional learning and development for teacher educators in higher education in Vietnam, for which 55 lecturers and academic leaders from three Vietnamese universities were surveyed on their engagement in 14 listed professional learning and development activities. These activities included participation in internal and external workshops, seminars, conferences and training courses, teaching clubs or lecturers’ associations, mentoring or coaching, classroom observations, conducting individual research or co-research, organising professional learning and development programmes, supervising EFL teacher trainees, and formal or independent studies. The study reported that attending both internal and external workshops, seminars and conferences, and internal or external training courses were frequent activities, ranking second after independent study. Additionally, Le (2011) points out that, due to time constraints and the large numbers of teacher participants, most

Chapter 1: Introduction

training programmes in Vietnam adopt a “cascade approach” (p. 28) – a training model that “is conducted at several levels by trainers drawn from a level above” (Hayes, 2000, p. 137). Applying this model, only a few teachers from each province are invited to participate in the programmes and are responsible for passing on the knowledge to their colleagues at their institutions (Le, 2011).

Traditional transmission and cascade approaches to professional development have been described as ineffective and unsatisfactory because of time, funds and human resources (Nguyen et al., 2020; T. N. Pham, 2010; Tran, 2016), and they have very little impact on classroom teaching (Gurney, Liyanage, & Huang, 2018) for four main reasons.

To begin with, traditional professional development programmes may not consider teachers’ and educators’ needs, or their teaching problems, because they are carried out in a top-down manner, frequently to ‘implement’ government policies (Nguyen et al., 2020). Such an approach is likely to “undermine teachers’ confidence and leave teachers feeling disempowered, which would appear to be contrary to an enhancement of their work” (Buchanan, 2012, p. 345). Nguyen and Mai (2018) confirm this view in their work examining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) initiatives to increase English competency focusing on professional development of English language teachers, stating that “the delivery methods of professional development programs in Vietnam are centralised in approach (top-down and cascade model)” (p. 18). Consequently, they may have restricted “the space available for [teachers and] educators to respond to local needs and innovate at the grassroots” (T. N. Pham, 2010, p. 55). Due to the disconnection between professional development demands imposed by the government and practical needs of teachers, the application and enactment of new learning in classrooms seems to be relatively low, as Truong (2015) found in his study. Truong’s (2015) study investigated the effects of teacher professional development activities on professional learning and teaching practices. Findings from a questionnaire surveying 114 teachers showed that nearly all respondents strongly agreed that participating in professional development activities increased their professional knowledge and improved their teaching skills. Although the teachers in the study valued their new knowledge, almost half of them did not feel that the knowledge acquired was necessary and applicable (46.5%), and many (44.7%) of the participants reported that their new learning did not practically affect their day-to-day instruction.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Another problem is that some scholars, reflecting on their own experiences with professional development, have claimed that traditional professional development activities in Vietnam are context-detached due to the traditional ‘deliver and apply’ model, such as brief workshops or in-service courses (Le, 2002; Pham, 2002). This model of professional development has led to well-known debates about the “theory-practice divide” (Hoban & Erickson, 2004, p. 302). Similarly, Le (2002), a senior lecturer in Applied Linguistics and a teacher educator at Vietnam National University, raises concerns about these professional development programmes. From his observations, when teachers return to their classrooms or workplaces, they are unable to apply what they have been taught because the context is different. This view seems to be in line with what teachers reported in Truong’s (2015) study, as mentioned earlier.

Pham (2002) and Truong (2015) claim that professional development initiatives that do not provide applicable alternatives to classroom instruction can make teachers lose confidence in their teaching and decide not to use new methods; even worse, it can lead to reluctance to take part in professional development. More importantly, theory and practice gaps in teacher professional development initiatives are not likely to provide teachers with opportunities to enquire into and reflect on their practice, learn from practice, develop their awareness of other ways of doing things, and make more informed classroom decisions. Gurney et al. (2018) state that effective professional learning and development should be “bound by the features of the contexts” (p. 512) in which it is situated. This view is supported by Dr Do Tuan Minh, President of the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi (ULIS – VNU). Expressing his view in an interview on *Dan Tri Online*, he stated that EFL teachers’ professional development and learning has to be practice- and context-based for it to be effective (Hanh, 2016).

The third problem is that, as in many countries, most current professional development programmes in Vietnam are one-off events, which discourage teachers’ engagement in a continuous process of learning or sustained professional learning (Hoban & Erickson, 2004). This view has been reflected in a review of the literature by C. V. Le (2018). The programmes fail to provide activities that allow teachers to undertake initiatives such as self-reflection and self-monitoring of their teaching. Glasgow and Hale (2018) suggest that professional learning should “create the space and opportunity for teachers to reflect on what they do and how they do it, and to envision change where it is warranted” (p.

Chapter 1: Introduction

71). Similarly, according to Fenstermacher (1994), learning in practice through reflection helps teachers interpret contextual know-how to apply more effectively what they learn in practice. Supporting this view, Pham (2002) believes that it is important for teachers to reflect on their teaching practice to identify problems. They need to think what they would like to change and what can realistically be changed for future practice.

Fourth, teachers often take an individual approach to their professional learning. Common barriers have been discussed by Tran (2016), with examples including few opportunities for collegial interaction and collaboration among teachers; insufficient professional learning support; busy teaching loads; limited time, skills and knowledge; and tight curriculum schedules. Tran (2016) states that these barriers constrain teachers and teacher educators from engaging in effective professional learning, which would provide more interactive and collegial opportunities for teachers to learn from and share knowledge with each other. Truong (2017) and Le (2002) suggest that effective professional learning experience should provide opportunities for teachers to work together, reflect on their practices, exchange ideas, and share strategies. Teachers learning together is not about making everyone the same – “the culture of sameness”, as mentioned in Le’s doctoral study (Le, 2011, p. 27) – but rather about generating ideas, taking risks and encouraging disagreement through individuality, which are all sources of improvement and growth (Solheim, Roland, & Ertesvåg, 2018).

Overall, the challenges faced by Vietnamese teachers involve one-off professional development practice, applying cascade and deliver-and-apply models, focusing on individual development rather than teachers’ collaboration and a lack of consideration of teachers’ needs and features of the contexts where professional development takes place making it unlikely to result in meaningful and ongoing professional learning. In order to support more effective long-term professional learning for teachers and EFL teachers in particular, it is of crucial importance to “understand how teacher learning process occurs and how professional learning is conceptualised” (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 82). The discussion suggests that a study of professional learning for teachers in a Vietnamese English language teaching context, concerning how teachers engage in an inquiry-driven learning process, and the interplay of various factors during the course of their learning, would provide a valuable contribution to current understanding of teacher professional learning and development.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In order to address the four concerns regarding teacher professional development experiences as mentioned above, Day (1999) suggests that teacher professional learning opportunities “must provide a range of learning experiences which encourage teachers to reflect upon and inquire into their thinking and practice through interaction between their own and others’ experience” (p. 201). Day’s (1999) view reflects constructivist and situative views of professional learning experiences, in which teachers are expected to take responsibility for and actively engage in professional learning in order to build their capacity and that of others in learning communities (Simoncini, Lasen, & Rocco, 2014). Also, the view situates teachers’ professional learning in practical teaching contexts (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

I wanted to address the four factors identified above, so I set up a study that offered insights into the complexity and multidimensionality of the teacher learning process. In this process, a variety of dimensions should come into play, including teachers’ beliefs, prior learning experiences, learning processes, and personal, contextual, and socio-cultural aspects. Engaging in inquiry requires teachers’ ongoing involvement in interrogating, enacting, reflecting, and becoming self-aware, which are fundamental to their professional growth (Crockett, 2002; Ermeling, 2010; Little, 1993). The study set up conditions in which these aspects of an effective learning process for teachers were enabled. The study also provided English teachers with insights into the potential for making use of reflection and interactive learning as means of professional learning.

In this study, student-centred approaches relevant to EFL learners were used as a content focus of teacher learning or “knowledge for practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 254). *Student-centred approaches* is more fully discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.2. See Appendix A for a framework of student-centred approaches applied in the study, which was developed based on the four main strategies in student-centred teaching practices suggested by O’Neill and McMahon (2005) (see section 3.2 for further detail). I used the phrase *student-centred approaches* to refer to a cluster of approaches related to how students best learn English language, drawing on the literature.

Together with the application of student-centred approaches as a content focus of teacher learning, teacher inquiry is used as a tool, functioning as the impetus for teachers’ reflection and co-construction of new learning. This was planned through a series of six *inquiries*, each of which represents one aspect of student-centred pedagogy. Apart from O’Neill and McMahon’s (2005) four main strategies in student-centred teaching

Chapter 1: Introduction

practices, the inquiries were designed based on my own readings, my professional understanding of SCA, and effective approaches to English language teaching, according to the literature. Each inquiry included an *overview* providing knowledge for practice of SCA for teachers, a *try-things-out* with selection of activities that teachers implemented in their classroom, and a *reflection* to learn about constraints, opportunities and potential improvement when teachers applied the approaches in general and the activities in particular (see Appendix B for an example). The six aspects of student-centred pedagogies in EFL include:

- Creating opportunities for language output
- Creating opportunities for student interaction
- Supporting students' thinking beyond language repetition and information recall
- Fostering the use of metacognitive language learning strategies
- Supporting self-regulated language learning
- Encouraging autonomous language learning.

The study was conducted at two universities in Vietnam. One was a public university and the other was a private one (see Chapter Four, section 4.4.2 for more information regarding the research context).

The teachers were mostly employed on a full-time basis (five of the six teachers) and had diverse teaching and educational backgrounds. In their work contexts, they were allocated into different groups based on their qualifications and experience. There are three specialised groups in the research context: (1) linguistics and skills (skills refer to Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing), (2) English for specific purposes (ESP), and (3) general English (GE). Among the six teacher participants, one teacher belonged to the first group, three belonged to the second group, and two belonged to the third group. Due to teacher shortage, all teachers in the three groups were allocated general English classes, as well as English-major courses belonging to the other two groups.

Within the scope of the study, classroom enactment, observation, reflection, and discussion were based on the context of general English teaching sessions. These teachers taught general English to first- or second-year students of other majors such as Business, Tourism, Nursing, Maths, and Law. The majority of the students had an elementary level of English at the start and were required to achieve pre-intermediate level after two or three compulsory general English courses, depending on the curriculum of each

university. Language knowledge and skills acquired in these general courses built a foundation for the students to move on to ESP courses in the third and fourth year.

In each teaching session, the teachers focused on teaching grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, getting students to do practice exercises in the textbooks, and guiding students towards test and exam tasks. Their main professional responsibility was to improve freshmen and sophomores' English skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), and lexical and grammatical knowledge. Another responsibility was to help students achieve higher proficiency levels essential for the ESP courses in the third and fourth years and reach the levels required for the completion of their academic qualifications.

Further information about the research participants in this study is provided in Chapter Four (section 4.4.1).

1.4 Aims of research and research questions

This study investigated the engagement in an inquiry process of six EFL teachers from two Vietnamese universities, and how the inquiry process shaped the teachers' professional learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge. Student-centred approaches relevant to English language learners were used as a content focus of teacher learning, and teacher inquiry was used as a tool to facilitate the teachers' reflection and co-construction of new learning.

The study was designed to address the following over-arching motivation:

What are effective ways of helping Vietnamese EFL teachers, working in higher education, to adopt more student-centred practices in language teaching?

To answer this general research question, five specific research questions were addressed:

1. What are the teachers' initial beliefs about and reported practices of student-centred approaches?
2. What influences on classroom practice are observed and reported when the teachers assume student-centred approaches?
3. How do the teachers learn within the inquiries?
4. What changes related to professional knowledge, professional practices and professional development practice do the teachers report?
5. How can the process of inquiry be harnessed to support teacher learning?

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study contributes to understandings of EFL teacher professional learning in Vietnamese higher education and student-centered pedagogy in three major ways.

First, the study offers unique insights into the nature and the process of EFL teacher learning in the Vietnamese higher education context. In this process, in addition to looking at the visible learning activities that promote teacher learning and practical change outcomes, through reflection, teachers' thinking processes associated with their enacted activities were examined. Teachers' thinking processes while learning are believed to potentially explain the reasons for their practice-based enactment and the factors supporting or hindering their application of new learning, of which personal, contextual and socio-cultural aspects are relevant. It was also hoped that the process of learning would shed some light on how the teachers translated their new learning into their existing pedagogical beliefs and classroom enactment. All of these contributions may inform future EFL innovation, EFL teacher education and EFL teacher professional learning and development in Vietnam and possible similar contexts.

Second, findings from this group of Vietnamese EFL teachers' cognition and practices in response to student-centred pedagogy with general English students are likely to inform understanding of how teachers adopt student-centred practices in EFL classrooms in Vietnam.

Finally, this study also provides EFL teachers with insights into the potential for using interactive learning with other teachers as an opportunity for professional dialogues. Through reflective conversations, teachers can learn from each other, share their practices in collaboration with others, solve classroom problems together, and negotiate different views for mutual understanding.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two provides the context for the study. This includes Vietnam's historical, political and socio-cultural contexts. The chapter also outlines teacher education programmes, and teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnamese higher education. Finally, the chapter highlights Vietnamese educational reforms as well as English language policy and challenges in reaching recent reform targets, which are all relevant to this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter Three starts by briefly discussing the literature on the general history of English teaching approaches and specific student-centred pedagogy. The chapter then continues to consider teacher cognition, in particular teacher beliefs in relation to knowledge and practice. The literature review ends with a review of how teachers learn to develop their knowledge and improve their practice. This is followed by a brief summary of the stages and forms of teacher learning. This section provides a rationale for the emphasis on constructivist and situative theories of learning in the study and the paradigm shift of professional learning in the contemporary context.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology of the research. The chapter begins with a review of the philosophical stances and briefly revisits the theoretical framework underpinning the current study. Then I discuss the rationale for predominantly qualitative research drawing on multiple data sources used in the study. Following this, sources of research data, data collection, and analysis processes are described. The chapter also outlines how the study's quality and ethical considerations were ensured.

In Chapter Five, I present and discuss the findings of four phases of the study. In Phase 1, initial information concerning the teachers' beliefs about their teaching approaches from questionnaire data is analysed. Phases 2, 3 and 4 of the study explored the process of teacher professional learning, individually and collectively, and factors taken into account during the teachers' learning process. The results from both phases are reported and discussed to gain insights into how the teachers changed and grew professionally during and after the learning experience provided in the study.

The thesis ends with Chapter Six, which discusses the findings, suggests implications and draws conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: SCENE SETTING

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set the scene for the research project reported in this thesis. A brief historical and political background of Vietnam during the colonial period is presented in relation to the country's language education policy. The chapter then explores the socio-cultural, economic and educational features that affect the current prestige status of English language and the teaching profession. Because of education's internationalisation and an economic open market approach, in recognising a need for further radical reform of the education system, the Vietnamese government launched two reform initiatives: the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) and the National Foreign Language Project (Project 2020). This chapter discusses challenges that the Vietnamese education system, educational institutions, teachers and students have encountered in the enactment of the reform initiatives. Particularly, the chapter highlights how these two educational reform initiatives affect teachers' professional learning and how they develop their professional learning within their work context. Two of the many barriers to reaching the reform agendas are the quality of teachers influenced by English language education programmes, and the traditional teaching approaches. These are also examined in this chapter.

2.2 Vietnamese historical and political influences on language education policy

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country and a multilingual society, with 54 different ethnic groups who speak more than 100 different languages (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Among them, ethnic Viet or Kinh is the dominant ethnicity, constituting nearly 86% of the Vietnamese population (Bradley, 2019). Despite the linguistic diversity, Vietnamese language is the most widely spoken.

In terms of foreign languages, due to the increasing involvement of Vietnam in regional and international economic and socio-cultural activities, English has become the most popular foreign language in Vietnam (Phan, 2008). However, during its history, Vietnam has witnessed major shifts in the country's language education policy, which reflect political influences and the relationships between the country and its allies (Nguyen &

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

Nguyen, 2019). Language education policy cannot be carried out apolitically and ahistorically (Vu, 2019). Therefore, it is important to investigate language education policy in its socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016). This section discusses language education policy in Vietnam, focusing on foreign languages together with the Vietnamese language policies, with full awareness of the country's long history of multi-colonisation, the political regime of socialism, and its position as a developing country in the world economic system. Figure 2.1 shows the changing political influences on language education policy over time.

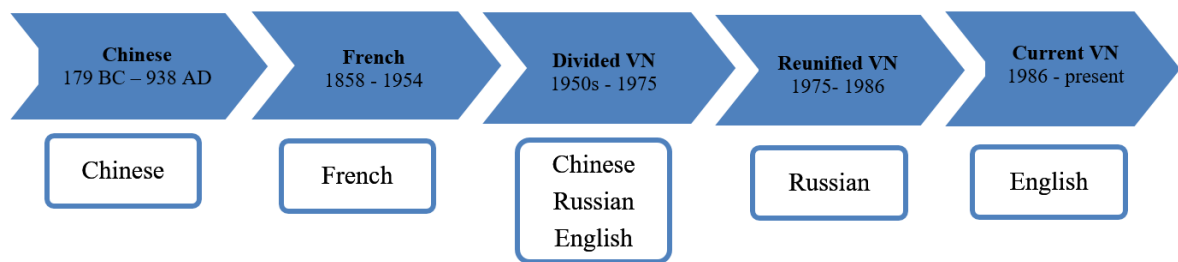


Figure 2.1 Political influences and language education policies

For a long time in Vietnam's early history, with over a millennium under Chinese domination from 179 B.C. to 938 A.D., Chinese language and its ideographic writing system was adopted as the official language in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese people, during that time, were able to devise their own written form of language based on Chinese characters, which was called *chữ Nôm* (vernacular language). Although *chữ Nôm* used Chinese characters, it was not intelligible to the Chinese people. The attempt to develop *chữ Nôm* was considered as an instance of the Vietnamese people's resistance to the hegemony of Chinese language and an effort to protect the culture from Chinese influence (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019).

Starting in 1858 and ending almost 100 years later, Vietnam was under the rule of French colonialists. During this time, French was made the official language in Vietnam and was the medium of instruction at all school levels. During the French domination, *chữ Nôm* and Chinese language were abolished and replaced by *Quốc ngữ* (literally means national language), "a Roman alphabetic writing system with diacritic markers to mark tones and pronunciation" (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019, p. 186). Since then *Quốc ngữ* has been used as the official written form of Vietnamese language and is still used today to represent the modern Vietnamese language. Under the rule of the French, although *Quốc ngữ* was promoted as the official Vietnamese language, it was ironically taught as a foreign

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

language at school because it was not used for official documents or classroom instruction. Any attempt to emphasise the teaching of *Quốc ngữ* in place of French was considered an act of rebellion. The language education policy resulted in a social division between those who spoke French as the elite of society, and those who spoke Vietnamese as laypersons.

When the French occupation ended in 1954, the Romanised *Quốc ngữ* officially became the national language of Vietnam and the medium of instruction at all school levels, in lieu of French. In 1954, with the partition of Vietnam under the Geneva Agreements, the country was divided into the Communist North and the Capitalist South, which made the language education policy more complex (Do, 2006). In the North, as a result of aid and influence from communist countries, especially the Soviet Union, Russian and Chinese became popular foreign languages. Meanwhile, in the South, with the involvement of American troops, English was taught at school and was used bilingually with Vietnamese as a mandatory language in all government documents. During this period, Vietnamese was used as the medium of instruction throughout the country (H. B. Nguyen, 2014).

In 1975, after the Americans left, the two divided parts of Vietnam were reunified because the South Vietnamese administration was overthrown by the North's forces. The unified central government of Vietnam has been located in the North since. During this period, emphasis was placed on strengthening national sovereignty and solidarity. One approach to this was to promote Vietnamese as the main language used across the country and the medium of instruction starting with primary school education (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Due to the subsequent change in the political and economic system and as part of Vietnam's alliances with the Soviet Union, Russian became the main foreign language and the most widely taught language in the country (Do, 2006; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). This reflected the government's desire to expand relations with the countries of the communist bloc (Do, 2006). As a result, English and French were removed from the curriculum and Chinese disappeared from the language education landscape.

After thirty years of war, the country was confronted with many challenges: the loss of 3.4 million Vietnamese lives (Morris, 2003) resulting in a lack of human resources; the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019); the centralised economy (Pham & Fry, 2004); economic decline (Do, 2006), an embargo on trade by the United States; and high inflation (H. B. Nguyen, 2014). All of these challenges pushed Vietnam into a critical situation and urged the Vietnamese authorities to turn outward and think

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

about the future of the country and its political and economic strategies (Pham & Fry, 2004). During this period, Russian became “a dead language” (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019, p. 189) and English began to replace Russian because of the withdrawal of Soviet support and the greater public interest in English. A lot of Russian teachers were re-trained to teach English during this period.

Responding to the country’s ten years’ crisis, during the Sixth Communist Party congress of Vietnam in 1986, a new policy, *Đổi Mới policy*, was introduced as part of a renovation of the country, aiming at improvement in social and economic conditions (Vu, 2019). *Đổi Mới* (Economic Renovation) focused on the social-economic development of Vietnamese society and opened Vietnam’s doors to the world. The reform aimed to replace centralised economic planning in the Soviet tradition with a regulated market economy. Since the adoption of an open market approach in Vietnam in 1986, Vietnam’s language education policy has experienced a significant shift, with English emerging as the most widely used language (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Pham & Fry, 2004). At the same time, to reinforce national culture, Vietnamese was consistently reasserted as the official language. The Education Law (1998) confirmed that Vietnamese language is the official language used in schools (Article 5).

In the 21st century, Vietnam has maintained diplomatic relationships with more than 180 countries in the world and has established economic partnerships with over 220 foreign markets (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Joining the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has boosted the demand for English (Hayden & Lam, 2010). The Education Law (2005) both re-emphasises Vietnamese as the official instructional language and specifies that compulsory foreign languages included in the national curriculum are those commonly used in international transactions (Article 7). This policy demonstrates proper awareness of the connection between language learning demands and national economic and social development. This was the first time that foreign languages were mentioned in education law. The recognition of foreign languages has important implications for the development of Vietnam’s education. Since then, English has been promoted as the ‘lingua franca’ of Vietnam – the most important foreign language across all levels of Vietnamese education (Hoang, 2017).

2.3 Vietnamese socio-cultural, economic and educational context

Research on education cannot be separated from its context. This makes sense in the language education area. Gibbons (2002) identifies two kinds of context: “context of situation” (p. 2) – the particular occasion on which language is used; and “context of culture” (p. 2) – the shared assumptions and expectations of people in a culture, meaning that people sometimes take for granted the ways in which things are done. The latter definition of context is the one discussed by many educators in translating pedagogical approaches into a particular context (L. V. Nguyen, 2011). This socio-cultural context is also the focus of discussion in this section, which aligns with the constructivist and situative perspectives in this study.

As mentioned above, Vietnam was under Chinese domination for almost a millennium and Vietnam has been influenced by Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs) since. Historically, Taoism and Buddhism entered and influenced the ancient Vietnamese cultures before Confucianism (Duong, 2002). These philosophies of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism shared many commonalities and enhanced one another (Phan, 2008), creating an integrated philosophy that is nowadays called Confucianism. Confucian philosophies have contributed to the perceptions of teaching and learning, and to educational values and practices in the country. In this section, CHCs are discussed with an emphasis on the contentious debates concerning teaching and learning, importance of education and lifelong learning, the role of the teacher, the position of English, and the contemporary view of collectivism in the Vietnamese context.

CHCs’ impacts on teaching and learning have been widely criticised. In CHCs, teaching is typically based on knowledge transmission and rote learning (Tran, 2013) and teachers are the central authority (Nguyen, Bulte, & Pilot, 2017), which makes students passive and unwilling to ask questions or speak up in class (Tran, Hallinger, & Truong, 2018; Tran, 2013). However, there are findings from empirical research and other scholarship that challenge the idea of stereotyping CHC learners and teachers. Biggs (1994) reviewed studies comparing the performance of CHC students and Western students and the findings reported that CHC students achieved significantly higher than Western students, especially in languages, mathematics and science. Also, in Biggs’ (1994) review, several studies, involving thousands of students, compared the general approaches to learning of CHC secondary and tertiary students with those of comparable groups of Western

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

students, on the basis of self-report questionnaires. In most cases, CHC students reported a preference for high-level, meaning-based or deep-learning strategies. These findings related to learning strategies concurred with a comparative study by Salili (1996). Similarly, Kember (2000) used evidence from over 90 action research projects to disprove the common assertions that Asian students prefer passive learning and resist teaching innovations. He explained that “students attempting to learn material by heart could be following a logical strategy because they perceive that the course and assessment require them to reproduce bodies of material” (p. 117). There was salient evidence that Asian students were not resistant to innovative teaching strategies and that if Asian students were given opportunities, time and support, they would adjust to active forms of learning. Two different research contexts, one in Hong Kong by De Vita and Bernard (2011) and one in Vietnam by MacKinnon and Le (2014), reported similar findings with respect to the higher learning skills of Chinese and Vietnamese students. De Vita and Bernard (2011) reported that Chinese learners were as capable as Western students of adapting to modes of learning and assessment requiring a reflective, deep learning approach. Likewise, MacKinnon and Le (2014) argued that the implementation of collaborative learning modes in Vietnamese classrooms was appropriate and fitting. Rao and Chan (2010) confirmed that teaching and learning are culturally embedded activities, but “the cultural context is constantly changing” (p. 16). The 21st century has brought about socioeconomic and technological changes, shifts in learning paradigms, new educational policies and widespread curriculum reforms in Asian countries, and in Vietnam in particular. This suggests considering the need to revisit CHC education systems (Chan & Rao, 2010) and acknowledge the strengths of CHCs in Asian education systems, including the Vietnamese education system. Furthermore, the complexities and diversity of both CHCs and Western pedagogical philosophies potentially challenge the binary assumptions associated with these two rationales. See section 6.5.1 for further theoretical discussion on this traditional dichotomy.

The significance of education stands out in the Confucian tradition. Education is perceived as important not only for personal improvement but also for society (On, 1996; Phan, 2008). For the Vietnamese people, this has created a fondness of and passion for learning and understanding, an eagerness for lifelong learning, and a spirit of social contribution (MacKinnon & Le, 2014). It explains a spirit of self-cultivation among

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

Vietnamese people, which encourages them to continue to further their knowledge, learning and enhance their skills and practice.

At the same time, there are considerable hurdles to overcome for many Vietnamese. Approximately 80 per cent of the population live in rural areas (Macrotrends, n.d.-b) where literacy levels are rather low (Macrotrends, n.d.-a; World Bank, 2013). Socio-economic differences between rural areas and the more economically developed urban areas have resulted in huge gaps in educational opportunities (C. V. Le, 2017). Wealthy parents in big cities are willing to pay for their children to study in top universities in English-speaking countries or private international agencies in Vietnam. They hope that their children will improve their English with native speaker instructors, gain admission to top universities in Vietnam or overseas, and get desirable, well-paid jobs in foreign invested companies or joint ventures after graduation (C. V. Le, 2017).

On the other hand, the challenges of living in rural areas make both parents and young people realise the important role that education plays in contemporary Vietnamese society. Traditionally, educated people have the highest social status of all classes in Vietnamese society – Sĩ, Nông, Công, Thương [Literati, Farmers, Artisans, Merchants] (MacKinnon & Le, 2014). As such, education is considered to offer upward social mobility (Gurney, 2018; Le, 2011) or “a ticket to ride” (Le, 2011, p. 16) for the younger generation in rural areas to access better economic and academic futures. Despite low English proficiency, limited study resources and socio-economic constraints, a lot of students from rural areas do make an effort to become English teachers for two reasons. One is that they have an increasing awareness of English learning. Another reason is that English teacher education programmes are fee-free in Vietnam, which can remove a huge financial burden from their families. Because of today’s market economy, as mentioned earlier, teaching careers have become less attractive to higher achievers in secondary school examinations (Le, 2020). It is a challenge for universities and colleges to get adequate enrolments in their English teacher education programmes; as a result, they have had to lower their entry requirements to attract lower achievers from high school. Consequently, the entry score at teacher training universities and colleges is usually lower than in other majors such as economics, foreign trade or the like, in order to attract more students. However, in Vietnam, teaching has traditionally been recognised as a noble profession (Phan, 2008), second only to the King, as exemplified in a popular motto in moral education *Quân-Sư-Phụ* [King-Teacher-Father] (MacKinnon & Le, 2014). It is

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

believed that being a teacher brings honour, prestige and pride to the family. The teacher is seen as “a guru”, which means weighty or honourable (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 53) and a “moral guide” (Phan, 2008, p. 113); therefore, teachers are seen to be knowledgeable and associated with morality and high standards of performance (Phan, 2008). Teachers commonly play the role of transmitters of knowledge and models of morality; students are expected to obey and follow their teachers in order to give their teachers face, rather than challenging or criticising them (Le, 2011). These ideologies, social norms and the function of teachers as role models can still be seen today, particularly in student teachers’ initial teaching practice, which results from observing and copying their own teachers.

The concept of *role model* in the form of successful family members or teachers has motivational influences on students’ career identities. In my teaching experience, it was not surprising for a student to say that he or she wanted to go into teaching because one or both of his or her parents were English teachers. It is called a family occupation (Lortie, 1975). A study by Mate et al. (2017) explored the career identities of Vietnamese students studying at an offshore (Australian) university in Vietnam. The study used a social constructionist and narrative psychology approach. Narratives from 31 students showed that the strongest influence on their career identities and career decision making was family, which was in accordance with the collectivist cultural values of Vietnam. Collectivist values emphasise family duty and obligation, obedience to in-group norms, and collective career decision making (Hayden & Lam, 2010; Truong, Hallinger, & Sanga, 2017). In other words, the role models established by family members have direct effects on the development of students’ attitudes towards their careers. Also, parents’ expectations and vocational advice from family influence students’ career decision making. These students would feel ashamed or guilty if they did not meet their family’s expectations or chose to go against their parents’ career advice. The study acknowledged Vietnamese socio-cultural influences, but at the same time encouraged students to make career choices based on their own personal values, interests, skills and goals.

Another Confucian value is the collectivist view – a “cultural bias towards thinking of ‘we’ rather than ‘me’” (N. H. Tran et al., 2018, p. 89). This view expects individual teachers to place the good of the group ahead of the individual. Group-referenced members often make efforts to maintain harmony and value collectivity and solidarity, avoiding group conflicts, showing peer respect, saving face, and having a sense of duty

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

to the work community (Hofstede, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2017; N. H. Tran et al., 2018; Truong et al., 2017). However, this interpretation may provide one particular perspective of collectivist culture and the interpretation may change in response to the current socio-cultural and educational contexts of Vietnam. The collectivism discussed in the analysis of socio-cultural context of higher education in Vietnam by MacKinnon and Le (2014) includes community relationships, group interests, social interaction, and collaborative spirit. Among these, the need for enhancing the traditional Vietnamese spirit of collaboration has been confirmed in the Higher Education Reform Agenda as one of the important skills for young graduates (see section 2.6).

With the spread of mass media and the globalisation of English, Vietnamese people are demonstrating increasing awareness of the value of learning English, and the economics of English in the job market today. Doan and Hamid (2019) conducted a study of over 23,000 job advertisements posted on the most popular website for job seekers and recruiters in Vietnam (<http://www.vietnamworks.com>) in 2015 and 2018. The findings indicated that the demand for English in the Vietnamese job market was high, with over 65% of jobs advertised requiring higher than an intermediate level of proficiency in 2015 and 67% of jobs requiring at least immediate level in 2018. Also, although language skill demands varied across sectors, listening and speaking skills were reported to be more important than reading and writing. In addition, the trend toward globalisation has created an international educational market, which attracts more and more students to study overseas. To meet today's job market demands and international education requirements, English plays a prominent role in Vietnamese society, creating "English language fever" throughout the country (Le, 2020, p. 9) and the "ascendancy of English" (Denham, 1992, p. 63) is still applicable in contemporary Vietnamese society.

Being rooted in CHC traditions and social values, "Vietnamese teachers actively seek opportunities to broaden their knowledge and qualifications, together with enhancing their moral life" (MacKinnon & Le, 2014, p. 153). The ultimate goals are to improve their instructional practices and improve student learning (Guskey, 2002; Truong, 2015). However, sometimes there is tension between the aspiration and reality (Le, 2020) because of student characteristics, top-down directives, assessment backwash, curriculum and textbook requirements, and teaching contexts (discussed further in section 2.7). In practice, teachers have to make decisions to negotiate between cultural values, social ideology, personal values, professional goals, and practical contexts.

2.4 English language teacher education in Vietnam

This section briefly introduces the context of teacher education programmes in Vietnam that have potentially had an impact on EFL teachers and specifically on the teacher participants in the present study.

The Vietnamese education system structure is composed of 12 years of schooling, followed by a three-year associate bachelor degree (college education) (*bằng cao đẳng*), a four-year bachelor degree (university education) (*bằng đại học*), a two-year master's degree (*bằng thạc sĩ*), and a two-to-four-year doctoral degree (*bằng tiến sĩ*) as seen in Figure 2.2. Since 2015, at the end of grade 12, students are required to sit a secondary school leaving examination, centrally coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Students are tested in a foreign language (typically English), mathematics, Vietnamese literature, and one of three other subjects, varying from year to year depending on students' selected strands, which can be either the science strand (physics, chemistry, and biology) or the social sciences strand (history, geography and moral education). Each student has to achieve a grade of at least five out of ten in each subject to pass the examination and to be awarded the Certificate of Secondary School Graduation (*Bằng Tốt Nghiệp Trung Học Phổ Thông*). Students who pass, depending on their scores and their majors, are allowed to apply to two institutions. Each higher education institution sets its own entry score for admission and selects students using their secondary school leaving examination results as admission standards. Students who fail to gain admittance to their first choice of institution are allowed to apply to their second preference.

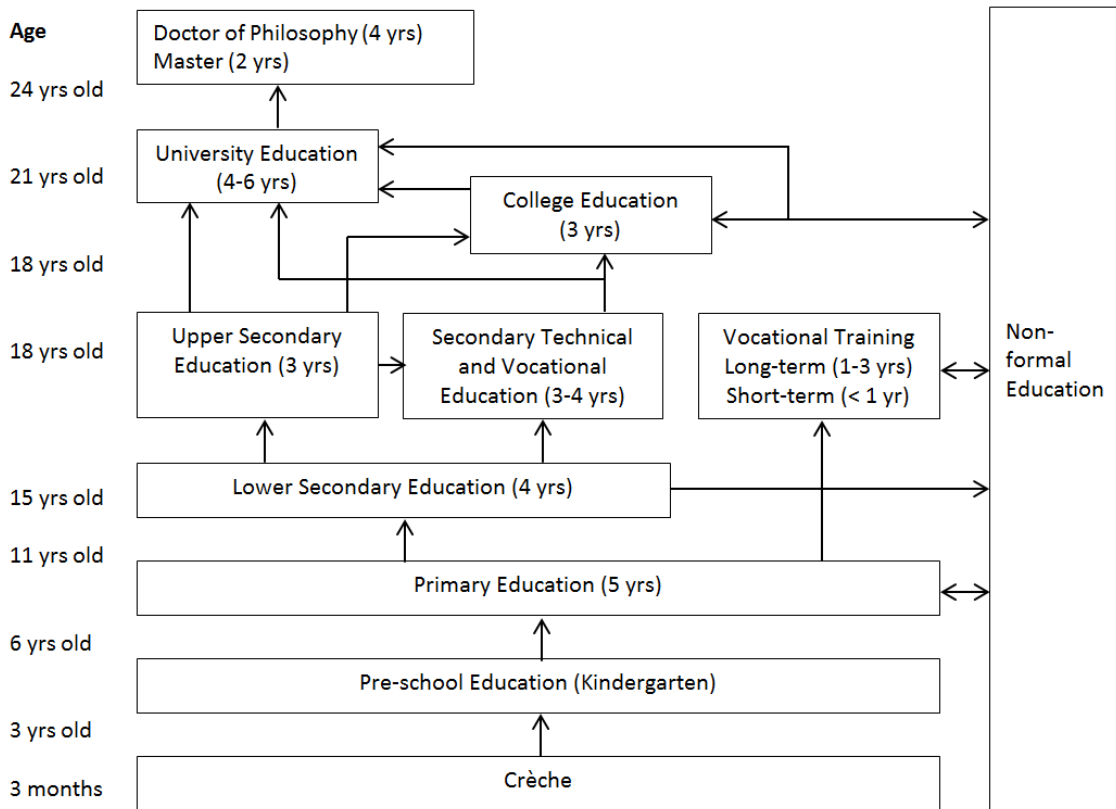


Figure 2.2 The Vietnamese National Education System (Ho Chi Minh University of Technology - Vietnam’s National University, n.d.)

Vietnam’s education is regulated by the Education Law. The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is the government agency responsible for directing all managerial and academic activities in education at all levels, particularly higher education. Since 2005, under the influence of the government’s overhaul of education, all Vietnamese tertiary education institutions have adopted the credit system (C. V. Le, 2017), in lieu of the previous tightly structured subject-based model. In the old system, a cohort of students entered a programme together and studied together throughout the entire degree programme, following the same curriculum. In the new credit system, with one credit being equivalent to 15 hours of classroom instruction, courses are assigned a credit value and students must complete a prescribed number of credits before being eligible to graduate. The reasons for the change are to be more in line with education systems around the world, to give institutions more autonomy, and to give students more flexibility in their studies. The credit system is outlined by MOET with a mandated number of credits for each degree programme, and institutions commonly develop their own curricula reflecting the MOET outlines. Furthermore, MOET has granted higher education institutions increased autonomy to determine their curriculum development and

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

admission quotas (Tran, Phan, & Tran, 2018; Trines, 2017). The design of syllabi for individual courses and the selection of course books are undertaken by subject teams or groups of experienced teachers, which creates both diversity and a lack of consensus about the learning content for English between institutions (Hoang, 2010). It is a common practice that the syllabus for each course dictates the content to be covered in the set textbook. Therefore, teachers have to juggle the required content for assessment purposes and the tight timeframe allocated for each course.

With regard to English teacher education programmes, the new Education Law (2019) has brought some amendments to the minimum requirements for teachers. To become teachers, students must finish 12 years of compulsory general education plus three years of teacher training education (12+3) as the minimum academic requirement. The previous requirement was 12+2. However, this is only a minimum requirement. Teaching at different levels requires different qualifications. There are two separate training systems for EFL teachers in Vietnam: at colleges or universities. According to the Education Law 2019 (Vietnamese Laws, 2019), primary school teachers must complete a three-year (12+3) teacher education programme at a college. Lower and upper secondary school teachers must complete a four-year (12+4) teacher education programme at university level. For tertiary education teachers or lecturers, a master's degree in their specialist area, together with a certificate in teaching, is compulsory.

One important change in the Education Law 2019 is that teachers of all school levels must be teacher education graduates. In the past, school teachers could be graduates in a specialist subject, with a separate certificate in teaching. The new law has placed more emphasis on the compulsory pedagogical requirements that graduates attain from teacher education programmes. At tertiary education institutions, despite the minimum requirement of the Education Law 2019, a number of teachers who hold a bachelor's degree may not meet the standard as a result of the old mechanism and the lack of higher education teaching staff.

Teacher education programmes in Vietnam comprise four main elements as described in Kieu, Singer, and Gannon (2016):

- General knowledge: to provide students with basic knowledge in social and natural sciences

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

- Specific (pedagogical) knowledge: to provide students with knowledge in their specialisation, such as general teaching philosophy and pedagogic techniques, with the use of Vietnamese as medium of instruction
- Teaching practice (practicum): where students are sent to schools for at least one month of practice teaching
- Graduation requirements: students can conduct research, or write a thesis, or take classes to achieve enough credits for graduation.

During pre-service teacher education period, student teachers have to focus on three strands of knowledge to earn enough credits for their qualifications. Take an English teacher education programme at University A (the research sites, as described in Chapter Four, section 4.4.2) as an example. In order to graduate, students are required to achieve 125 credits, which include 36 credits in general foundation knowledge (for example, physical education, Hochiminhism, Marxism), 61 credits in linguistic knowledge and language skills (for example, skill subjects such as listening, speaking, reading, writing; linguistics such as grammar, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax) and 28 credits in education and pedagogical knowledge (for example, teaching methodologies, educational psychology, testing and assessment). Pedagogical knowledge accounts for only one fifth of the total training program, which is “strongly theory-oriented” (Hamano, 2008, p. 406). As part of this 125-credit programme, student teachers are required to have 75 hours of practicum teaching experience, which is equivalent to 5 credits. The 75-hour practicum is usually offered over six weeks to develop students’ understanding of teaching realities in schools. The practicum period seems too short to prepare student teachers for actual teaching practice after graduation.

In her study, M. H. Nguyen (2013) compared and contrasted the curricula for English language teacher education in two universities, one in Australia and the other in Vietnam. The data were collected from relevant literature, policy and curriculum documents, and interviews with curriculum developers from the two universities. The study findings revealed that each curriculum from the two universities included all the six main domains of knowledge suggested by Richards (1998, as cited in the study), including theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning skills and decision making, and contextual knowledge. However, they found different foci in the domains of knowledge in the two curricula. The Australian university integrated much more contextual knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision-making

skills into the curriculum, whereas the Vietnamese institution placed much greater emphasis on developing pre-service teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, and communication skills and proficiency. Also, the study reported distinctive contextual factors that help to explain this variation – the pre-service teachers' low proficiency at entry into the teacher education programmes seemed to play an influential role in the Vietnamese curriculum. In analysing eighteen Vietnamese course syllabi of pre-service English teacher education, together with interview and focus group data, Vu and Dudzik (2020) revealed similar findings indicating student teachers' experience of gaps between theoretical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, and a lack of contextual knowledge in the syllabi.

From observation of the teacher education programmes described above, a number of Vietnamese scholars (Le, 2002; M. H. Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2002) have called for a more reasonable balance between teaching theory and practice; a re-distribution of the teacher education curriculum between general knowledge, linguistic knowledge, language skills, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching practice; and an increase in the curriculum load in teaching practice. M. H. Nguyen (2013) suggests that it is important to incorporate core courses focusing on knowledge of local teaching contexts and knowledge of learners into the current teacher education programmes to help student teachers envisage actual teaching realities. Finally, Bui and Nguyen (2016) suggest that English language teacher programmes should go beyond merely improving English knowledge and skills, but provide pre-service teachers with life-long learning and reflective skills that develop their future professional learning.

2.5 Vietnamese EFL higher education context

There are two types of English provision at tertiary level in Vietnam. Non-English majors take general English (GE) during their first and second years and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) during their third and fourth years. For this group, GE is normally taught five periods per week for three semesters, for a total of 150 periods (1 period = 45 minutes); ESP is taught five periods a week for 9 weeks in one semester, for a total of 46 periods (Trinh & Mai, 2019). GE courses focus on improving students' four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and providing students with the general knowledge necessary to master English, such as grammar. ESP courses focus on learning vocabulary and reading skills development in students' specialist majors. First-

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

year students in this group do not have to take English entrance tests but are tested in other subjects depending on their majors. Their entry level varies; however, the majority of them are at elementary English level (equivalent to Level 1) (Trinh & Mai, 2019), which is rather low. The standardised benchmarking levels of teachers and students' English proficiency are discussed in more detail in section 2.6. As a result, many tertiary institutions have to provide English programmes from elementary up to lower or upper intermediate levels, so that students are able to reach Level 3 by the time they graduate. According to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), it takes approximately 200 guided learning hours for a language learner to progress from one CEFR level to the next (Hoang, 2017). In practice, non-English majors in Vietnamese tertiary institutions are allocated less than 200 hours to progress from Level 1 to Level 3. This seems to be an unrealistic required outcome for Vietnamese university graduates and teachers.

English majors, on the other hand, specialise in English studies. They have to take courses including general knowledge, linguistics and language knowledge and skills, pedagogical knowledge, and do a teaching practicum as discussed in section 2.4. Their standardised proficiency requirement to be eligible to graduate is Level 5.

In Le's (2017) study, a questionnaire with three open-ended questions was used to explore the views of department heads at 52 universities and colleges across the country and focus group interviews were organised with senior teachers of English at those universities. The study investigated respondents' views about the pedagogic changes introduced in response to the policy of students' proficiency standardisation and their estimates of the achievability of the standardisation. The questionnaire findings reported a perceived low likelihood of students being able to achieve the mandated proficiency levels: the estimate from the most optimistic respondents was a maximum of 45% for non-English major students and 30% for English major students. The interview results showed an even lower percentage from the teachers' viewpoints. However, this was primarily a survey study. There is a strong need for qualitative research to gain more in-depth understanding of the situation.

The study above reflects the current status of EFL education at Vietnamese tertiary institutions. Vietnamese EFL higher education has made significant progress; however, there are many challenges that may affect classroom practice, and teaching and learning outcomes. Many Vietnamese scholars have noted these challenges, including the culture

of teaching and learning in the Vietnamese EFL context, the quality of teachers, large class sizes, lack of teaching facilities, inappropriate materials, students' low motivation and the testing-oriented system (C. V. Le, 2017; Le, 2020; Le, 2012; D. T. N. Le, 2017; L. V. Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Pham & Fry, 2004; Pham, 2011; Phan, 2015; Trinh & Mai, 2019).

2.6 Context of Vietnam's education reforms and English language policy

The socio-economic and educational reforms have actively impacted English language policy in Vietnam. Since 1986 (*Đổi mới policy*), English has been introduced at all levels of education and is widely used for international communication and economic partnerships (see section 2.2).

Between 2000 and 2001, the Vietnamese government initiated general education curriculum and English language policy reforms via Decree No. 40/2000/NQ-QH10 (2000) and Decree No. 14/2001/CT-TTg (2001) to urgently develop and implement the national curriculum, including English curriculum, to meet the needs of the country's modern development. The reforms further emphasised student-centred pedagogical approaches, stimulating students' creativity and autonomy with the ultimate aim of developing and globally integrating the nation.

In 2005, recognising a need for further radical reform of the education system, the government produced Resolution 14 on the "Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006-2020" (also known as the Higher Education Reform Agenda, or HERA). This presents a vision of what the Vietnamese higher education system should become (T. N. Pham, 2010). The scale of the reforms proposed by HERA is huge. One of the general aims of HERA is:

To carry out fundamental and comprehensive reform of higher education; undertake a process of profound renews [*sic*] in the area of the quantity, quality, and effectiveness in order to meet all the demands of industrialization, modernization, global economic integration and society's demand for learning opportunities. By 2020, Vietnam aims to have a higher education system that is advanced by international standard [*sic*], highly competitive, and appropriate to the socialist-oriented market mechanism. (T. N. Pham, 2010, pp. 51-52)

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

Among the many objectives and responsibilities stated in the HERA document are a focus on teaching and learning, including the need to build learning societies, a shift from an instructional to a learning paradigm focusing on student-centered pedagogy, the development of teacher capacity, and increased opportunities for teacher professional learning and development, an emphasis on the use of advanced technology in education, and demand for more relevant graduate skills – ‘industry ready graduates with broader range of high level and adaptable skills’ (Harman & Nguyen, 2010).

In recognising the importance of foreign languages in educational reform, under Decision 1400, the Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (hereafter referred to as Project 2020) in 2008. This national-scale language reform policy focuses on bringing the overall English proficiency of Vietnamese citizens to a more competitive level, both regionally and globally. The aim was to approach this target through four major strategies, as described in C. V. Le (2017, p. 187):

1. Making English a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary levels of education
2. Upgrading teachers’ proficiency in English and their pedagogical knowledge and skills towards more communication-oriented teaching
3. Introducing a new curriculum and writing new English textbooks
4. Mandating standardised benchmarking of students’ proficiency.

With regard to teachers, professional development forms a part of the English language teaching initiative. MOET has set Vietnam’s English Teacher Competencies Framework, including five domains:

1. Knowledge of English and the curriculum
2. Knowledge of instructional methods
3. Knowledge of learners
4. Professional attitudes and values embedded across knowledge domains
5. Informed knowledge of teaching context

This framework is seen as a blueprint for teachers’ professional development and receives substantial support from the government in terms of resourcing. Within the project framework, language teachers are re-trained in three stages through professional development programmes, which consist of a combination of attending conferences and courses, and self-learning. These programmes aim to improve teachers’ language

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, teaching practice and to provide opportunities to conduct research.

In order to assess teachers' language proficiency, MOET initially used the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as an assessment blueprint. The required level for primary and lower secondary school teachers is Level 4 and for upper secondary and university teachers is Level 5 (Table 2.1). However, the mandated proficiency levels have been described as ambitious and unrealistic, as discussed further in section 2.7. Following this, a six-level proficiency framework, a modification of the CEFR, was developed locally, and is called the Vietnamese Standardised Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP). This is used as an assessment tool for teachers' proficiency. VSTEP was developed by local experts using a blend of test materials including the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET), and the First Certificate of English. This framework is in its infancy and has experienced some constraints such as lack of communication and consistency from the authorities (Nguyen et al., 2020). The English competence set out for teachers, however, implicitly functions as a form of professional identity, within the syllogism that "the more fluent in English, the more effective the teacher" (Freeman, 2017, p. 32). Critically, this logic considers the teacher's English competence as a measure of professional performance, rather than what the teacher practically and pragmatically does in the classroom (Freeman, 2017).

Table 2.1 English proficiency requirement for teachers in the Vietnamese educational system

Level 6	CEFR C2 IELTS 8.0 – 9.0 Cambridge CPE				
Level 5	CEFR C1 IELTS 7.0 – 8.0 Cambridge CAE				
Level 4	CEFR B2 IELTS 5.5 – 6.5 Cambridge FCE				
Level 3	CEFR B1 IELTS 4.0 – 5.0 Cambridge PET				
Level 2	CEFR A2 Cambridge KET				
Level 1	CEFR A1 Cambridge Movers				
English level	Equivalent	English primary school teachers	English lower secondary school teachers	English upper secondary school teachers	English teachers at colleges and universities

One of the very common forms of professional learning for English teachers under Project 2020 in Vietnam is training-of-trainers (ToT); a cascade approach, as mentioned earlier. In the ToT model, a small number of teachers receive training from key trainers, who are external educational experts or experienced university lecturers, to become qualified trainers themselves. Qualified trainers return to their own contexts to train other teachers. The ToT model aims for capacity building in teachers, which accommodates not only content knowledge, but also pedagogical skills and practical experience. This model also helps to reach a large population and provide training. However, this cascade model has been perceived as ineffective, as discussed in the previous chapter, section 1.3.

Along with the focus on improving teaching and EFL teachers, Project 2020 places an emphasis on learning aspects and students. The reform aims to cultivate a generation of

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

well-educated Vietnamese graduates with good English language skills in addition to intercultural and communicative competencies. The government's Decision 1400 states that:

...by the year 2020, most Vietnamese youth graduating from vocational schools, colleges and universities will be able to use a foreign language independently and confidently to communicate, learn and work in an environment of integration, multilingualism and multiculturalism. Foreign languages will be a strength of the Vietnamese people, and will serve the cause of industrialisation and modernisation for the country. (Vietnamese Government, 2008, Decision 1400, p. 1, as cited and translated in Nguyen, 2018, p. 96)

With the enactment of the government's Decision 1400 and the National Foreign Language Project (Project 2020), the ultimate emphasis is on foreign language proficiency so that, by the year 2020, most Vietnamese young graduates from vocational schools, colleges and universities gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently, to communicate confidently, and to be able to work and study in a multicultural environment with a variety of languages. The proficiency framework, therefore, applies to students at all levels of the Vietnamese educational system (Table 2.2) as a graduation requirement. As can be seen in Table 2.2, arguably, upper high school students and university graduates, irrespective of their major area of study, are supposed to achieve Level 3 of the framework in order to be eligible for graduation. Although a great amount of money has been budgeted for the development of VSTEP, many universities have opted for TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) because of the credibility gap in the quality of the locally produced tests and test administration (C. V. Le, 2017).

In tertiary education, EFL is an important instructional focus (Le & Chen, 2019). English is taught as a compulsory non-major subject in the first two years at university and is increasingly used in ESP courses, where students learn language related to core specialist subjects, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, business, tourism, and nursing, in English. To meet the requirements of the education reform and the country's industrialisation and modernisation process, together with the ability to use foreign languages to communicate independently and confidently, there is a growing demand for graduates with broader skills. These include critical thinking, initiative, collaboration, information literacy, planning and management skills, capacity for lifelong learning and

self-learning, and flexibility. Given these changes, teaching pedagogy should be re-considered and outdated teaching methods should be replaced with more appropriate pedagogical practices. Harman and Nguyen (2010), who have worked in World Bank higher education projects in Vietnam as consultants, suggest student-centred teaching has the potential to motivate deep learning and result in learners acquiring higher order critical, analytical, behavioural, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

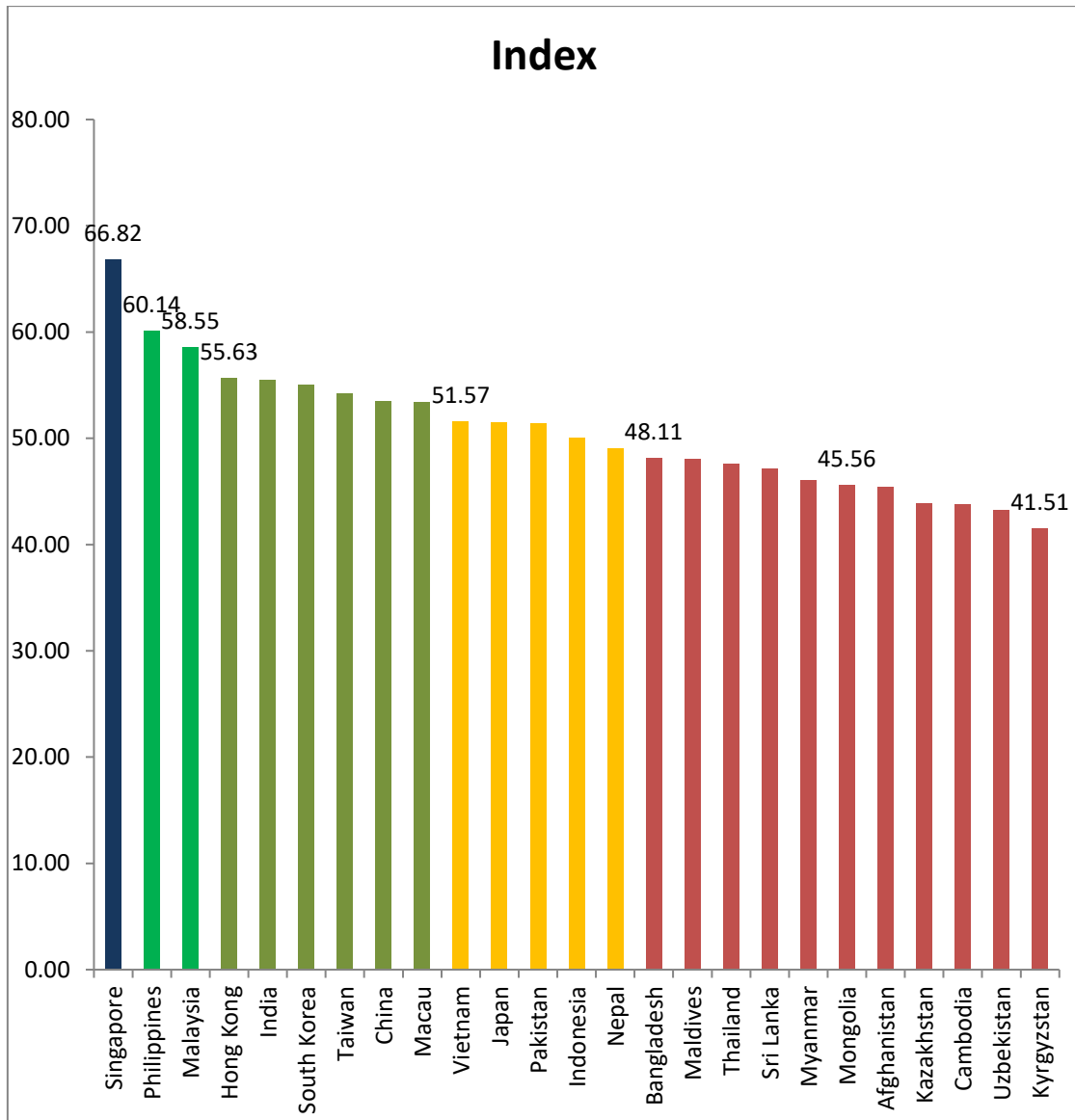
Table 2.2 English proficiency requirement for students in Vietnamese educational system

Level 6	CEFR C2 IELTS 8.0 – 9.0 Cambridge CPE								
Level 5	CEFR C1 IELTS 7.0 – 8.0 Cambridge CAE								
Level 4	CEFR B2 IELTS 5.5 – 6.5 Cambridge FCE								
Level 3	CEFR B1 IELTS 4.0 – 5.0 Cambridge PET								
Level 2	CEFR A2 Cambridge KET								
Level 1	CEFR A1 Cambridge Movers								
English level	Equivalent	Primary school students	Lower secondary school students	Upper secondary school students	Vocational training school students	Non-English major college students	Non-English major university students	English major college students	English major university students

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

Given the long-term vision of the national reform and Project 2020, the enactment prompted education institutions, English teachers and learners and Vietnamese people in general to face and seek solutions to several long-standing problems as well as the potential challenges related to English language teaching in the country (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). For institutions, considering the situation on the ground, there has been much to discuss with regard to curricula, textbooks, assessments, and teaching and learning facilities. For teachers, the reform targets have created a central role for English teachers in enacting the government policies and required them to undertake professional learning and development activities to improve their language proficiency, pedagogical competencies, and practices.

From the learners' point of view, the rhetoric and the reality of the policy and Vietnamese students' English ability still do not match. The English Proficiency Index (see Figure 2.3) shows English proficiency levels of Vietnamese students in 2019, in comparison with students from other countries across the region. The Education First (EF) Standard English Test is a standardised online test of English language ability designed for non-native English speakers. The test is set up and administered by EF, a global language training company based in the USA. The 2019 test involved 2.3 million test takers from 100 countries worldwide. The Education First English Proficiency Index places the surveyed countries and territories into five proficiency bands, from *very high* to *very low*. Education First (2019) ranked Vietnam's English proficiency 52nd out of 100 surveyed countries and regions and regionally 10th out of 25 Asian countries, falling into the low proficiency category. Vietnam's score for 2019 was 51.57, compared to the highest-rated Asian countries; Singapore (66.82), the Philippines (60.14) and Malaysia (58.55).



Proficiency:

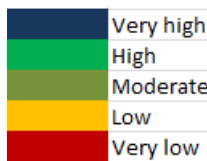


Figure 2.3 EF EPI ranking of Asian countries and regions (Education First, 2019)

The following discussion of bilingual policies and the status of English in Singapore and the Philippines aims to foster a comparative perspective on the enactment of English language education policy in Vietnam. Singapore and the Philippines are two countries where multilingualism is an expectation and a norm. A Bilingual Education Policy has been enacted since 1965 in Singapore (Jain & Wee, 2019) and since 1974 in the Philippines (Young & Igalinos, 2019). In the Philippines, beside the national language

of Filipino, English is an official language, serving as a medium for business transactions and as the primary medium of instructions in schools (Young & Igcainos, 2019). In Singapore, besides ethnic mother tongues such as Mandarin, Tamil, Malay and others, English is the ethnically neutral language and “serves as the inter-ethnic lingua franca as well as the language of socio-economic mobility and global advancement” (Jain & Wee, 2019, p. 273). A snapshot of Singapore and the Philippines in relation to government policies and education reforms raises a number of questions for Vietnam. We may wonder if the Vietnamese education system, education institutions, teachers, and students have been prepared for the reform. We may wonder if the reform goals are adequate and achievable from the perspectives of the stakeholders involved. We may wonder what will happen to students who are able to achieve the required proficiency levels and to teachers if they are unable to improve their language proficiency. We may also wonder what support channels and means will be provided to help elevate English teaching and learning quality. Another question relevant to the wider Vietnamese society is whether there will be a social division between those who can speak English and those who cannot, because of the greater prestige and value accorded to English, similar to what happened in the early 1900s between the French-speaking elite and Vietnamese-speaking laypersons. Within the low-immersion ELT context of Vietnam, where English is learned in the classroom rather than spoken in daily life (C. D. Nguyen, 2017), these questions are still unanswered.

The following section discusses further challenges to meet the reform targets.

2.7 Challenges to reaching the reform targets

There have been controversial responses to the impacts of Project 2020 from its beginnings through to the present day (Bui, 2016; Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Le & Barnard, 2009; Le & Yeo, 2016; Nguyen & Mai, 2015). Most previous studies focused on school-level teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of new curricula and the standardised benchmark requirements for teachers’ English proficiency. With respect to research on perceptions of Project 2020’s impacts on teachers’ professional learning, there were positive outcomes in Nguyen et al.’s (2020) very recent qualitative case study using activity theory to conceptualise teacher professional learning. Nguyen et al. (2020) found that Project 2020 has created positive impacts on teachers’ motivation to enhance their professional learning; however, teachers in their study “have a strong desire for ‘true’

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

professional learning and are in real need of professional development for their effective teaching” (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 92). In order to achieve this as well as other reform targets, the following challenges need to be considered.

A lack of qualified teachers at all levels is one of the inherent challenges in the enactment of the government’s reform policy (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; C. V. Le, 2017). It is important to note that quality of teachers in this context refers both to their language proficiency and pedagogical competencies. Project 2020 has a total budget of VND10 trillion (US\$480 million), divided into three stages: Stage 1 (2008-2010), Stage 2 (2011-2015), and Stage 3 (2016-2020) (Le, 2020; MOET, 2008; Viet Toan, 2013, March 27). After the second stage of the project, the aim was to improve Vietnamese EFL teachers’ English proficiency to meet the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels set out by the government as discussed in section 2.6. As mentioned earlier, the NFL Project 2020 requires primary and lower secondary teachers to reach level B2 CEFR while upper secondary teachers are expected to reach level C1 CEFR. Unfortunately, this objective was not achieved. According to a report on orientations in testing and assessment of English in the Vietnamese national education system between 2013 and 2020, 83% of primary teachers, 87% of lower secondary teachers, and 91.8% of upper secondary teachers did not meet the required benchmark levels (N. H. Nguyen, 2013). These data were acknowledged again by Nguyen Ngoc Hung from the NFL Project 2020 in a review report by Truong (2017). Only 0.1% of upper secondary school teachers achieved level C2 according to the CEFR (T. Nguyen, 2017).

There were a number of reasons for the failure of stage 2 of the project in terms of improving teachers’ English proficiency. The first reason was that the CEFR framework had not been used to guide language syllabus design in teacher training programmes in Vietnam, explaining teachers’ lack of familiarity with the language test format and their limited language proficiency, probably due to low entry levels of English language proficiency (C. V. Le, 2017). Secondly, after the teacher education programmes, there were no means by which teachers could build their language proficiency and develop their language practical skills outside the classroom, and the lack of opportunities to practice English language contributed to teachers’ limited English proficiency (Phan, 2015). Also, teachers’ use of English is often confined to teaching lower-level classes for a long period of time, which makes it challenging for teachers to maintain their English proficiency (Nguyen & Mai, 2015). Another possible explanation is mentioned in Mai’s

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

study (2014). In his study, a number of teachers stated that most of the English enhancement courses they were required to take were designed for getting them to pass CEFR tests, rather than cultivating the pedagogical competencies they needed to be able to do their job. Thus, “there is little guarantee that teachers’ language proficiency will be improved after the retraining programmes” (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019, p. 195).

Although EFL teachers in Vietnam are aware of the reforms and initiatives, researchers have observed that teaching in Vietnam’s higher education institutions continues to be conducted mainly in a traditional way; teachers present knowledge to students (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. N. Pham, 2010). T. N. Pham (2010) and Le and Chen (2019) point out that traditional methods in language teaching with a focus on grammar, translation, and drills still have a strong hold on Vietnamese ELT. This observation has been reflected in teacher education programmes as reported in a study by Kieu Thi Kinh and her colleagues (2016). To identify challenges in education for sustainable development implementation in teacher education institutions in Vietnam, these authors interviewed 10 teachers and 75 student teachers in five teacher education institutions across Vietnam and organised focus groups with groups of student teachers at each university. One of the challenges reported was the prevalence of top-down pedagogy and teacher-centred teaching with a focus on content-based teaching, which requires student teachers to memorise knowledge rather than achieve competencies (Kieu et al., 2016). Pham (2002) presented a possible reason from his own teaching experience, noting that many of the older teachers in Vietnam “undertook training in the past, when modern approaches and methods had not reached the country yet, and were deprived of the knowledge of modern teaching methods” (p. 36). These teachers tend to apply these approaches in their practice and their students in turn follow what they learn during their own learning experience.

Another possible explanation for the long-standing of traditional teaching practice in Vietnam’s educational settings could be the disproportionate disparity between English language knowledge and skills and the pedagogical knowledge and skills of teachers. There is also a mismatch between expected learning outcomes and programme design (Mai & Pham, 2019). In their review comparing Vietnam’s English language teacher education programme with similar EFL teacher training programmes abroad, such as American or Australian programmes, Mai and Pham (2019) argued that Vietnamese English teacher education programmes were structured to develop English language competencies rather than focusing on pedagogical training in methods.

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

One example was provided from the EFL teacher education programme at the prestigious University for Languages and International Studies of the Vietnam National University – Hanoi (VNU ULIS). The VNU ULIS programme consists of 133 credits. The first two years of the programme offer many courses in English language knowledge and skills development, and the last two years offer courses in general pedagogical knowledge for teaching a range of subjects, such as psychology, English teaching methodology, and higher-level linguistic courses, such as morphology, semantics, and syntax. From Mai and Pham's observation, knowledge of specific methods for teaching the four English skills is taught in the final year but only for a short time and the focus is primarily on theories. As part of this programme, students are required to have one official 6-week practicum, during which they are sent to schools to observe teaching and learning and to familiarise themselves with practical teaching realities. The purpose of the practicum is for students to learn and gain experience from real teaching and learning contexts. However, Mai and Pham's (2019) findings from oral feedback sessions with VNU ULIS students (from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017) show that this practicum was quite short and sometimes ineffective because students had a tendency to follow exactly the teaching steps and lesson plans of the school teachers, without analysing their effectiveness, because they wanted to satisfy the school teachers, who were perceived as having more experience and knowledge of the teaching contexts. The findings in this study support the results M. H. Nguyen (2013) reported in her comparative study of two curricula for English teacher education in an Australian university and a Vietnamese university, mentioned earlier in section 2.4. This was not an unusual finding but it has a particular impact on perpetuating traditional methods in Vietnam in a way that might undermine new initiatives.

Teachers' beliefs play a vital role in shaping decision-making and practices. However, the enactment of policy and implementation of changes by EFL teachers in Vietnam are complicated by various factors, including teachers' poor English proficiency and skills, disparity between teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, a mismatch between expected learning outcomes and programme design, heavy teaching workloads, inadequate teacher education and training, and contextual constraints (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Le, 2007; Mai & Pham, 2019; Pham, 2002). Nguyen and Mai (2015) conducted a study investigating in-service Vietnamese EFL teachers' responses to the government language proficiency requirements imposed on them. In this study, 350 teachers working

Chapter 2: Scene Setting

in four Northern provinces of Vietnam completed a language proficiency self-assessment survey. Subsequently, 44 teachers were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews, and five of the 44 teachers then participated in several in-depth and repeated interviews over a 10-week period. The findings reported that the teachers wanted a more appropriate support framework to improve their English proficiency, while acknowledging that they considered themselves to be competent teachers. Critically, the current literature fails to explain how changes in educational policy impact professional learning and how teachers develop their professional learning within their work context (Nguyen et al., 2020). This also echoes the need for developing teachers' agency to implement innovative practices and changes through appropriate and ongoing professional learning and development.

In the current educational context, the national reform, particularly in English language teaching, has emphasised the central role of English teachers in 'implementing' government policies and has required them to undertake professional learning and development activities to improve their language proficiency, pedagogical competencies, and practices. However, taking the above challenges into consideration, there are likely some gaps between teachers' proficiency and pedagogical competencies and practices, and between language policy and practical policy implementation in Vietnam. These gaps will be followed up in the Chapter Six, section 6.5.3. Higher education teachers generally, and EFL teachers particularly, need support to enact and achieve the government's initiatives. However, from the observations and arguments presented above, there is a need for a more practice-based and collective approach to 'meaningful' teacher professional learning and development, as mentioned earlier in Nguyen et al. (2020). This is likely to build a foundation for continuous professional learning throughout teachers' careers.

In her doctoral research, Huong Nguyen (2015) argued that from her observation of the reforms in Vietnam, "more attention is paid to the state of change. That is, people appear to support the surface activities, talk about innovative terms, or evaluate the final products rather than [go] into the deep structure of the process of innovations" (p. 248). C. V. Le (2017) reference to "surface changes" (p. 191) may be somewhat overstated as some progress has been observed as a result of the reform agenda (Nguyen et al., 2020). My study did not aim to be interventionist, directing the evolution in teachers' professional behaviour in a more desirable way (Gurney, 2015). In this study, rather than focusing on

the learning activities per se, or the final state of change, I sought to focus on the inquiry process of teacher learning through enactment and reflection, individually and collectively, and to gain insights into how teachers translated new learning into practice and how this inquiry process shaped teacher professional learning.

2.8 Chapter summary

English language teaching cannot be understood thoroughly without being bound in local educational context. This chapter has briefly introduced the historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural background of Vietnam to set the scene for this research project. English language teacher education programmes have been discussed to provide some insights into the transition between pre-service and in-service training of teachers in Vietnam and its potential impact on teaching staff. The chapter has also presented an overview of the HERA and Project 2020, focusing on improving the Vietnamese education system, quality of teaching and learning English in Vietnam to provide insights into teacher professional learning context in Vietnam, discussed both in this chapter and in the previous chapter, in section 1.3. Finally, the chapter has presented several challenges for the country, education institutions, teachers and students to reach the reform targets. All of these have justified the rationale for and significance of the current study.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter first reviews key literature on student-centred approaches (SCA) in English language teaching, which serves as the content focus of the teachers' professional learning in this study (section 3.2). The chapter then explores the construct of teacher cognition, in particular the concepts, the nature of teachers' beliefs and the factors shaping teachers' beliefs (section 3.3), and how teachers' beliefs relate to knowledge and practice. The focus is then narrowed to studies on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs and practices in the Vietnamese context. Section 3.4 reviews the literature related to teacher professional learning and paradigm shifts in teacher professional learning. This study is grounded via the two theoretical lenses of teacher learning: constructivist and situative, which are highlighted in the chapter. As this study was located in Vietnam with a focus on teachers of EFL, I provide a brief overview of professional learning of EFL teachers in general and tertiary teachers in Vietnam in particular. Finally, the chapter summarises and highlights the research gaps in which the present study situates itself.

3.2 Student-centred approaches

Student-centred approaches have been well established in the past decades in language teaching (Amini, 2011; Nunan, 1988; T. T. H. Pham, 2010). However, being a broad, multifaceted, and evolving concept, there is little agreement on the meaning of *student-centredness* (Bremner, 2019; Paris & Combs, 2006). In many cases, the term is used freely, without definition, and with a presumption of shared understanding of the term (Paris & Combs, 2006). As a result, *student-centredness* can mean different things to different people, which has led to confusion surrounding its implementation (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, a student-centred approach is not a method, nor a set of techniques (Tudor, 1993, 1996). Student-centredness is used to refer to a broad pedagogical philosophy, which includes a cluster of approaches (Nunan, 1988) or "a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning" (Anthony, 1963, p. 63). I used Bremner's (2019) definition of student-centred pedagogy as:

Chapter 3: Literature Review

a teaching approach in which learners cease to be passive receivers of knowledge and become more active participants in their own learning process; learning is contextualised, meaningful, and based, wherever possible, around learners' prior knowledge, needs and interests; finally, learning is more dialogic and democratic, and learners have more control with regard to what and how they learn. (p. 54)

Bremner's (2019) definition of student-centred pedagogy entails a philosophy of student-centredness. Student-centredness encourages students' autonomous participatory and active learning, empowers students to think independently, construct their own knowledge and draw their own conclusions, and develops students as critical thinkers and independent learners (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Pham & Renshaw, 2013). To achieve these aims, both teachers and students are required to take on significantly different roles to support students' active and independent learning. SCA is highly influenced by context, due to the differences in students' needs, characteristics, motivations, and the beliefs that they bring to the class.

Discussion of student-centredness varies in terms of focus and interpretations. Pedersen and Liu (2003) discuss student-centred approaches focusing on the goals of student learning, the roles of the teacher and the student, students' motivational orientation, assessments, and student interactions. In revisiting the literature on student-centred education, White (2007) identifies four key interpretations that have guided and characterised practices of student-centred language teaching. They are student-centredness as relevance, as responsiveness, as commitment to knowledge construction, and as a prevailing culture of enquiry. First, student-centredness as relevance means that learners' needs are identified and considered by teachers, which is in line with Bremner's (2019) view above. Second, responsiveness focuses on the ways in which teachers are responsive to aspects of individual learners and their learning; for example, their prior knowledge, background, interests, and experiences (see also Bremner, 2019). Third, student-centredness as commitment to knowledge construction by the learner means that learners become more active participants in their own learning process (see also Bremner, 2019). In other words, students "must make sense of new language and experiences in the context of their unique world view, and teaching should create and sustain personally meaningful connections between language context and the lived experience and world of each learner" (White, 2007, p. 322). Finally, student-centredness as a prevailing culture

Chapter 3: Literature Review

of inquiry means that teachers and students are involved in parallel processes of ongoing learning.

Empirical studies have also been conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of SCA (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Brinkmann, 2019; Pedersen & Liu, 2003). Conducting an empirical study, Paris and Combs (2006) explored what teachers meant when they said they were student-centred. Interview data from twelve primary teachers, four secondary teachers and two teacher educators found that student-centredness meant placing students as the starting point for curriculum making (see also Bremner, 2019), teacher and students as co-participants in the learning process (see also Bremner, 2019; Pedersen and Liu, 2003) and students' active engagement in their learning process (see Bremner, 2019; White, 2007). As previously mentioned, there are overlapping as well as different meanings underlying student-centred pedagogy among these scholars.

The emergence of SCA in language teaching resonates with a strong tradition of students' active involvement and engagement in English language teaching and learning. A number of classroom practices, which have gained wide currency in ELT, are believed to promote student-centred teaching and learning, including the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Approach, Project-based Approach, and Problem-based Approach (Pedersen & Liu, 2003). Common to these approaches are engaging students in communicative processes of information exchange, negotiation of meaning and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), and presenting students with a central question in different forms, including a problem, an issue, or a project, which is framed as a goal for student learning. Learning is a result of students' efforts to develop a response (a solution, an opinion, a decision, a plan of action, a design or a project product) to that question (Pedersen & Liu, 2003). All of these represent student-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

As briefly discussed in section 1.3, in this study, student-centred approaches relevant to EFL teaching and learning were used as a content focus of teacher learning or "knowledge-for-practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 254), which relates to constructivist views of learning (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). See Appendix A for a framework of student-centred approaches applied in the study. This framework was developed based on the four main strategies in student-centred teaching practices suggested by O'Neill and McMahon (2005): making students more active in acquiring

Chapter 3: Literature Review

knowledge and skills; making students more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it; focusing on interaction; and emphasising transferrable skills.

As mentioned earlier, together with the application of student-centred approaches as a content focus of teacher learning, teacher inquiry was used as a tool to drive the teachers' reflection and the co-construction of new learning. This was planned through a series of six *inquiries*, each of which represented one aspect of student-centred pedagogy. These inquiries were designed based on my own readings, my professional understanding of SCA, and effective approaches to English language teaching, according to the literature. Each inquiry included an *overview*, providing knowledge for practice of SCA for teachers, a *try-things-out* with a selection of activities that teachers implemented in their classroom, and a *reflection* to learn about the constraints, opportunities and potential improvement when teachers applied the approaches in general and the activities in particular (see Appendix B for an example). The six aspects of student-centred pedagogy in EFL used in the inquiries were:

- Creating opportunities for language output
- Creating opportunities for student interaction
- Supporting students' thinking beyond language repetition and information recall
- Fostering the use of metacognitive language learning strategies
- Supporting self-regulated language learning
- Encouraging autonomous language learning.

3.2.1 Predominant pedagogical approaches to teaching English in Vietnam

The aim of this section is not to look at the history of English language teaching approaches but to provide the bigger picture of how these approaches may have influenced the learning experiences and teaching practices of the teachers in this study.

Although the impact of student-centred approaches in language teaching, such as CLT, has been observed since the 1960s (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf Jr, & Moni, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Tudor, 1993, 1996), these approaches were introduced in Vietnam rather later than in other countries (Le & Barnard, 2009). C. D. Nguyen (2017) found that English language teaching in Vietnam between the 1980s and the 1990s was still characterised by 'traditional methods', which placed an emphasis on grammar, vocabulary and reading; for example, Grammar-Translation, Behaviourism and the

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Audiolingual Approach (C. D. Nguyen, 2017). Although these approaches have made important contributions to second and foreign language teaching and learning around the world and in Vietnam in particular, they are criticised for being too focused on forms and structures and creating passive practices of language learning. Nowadays, linguists doubt the efficacy of these approaches (Matamoros-González, Rojas, Romero, Vera-Quiñonez, & Soto, 2017).

In Vietnam, traditional teaching methods have been popularly used at all levels of education (L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018). However, a number of teachers perceive a need for change. C. D. Nguyen (2017) conducted a narrative interview study with six EFL primary teachers in two cities in Vietnam to examine the teachers' reflections on their EFL learning experience during their secondary education, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. On a broader level, the study explored the connections between the teachers' learning experience and their teaching practice. The prevalence of grammar-focused practices in all EFL classes were central to the teachers' narrative stories; however, the teachers were not content with these practices. The teachers learned and reported that the prevailing approaches to teaching of that time were no longer appropriate for language education; as a result, they were prepared for change. The teachers' narratives also explained that historical contexts with limited access to the modern ELT world created a barrier for teachers, inhibiting their exploration of new approaches to teaching. The study helps explain why traditional teaching approaches are still observed in Vietnamese EFL teaching today.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach is a well-known, contemporary approach to English language teaching. This approach aims to promote communicative competence among language learners and make them more actively involved in their learning process, beyond repetitive drilling practice as in the audio-lingual method and language structures as in the grammar translation method (Kim, 2014; Matamoros-González et al., 2017). In addition to CLT, linguists have proposed other ways of teaching English language, including the Task-based Approach, Project-based Approach, and Problem-based Approach. The focus of these approaches is aligned with the principles of student-centred approaches; in other words, student-centred philosophy "emerged as an offspring of communicative language learning" (Nunan, 1990, p. 179). In English language instruction, the development of a student-centred approach has come with the advent of communicative language teaching as a "cluster of approaches than a

single methodology” (Nunan, 1988, p. 24). Therefore, I use the phrase *student-centred approaches* to refer to this cluster of approaches as a content focus of this study.

The discussion above highlights different approaches to ELT employed in Vietnam. Under the English language reforms promoting more active learning and student-centred teaching, despite SCA being a common pedagogical construct for teachers at all education levels, it has been subject to multiple interpretations (Tudor, 1993). Its broad, flexible and evolving concept has meant different things to different people (Nunan, 1999; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005; Tudor, 1993).

The next section examines the implementation of SCA in Vietnam and the potential conflicts and challenges that EFL teachers and learners have encountered.

3.2.2 Implementation of SCA in Vietnam

Despite the wide implementation of student-centredness across socio-educational contexts (Bremner, 2019; Brinkmann, 2019; Dang, 2006), after the Vietnamese Government’s policies and MOET’s directives about English language reforms, this approach has been cautiously adopted in higher education in Vietnam (Dang, 2006). A few studies have explored student-centred pedagogy in Vietnamese tertiary classrooms (Dang, 2006; T. V. Le, 2014; Nguyen, Dekker, & Goedhart, 2008; V. T. Nguyen, 2011). In his study, Dang (2006) examined how student-centredness was employed in EFL teaching at a teacher training college in Vietnam. The data were drawn from document reviews, a classroom observation, an in-depth interview with a teacher and six EFL undergraduate students of a *chất lượng cao* (high quality – both high proficiency and academically strong) class. During the classroom implementation, students were asked to join group discussions, give presentations, and participated in whole-class discussion. Dang (2006) found that the students had positive attitudes towards student-centredness, and that students were involved actively in their learning. He also critiqued the assumption that Vietnamese students were passive by nature and found that their learning was influenced by learning conditions. He found that when the students were equipped with appropriate EFL teaching and learning conditions and resources, such as comfortable furniture and technologically advanced equipment, students made full use of available opportunities to develop their self-study skills (Dang, 2006).

In his study, Dang (2006) also found factors that supported the development and enhancement of students’ active participation in learning activities. These factors

Chapter 3: Literature Review

comprised four key elements: teachers, learners, tasks and contexts. To be specific, first, the teaching and learning of the high quality class was positively influenced by different levels of contexts, such as national, organisational policies, and favourable classroom atmosphere. Second, the supportive learning tasks, which were representations of the curriculum and syllabus, learning material, learning activities and assessment, gave teachers and students much more freedom in covering the content relevant to the students' needs and interests. Third, the success of student-centred instruction resulted from teachers who had an awareness of their roles from a student-centred perspective, and a vision of the ideal student-centred classroom, involving fairness, enthusiasm and constructive attitudes towards students and teaching. Finally, various student attributes were also identified that affect students' involvement, notably their personal characteristics and the way they responded to a student-centred approach. Students were aware of their roles and performed these roles in accordance with the principles of student-centredness.

In contrast with the findings of Dang (2006), some Vietnamese scholars have explored numerous constraints and difficulties in relation to student-centredness. One of these factors is the cultural context of education; as Broadfoot (2001) argues, pedagogies do not often produce the same outcome in a different cultural context. This view aligns with the finding by Dang (2006) that at the classroom level, in a classroom culture valuing an open and non-threatening atmosphere, there was a good rapport between teachers and students and among students, respect for one another's ideas, and a spirit of assistance and cooperation had a direct and significant impact on constructing and developing involvement in students. The cultural context of education is also linked to the teaching philosophy applied. In Lewis and McCook's study (2002), using CLT as a form of SCA, fourteen Vietnamese high school teachers of English noted that they retained traditional views and methods while using CLT in class. Particularly, the teachers focused on teaching not only oral skills, but also writing skills. Furthermore, valuing the cultural traditions of memorisation and perfection, the teachers thought that memorising and understanding played a significant role in language acquisition as they helped students with fluency and accuracy of language forms (Lewis & McCook, 2002). Various explanations may account for this phenomenon, as reviewed in Phan (2008). CLT has been criticised for its inappropriateness to teachers and students in countries where successful teaching and learning is measured in examinations; its additional workload in

Chapter 3: Literature Review

designing lessons; and its conflict with Asian learning settings, such as material design, large size class, and a lack of funding for ELT (Phan, 2008).

In her work, T. T. H. Pham (2010) applied Casual Layered Analysis (CLA) as a framework to examine factors influencing the application of SCA in Vietnam. CLA has four main components, each of which investigates a level of the problem from the surface to the deepest. The component levels are described as litany, cause, worldview, and metaphor. The results indicated that the application of SCA was influenced by various tensions, contradictions, and invisible drivers at different levels of CLA. At the litany level, the weaknesses of the dominant teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning were analysed and criticised for their inadequacy in providing students with newly-required thinking and learning skills such as communication, cooperation and independent learning. Systematic causes involved local infrastructure conditions and limited resources, such as class size, material limitations, and curriculum coverage requirements. For the worldview and metaphor levels, a number of cultural elements were raised such as teaching and learning perceptions, culture of power distance and face saving, and the influence of Confucian philosophies. T. T. H. Pham (2010) suggested that Vietnamese traditional teaching approaches and SCA embodied different, even opposing philosophies about the nature of teaching and learning. Consequently, there might be some potential conflicts in several aspects. This view echoes the work of Phan (2008), which found that pedagogical values of innovative student-centred approaches “have conflicted with a number of cultural and professional values embedded in the practice of teaching and learning in Asia” (p. 91), including Vietnam. Examples include the role of the teacher in society and issues of respect between teacher and student.

The teachers’ incorporation of traditional aspects of language teaching into their adoption of SCA, as in Lewis and McCook (2002) and Pham (2016), illustrates the need for considering cultural continuity in teachers’ uptake of SCA (Chu, 2014). Considering social and cultural influences in Vietnam, other Vietnamese scholars suggested that the adoption of SCA should be modified or bridged to become culturally appropriate in the Vietnamese context (Pham, 2016; Pham, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to elaborate more on SCA conceptions and enactment, as well as socio-cultural and contextual factors, in the Vietnamese ELT context.

3.3 Teachers' cognition

Research on teacher cognition in the 1990s and 2000s has helped capture the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, and what they do in the classroom (Kang & Cheng, 2014). The construct of teacher cognition is commonly discussed in relation to the process of teacher learning, in which teachers play a central role. In a broad sense, teacher cognition refers to “what teachers know, believe and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). With regard to language education, Borg (2006b) defines language teacher cognition as an inclusive term referring to “the complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language teachers draw on in their work“ (p. 272). In reviewing research from the field of foreign and second language teaching into teacher cognition, Borg (2003, 2006a, 2006b) observes that language teacher cognition is commonly examined with a critical link to classroom practice and other aspects of their work. Recent research and scholarship have experienced a shift towards constructivist and situative perspectives of teacher learning and teacher cognition with complexities being inherent. These two perspectives are further explored in section 3.4.

This study focuses teachers' cognition on teachers' beliefs and knowledge that are affected by participation in the inquiry process. Further explorations of these components in relation to teachers' practice are presented in subsequent sections of this chapter.

3.3.1 Teachers' beliefs

Teachers' beliefs, a subset of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003), have been substantially discussed in the literature for more than half of a century (Bijan, Zohreh, & Nasrin, 2020; Fives & Gill, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Purwanti & Hatmanto, 2020; Richardson, 1996). Beliefs play an important role in many aspects of teaching as they help individuals make sense of the world and influence how new information is perceived. Teachers' beliefs is a complex concept because there have been multitudes of terms and variations of definitions from scholars within and across the fields. Pajares (1992) identifies a list of other terms used interchangeably in the literature on teachers' beliefs: attitudes, values, judgments, perceptions, conceptions, assumptions, implicit theory, personal theory and the like. In his literature review, Borg (2003) identifies sixteen different terms for teacher cognition that have been used in the literature in the last few decades, such as personal

Chapter 3: Literature Review

pedagogical systems, theories for practice, personal practical knowledge, practical knowledge, personal theories, pedagogical reasoning and the like.

While Kagan (1992) defines teachers' beliefs as an unconscious assumption about students, classrooms, and the academic materials to be taught, Borg (2001) views belief as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment" (p. 186). Taking a similar stance to Borg's view about teachers' beliefs as a system, Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis (2004) introduce beliefs as:

statements teachers made about their ideas, thoughts, and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what 'should be done', 'should be the case', and 'is preferable'. (Basturkmen et al., 2004, p. 244)

The term *beliefs* used in this study refers to teachers' pedagogical beliefs, which encompasses the essence of teachers' beliefs represented in Basturkmen et al.'s (2004) definition. The definition shows the interconnectedness between teachers' beliefs and practices and suggests the need to study teachers' beliefs in relation to their classroom practices.

The study of teachers' beliefs sets the foundation for the study of teacher learning in a number of ways. First, teachers' beliefs play a role as cognitive filters of information (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992); that is, beliefs influence how teachers interpret new information and experiences. In addition, teachers' beliefs are reflected in the ways teachers define or frame a problem, particularly ill-defined problems, or a task in the classroom (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Nespor, 1987). Once the problems are defined, teachers' beliefs are acknowledged to influence their thoughts and actions in practice (Borg, 2001; Borg, 2003; Elbaz, 1981; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Tamimy, 2015). Teachers' actions in this study refer to behaviours or practices undertaken by teachers to enhance student learning; for example, teachers adopt different pedagogies, select relevant teaching materials, and incorporate suitable learning activities to support student learning (Tam, 2015). Furthermore, teachers' beliefs guide the adoption of teaching strategies for solving practical challenges, and influence the processing of new information. To explain this, Farrell (2007) claims that "exploring language teachers' beliefs and corresponding classroom practices helps clarify how teachers can implement any changes to their approaches to teaching and learning over time" (p. 36). Teachers' beliefs, therefore, play

Chapter 3: Literature Review

a vital role in the design and delivery of teacher learning initiatives to improve teachers' practices through enhancement or adjustment of their beliefs (Gurney, 2015).

Teachers' beliefs have been controversial with regard to their implicit (unconscious) or explicit (conscious) nature. According to the implicit view, beliefs "guide a teacher's behavior and filter interpretation of teaching experiences without the teacher's awareness" (Fives & Buehl, 2012, p. 474). Therefore, teachers are unable to control their implicit beliefs and are not influenced by personal reflective practice (Nespor, 1987). Fives and Buehl (2012) argue that this view of implicit beliefs shows a lack of understanding of the beliefs of which teachers are aware and rely on to guide their practice. In contrast, explicit beliefs refer to a deliberate and conscious approach that requires justification for beliefs to be maintained or adjusted (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Discussion of teachers' beliefs also refers to espoused and enacted beliefs. Espoused beliefs are those that teachers state through verbal or written communication, whereas enacted beliefs are reflected in the analysis of actual teacher actions or planned actions (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

3.3.2 Teachers' beliefs and teachers' practices

Discussion of teachers' beliefs in the literature typically includes the connection between beliefs and practices. Empirical studies of teachers' beliefs have provided evidence of diverse relationships between beliefs and practices. These include congruence between beliefs and practices, incongruence between beliefs and practices, and reciprocal but complex relationships between beliefs and practices.

There has been support for the view that teachers enact practices based on the beliefs they hold (Johnson, 1992; Kim, 2014; Lin, Chuang, & Hsu, 2014; Thomas, 2013). In contrast, findings from other studies have led researchers to conclude that teachers' beliefs are not always consistent with their classroom practices (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Brinkmann, 2015; Kaymakamoğlu, 2018). Apparent inconsistencies may be because teachers hold different beliefs simultaneously (Levin, 2015) and sometimes these beliefs are contradictory (Kang & Cheng, 2014).

Another alternative to those positions is that there is a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices depending on teachers' experience (Aliakbari & Mohsen, 2015; Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013); the teaching context (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Levin, 2015); prior knowledge and learning experience (Levin, 2015);

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Tamimy, 2015); planned or unplanned aspects of classroom practice (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Johnson, 1992; Tamimy, 2015); culture (Ashton, 2015); and wider social and institutional contexts (Buehl & Beck, 2015).

Due to the distinct nature of language teaching, Borg (2006b) notes that the relationship between language teacher cognition and practice is not linear or unidirectional due to a number of mediating factors. These include both personal and contextual factors. Personal factors involve teachers' needs, motivation, preferences, prior knowledge and experience. Different schools of thought have understood contextual aspects differently (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004). For example, anthropologically oriented approaches have defined context as "socially and culturally conditioned aspects of practical communities" (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004, p. 236), whereas cognitive science has viewed context as "constituted by environmental circumstances . . . and characteristics of tools and artifacts" (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004, p. 236). The combination of two learning perspectives in this study incorporates a wider discussion of contextual factors comprising the environmental classroom circumstances, faculty or department, institution, and socio-cultural aspects in which teachers work, some of which can be temporary and situational and some of which can be more enduring (Borg, 2006b; Levin, 2015). Interaction between contextual factors and teachers' cognition tends to occur in two ways: contextual factors may change teachers' cognition, or alter teachers' practices without changing the underlying cognition. The latter scenario can lead to a lack of congruence between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices. Borg (2006b) highlights the substantive role of context in language teaching and learning, and views language teaching and learning as "a process which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context, and experience" (p. 275).

Teachers' cognition, especially beliefs stemming from early experiences, has been controversially viewed as difficult to change and inflexible (Cabaroğlu & Roberts, 2000). This view represents a rigid structure of teachers' cognition (Pajares, 1992). However, evidence suggests that teachers' cognition does change (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Kang, 2008; Kang & Cheng, 2014; Larenas, Hernandez, & Navarrete, 2015). Changes in teachers' beliefs can be grouped into three areas, including developmental changes, changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs, and changes in in-service teachers' beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In a study of student teachers' cognition development involving 25 students in a sequence of three in-depth interviews, Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) reported development in the participants' cognition. They identified eleven change process categories, including awareness (of a discrepancy, conflict or coherence), confirmation (of existing beliefs), elaboration (reconstruction of beliefs), addition (of new beliefs), re-ordering (rearrangement of beliefs), relabeling (renaming of a construct), linking up (establishment of a connection between constructs), disagreement (rejection of existing beliefs), reversal (adoption of opposite beliefs), pseudo-change (false change) and no change. These change process categories have also been observed in in-service teachers, as in the following example.

In a qualitative longitudinal study, Borg (2011) examined the impact of an intensive 8-week in-service teacher education programme, a full-time Delta course (Diploma in English language teaching to adults) in the UK, on the beliefs of six language teachers. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews, coursework and tutor feedback, his study provided evidence that the programme had a considerable impact on the beliefs of the teachers studied. The programme allowed teachers to think more explicitly about, become aware of, and articulate their beliefs; to extend and consolidate beliefs they were initially – and sometimes tacitly – positively disposed to; to focus on ways of developing classroom practices which reflected their beliefs; and to develop links between their beliefs and theory. This conceptualisation of changes in teachers' beliefs resonates with the findings of Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) discussed above.

3.3.3 Teachers' beliefs and teachers' knowledge

The relationship between beliefs and knowledge has generated much research. The distinction between beliefs and knowledge is a controversial issue in educational research (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Attempts have been made to differentiate between the two constructs. Beliefs are regarded as having stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge; therefore, teachers' beliefs typically operate independently of the cognition associated with teachers' knowledge (Nespor, 1987). Basturkmen et al. (2004) define teachers' beliefs as subjective claims that the individual accepts or wants to be true, as well as individuals' evaluations of what should be, ought to be, or is preferable. In contrast, knowledge is characterised as having a truth component that can

Chapter 3: Literature Review

be externally verified or confirmed by the wider community. These views are reflected in the claim made by Borg (2001):

A belief is a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternatives beliefs may be held by others. . . . Knowledge must actually be true in some external sense. (p. 186)

Arguably, the condition of external verification by the larger community raises a concern regarding who is the larger community and what are the procedures of verification (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Empirically, these two constructs are difficult to disentangle as they are interwoven (Fives & Buehl, 2012) and inform one another (Freeman, 2002).

Considerable work has discussed the diverse characterisations of knowledge, stemming from developments in cognitive science. First, teachers' personal practical knowledge has been much discussed by Elbaz (1983), Clandinin (1985), and Fenstermacher (1994). Personal practical knowledge emphasises the nature of teacher knowledge being embedded in the teaching act, which is intuitive and tacit (Tsui, 2003). While Elbaz (1983) places an emphasis on the practical dimension of teacher knowledge, Clandinin (1985) places a focus on personal dimensions. Elbaz (1983) defines practical knowledge with "attention on the action and decision-oriented nature of the teacher's situation, and construes her knowledge as a function, in part, of her response to that situation" (p. 5). She asserts that a teacher's actions are informed by the teacher's theoretical knowledge of the subject matter and that practical knowledge closely ties to the teacher's experience and the specific contexts of the classroom. Clandinin (1985) states that personal practical knowledge is embodied in all the professional and personal experiences of the teacher, with a focus on the teacher's narratives. In this view, "theory and practice are viewed as inseparable; practice is seen as theory-in-action" (Clandinin, 1985, p. 364). Personal practical knowledge is viewed as tentative and subject to change. In other words, the dialectical view of theory and practice assumes that practice continues to shape the teacher's knowledge and how the teacher structures the practical classroom situation in accordance with her knowledge (Clandinin, 1985).

Similarly, Schön (1992) sees professional knowledge as knowing-in-action. In our day-to-day practice, we make innumerable judgments of quality or choices of solutions for situations for which we cannot state adequate criteria, rules or procedures. In such situations, we are dependent on tacit recognition, judgment, and skillful performance,

Chapter 3: Literature Review

which is called tacit knowledge, know-how, or knowing-in-action (Schön, 1992). This is a kind of knowing that does not stem from a prior intellectual operation (Schön, 1992) but is a subconscious process that we develop and refine as a consequence of learning from experience (Loughran, 2010). This view highlights the importance of reflection in the development of professional knowledge and professional expertise. According to Loughran (2010), through reflection on experience, “teachers’ knowledge-of-practice is developed and enhanced in ways that help to inform and shape their expertise” (p. 183). This argument is in line with the concept of *knowledge-in-practice – practical knowledge* for teachers proposed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), which is acquired in everyday life in classrooms through teachers’ reflections on practice, practical inquiries, or narrative accounts of practice. To improve this knowledge in practice, teachers need to have more opportunities to “examine and reflect on the knowledge that is implicit in good practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 262). This is discussed in further detail in section 3.4.6.

Discussion of personal practical knowledge in the studies cited above frequently refers to the situated nature of teacher knowledge. This means that teacher knowledge is shaped and developed contextually when the teacher acts in response to a particular practical and social context of teaching.

Knowledge has been theorised differently in educational research, as discussed above, and is organised into various taxonomies (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Shulman, 1986, 1987). In this thesis, knowledge is conceptualised as personal practical knowledge, knowing-in-action, or knowledge-in-practice, in alignment with Elbaz (1981); Fenstermacher (1994); Schön (1992), and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), and as knowledge-of-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hulme, 2013; Poekert, 2011), as discussed in section 3.4.6. The former practical type of knowledge is constructed through teachers’ reflection on and inquiry into their practices. The latter type focuses on teachers’ co-constructed knowledge through interaction and collaboration within inquiry communities, connecting teacher learning to larger educational contexts. From the two perspectives of knowledge in this study, it is not assumed that teachers’ knowledge is generated exclusively by experts and researchers who have studied teaching and learning; nor is teachers’ knowledge considered an exclusion of formal knowledge that teachers acquire prior to their entrance to the teaching careers. Rather, it is assumed that

professional expertise comes to a large extent from inside the teaching profession itself (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

3.3.4 Studies on EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in Vietnam

Numerous studies on teachers' beliefs have been conducted in English as a second language (ESL) contexts in English-speaking countries. Borg (2015) reviewed 180 studies on in-service teachers' beliefs and very few of them were in an Asian context. However, in practice, there have been a good number of studies on teachers' beliefs in Asian countries, most of which have been conducted in Hong Kong and Singapore, as reviewed by Le (2011) in his doctoral thesis. Because of the scarcity of research that examines the impact of teachers' beliefs on their actual practices in Vietnam, particularly in tertiary education (Pham & Hamid, 2013; Phan, 2018), I was particularly interested in reviewing studies on EFL teachers' beliefs in relation to their classroom practices in Vietnam. These studies emphasised aspects of student-centred pedagogy and learner autonomy; for example, the use of communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, questioning techniques, and effective instruction focusing on students' communicative skills.

The following studies (Hong & Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, Haworth, & Hansen, 2019; Phan, 2004) share a common focus on the congruence between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, in contrast to the study by Mai and Iwashita (2012) in which there was no practical dimension in the comparison.

Phan (2004) explored two Vietnamese teachers' accounts of their own teaching experiences of EFL in Vietnam. Findings from in-depth interviews and journal entries indicated that the two teachers valued the importance of using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the language classroom to promote students' grammatical competence. In practice, how the teachers helped their students in class was a reflection of what they believed. However, the study was analysed from the teachers' reported views and their perceived practices. What teachers espoused as their beliefs through verbal or written communication is likely to differ from their actual observed classroom actions (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

Similarly, Mai and Iwashita (2012) used a questionnaire to compare Vietnamese learners' and teachers' attitudes towards CLT in terms of four factors: grammar instruction, error correction, group and pair work, and the teacher's role. A quantitative analysis of the

Chapter 3: Literature Review

responses from 37 teachers and 88 university learners of English in Vietnam showed that both teachers and learners held favourable attitudes to CLT. However, the teachers in the study had more positive attitudes than the learners for all factors, except group and pair work. Similar to Phan's study (2004), in this study, practising teachers' beliefs were investigated in isolation from their classroom practices; in other words, questionnaire responses may not reflect actual classroom practice in universities in Vietnam. In addition, quantitative analysis of the data did not give insights into the exact nature of the participants' attitudes and the gaps between the teachers' and learners' attitudes.

Recently, Hong and Nguyen (2019) reported a descriptive study that explored teachers' beliefs and their practices with regard to the questioning strategy to scaffold students' reading comprehension. From a constructivist viewpoint, these two scholars described reading comprehension as an active and dynamic process of meaning making between the text, the readers' cognitive processes and their prior knowledge. Data from sixty-four EFL teachers in lower secondary schools in the Mekong delta region in Vietnam were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that the teachers believed that questioning techniques were helpful and effective in scaffolding students' reading comprehension in three ways – leading students to a new topic, arousing students' interest, and connecting students' individual experience to the text. The study indicated that the teachers' beliefs were aligned with their questioning practices in class. The study also highlighted that open-ended questions were reported to be the most frequently used by the teachers.

In another study, Nguyen et al. (2019) questioned eight English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Science lecturers from five colleges within one university in Vietnam regarding their beliefs about students' active learning. Findings showed that the eight ESP lecturers were aware of active learning as a student-centred approach. The study revealed that the lecturers' beliefs were aligned with their observed classroom practices – they tried to implement more active and interactive activities in their classroom practices. As a result of their attempts to include active learning in their classes, the lecturers recognised that their expected teaching roles changed as they became facilitators. Nguyen et al. (2019) concluded that the lecturers' core beliefs about their professional identities, as committed academic lecturers in this case, could influence their decision-making process in relation to changing their practices.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

However, evidence from other study of English language teaching in the Vietnamese context also indicated some disparity between what teachers believed and what they actually implemented in their classes. For example, Nguyen (2016) aimed to investigate English language teachers' beliefs and their reported practices regarding learner autonomy in Vietnam. Eighty-four teachers from six public universities in Vietnam were involved in a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire findings showed that the teachers emphasised the importance of enhancing learner autonomy and their vital role in creating opportunities for their students to develop learner autonomy skills. In reporting their practices in the interviews, the teachers' responses diverged from their questionnaire data. In the interviews, most of the teachers reported that they encouraged students to do further work on their own outside the classroom or participate in group in class. A small number of teachers reported that they created opportunities for students to develop more autonomous learning skills such as determining learning goals, making learning plans, or making choices on topics for learning and materials, and so on. Some evidence of the students' characteristics such as their ability and their attitudes, which influenced the alignment between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, was investigated. However, there is a need to conduct classroom observations to study teachers' practical enactment of promoting autonomous learning.

A number of other studies showed gaps between teachers' beliefs and their actions in Vietnamese classrooms. The discrepancies varied from moderate to substantial levels. This evidence comes from the work of Phan (2018), Pham and Hamid (2013), Ngo (2018), and V. G. Nguyen (2013). Phan (2018), investigating effective EFL instruction, showed that there was a wide gap between what was believed and what was actually implemented by six experienced EFL teachers in one university in Vietnam. The study took a qualitative approach using focus group discussion, journaling, non-participant observation, and post observation individual interviews as data collection tools. From the teachers' views, effective instruction aimed to facilitate students' communicative ability and engender their engagement or motivation in the classroom. Phan (2018) found that the teachers valued and were actually aware of the benefits of interactive approaches to students' communication skills; however, they adopted teacher-centred, grammar translation-oriented instruction in the classroom. According to these teachers, contextual and socio-cultural factors such as students' motivation and low proficiency levels, traditional educational values and norms, contextual working constraints (syllabus

Chapter 3: Literature Review

timeframes, large class sizes, physical teaching context), and out-of-work pressures (family commitments) appeared to affect their teaching practices in the classroom. Despite the fact that the study was rigorous in terms of methodological approach and data collection tools, the sample's limitation of including only one male teacher may have influenced the data and the interpretation of women's perceived family roles and commitments.

Motivated by the same topic as Hong and Nguyen (2019), Pham and Hamid (2013) investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs about quality questions and their questioning behaviours in terms of questioning purposes, content focus, students' cognitive level, wording and syntax. Thirteen beginning EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university participated in open-ended questionnaire surveys and classroom observations. The findings showed both congruence and incongruence between teachers' beliefs and practices. At a broad level, there were consistencies between what the teachers thought and what they did in terms of lexis and syntax, content focus, and targeted cognitive level. However, a closer examination of quality questions produced significant discrepancies between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom actions. For instance, the questionnaire data indicated that the teachers first tested students' conceptual knowledge, then factual knowledge and procedural knowledge. In practice, however, they put conceptual knowledge behind the other two. Crucially, there was a substantial gap in terms of the purposes for the teachers' questions. The questionnaire data showed that the teachers were guided by CLT in fostering students' output and interaction; however, in practice, the teachers were observed to follow Initiation-Response-Evaluation patterns that gave little opportunity for students to use the language. The study could have been more comprehensive if other data collection tools, such as interviews, had been used to provide more insight into why the teachers' beliefs were not fully translated into practice.

In their doctoral research on Vietnamese teachers' beliefs and practices regarding task-based language teaching and form-focused instruction, V. G. Nguyen (2013) and Le (2011) conducted two case studies with upper secondary school teachers and found conflicts between the teachers' beliefs and their practices. Several factors were explored for the belief-practice mismatch, including teacher factors, student factors, contextual factors and institutional factors. A number of other aspects, such as socio-cultural factors, remained complex and therefore deserve further research. Among the studies reviewed above, only three discussed socio-cultural factors; Phan (2018) mentioned traditional

values and norms; Nguyen et al. (2019) referred to professional identities; and V. G. Nguyen (2013) pointed out the formation of teachers' beliefs through a process of interacting with the context in their community of practice. Brinkmann (2015) argues that it is insufficient to look only at individual teachers' beliefs without examining the cultural context that shapes those beliefs. She adds that it is crucial to examine broad shared cultural patterns that are dominant across a group or society (Brinkmann, 2015, 2019).

3.4 Teacher professional learning

Professional learning and development have become common for many groups of professionals worldwide, including language teachers (Gurney et al., 2018), and have been a central theme in the field of language teaching since the mid-1990s (Freeman, 2006). Richards and Farrell (2005) emphasise that opportunities for continuous in-service professional learning and development are crucial for language teachers, since language teaching is subject to rapid changes, "both as the profession responds to new educational paradigms and trends and as institutions face new challenges as a result of changes in curriculum, national tests and student needs" (p. vii). The knowledge base of teaching constantly changes and not everything teachers need to know can be provided in pre-service teacher education (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In the wider view of the literature, many educational researchers suggest that professional learning and development therefore play an important role in enabling teachers to improve their professional competence, to adopt a more dynamic and innovative approach to teaching, to contribute to improved practice and quality teaching, and to progress in their careers (Ahn, Shimojima, Mori, & Asanuma, 2018; Cameron et al., 2013; Guan & Huang, 2013; Gurney et al., 2018; Sadler-Smith, Allinson, & Hayes, 2000).

The following section presents the concept of professional learning, followed by an introduction to the stages of teacher learning. The subsequent section unpacks the paradigm shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches to teacher professional learning. Self-directed and collective activities in teacher learning are introduced. The section outlines the theoretical perspectives of constructivist and situative learning, on which this study was based. Following this, an inquiry approach to teacher learning is discussed. Finally, the section reviews studies related to teacher professional learning in a Vietnamese education context to illustrate the research gaps that this study aimed to fill.

3.4.1 Concept of professional learning

Professional learning is regarded as a very complex, multi-faceted phenomenon (Pang, 2014). Despite professional learning being a common concept in the field of education, there appears no widely accepted definition. Perhaps researchers have not been able to agree on a single comprehensive concept of learning “which covers all aspects of professional learning and provide[s] a complete explanation for how and why professional learning occurs” (Pang, 2014, p. 592). Often different theories of learning that have been developed account for different aspects of professional learning.

In the broad context of professional learning, Eraut (2004) discusses it in terms of nuanced gradations on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is explicit learning, or formal learning, which focuses on programmes and content rather than on learning experiences, views knowledge as transferrable, and may equate with formal (training) courses teachers attend or coaching programmes they receive (Eraut, 2004; Evans, 2019; Webster-Wright, 2009). At the implicit end of professional learning, a number of scholars link the construct with people’s awareness (Eraut, 2004; Simons & Ruijters, 2004). Put another way, implicit learning is interpreted as “learning that [the] learner is unaware of at the time of its occurrence, but of which s/he may (or may not) subsequently become aware, after the event [learning experience]” (Evans, 2019, p. 6). My perspective of teacher learning in this study slides on the continuum, moving toward the implicit end of professional learning. Put another way, teacher learning opportunity in this study supports teachers to adapt formal theories, reflect upon, evaluate their classroom actions, and develop their own practical knowledge and an awareness of different ways of doing things and reasoning underlying their classroom decisions.

As a basis for this study I have drawn on the work of Shuell (2001) and use his articulated definition of learning, which states:

First, learning is an active self-regulated, constructive, cumulative, and goal-oriented process. Second, learning is dependent on (situated in) particular context in which it occurs. Third, learning is fundamentally a social, cultural, and interpersonal process; a process governed as much by social and situational factors as by cognitive factors. (pp. 8615-8616)

From Shuell’s (2001) perspective, learning entails both personal and social transformation (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). This definition has been selected because the components described in it resonate with key areas in the design and the teacher

Chapter 3: Literature Review

learning process of this study and it aligns closely with my two key lenses for investigating teacher professional learning: constructivist and situative learning.

For the present study, teacher professional learning was centred on student learning, which supports teachers to adopt student-centred approaches in EFL teaching in a Vietnamese university context. In other words, the approach to teacher professional learning in this study mirrors SCA: teachers-as-learners are central in the learning process (Buchanan, 2012; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Tam, 2015) and “become enlisted in self-emancipation rather than mere implementation” (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & López-Torres, 2003, p. 248). Also, professional learning in the current study focused on reflective, constructivist, and situative learning opportunities that allow teachers to learn about, then try out the new learning, reflect on new practices, learn from experience, and interact and share knowledge and experiences with each other.

Attention now turns to why teacher professional learning is important for developing teachers’ knowledge and practice. Despite different shades and aspects of meaning, professional learning is believed to be beneficial for teachers and learners in various ways. Professional learning has been widely discussed in the literature as a means for improving teachers’ practices and student learning (Guskey, 2002). Desimone (2009) argues that effective professional learning contributes to teacher learning and teacher change, and ultimately improves student learning. This claim is consistent with Avalos’ review (2011) of publications on teacher professional learning and development in *Teaching and Teacher Education* over ten years (2000–2010). Teacher change summarised in Avalos’ work includes teacher changes in cognition and practice. Borg (2006b) argues that cognitive change and behavioural change are distinct because “one does not necessarily imply the other” (p. 277).

Besides these potentially visible but narrowly interpreted evidences of teacher professional learning, centralising teacher change, and improved student learning (Evans, 2019), recent research highlight the benefits of teacher professional learning using the lens of positive psychology. For example, when teacher learning opportunities meet teachers’ needs and expectations, teachers’ job satisfaction increases, which contributes to the improvement of curricular understanding and increased self-confidence and self-efficacy (Avalos, 2011; Harper & Nicolson, 2013). This in turn empowers teachers’ professional resilience (Hadar & Brody, 2018) and improves longevity in the profession (Gurney, Liyanage, & Gharachorloo, 2014). Positive psychological benefits are observed

Chapter 3: Literature Review

especially when teacher professional learning opportunities take place in a wider social context, such as teacher professional learning communities. In a study on professional learning community characteristics and positive psychology connections, Owen (2016) observed linkages between professional learning community characteristics and positive psychology wellbeing elements. The study drew on data from the case studies of three innovative schools in South Australia, using document study, surveys, interviews and focus groups. The participants included school leaders, teachers, and students. The findings of the study highlighted a number of positive psychology wellbeing benefits among the teachers, such as building trust, establishing shared norms and identity with others in the team, reinvigorating teaching passion, and nurturing teacher wellbeing and flourishing (Owen, 2016).

Furthermore, research on professional learning has produced evidence about how professional identities and agency are intertwined with professional learning (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2014). It is commonly believed that professional learning contributes to professional growth and identity (Gurney et al., 2014). Teacher professional learning impacts teachers' identities – how teachers view “who they are, their self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work and the meanings that are attributed to them by others” (Day & Gu, 2010, p. 34). There appears to be a connection between teachers' identities and their potential agency (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, with increased agency, effective professional learning empowers teachers to influence, make choices, and take stances on their work (Eteläpelto et al., 2014). From adaptive teaching principles, effective professional learning promotes teachers' instructional adaptability (Parsons, Ankrum, & Morewood, 2016). In the current environment, where job demands and pressures on teaching staff have increased, achieving and sustaining a healthy state of positive identity and wellbeing for teachers is crucial (Day & Gu, 2010). Teacher wellbeing represents teachers' organisational behaviour (via job satisfaction, intention to leave, and absences) and their self-reported health (measured via teachers' symptoms of exhaustion, tension and anxiety, and levels of motivation, commitment and resilience) (Day & Gu, 2010). It was also reported in Owen's (2016) study that teachers' pedagogical changes resulting in positive outcomes for students also helped to ensure teacher wellbeing.

A number of important factors have been identified in the literature regarding effective professional learning practices. A three-year national longitudinal study by Desimone,

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002), using a purposefully selected sample of 207 teachers in 30 schools, in 10 districts in five states of the United States, examined the effects of professional development on teachers' instructional practice. Drawing on the findings of Desimone et al. (2002) and a broad base of the literature, Desimone (2009) confirms that "there is enough empirical evidence to suggest that there is in fact a consensus on a core set of features" (p. 183) of the effectiveness of professional learning and development. These serve as the characteristics of professional learning and development that are critical to increasing teacher knowledge and skills and improving their practice, and which hold potential for increasing student achievement (Desimone, 2009). The characteristics proposed include: (1) content focus, (2) active learning, (3) coherence, (4) duration, and (5) collective participation. These five factors align with the five qualities recommended for effective professional learning and development in Thacker's study (2015). These include:

- A focus on the improvement of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge
- The use of active learning methods
- Ongoing and sustained learning over time
- Attention to the particular context of the students, teachers, and school
- Collective participation and collaboration among teacher participants (Thacker, 2017, p. 37)

In a review of the literature, Desimone (2009) indicates that there is a similar foundational conception present in most conceptual or empirical studies. Despite the different terminology used in Borko's review of the literature (2004), she focuses on subject matter (content), engaging teachers as learners (active learning), and strong professional learning communities (collective participation). Wilson and Berne (1999) suggest three features of effective professional learning, which seem to overlap with Desimone's characteristics. The three features comprise communities of learning, teachers playing an active role, and critical collegiality. The overlap appears to reside in the notions of collective participation that provide opportunities for teachers to share and discuss and active learning opportunities where teachers lead the professional learning and development.

Although there seems to be generally an agreement about what constitutes effective professional learning, there has been no set framework or model of an effective professional learning practice that works best for every teacher. Ono and Ferreira (2010) point out that there remains a gap between "the rhetoric and reality" (p. 62). Also, this

practice varies from teacher to teacher with regard to what is effective for them in different contexts, different learning goals, and different learning preferences (Louws, van Veen, Meirink, & van Driel, 2017). As such, it is preferable for teachers to choose a professional learning exercise that suits their needs and preferences best, and works in their practical context (Dengerink, Lunenberg, & Kools, 2015; Truong, 2015; Yumru, 2015). Drawing on the common factors regarding the effectiveness of professional learning practices from multiple professional learning models and being aware of the local practical context, this study provides holistic perspectives that provide richer insights into EFL teachers' professional learning process in a Vietnamese context, considering the models as representations rather than as tools.

3.4.2 Stages of teacher learning

There are three key stages of teacher learning, comprising the apprenticeship of observation, formal pre-service teacher education and training, and in-service professional learning and development.

First, research on teacher learning has showed that teachers normally teach in the ways they have been taught (Bailey et al., 1996). The reason is that teachers establish their beliefs about language teaching and learning during their previous experiences as language learners themselves (Pajares, 1992), or during the 'apprenticeship of observation' (Bailey et al., 1996; Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975). The apprenticeship of observation describes the years of schooling during which student teachers observe, interact with and evaluate their teachers in action (Borg, 2004). This apprenticeship is responsible for many of the preconceptions that student teachers hold about teaching (Lortie, 1975).

However, it is considered that this apprenticeship for teaching only partially helps student teachers learn about teaching. Watching their teachers from a student-oriented perspective does not allow students "to place the teachers' actions in a pedagogically oriented framework" (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). As a result, what student teachers learn about teaching is "intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles" (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). For that reason, assessments of their teachers' performance are usually on an affective basis of liking and disliking, because student teachers are not likely to make connections between teaching objectives and the teachers' actions, or to perceive the teachers' decisions among

Chapter 3: Literature Review

teaching strategies (Lortie, 1975). This period of apprenticeship tends to “provide student teachers with ‘default options’ by way of teaching action” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 535), little of which may be or become conscious.

After the apprenticeship of observation, student teachers undergo formal teacher education or training as the second stage of teacher learning. For example, the teachers in my study underwent a four-year undergraduate programme offered at tertiary level. Language teacher education programmes provide student teachers with “knowledge-for-practice” or a “formal knowledge base” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 253) – basic concepts and principles applicable to teaching and opportunities to demonstrate instructional principles and practices in the classroom (Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, they have been historically criticised as too theoretical and fragmented, with a focus on areas such as linguistics and language acquisition, and deficient in instruction in teaching methods (Freeman, 1989; Lortie, 1975; M. H. Nguyen, 2013). As a result, it has been suggested that formal teacher education may contribute to “the lack of systematic codification of practical experience” (Lortie, 1975, p. 69). The separation of theory from practice within this formal teaching education period is perceived as creating traditional classrooms when pre-service teachers experience full-time teaching (Tam, 2015). During formal language teacher education programmes, the only opportunity for practice teaching is when student teachers do a practicum as part of their degree requirements (Lortie, 1975; M. H. Nguyen, 2013). Student teachers tend to find this practicum period of language teacher education programmes short and relatively simple when they work alongside with an established teacher and teach school classes under that teacher’s supervision (Lortie, 1975). Despite the limited duration of practice teaching experience, most student teachers value its usefulness (Lortie, 1975). However, problematisation of practice teaching concerns the restricted contact between practice teachers and supervising teachers (C. V. Le, 2014). Potential problems between practice teachers and supervising teachers include mismatches of teaching conceptions, poor teaching abilities in supervising teachers, and lack of effective feedback and support from supervising teachers (Lortie, 1975); as a result, practice teachers may become less self-confident after the experience of practice teaching (Yayli, 2012) or arguably they may opt for traditional and individualistic approaches to teaching, in which they tend to follow exactly what the school teachers or supervising teachers want them to do (Lortie, 1975; Mai & Pham, 2019).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Despite the widespread support for formal teacher education programmes, there are alternative entry routes to the teaching profession through short-term teacher preparation or training because of the (school) teacher shortages in several countries, such as the USA (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002), or because of a market-driven path, as in the UK (MacBeath, 2013b). These training systems normally aim at short-term and immediate intended goals, such as providing teachers with certain skills, techniques, and strategies (Richards & Farrell, 2005), or focusing on pedagogical knowledge (MacBeath, 2013b). Many training programmes are offered as ways to gain credentials after teachers have started their teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Teachers can also undertake these teacher education programmes and trainings as their ongoing professional learning and development, as discussed below. However, these alternative pathways to the teaching profession are not common in Vietnam because of MOET's requirements, as discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.4.

The third stage of teacher learning, after teachers enter their teaching profession, is in-service teacher learning. Throughout their careers, teachers participate in in-service professional learning activities to enhance their knowledge, skills and teaching practices. During this stage, teachers may undertake individual or collective learning activities, and top-down or bottom-up approaches to their professional learning, as discussed further in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

During this third stage, teachers' engagement in their professional learning varies with their career phases. Beginning teachers in the *survival* phase tend to experience reality shock, anxiety, dilemmas, continuous trial and error, and wide discrepancies between instructional goals and what one is actually able to do in the classroom (Huberman, 1989; Lortie, 1975; Tsui, 2003). It is also a phase of *discovery* in which beginning teachers are excited, enthusiastic, and proud of their profession and having their own students (Huberman, 1989). This phase is a sharp learning curve for beginning teachers. There is so much for them to explore. A good deal of prior learning experience and knowledge is likely to help beginning teachers (Huberman, 1989). Some turn to other teachers for help or advice; however, because of their isolation, beginning teachers frequently work things out as best as they can before asking for assistance (Lortie, 1975). Their learning is limited by their personal resources – their observations or capacity to take effective action through independent reading of books, journals or online resources (Lortie, 1975). Positive experience in the first phase leads to a phase of *stabilisation*, where teachers

Chapter 3: Literature Review

consolidate their experience from the first phase, gain more experience and master teaching skills (Tsui, 2003). This is when teachers gain their independence from supervision, and begin to form their preferred teaching style(s) with a basic instructional repertoire on which they can rely (Huberman, 1989).

Following this phase, Huberman (1989) observes that teachers go through a phase of *experimentation, diversification* and *change*. Teachers are motivated, enthusiastic and ready to take on new ideas, challenges and engagements to increase their impact in the classroom. During this phase, teachers tend to have a high awareness of institutional constraints and have a desire to go beyond their own teaching contexts to bring about change and innovation (Tsui, 2003). This '*renewal*' phase (Tsui, 2003) motivates teachers to engage in more ambitious and collective projects with the desire to use their newly-acquired instructional skills and prevent stagnation (Huberman, 1989). Through their years of experience, teachers are equipped with different forms of formal and experiential knowledge (Borg, 2006b). This mid-career phase may be a period of increased reflectiveness for teachers (Huberman, 1989). Some teachers may experience disappointment or crisis during this phase because of monotonous teaching practices or unpleasant working conditions, resulting in uncertainty about their teaching commitment and a need for reassessment (Tsui, 2003). This phase relates particularly closely to most of the participants in my research project.

Then, teachers come to the *serenity* phase with peace of mind, accompanied by a decline in professional investment and enthusiasm (Huberman, 1989; Tsui, 2003). This phase is followed by a *conservatism* phase, characterised by resistance to and skepticism about innovation and change (Huberman, 1989; Tsui, 2003).

These stages of teacher learning should not be considered as discrete stages but as a continuum of teacher learning from the apprenticeship of observation to pre-service education and in-service professional learning (Hulme, 2013), because all prospective, novice and experienced teachers bring prior knowledge and experience to all new learning situations, which are social and specific (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Active learning is an ongoing process of shaping and reshaping knowledge, skills and practices, which requires opportunities to link previous knowledge with new understandings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The introduction of teachers' career phases enabled the recognition of potential nuances in professional learning needs and goals in this study.

3.4.3 Self-directed and collective teacher learning activities

There have been on-going debates about the dualism of learning as an individual or as a collective endeavour. To capture the two distinct conceptualisations of learning, Sfard (1998) presents two metaphors of learning: the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor. The acquisition metaphor suggests that knowledge is a commodity to be acquired by individual learners, whereas the participation metaphor is defined as an action of “knowing” and “doing” or, to put it differently, learning is an active process of becoming a member of or involved in a certain community that requires learners to communicate, negotiate the meaning of norms, and act accordingly.

However, the acquisition metaphor may lead one to conclude that learning is an individual activity with a connection to the transmission form of teacher learning. Biesta, Field, Hodkinson, Macleod, and Goodson (2011) argue that the acquisition metaphor separates out the learner, the process of learning and the content of what is learned. Boud and Hager (2012) support this view. They further argue that acquisition metaphor suggests pre-specification and standardisation of the content that is learned and over-simplifies the nature of professional practice. In other words, professional practice is conceived to be application of theory, which elevates the theories and understandings taught in formal professional education and training programmes, whilst potentially “devaluing theories and understanding that derive informally from experiences of professional practice” (Boud & Hager, 2012, p. 21). In this study, the term *individual learning* is better understood as *self-directed learning*. Self-directed activities may be undertaken individually when “teachers are able to formulate their own learning needs and consequently direct their own learning” (M. Louws, J. Meirink, K. van Veen, & J. van Driel, 2017, p. 172). This definition of self-directed learning places teachers as active and agentic agents in their learning. Self-directed activities in teacher learning include academic research and writing for publication (Gurney, 2015), and self-initiated professional reading (Beck & Kosnik, 2014; Wermke, 2011).

The participation metaphor, as described by Sfard (1998), is more conducive to social or collective learning and has become a characteristic of much recent writing about learning or teacher learning in particular. Teacher professional learning communities represent one of the various forms of collective learning that are discussed further in section 3.4.6.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This participation metaphor of learning aligns with the social dimension of situative learning.

By presenting the two different metaphors, Sfard (1998) further argues that she does not aim to suggest giving up either of the two but to critically discuss the mutual dependence of interpretations of the metaphors. She argues that “a dictatorship of a single ideology may lead to theories that serve the interests of certain groups to the disadvantage of others” (p. 11) and suggests that a combination of the acquisition and participation metaphors would maximise the advantages of each of them, while minimising the drawbacks of each. Likewise, Hodkinson, Biesta, and James (2008) point out why an ‘either-or’ perspective provides insufficient insights into learning in professional working contexts. Individual learning is often decontextualised and is not always understood as embodied or social. Additionally, individual cognitive learning often fails to fully incorporate wider contextual influences such as historical, social, cultural, and political factors.

In this study, I wanted to examine the complex and multidimensional process of teacher professional learning. This process of teacher learning promotes both individual and collective learning as it is believed that these two learning experiences supplement each other (Solheim, Roland, et al., 2018). Embracing these two perspectives helped me shape a thick description of how teachers learned and provided a holistic understanding of the teachers’ learning process and thorough insights into the complexity of teachers’ learning.

The practices of professional learning have undergone a paradigm shift from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach. This is reviewed in the following section, which discusses the two approaches to teacher professional learning – traditional and current.

3.4.4 Paradigm shift in professional learning

3.4.4.1 *Traditional paradigm*

In the 1980s and 1990s, the term *professional development* was referred to as *staff development*, or *in-service training* or *staff training* (Sithamparam, 2015, p. 169), which was considered largely a “dissemination activity” of knowledge and skills for teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1041). As discussed earlier in Chapter One, some professional development activities are provided in forms of short-term courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, or lectures by outside experts or educators, from which teachers ‘get’

Chapter 3: Literature Review

knowledge and skills (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Musset, 2010; Sithamparam, 2015). It is important to acknowledge this traditional approach to professional learning and development because this was my participants' prior experience.

However, these models have been criticised as fragmented, disconnected, and potentially irrelevant to teachers' needs concerning classroom practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010; Pitsoe & Maila, 2012; Sithamparam, 2015). Feiman-Nemser (2001) points out that these modes of professional development "do not help teachers bring new knowledge to bear on practice or generate new knowledge in practice" (p. 1041). Feiman-Nemser's (2001) view resonates with that of Hoban and Erickson (2004), who confirm that this traditional deliver-and-apply model of professional development has been seen as a source of theory-practice divide (Hoban & Erickson, 2004). In agreement, Day (1999) claims that professional development opportunities must "provide a range of learning experiences which encourage teachers to reflect upon and inquire into their thinking and practice through interaction between their own and others' experience" (p. 201). Therefore, this paradigm of traditional professional development has been recognised as "woefully inadequate" (Borko, 2004, p. 3) despite the recognition of the importance of professional learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Sithamparam, 2015). These critiques have spurred a reconceptualisation of professional development.

3.4.4.2 *Current paradigms*

From the late 1990s, a paradigm shift occurred from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to professional learning. This relates to Borko's (2004) *situative* perspective on teacher learning and professional development, which focuses on sustained professional growth and teacher learning orientation (Sithamparam, 2015). Borko's theory conceptualises teacher learning as "changes in participation in socially organised activities, and individuals' use of knowledge as an aspect of their participation in social practices" (Borko, 2004, p. 4). In other words, this is the process of "increasing participation in the practice of teaching, and through this participation, a process of becoming knowledgeable in and about teaching" (Adler, 2000, p. 37). In agreement with these scholars, Hoban and Erickson (2004) argue that learning is fundamentally situated in the context in which teachers act. Sithamparam (2015) highlights that this process of learning produces growth for teachers in terms of subject matter knowledge, understanding student thinking, and

knowledge of instructional practices. These are the three key areas of focus for professional learning in order to produce changes in teaching practices, thus resulting in more effective learning (Sithamparam, 2015).

Together with the recognition of the importance of learning in practice (*action setting*), Hoban and Erickson (2004) highlight two other influential elements supporting teachers' long-term professional learning. One is the personal dimension that teachers bring to their learning setting; the other is the socio-cultural influences on learning. The personal dimension includes personal history, beliefs, dispositions, prior knowledge, needs, and motivation. Also, "other related aspects of personal learning include the notions of agency and relevance as manifested in a need for individuals to try out ideas . . . , and the freedom for individuals to make decisions about and to experiment with personal practice" (Hoban & Erickson, 2004, p. 303). Socio-cultural influences are present at a variety of different levels, including the immediate social group (professional practice settings mediated by other group members), and professional practice settings engaged with others who are outside the immediate social group. The current paradigm of teacher professional learning is in alignment with the constructivist and situative lenses, as discussed in the next section.

Attention now turns to discussing what this paradigm shift means in relation to theories of learning and what it meant in the present study. As mentioned earlier, often different theories of learning account for different aspects of professional learning.

3.4.5 Theoretical perspectives on teacher learning

Views of learning theories are often associated with a particular philosophical perspective. Shuell (2001) argues that "to fully understand learning, one must realise that a particular theory may provide a good explanation of learning in one situation but a poor explanation of learning in a different situation" (p. 8614–8615). Teacher professional learning in this study was grounded in two perspectives: constructivist and situative learning.

3.4.5.1 Constructivist perspective of learning

Primarily stemming from Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, constructivism is not a unified theory but contains different viewpoints and various emphases. The common belief of a constructivist perspective is that learning is the process of construction (Jonassen, 1999;

Pang, 2014; Shuell, 2001; Tam, 2009). In particular, constructivists conceive of learning as an active process, in which learners are active constructors of knowledge who make sense of the world and learn by interpreting events through their existing knowledge and beliefs (Putnam & Borko, 2013). In terms of teacher learning, according to constructivism, teachers are viewed as active agents who interpret new information from their own views, based on their schemata – the network of interrelationships among the constituents of their learning (Donald, 1987), including existing knowledge, preconceptions, beliefs and previous experiences (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2014). For that reason, different teachers may arrive at different answers or make sense of new learning in different ways. Furthermore, the constructivist view advocates learning as a dynamic process of making meaning or constructing one's own understandings, determined by the complex interplay of existing knowledge, social context, and the content of what is to be learned (Tam, 2009).

3.4.5.2 Situative perspective of learning

A situative perspective of learning views learning as a social practice, situated in particular physical and social contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger's (1991) view is supported by other scholars, who state that learning is an interactive and social act outside of the learner's mind involving social interactions, and embracing wider social, cultural and political factors (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Hodgkinson et al., 2008; Pang, 2014; Putnam & Borko, 2000, 2013; Sfard, 1998), which, therefore, cannot be considered separately from the context in which learning takes place (Mason, 2007).

According to the situative view, teacher learning is seen as a process of enculturation (Mason, 2007), in which teachers participate in, communicate with, and belong to a community. Lave (1991) proposes learning is “a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice” (p. 65) and states that “developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgably skillful are part of the same process” (p. 65). From that viewpoint, knowledge is situated and learning is viewed as a cultural activity. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argue that “knowledge is situated, being in part a product of activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (p. 32). In this sense, Bang (2015) further contends that culture is historically constituted and dynamically changing through participation in social practices and making sense of life.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

From this perspective, the focus is on socio-cultural forms of learning. Situlative scholars conceptualise learning as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mason, 2007), and the unit of analysis is not the single individual but the social setting (Pang, 2014). This socio-cultural focus of the perspective is illustrated through the use of the *participation metaphor* proposed by Sfard (1998), as discussed in section 3.4.3, which reinforces the view of learning as an active process of becoming a member of or involved in a certain community that requires learners to communicate, negotiate the meaning of norms, and act accordingly.

Constructivist and situative learning theories involve attention to both individual teachers as learners and their participation in social learning communities. Cobb (1994) contends that constructivist and situative views of learning should be seen as complementary perspectives, one focusing on the sense-making of individuals within a social context, and the other focusing on the social context and how it shapes individual learning. Due to its constructed, situative and socio-cultural nature, teacher learning is viewed as dependent on personal factors of teachers, such as prior knowledge, experience, and socio-cultural and contextual factors of the learning environment. These perspectives shaped the design of teacher learning in the present study.

3.4.6 Teacher inquiry

Teacher inquiry is seen as a powerful professional learning strategy because teachers are active agents in the process of generating practical knowledge (Beck & Kosnik, 2014; Poekert, 2011). Current education reforms require more authentic professional learning and development than the conventional approach of delivering particular content or skills for teachers to master (Poekert, 2011). Teacher inquiry is relevant to the current shift in teachers' professional learning because it takes place in the context of instructional practice and meets the needs of teachers (Poekert, 2011). Beck and Kosnik (2014) recommend using the term *teacher research* to refer to *teacher inquiry*; however, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that the goals of teacher learning through inquiry may or may not be to do research and to produce findings, as is often the case for other researchers. In this study, *teacher inquiry* was used as an umbrella term referring to a teacher learning approach, and teacher research is considered as one form of teacher inquiry.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Teacher inquiry is founded on constructivist learning theory. The central theme is that learning is the process of constructing meaning. Poekert (2011) defines teacher inquiry as teachers' systematic and intentional reflection on their own practice. More specifically, it is an "active learning approach focusing on teachers' questioning, critical thinking, problem solving and reflecting" (Gunawardena, 2003, p. 146). Teacher inquiry can involve individual or collegial reflection. Teacher inquiry is grounded in the creation of *knowledge-of-practice* (Poekert, 2011). Knowledge-of-practice is the idea that "teachers learn collaboratively, primarily in inquiry communities and/or networks where participants struggle along with others to construct meaningful local knowledge and where inquiry is regarded as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning and schooling" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 278). It is a shared process, engaging other teachers in collaboration in connection to larger educational contexts, such as political and social agendas (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Next, this process is adaptive, because when teachers collaboratively participate in inquiry, they continually adapt and apply knowledge and pedagogical approaches in response in their work in the classroom. The iterative cycles of reflection drive teachers' deep learning, and improve critical thinking, reasoning and reflective skills. This contributes to "the generation of teacher knowledge by promoting the development of a *culture of inquiry* at the sites where it is utilized" (Poekert, 2011, p. 20). This *culture of inquiry* is developed by a professional orientation to communities and collaboration; for example, professional learning communities or communities of inquiry (Butler & Schnellert, 2012).

Building on Dewey's work, Schön further developed the concepts of inquiry and reflective practice (Ermeling, 2010). Since Schön (1992) built on and developed the theory of the reflective practitioner, the notion of reflection has gained much popularity in education. In his work, Schön (1992) describes two types of reflection: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-in-action, or phrases like "thinking on your feet", "keeping your wits about you", or "learning by doing" (Schön, 1992, p. 54) is when the practitioners think about what they are doing, even sometimes while doing it. Schön (1992) explains that the process of reflection-in-action occurs when

there is some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further actions. (p. 50)

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In other words, when there is a situation puzzling to us, we usually ask questions about why and how that happened. Then reflection-in-action helps us to find solutions and reshape the situation. During the process of reflection-in-action, we often connect our thinking with experiences, feelings and theories to deal with the situation. Sometimes we find that the knowledge we bring to the situation may not fit the new situation and needs to be changed to suit the new situation. This entails the building of new understanding or knowledge.

Schön (1992) argues that one can also reflect on action after the action has been done, to reflect on what worked well, what did not work well, and what can be done differently in the future using one's repertoire of experiences. Reflection-on-action is defined as "a deliberate process developed and purposely used to reconsider existing knowledge, beliefs, possibilities, ideas and actions" (Loughran, 2010, p. 163). Schön (1992) explains:

Practitioners do reflect on their knowing-in-practice. Sometimes, in the relative tranquility of a postmortem, they think back on a project they have undertaken, a situation they have lived through, and they explore the understandings they have brought to their handling of the case. (p. 61)

Schön's (1992) reflection theory explains the way new knowledge and skills are constructed using schemata – the networks of interrelationships among constituents of learning (Donald, 1987), including existing knowledge, preconceptions, beliefs and previous experiences (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2014). These constituents exist in the mind and are drawn on when practitioners engage in the process of reflection, comparison, evaluation and self-direction for their learning.

In English language teaching and learning, reflection is increasingly seen as a key means to support teacher learning (Farrell, 2007; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003). Self-inquiry and critical thinking help teachers move from "a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (Richards, 1990, p. 6). There are a number of empirical studies involving EFL teachers focusing on reflection (Farrell, 1999; Fatemi, Shirvan, & Rezvani, 2011; Harford & G., 2008). In a study investigating in what ways regular group discussion promoted reflective thinking with three experienced EFL teachers in Korea, Farrell (1999) found that the teachers discussed theories of teaching based on personal opinions when they met for discussions. Furthermore, the teachers in this study reflected

Chapter 3: Literature Review

critically by evaluating their teaching problems and lessons and generating solutions to these problems. The research findings were drawn from the use of multiple data collection sources such as the researcher's field notes and written logs, group meetings, individual meetings, the participants' written reaction-journals, and written artifacts. Farrell (1999) suggested the use of teacher development groups as a means to promote critical reflection for EFL teachers.

When reflection is treated as an isolated skill, it is unlikely to support meaningful teacher learning (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003). The reason is that consciousness from reflection alone is not sufficient; it must synchronise with meaningful praxis – “the dialectical union of reflection and action” (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003, p. 249). Teacher learning through reflection is regarded as building theory and practice together (Cordingley, 2013). As discussed in the previous section, this study is well suited to the situative perspective of learning, which emphasises the shared nature of reflection through three concepts: situated activity, reflection as a social endeavour, and reflection as a distributed process (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2013). From this perspective, reflection occurs in teachers' everyday teaching activities with an opportunity to interact with their colleagues, and is distributed through wider social contexts and artifacts of national policies, institutional systems, and teacher groups or communities. This concept represents the complexity of the reflective nature of teachers' practice and learning with a desire to achieve praxis.

Various documented models of professional inquiry focus on improving classroom instruction. These include as lesson study (Crockett, 2002; Cheung & Wong, 2014; Doig & Groves, 2011; Tran, 2014), teacher research or action research (Bleicher, 2014; C. V. Le, 2018; Mertler, 2009; Poekert, 2011), the Getting Results model (Ermeling, 2012; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009), teaching journaling or journals (Farrell, 2007; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati, & Sukyadi, 2017), and teacher study groups or teacher learning communities (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Tam, 2015; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). It should be noted that there was no attempt to promote or validate one particular model of professional inquiry in this study. These models are introduced here as a synthesis of the relevant literature. This study focused on the inquiry *process* to present evidence for the value of inquiry and explore how teachers learned in practice. As mentioned earlier, teacher inquiry is used as a tool, functioning as the impetus for teachers' reflection and co-construction of new learning.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

There are some studies using one of these aforementioned approaches as a means of teacher learning in Vietnam, as discussed in the subsequent sections. However, collegial approaches to teacher learning that enable Vietnamese teachers to interact and collaborate are under-researched. Some scholars claim that this may be because of Vietnamese teachers' lack of dialogical custom (Saito, Tsukui, & Tanaka, 2008) or habit of working together (Vo & Nguyen, 2010). So, what is evident from the literature is that further investigation is required to better understand the cultural aspects affecting teacher collegial learning and how EFL teachers in the Vietnamese university context construct knowledge, improve their practice, and enhance professional learning practice through the process of inquiry.

3.4.6.1 Lesson study

Lesson study, initially adapted successfully in Japan, is “a form of action research in which teachers working in collaboration set goals for student learning, design and teach a lesson incorporating these goals, collect evidence for evaluation, and if appropriate, improve the design, and teach again with a view to improving learning outcomes” (Wood & Sithamparam, 2014, p. 1).

Positive findings about this model of professional learning have been mentioned in the literature. Crockett (2002) researched four mathematics teachers in an elementary school in Southern California. Their engagement included a weekly open-ended problem, a video teaching vignette, lesson planning sessions, and the examination of student work. The participants commented that through discussions and interactions in these activities their subject matter knowledge was enhanced and their thinking and their understanding of student thinking were shifted. Similarly, a lesson study was carried out by a group of mathematics teachers in a Vietnamese high school setting (Tran, 2014). It is reported that lesson study is served as a means to introduce innovation in mathematics teaching, where teachers play a central role in bringing innovations into their actual classrooms and in helping each other with mathematics instruction. This consequently triggers improvement in students' learning. All in all, it can be seen that this model is an innovation in the implementation of collaborative professional learning for teachers.

3.4.6.2 Teacher research

The second form of teacher inquiry, teacher research, is a process in which teachers interrogate and problematise their own practice. Teachers begin by wondering about their classroom practice, form a research question from this wondering, collect relevant data, analyse the data based on research literature, and take action in the classroom based on their findings (Poekert, 2011).

A number of studies have used teacher research as an approach for teachers' professional learning and development. Of note is Poekert's study (2011) in the elementary school context in Florida. This qualitative study examined the pedagogy of facilitation by following the experiences of six first-time teacher inquirers working under the direction of a facilitator who guided them through various stages of the inquiry process. Interviews were initially conducted to allow participating teachers to freely express their thoughts and feelings, and the facilitator to talk about her perspectives on the supports provided in the inquiry process. Then, teachers were invited to identify a dilemma in their teaching practice. They had access to a wide variety of resources to generate new ideas, applied these new ideas in their classroom practice and evaluated the effectiveness of their interventions by recording evidence from the teaching and artifacts. Ideas, advice, artifacts and obstacles were discussed in monthly meetings and individual sessions. Finally, the sharing stage involved teachers' public presentations of their learning. The research findings were reported positively in terms of teacher learning and professional development. However, this model of teacher research applying the inquiry approach still regards teachers as a group of individuals (Saito et al., 2008), placing the main focus on individual experiences and the learning of each teacher inquirer throughout the inquiry process. In addition, the constraint of the study resides in the research tools, as the study "did not involve direct observation of teacher practice in the classroom and therefore cannot substantiate claims of changes in teacher practice beyond the reports of teacher participants" (Poekert, 2011, p. 24).

Borg (2013) provides a foundational framework and empirical data regarding teacher research in language teaching. Borg (2013) asserts that teacher research "has the potential to be a powerful transformative force in the professional development of language teachers" (p. 6). However, this approach still remains "a minority activity in the field of language teaching" (p. 6) due to a number of barriers such as limitations in teachers'

awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge, limited resources, and lack of teacher motivation (Borg, 2013).

3.4.6.3 Teaching journals

Richards and Farrell (2005) describe a teacher journal as “an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching, usually in the form of a notebook, book, or electronic mode, which serves as a source of discussion, reflection or evaluation” (p. 68). They argue that journal writing can help teachers question and analyse their teaching practice. According to Farrell (2007), writing journal entries regularly can help teachers clarify their thinking, explore their beliefs and practices, become aware of their teaching styles, and be able to monitor their practices. Teachers can engage in individual or collaborative journal writing (Farrell, 2008).

Journals can vary depending on the levels and dimensions of reflection. Jay and Johnson (2002) suggest three dimensions of reflections in writing journals: descriptive, comparative, and critical. At the descriptive level, teachers can simply track class materials, such as the use of illustrations and activities to avoid repetition or omission, and write down comments from students and exchanges with them during class discussions to take on students’ ideas. The comparative level of teaching journalling provides a way for teachers to compare their practices against alternatives, or to compare teachers’ instructions with misunderstandings from students’ perspectives as a rich source of possible change and revisions in the future. The highest-order thinking occurs in the critical dimension of reflection. This is when teachers self-critique, make judgements and consider the broader implications and deeper meaning of classroom instruction for continuous learning and improvement.

3.4.6.4 Teacher learning communities

Within the situative paradigm, a vast body of literature explores the role of professional communities of teachers in their learning (Russ, Sherin, & Sherin, 2016). The shifting paradigm of collaborative professional development encourages greater participation and interaction between teachers, peer-based learning through sharing skills and experience, and solutions to common classroom problems. This is the foundation for a teacher learning community to build on (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The notion of a teacher

Chapter 3: Literature Review

learning community is a key way in which contemporary professional learning is envisioned.

A teacher learning community is generally defined as “a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an outgoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth promoting way” (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 223). Those communities are flexible and vary in size, including members with similar or different roles or responsibilities from one group, or members of multiple groups, or representatives from different groups (Learning Forward, n.d.) on the condition that they have “a focus on a shared purpose, mutual regard and caring, and an insistence on integrity and truthfulness” (Hord, 2009, p. 40). Scholars have described five essential characteristics of professional learning communities, involving shared values and norms, an emphasis on student learning, reflective dialogues, de-privatisation of practice to make teaching public via classroom observations or giving and receiving instructional feedback, and a focus on collaboration (Louis & Marks, 1998; Tam, 2015; Vescio et al., 2008). Dialogues, action research, reflections and classroom observations are the collaborative activities that teachers frequently engage in when they belong to learning communities (Tam, 2015).

Teacher learning communities have proved to be an effective model for promoting professional learning for English language teachers in Western countries (Yhao, 2013). However, it is a relatively new approach for English teachers at tertiary level in Asia (Yhao, 2013). Yhao’s paper highlights the need to construct teacher learning communities for English language teachers at tertiary level because teacher learning communities will help teachers tackle teaching problems through collaboration, inquiry, reflection, sharing and peer evaluation (Yhao, 2013).

3.4.7 Professional learning of tertiary teachers in Vietnam

As described in Chapter One, Vietnam has enacted a Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) generally, and foreign language education reform in particular, across all education levels. One response is the launching of Project 2020, in which MOET set a Vietnam’s English Teacher Competencies Framework stating what teachers of all levels are required to achieve in order to be qualified in the profession (see Chapter Two, section 2.6). A number of professional development activities have been undertaken in Project 2020, including professional development training to improve teachers’ language

Chapter 3: Literature Review

proficiency and pedagogical competence, and opportunities to conduct research (C. V. Le, 2018; Nguyen & Mai, 2018). A few studies on Vietnam's teacher education and in-service professional development training have been conducted by foreign scholars after the implementation of teacher training projects by foreign partnerships (Hamano, 2008; Saito et al., 2008; Tsukui & Saito, 2018). There have also been some studies in related fields conducted by local researchers, but mainly focused on English teacher education (Kieu et al., 2016; Le, 2002; Pham, 2002; N. H. Tran et al., 2018; Tran, 2014).

As mentioned in section 3.4.6, thoroughly documented models of teacher inquiry include lesson study, teacher research, teaching journaling, and teacher learning communities. Apart from these inquiry models, other professional learning models, such as peer observation, mentoring and critical friend groups, are also documented in the scholarship of teacher professional learning. Although, in Vietnam, teacher inquiry has been explored in various modes, such as lesson study, teacher research, and collegial study groups (see studies reviewed below), H. T. M. Nguyen (2014) highlights that "scant attention has been paid to the field of teacher learning through [the] practice of teaching" (p. 75). Likewise, the mentoring model has been a focus of teacher education (for pre-service teachers) and approaches to teacher professional learning and development for beginning teachers (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2017); however, this is beyond the focus of this study.

Lesson study, as described in section 3.4.6, is a collaborative inquiry model of professional development developed in Japan (Ahn et al., 2018; Rock & Wilson, 2005). Lesson study "involves groups of teachers meeting regularly over a period of time . . . to work on the design, implementation, testing and improvement of one or several research lessons" (Rock & Wilson, 2005, p. 78). This model is a school-based approach, used notably in primary school education and to a lesser extent in secondary school education (Doig & Groves, 2011; Saito, Khong, Hidayat, Hendayana, & Imansyah, 2018). This model is no longer restricted to Japan but has expanded to the West and throughout South-East Asia (Chen & Zhang, 2019; Doig & Groves, 2011).

However, in Vietnam, limited research is available on teacher professional learning through the use of lesson study. Tran (2014) investigated the effectiveness of lesson study as a professional development practice in teaching and learning mathematics for year 7 in Vietnam. The teacher participants were introduced to lesson study at a research workshop and then guided to prepare lesson plans adopting innovation and good practice in teaching mathematics. Through classroom implementation, their teaching sessions

Chapter 3: Literature Review

were videotaped, analysed and discussed. The findings of the study indicated the relative contribution of lesson study in both teaching and learning mathematics, focusing on higher order thinking.

In a different school setting, Tsukui and Saito (2018) primarily used field notes and interviews with one Vietnamese primary school teacher, Mr Moi (pseudonym) describing his experiences and reflections on the events that occurred following the introduction of lesson study from Japan into Vietnamese schools during 2006–2009. The study was grounded in situative and socio-cultural perspectives. Mr Moi and his colleagues acted as strollers, who “walked around in classrooms on foot or used their eyes to seek real encounters with students – their minds, learning and existence” (Tsukui & Saito, 2018, p. 176). The conventional construct of ‘inspection’ focused on bureaucratic actions and the values of teachers to underline compliance with prescribed curriculum and plans; therefore, teachers had a tendency to strictly check and evaluate students’ work and even their colleagues’ work to see whether their achievements were satisfactory. The emerging construct of ‘strolling’ used in this study represented democratic actions and values that appreciated students’ existence and learning. The study indicated that Moi and his colleagues began to accept this new act of strolling in their practices and they re-focused on students’ learning when they performed a stroll. Another finding of the study was that strolling helped teachers to make use of and improve their collegiality. Tsukui and Saito (2018) suggested that lesson study provided teachers with the experiences of seeing themselves and their underlying values to generate possible momentum in the shift to new learning.

There is a gap in the literature with regard to the engagement of tertiary teachers in conducting research as a means of professional learning. In his study, Hiep H. Pham (2006) analysed data from official documents relating to the regulation of research at Vietnamese universities and interviews of seven English language educators from three tertiary institutions in Vietnam. The study shows that the educators espoused the need to conduct research as a professional learning practice. However, multiple factors such as researchers’ dissatisfaction with the current evaluation regulations, lack of time, lack of resources and opportunities for research and research publication opportunities, and inadequate research training and research skills tended to discourage the teacher educators from engaging in research activities. Current research shows a stronger involvement of English language university teachers. Framed within a sociocultural

Chapter 3: Literature Review

viewpoint, Huong H. Le's (2018) qualitative case study, using survey questionnaires and interviews, indicated that the way English language university teachers engaged in research was intertwined with the current context where the research was done. Action research on English teaching methodologies was reported to be popular. Interestingly, the research findings supported the Project 2020 initiative, part of which was an action research training project conducted in 2015 as described in Canh V. Le's (2018) project. Although the action research projects reported by Huong H. Le (2018) and Canh V. Le (2018) highlighted positive outcomes, these valuable learning experiences for teachers still need to be paid attention to and should be researched in depth.

Another aspect of teachers' collegial learning was studied by Vo and Nguyen (2010). In their qualitative study using interviews and observations, Vo and Nguyen (2010) examined the value of Critical Friend Groups (CFGs), a collaborative model of teacher professional learning, which involves teachers' collaboration in problem solving and mutual learning. Four beginning Vietnamese EFL teachers participated in a CFG over one semester. The teachers participated in a full CFG process, which involved three feedback meetings. Two weeks after the completion of the CFG process, interviews were conducted with each of the four teachers. The teachers were also observed in their feedback sessions. Drawing on the data collected, Vo and Nguyen (2010) found that the four beginning EFL teachers expressed great pleasure and satisfaction with their CFG experience. The teachers valued the opportunity to satisfy their growing needs for feedback from their colleagues and to exchange professional ideas in a relaxed manner. The four teachers also reported that they felt more positive thanks to the good work relationships built up, resulting in a sense of community and mutual understanding. The interview data revealed that the positive outcomes enhanced the teachers' motivation for teaching, encouraged them to provide greater care for their students, and improved lesson preparation. Vo and Nguyen (2010) suggested the application of CFGs as a model of EFL teacher professional development in Vietnam.

Another innovative collaborative professional learning activity – professional learning communities – has recently been paid attention to. Phan (2017) used primary schools in Thanh Van city (pseudonym) as the research site in her doctoral thesis. To be specific, Phan's (2017) study investigated a mandatory activity for primary school English teachers (PETs) called *Sinh hoạt cụm chuyên môn* (Participating in Professional Communities), referred to as professional learning communities (PLCs) in this study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

There were six PLCs in this city involving PETs from seven or eight primary schools, meeting once or twice every semester (four months) to discuss professional matters. In phase 1, with consent from the Department of Education, PLC leaders, an EFL consultant and PETs, Phan (2017) examined PLCs' operation by observing four professional learning communities (PLC A including 21 teachers, PLC B 18 teachers, PLC C 24 teachers, and PLC D 19 teachers), interviewing PLC leaders, and the EFL consultant. In phase 2, Phan (2017) looked for evidence about the PLCs' affordances on the PETs' learning by observing the PETs' EFL lessons at their schools, followed by an interview after each lesson. Framed within a socio-cultural perspective, which highlights the situatedness and interactiveness of teacher learning, the study showed positive results in the reshaped professional learning communities, allowing for bottom-up professional learning. The study indicated that the PLCs helped cultivate a culture of reflective inquiry among the PETs through individual reflections (*private reflections*) on their own teaching and shared reflections together in groups (*public reflections*). The teachers also reported their learning through social interactions among PETs and with the experts, including PLCs' leaders and the EFL consultant. Phan (2017) suggested models of professional learning communities appropriate to the Vietnamese context.

One important point revealed by these studies is that the authors of these studies focused on using one of the professional development activities or models to investigate its application and effectiveness in the local context. This entails a causal model of professional development (Biesta, 2007). It is based on the idea that "professionals do something – they administer a treatment, they intervene in a particular situation – in order to bring about certain effects" (Biesta, 2007, p. 7). Effectiveness, in this sense, has an instrumental value and does not say anything about what an intervention is supposed to bring about (Biesta, 2007). In contrast, a situative perspective focuses on teacher learning processes to gain insights into the processes of how teachers learn, drawing on unique features relevant to the socio-cultural, political and institutional particularities of the Vietnamese context.

Recent research on teacher professional learning in the Vietnamese context has been predominantly theoretical and conceptual discussion papers based on researchers' experiences and observations (Duong, 2003; Le, 2002; Mai, 2018; Pham, 2002; Truong, 2017). Vietnam is an under-explored context, and little research has been conducted in relation to professional learning for university EFL teachers. Empirical research needs to

be conducted on tertiary EFL teacher professional learning; within this, the processes of how tertiary EFL teachers learn via reflection and co-construction of knowledge are worthy of investigation.

3.5 Chapter summary

Through the review of literature on empirical studies of teacher professional learning in Vietnam, the following gaps have been identified:

- First, scant attention has been paid to teacher professional learning that uses teacher inquiry focusing on teachers' reflection and situative learning in the practice of teaching.
- Second, research on tertiary EFL teachers' engagement in research activities as a form of teacher learning is limited.
- Third, collective and interactive opportunities for teacher learning, such as Critical Friend Groups or Professional Learning Communities have not been widely explored.
- Fourth, research on teacher learning in Vietnam appears to place greater emphasis on learning activities and teacher change than on exploring the complex process of teacher learning.
- Fifth, recent research on teacher professional learning in Vietnam predominantly comprises conceptual discussion papers based on researchers' experiences and observations. There is a need for more empirical studies of tertiary EFL teacher professional learning.
- Finally, there is a need to elaborate more on SCA concepts and implementation, as well as cultural and contextual factors, in the Vietnamese ELT context.

To address these gaps, this study examined how engaging in the process of inquiry shaped teachers' learning. The study adopted a constructivist and situative perspective on learning, which defined teachers as active agents in the process of sense making. Their learning was social and situated; as such, multitudes of factors – personal, contextual, and socio-cultural – were explored to investigate the complexity and multidimensionality of the teachers' learning processes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

A predominantly qualitative research design was used to collect data and gain insights into the process of teacher learning in this study. Chapter Four covers the study methodology in detail.

The study was guided by the following five research questions:

1. What are the teachers' initial beliefs about and reported practices of student-centred approaches?
2. What influences on classroom practice are observed and reported when the teachers assume student-centred approaches?
3. How do the teachers learn within the inquiries?
4. What changes related to professional knowledge, professional practices and professional development practice do the teachers report?
5. How can the process of inquiry be harnessed to support teacher learning?

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The present study investigated teachers' engagement in an inquiry process in English language teaching (ELT) in a Vietnamese tertiary education context. Overall, the study examined how the process of inquiry shaped the teachers' professional learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge. In particular, the study investigated the process of enactment and reflection in teachers who enacted student-centred approaches (SCA) while endeavouring to develop their pedagogical knowledge and teaching practices, and engage in a professional learning practice. Through this learning process, the study examined how the teachers translated their new learning of SCA into their practices.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the study was guided by the following questions.

1. What are the teachers' initial beliefs about and reported practice of student-centred approaches?
2. What influences on classroom practice are observed and reported when the teachers assume student-centred approaches?
3. How do the teachers learn within the inquiries?
4. What changes related to professional knowledge, professional practices and professional development practice do the teachers report?
5. How can the process of inquiry be harnessed to support teacher learning?

In asking these questions, I explored the beliefs about teaching approaches initially held by the teachers before they took part in the inquiries to inform me as a researcher how to proceed the next stage. The study also investigated how the teachers interpreted and implemented student-centred approaches (SCA), and unpacked the influence of their reflections on implementing classroom inquiries. I also wanted to study the extent to which the teachers interacted and co-constructed their pedagogical content knowledge specifically related to SCA and their instructional practices through collective learning opportunities with other teacher participants. Furthermore, I sought to investigate shifts in the teachers' pedagogical knowledge, classroom practices, and professional learning practices. Importantly, I examined insights into how the process of inquiry engagement

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

via enactment, reflection, and co-construction of knowledge shaped the teachers' professional learning experiences.

This chapter describes the research methodology, methods, participants, and processes of data collection and analysis used in the study. First, it provides a detailed discussion of the interpretive paradigm including the ontological and epistemological stances in relation to the two theoretical perspectives of constructivist and situative learning. The study used a predominantly qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the inquiry process of the teachers' learning, how they made sense of their learning individually and collegially, and how they translated the new learning in practice. Five instruments for data collection were used in a four-phase process to explore the research questions: a questionnaire in Phase 1, classroom observations and debriefs in Phase 2, group discussions in Phase 3 and individual interviews in Phase 4. The research context, participants and the process of recruiting the participants are also described. In analysing the data, I used a qualitative inductive data analysis approach. Most of the data were analysed thematically, apart from the group discussion and individual interviews, which were analysed and presented in the form of vignettes. The questionnaire data were analysed descriptively. The chapter ends with an outline of how the research quality was assessed.

4.2 Interpretive paradigm

Wilson (2001) defines a research paradigm as “a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you are going to go about doing your research” (p. 175). A paradigm encompasses elements of epistemology, ontology, theory, and methodology (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Each of these elements will be unpacked in the following sections.

A researcher always brings into the research a number of philosophical assumptions, as Punch and Oancea (2014) argue:

Methods of inquiry are based on assumptions – assumptions about the nature of the reality being studied, assumptions about what constitutes knowledge of that reality, and assumptions about what therefore are appropriate ways of building knowledge of that reality (p. 16).

These philosophical assumptions are believed to come from different sources, such as personal experience, education, professional practice, professional communities and the

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

like. Philosophical stances are of profound importance in research because they shape how the researcher formulates the problems and research questions. Also, these stances inform how the researcher views the world, and are thus likely to influence the interpretation of data and the research outcomes. This study takes interpretive inquiry as its research paradigm, which is represented in the philosophical assumptions discussed below.

The first philosophical perspective embraced in this research relates to ontological stance, which refers to the nature of realities (Wilson, 2001). Taking this ontological position, people believe, see and understand the kinds of things that exist and the meaning of their existence in relation to themselves and to other entities. As a researcher, I understand reality to be pluralistic (Schwandt, 1994) and believe that knowledge changes constantly because knowledge is reliant on social interactions among people as they take place (Walliman, 2016) and on the contextual elements where they take place. Therefore, knowledge is not pre-defined but constructed and the process of knowledge creation is not linear, but fluid and dynamic among the creators.

The second philosophical assumption encompassed in the study is the epistemological stance. Epistemology is a term describing how we know things and what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge in the field (Walliman, 2016). In this study, my stance is that teachers view the world differently and the way they view the world will influence what they regard to be true. I thus hold a subjective epistemology of the world because I believe knowledge is reliant on teachers' subjective experiences. Teachers have their own values, beliefs, interests, education backgrounds, and personal, contextual and socio-cultural experiences. In acknowledging my subjectivity as a researcher, I recognised the importance of on-going reflexivity as I planned my research, enacted my research practices, and interpreted my findings. I will discuss reflexivity and how it was integrated in this study in section 4.6.2.

In qualitative research, philosophical assumptions are embedded within an interpretive framework to understand the meaning of reality and research phenomena. An interpretive approach studies how people make sense of the world differently because they have different perceptions about the world they live in. This is an attempt to understand the subjective meaning of the human experience within a context. This study used an interpretive approach in the way that it looked at the teachers' complex and multidimensional process of learning, and sought to understand teachers' beliefs,

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

perceptions, socio-cultural and contextual factors, and their experiences linked to their teaching behaviours and the learning process. The purpose of the research was to gain in-depth insights into the process of how the teachers learned, interpreted the new learning, acted in practice, and gained an understanding of why they acted the way they did.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.4.5, this study looked at teachers' professional learning through two theoretical lenses: constructivist and situative. From the perspective of constructivism, learning is a complex and dynamic process of making meaning, and constructing and interpreting one's own understanding. In this learning process, individuals play a central and active role. With regard to teachers' professional learning in this study, the teachers were not passive recipients of knowledge but active constructors of new knowledge, who made sense of the world and learned by interpreting events through their existing knowledge and beliefs. The teachers had their own values, beliefs, interests, education backgrounds, and personal experiences prior to the learning experience. Constructivist and interpretivist are related approaches to research in that knowledge is a form of interpretation based on the teachers' existing conceptions and experiences (Putnam & Borko, 2013). From the situative perspective, teacher learning is situated in particular physical and social contexts and is social and distributed in nature. With that said, the situative perspective of teacher learning gives insights into contextual and socio-cultural influences in interaction with others in the teacher learning process. Given the contextual and socio-cultural influences, knowledge constructed is not static but changes all the time depending on social interactions among the teachers and the contextual elements where the process takes place. In Chapter Three, section 3.4.5 provides a detailed discussion of these two theoretical approaches to teacher learning used in this study.

4.3 A predominantly qualitative research design

Some scholars view quantitative and qualitative methodologies as two fundamentally incompatible research approaches (Bryman, 2016; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Punch, 2009) with each playing to its respective strengths and weaknesses. For example, the strengths of quantitative research include its capacity to conceptualise variables, profile dimensions, trace trends and relationships, formalise comparisons, obtain objective facts, use large representative samples, and generalise to a wider population (L. V. Nguyen, 2011; Punch, 2009). However, there are arguments against using quantitative

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

research in isolation. For instance, the positivist stance of quantitative research was criticised for its mechanistic and reductionist view of nature and human behaviour, and for the objectivity brought into research (Bryman, 2012; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Punch, 2014). This results from overlooking in-depth understanding of the social and cultural contexts of the participants.

On the other hand, qualitative research, as predominantly used in this study, brings the strengths of “sensitivity to meaning and to context, local groundedness, the in-depth study of smaller samples, and great methodological flexibility which enhances the ability to study process and change” (Punch, 2009, p. 290). Gray (2014) explains that thanks to its characteristics being highly contextual and data being collected in a natural, real-life setting (for example, a classroom setting), qualitative research can show how and why things happen, incorporating people’s motivations, emotions, prejudices and incidents of interpersonal cooperation and conflict.

To examine the complexity and multidimensionality of the teacher learning process in this study, incorporating a multitude of factors such as cognition (beliefs, knowledge, attitudes), contextual factors, socio-cultural elements, the study accordingly had a predominantly qualitative research design, involving a number of characteristics as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). This study was conducted in the teachers’ classroom context, with a focus on the processes and the ways in which the teachers acted, to account for their actions and constructed knowledge. The research findings emerged from the data and my role as a researcher was to gain a holistic or integrated overview of the teachers’ learning process, including their underlying thinking.

The study was predominantly qualitative, with a small amount of quantitative data collected via a questionnaire at the beginning of data collection. The study used a combination of methods, including classroom observations, debriefs, group discussions and individual interviews (as discussed in section 4.4.4). The complementary use of methods reflected both the complex and multidimensional nature of teacher learning and the philosophical stance that reality is pluralist and complex.

4.4 Participants and data collection procedure

4.4.1 Participants

Six EFL teachers working on a part-time or full-time basis in two tertiary institutions in the Central Highlands of Vietnam participated in this study. Throughout the thesis, the names of the teachers have been replaced by pseudonyms. Participant demographics are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Participant demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Highest qualification	Years of service
Tien	40 - 50	Female	Bachelor's degree in English Master's degree in TESOL	above 20
Lanh	20 - 30	Male	Bachelor's degree in English	1 - 5
Manh	20 - 30	Male	Bachelor's degree in English Translation	1 - 5
Nhi	30 - 40	Female	Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching Master's degree in Applied Linguistics	15 -20
Uy	30 - 40	Female	Bachelor's degree in English Master of Business Administration	10 - 15
Trinh	30 - 40	Female	Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching Master's degree in Applied Linguistics	10 -15

Three teachers from University A (one worked on a part-time basis) and three full-time teachers from University B were involved in this project. They were aged between 24 and 50 years. Two were males and the rest were females. These six teachers had a range of expertise, teaching experience, and courses that they oversaw. Three teachers had backgrounds specialising in English language teaching (Tien with a Master's degree in TESOL, Nhi and Trinh with Bachelor's degrees in English Language Teaching and Master's degrees in Applied Linguistics). Uy held a Master's degree in Business Administration. The other two had a Bachelor's degree in English, in which pedagogical

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

courses were optional. One veteran teacher had been in service for 22 years; the middle group's teaching experience ranged from 11 to 16 years; and the group of novice teachers' service was between one and two years. Most of them were in charge of English major and non-English major courses, except Manh, who taught three non-English major courses during the semester.

Participant demographics are presented in Table 4.1 to enable readers to understand the diversity of the participant group. The selection of the six teachers from two research sites not only allowed for variations in terms of contexts, perspectives, and experiences, but also added rigour to the data collected and permitted in-depth analysis. Bryman (2012) argues that a small sample size “increases the qualitative researcher's chances of getting close involvement with their participants. . . and generating fine-grained data, features that are significant for their study” (p. 426). He further argues that “conducting qualitative research in more than one setting can be helpful in identifying the significance of context and the ways in which it influences behaviour and ways of thinking” (p. 402). In practice, the number of participants involved in this project was justified by the work of other qualitative researchers working in the area of teacher professional learning and development, who used a similar number of participants (González & Skultety, 2018; H. B. Nguyen, 2014; L. V. Nguyen, 2011; Sarfraz, 2019). However, due to the study scope, research aims and small sample size, no claims or generalisations are made in this thesis about the correlation between participants' variables and the research findings.

4.4.2 Research sites

The study was carried out in two universities in Vietnam – University A and University B. These two universities were selected because these were the only two universities in the city chosen for the study. Other than these two, there are a few colleges in the city; however, concerns that different training programmes and durations could cause discrepancies in comparing instructional content, teaching practices, and professional development practices drove my decision not to involve other tertiary institutions in the research.

University A is a public multidisciplinary university in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, with 19 faculties offering 39 programmes. The Faculty of Foreign Languages – University A, established in 1992, offers two programmes: a Bachelor of English and a Bachelor of English Language Teaching for both on-campus and off-campus students.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The faculty is also in charge of providing instruction for general English courses and ESP courses for another 37 non-English major programmes at the university. Every semester one teacher is usually in charge of approximately five courses, consuming about 300 teaching hours. Beside teaching commitments, teachers are required to engage in research activities: writing articles, and participating and presenting at workshops, seminars, or conferences.

University B, a non-state university in Vietnam's Central Highlands, was founded in 2004. The Department of English Language – University B was established in 2004 with the first batch of trainees entering in 2005. Because English was recognised as an indispensable tool for graduates' future careers, at the time of data collection, all English-major students were required to pass a standardised English test – the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) – to be able to graduate. With an emphasis on students' communication skills, the department's teaching materials and teaching approaches emphasised improving students' speaking skills. Given that purpose, activities incorporated in the courses had to ensure they improved students' speaking skills. At this research site, commitment to research was not compulsory when the teachers participated in this study in 2016. Therefore, teachers were not required to commit to certain numbers of research hours although engagement in research activities was encouraged.

4.4.3 Data collection procedure

Data were collected via a four-phase process (see Table 4.2) over a semester. In the first phase of data collection, a questionnaire was used. Phase 2 onwards involved fieldwork, when primary qualitative data were collected. This was when the teachers engaged in the inquiries of SCA. For the second phase, classroom observations were conducted to investigate how the teachers interpreted and translated the new learning of SCA in practice, which was followed by debriefs to gain some insights into their underlying assumptions or rationales for their classroom activities. The third phase in the process was the group discussion, and the fourth phase was the individual interview.

Detailed discussion about the data collection instruments, including the questionnaire, observations, debriefs, group discussions, and individual interviews is provided in the following section.

Table 4.2 Data collection phases

Data collection phase	Instrument used	Procedure description	Participants
Phase 1 (Jan – Feb 2016)	Questionnaire	An email was sent out to briefly introduce my study and invite English teachers in the Faculty of Foreign Languages from University A and teachers in the Department of English of University B to engage in an online questionnaire.	20
Phase 2 (Feb – Jun 2016)	Observation, Debrief	Each teacher’s instructional practice was observed in their class. A debrief followed as soon as the teaching session finished.	6
Phase 3 (Feb – Jun 2016)	Group discussion	Six teachers were invited to engage in a group discussion after each cycle of classroom observation.	6
Phase 4 (Jul – Aug 2016)	Individual interview	Interviews were conducted individually with each teacher.	6

In Phase 2, the six inquiries were categorised into four cycles of observation based on their theoretical relevance. They were:

- First cycle of observation focusing on Inquiry 1
- Second cycle of observation focusing on Inquiries 2 and 3
- Third cycle of observation focusing on Inquiries 4, 5 and 6
- Fourth cycle of observation synthesising all inquiries.

Prior to the commencement of participant recruitment, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Waikato (see Appendix C). Two documents, an information letter and an informed consent form, were also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. Before the fieldwork started, I sent the information letter in English (see an example in Appendix D) and briefly translated it into Vietnamese to apply for approval from the top institutional level of University A, then departmental agreement, and faculty support. Once the approval was granted, I

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

approached potential teacher participants (see below for further detail). The information letter and consent form (see an example in Appendix E) were sent out to four teachers at University A who expressed their interest and availability to participate in this study. An allowance of two days for teachers' consideration was given before the teacher signed the consent forms. However, one teacher ultimately had another training commitment and was unavailable to participate in this study. All the signed letters and forms were kept on file in hard copy format.

Due to the available number of participants from University A and because of the aim of the study, I saw a need to conduct my project at an additional research site and to involve other colleagues in the project. Therefore, I decided to extend an invitation to teachers in the Department of English Language at University B. I was unable to start Phase 2 until I received ethics approval for the extension of the research project from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The same process of gaining access and obtaining consent from participants was adopted. Three teachers agreed to participate in the study. At each site, an initial group meeting was organised to allow the teachers to get to know more about each other, their teaching practices, and the details of the study.

The information letter and consent form for the participants mentioned one extra instrument for data collection: blogging on a wiki page. This instrument was originally selected for the study but later discarded during the data collection process due to practical concerns when I was carrying out fieldwork in Vietnam. An individual interview with each participant was used to supplement the richness of data. The participants were informed of this change and consented to participate in the individual interviews.

From Phase 2, this study used a purposive sampling technique, which is widely used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling “used the judgement of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind” (Neuman, 2006, p. 222). Reflecting on the purpose and the questions guiding the study, my selection of the six teachers was based on a number of characteristics described generally in broad categories to maintain ethical anonymity of the participants. The characteristics included teachers' availability throughout the semester, teachers' interest in professional learning and development, and particular types of cases who were diverse in terms of genders, years of experience, and educational backgrounds (qualifications).

4.4.4 Instruments

The section below unpacks the rationale behind my selection of data collection instruments. Table 4.3 shows the data collection instruments in relation to the research questions. As discussed earlier, triangulation of data from these different sources was not my intention. Rather, the use of multiple data collection instruments added to the comprehensiveness, rigour, saturation of the study and reflected the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the teachers’ learning process. This unique combination of data collection methods aimed to capture the entire process of teacher learning through iterative cycles of reflection, which is further discussed in Chapter Six, section 6.5.2.

Table 4.3 Data collection instruments in relation to research questions

Research question	Research method	Rationale
1. What are teachers’ initial beliefs about and reported practice of student-centred approaches?	Questionnaire	To investigate general beliefs and reported practices about SCA from a broader group of teachers from two institutions.
2. What influences on classroom practice are observed and reported when teachers assume student-centred approaches?	Observation, Debrief	To investigate how the teachers interpreted and enacted SCA in their classroom practice.
3. How do the teachers learn within the inquiries?	Group discussion, Interview	To examine the process of teacher learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and the process of co-construction of knowledge.
4. What changes related to professional knowledge, professional practice and professional development practice do teachers report?	Group discussion, Interview	To reflect on the changes in terms of pedagogical knowledge, professional practice, and professional learning practice the teachers reported.
5. How can this process of inquiry be harnessed to support teacher learning?	Group discussion, Interview	To identify supports and hindrances in the teacher learning process.

A summary of the data collected via the five different instruments is outlined in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Data collected through different sources

Source	Length of time	University A	University B	Total
Questionnaire	30 items	17 participants	3 participants	20
Observation	60 minutes each	12 sessions	13 sessions	25
Debrief	15 minutes each	6 debriefs	10 debriefs	16
Group discussion	60 minutes each	3 participants	3 participants	6
Individual interview	30 minutes each	3 interviews	3 interviews	6

4.4.4.1 Questionnaire

In Phase 1 (1 January–14 February 2016), a questionnaire was used (see Appendix F). Before I went back to Vietnam for my fieldwork, I sent out an email briefly introducing my study and inviting twenty-three English teachers of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of University A to engage in an electronic questionnaire. The same questionnaire was emailed to four English teachers in the Department of English Language at University B when approval was obtained to extend the research coverage. This questionnaire aimed to gather initial information about the teachers’ reported beliefs and practices to inform me as a researcher how to proceed the next stage of the study. Twenty responses were collected.

The questionnaire had four main parts. Part A asked for general information about the respondent and their classes. Part B inquired into the teachers’ reported classroom practices. Part C included 20 five-point Likert scale statements which sought to examine the teachers’ perceptions of SCA. Part D consisted of two open-ended questions to explore the teachers’ perceptions of the roles that a teacher and a learner play in teaching and learning. The questionnaire was piloted with three postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand and one postgraduate student at the University of New England in Australia. Three of them were English lecturers and one was a physics lecturer. The aim of the pilot was to seek feedback on the content, the question sequence, and the comprehensibility of the questionnaire. Their comments provided me with an opportunity to review and refine the statements and questions in the questionnaire.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Questionnaires are “one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design” (Bryman, 2012, p. 232). Questionnaires have a number of advantages: they are cheap, quick to administer, convenient for respondents; there is an absence of interviewer effects and no interviewer variability (Bryman, 2012). Even though questionnaires are often used in quantitative research, in this study, I used a descriptive questionnaire to understand the teachers’ perceptions before beginning to work with them. It was not my intention to use the questionnaire data for triangulation or integration with data from other sources.

4.4.4.2 Observations

The fieldwork was carried out between 15 February and 20 August 2016. This was when the inquiry process started (February–June 2016). As mentioned in section 3.4.6, this study used teacher inquiry as a tool, functioning as the impetus for the teachers’ reflection and co-construction of new learning with each other. There were six *inquiries*, each of which represented one aspect associated with student-centred pedagogy. As mentioned above, the six inquiries were categorised into four cycles and each cycle incorporated one or more aspects of inquiries, which relied on their theoretical relevance. For example, cycle 1 included Inquiry 1, cycle 2 combined Inquiries 2 and 3, cycle 3 comprised Inquiries 4, 5 and 6, and cycle 4 integrated all the inquiries from 1 to 6. These inquiry cycles were the basis for the observation sessions.

When I went back to Vietnam for my field work, I asked for permission from one senior teacher to observe her class as an observation pilot because I wanted to practise the multiple skills including observing, note taking, listening during the teaching session and identifying pertinent moments to discuss with the teacher in the briefing afterwards. The pilot went well and it was noted that if I missed anything, I could use the audio recording as a backup.

After the teachers engaged in each cycle of inquiries, classroom observations were planned. The purpose of observation sessions was to explore how the teachers interpreted and enacted SCA, guided by the six inquiries in practice. As the teachers might teach several courses during the semester, observation sessions were conducted in classes that were chosen by each teacher. I perceived that culturally, the teachers and their students could feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar with me as the researcher being in the classroom and observing them. The flexibility, to a certain extent, allowed the teachers to select the

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

classes and teaching sessions that they were most comfortable and confident with. Because the teaching schedules of the two universities were quite different, it was agreed that each teacher would notify me of the observation schedules one week in advance. Also, observations were scheduled into one-week intervals between the two groups of teachers from the two universities to avoid timetable clashes and to allow the teachers sufficient time to thoroughly prepare and translate the new learning into classroom enactment.

Each teaching session was 3 hours long, including a 10-minute break. However, each observation lasted for approximately 60 minutes, which could be before or after the break to minimise classroom disruption. As can be seen in Table 4.4, twelve teaching sessions involving University A's teachers were observed and thirteen sessions involving University B's teachers. There was one extra observation session at the University B site: at the end of the four inquiry cycles, although classroom observation among the participant teachers was not a tool used in this study, the teachers in University B expressed their desire to observe Uy's lesson. These teachers were passionate about project-based teaching (Inquiry 6) and wanted to learn how to use this approach in their class because they were concerned about the low proficiency level of their students and time limitations. The teachers discussed with Uy how to organise a co-teaching session for a consolidation lesson. I joined this group of teachers in this extra teaching session.

During each observed teaching session, I sat in an unobtrusive spot in the classroom, usually at the back, where I observed and took notes in an observational protocol (see Appendix G). After gaining consent from the teachers in the consent form and verbal consent from their students, classroom activities were audio recorded during observation sessions and, together with my observation notes, they served as rich on-site data. Observation notes were typed shortly after each observation and kept on file in soft copy (see a sample of typed observation notes in Appendix H).

4.4.4.3 Debriefs

After each of the lessons observed, a debrief was conducted with each of the teachers. Debriefs were carried out in the teaching staff room during teachers' breaks or in the classroom after the lesson finished. Most observed lessons were followed by a debrief, except for a few instances when evening classes finished late and the teachers were in a hurry to go home.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Debriefs provided opportunities to gain insights into the teachers' reflection on their practice when it was still fresh in their mind. In other words, during the debriefs, the teachers were asked questions to reflect on certain moments of their practices. Questions were not prepared in advance but emerged from the teachers' instruction and teaching activities. Debriefs focused on SCA pedagogy or repeated practice in observed lessons. I used the questions 'why', 'in what way', or 'could you explain about . . .?' to elicit elaborative reasoning underpinning the teachers' actions in the class. On average, each debrief lasted about 15-20 minutes. They were audio recorded, then transcribed and translated into English. In total 16 debriefs were conducted: 6 with University A's teachers, and 10 with University B's teachers.

4.4.4.4 Group discussions

A group discussion is an informal discussion among a small number of people, usually from six to eight, and rarely more than twelve, about a particular topic (Hiratsuka, 2014; Liamputtong, 2011; Wilkinson, 1998). The particular advantage of group discussions, as Wilkinson (1998) states, is the opportunity for group participants to share their experiences and their ways of making sense of these experiences (p. 189). Group discussions, therefore, offer an opportunity for researchers to gain insights into the commonly held assumptions, concepts, and meanings that constitute and inform participants' talk about their experiences (Wilkinson, 1998). Group discussions also enable researchers to "observe how people engage in the process of collective sense-making: how views are constructed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified within the context of discussion and debate with others" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 186). In this study, group discussions, regarded as a social activity, enabled the participants of the group to explore existing understandings of teaching approaches and SCA in particular, and collegially reflect on their practical experiences. Group dynamics allow participants to make meaning of their experiences through interaction (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis; Moloney, as cited in Hiratsuka, 2014), which is sometimes hidden in in-depth interviews (Liamputtong, 2011). Via group discussions, this study investigated how the teachers' participation in this interactive opportunity, which shaped their professional learning.

In Phase 3 (February–June 2016), the teachers participated in three group discussions, which were usually organised after each cycle of observation. Each group discussion was scheduled to be 60 minutes in duration; however, due to the productivity of the

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

discussions and the number of topics covered, discussions sometimes went longer than scheduled. Three group discussions were organised during the teaching semester. Because Phase 2 and Phase 3 occurred over a period of four months with the six teachers and three different data collection measures, a careful timeline was planned to ensure sufficient time for teachers' lesson plans and reflection. Table 4.5 shows an example of the first cycle of inquiry. The initial O was for observation, D was for debrief, and GD was for group discussion.

Table 4.5 Example of a time plan for Phase 2 and Phase 3

Week	UNIVERSITY B									UNIVERSITY A								
	Uy			Nhi			Trinh			Lanh			Manh			Tien		
	O	D	GD	O	D	GD	O	D	GD	O	D	GD	O	D	GD	O	D	GD
Week 1	Inquiry 1 was handed to the teachers																	
Week 2										✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Week 3	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓										
Week 4			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓

Before each group discussion, the teachers were provided with a list of discussion questions in the discussion prompt prepared (see Appendix I). The questions addressed aspects of their enactment of student-centred inquiries in practice; for example, what activities they tried out, how successful they were, what supporting or hindering factors influenced the implementation, what the teachers would do differently in future practices, and what other useful activities or techniques they would suggest. This approach was chosen for two reasons. One was that the approach provided the teachers with opportunities to think carefully about their classroom enactment, meaningful learning experiences, and to identify and reflect on relevant aspects of their teaching. The other reason was that, culturally, good preparation for meetings is preferred in Vietnamese culture as it is believed that well-informed preparation contributes to fruitful and in-depth discussions. The teachers used Vietnamese to discuss matters in the group and, from my

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

observations, common linguistic terminology was mentioned in English. Group discussions were audio recorded, then transcribed and translated into English.

Despite successful data gathering through group discussions, there were a number of challenges while carrying out the group discussions with the teachers: different teaching schedules among the teachers from two universities; teachers' heavy teaching loads; and other work and family commitments. Not all of the six teachers were able to make time for group discussion 1 and group discussion 3. Table 4.6 provides details of the discussion topics and participants.

Table 4.6 Group discussion topics and participants involved

	Topic	University A	University B
Group discussion 1	Inquiry 1	Lanh, Manh	Uy, Nhi, Trinh
Group discussion 2	Inquiries 2 & 3	Lanh, Manh, Tien	Uy, Nhi, Trinh
Group discussion 3	Inquiries 4, 5 & 6	Lanh	Uy, Trinh

4.4.4.5 Semi-structured individual interviews

Interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research (Lichtman, 2006). An interview is defined as a method that permits the researcher and the participants to engage in a verbal exchange (Brinkmann, 2018). In my study, I used individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews with my participants. Vietnamese culture values face-to-face interaction, which helps to build trust and fostered the relationship with the participating teachers. The research questions served as a guided interview protocol to ensure valid data were obtained from the teachers' responses.

The interview and group discussions were not piloted in practice due to time constraints and concerns about practicality, particularly concerning a pilot group discussion. However, after drafting the interview and group discussion questions, I shared them with the four teachers with whom I piloted the questionnaire and with a few colleagues in Vietnam to ascertain how comprehensible the questions were. The comments were generally positive and constructive, and I was prompted to make several minor changes to expression in order to improve clarity.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Qualitative researchers often select this method because of the following benefits. Interviews yield rich data and at the same time allow immediate follow-up and clarification if required (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Importantly, “interviews reveal evidence of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, including the context and situations in which they emerge, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences and their social worlds” (Miller & Glassner, 2016, p. 51). Combined with observations, interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings underpinning the daily practices of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

However, interviews have limitations. The richness and depth of the data collected via interviews is very much reliant on trust and thus on openness between the researcher and the respondents. That led to my decision to conduct face-to-face interviews with the teachers instead of a virtual interview.

In Phase 4 (July–August 2016), semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with the six teachers. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes on average. The interview venue was decided based on the teachers’ convenience: at their university, a café, or in their home. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Five of the six teachers answered in both Vietnamese and English. Lanh was the only one who used English in the interview.

I encouraged the teachers to use Vietnamese and/or English in the interviews according to their preferences. I understood that the teachers had different language competencies, and the intention of allowing the use of both Vietnamese and English was to enhance communication and build rapport. Like in the group discussions, five teachers used both Vietnamese and common English language terminology to express their opinions. Lanh was the only one who used English in the interview. The teachers’ use of translanguaging, blending between English and Vietnamese, in the interviews enabled communication more effectively. The translated transcripts were emailed to each teacher for verification.

The interviews had five main themes. A list of prompt questions for the individual interviews was prepared (see Appendix J). First, the teachers reported their perceptions of their role as a teacher. Then, the teachers were asked to describe the changes they perceived in terms of their classroom practices and cognition through the cycles of inquiry reflection. The teachers were also asked to reflect on the extent to which the group

discussions with other teachers affected their practice and cognition and how this interactive opportunity shaped their learning. The next part of the interview concerned factors that they felt supported or hindered the process of learning generally and of enactment of SCA particularly. Looking forward, interviews also enabled the teachers to share their future intentions and desired support for their professional learning and development.

4.5 Data analysis

In this study, in analysing the data, I used a qualitative data analysis approach, which is an iterative process of describing, classifying (categorising), and connecting data (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). There is no single right way to do qualitative data analysis and much depends on the purposes of the research and careful consideration of the proposed method of analysis with regard to other parts of the research from the start (Punch, 2014). Regardless of the methods or approaches to analysis to be used, they need to be systematic, disciplined, transparent, and described (Punch, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I followed an inductive analysis process and I also adapted thematic coding strategy, which permitted themes to emerge from the data (Bazeley, 2013). Inductive analysis process allows concepts to be developed inductively from the data and raised to a higher level of abstraction, and their relationships are then traced out (Punch, 2014). Thematic coding helps identify, analyse and interpret the patterns of meaning (themes) that emerged from the collected data (Punch, 2014). The combination of inductive analysis and thematic coding captures the richness of the researched phenomenon in this study, that was, the teachers' learning process.

Throughout the process of analysis, I used the NVivo qualitative data analysis programme for organising, visualising and categorising data. NVivo provided a database for storage and navigation of questionnaire responses, observation notes, and debrief, group discussion and individual interview transcripts (see Figure 4.1 for illustration of data storage in NVivo). This analysis tool also allowed the creation of memos to document my thoughts, doubts, and insights that were emerging as I was going through the data. The detailed process of data analysis is elaborated in the following sections of this chapter. Despite NVivo being described as effective and efficient as a qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo and similar software packages are basically data management packages, which support researchers during the data analysis process (Zamawe, 2015). The use of

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

NVivo did not compromise my own analysis. This explains why I incorporated a manual coding step using hard copies of transcripts prior to NVivo coding. See the subsequent sections for specifics of the data analysis process.

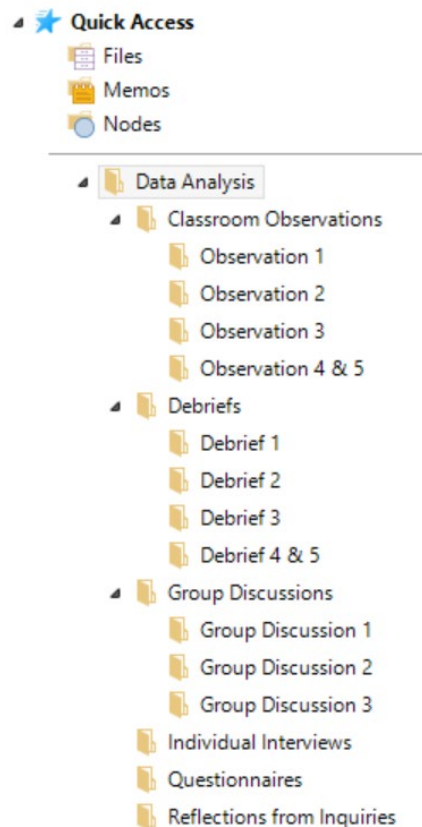


Figure 4.1 Collected data organisation in NVivo

As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that my position in the study would have had some impact on the participant teachers and the information I got from them at different stages of the study. The potential reason, as argued by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014) and Benaquisto (2008), is that social science researchers are likely to either derive them from the existing literature or be influenced by the literature in their creation. Also, as mentioned in section 4.2, my philosophical position had some impact on how I viewed the world and the teacher learning in this study.

In the following sections of the chapter, data analysis procedures are presented for each type of data: questionnaire, observations and debriefs, group discussions and individual interviews.

4.5.1 Data analysis: Questionnaire

Questionnaire data were analysed descriptively. Descriptive statistical analysis is commonly used to explore trends. Specifically, in this study, measures of central tendency (percentages) were used to analyse patterns in the data relating to participants' views of SCA and their experiences. The use of descriptive statistics is an effective means for presenting initial information about the problem or phenomenon being surveyed in this study – the teachers' beliefs and reported practices of SCA.

At the beginning of the research project, an electronic questionnaire, which I designed, was forwarded to a wider group of EFL teachers in two universities. Twenty responses were returned. The 20 Likert-scale statements in the questionnaires pertained to five meaningful categories. These were: 1) teacher's role and effective teaching, 2) student's role and effective teaching and learning, 3) students' engagement in teaching and learning, 4) role of syllabus and textbooks, and 5) English language environment.

These main themes or categories were considered as part of the questionnaire design process. However, to deal with social desirability bias (Andres, 2012; Gittelman et al., 2015) (the tendency to want to be accepted, which may lead to providing inaccurate answers to questions) and assimilation effects (Andres, 2012) (when the placement of a particular question affects responses to subsequent questions), I decided not to group the questions in the questionnaire by topic, but mixed them up with the hope to receive the most accurate answers from the teachers. When I received the teachers' responses, I re-grouped them into the five categories, in line with the initial design.

The last two questions in the questionnaire were open-ended and the respondents were asked to describe the teacher's role and the students' role in their own words. The participants' responses to these two questions were analysed manually by creating two word clouds based on word lists and the key-word-in-context (KWIC) technique (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). For analysis, the same and very similar single words (nouns) were identified and grouped. Verbs were converted into corresponding nouns. For example, the response "in my class, I always try to facilitate the process of learning of my students" was converted to 'facilitator'. For further detail, see section 5.2.2 in Chapter Five.

4.5.2 Data analysis: Observations and debriefs

In preparing to analyse observation and debrief data, first, I listened to observation audio recordings a couple of times and simultaneously read my observation notes. Based on this, I tabulated the observed classroom activities of the six teachers to foreground the key similarities and differences in their practices. I then grouped the commonly observed activities into three levels of adoption and innovation in the teachers' practices. They were routine classroom pedagogy, changes towards SCA classroom practices, and expansion in teaching practices beyond the inquiries. Following this step, I listened to the recordings and read the observation notes again to select data excerpts to illustrate the teachers' practices. Together with the debriefs, I commenced the process of transcribing and translating.

Transcribing and translating were done simultaneously by me with the assistance of transcription apps. All debriefs and selected observed teaching excerpts were translated to English. I transcribed the recorded data manually with the support of oTranscribe (<https://otranscribe.com/>), a browser-based tool that keeps everything contained within the browser, which reduces changing between open windows and apps. The Vietnamese-language raw data remained on secure computer audio files and the English translations were available for access if necessary. Since I conducted the observations and debriefs, it was easy to ascertain the context in which the participants spoke and the Vietnamese language content that the participants delivered. However, the process of translation from Vietnamese verbal conversations to English textual form was carefully considered. After the translation, the English translations were all checked by a colleague, and sample checked by my supervisors for accuracy and readability. The English translations included non-verbal features such as pauses, laughter, or hesitations in the participants' speech. The English translations were emailed back to the teachers to check their accuracy and to invite additions or changes. This step aimed to check the translations against recordings (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Two feedbacks were received from one teacher in terms of typos and the translation of the phrase *trình độ cơ bản*, where the teacher preferred to use *low-intermediate level* instead of *elementary level*. The process of checking translations against recordings and checking the quality of translation was iteratively conducted by me until the completion of writing up the findings. Despite my translation being checked carefully, in some instances when the participants' expressions were vague or could be translated in different ways, I included English translations and

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

original Vietnamese data in square brackets. I endeavoured to present the translated transcripts with as little editing and interpreting as possible in order to mirror the words spoken by the participants (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Table 4.7 illustrates the transcription and reference conventions used in this study.

Table 4.7 Transcription and reference conventions used in the study

Convention	Explanation
R	Researcher
U	Uy
N	Nhi
Tr	Trinh
L	Lanh
M	Manh
T	Tien
O1	Observation 1
O1D1	Observation 1 debrief 1
GD	Group discussion
...	Parts of quotation omitted within a sentence
....	Parts of quotation omitted between a sentence
[]	Translated text or text inserted by the researcher
<i>Italic text</i>	Vietnamese original text

After the preparing and organising of data for analysis, the coding process began, which is described together with group discussion and debrief data in the following section.

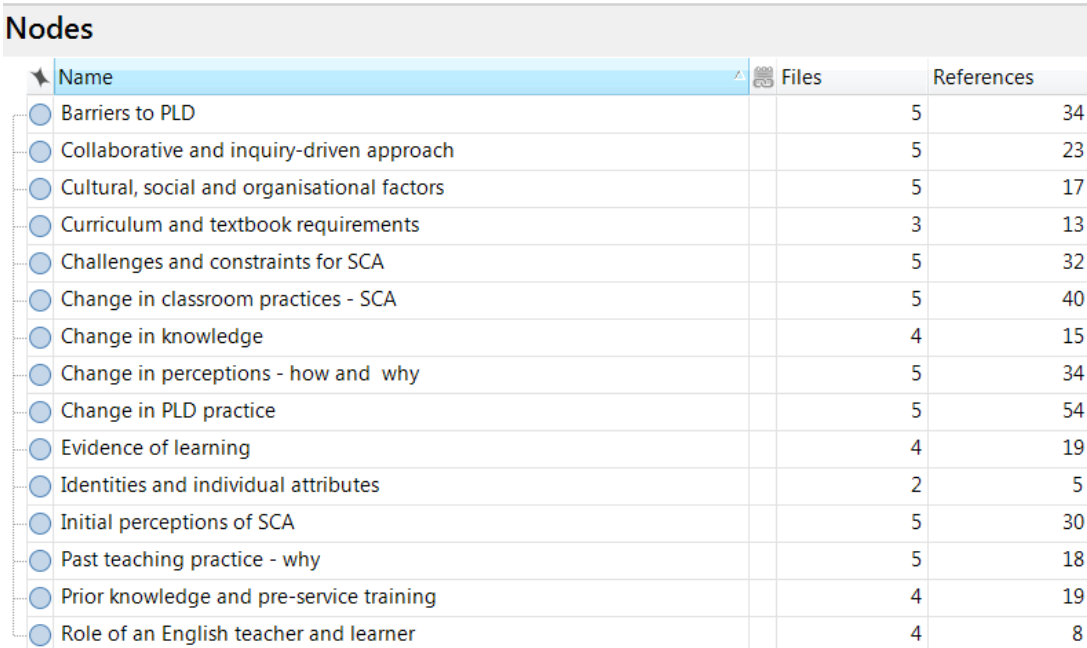
4.5.3 Data analysis: Group discussions and individual interviews

Once the debriefs, group discussions, and individual interviews were translated, all the English translations were printed as hard copies. Care was taken to read through the

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

English translations several times to familiarise myself with the content, begin to understand the meaning, and make connections between the teachers' stories.

Once the English translations of the transcripts had been read repeatedly for familiarisation, I started the process of initial descriptive coding (Neuman, 2006) or open coding (Punch, 2014) manually by putting tags, names or labels against significant pieces of data (Neuman, 2006). I marked the translations with coloured pens, put notes beside them, and underlined significant statements that could potentially be extracted as quotes. This manual coding process was done for each instrument and with its correlated instrument: debriefs in accordance with related observations, group discussions in accordance with inquiries, and individual interviews. This enabled me to make comparisons and identify patterns. Then, this process was repeated in NVivo, which gave me another opportunity to review the data and consider participants' statements and initial codes. In NVivo, these identified statements were extracted, grouped together, organised together, and generated as axial codes (Neuman, 2006) or pattern codes (Punch, 2014), which are smaller number of meaningful units pulled together (Punch, 2014). Figure 4.2 illustrates pattern codes for interview data of this study in NVivo.



Name	Files	References
Barriers to PLD	5	34
Collaborative and inquiry-driven approach	5	23
Cultural, social and organisational factors	5	17
Curriculum and textbook requirements	3	13
Challenges and constraints for SCA	5	32
Change in classroom practices - SCA	5	40
Change in knowledge	4	15
Change in perceptions - how and why	5	34
Change in PLD practice	5	54
Evidence of learning	4	19
Identities and individual attributes	2	5
Initial perceptions of SCA	5	30
Past teaching practice - why	5	18
Prior knowledge and pre-service training	4	19
Role of an English teacher and learner	4	8

Figure 4.2 Illustration of pattern codes for interview data

A similar coding process was initially conducted for the three group discussions. I grouped similar codes together to reduce overlapping and redundancy of codes and develop them into themes (Creswell, 2014). However, at this final stage of data analysis,

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

involving comparing the teachers' responses across the instruments (group discussions and individual interviews) and reflecting on the research questions, I realised a challenge in preserving the interactive nature of the group discussion data (Wilkinson, 1998). In addition, presenting the group discussion findings by providing numerous direct quotations from the group participants added unnecessary length and tedious repetition of the data. In presenting extracts of participants' words, I shared the view that understanding and explaining how the participants make sense of their experiences, careful selection of their words, phrases and excerpts, providing coherent linkages and interpretation in relation to other factors, and meaningful conceptualisation of the data were real evidence, in lieu of long, disjointed data excerpts (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). As a result, I decided to use vignettes to report the findings of group discussion and individual interview data.

A vignette is "a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic" in the study (Miles et al., 2020). The use of vignettes is recommended as one of a number of ways to analyse group discussion data while preserving the social context in the group (Wilkinson, 1998). Furthermore, vignettes "provide a valuable technique for exploring people's perceptions, beliefs and meaning about specific situations" (Barter & Renold, 1999, n.p.). To help me to explore the research questions without repeating excerpts of data, four vignettes from the three group discussions were selected to analyse and report. In this analytic coding step, various vignettes provided opportunities to explore the structure and dynamic of the discussions and the multidimensionality of how the teachers learned. Boeije (2010) suggests three levels of group discussion analysis: the intragroup level, intergroup level and the individual level, but "not every study demands an analysis of three levels" (p. 140). Because of the scope of the study and the small group size, this group of six teachers was treated as a group itself, so it was purposeful in having two levels of group analysis in this study. In analysis of group levels, attention was paid to group interactions, such as levels of agreement, consensus, conflict, negotiation, and changes in opinion, collegial sharing of experiences, and collective understandings of shared problems and solutions to the problems (Bazeley, 2013; Boeije, 2010; Wilkinson, 1998). In analysis of individual levels, the responses and behaviours of separate members were examined in relation to contextual factors and personal factors such as prior experience and existing knowledge.

4.6 Ensuring research quality

Qualitative researchers in general and interpretivists and constructivists in particular find it challenging to justify their analyses of qualitative data (Burr, 2003). It was proposed that the same criteria, including validity and reliability, used for traditional research methods should be used for evaluating qualitative research (Lichtman, 2006). However, these criteria are believed to oppose the nature and the soundness of qualitative research. Flick (2007) suggests that managing quality in qualitative research concerns not just issues linked to the use of one specific method or step in the research process but rather considers the research process as a whole in addressing issues of quality in qualitative research.

With a process-focused inquiry, this study took into account three central discussion points in ensuring quality throughout the research project. They were research rigour, trustworthiness through reflexivity, and ethical considerations.

4.6.1 Research rigour

Morse (2018) reframes strategies to evaluate qualitative research rigour, which are primarily concerned with the adequacy and appropriateness of data quality. These strategies include audit trail, member check, comprehensiveness of data, and saturation.

In my study, a detailed description of the research process, participant recruitment, research contexts and challenges has been provided in this chapter, to describe the study and the complexity of the research. This chapter has also clearly presented how the data were analysed. This practice is supported by Creswell and Miller (2000), who recommend developing an audit trail - “a clear documentation of all research decisions and activities” (p. 128).

Member checking, known as participant validation, is one means of enhancing rigour in qualitative research and ensuring credibility of the data being collected. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) summarise three methods of member checking, including returning transcripts to participants to review the accuracy of the data, carrying out member check interviews after returning transcripts to the participants, and undertaking a focus group to validate the results of a study. In this study, because of distance constraints between New Zealand and Vietnam, transcripts of debriefs, interviews, and group discussions were returned to the six teachers via email to review

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

the accuracy of the transcription. This was the opportunity for the teachers to add more information, clarify, or edit what they had said. All six teachers responded to my email and appreciated the opportunity to see their experiences recorded. As mentioned in section 4.4.3, apart from one feedback requiring minor changes, the five other teachers required no amendment to the transcripts. Furthermore, as discussed in section 4.5, translated transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and revised through iterative cycles by me, a colleague and my supervisors.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or sources of data in a study (Bryman, 2016). The original intent of triangulation was for reliability and replication (Morse, 2018). However, a more recent interest, which aligns with my study focus, is in the comprehensiveness of the data. In this study, the participants were from two universities, which helped me to explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon of teacher learning. This research project was not a comparative study of teacher professional learning in two groups of teachers, but the selection of research sites and classroom-based environments contributed to the complexity and multidimensionality of the depiction of their learning process. Furthermore, looking at teacher professional learning through the two perspectives of constructivist and situated learning complemented each other. Finally, the use of multiple data collection instruments and different approaches to data analysis added value to the comprehensiveness and rigour of the study.

Saturation in qualitative research commonly refers to the point in the research “when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1408). However, in reframing the concept of saturation in qualitative research, Morse (2018) argues that saturation is more than seeking replication. Saturation links similar concepts and processes in different instances, experiences, contexts and events. It “develops concordance within the data set, not necessarily at the micro-analytic “quotation” level but at conceptual level” (Morse, 2018, p. 812). As long as research findings are provided with multiple, strong examples of concepts and presented in logical coherent manner, there is saturation in the research. Saturation gives readers certainty in the ‘rightness’ of the data analysis (Morse, 2018). This view is supported by Corden and Sainsbury (2006). In this study, a comprehensive description of the data analysis process

and the importance of the interconnected conceptualisation of the data presented in a coherent way, as discussed in section 4.5, contributed to the research saturation.

4.6.2 Trustworthiness and reflexivity

4.6.2.1 *My role as researcher*

Participating in this study, as a researcher, I had worked at the same institution with three teachers – Tien, Lanh and Manh. The other three teachers, including Uy, Nhi, Trinh, were working at a different institution in the same city – University B. Therefore, at the start of the study, my professional relationship with the participating teachers could be considered to be that of both an insider researcher (University A) and an outsider researcher (University B). It is crucial to discuss my role in the study to balance my insider and outsider perspectives over the course of the study.

The term insider researcher has a number of characteristics and definitions. An insider researcher is a “member of the in-group” (Le Gallais, 2008, p. 146) having access to its past and present histories (Jenkins, 2000), sharing characteristics such as cultural, linguistic, political, and occupational similarities (Loxley & Seery, 2008), similar cultural values (Merriam et al., 2001) and identities and experiences (Chavez, 2008). My insider status was clearly recognised in having multiple commonalities with my participants from University A, such as a shared organisational culture, educational experiences, and working experiences. My insider status gave me insights into and understandings of the practices and the culture of University A.

In addition to the advantages when conducting an insider research, it is essential to discuss the pitfalls an insider researcher might encounter. The first challenge is that “the risk of over-rapport can limit data gathering opportunities” (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 52). This over-rapport can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can encourage participants to reveal stories that may take a great deal of time for an outsider researcher to obtain. On the other hand, the participants may feel uncomfortable talking about their practices or institutional information for fear that their future professional relationships could be affected, or that their information could be disclosed to senior leaders. Thus, when working with the teachers, I had to make sure that they were well-informed of all ethical considerations when they got involved in the project, including the kind of information

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

the project would focus on, and that the data reporting and disclosure maintained confidentiality about themselves and the organisation.

An outsider researcher is viewed as someone who is not a member of that group and possesses a different set of characteristics (Loxley & Seery, 2008). Claims of my 'outsiderness' in this study are based upon the fact that I was not employed at University B and that I was a full-time researcher working alongside the teachers over the project period.

It was critical for me as a researcher to balance and bring both the insider's and outsider's perspectives into the inquiry process. The reason is that how researchers position themselves in the research setting determines power relations between the researcher and the participants, research ethics, and the validity or trustworthiness of the study's findings (Herr & Anderson, 2005). To address the positionality concern, my continuous self-reflection and reflexivity throughout the study process was very effective in terms of the trustworthiness of the study and the ethics of the research. This is discussed in further detail in the following section.

4.6.2.2 Reflexivity

Creswell and Miller (2000) note that engaging in reflexivity is a common practice to legitimatise the trustworthiness of the research process. Berger (2015) views reflexivity as a "process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). Engward and Davis (2015) believe that being reflexive enables the researcher to make transparent decisions in the research process, enhances the trustworthiness of the data and research findings, and eventually develops the quality of the research. In other words, reflexivity is the researchers' own reflections on their actions and observations in the field and their feelings (Gray, 2014).

In my study, reflexivity was not purely viewed as the awareness to maintain a distance from the two groups of teachers. Instead, sliding between the insider and outsider positionings as discussed above, I found that reflexivity was crucial and helped me to balance my insider and outsider perspectives, critically provide reasonings to justify my data and findings, and avoid taken-for-granted assumptions or prejudice that might hinder important dimensions of the participants's stories, thus avoiding blind spots in my data (Unluer, 2012).

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

During my fieldwork, I kept a fieldwork diary for myself. I wrote down informal descriptions and reflections about the context, myself and the participants. For example, I described where and how the contexts were, what contextual influences might influence the participants' feelings and responses, what I was feeling and thinking at that time, how the participants responded or reacted to the questions or situations, what factors need to be considered in the responses, and so on. In the observation sheets, beside the description column, there was a reflection column for me to note down or draw situational maps. In addition, I created tables to compare attributes, age and attitudes between me and the participants to show whether I assumed a total insider positioning, a total outsider positioning, or a partial insider-outsider (see an example in Appendix K). These factors would clarify my assumptions, values and beliefs that might impinge upon the data analysis and the findings of the study. On my observation sheets and interview question sheets, there was a small text box, which was like a bracketing note (Lichtman, 2006), allowing me to make notes of pre-assumptions or biases that arose in my mind. This helped me avoid imposing my views on the participants and impacting the research findings. Finally, I always made sure that key discussion questions were prepared and sent out to the teachers prior to the meeting dates. This gave the teachers some clues about what they would discuss in the meetings and avoided me asking biased questions.

4.6.3 Ethical considerations

Ethics is always a concern in research because we are humans, whose behaviours are subject to ethical principles, rules and conventions (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Ethics as principles to “guide the behaviour of researchers and offer security and protection to participants” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 26) are fundamental. This is even more compelling for qualitative research, in which there is an emphasis on multiple realities, idiosyncratic local context and closeness to the participants of qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Flick (2007) argues that “quality of research can be seen as a prerequisite for ethically appropriate research” (p. 125). Therefore, ethical considerations must be ensured through different stages of the research process, including recruiting the participants, getting their consent, on-going fieldwork, data analysis and reporting.

This section discusses these crucial areas including (1) informed consent, (2) avoidance of harm and risk, (3) managing power distance and conflict in roles, and (4) honesty and trust.

4.6.3.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is the most fundamental principle for research ethical consideration (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). It is critical for participants to be clearly informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and the risks and benefits of their participation.

The process of gaining approval and consent from the two universities, the two faculties and the teachers was discussed in section 4.4.3. By undertaking the study within my own workplace (University A), I was aware that with pre-existing relationships, the teachers were far less likely to refuse to participate in the project. Therefore, I repeatedly acknowledged that their participation was voluntary, with no coercion, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time before the analysis stage.

In the first group discussion with the participants, I explained once again about the research project in Vietnamese and invited questions from the participants just in case of missing information or cultural issues of hesitancy about asking questions in a bigger group in the workshop. Furthermore, in order to ensure the on-going consent of the participants, a short oral reminder about their rights, well-being and required discussion etiquette was delivered to the participants before every group discussion session.

Even though in observation sessions, the classroom students were not the key focus of my observation, I orally gave a brief introduction about myself and the research project, and ensured them that their performance would not be recorded or evaluated. This helped students understand and recognise my presence in the class without interrupting their learning process.

4.6.3.2 Avoidance of harm and risk

According to the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations of the University of Waikato, harm can entail a number of facets: physical, psychological, social, economic, or cultural. In addition, potential harm can include pain, stress, fatigue, emotional distress, embarrassment, and exploitation. I will address in detail a number of concerns in terms of individual and organisational harm and risk of harm in my project as follows.

Firstly, it was essential that the identities of the participants in the project were protected. I used pseudonyms to address the participants in the study. This helped to protect their

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

identities not only during my fieldwork but also later in the reporting and publishing stages. Additionally, I avoided personal conversations with the participants at the two research sites, except for debriefs after the observation sessions.

Secondly, in observation sessions, the participants were assured that no negative judgement or evaluation would be made of their teaching and that what I observed in the classroom, at that stage, would be confidential. I stressed that appreciative evaluation looking for positive enactment of SCA would be the focus of my intervention. Also, no information would be reported to their senior leaders.

Thirdly, in group discussions, some ground rules were explicitly explained to the participants, who came from two different universities with possibly different cultures and codes of practice. They were encouraged to give their opinions from their experiences. In doing so, they were asked not to talk over or talk about each other. They were expected to treat what other people said as confidential and not to be repeated outside the discussion sessions. Opinion sharing and contribution of experiences were welcomed, but critiques of one's practice and organisational culture were excluded. Negative evaluative commentary that could intimidate other participants or other teachers was not the kind of data I was looking for. As the group moderator, I closely followed the discussions and debates among the teachers so I could intervene if necessary. All of these contributed to protecting the participants from harm and building trust among the participants.

Finally, professional relationships among teachers from two universities and between the researcher and the participants were maintained because no disclosure of certain confidential information of the two organisations was recorded.

4.6.3.3 Managing power distance and conflict in roles

During my fieldwork, I tried to maintain a neutral position with all the participants. I did not approach any of the teachers for private catch-ups. In group discussions, I called the teachers by their titles ('Thầy' for a male teacher and 'Cô' for a female teacher) before their names and I addressed myself as 'tôi' (I) to avoid the hierarchy of age and intimacy of the relationships. Also, I found myself using 'we' in conversations with the teachers from both universities whenever I referred to both groups of teachers, to make them feel they belonged to the same group. Seating arrangements were also important so that all

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

the teachers from one institution did not sit together. This created an opportunity for interactions with teachers from the other group.

Finally, to bridge the power imbalance between researcher and participants, I tried to avoid showing that my knowledge could be superior and that I knew more about the topic of the study than the teachers. My strategy was to gather the data with my eyes open but assuming that I knew very little about teaching methodology and that the teachers would be experts in English language teaching because I did not do a teaching certificate at university. Also, I would try to avoid receiving deferring responses from participants; for example *you know what I mean*, by asking them clarification questions to elaborate their thoughts (Greene, 2014). I tended not to provide instant solutions or advice regarding teaching methodology when asked by the teachers but sought group solutions or recommended resources for their reference.

In the event of a dispute, the participants were encouraged to talk to me about their concerns. If we were not able to resolve the problem, participants were advised that they could contact my Chief Supervisor. Contact details were provided in the information letter and consent form.

4.6.3.4 Honesty and trust

As I was conscious that building trust was a decisive factor of a qualitative research, I was always open and honest with the teacher participants. It was even more challenging when the participants were from two different organisations. It was important to ensure with the teachers that any information revealed was for research purposes only and not to be reported or discussed with anyone outside the participant group. In the first meeting, the teachers and I agreed on some ground rules so that we acted to build trust with each other. For example, if any of us had any concerns during participation in the group discussion, it was agreed that we would be upfront and bring it to the table for further discussion in the group.

4.7 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the philosophical positions underpinning this study. The study was conducted under the assumptions that there are multiple realities as people view the world differently and that what people bring to a situation is subjective as they are not empty entities. That is, they have their own perspectives about the world,

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

their own contexts, experiences, cultures, and beliefs. An interpretive approach and a predominantly qualitative research design allowed in-depth insights into the participants' experiences, engaging in the inquiry process to construct and co-construct knowledge collectively.

Additionally, the chapter has presented the details of the research process. As can be seen in the research design, each phase of the research process played a crucial role in promoting this professional learning experience, which took place in the classroom contexts of the teachers. Six EFL teachers employed at two universities in Vietnam participated in this study. Five data collection instruments were used in four phases of data collection: questionnaire, classroom observation, debrief, group discussion and individual interview. Data analysis was carried out using three approaches: descriptive analysis for the questionnaire, inductive thematic analysis across the six teachers for observations and debriefs, and analysis in the form of vignettes for group discussions and individual interviews.

The following chapter, Chapter Five, examines the outcomes of this analysis.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The first four chapters have provided the rationale, contextual, theoretical and methodological background for this study. Chapter One briefly described my motivation for doing this study, its significance and the research aims, research questions and also provided an outline of the thesis and some key concepts. Chapter Two provided a description of the historical, political, economic, social, cultural, and educational contexts of Vietnam where the study was carried out. Chapter Three reviewed various aspects of teacher cognition, in particular the concepts and nature of teachers' beliefs, factors shaping teachers' beliefs, and relations between their beliefs, knowledge and practice. Chapter Three also reviewed the literature and outlined teacher learning focusing on reflective and inquiry practice. As presented in Chapter Four, this study was predominantly qualitative in order to seek an in-depth understanding of the teachers' application of student-centred approaches (SCA) in practice. These methods included observation, debrief, group discussion and individual interview. This study also used a small amount of quantitative data collected via a questionnaire at the beginning of data collection. Through the process of inquiry, paying attention to cycles of reflection and knowledge construction, the study investigated how this process shaped the teachers' learning.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the four phases of the study. In the first section, questionnaire results are described, providing an overview of the participants' initial beliefs and stated experiences of SCA. It was, therefore, important for me to know what was going on in these institutions and what the wider group of teachers believed or thought about SCA before I commenced working with the focus group of six teachers.

Next, the qualitative data are presented in two clusters: (1) observation and debrief data and (2) individual interview and group discussion findings. The former was analysed thematically across the six teachers to establish the teachers' understanding of SCA and how they interpreted and implemented this in practice, with a focus on commonalities, relationships and differences. The latter was analysed and presented via four vignettes of the group discussions to examine the teachers' learning process focusing on cycles of reflection and the co-construction of knowledge. The use of vignettes ensured the

preservation of the social context in the group. Comments from the teachers' individual interviews helped clarify meanings and underlying beliefs and assumptions of the teachers when they interacted with each other, how their engagement in this inquiry process shaped their professional learning as well as factors impacting their learning.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, section 4.5, using two approaches – thematic and vignette analysis – to analyse the data helped to explore individual teachers' approaches, as well as commonalities within the group. Also, the two analysis strategies helped to tie the observed practices into the teachers' reported interviews as well as the individual and collective learning dimensions.

5.2 Questionnaire findings

Descriptive statistical analysis is commonly used to explore trends. Specifically, in this study, measures of central tendency (percentages) were used to analyse patterns in the data relating to the participants' views of SCA and their experiences. The use of descriptive statistics was an effective way of presenting initial information about the problem or phenomenon being surveyed in this study – the teachers' beliefs and reported practices.

Because the questionnaire aimed to capture teachers' overall perceptions of SCA to inform me as a researcher the next step to proceed in this study, the data from the participants' responses were aggregated and the analysis was presented across the two research sites.

This section outlines the key findings for the first research question.

- *What are the teachers' initial beliefs about and reported practice of student-centred approaches?*

In total, 20 participants from the two universities completed the questionnaire (17 participants from university A and 3 from university B) (see Table 5.1 for demographic data).

Table 5.1 Demographic information of questionnaire respondents (N = 20)

Variables		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	8	40%
	Female	12	60%
Highest qualification	Bachelor’s degree	5	25%
	Master’s degree	12	60%
	Doctorate	3	15%
Teaching experience (years)	1 – 7	6	30%
	8 – 15	6	30%
	16 +	8	40%
English language group	General English (GE)	4	20%
	English for Specific Purposes (ESP)	5	25%
	Linguistic knowledge and language skills	11	50%

5.2.1 Likert scale statements

Findings from the questionnaire analysis are presented in four sections. The first section explores the participants’ beliefs about SCA. Participants responded to nineteen statements in five categories: (1) a teacher’s role and effective teaching; (2) a student’s role and effective learning; (3) students’ engagement in teaching and learning; (4) the role of syllabus and textbooks; and (5) the English language environment.

The participants were asked to select a position on a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree (see Appendix F). For each question, the frequency of the participants’ responses is presented as a percentage.

Table 5.2 shows how the participants perceived their role as a teacher and how they saw this affecting their teaching practices. As can be seen in the table, the overall findings indicate that the participants appeared to have an awareness of SCA.

Table 5.2 Participants’ perceptions of a teacher’s role and effective teaching

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
A teacher’s role and effective teaching					
Teachers should manage the learning process as they know best how students learn.	5	10	15	50	20
One of the teacher’s major roles is to provide an English language model.	5	0	15	60	20
It is the responsibility of teachers to determine the objectives of the lesson.	5	0	5	55	35
English teaching should exploit things that students like to use, e.g. technology.	0	0	20	40	40

Overall, the participants placed a high value on a strong role for the teacher in the learning process. Table 5.2 shows that the majority agreed or strongly agreed that learning objectives should be determined by the teacher (90%) and that an English language learning model should be provided to help the learning process (80%). In addition, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that English teaching should exploit tools that students like to use to support learning; for example, technology incorporation. Two thirds of the participants agreed that the teacher should be managing the learning process because they know best how students learn.

Table 5.3 presents the participants' perceptions of a student's role and what makes for effective teaching and learning.

Table 5.3 Participants' perceptions of a student's role and effective teaching and learning

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
A student's role and effective teaching and learning					
The best way for students to correct their errors and improve their language is to have teachers provide an explanation of the errors.	5	20	45	15	15
It is important for students to reflect on their learning and engage in self-assessment.	0	0	0	50	50
Memorising rules will help students learn English better.	5	20	25	45	5
Student interaction is beneficial for low proficiency students because they learn from each other.	10	15	10	40	25

This table shows possible conflict between perceptions of a teacher's role and a student's role in English teaching and learning. On one hand, all participants placed an emphasis on students' reflection on their learning and engagement in self-assessment (50% agreed and 50% strongly agreed). On the other hand, a number of participants (15% agreed and 15% strongly agreed) reported that error correction and explanation on the part of the teacher would help to improve students' learning. Nearly half of the participants held a neutral view on whether or not error correction was the teacher's responsibility. Also, forty per cent of the participants agreed and twenty five per cent strongly agreed that student interaction would help students with a low level of English proficiency because students could learn from each other. The results presented in Table 5.3 also show that the participants valued high-level thinking skills in students, such as self-reflection and self-assessment in their learning, but half of the participants believed that low-level thinking skills such as memorising rules would help students learn better. A quarter of them were undecided.

Table 5.4 shows the participants’ perceptions of the importance of students’ engagement in teaching and learning.

Table 5.4 Participants’ perceptions of students’ engagement in teaching and learning

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
Students’ engagement in teaching and learning					
Teachers cannot do a good job unless students are engaged in learning.	0	5	10	25	60
Teachers should change the teaching methods and activities when they see that students are not engaged.	0	5	5	35	55
Students would participate more if they had more of a say in class.	0	10	10	40	40
Communicative tasks can undermine a teacher’s discipline.	20	25	30	25	0

The majority of the participants agreed about the vital role of students’ engagement in teaching and learning. Nearly 90% strongly agreed or agreed that effective teaching requires active engagement of students, and 90% strongly agreed or agreed that the teacher should change the teaching methods and activities when they see that students are not engaged. Additionally, 80% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed (40% and 40% respectively) that the degree of student autonomy represented in terms of students’ say in class contributes to participation and engagement. There was not clear agreement on whether communicative tasks can weaken the teacher’s discipline. As many teachers agreed (25%) as disagreed (25%) that communicative tasks can weaken the teacher’s discipline. Slightly less than a third (30%) held a neutral view on that perspective.

Table 5.5 further outlines the role of a syllabus and textbooks. The figures show a high agreement among the participants, favouring a less structured syllabus and having a more flexible use of textbook content and activities.

Table 5.5 Participants’ perceptions of the role of a syllabus and textbooks

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
Role of a syllabus and textbooks					
It is necessary for teachers to incorporate new activities to complement the topics covered in the textbook.	0	5	15	35	45
Teachers should design and incorporate new learning activities to suit their students’ proficiency levels and learning styles.	5	0	5	20	70
Activities in the textbook should be strictly followed.	15	50	30	5	0

A very small proportion of the participants (5%) expressed their agreement with the view that activities in the textbook should be strictly followed, whereas 65% (15% strongly disagreed and 50% agreed) expressed an opposing view. This finding was consistent with what the participants perceived about a student-centred approach in the other two statements. Over 80% stated that the teacher should change teaching methods and incorporate new activities to suit students’ learning levels and learning styles. Similarly, over three quarters of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that incorporating new learning activities, apart from suiting students’ learning preferences and proficiency levels, could complement the topics covered in the textbook. In the same vein as the other two statements, only 5% disagreed with the statement.

Table 5.6 shows the participants’ perception of a desirable learning environment for English language students.

Table 5.6 Participants’ perceptions of a learning environment

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
English language environment					
It is important for teachers to use as much English as possible even if students don’t understand everything they say.	10	25	10	35	20
It is important for students to use language more even though they may have errors in their spoken language.	0	0	0	15	85
Students should be encouraged to learn as much English as they can outside the classroom.	0	0	0	20	80
Exposure to English is an important way to learn.	0	0	5	25	70

Not surprisingly, there was almost total agreement that exposure to English helps learning. The participants agreed that the more students use the language, in class or outside class, the more it helps their learning and that they might not use perfect language but they can learn from their errors. However, the statement, ‘It is important to for teachers to use as much English as possible even if students don’t understand everything they say’, generated different responses from the respondents. They had various views across the scale: 10% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed, 10% were neutral, 35% agreed and 20% strongly agreed. There may be many different explanations for these diverging views, which cannot be captured on a Likert scale like this.

The next section examines the connection between what the respondents stated as their beliefs and what they reported they did in their class. Findings concerning reported classroom practices are presented in Table 5.7.

Chapter 5: Findings

The participants were asked to select the relevant level of frequency for each of the listed student-centred teaching activities they conducted in their classes. This section asked about the seven activities that could be compared and triangulated with statements in the previous section to map the participants' stated beliefs and reported practices.

Table 5.7 Participants' reported practice of SCA

In any of your classes that you teach, how often do you...?	Rarely or never	A few times/semester	A few times/month	Almost every class
	%	%	%	%
Have students work in pairs or small groups	5	5	10	80
Have class discussions	5	15	35	45
Get students to ask questions in class	5	5	40	50
Ask students to monitor and assess their own spoken and written English	26	16	37	21
Get students to think about or set learning goals before the lesson starts	10	15	25	50
Get students to work on individual tasks or projects outside of class which they then share with others	5	20	35	40
Ask students to summarise or reflect what they have learned after each lesson and then share their summary with the class	20	35	20	25

Overall, the participants reported aspects of SCA in their teaching practices. The majority of the participants (from 75% to 90%) said they provided opportunities for students to talk, ask questions, share their work, and interact in pairs, groups or with the entire class. Half of the participants reported that they asked students to set learning goals in almost every class and 25% said they did that less frequently – a few times per semester. Fewer participants reported prompting students to reflect on what they learned (20% rarely and 35% a few times/semester) or do self-review or self-assessment (26% rarely and 16% a few times/semester).

5.2.2 Open-ended questions

The last two questions in the questionnaire were open-ended and the respondents were asked to describe a teacher's role and a students' role in their own words. The participants' responses to these two questions were analysed manually by creating two word clouds based on word lists and the key-word-in-context (KWIC) technique (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). For analysis, the same and very similar single words (nouns) were identified and grouped. Verbs were converted into corresponding nouns. For example, the response "in my class, I always try to facilitate the process of learning of my students" was converted to 'facilitator' (see Appendix L for the initial complete list).

Long meaningful phrases were converted into representative equivalents. For instance, one participant mentioned the learner role as 'acting as a sponge and soaking up everything of value they can from their teachers, textbooks and their own experience'; this statement was interpreted as 'knowledge absorber' and 'knowledge sponge'. I then used Pro Word Cloud (a Microsoft add-in tool) to generate the word clouds describing the role of the teacher and the role of the learner. Word clouds represent frequency in the way their items are represented so that the more frequent a term the larger and bolder it appears. Given that Pro Word Cloud is not flexible in recognising two-word nouns with or without a hyphen (-); for example, autonomous learner or self-directed learner, I chose to write these nouns as one word (for example, autonomouslearner).

The main finding from the open-ended questions was that the participants had a diverse range of understandings about the roles of the teacher and the learner. From the teachers' responses, the participants viewed their role very much as a facilitator, an organiser, an observer, a supporter, a consultant, a participant, a guide, a helper, a friend, or a learning enabler (see Figure 5.1). At times, some terms which placed more weight on the teaching role of the teacher can be seen, such as teacher, instructor, and knowledge provider.



Figure 5.1 Word cloud for a teacher’s role

From the teachers’ responses, as can be seen in Figure 5.2, they viewed the various roles of a learner as a self-directed learner, an active participant, a self-assessor, and so on.



Figure 5.2 Word cloud for a learner’s role

In a later section, I will return to the analysis of the two open-ended questions to discuss in detail how these pre-conceptions of the teacher’s role and the learner’s role were elaborated in other qualitative data sources.

5.3 Observation and debrief findings

After completing the questionnaire, six teachers from two universities were invited to participate in Phase 2 of the study – observation of their teaching sessions. As mentioned in Chapter Four, section 4.4.1, the range of their teaching experience was 1 to 21 years. One of the teachers was very experienced (Tien with 21 years' experience); three had moderate experience (Uy, Nhi and Trang with over 10 years' experience); and two were less experienced (Lanh and Manh with 1 to 2 years' experience). All of the participating teachers taught general English to students of different majors such as nursing, business administration, and tourism. For more participant demographic information, see Chapter Four, section 4.4.1.

This section presents data concerning the teachers' enactment of SCA in their instructional practices, their critical reflections on what happened in their classes, and their underlying beliefs and assumptions about their practice. This section outlines the key findings for the second research question:

- *What influences on classroom practice are observed and reported when the teachers assume student-centred approaches?*

The framework for analysis captured three levels of adoption and innovation in the teachers' data. The levels were: (1) routine classroom pedagogy, (2) changes towards SCA classroom practices, and (3) expansion in teaching practices. This framework is in line with Kennedy's (1991) and Putnam and Borko's (2013) views about teacher learning. Kennedy (1991) claims that "teachers, like other learners, interpret new content through their existing understandings and modify and reinterpret new ideas on the basis of what they already know or believe" (p. 3). Each level of the framework is examined in the individual cases below.

It is important to note that although student-centred approaches and activities adopted in this study may not be precisely an innovation in other contexts, the term 'expansion or innovation in teaching practices' can be taken differently in this study context. This refers to practices that are different from the way the teachers traditionally approach their teaching practices and these are something not recommended in the inquiries. The definition of SCA activities in this study is, therefore, context specific.

5.3.1 Routine classroom pedagogy

The data from the six teachers' classroom observations showed that there were frequently repeated practices from class to class. These included reviewing the lessons, checking the meaning of the words, correcting pronunciation, checking understanding, translating instructions between English and Vietnamese, reading from the board, and doing choral repetition (see Table 5.8). Examples of the routine instructional practices are described below with reference to observation data and explanation from debriefs.

Table 5.8 Summary of the teachers' routine classroom pedagogy

Activities	Uy	Trinh	Nhi	Lanh	Manh	Tien
Reviewing lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking questions • doing vocabulary exercises 	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Checking the meaning of words	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Presenting and explaining vocabulary						
Checking and correcting pronunciation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Checking understanding of instructions, grammar and content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions • Asking students to translate 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Translating instructions between English and Vietnamese	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading from the board	✓	✓	✓			
Reading scripts						
Doing choral repetition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

As observed across all the teaching sessions, the six teachers mainly used English as a medium of instruction in their general English classes. They reflected that exposure to English instructions, especially spoken English, would help students “be familiar with English” (O1D1_Manh) and “be able to use English more if they understand the instructions in English” (O1D1_Nhi). The teachers reported that they observed students as a way of checking whether students understood what the teachers were saying (Nhi,

Manh). However, at times it was observed that students were hesitant in replying after listening to their teachers' instructions, as Nhi commented: "This is just the second week of the semester. Students will need time to familiarise themselves with my accent" (O1D1_N). Further discussion regarding this will be elaborated in sections 5.3.2, 5.4.1, 6.4.4.

It was observed that translation was mainly used to check students' understanding of instructions in all the six teachers' classes. In the debrief reflection, Nhi commented that she could have used other techniques to check students' understanding of instructions; for example, yes, no and short answer questions. She noted: "It is probably more effective when students can understand my instructions in English because students will be able to use English more. As a result, students are exposed to more spoken English" (O1D1_Nhi). After taking part in the inquiries, the teachers became more aware of different ways of checking students' comprehension beside translation technique, and from the subsequent teaching sessions, it was observed that the teachers were trying to use yes/no questions, simple questions, or choice questions to check students' understanding of their instructions. The following excerpt from the second observation illustrates the adjustment of the technique of checking understanding.

Nhi: In pairs, working with your partner, think about something you borrowed from your partner. Unfortunately you broke it. Say sorry to your partner. Remember to give some explanation when you apologise. Do you understand?

Nhi: Who do you work with?

Ss: In pairs.

Nhi: What do we do? Did you use the things of your own or your partner's?

Ss: Partner's.

Nhi: What can you borrow from your partner?

Ss: An eraser, a pen, a book.

Nhi: What happened?

S: Something was wrong with it.

Nhi: What will you do?

[No response from students.]

Nhi: And give?

Ss: Give explanation.

Nhi: And next?

S: Say sorry.

(O2_Nhi)

As another example, after giving instructions, particularly for activities outside the textbook, Uy asked students short and simple questions in English, for example yes/no questions, either/or questions and simple *wh*- questions to check and make sure students understood what they were expected to do.

Uy: We'll move to part d. Listen for general meaning. Listen to a girl and a boy talking about their school. How many people are you going to listen to?

S: Two.

Uy: A? and a?

S: A girl and a boy.

Uy: What are they talking about?

[No response from students.]

Uy: Their house, their girlfriend or boyfriend? So what are they talking about?

S: Their school.

(O1_Uy)

In addition to checking students' comprehension of instructions, the teachers used different techniques to check students' comprehension of grammar and content. The teachers (Uy, Trinh, Nhi, Manh) used short or direct questions more often. For example, from observations, Uy asked a direct question *Do you understand?* and the answer from the class was frequently *Yes*. Checking students' understanding was also evidenced by asking students to translate into Vietnamese (Uy, Trinh, Nhi, Lanh, Manh, Tien). This technique was observed when students were called upon to give their answers to the textbook exercises. During my first observation, students were asked to do an exercise in the textbook. They had to decide whether *can* in the sentences referred to permission or ability. Uy called on some students to give their answers. They were asked to read an entire sentence, not just give the answer, and then translate the sentence into Vietnamese.

To explain this practice, Uy commented:

I wanted students to read sentences because, besides giving the right answers, reading the sentences was an opportunity for students to practice their pronunciation and speaking They had to read the English sentences before they translated them into Vietnamese. After reading the English sentences, I corrected their pronunciation as well I think this would help students to be aware of correct language forms and structures.

(O1D1_Uy)

A similar practice was observed when students were asked to complete grammatical tasks in the textbook in Nhi's class. Students were asked to work in pairs and then nominated to read the sentences and give their answers to the teacher, and finally to translate the text into Vietnamese. Nhi explained: "There are sample answers in the course book. I want to make sure that students understand what they are doing" (O1D1_Nhi).

The teachers' observed practices were aligned with their reported beliefs and instructional goals. For example, vocabulary and pronunciation activities were major parts of Lanh's teaching. Lanh believed that "before improving students' language skills, they [students] need to have knowledge of the language, vocabulary in particular" (O1D1_Lanh). He spent time in class explaining the meaning of new vocabulary and got students to use choral repetition to practice pronunciation of the words. In the same vein, in her teaching, Uy had a strong focus on oral skills and pronunciation. When students made mistakes, she corrected them on the spot as she believed that this helped students be "aware of correct language forms, structures and pronunciation" (O1D1_Uy). Below is an example of Uy's error correction practice.

Uy: What did you have for breakfast this morning?

S: /brit/

Uy: /brit/ or /bred/ or /bru:d/?

[Uy gave the student three options to choose the correct pronunciation.]

[No response from the student. Uy nominated another student to give correct pronunciation of the word.]

S: /bred/

[The teacher then asked the previous student to repeat the pronunciation of the word *bread*.]

(O3_Uy)

Chapter 5: Findings

Interestingly, the three teachers from University B (Nhi, Trinh and Uy) shared a similar practice of writing key words or symbols on the board and then asking students to read [the recipe for making kebabs] from the board in the third lesson about cooking recipes. Commenting on this practice, Uy explained:

Repetition helps familiarise students with the language and the forms. It then can become their own language over time in the practice stage Students should do well at repetition; then, they'll do well in the language production stage.

(O3D3_Uy)

Considering the proficiency level of their students, both Trinh and Uy perceived the importance of input such as vocabulary and structures. Repeating the language could contribute to students' use of language in the production stage. Uy reflected:

Because my students' language proficiency is limited, they should be well prepared for the repetition tasks; then they can produce something in the language production stage. If students do not practice, they still can do it but they will do it incorrectly. Then it turns out to be very time consuming and ineffective later. So spending some more time for students to practice is a good idea, from my experience.

(O3D3_Uy)

Likewise, Nhi asked students to read scripts and listen to recordings at the same time. In the debrief, Nhi reflected that these practices could promote language acquisition because it enabled students to notice linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and phonological and orthographical features, while reading scripts. After that, students were nominated to work in pairs and role play the dialogue to practice their speaking and pronunciation. Nhi explained this practice:

Through this, students learn actual words and how they are pronounced. I think it's effective for my students. I know my students' limited level of proficiency and I think that they don't have enough vocabulary and structures to make free conversations by themselves. I think reading scripts is a way to support students' speaking.

(O3D3_Nhi)

While Uy and Nhi provided the reasoning for this practice from their experience, Trinh reflected from a theoretical perspective. Trinh thought about her pedagogical approaches in practice and referred to her prior knowledge when she did her master's degree. The

reflective debrief below shows that Trinh recognised her teaching practice was influenced by her prior knowledge and confirmed the role that it played.

When I did my master's study, I learned behaviourist theory. . . . It is the process of learning in which learners learn by repeating and imitating or mimicking the language. Some teachers might think that this theory is out-of-date but, to me, it's good because learning English by repeating can help the learners use it correctly first; then they can move on to the next step - that is language production.

(O3D3_Trinh)

Overall, there were a number of commonly observed routine practices in the six teachers' instructions, focusing on translation between English and Vietnamese, repetition and memorising vocabulary and grammatical structures and practicing pronunciation and scripted dialogues. Some of these teachers frequently conducted these activities in their classes, reflecting their instructional goals, pedagogical beliefs, and teaching experience; whereas, others based their actions on their existing theoretical knowledge. The above commentary from Trinh confirmed that traditional teaching approaches such as behaviourism played a role in her instruction.

5.3.2 Toward SCA classroom pedagogy

It is evident from the teachers' observed practice and reported reflection that they were open to the uptake of student-centred pedagogy and that they reported an increased awareness of the inclusion of opportunities for students' output, interaction, and free production of English language. The designation of SCA teaching activities in this study is context specific, as mentioned previously. Some instructional attempts were also conducted by the teachers to support students' higher thinking and learning skills (see Table 5.9). Unlike Uy, Trinh, Nhi, and Lanh, who were active in experimenting with the SCA activities suggested in the inquiries, Manh and Tien were implementing SCA with caution.

Table 5.9 Summary of the teachers’ enactment of SCA activities

Activities	Uy	Trinh	Nhi	Lanh	Manh	Tien
Question-answer drills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students asking questions, summarising lessons	✓	✓		✓		
Pair work and group work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
High-level thinking skills	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Learning skills	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Delayed correction of students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Teachers’ questions were used in every teaching session by the six teachers. Some used this technique as pre-, while-, or post-listening or -reading activities, or as a warm-up activity. The teachers also used question-answer drills in teaching vocabulary and grammar. The following observation excerpt about school rules illustrates the way Uy used lead-in questions in her pre-listening activity. In some instances, when there was no response from students, Uy had to answer her own prompting questions. This happened in other teachers’ classes as well (Trinh, Nhi, Manh and Tien).

Uy: Can you give me some rules at the university campus? Can you smoke?

S: No.

Uy: You can’t smoke in classroom. What else?

S: You can’t wear jeans.

Uy: What else?

S: You can’t cellphone in the class.

Uy: Động từ gì nhi? [What’s the verb?] Give me a verb here.

S: *Selfie*.

Uy: How about *use*?

S: You can’t use cellphone in the class.

(O1_Uy)

Chapter 5: Findings

Uy explained the importance of this questioning technique in her classes although the questions were short and simple. She stated that different ways of questioning could serve different purposes:

It was similar to a pre-listening activity. This served as guidance towards the content of the recording. This would help students brainstorm and predict the content of the recording I think teachers should include some kinds of lead-in activity before a listening task, which will be very helpful for students.

(O1D1_Uy)

Trinh agreed with Uy that teachers' questions in a pre-listening activity prompted students to brainstorm. This was the first stage of the English language learning process that Trinh had learned in the past. She also mentioned the stages of language teaching including language input [presentation], practice, and reproduction [production] (O1D1_Trinh).

Another observed practice in the teachers' classes that supported students' language output was getting students to ask questions, which was not observed during the first couple of lessons. In the lesson about cooking recipes, before asking students to do exercises, Uy said:

First take a look and check the meaning of the new words. Các bạn nhìn qua các từ mới xem có từ nào các bạn không hiểu không? [Are there any new words that you don't know in the sentences?] If you don't understand any words, please ask me.

(O3_Uy)

This was an opportunity for students to clarify the meaning of new words. Students used the same structure *What does ... mean?* to ask Uy. Although the students asked the same type of meaning-checking question, Uy believed that the practice was still helpful as it helped her know what new words students were having difficulties with to provide support. This practice was also observed in Lanh's class. In one reading comprehension activity, Lanh instructed students to read a passage and each group had to ask two questions, which could be content questions or vocabulary questions. About six groups of students asked the same type of question *What does ... mean?*. Lanh recognised that this practice was not producing output when students used the same structure, so he changed the strategy by asking students questions.

Positive feedback after successful enactment of SCA in the teachers' classes were reported. For example, Nhi commented: "I have a feeling of satisfaction when conducting

Chapter 5: Findings

successfully the activity in the class” (O4D4_Nhi). At the same time, constraints to implementing SCA also emerged throughout the teachers’ commentaries about their lessons. These constraints fell into two categories: institutional factors and students’ characteristics. Institutional factors included textbook design, text book coverage requirements, exam focus and class time limitations (Nhi and Uy). The majority of the teachers’ commentaries were related to barriers caused by students’ characteristics. These included students’ low proficiency (Lanh, Tien, Trinh, Uy, Manh and Nhi), students’ attitudes and behaviours in class such as being shy, lazy, and passive (Tien, Nhi and Manh), and students’ habit of using Vietnamese (Manh and Lanh). A few comments referred to the nature of the activities promoting SCA; for example, the suitability of the activities (Nhi and Trinh) and students’ lack of familiarity with the activities (Uy and Lanh). Reflectively, Trinh, Uy and Nhi discussed their own perceived shortcomings during the implementation, such as giving unclear instructions or providing insufficient input in terms of vocabulary and structures to students.

When acknowledging the limited proficiency level of their students and reflecting on their error correction practice, the teachers reported some changes. Uy’s attention to students’ language accuracy shifted. In trying to ask her students a lot of questions to encourage their responses, it was observed that Uy did not often pause and correct students’ pronunciation or spoken structures immediately, as she did at the beginning of the first session. Uy explained: “I hope that students could use their vocabulary knowledge; at this stage, the focus was not on accuracy but to refresh their vocabulary” (O1D2_Uy). Similarly, Manh delayed correcting students’ grammar and pronunciation mistakes (O1D1_Manh). Tien commented that she placed more emphasis on students’ communication skills and as long as the errors did not affect the meaning, immediate error correction was not necessary. She decided to correct students “when they finished their talks so that they could continue their speaking naturally” (O2D2_Tien). In contrast, Trinh’s rationale was more about achieving communication purposes.

Nowadays, teachers are more focused on communicative approach.
This means that when students communicate and people understand
what you say, that's good. Accuracy is not the most important issue.

(O3D3_Trinh)

Overall, the teachers were observed implementing SCA in line with the inquiry suggestions, including creating opportunities for students’ language output, student

interaction through pair work or group work, and supporting students' thinking and learning beyond repetition and recall. The use of pair work and group work represented a radical departure from the teachers' normal practice of lecturing and explaining to the whole class. Practical examples of these constituted a higher level of questioning, brainstorming, summarising, and freer practice. The observed practice and reported reflection showed the teachers' willingness to incorporate SCA in their instruction. They also considered possible constraints on the implementation of SCA, in terms of both institutional and student factors.

5.3.3 Expansion in teaching practices beyond the inquiries

The inquiries were based on my review of English teaching theories and literature as well as my professional understandings of SCA and effective practices for teaching English; therefore, they could be viewed as a theoretical foundation to help the teachers become more aware of SCA, bridge theory-practice gaps, and justify their theoretical interpretation of SCA. Opportunities for students to use English and for the teachers to promote student-centredness expanded beyond interactions between the teacher and the students or students and students in pair work or group work. Table 5.10 illustrates expansion in the teachers' practice beyond the inquiries.

Table 5.10 Summary of the teachers' expansion beyond inquiries

Activities	Uy	Trinh	Nhi	Lanh	Manh	Tien
Do presentations	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Mind mapping	✓	✓				

Four teachers (Uy, Trinh, Nhi and Lanh) endeavoured to incorporate opportunities for their students to practice and do presentations in class. Speaking of her first experience with this, Uy said:

The first presentation was a homework assignment. It was not very easy for my students to get together and prepare the presentations. So they did not do it very well and carefully as homework. Learning from that experience, I decided to ask my students to do their second presentation in class. It could be time consuming in formal class time but helped

Chapter 5: Findings

students a lot as we could see the improvement in today's session. Students presented with confidence without reading their notes.

(O4D4_Uy)

At first, her students were reticent and uncomfortable speaking in front of the class. They spoke softly. However, later on, they appeared to benefit from Uy's feedback on their presentations and improved, as Uy mentioned above. Uy confirmed this in the following comment:

I usually provided feedback in terms of the language used, the content of the presentation and the presentation skills. For example, students speaking too softly and other students couldn't hear; text on the slides was too small and others couldn't see; there were grammatical errors in their speech and on the slides. These would help students to be more aware when giving presentations.

(O4D4_Uy)

In facilitating one reading activity in Observation 4, Uy had her students to read through the reading passage quickly and created a diagram representing the structure of the reading text. She explained this observed practice:

Understanding the structure of the text would help students have better comprehension in their reading process, and help their imagination. This skill helps them not only in their English learning but also in other courses or subjects.

(O4D4_Uy)

A few times in her reflection, Uy was not sure of the theoretical terminology when explaining her practice. Uy was trying to explain this technique from her personal and practical experiences. She reflected:

I am not sure. I think it's called mind mapping. Honestly, I have heard about the concept of mind mapping but have not done much reading on mind mapping. From my personal and practical experiences, it would be much easier for students to understand and to remember.

(O4D4_Uy)

Following the activity, Uy asked her students how they could identify the structure without having to translate it into Vietnamese to understand the details. Some students said that they looked at the headings, some mentioned key words and main ideas, and some said that they looked for the existing vocabulary they knew about the topic. Then

they discussed it within their groups. Explaining the general purpose of the activity from her own view, Uy stated:

I wanted to help students know how to solve problems in their reading. Sometimes students do not understand the text, paragraphs or words, and they may not know what to do to solve it. I wanted my students to be aware of their problems and how to solve the problems. When they were able to solve their problems this time, they would be able to solve [them] next time – for a different reading passage.

(O4D4_Uy)

In another observation session, taking a similar approach, Uy asked students to work in groups of five. They talked within their groups about the future of one of these topics – TV, weather, study, house, and travel. Beside practicing speaking and listening, and supporting student interaction, Uy explained the purpose for this activity as follows:

Other skills were important in this activity too, such as group work and note taking. Every member had to contribute their ideas, know how to negotiate the ideas, reach an agreement within the group's discussion. Group ideas are more diverse. Students will need to be able to make judgement about others' ideas whether they were good or not. Besides, collaboration is crucial too. For example, each group had five members; each student gave one idea.

(O2D2_Uy)

Generally, by giving opportunities for students to communicate, Uy was observed moving beyond question-answer drills and providing them with opportunities to do oral presentations and free practice of the language. Also, interaction went beyond the boundaries between teacher and student, or between students in pair work, or small groups.

Expanding beyond the classroom activities in the inquiries, Lanh shared some significant new pedagogical ideas in his practice. Lanh challenged his non-English major students by assigning them to groups and asking them to prepare an icebreaker for every class. In each lesson, one or two groups were randomly appointed to initiate an icebreaker, which could be a game, a quiz, a listening activity or a presentation. In this lesson, one group played a video introducing Niagara Falls in English. Most of the students couldn't understand it because the audio was in English and required good English proficiency to understand. Then that group was asked to briefly translate the audio into Vietnamese for better understanding of the video content. The second group introduced the topic of The

Chapter 5: Findings

Hidden Beach in Mexico. One student, on behalf of the group, introduced key features of this destination, including geographic features, history, transportation and activities. In the last slide of the presentation, the group put up a list of new vocabulary in English and Vietnamese. At the end of the presentation, Lanh read the vocabulary in the list and asked students to repeat after him. When being asked why he required students to do this icebreaker every lesson, Lanh commented:

I wanted to focus on the usefulness of the activity. Students have to understand what they are presenting or showing [video]. If they don't understand what they are presenting, other students will not understand. That's not useful.

(O1D1_Lanh)

Lanh mentioned the benefits of the activity as in the following debrief excerpt:

Preparing for this activity – presentation, game or video – requires students to do research to gain information. This will help to enrich their background knowledge. This is for their long term benefit as well their future success. This activity also helps to build up confidence for students, especially when they have to present in front of the class. Each time the group has to change the presenter, which means that every student in the class has an opportunity to present at least once (for 5 minutes) during the semester.

(O1D1_Lanh)

The fourth teaching session was the first time Trinh provided students with a reading text outside of the textbook and asked them to look for the structure of the text. Trinh's purpose was to integrate a similar activity to the mind mapping that Uy carried out in her class, as described above. Students started to read and translate it into Vietnamese to understand the structure of the text. Trinh did not explicitly explain to students how they should read, because she believed that explicit instructions on reading skills, including skimming and scanning, would not help students but would cause them confusion. Talking through her experience in a reading comprehension course for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students, Trinh commented:

I don't know why but I teach one reading course this semester and my students don't know how to use the skills of skimming and scanning. If I include too many strategies like skimming and scanning in one unit or lesson, I don't think it will be effective because students will be confused so they will do as they normally do - reading each sentence,

Chapter 5: Findings

trying to translate and understand it. Students are too familiar with the grammar translation method, so they think that translating helps them have better understanding of the text.

(O4D4_Trinh)

As reflected, Trinh held a mix of different pedagogical beliefs and instructional goals. On one hand, she wanted to teach mind mapping, skimming and scanning techniques; on the other hand, she was skeptical of their effectiveness with her class. Trinh's compelling expression illuminates a critical inquiry of what counts as standard knowledge of effective teaching pedagogies. She wanted to improve students' communication skills (O1D1 and O3D3_Trinh) but she stated that students were more familiar with the grammar translation method. Trinh reflected that she found herself "contradictory" (O3D3_Trinh). She was unable to articulate specific approaches or theories that she applied in her practice. Her pedagogical decisions were based on her "intuition" that what she was doing just felt right (O3D3_Trinh). She explained:

Being a teacher when you enter a class, you feel the atmosphere, then you know what to do and how to make it suitable and good for students. I can't explain it. . . . Teachers should not apply activities or tasks automatically like a machine. The teacher should be flexible to make it suit the class and the students. . . . I teach with my intuition depending on factors such as the class sizes, students' level, students' personalities affecting learning styles, so they will need different task design. . . . I don't usually use or apply one particular theory or teaching approach in my practice. . . . I never use the same way to teach different groups of students even though they are taking the same course and same lesson content.

(O3D3_Trinh)

These inquiries reflect the confusion, flexibility, fluidity, and an intuition- and practice-approach to Trinh's teaching.

Overall, the observation and debrief data showed that four teachers expanded their practices beyond improving students' linguistic knowledge and skills. In her instruction, Uy integrated other higher level thinking skills such as metacognition, and other skills such as presentation, collaboration, decision making, critical thinking, discussion and problem solving. Likewise, Lanh's justification for the use of presentation as a warm up activity went beyond teaching students vocabulary or language skills. He focused on improving general background knowledge, developing skills such as research, and

building students' confidence for future success. These are considered crucial skills and qualities for guiding students towards becoming independent and self-directed learners. For the expansion of practice, the teachers reported using their intuition, personal and practical experiences to design activities that were right, and effective, for their students.

5.3.4 Summary of observation and debrief findings

The analysis has so far highlighted that the six teachers in the study demonstrated similar adherence to traditional pedagogy such as behaviourism and grammar translation with a reliance on the textbook. This was reflected in their specific classroom practices. Reflecting on their practice, it appeared that the traditional classroom pedagogy continued to have a role to play in the teachers' practice.

From observations and debriefs, the teachers showed their uptake of more student-focused activities that were built up in the inquiries. In the debriefs, the teachers critically reflected on their teaching, which helped them to become more conscious of their classroom decisions, the shortcomings, and the constraints.

Four teachers were observed implementing innovative classroom activities such as asking students to do presentations and practicing mind mapping. However, these activities were built on the teachers' personal prior and practical experiences.

The following section presents findings from the interview and group discussion data.

5.4 Group discussion and individual interview findings

The findings from the interviews and group discussions that occurred in Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the current study are presented below. The findings offer more insights into the process of how the teachers learned and how the teachers translated the new learning into their practices. Teacher learning and change are complex processes. Measures of change are defined differently and may not be effectively discussed in isolation from each other. Discussion of how the teachers learned, changed and grew professionally was interwoven with group discussion data through the use of vignettes, as discussed in section 4.5.3. While the vignettes of the group discussions illustrated different dimensions of the collective learning process, the reflective interview data provided evidence of the changes or growth in the individual teachers' cognition and how they translated these into their practice. Factors that supported or hindered the teacher learning process were

reflected in both group discussion and individual interview data. These were the rationales underlying my decision to group the three research questions together in the findings presentation and discussion of this study.

This section outlines the findings of the three research questions:

- *Question 3: How do the teachers learn within the inquiries?*
- *Question 4: What changes related to professional knowledge, professional practices and professional development practice do the teachers report?*
- *Question 5: How can the process of inquiry be harnessed to support teacher learning?*

5.4.1 How did the teachers learn?

The interviews and group discussions explored the process of how the teachers learned. At the beginning of the process, the teachers reported that they participated in formal teacher education programmes or English language programmes (undergraduate programme) some time ago, when they were taught English language teaching methods such as grammar translation, behaviourism, audio-lingualism, and top-down and bottom-up approaches. They realised that there might be gaps in their knowledge. The reported findings also demonstrate that the teachers recognised that their teaching practices were influenced by their prior learning experiences but they were unsure whether the prior knowledge and learning experiences were still applicable for effective teaching practice. This caused them to think that “the study would be very useful” (Group discussion 1_Trinh) as they could be exposed to new learning and new knowledge (Group discussion 1_Uy). Examples are below.

During my years at university, one of the courses I did was Teaching Methodology. I think the background knowledge I learned was just basic concepts, basic knowledge that helped me to develop on it - kind of very fundamental. I was taught English language teaching methods such as audio-lingualism, behaviourism, and grammar translation. I knew all of these methods and I followed the principles of these methods to design my own activities. My knowledge is limited to some extent though.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

From my experience as a language learner, I followed a traditional approach, which means teachers giving instructions; students copying

what was taught. That somehow affects me and my teaching. One reason was that I did not have any training in English Language Teaching.

(Individual interview_Manh)

The teaching methods used were copied from my former teachers. I teach the way I learned from my teachers at university.

(Individual interview_Trinh)

In this inquiry process, the teachers had opportunities to close the gaps between theory and practice by engaging in cycles of inquiry, reflection and enactment with regard to aspects of student-centred pedagogy. Four vignettes developed from group discussions and individual interviews are featured below to demonstrate different dimensions of teacher learning in this study after their classroom enactment of SCA.

Each vignette includes the teachers' engagement in a cycle of: (a) encountering a state of perplexity, (b) reflecting individually, and/or (c) interacting collegially, and (d) constructing new knowledge. Encountering a state of perplexity was a regular feature in group discussions, when the teachers shared problems experienced when applying SCA inquiries in their classes. Individual reflections prepared the teachers to critique their own lessons and become self-aware of what had worked, what had not, what they should adapt for future classroom actions, and the pedagogical reasoning for their classroom decisions. Interactions with each other in the focus group were an opportunity for collegial professional dialogue. While examining new learning in connection with the classroom context and their enactment, the teachers had opportunities to reconsider their beliefs and practices. This was when new learning was constructed or old learning was adapted or enhanced. It is crucial to note that this was not a linear process of causality of teacher learning and desired changes to practice or knowledge. This process focuses attention on the complexity of the teachers' learning.

To enhance communication, findings are accompanied by excerpts taken from the group discussion and interview transcripts.

5.4.1.1 Vignette 1: Encouraging students to speak English

After enacting the first inquiry cycle on encouraging students' English language output by creating more opportunities for students to speak, the teachers met together and discussed their classroom experience. The two suggested activities in the inquiry were

encouraging students to ask questions and asking students to do lesson consolidation in English.

The teachers started the first discussion with the challenges they encountered in getting students to ask teachers questions. Some of the potential reasons for the difficulties they faced included students' characteristics such as being shy, passive, and quiet (Nhi, Lanh, Trinh, Uy), the learning culture (Nhi, Lanh, Uy), the culture of face (Manh, Trinh), students' low proficiency levels in English (Trinh, Lanh, Uy) and students' lack of familiarity with the questioning activity (Lanh). Nhi revealed her own learning experience to further explain this lack of students' questioning habit:

When I was a student, I seldom asked questions in front of the class especially when I did not really understand the lesson. But, generally, I hardly asked questions.

(Group discussion 1_Nhi)

In addition, the teachers directed the reflective discussion towards more student-orientation with a focus on teacher action. The following reflective comments from the teachers suggest greater emphasis on the students' attitudes, needs, interests, motivation and necessary skills, which affirmed the teachers' positive beliefs about SCA practices.

Students usually think that English is not their major, so they do not usually want to study it in depth. . . . They don't have a habit of digging [into] the lesson in depth. . . . They are happy with the amount of knowledge from the teacher.

(Group discussion 1_Uy)

In contrast to Uy, Manh shared an observation from his experience that "those students who understand the lesson usually ask questions to have deeper knowledge about the lesson . . . students are interested in asking questions when they want to know other uses of language or language forms in other situations" (Group discussion 1).

Besides students' attitudes, needs and interests, in their reflective comments, the teachers realised higher skills were required in students' questioning techniques such as critical self-inquiry, which meant "self-questioning; for example asking why, what if, or so what questions" (Group discussion 1_Uy), and "analytical and synthetic skills" (Group discussion 1_Trinh).

In negotiating the interaction with other teachers in the group, Lanh diverted the collegial conversation to more pragmatic solutions. He said:

Chapter 5: Findings

I think there are many reasons why students are afraid of asking questions. But we need to have enough evidence to address the reasons why. So I am not going to discuss about the reasons here. But in terms of solutions, I have noticed that students only ask when they are motivated. They ask questions when they like it. They ask in order to solve a certain learning task. There are many ways to motivate students.

(Group discussion 1_Lanh)

Lanh suggested a number of approaches that teachers could use to encourage students to ask questions in the class; for example, teachers' flexibility in the use of classroom tasks or topics and the importance of teachers observing and adjusting instructions. Manh's following comment showed his strong emphasis on students – their needs, reactions to the lesson, motivation, interests, autonomy, critical thinking, problem solving and creativity and what teachers could do to provide support and guidance to their students.

One example is [that the] teacher should not strictly follow the content in the course book. When the teacher observes the class, if there is no longer a positive reaction from the students to the lesson, the teacher had better change topic, move the lesson to something that students feel interested in and they want to ask about. The teacher should be flexible, looking for an interesting topic for students to talk about and to ask. I usually give them tasks and ask students to solve the tasks, for example drawing or story making and storytelling. The teacher should provide some guidance to students. While they are doing that task, they will ask the teacher questions to clarify or to find ways to solve that task.

(Group discussion 1_Lanh)

In agreement with Lanh, three other teachers provided practice-based solutions for encouraging students' English language output. These included “group work via discussions” (Trinh) “appropriate and well-designed tasks” (Uy) and “clear instructions” (Nhi) because “when students are well aware of the instructions and they know what they are required to do, they will speak more English in class” (Group discussion 1_Nhi). Appropriate and well-designed tasks and activities, like Uy shared, might be perceived as departures from their routines. The use of questioning techniques is one example. Besides using questioning techniques pre-, during-, or post-activity, Uy asked students questions about their daily life as a warm-up activity. Commenting on this different type of warm-up, Uy explained:

This activity helps to create a relaxing atmosphere for students to use English before starting the lesson. The questions are not in the lesson

Chapter 5: Findings

content, so they don't have to open the textbook or notebook to check and read information. They just need to use the structures they learned in the previous lesson.

(Groups discussion 2_Uy)

In making connections between the activity, students, implementation, and required outcomes, the teachers commented that the purpose of the inquiry activities was “positive” and “interesting” (Group discussion 1_Nhi). Some were suitable for students; some were not because of the lesson content and the skills required in each lesson; therefore, in some instances, implementation could be challenging (Nhi). Nhi further suggested a macro-level solution in relation to curriculum and textbook design. She added: “One important thing to engage students’ speaking is to select appropriate course books which provide well-designed activities for students to perform” (Group discussion 1_Nhi).

With a desire to expand her understanding and practice, Uy wanted other teachers in the group “to share some activities that could help students speak and understand lessons more in-depth” (Group discussion 1_Uy). A number of activities were recommended with step-by-step descriptions, which included storytelling (Manh), object description (Trinh) and picture comparison (Nhi). In the interview, the teachers valued the opportunities to share new ideas and practices (Uy, Lanh), learn from other teachers (Nhi, Uy and Manh), interact to seek advice and measures from each other (Uy) and understand difficulties in other teachers’ teaching practices (Uy and Lanh). The teachers also realised that activities might bring about different learning outcomes depending on the classroom contexts and students’ characteristics, so it would be helpful to “look at problems from different perspectives” (Lanh). Below is an example from Uy.

I have learned a lot from other teachers. I also understand difficulties in other teachers' practice and classrooms. I like the the way we interact to seek advice and measures from each other in the group. This is very helpful for teachers as we are aware of the possible challenges and how to deal when applying student-centred approaches in our class.

(Individual interview_Uy)

In addition to exchanging pedagogical ideas and practices, the teachers reported their experiments with the new activities or practices in their own classes. Nhi reflected:

I applied [questioning as] the warm-up activity at the start of each class that Uy recommended. The learning atmosphere became better in my

class. . . . I used to think that teachers' instruction in English or Vietnamese is not really my concern. In one of the group discussions, some teachers suggested that using English in class is better because students are immersed in this language. As a result, they will be more aware of the use of English in the class. I applied that in my class and my students were happy with the new approach.

(Individual interview_Nhi)

The reflective discussion continued and the teachers raised key barriers in asking students to summarise the lesson content at the end of each teaching session. All the teachers reported that, despite their awareness of its importance in improving students' speaking skill and checking students' understanding, time limitations prevented them from asking students to summarise the lesson content. However, the teachers realised that there were different ways to ask students to review the lessons and to check their understanding, which could be incorporated in the following teaching session. Uy revised the previous lesson by asking students questions, or wrote a word on the board [related to the lesson] and asked students to describe it or define it. One alternative approach that Nhi shared was to ask students to write on a piece of paper one to three things they thought about in the previous session, then discuss this in groups and then talk in front of the class. Uy liked the way Manh and Trinh approached the consolidation task – writing key words on the board and asking students to summarise the lesson content, acknowledging that students might make mistakes but after several attempts students would do it better (Group discussion 1_Uy).

5.4.1.2 Vignette 2: Creating opportunities for student interaction

In the second cycle of inquiries, the teachers' practice was focused on creating opportunities for student interaction and students' thinking beyond language repetition and information recall. Among many activities suggested, the teachers reported their reflection on the three activities they implemented in their classes, which were storytelling, story completion, and debate. All of the six teachers selected the topics for the activities in alignment with the lesson content. However, each teacher slightly modified the activity to suit the contexts: Manh breaking the activity into smaller steps to guide students through, Uy asking students to make up the story by themselves to encourage their creativity and using interactive warm up activity, Nhi and Trinh using jigsaw activity to accommodate the tight classroom time, Tien conducting group listening activity, and Lanh trying out movie storytelling. Generally, the teachers reported positive

Chapter 5: Findings

impacts on students' learning as evidenced by their affective responses. For example, students were very excited, motivated and engaged in the activity (Individual interview and group discussion: Uy, Tien, Lanh, Manh, Trinh, Nhi). Below is an example from Lanh.

I played a short video (2-3 minutes) about family. At first, I asked my students to watch the movie carefully, [and write] down words referring to objects/things they could see in the movie. They should try to understand and remember as much information as possible because I would then ask them some questions. One of the questions I asked them was to write down their feelings about the character of the father after watching this short movie. I thought that my students could not do it. However, it turned out differently and really surprised me. After watching the movie, students discussed together in their groups. They presented their opinions. They were really, really good, very thoughtful.

(Group discussion 2_Lanh)

Because of the nature of these activities that promoted student interaction, students had more opportunities and greater freedom to work in pairs or in groups. This was when the teachers experienced a dilemma regarding students' use of Vietnamese. The six teachers expressed their opposing views about this practice. While Uy and Lanh were against allowing students to speak Vietnamese in class (Group discussions 1 and 2), the other four teachers had a more flexible view of student use of the mother tongue (Groups discussions 1 and 2). Manh justified his practice on the basis of his individual experience as a student, as follows:

From my experience as an English major, I used to use mostly Vietnamese when I discussed in my group. It was impossible for us to use 100% English in class. And now I am teaching non-major students, how can I ask them to use 100% English in the class?

(Group discussion 1_Manh)

Critically, Nhi used research to back up her views. She commented:

I don't think that we can forbid students using Vietnamese because research shows that this is a controversial issue. Some scholars are advocates of using [students'] first language to express their meaning in a language classroom, which is still more effective than trying to use 100% target language.

(Group discussion 1_Nhi)

Chapter 5: Findings

In contrast, Lanh had quite a strong view about the idea of ‘no Vietnamese’ in his classes. He commented:

In my class, speaking Vietnamese is forbidden. I won't allow students to use Vietnamese in the class, especially when discussing in groups. My students all know the rule. So, whenever they see me around monitoring the class, they speak English. I am not a strict teacher but in this case I have to do that.

(Group discussion 2_Lanh)

Despite the different views, the teachers all agreed that teachers should encourage the use of English in their classes. In negotiating the differences, Tien and Uy shared some strategies from their practical experiences to encourage English speaking in class.

I think one of the ways to encourage students to use English is that, as a facilitator of activities, the teacher moves around the class when groups are working. At the same time, monitor their use of English or Vietnamese. If any student uses Vietnamese, I remind them and ask them to say it again in English. If we do it again and again, it will become a habit of speaking English for students. I don't really know any other ways. It is not easy at all.

(Group discussion 2_Tien)

I usually ask my students to do pair work and I think that it's more effective because students won't use as much Vietnamese as they do in group work. . . . When working in pairs, my students can use about 80% to 90% English. Too many students in one group can prevent students from speaking English.

(Group discussion 2_Uy)

Another example from Trinh's reflective conversation could challenge the consensus about pair work and group work in promoting student interaction for low level students, trigger re-consideration of learning outcomes and learning effectiveness, stimulate the teachers' thinking, and seek confirmation from her colleagues. Trinh described the activity she conducted in her class aiming to foster student interaction and expressed her uncertainty, hoping to get other teachers' thoughts.

This morning I carried out one group work activity. I was not sure if it would promote a lot of interaction among students. But I think it was more effective than pair work. The lesson was about *used to*. I asked one student to stand up and give one example of what they used to do in the past. Another student was called on randomly to repeat the first

Chapter 5: Findings

student's sentence and stated their own sentence. The last person would tell everyone's past habits and state his own sentence. I think this activity did not create much opportunity for student interaction but it was very effective.

(Group discussion 2_Trinh)

Uy agreed with Trinh that the activity could be considered effective in terms of engaging students and encouraging them to speak English. However, the teaching practice challenged the relationship between task accomplishment and learning outcome achievement because, in this case, students appeared to be working to complete the task rather than interacting with each other (learning outcome). She posed questions in terms of task accomplishment for the group to consider, for example: “How could students talk and interact with each other? And which language did they use?” (Group discussion 2). Manh added: “If students talk and discuss in Vietnamese, they don’t need to negotiate meanings at all” (Group discussion 2). The teachers (Manh, Lanh, Tien) were uncertain about the interactive purpose of this activity.

The findings also show several instances when the teachers experienced dissonance – defined as “the discrepancy between teachers’ reports in their expectations and plans for a lesson and what actually happened” (Solheim, Ertesvåg, & Dalhaug Berg, 2018, p. 525) – between their teaching practices and classroom situations.

After implementing the debate activity with their students, Nhi and Uy reflected on the experience. Nhi asked students to debate two versions of the food pyramid. In experimenting with a new approach, Nhi decided to not provide pre-activity input to students as she normally did; however, in her reflection, she commented that students were unable to provide logical and possible reasons for their arguments in favour of their selected version of pyramid, which could stimulate their thinking. She concluded: “I was not happy with students’ performance” (Group discussion 2_Nhi).

Reflecting on the activity, Nhi not only explored the possible causes of the students’ unsuccessful performance, but also considered clear instructions and better guided tasks as ways to approach the practice differently in the future.

I think that was because of my guidelines and my instructions. What I would do differently next time is to give more straightforward guidelines and more information before they could do this activity.

(Group discussion 2_Nhi)

Expanding on Nhi's comment, in the group discussion, the teachers noted that, in addition to the need to provide more input to their students, teachers should be more aware of their instructions. They reported that they sometimes provided confusing or incomplete instructions (Nhi, Uy, Trinh). Lanh emphasised the importance of clear instructions in the interview. He added:

The application of activities is very important, especially at the planning stage. Teachers should plan classroom activities very carefully and teachers should foresee what difficulties their students might encounter. Giving clear instructions is crucial to the success of students' performance in those activities.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

In Uy's lesson using debates between buying a PC or a laptop, Uy was aware that students' language proficiency was a constraint for unguided language production as in a debate. Uy thought the activity was not as effective as planned because "students simply looked up the words in a Vietnamese-English dictionary and put the words together to make sentences. Sometimes, the statements don't make any sense or [are] grammatically incorrect" (Group discussion 2_Uy). Additionally, it was a challenge for Uy to monitor a class debate involving more than thirty students.

In the group discussion, when Uy shared how she incorporated the debate activity with other teachers, Uy realised that providing more input as a guided practice would be helpful for students:

Definitely I should have provided students with some language for the debating first Although some input was provided at the beginning of the activity, students still needed more support, for example vocabulary and basic grammatical structures for debating.

(Group discussion 2_Uy)

The above examples indicate that the teachers sometimes experienced dissonance between their expectations and practical classroom implementation. When they reflected further and sought to understand the reasons for the dissonance, they were able to develop better ways to enact the activity in the future.

5.4.1.3 Vignette 3: Teaching high-level thinking and learning skills

As the group discussions developed and participants found their voices, the conversations developed greater complexity and depth. Discussion on whether higher thinking and

Chapter 5: Findings

learning skills should be taught to non-English majors produced conflict among the teachers. Interview and group discussion findings revealed the teachers' underlying assumptions and the reasoning behind their views. When encountering conflicting views, the teachers tried to negotiate different views for mutual understanding; however, in some instances, the teachers recognised the value of both positions. The teachers reported a lack of awareness of teaching learning skills in the practice because of the focus on linguistic knowledge and skills. All of these contributed to the teacher learning process.

Almost immediately, conflict arose when the teachers discussed their views and implementation of the last three inquiries, aimed to foster students' metacognitive strategies, higher thinking and self-directed learning skills. The teachers used think-aloud to improve reading comprehension as an activity for discussion because most of them found this activity possibly more applicable. In the interview, Manh reported that teaching these skills and strategies was impossible due to students' low proficiency level and their negative attitudes to English learning. Strongly supporting Manh's viewpoint, Lanh entered the group debate commenting that it was "a waste of time" teaching those skills and he was "doubtful of the feasibility and effectiveness of the application" in practice (Group discussion_3). He acknowledged that his idea could be "biased, subjective and against others' views in the group" (Group discussion 3). With an exam-directed view of teaching and learning, Lanh constructed learning as "a process when students have to learn on their own and my teaching is to prepare them for exams" (Group discussion 3). An example of his comment is:

My teaching approach is usually for the exam, which means that I usually direct my instruction to the skills or knowledge that students would need for the exam [so] that they can do better in the exam.

(Group discussion 3_Lanh)

He defined metacognitive language learning as preparation strategies before the actual learning period (Group discussion 3). Lanh further explained that exams required more cognitive skills than metacognitive skills and that metacognitive language learning strategies are "just learning skills, not exam strategies" (Group discussion 3). Lanh also assumed that higher-level students should already know and use these metacognitive skills in their learning (Group discussion 3), which might explain why Nhi believed that these skills were more suitable for juniors and seniors than freshmen and sophomores (Individual interview). Lanh concluded:

Teaching activity such as think-aloud can be applied to: firstly children or first time language learners who have not been familiar with English language; secondly, learners of low English proficiency level; thirdly, learners with no exam pressure. . . . Teaching metacognitive language learning strategies may help learners improve their learning gradually. But I am not sure about the possibility that students would do better in the exam if they use these strategies.

(Group discussion 3_Lanh)

Lanh's comments display a common perceived backwash of examination orientation, reflect some confusion about metacognitive language learning strategies, and show some false assumptions about suitability of higher thinking skills and student levels.

In contrast, Trinh and Uy shared different insights into the theory of metacognition in language acquisition. Trinh described metacognitive strategies as “strategies to help students understand their thinking and how they learn” (Group discussion 3). Both Trinh and Uy had very positive opinions regarding the implementation of think-aloud activity in their classrooms. Trinh commented:

Think-aloud is a way to help students think and read more effectively. This helps students be aware of necessary steps in thinking while reading. . . . Gradually, this will help students have a habit or consciousness of the steps and strategies for better comprehension.

(Group discussion 3_Trinh)

While Lanh believed in a ‘practice makes improvement’ approach, Trinh and Uy believed in a strategic approach. In other words, according to Lanh, the more students read and did exercises, the more they improved in reading skills. On the contrary, Uy and Trinh thought that a good reader had reading strategies. For example, if students did not know the meaning of a word, they needed to know how to guess the meaning of the word in context. Lanh defended his view and stated that prediction was not always a wise strategy for students. He commented:

Prediction is not a wise strategy for students. . . . Prediction based on background knowledge could be wrong. . . . Background knowledge does not guarantee to be correct and therefore does not guarantee the success of the reading. It is a must for students to carefully read and understand the text content.

(Group discussion 3_Lanh)

Chapter 5: Findings

The discussion continued, though the teachers were polarised on the practice of teaching higher thinking and learning skills. At the same time, the debate provided the seeds of an emerging negotiation of different views for mutual understanding and a recognition of the value of both positions. Trinh explained:

I understand where Lanh was speaking from in terms of exam-oriented teaching but to me these strategies are also very important to do well in a reading test or exam.

(Group discussion 3_Trinh)

Uy, in considering Lanh's opposing position, tried to ease the tension, commenting:

As a teacher, I think teaching for an exam is one of the objectives for teachers. They try to look for similar types of questions or exam situation for their students to do in order to be prepared for the exam or what we say test/exam taking strategies. However, besides that, I think a teacher really wants their students to be able to use the strategies and a proper attitude to their learning. I agree with Lanh that the more reading practice students do, the better students will perform. However, I also believe if students are able to apply strategies during their reading, the performance will become even faster and more effective.

(Group discussion 3_Uy)

Uy's rationale seemed to have an effect on Lanh; the positions shifted, and a consensus about the role of higher thinking and learning skill instruction was achieved. Lanh agreed with Trinh and Uy that these skills should be incorporated in the lessons at early stages and should be taught explicitly. Even higher-level students, for example English majors, might not be aware of these strategies if they were not taught explicitly. Importantly, they agreed that scaffolding these strategies and skills throughout the semester would result in greater long-lasting benefits for students (Lanh, Uy, Trinh, and Nhi).

In the interview, Uy mentioned the lack of self-awareness in her teaching practices and emphasised that "to be growing in the profession, teachers should be aware of their gaps" (Individual interview_Uy).

The reason for not teaching learning skills is that I am not aware of them and that I am not familiar with the ideas of improving learning skills for my students. I think I should change. Learning strategies should be explicitly introduced to students in early sessions and scaffolding throughout the course so that students are aware of the strategies and can apply them in different learning contexts. (Individual interview_Uy)

Importantly, Uy added: “when teachers are conscious of strategy instructions, they will teach students in a conscious way.” (Group discussion 3_Uy). In a similar vein, Trinh expressed her awareness of the importance of guiding students’ self-directed learning.

I have to say that there have been so many changes. But the major change is my awareness of students' self-directed learning. Students have to be active in their learning. This is what all the teachers should guide them [toward].

(Individual interview_Trinh)

Nhi, Uy and Trinh’s emphasis on the changes in their increased awareness of students’ learning and their teaching was part of the teacher learning process and closely connected with professional growth.

5.4.1.4 Vignette 4: Incorporating classroom activities to promote SCA

The interview findings showed that the teachers had diverse perceptions of and attitudes towards SCA activities. Some inquiry activities were completely new to some teachers and some were not. For example, while Manh was not aware of the inquiry prior to his participation in the study (Individual interview), Uy commented that some recommended activities were familiar to her (Individual interview). Furthermore, three teachers (Trinh, Lanh and Tien) shared slightly negative perceptions of classroom activities during their interviews. Trinh interpreted a number of classroom activities as “trò” [games] (Individual interview). Likewise, Lanh and Tien classified some classroom activities with an element of fun (Individual interviews). These three teachers commented that carrying out these games in the class was time-consuming given syllabus and textbook requirements (Individual interviews). To these teachers, activities promoting SCA were positive but the implementation would be challenging due to students’ low proficiency level, Vietnamese students’ learning cultures, students’ lack of familiarity with SCA activities, and teachers’ busy teaching loads (Group discussion 1). As a result, they were hesitant about their use. Lanh commented:

Teachers need to balance between having fun and teaching the textbook content. If students study content too much, they will get bored. But if teachers focus on having fun too much, students will not learn anything and that affects the results when students have the exams.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

Chapter 5: Findings

Another finding emerged from the teachers' interview, indicating that the teachers had a tendency to adopt SCA practice unconsciously, overlooking underlying pedagogical reasoning. This resulted from the teachers' prior learning experience, as Nhi stated:

I did incorporate activities in my teaching. However, I was not aware of the purposes. I applied them unconsciously. I did not know how and what activities could improve the students' learning. I applied what I learned during my pre-service training. I did not know how and whether the activities support learning.

(Individual interview_Nhi)

The reflective comments from the teachers after their enactment become more positive because of the connection between the theory of SCA and the enactment of SCA activities in practice. Each inquiry started with an overview of an SCA topic; for example, creating opportunities for students' language output. This section introduced what the topic was about (*what*) and why it was important for students' learning (*why*). Then, a 'try things out' section suggested topic-related activities that teachers could try out in their class (*how*), followed by a few reflective questions for the teachers to respond to after the implementation. The systematic presentation of the *what*, *why*, and *how* in the inquiries enabled Uy and Nhi to link those elements consciously in their practice and thus link theory with practice systematically. Uy reflected in her comment:

Actually, some activities are not absolutely new to me and they are sometimes applied in my class. However, when they go in each inquiry with a brief overview, I become more aware of those activities and purposes; I mean the *what*, *why*, and *how* when choosing the activities to conduct in my class. . . . I think, for any teaching strategy, it is important to start from the foundation - the *what*, *why* and *how* of the application. Then it's the implementation stage when I implement it in the class. Then in the reflection stage when I reflect on the success and the failure of the application, lessons learned and how I will make it better next time or in other classes.

(Group discussion 3_Uy)

Interestingly, in the interviews, both Trinh and Nhi reported that, after the learning experience in the study, they became more self-reflective about their classroom decisions. They often set a specific goal for themselves before each teaching session. The trilogy of teachers' beliefs, actions and intentions (goals) as part of the learning process was reflected in the following comment.

The most obvious thing that I have recently noticed in my practice is that I always come to the class with a goal in mind; for example, today I want to focus on my instructions, and tomorrow I will focus on students' talking time. Not just coming to class with an empty mind trying to tick off the sections in the textbook.

(Individual interview_Nhi)

It appears that Lanh's perception of incorporating classroom activities changed from seeing them as just having fun to supporting students' learning. The extract suggests that positive feedback from students might be a contributing factor to the change in Lanh's perception.

I am thinking of ways to incorporate activities into the classroom but that has to support learning. I have a chance to apply different activities in the classroom and see how my students react to activities, and most of them are very positive.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

5.4.2 Summary of interview and group discussion findings

The interviews and group discussions reported the process of how the teachers learned. In this process, all the teachers engaging in Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the study did some puzzling and inquiring into their existing pedagogical knowledge and were open to SCA. The four vignettes illustrated different dimensions of the learning process, focusing on reflective connections between theory, cognition and practice, interaction with other teachers, and construction of new knowledge. The reflective data provided evidence of the changes in the teachers' cognition and how they translated these into their teaching practice.

In addition to personal learning experiences, the teachers experienced interactive and collegial learning opportunities with other teachers in the group. Engaging in professional dialogues and continuous reflection helped the teachers not only gain more insights into their own teaching practices, but also to learn new teaching techniques from each other, find solutions to their pedagogical problems collaboratively, discuss practical alternatives, stimulate each other's thinking, negotiate different perspectives for mutual understanding, reach consensus, and/or consider the value of different views.

Finally, contextual factors and barriers, teachers' attitudes and students' characteristics played a crucial role in the teacher learning experience and the enactment of the new

learning. In response to these internal and external barriers, the teachers acted with their agency by selecting what to experiment with, how to adjust the activities to suit their students, and what and how best to teach their students. All of these contributed to the complexity and multidimensionality of the learning process.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings relating to the five research questions.

- The main finding for the first research question was that before participation in this study, the teachers reported an awareness and favourable perceptions of SCA and aspects of SCA in their stated teaching practices; however, some inconsistencies in their reported beliefs were noted.
- The findings for the second research question revealed the teachers' openness to the adoption of student-centred pedagogy. The study indicated that all the teachers in the study changed certain aspects of their practice and cognition regarding SCA. This was evidenced by the various strategies and activities the teachers implemented in their classrooms and by their reflections. However, traditional teaching pedagogy continued to play a role.
- The findings for the third research question suggested that the teachers learned to bridge theory-practice gaps by enacting, inquiring into, reflecting on, and critiquing their practices, which contributed to the development of their self-awareness or self-realisation of pedagogical reasoning for their classroom decisions. This enabled the teachers to adapt their teaching practices, construct their practice-based knowledge, and monitor their professional growth and development. Further, engaging professional dialogues and continuous reflection supported the teachers to learn from and with each other, problem solve together, realise different ways of doing things, and become involved in the process of negotiating views and meanings with each other.
- The findings for the fourth research question indicated that the teachers shifted their beliefs, practices, and developed their pedagogical knowledge. However, the relationships of these changes were diverse. Being reflective teachers, they were able to reach a state of self-awareness, self-realisation, and self-evaluation from practice, which contributed to the construction of their practical knowledge. Further, the teachers reported experiencing dilemmas or recognising the

Chapter 5: Findings

shortcomings in their practices. All of these were part of the learning processes to enable them to professionally grow and develop.

- The findings for the fifth research questions revealed personal, contextual, and socio-cultural factors that could support or hinder the teachers' learning process and their application of new learning. This ultimately required the teachers' local (situated) knowledge and experience, and their enactment of active and agentic role in order to make the learning processes effective and meaningful. Further discussion on the findings for the fifth question in relation to the teacher learning is examined in Chapter Six, section 6.4.4.

The next chapter contains a discussion of these findings. Chapter Six explores the relationships between this study's findings and other research findings in the area. The findings are contextualised in the literature on teacher learning, presented in Chapter Three, and the implications of the findings for EFL teacher professional learning in Vietnam are discussed.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study investigated the engagement in an inquiry process of six EFL teachers from two Vietnamese universities, and how the inquiry process shaped the teachers' professional learning, paying attention to cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge. This study situated the learning process in the context of student-centred approaches (SCA) inquiry. This was used as the 'content' of teacher learning. I explored the teachers' initial beliefs and their reported practices, how they interpreted and integrated new knowledge of SCA in their classroom practices, how their pedagogical knowledge of SCA developed, and how their beliefs about teaching and learning changed. I also wanted to find out how cycles of reflection influenced an increased awareness of their teaching practices, how collective learning opportunities in groups contributed to their learning. The study also examined the teachers' professional growth from their experience of engaging in the inquiry process. These included changes in the teachers' beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, teaching practices, and professional learning and development practice. I hoped that an in-depth understanding of the complexity and multidimensionality of the teachers' learning processes in their practical context would provide insights about how to support teachers' professional learning in the Vietnamese higher education context.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, teacher learning in this study was approached using constructivist and situative lenses. Constructivists conceive of learning as an active process of making meaning, in which teachers are active agents and knowledge is individually constructed and socially co-constructed, determined by the complex interplay of multiple factors (Donald, 1987; Pang & Ling, 2012; Putnam & Borko, 2013). These factors include personal influences, such as existing knowledge, prior experiences, interests, motivations, needs, preferences, experiences with the world, beliefs, and interactions with wider contextual influences, which can be institutional, social, and/or cultural. From the constructivist view, teachers may perceive and interpret new information differently. Within both situative and constructivist perspectives, learning is conceptualised as a social practice; teachers participate in, communicate with, and belong to a community (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991). From these two views, knowledge is situated and responsive to the context in which it is negotiated.

Therefore, it is important to take into account contextual and socio-cultural dimensions that the community or the group is built on.

In order to explore and document the complex process of teacher learning, the research used a predominantly qualitative research design, with a small amount of quantitative data collected via a questionnaire administered at the beginning of the study. Besides the use of the questionnaire sent to a wider group of EFL teachers at two universities in Vietnam in Phase 1, a variety of data collection instruments were used. These involved carrying out classroom observation sessions and debriefs with a group of six selected teachers (three from each university) in Phase 2; collecting data from group discussions involving the same group of six teachers in Phase 3; and conducting individual interviews with these six teachers in Phase 4. Questionnaire data were analysed by using descriptive statistics to examine the teachers' initial beliefs and reported practices of SCA. Then, observation and debrief data were thematically analysed and presented for the six teachers to reinforce the teachers' understanding and enactment of SCA. Finally, group discussion and interview data were analysed and presented in the form of vignettes to examine the teachers' learning processes. The analysis approaches specifically focused on how the cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge supported teacher learning, what changes related to professional knowledge, teaching practice, and professional development practice were reported, and what factors should be taken into account.

Chapter Six combines both the discussion and conclusion relating to the study. First, it briefly summarises the findings of the study based on the five research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the findings for the five research questions in relation to the literature and other research. In answering these questions, the discussion is organised into two main sections. One examines the teachers' stated beliefs, reported practices and observed practices regarding SCA; the other explores the process of teacher learning in the study's context.

The chapter further expands the discussion about theoretical, methodological and practical implications for EFL teacher learning in Vietnam. Limitations and recommendations for future research are suggested.

6.2 An overview of the findings

From the questionnaire responses, the participating teachers reported an awareness of SCA. However, there were a few instances when their reported beliefs diverged from SCA principles. In practice, observations of their classroom instruction showed an increased practical application of SCA in their classes. At the same time, the teachers demonstrated complex inter-relationships between their beliefs and practices.

Engaging in the inquiry process, the teachers made sense of SCA principles through classroom enactment, cycles of reflection, and construction of knowledge both individually and in collegial group dialogues. Individual critical reflection enabled the teachers to critique their own practices and develop an awareness of pedagogical reasoning for their classroom decisions. Having reflective dialogues with other teachers provided opportunities for the teachers to reflect on their own and others' practices. In this social learning environment, the teachers shared their repertoire of pedagogical practices, analysed classroom problems and discussed possible responses. Reflecting on their enactment in groups also revealed teachers experiencing dissonance – the discrepancy between their pedagogical intentions and enactment outcomes. Such cases prompted critical thinking and reflection on possible causes for the dissonance, linking theory and practice, context and teaching purposes, developed their awareness, and recognised alternative classroom solutions. Group discussions stimulated teachers to think and to seek ideas and confirmation from their colleagues. As the group discussion developed and the teachers encountered different views, the dialogues became more complex and critical. The teachers demonstrated their learning through negotiating their views, reconsidering their beliefs and practices, reconciling differences, shifting perspectives, or recognising the value of multiple positions. In both individual and collective learning endeavours, the process of learning emphasised the active and agentic engagement of the teachers and their reflective practices, embedding cognition, enactment and contextual aspects.

Engaging in the process of inquiry fostered the teachers' learning, leading to professional changes and growth. The teachers reported a number of factors that needed to be accounted for: personal, contextual and socio-cultural. The teachers reported a need for a support framework from institutions and authorities in order to be able to engage in

ongoing professional learning and development while fulfilling other academic commitments.

6.3 Teachers' beliefs and practices of SCA

6.3.1 Prior to participation in the study

Prior to their participation in the study, the teachers reported an awareness and favourable perceptions of SCA, and expressed their agreement with the key tenets of the approaches (section 5.2.1). From the teachers' questionnaire responses, they valued many aspects of SCA principles. These included the importance of learners' autonomy (having a say in class) (Tudor, 1996), self-directed learning skills (self-reflection, self-correction, and self-assessment) (Hoskinson, Barger, & Martin, 2014; Tudor, 1996), learners' active participation and engagement in class (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996), an English-rich learning environment (Ulla, 2018), and less prescriptive use of the syllabus and textbooks (Nunan, 1988; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Tudor, 1996).

However, the analysis confirmed two preliminary observations when the teachers reported inconsistent beliefs with regard to student-centred pedagogy in the questionnaire. First, while valuing learners' autonomy and opportunities for self-directed learning, many of the teachers also supported a strong role for teachers in the learning process, particularly in class management. They believed that teachers should determine the objectives of the lesson, manage the learning process, provide an English language model, and give explanations of students' language errors. There are a number of possible reasons for these inconsistent reported beliefs. First, a teacher-centred teaching tradition has existed in Asian education contexts for a long time (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Ellis, 1994; Pham & Renshaw, 2013; L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018; Trinh & Mai, 2019), which may have influenced the teachers' perceptions prior to their participation in the study. Another possible explanation is that, prior to their participation, the teachers may have had varying understandings and perceptions of SCA. With regard to cognition theory, as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3.2, the teachers may hold different beliefs simultaneously (Levin, 2015) and sometimes such beliefs are contradictory (Kang & Cheng, 2014). As a result, their classroom decisions are never simple (Lampert, 1985). Furthermore, in terms of research methods, it has been suggested that discrepancies between teachers' reported beliefs and/or practices may arise through the use of particular 'pencil and paper' data

collection instruments, such as questionnaire and other self-report procedures (Basturkmen, 2012; Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008; Isikoglu, Basturk, & Karaca, 2009; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991).

Another inconsistency was how the teachers saw themselves in the two open-ended questions (see Chapter Five, section 5.2.2). The teachers identified a number of teacher roles that exist within the context of student-centredness. However, while the teachers seemed to move towards a strong view of the self-directed role of students and facilitating and organising roles of teachers, they still placed weight on the traditional teaching role of teachers, for example, as an instructor or a knowledge provider. For example, Lanh perceived his multiple roles in class; as a facilitator who facilitated the process of student learning, as a model for them and as their friend. In contrast, Lanh's questionnaire response stated that there were a few times he had to act as a traditional teacher who maintained classroom management and required students to complete tasks. Similarly, Manh and Tien recognised their various roles in class, including the mutually exclusive roles of a facilitator and a knowledge provider (Manh) or instructor (Tien) who taught students basic knowledge. This finding is consistent with Chu (2014) findings on teachers' conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach to TESOL in Vietnam. In her study, the participants used terms such as *facilitator*, *helper*, *guide*, and *instructor* to describe the role of a facilitator. Chu (2014) found that the participants in her study used *instructor* to refer to both the role of a *facilitator* and the role of a *knowledge provider*. The roles of knowledge provider and knowledge expert are not directly linked to student-centredness.

Sometimes teachers may have difficulty making transitions from their culturally and traditionally defined roles to their newly assigned roles in the student-centred system, which links to the previous discussion point, in relation to teacher-centred teaching tradition. According to Confucian philosophy, teachers should always know better than students. They are considered masters, who are a source of knowledge (T. T. H. Pham, 2010) and are highly respected (H. B. Nguyen, 2014; Phan, 2008), as discussed in section 2.3. The expectation that teachers view their role as masters is simplistic and limiting, which is reflected in the findings of this study. These perceptions are likely to challenge the principle of student-centred approaches and may be a strong cultural impediment to teachers "accepting any pedagogical practice that tends to put teachers on a par with their students and detracts from teacher authority" (T. T. H. Pham, 2010, p. 28). Further, Lee

and VanPatten (2003) state that if teachers and students are not ready to assume their new roles, they are unlikely to undertake new kinds of learning tasks and activities because roles dictate tasks. Therefore, it is crucial to raise teachers' awareness of their new roles in the execution of SCA (Chu, 2014; Tudor, 1996) and enhance teachers' understanding of the theory of SCA (Aliusta & Özer, 2017).

It is significant to note that the questionnaire responses were based on the teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices, which may have created a potential bias, as noted earlier. Furthermore, the questionnaire data were collected from a wider group of participants, and thus captured wider views. Discussion is now narrowed down to the group of six teachers who participated in phases 2-4 of the study.

6.3.2 After participation in the study

After participating in the study, the results displayed diverse relationships between the beliefs and practices of SCA among the six teachers. The evidence indicated that the teachers became more aware of student-centred pedagogy, especially in relation to their roles. For example, in the interview, Trinh reflected that she had to shift from her knowledge transferring role to take on more diverse roles: an instructor who gives instructions to students, a monitor to assess students' performance, a facilitator, and an observer. Trinh stated that "in order to assist student learning, a teacher is not only a talker in the class" (Individual interview_Trinh). This reflects evidence in the literature suggesting that the types of classroom activities in SCA imply various new roles for teachers, including being a facilitator, a monitor, a needs analyst, a counsellor, and a group process manager (Pedersen & Liu, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Tudor, 1996). Five out of six teachers reported being facilitators. For example, the interview finding indicated that Uy perceived her role mainly as a facilitator of learning. Uy stated:

I think a teacher has to be a good facilitator in class. In order to be a good facilitator, teachers should prepare various activities to implement in class to motivate and engage students, to provide them with opportunities to practice and use the language in class, which is a crucial element of an effective English class.

(Individual interview_Uy)

Uy also reflected about what had contributed to the success of her facilitating role and a teaching session. Uy stated:

[to facilitate student learning in class], first, I identify and introduce [the] main content of a lesson, which can be considered as the objectives of a lesson, then integrate to present the content and have students practice. When implementing activities, students play a key role and the teacher is the one who facilitates the activities and monitors students.

(Individual interview_Uy)

Findings from the observational data showed a high degree of coherence between these teachers' beliefs and their practices in performing their student-centred teacher roles. It is also evident from the teachers' debrief, interview, and group discussion data that they seemed to recognise the importance of making students central to their teaching practice. Careful lesson planning and activity design focusing on student-centredness, anticipating students' challenges (section 5.4.2.1), giving clear instructions (section 5.4.2.2), developing high-level thinking and independent learning skills (section 5.4.2.3) were foregrounded as ways to help students speak more, foster student interaction in class, construct meaning and develop skills to become independent learners. The reflective comments from the teachers, as reported in section 5.4.2, suggested greater emphasis on the students' attitudes, needs, interests, motivations and development of necessary skills, which affirmed the teachers' commitment to SCA practices. From observations and debriefs, the teachers enacted more student-centred activities that were built up in the inquiries and began to expand their activities beyond the inquiries. For example, the teachers attempted to translate new learning of SCA into their practices by having students work on communicative and interactive activities such as questioning, jigsaws, story completion, or debate to generate more interaction and language use. Four of the six teachers also incorporated activities that enhanced students' thinking and learning skills. The findings from this study add to previous knowledge, which suggests that teachers enact practices based on the beliefs they hold about SCA (Johnson, 1992; Kim, 2014).

The results also indicate that there was some congruence between the teachers' reported and observed practices. Aspects of student-centred instruction were reported in the teachers' practices; for example, the importance of students' active participation and engagement in class. The teachers agreed that effective teaching requires active engagement of students and that teachers should change their teaching methods and

activities when they see that students are not engaged. In observing their practices, the majority of the teachers provided opportunities for students to talk, ask questions, share their work, and interact in pairs, groups, and with the entire class as ways to encourage students' participation and engagement in class activities. The teachers were also observed changing or adapting activities or instructions when they saw no engagement from their students.

However, the teachers' reported beliefs did not always correspond with their practices. For example, the interview data show that Manh viewed himself as a facilitator in class, but in his description, he shifted back to the traditional teacher-centred role. Manh commented that teachers played a decisive role in student learning. He viewed what teachers said as the truth, and believed that students listened to and learned from teachers. In his reflection, he was aware of his traditional practices, and explained:

I had to use the traditional approach. I taught and students wrote down information to learn. They did not know that they needed to use English in class. . . . There was no other way. . . . That was because of the low proficiency level of students.

(Individual interview_Manh)

Manh's comment echoed his prior learning experiences, as reported in section 5.4.2.

From my experience as a language learner, I followed a traditional approach, which means teachers giving instructions; students copying what was taught. That somehow affects me and my teaching.

(Individual interview_Manh)

In line with this belief, the observational data produced a similar picture, showing that Manh continued to perform traditional roles, despite his self-described role as a student-centred facilitator. Although Manh used Microsoft PowerPoint in place of the blackboard to present lesson content, lecturing, explaining, demonstrating, questioning, and translating were the most commonly used techniques in his classes, suggesting that the teacher held the authority and control, making all decisions regarding teaching and learning (Aliusta & Özer, 2017). This supports previous studies that found traditional teacher roles still commonly influence teaching practices, especially in developing countries where SCA has been introduced through national government policies (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Yilmaz, 2009). The data suggest that Manh's awareness or knowledge of SCA increased and he attempted to change his classroom practices; however, his beliefs were not necessarily affected. The findings relating to Manh are slightly different from

those of Meirink, Meijer, and Verloop (2007), who found more changes in cognition than in behaviour. However, in their study, the findings may have been influenced by the heterogeneous group of six teachers of six different subjects: science, mathematics, English language, cultural and arts education, economics, and history, compared to the homogeneous group of teachers in my study. Another possible explanation is that the findings were based on interviews and teachers' digital logs. Using a different method of data collection, such as observations in classrooms, might have resulted in different findings.

This finding generally fit well with several prior studies (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Brinkmann, 2015; Kaymakamoğlu, 2018) that indicate inconsistencies between beliefs and practices, as explored in section 3.3.2. Understanding the inconsistencies requires an awareness of a number of factors, as discussed in section 3.3.2. They include teachers' experience (Aliakbari & Mohsen, 2015; Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013), the teaching context (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Levin, 2015), prior knowledge and learning experiences (Levin, 2015; Tamimy, 2015), planned or unplanned aspects of classroom practice (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Johnson, 1992; Tamimy, 2015), culture (Ashton, 2015), and the wider social and institutional context (Buehl & Beck, 2015). These influences are explored in-depth in association with teacher learning in the following sections.

At a more complex level, the teachers reported mixed beliefs and enacted practices of both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches. For example, Lanh acknowledged the traditional role of knowledge transmission alongside other student-centred roles that a teacher performed in class. Lanh's comments below suggest that he believed students played an active role in their learning and he viewed himself as a facilitator, organiser, guide, and observer who facilitates students' learning process and responds to students' needs and interests. He stated:

I think that a teacher now has not only the responsibility for teaching students, but being a facilitator. In their various roles, teachers have to organise and facilitate the learning process of students and try to create a good learning environment for students.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

When the teacher observes the class, if there is no longer positive reaction and engagement from the students in the lesson, the teacher should change the topic, or shift the lesson to something that students

feel interested in and they want to ask about The teacher should provide some guidance to students. While students are doing a required task, they will ask the teacher questions to clarify or to find ways to solve that task.

(Group discussion 1_Lanh)

The findings suggest that the teachers in this study practice at the interface of multiple and sometimes competing influences, including Confucianism, SCA, their professional values and goals, and their students' attributes. These factors influence how the teachers understand and enact their roles. As a result, they seem to have adopted elements of both traditional and SCA-oriented teaching.

It is evident from the observation and debrief data presented in section 5.3 that in participating in the inquiry process, the six teachers demonstrated similar adherence to traditional classroom practices, adopting behaviourism and grammar translation methods with a reliance on textbooks. From the lesson observations and teachers' debriefs, their interpretation of SCA seems to centre around student interaction and linguistic production with a focus on developing students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. The teachers shared similar classroom methodological approaches to presentation, practice and production, and input, interaction and output. Uy, Lanh, Nhi, Trinh and Manh commented that linguistic knowledge influenced the improvement of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (see section 5.3.1) and that student interaction was enacted mainly via pair work and group work (see section 5.3.2). At times, the teachers fostered student interaction through pair work and group work with a traditional teaching orientation. For example, to practice grammatical tasks from the textbook, students were asked to work in pairs and then nominated to read the sentences, give their answers to the teacher, and finally to translate the text into Vietnamese. This is illustrated in the following example:

Nhi: Work in pairs. Fill in the sentences in the exercise with correct relative words and find out the rules for using these relative words.

(O1D1_Nhi)

After allowing students to work in self-selected pairs, Nhi nominated one student to correct each sentence in the exercise.

Nhi: Let's correct the exercise. I'd like you to read the whole sentence and translate into Vietnamese.

S: This is the camera *which* students often use for their project work? - Đây là cái máy chụp hình mà sinh viên thường sử dụng cho các dự án.

Nhi: Which thay thế cho từ nào vậy em? [What does *which* replace for?]

S: *The camera.*

Nhi seemed to introduce an interactive learning opportunity; however, her instruction focused on a grammar-translation approach. Another observed practice fostering SCA with a traditional orientation was that after presenting a new language form or structure to students, the teachers got students to work in pairs to rehearse the new language form or structure (behaviourism or total physical response approach).

SCA aims to develop students as critical thinkers and independent learners, as noted in section 3.2.1. Activities requiring independent learning, high-level thinking and articulated skills, such as collaboration, group work, goal setting, self-monitoring, self-reflection, self-review, self-assessment and project-based teaching, received different reactions from the participating teachers. There was some disparity between how SCA was perceived and how the teachers reported their practical applications, especially those related to higher thinking and learning skills. For instance, the teachers believed that skills such as self-reflection and self-assessment are crucial in helping students to become self-directed learners. Despite these activities being very student-centred, the teachers reported that they did not often get students to reflect on what they learned or do self-review or self-assessment. In practice, these two activities were rarely observed in the teachers' classes, except in Uy's last two observed sessions. Similarly, in their espoused practices, three quarters of the teachers reported that they frequently asked students to think about or set learning goals before lessons started. In the enacted practices of the six teachers, only Lanh and Trinh attempted to incorporate goal-setting activity in practice. As reported in sections 5.4.2.1 and 5.4.2.2, the teachers described challenges when getting students to work together in pairs or groups. Unlike common critiques of Confucian heritage cultures (Nguyen et al., 2017; N. H. Tran et al., 2018; Tran, 2013), the teachers in this study explained that the challenges were due to students' use of Vietnamese and the lack of structures for communicating when working in pairs or groups. In the second group discussion, Trinh suggested that teachers "should spend the first teaching session of each course to provide students with some guidance on how to work in groups, together

with useful language and structures students can use to discuss with each other”. Tien agreed with Trinh and further added this practice should be institutionalised as a formal practice in the two organisations (Group discussion 2). This reflects a crucial consideration of students’ voices and needs in the reform process and practice change. Like their teachers, students need to be trained about the philosophy, methods and skills underlying SCA (Aliusta & Özer, 2017).

What was most noteworthy in this study was that five of the six teachers eventually adopted a more pragmatic “hybrid” approach, which implied using a combination of teacher- and student-centred approaches. For example, Lanh commented in the interview that he did not apply one particular teaching method or approach in his class but tended to combine methods and approaches. Two of his favoured methods were Communicative Language Teaching and Audio Lingual because they focused more on repetition, communication and grammar, rather than other skills and knowledge that were not necessary for speaking skills. The use of a hybrid approach is supported in the literature by a number of studies (Bremner, 2019; Pham, 2016; Tam, 2015). In contemporary classrooms, teachers are likely to encounter students from diverse backgrounds with a range of learning needs and preferences (Bremner, 2019). Teachers are also faced with the realities of teaching environments, which include the physical classroom, institutional structures, national policies, and wider socio-cultural contexts (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven, & Dochy, 2010; Nguyen, 2016; Pham, 2016; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tamimy, 2015). The approaches used depend on how appropriate they seem to be in different situations, and what is best for student learning. The teachers in this study were student-centred in that they took account of students’ characteristics and socio-cultural contexts, and institutional constraints. However, the teachers’ ideal teaching practices were sometimes superseded by pragmatic concerns about how they might best help students learn. This implies a paradigm of principled pragmatism, in which the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and actualisation can only be realised in practical applications informed by teachers’ experience and contextual factors (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Accordingly, a number of teacher-centred routine practices were conducted in their classes, as they were believed to build up students’ linguistic knowledge and language skills, which were considered crucial for students at low proficiency levels. The five teachers endorsed both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches.

The use of hybrid approaches is suggestive of the tensions between core and peripheral beliefs (Pajares, 1992), as mentioned in section 3.3.1. For example, Trinh's comment illustrates shifting between core and peripheral beliefs. She reflected:

When I started my teaching career, my main goal of teaching practice was to help students achieve high marks in the exams. Then my goal changed to help students be able to speak English. And now [after participating in this study] I realise the importance of student autonomy and their self-directed learning.

(Individual interview_Trinh)

Although Trinh stated that, after participating in this study, she believed in the importance of fostering student autonomy and self-directed learning both inside and outside the classroom (Individual interview), in practice, she reverted to enacting various traditional teacher-centred approaches to teaching such as behaviourism (section 5.3.1) and her previous instructional goal, which was creating opportunities for students to speak. She reflected that these would help her students (section 5.3.1) even if it meant adopting typically teacher-centred methods. Because of her students' characteristics and contextual constraints such as the curriculum, textbook design, and large class sizes, Trinh's core belief (what was best for her students) appears to have overridden her peripheral belief (value of SCA). Trinh realised that her beliefs were contradictory (section 5.4.2), which is supported in the literature: teachers may hold different beliefs simultaneously and sometimes these beliefs may conflict with each other (Kang & Cheng, 2014; Levin, 2015). This is when teachers' experience plays a role in teachers' decisions about what is best for students (Basturkmen, 2012) and teachers need a degree of autonomy to respond to students' physical, intellectual, and emotional needs (Croft, 2002).

Student-centredness and teacher-centredness should not be a dichotomous choice or competing approaches, because "the merger of practical realities and theoretical complexities tends to collapse the binary of teacher-centred and student-centred classrooms" (Kain, 2003, p. 104) or influence implementation success versus failure (Schweisfurth, 2011). Croft (2002) argues that student-centred practices – insofar as they prioritise learning outcomes – may mean that teachers develop different teaching practices in different situations in relation to local conditions and available resources to best facilitate student learning, even if this means teaching in a teacher-centred way. O'Sullivan (2004) and Kain (2003) make similar points. As a result, instead of student-centred approaches, a number of researchers have proposed new terms such as learning-

centred (Brinkmann, 2019; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2004) or classroom-centred (Kain, 2003) to refer to any teaching approach in which teachers place an emphasis on effective facilitation of student learning.

Shifting from teacher-centred education to a student-centred approach can be a complex change process related to educational reforms, which may involve uncertainty, adversity and resistance (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Bremner, 2019; Pratt, 1992; L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018). For the reforms to be successful and change to happen, all interdependent components of the educational system need to be simultaneously addressed; most importantly, the curriculum, assessment practice, and the people embedded in it, such as students and teachers. Teacher engagement is considered a vital determinant of success (Buchanan, 2012; L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018). Teachers need to be adequately supported if they are expected to change their beliefs about teaching and learning, adopt new roles and acquire new knowledge and practices (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Bremner, 2019; Brinkmann, 2019). One supportive measure is the cultivation of teacher professional learning and development, which is discussed in the following section.

6.4 Teachers' professional learning

The results of this study, as summarised in sections 6.2 and 6.3, raised some points for discussion that centre on teacher learning. These include:

1. Teachers' beliefs should play a vital role in the design and delivery of teacher learning.
2. Teacher learning activities should include opportunities for enactment, reflection, and sharing.
3. Teacher learning opportunities should acknowledge individual differences and create a common ground.
4. Teacher learning is a mediating process.
5. Teacher learning reconceptualises change as a process of growth.

Taking into account of all these points, which are explored further below, a recommended framework for teacher professional learning was developed, drawing on the findings of this study.

6.4.1 Teachers' beliefs should play a vital role in the design and delivery of teacher learning

In this study, a questionnaire was conducted in Phase 1 before the teachers participated in the inquiry process. The questionnaire provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect upon their existing beliefs and prior practices to gain an awareness of their preconceptions about teacher roles, learner roles, and teaching and learning. Through reflection, the teachers were encouraged to articulate their beliefs to become more aware of the origin of those beliefs and could then decide whether they remained valid and useful for their particular context in the subsequent phases of the study.

There has been ample research on teachers' beliefs and practices of SCA (Bremner, 2019; Brinkmann, 2015; Chu, 2014; Dang, 2006; Kaymakamoğlu, 2018; Lin et al., 2014). However, to understand how teachers learn to teach with a student-centred focus, we need to extend findings about learning from students-as-learners to teachers-as-learners and we need to define teacher learning as a function both of the teacher-learner and of the learning experience itself (Kennedy, 1991). Kennedy (1991, p. 3) argues that it is crucial to design research that examines “what teachers bring with them to new experiences – what they already know, believe, or value” in their professional learning, particularly with an ongoing, practice-based, and bottom-up approach. Similarly, in the study of teacher thoughts and decisions, Woods (1996) notes that how teachers think depends on their existing knowledge and belief systems. This study mirrored a teachers-as-learners approach, so obtaining teachers' initial beliefs was an important starting point to ensure that the new practices or strategies were well aligned with their existing ones (Guskey, 2002) and to “negotiate acceptance of the innovation” with the teachers (Tudor, 1996, p. 232). This starting point can also avoid superimposing potentially inappropriate theoretical frameworks derived from the knowledge of the researchers or outsiders (Johnston, 1992). Teacher learning opportunities that take prior beliefs into account are likely to avoid competition between new learning and teachers' existing beliefs and theories (Farrell, 2006).

The literature has indicated that teachers' initial beliefs are important indicators that reflect teachers' change in the process of teacher learning (Tam, 2015). Their initial beliefs can be formed during the apprenticeship of observation or pre-service teacher education or training (Lortie, 1975), as mentioned in section 3.4.2. Teachers' early

beliefs, as discussed in section 3.3.1, along with their understandings of teacher roles, student roles, and the way they think about teaching and learning, are cognitive filters that guide the way they act in the classroom (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Tam, 2015). Teacher beliefs also guide teachers to adopt teaching strategies for solving practical challenges and influence the processing of new information (Farrell, 2007). More importantly, teachers' beliefs about learning determine not only the instructional decisions that they make but also "determine what learning they themselves undertake" (Opfer & Pedder, 2013, p. 94). The findings indicated that the teachers, both prior to and after participating in this study, had an awareness and favourable perceptions of SCA, as discussed in section 6.3. While Desimone (2009) contends that changing teachers' beliefs has been considered a prerequisite for instructional developments and reforms, Guskey (2002) argues that professional learning and development activities designed to initiate change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, leading to change in practices and student learning outcomes, may be ineffective for experienced teachers. Guskey (2002) then proposes an alternative model, suggesting a different sequence for the three major outcomes: change in teachers' classrooms practices, leading to change in student learning outcomes, followed by change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes. Arguably, these two proposals of teacher change imply a linear procedure of change (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), which may need re-consideration because teacher learning and change is a complex process (Tam, 2015). Teacher change is further discussed in section 6.4.5.

Although there are different opinions about the sequence of events in teacher change, it has been generally accepted that pre-service and in-service teachers come to any teacher learning, development and training opportunities with prior knowledge and beliefs (Aliusta & Özer, 2017; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Desimone, 2009; Farrell, 2006; Lortie, 1975). However, prior beliefs are usually held tacitly or taken for granted (Pratt, 1992), forming subconscious assumptions on which practice is based (Farrell, 2006). These implicit beliefs are not consciously articulated without some assistance (Johnston, 1992). Therefore, teacher learning needs to provide activities for teachers to articulate and make their implicit beliefs about teaching and learning explicit, to achieve "awareness conceptions of teaching before any change can be considered" (Farrell, 2006, p. 244). In this study, the questionnaire and debrief were used to make the implicit explicit (Thornbury, 1991, p. 198). As Thornbury (1991) has noted, without adjustments at the

level of awareness of prior beliefs, the effect of teacher learning and development may only be superficial. It is not possible to decide whether teachers' existing beliefs are right or wrong (Farrell, 2006) even if the existing beliefs are built on conventional pedagogies, as choices among techniques, principles and approaches depend on learning outcomes (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) and teaching contexts.

6.4.2 Teacher learning activities should include opportunities for enactment, reflection, and sharing

In education research, reflection has been considered integral to learning (Farrell, 2007; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Schön, 1992). Professional learning is widely believed to be more effective when it is based on self-development and practice-based learning (Stoll et al., 2006). Research has indicated that teachers learn when they have opportunities to examine and reflect on their practical experience (Day, 1999; Solheim, Roland, et al., 2018; Webster-Wright, 2009). Reflection is a process of becoming more conscious about actions, conditions, and the consequences of action (McCotter, 2001). Conscious reflection on practice enables teachers to provide a descriptive account of what they do in the classroom and critique their practice. When “what they [teachers] do is discussed, raised consciousness and shared collegially, they lay groundwork for systematic self-evaluation and improvement” (MacBeath, 2013a, p. 17).

This study found that the teachers had numerous opportunities to critically reflect on their cognition, practice, and specifically the *why* – the reasoning behind and justification of their classroom decisions. The learning process provided the teachers with opportunities to reflect on their classroom practices and activity enactment. They critiqued and learnt from their own lessons when they realised that, in some instances, dissonance between the teachers' expectations and classroom reality. This was when the teachers looked for ways to close gaps or mitigate contextual constraints, which triggered new learning. The teachers reported an awareness of their traditional role and practices alongside SCA and theory-practice gaps; an increased realisation of importance of student-centred pedagogy and incorporation of classroom activities; and increased consciousness of enactment, critical examination and justification of their practices (see Chapter Five, section 5.3). Engaging in critical reflection also creates the possibility of transformative change and growth when teachers question their underlying habitual patterns of thoughts and actions

(Webster-Wright, 2009) to avoid “doing for the sake of doing” (Individual interview_Trinh). This is discussed further in section 6.4.5.

Engaging in reflective dialogues and interaction with each other, the teachers had opportunities to learn from others who share the reality of classroom life (MacBeath, 2013a), share the repertoire of their pedagogical knowledge and practical experiences; and realise and discuss different ways of doing things (Vignette 1). These learning activities also happened often in collective learning settings in other studies (Meirink et al., 2007; Solheim, Roland, et al., 2018) and are a key feature of social learning (Meijs, Prinsen, & de Laat, 2016). In enacting new understandings of SCA, in sharing their experiences of dissonance between expectations and classroom reality, and of classroom problems, the teachers were open to new practical knowledge by analysing causes and suggesting possible responses to problems (Vignette 2). In this collegial interaction, the teachers sometimes challenged and stimulated each other’s thinking, especially when they expressed different views about a certain instructional practice or problem. This type of interaction is regarded as an important collaborative component of meaningful professional learning, which includes critique and dissent among members (McCotter, 2001). In this case, the teachers either re-considered, shifted their views and decided to reconcile the differences (Vignettes 2 and 3), or negotiated their different views, defended their positions, and ultimately recognised the value of different positions (Vignettes 2 and 3). Finally, from the teachers’ learning experiences, all six teachers reported development in their recognition, awareness, change, and growth (Vignettes 1- 4). These learning activities illustrated how the teachers learned in the social world. This study confirms previous studies (Crockett, 2002; Meijs et al., 2016; Tam, 2015; Vescio et al., 2008), which found that teachers’ collective learning, in situations such as professional dialogues or professional learning communities, provides a powerful learning environment which in turn leads to teacher growth. However, this is not to claim that what teachers learned and how teachers changed and grew were the same for all participants. Further discussion in terms of teachers’ reported and observed change and growth follows in section of 6.4.5. The findings in this study critically challenge the claim by Bui and Nguyen (2016) that EFL teachers in Vietnam tend not to develop and practise the habits of collegiality. This discussion is built on in more depth in sections 6.4.3, 6.4.4, and 6.4.5.

6.4.3 Teacher learning opportunities should acknowledge individual differences but create a common ground

As discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.4.5, this study is grounded in two key theories of constructivist and situative learning, which reflect the need for attention to both individual teachers as learners and their participation in social learning communities. Cobb (1994) contends that these two views complement each other, one focusing on the sense-making of individuals within a social context, and the other focusing on the social context and how it shapes individual learning. It is, therefore, crucial to highlight the importance both of individuals and the social world (learning communities), acknowledging the differences between individuals and the common ground of communities.

Undertaking a teachers-as-learners approach to learning ought to keep teachers at the centre of learning processes. Kennedy (1991) argues that “teachers, like other learners, interpret new content through their existing understandings and modify and reinterpret new ideas on the basis of what they already know or believe” (p. 3). Teachers have their unique existing beliefs, as discussed in section 6.4.1, and prior knowledge and learning experiences, which influence teachers’ present thinking and practice, projecting and shaping their professional learning (Freeman, 2002). Teachers’ prior knowledge is unique and comes from the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) and prior learning experiences are potentially from “memorable teachers” (Pratt, 1992, p. 203) during their years of schooling and teacher education and training. The findings from this study are consistent with the literature. All six teachers reported that their present teaching practices were copied from their former teachers.

The conceptualisation of teacher professional learning, as stated by Freeman (2002), is established over time, throughout a teacher’s career, which points to stages in development and practice, as mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.4.2. At different stages of teachers’ careers, they have different professional goals, interests, and concerns (Freeman, 2002). This view is supported by M. Louws, K. van Veen, et al. (2017). Interview data from sixteen secondary teachers found that different domains of professional learning goals were related to varying levels of teaching experience. Early career teachers (0-7 years) formulated their learning goals in terms of communication and classroom organisation. Learning goals pertaining to curriculum and instruction were formulated by all teachers across three groups, although mostly by early career teachers.

Learning about technological innovations in the classroom and learning related to extracurricular tasks were typical of mid-career teachers (8-19 years) and late-career teachers (20+ years). Learning about oneself as a professional was mentioned only by early- and mid-career teachers. In another study, using a sense-making approach, M. L. Louws, J. A. Meirink, K. Van Veen, and J. H. Van Driel (2017) further found that teachers' workplace conditions, especially cultural and structural conditions, could direct teachers' learning goals.

Another possible explanation for differences in professional goals, interests and concerns at different stages of a teacher's career stems from a cognitive perspective. Berliner (2001) argues that, for every stage, different knowledge structures are distinguished, moving from rule-driven, disorganised and exemplary knowledge (novice) to an integrated, holistic, intuitive and situated knowledge (expert) (Berliner, 2001). As a consequence, novice and expert teachers can be expected to differ in what, how and why they want to learn. Interestingly, in this study, Trinh reported her interests depending on different cohorts of students. She commented:

For non-English major classes, I am usually concerned about my teaching methodology, whereas, for English-major classes, I am concerned about the knowledge that students are supposed to learn. This probably results from my learning experience as a student at university. At that time, I just wanted to grasp as much knowledge about the subject as I could and didn't pay much attention on the teaching methodology.

(Individual interview)

To add to this, Lanh acknowledged that teachers' personality traits might potentially influence their preferred approaches to learning. For example, some teachers may prefer a self-initiated learning approach such as doing research (like himself), whereas others may opt for a collective learning experience (Individual interview). Likewise, the teachers reported their cultural preference for face-to-face discussions over online ones (Individual interview_Lanh, Trinh, Nhi, Uy, Manh). Further, considering the possible diversity of teachers' instructional interests and concerns, this study did not impose any single method on the teachers, but took SCA as a broad content orientation of teacher learning. Different methods with a student-centred focus offer teachers alternatives to what they currently think and do (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Individual and collective learning is interrelated (Solheim, Roland, et al., 2018). Collective learning both enhances individual learning and serves the collective goals of

learning groups or professional communities (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Solheim, Roland, et al., 2018). As discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.4.6.4, essential conditions and characteristics, under which collaboration and collegiality are most effective for teacher learning in social settings, involve shared interests and values, mutual goals, and reciprocal trust, respect and support (Hord, 2009; Louis & Marks, 1998; Tam, 2015; Vescio et al., 2008), which served as a common ground for the teachers. Participating in this study, all the six teachers had a common interest of developing new knowledge and skills of SCA. Elements of collegiality were reported in the interview with Lanh, who highlighted the importance of the group's purpose, working rules, and mutual trust. In terms of trust, he commented that "trust is not defined by people's geographic locations. Trust is achieved when people are open-minded. They [teachers] don't criticise each other. . . . They encourage each other to realise what should be done" (Individual interview). Integrated in Lanh's definition of 'trust', there is a common ground of mutual engagement on which the teachers build their community (Wenger, 2000). That is, teachers work together to negotiate their joint inquiry, identify and address gaps in their knowledge and practice in a supportive way. In addition, Lanh's definition of 'trust' aligns with the Confucian's values of harmony, collectivity, avoiding group conflicts, showing peer respect, saving face and having a sense of duty to the community, as discussed in section 2.4.

Likewise, Trinh conceived of shared goals, interests, mutual trust and openness to collegial discussions in her experience. Through conversations with trusted colleagues, teachers are able to visualise a better practice (Tam, 2015). Trinh reflected:

Teachers in the study were working towards the same goal, so we were very much on the same page and discussed similar concerns. Every time, participating in the group discussion, I found it very helpful. We shared the difficulties that we might or might not have encountered; sometimes, we encountered but yet recognised it as a challenge. We discussed problems and shared solutions that have worked for our class or solutions that we could think of. That was when we sometimes had 'ah ha' moments. Personally, I felt that the group was very open to discussions.

(Individual interview_ Trinh)

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, a situative perspective posits teacher learning as emerging through social interaction within a community or a social world (Lave &

Wenger, 1991; Richards, 2008). Such social participation and interaction shape not only what teachers do, but also who they are and how they interpret what they do (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010). This view is confirmed by Richards (2008), who notes that teacher learning through a situative lens involves the process of shaping and reshaping the teachers' identities and identities within the social interaction. Identity reflects how teachers see themselves and how they enact their roles in different settings. As the teachers reported in section 6.3.2, they enacted various roles towards SCA, such as an instructor, facilitator, monitor, and observer. However, as teacher-learners in the group, they no longer enacted simply the Confucian traditional roles of a guru, a moral guide, or a knowledge transmitter, but started to develop their identities as members of a community of practice (Lave, 1991). They negotiated their identity through the social interaction of the community and their new roles were adopted. Collegiality creates new roles for teachers, such as team leaders, teacher trainers, critical friends, mentors and peers (Richards, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Situative learning develops practical knowledge that teachers draw upon in their work. This type of knowledge is concrete, integrated and rich in detail and connected to context (Ball, Ben-Peretz, & Cohen, 2014). Unlike general expert knowledge, this practical knowledge (as discussed further in section 6.4.5) remains unique and private. For example, Uy used conventional questioning techniques as a warm-up activity to create a relaxing classroom atmosphere in relation to previous lesson content. In contrast, Lanh challenged students with group presentations as a warm-up activity; without focusing on lesson content or presentation skills, he understood that the activity would benefit students in many ways, such as building their confidence and enriching their background knowledge. Central to teachers' collective learning in a professional community is the construction of shared knowledge based on the individual experiences of its members; in other words, this creates common ground when "individual experience becomes communal, distributed expertise can be shared, and standards of practice can evolve" (Shulman, 1998, p. 521), which is in line with a situative perspective (Putnam & Borko, 2000, 2013). Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler (2002) propose building a system for developing a professional knowledge base out of what individual teachers know and can do. Ball et al. (2014) share a similar view and call this system "the collective knowledge base" of a learning community (p. 320).

Overall, teacher learning based on constructivist and situative perspectives regards learning as an active and interactive process used by teachers as individuals and members of a learning community. When it comes to learning, teachers bring with them unique prior knowledge, learning experiences, professional goals, interests, preferences and professional wisdom. When participating in a social learning setting, teachers become members of a community, sharing communal goals, mutual trust and collective knowledge and experiences.

6.4.4 Teacher learning is a mediating process

From the theoretical perspectives of constructivist and situative learning described in Chapter Three, section 3.4.5, a fundamental concept is that learning is mediated by a number of factors. Therefore, teacher learning involves several mediating influences, for example student characteristics (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999), individual teacher characteristics (Richardson, 1996), contextual factors (Little, 2002), and wider socio-cultural factors (Hodkinson et al., 2008). These mediators may enhance or impede teacher learning.

New conceptualisations of teacher learning have created a key and active role for teachers in their learning process. Individual teacher characteristics, such as experience, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes (Desimone, 2009) contribute to their interpretations and development of new learning experiences, as discussed in section 6.4.1. In addition, teachers' theory-practice gaps during their teacher education and training programmes (see Chapter Two, section 2.4) and their practicum experiences with supervising teachers (see Chapter Two, section 2.7) may have a particular impact on teachers' new learning experiences. Further, Vermunt and Endedijk (2011) take into account other personal factors such as teachers' learning motivation, professional identity, agency, and personality traits, as discussed in sections 6.3.2, 6.4.3, and 6.4.5.

Besides teachers playing a mediating role in the process of enacting SCA, student characteristics and contextual constraints provided obstacles to the application of SCA. In this study, constraints to implementing SCA emerged throughout the teachers' commentaries about their lessons. As briefly mentioned in sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.2.1, students' characteristics, such as shyness, learning culture, the culture of face, and low levels of English proficiency caused barriers to SCA enactment. There was evidence that the teachers saw students' characteristics as being an impediment to the implementation

of student-centred instruction. These factors included students' lack of familiarity with student-centred classroom activities and their limited English language proficiency, particularly in general English classes. These findings concur with the barriers highlighted in the literature (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Levin, 2015; Schweisfurth, 2011).

Evidence from the interviews and group discussions showed that institutional influences, such as time limitations, curriculum requirements, and exam orientation (see Chapter Five, section 5.3.2), influenced teachers' adoption of new learning. Time constraints also related to various work commitments on top of the teaching loads that each teacher was assigned. Uy explained: "We are very busy. We usually go home after our teaching sessions end. We don't have time to sit together and share professional issues" (Individual interview). Nhi added: "If there are meetings at our department, they are brief and mainly about administrative requirements" (Individual interview). These factors referring to work processes and organisational arrangements are argued to inhibit the teachers' learning potential (Ellstrom, 2001) because lack of peer support and lack of opportunities to engage in social or collective learning with other teachers can severely restrict learning opportunities and therefore development and growth (Boud & Hager, 2012).

With respect to contextual factors, the perceived value of professional learning and support from leadership also influenced teachers' motivation for professional learning. Teachers' engagement in professional learning cannot be achieved without leadership support, and teachers' intentions and motivation for such activities is more likely to be sustained with professional recognition and an organisational learning culture. Lohman (2000) found four environmental inhibitors to teacher learning, including lack of time for learning, lack of proximity to learning resources, lack of meaningful rewards for learning, and limited decision-making power. In a later study, Lohman (2006) indicated that the degree of teacher engagement in learning activities depended on collegial availability and support, as well as the organisational climate for learning. Lohman's (2006) study also reported other inhibitors of teacher learning, including time constraints, inaccessibility to colleagues' work areas, and budget constraints. A number of these factors were reflected in Lanh's comment:

First and foremost, I would say the policy supporting professional learning plays a crucial role. The organisation should be encouraging teachers to engage in professional learning and development and creating more opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching,

exchange their practical and research ideas. . . . If teachers' commitment to professional learning and efforts for improving their teaching practice was recognised by the institution via encouraging rewards, they would be more likely to continue the same effort. . . .more funding for research activities.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

Uy reported the role of professional learning and the influence of leadership on teachers' motivation and interest in professional learning. A possible explanation for this resistance to professional learning relates to the hierarchical political system of Vietnam. In this system, "without receiving command or guidance from superiors, subordinates would not act" (L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018, p. 14). However, this explanation does not fully take into account the role of teachers' agency in their learning. What is more important is how to motivate teachers to take active, self-directed, and agentic positions in learning (Evans, 2019).

In the past, in my faculty, there used to be strong professional learning and development requirements for teachers such as writing papers, presenting at workshops or seminars, classroom observations and teachers' sharing sessions. But the practice no longer exists under new leadership. So teachers are not doing it if it is not compulsory from the faculty.

(Individual interview_Uy)

Teachers' adaptation of an educational innovation explained by their personal and contextual factors in this study fit well with a study by L. H. N. Tran et al. (2018). This study identified factors that influenced the implementation of SCA in Vietnamese universities and confirmed that teachers disengaged from the implementation of SCA or executed it with discrepancies because of their teacher-centred beliefs and a lack of student-centred teaching expertise. Moreover, the study found that existing contextual factors associated with institutional leadership and management practices were an impediment to changing teachers' practice. These factors included a lack of visibility and accessibility of policy and implementation strategy to teachers, incentives, and management tools to promote the application of SCA, and an absence of continuous professional development and communities of practice where teachers could be supported in the use of new SCA teaching and assessment practices.

To resolve the tensions between student-centred practices and contextual constraints, the teachers, at times, had to be selective to ensure alignment between their instructional goals

and the curriculum requirements (Individual interview,_Nhi), or compromise new learning and practice; in this case, student-centred practices for content coverage (Individual interviews,_Nhi, Uy, Lanh, and Trinh). As a result of these tensions, the instructional decisions teachers make may be affected by exigencies in the classroom rather than by deliberate methodological considerations (Gurney, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). It can be argued that the teachers' practices in this study are emergent from the context because "context transforms practice in an ongoing creative process" (Boud & Hager, 2012, p. 23) In terms of teacher learning, all six teachers reflected that, because of constraints, their common professional learning activities were self-directed ones such as reading published materials (Manh, Lanh) and/or conventional forms of professional development such as participating in workshops and conferences (Trinh, Nhi, Uy, Lanh, and Tien). The professional development activities reported in this study concur with the doctoral research findings of Tran (2016), as mentioned in Chapter One, section 1.3. This finding highlights the importance of creating autonomous and supportive contexts for teacher learning and has implications for the design of teacher learning in practice, aligning with constructivist and situative principles.

Learning is a cultural phenomenon involving practices, interaction and communication (Hodkinson et al., 2008). Social learning opportunities enable teachers to interact and learn from each other and with each other. In this study, there were a couple of instances when the teachers raised concerns in relation to cultural aspects in the knowledge co-construction process. One response from Lanh showed that lack of collaboration among teachers could be an influential factor in a social learning opportunity. Talking about teachers, Lanh said:

Some teachers may not be comfortable with the idea of learning from or learning with each other. . . . They may want to learn by themselves. They don't want to collaborate or they don't find collaboration important and helpful.

(Individual interview_ Lanh)

Lanh considered the relationship among teachers in a professional learning community to be the key to success. He expressed his view in the following excerpt.

The relationship among the teachers in the group plays a significant role. This is because once people are close to each other, they might be more open-minded and more willing to listen to others' ideas. Thus, a strong relationship among the members of the learning community

should also be a necessary condition for successful professional learning and development.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

As the teachers (Lanh and Trinh) commented earlier, group discussions in this study enhanced a culture of openness among the teachers. Previously, having professional dialogues with colleagues had not been a common professional learning practice in either of the universities involved in the study. Uy reported that she usually sought professional solutions by herself as she did not have opportunities to share with other colleagues. In contrast to Uy, whose interaction with faculty was limited, Trinh commented that she often talked to other teachers about issues related to teaching or student learning during lesson breaks and sought advice from her colleagues; however, the talk might be perceived as “cordial everyday talk” (Hadar & Brody, 2018, p. 107). She was told those were common issues in every class but received no professional advice from her colleagues. She explained:

This is probably because I didn't sound serious enough to get my colleagues' attention on the issue. My colleagues might think that this was just part of a chat to start a conversation and that I might not desperately need advice.

(Individual interview_Trinh)

When explaining why she received little professional advice in conversations with colleagues, Trinh talked about the influence of culture. Trinh's compelling expression below reflects the Confucian philosophy of harmony and modesty and humbleness of self in society in general and at the workplace in particular.

Perhaps one aspect of the Vietnamese culture or Asian culture is that we don't usually feel comfortable giving advice to colleagues, for example, why don't you do this . . . ? Why don't you try this . . . ? The receiver of the message might think that you are giving a lesson.

(Individual interview_Trinh)

Despite common critique about Vietnamese teachers' lack of dialogical custom (Saito et al., 2008) or collaborative work habits (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Vo & Nguyen, 2010), various contextual and cultural explanations could account for this phenomenon. For example, teachers are not trained to work collaboratively during their pre-service professional education and training (Bui & Nguyen, 2016). Another possible explanation is that teachers' on-campus time constraints hinder comprehensive conversations about

issues relating to teaching and student learning. Also, teachers may find it inconvenient to come to staff rooms during their short breaks (usually 15 minutes) as they are normally far away and there are not always staff rooms in each campus building (Tran, 2016), see Chapter One, section 1.3. Unlike the findings of Le and Nguyen (2012), stating that teachers perceived that asking for help or raising their own teaching problems with colleagues would betray their ignorance, in this study, Trinh's willingness to share her teaching concerns with her colleagues indicated a feeling of trust. However, in relation to Trinh's comment above, another explanation for the rarity of professional dialogues with colleagues during breaks might come from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism cultures, which have all influenced *Vietnamese* culture. All have contributed to the idea of humbleness of self, harmony among people, and respect for colleagues (Truong et al., 2017), as described in Chapter Two, section 2.3.

Successful teacher learning, both individually and collectively, cannot be taken for granted. Individual (student and teacher) and contextual (physical classroom and institution) factors, and socio-cultural elements can impede the adoption of educational innovations and hinder teachers' engagement in professional learning. The reasons include the amount of risk involved, the communicability of the innovation, compatibility with existing practices, the number of stakeholders involved, the perceived benefits of innovation, and the organisational, political, social and cultural context (Richards, 2008). Collective learning is particularly difficult to sustain (Beck & Kosnik, 2014); therefore, teachers' learning practice must be carefully planned, monitored, and supported (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Butler and Schnellert (2012) suggest valuable support such as time, resources, and structured opportunities for interaction and collaboration. Their suggestion is reflected in Lanh's commentary.

To support teacher learning and sustain the practice, I think, there should be more opportunities for teachers to exchange their teaching and research ideas... Teachers should be supported by reducing their teaching loads and providing them with necessary resources for their learning and development, such as financial grant for doing research... [the] working environment should be encouraging and supportive... strong supportive relationships among teachers in the same faculty as well as within [the] same institution.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

6.4.5 Teacher learning reconceptualises change as a process of growth

Teacher learning is commonly seen as a pathway to developing teacher knowledge and professional competence (Cheng, 2009), which in turn results in improved student learning outcomes (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Wood & Sithamparam, 2014). Educational institutions and researchers commonly position teachers and teacher learning in relation to change (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002). These are assumptions linking teacher learning and evident tangible outcomes, as mentioned in earlier sections of this study. An example in this study was that Trinh reported that she had “a nice diary to record all the useful tips, activities and ideas learned in this study project and suggested by the teachers” (Individual interview). However, change can mean different things and is not always measurable (Richards, 2008). In this study, change is seen as a complex process that involves learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), predicated on the idea that it is “a learning process for teachers that is developmental and primarily experientially based” (Guskey, 1986, p. 7) and conceptualised as growth – “teachers change inevitably through professional activities” when teachers are learners in a learning community (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 948). In this study, teacher change as growth is described in terms of teachers’ willingness to implement something new or different, cognitive, affective and behavioural change. Measures of change involved the teachers in inquiry into practices, reflection on their practices, self-evaluation, self-realisation and self-awareness, which enabled the teachers to monitor their growth and development over time.

Observations of teacher change include cognitive and behavioural changes (Avalos, 2011; Borg, 2006b). Changes in cognition and behaviour are considered separately in this conceptualisation of learning, because one does not necessarily imply the other (Borg, 2006b; Meirink et al., 2007). This study found that the teachers’ change in cognition corresponded to a number of the cognitive change process categories of Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000), as described in section 3.3.2. The teachers reported an increased awareness and knowledge of SCA instruction, realisation of theory-practice gaps, and conscious enactment and critical examination and justifications of their practices, as reported in Chapter Five, particularly sections 5.4.2.3 and 5.4.2.4. Engaging in this inquiry process enabled the teachers to reconstruct, re-order, and link up constructs of SCA and student-centred practices. For example, Uy and Nhi reflected that although the inquiries were not completely new, they allowed the teachers to consciously and critically

link the theory of the *what*, *why*, and *how* of SCA and their practices (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.2.4). In addition, while the teachers made sense of and adopted new beliefs and knowledge of SCA, they simultaneously confirmed their existing beliefs and knowledge of traditional teacher-centredness as they commented that traditional teaching approaches still played a role in their classes due to the multiple factors discussed in Chapter Three, Chapter Five, and this chapter (section 6.3). Numerous studies have reported similar findings (Bremner, 2019; Brinkmann, 2015; Chu, 2014; L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018).

Teacher changes in cognition were also evident in the way the teachers perceived their facilitative roles, re-labelled classroom activities beyond the element of fun - “trò” [games], and in their willingness to try out new SCA activities. Teacher growth is reflected in the process of negotiation between existing and new knowledge and beliefs. Sometimes, the teachers moved away from their existing beliefs to new ones, or disagreed with the new knowledge and experience, and shifted their views later. For example, Lanh was initially opposed to the idea of teaching higher-level thinking and self-directed learning skills, such as goal setting. Realising the benefits of teaching students thinking strategies during their learning, he changed his initial beliefs. Lanh reflected in the individual interview:

I didn't set goals for my students. I was guilty about not setting goals in the past until I read the inquiry and especially until yesterday I read some papers on setting goals and learning motivations. I say “oh my goodness, this is good” and then I realised that setting goals is important for the learners’ self-directed learning.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

Lanh realised the importance of the students setting their own learning goals so that they made efforts to work towards their goals, and the need for teachers to know how to implement this in the class to make it work. From Lanh’s comment, it appears that Lanh attached great importance to researching knowledge or “deliberate search” (Evans, 2019, p. 10). Then he became more convinced when there was evidence of effectiveness from published research. Further deliberate searching and evidence of effectiveness contributed to Lanh’s consideration of his beliefs and practices so that he enhanced or adjusted them.

Teacher growth is also a process of the construction of a variety of knowledge types, which is in line with the interpretive paradigm and the constructivist perspective in this study. This study differentiated knowledge constructed by individual teachers in response to their reflective engagement in this learning experience and knowledge co-constructed in their interactions with other teachers in the learning community. There is knowledge that forms a backdrop of awareness for teachers (Gurney, 2015); the new knowledge that increases teachers' awareness of factors and ideas relevant to their practice, but is not necessarily (immediately) applicable in teaching activities. They may also need time to get comfortable with new ideas, and think about how they might use them in their classrooms, before launching them. Trinh reflected "some activities learned in the study might not be fully applied in the courses I teach this semester but I am aware of step by step how to carry out them in class. . . . I have noted down in my teaching diary for my future practice. I can't name all the new knowledge I have benefited from the discussions. Recommendations of classroom activities and how to manage classroom activities are definitely helpful" (Individual interview_Trinh). A possible explanation is that teachers do not experiment with all new knowledge and classroom activities because of the annual plans they have to follow. For example, Uy stated that she finished her teaching sessions for one course before her participation in the study (Individual interview). The one-semester period is also quite short, as Nhi reported earlier. However, the teachers reported their intentions to incorporate more student-centred practices in the following semesters, as discussed further below.

Another type of knowledge is personal practical knowledge, which is similar to knowledge-in-practice or experiential knowledge, based on which teachers make their pedagogical decisions, as discussed in sections 3.3.3 and 5.3.3. It is important to note that the boundaries between these types of knowledge are sometimes blurry. Personal practical knowledge can be tacit and intuitive, as stated in Trinh's comment "Being a teacher when you enter a class you feel the atmosphere, then you know what to do and how to make it [teaching] suitable and good for students" (O3D3_Trinh). Personal practical knowledge is also closely tied to teachers' experience and the specific context of the classroom (Elbaz, 1983). As Uy stated in section 5.3.3, she conducted an activity in her class without knowing that the activity was termed 'mind-mapping'. From her personal and practical experiences, she commented that the activity (mind-mapping) could enhance students' imaginations and help students visualise connections.

In teachers' working lives, they commonly experience a detachment between theoretical knowledge and everyday practice (Hoban & Erickson, 2004; Kuusisaari, 2013). The examples above (Trinh and Uy) suggest that many of the problems in teachers' work settings are solved using their own experience or intuition (Kuusisaari, 2013; Richards, 1990). This type of personal practical knowledge helps bridge the gaps between theory and practice. For example, Trinh, reflecting on her learning experience when she did her Master's studies, found that the disconnection between theory and practice made her confused and unable to master broad conceptualisations of English language teaching such as cognitive acquisition, metacognition and the like (Individual interview). Her learning outcomes at that time, because of other work and life pressures, were "to submit assignments on due dates and pass" (Individual interview, _Trinh). In contrast, she valued the learning experience in the present study because "it's easier and more helpful to learn from practice" (Individual interview). In addition to the examples in section 6.3, the following comment from Trinh depicts her awareness of the logical link between theory and practice.

Reflecting on my previous lessons, I think I incorporated higher-level thinking skills and learning strategies in the lessons, but I was not aware that they were thinking skills and learning strategies. I implemented it for the sake of doing it without knowing the purposes or reasoning. That's why the implementation was not logical and effective. Now I am aware of the rationale underpinning those activities, learning tasks. I think I will plan my lessons better to support student learning more effectively.

(Individual interview _Trinh)

The last type of knowledge distinguished in this study is knowledge-of-practice. This notion of knowledge links with the situative perspective of learning, in which learning is regarded as a dynamic social activity situated in physical and social contexts and distributed across persons, tools, and activities (Borko, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). The situative perspective has viewed teachers not only as users but as "creators of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). Such a view has radically transformed the notion of teacher learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). From this perspective, teacher learning is not viewed as translating knowledge and theories into practice but as learning from experience (Shulman, 1998) and "constructing new knowledge and theory

through participating in specific social contexts and engaging in particular types of activities and processes” (Richards, 2008, p. 164). This process of theorising practice enables teachers to generate knowledge-of-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) or practitioner knowledge (Richards, 2008), which is a source of teachers’ practices and understandings (Richards, 2008). Teacher learning must provide opportunities for teachers to learn the “skills of reflectivity” and “the discourse and vocabulary that can serve participants in renaming their experience” (Freeman, 2002, p. 11). A focus on teacher learning as a field of inquiry in this study, grounded in constructivist and situative perspectives, was well-positioned to address the two functions mentioned above. First, the teachers’ reflections, both individually and in groups, cultivated skills in reflectivity, illustrating the thinking underlying the behaviours the teachers enacted in the classroom in order to understand the rationale for the decisions that they made. This learning experience also acknowledges the situated and the social nature of learning, which can support or inhibit new learning. This, in turn, contributes to the process of knowledge construction and shapes the process of teacher learning. Second, the inquiries could be viewed as a theoretical foundation or discourse to help the teachers become more aware of SCA, bridge theory-practice gaps, and justify their theoretical interpretations of SCA. Finally, group discussions were means of socialisation into professional thinking and discourse that enabled the teachers to rename their experiences and to learn via their professional experiences.

Teacher growth is a complex and ongoing process associated with learning in practical teaching contexts, taking beliefs, knowledge and practice into account. The following comment illustrates the reported learning experience and professional growth, which in turn resulted in “a feeling of satisfaction” (O4D4_Nhi) and “a source of encouragement and inspiration” (Individual interview_Lanh).

I think I have been more aware of my teaching and my practice, including teaching methods, classroom activities, learners, their learning needs, their learning styles and preferences, and the importance of their self-study. I have continuous adjustments to my teaching. It was a very good opportunity to discuss with other teachers and learn from them. Although it was only one semester, I have to say that the biggest change is that I am more aware of my teaching. I know what I am doing and importantly why I am doing that in my classes [conducting activities in class].

(Individual interview_Nhi)

Behavioural change encompasses ideas and knowledge that are or may be enacted in practices, and teachers' willingness to take risks by trying out new teaching approaches. From such a perspective, teacher growth involves student-centred practices by the teachers, which are iteratively refined through a process of enactment and reflection, as outlined in sections 5.3, 5.4 and 6.4.2. In this study, the teachers' efforts in applying SCA in their teaching contexts was evident when they believed that learning from the inquiries and ensuing pedagogical practices helped to shift (to a certain degree) teaching and students' learning towards being more student-centred. However, professional growth is an ongoing journey, not a destination (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Tam, 2015), which requires iterative cycles of implementation and reflection (Individual interview_Nhi). For example, reflecting on her experience, Nhi explained that, as a teacher, she could learn from her own experience by reflecting on the practice, asking herself what she could do better next time and how she could deal with a particular challenge, and modifying for improvement in the future practice (Individual interview). Therefore, besides being selective of or compromising student-centred practices, as discussed in section 6.3.2, the teachers also reported their "personalized enactment" of SCA activities, knowledge and beliefs (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 955) to suit their students and the teaching context.

The interview data indicated general improvement in the teachers' skills and practices. For example, after the new learning, Trinh appeared to invest more time in designing lesson plans and classroom activities. Trinh reflected:

I spent more time and efforts in designing lessons and activities for students. That's why my lessons are more well-planned this semester.

(Individual interview_Trinh)

This change was also supported by comments from other teachers:

After participating in the study, I have more energy and more thoughts on the teaching methodology and I have more innovative ideas to implement for my classes.

(Individual interview_Lanh)

From the project, I think I need to do more research to look for appropriate activities for my students.

(Individual interview_Uy)

During their practical implementation, the teachers looked to their students for evidence of improved learning and enhanced practices. Generally, the teachers reported a positive

impact on students' learning as evidenced from their affective responses. For example, students felt more motivated, excited and engaged (Individual interview_Lanh, Manh, Uy). The teacher learning outcomes were reported via students' cognitive evidence – evidence that students understood the concepts being taught indicated student learning in the second group discussion.

Students were able to use the structure which was taught in the lesson – passive voice. Also, they were able to describe objects such as materials, size, shapes, and so on.

(Group discussion 2_Nhi)

Students were very excited, motivated and engaged in the activity. They had very good opinions to back up their arguments.

(Group discussion 2_Uy)

I thought that my students could not do it. It turned out differently and really surprised me. After watching the movie, students discussed together in their groups and then presented their opinions. They were really good and very thoughtful.

(Group discussion 2_Lanh)

Teacher growth in both cognition and behaviour was also present in the ways teachers extended their new knowledge. Teacher learning was not limited to the content of particular learning activities. For example, valuing the learning opportunities in this study and considering the learning experience as a source of inspiration (Individual interview_Lanh), the teachers reported their future intentions to introduce different sorts of learning activities in order to strengthen their SCA practice. For example, they were motivated to locate and read more materials on student-centred language teaching (Lanh, Uy), do research (Lanh, Trinh), and observe each other's classes (Trinh, Uy, Nhi, Lanh). The teachers excitedly share their intentions for future classes. For example, Uy shared some teaching plans aimed at promoting students' self-directed and autonomous learning via project work for her classes in the coming semester. Lanh reported that he was preparing to apply a flipped classroom approach in one of his courses the following semester. Trinh made plans to re-design teaching materials for Reading Comprehension courses for more student-centredness, promoting more self-directed learning. Nhi intended to use SCA more often. These outcomes concurred with the findings of Meirink et al. (2007), who examined how teachers actually learned in collaborative settings by exploring learning activities in relation to reported changes in cognition and/or behaviour

of six teachers. They found seven configurations, in five of which the teachers reported their intentions to apply new learnings in future practice. Based on self-determination theory, it has been argued that teachers' autonomous motivation in every aspect of their work, including in-service professional learning and training, is "a vital ingredient for their optimal functioning and professional growth" (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014, p. 3).

However, the connection between teacher learning and change as growth is not always a simple and linear causal chain (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002); rather it is a complex process (see Chapter Five, sections 5.3 and 5.4, and Chapter Six, section 6.3). Tam (2015) distinguishes three common patterns: change in belief but not in practice; change in practice but not in belief; and change in both belief and practice. The findings of this study complicate, problematise and add to the patterns proposed by Tam (2015). As discussed in section 6.3, there were diverse relationships between the teachers' beliefs and practices. Numerous influential factors led the teachers to undertake a hybrid approach to learning, which combined existing beliefs, values and knowledge with new ones to achieve effectiveness and responsiveness in student learning. However, it is worth noting that the teachers in my study taught non-English major EFL learners who had low levels of English proficiency, which may have inhibited the teachers from full enactment of SCA. Another possible reason for this hybrid approach is cultural issues, as briefly discussed on section 6.3.1. Pham (2016) suggests that change should be seen as a cultural continuity or blending between existing beliefs, knowledge and approaches and new ones.

Overall, the findings of this study illustrate the complication of the relationship between teacher learning, teachers' changes in cognition, and teachers' practices. Unlike the interventionist approach to teacher development, which positions teacher development as a way to change teachers' practices or to achieve predetermined policy mandates or institutional aims (Gurney et al., 2014), meaningful and effective learning adopting a bottom up and practice-based approach requires teachers' active engagement in critical inquiry into and reflection on their practice. As mentioned in section 3.4.1, there is an interdependence between teacher professional learning, professional identities and agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2014; Gurney et al., 2014). Teacher professional learning impacts teachers' identities (Eteläpelto et al., 2014) as "learning or acquiring professional expertise is conceived as a process of identity formation within practical communities" (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004). As teachers become more aware of their professional

identities, they are more likely to have an increased sense of agency, and this, in turn, will influence their decision making (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; H. B. Nguyen, 2014). When teachers act as agentic, critical and reflective practitioners, they are more active and engaged in meaningful professional learning, rather than making attempts focused on “the surface of ... change implementation” (L. H. N. Tran et al., 2018, p. 13).

It has been argued that continuous teacher learning needs to provide opportunities for systematic and intentional reflection on teachers’ practice (Poekert, 2011; Schön, 1992); for collegial interaction with their colleagues (Desimone, 2009; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999); for constructing meaningful local and practical knowledge for teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999); and for using contextually responsive work experience (Gurney et al., 2014). In this way, teacher learning may foster practice-oriented outcomes such as self-awareness, lifelong learning and professional growth (Gurney, 2015). Also, professional growth and sustaining change must be seen as part of the learning process, in which teachers’ pedagogical practices “need to be continually renegotiated within specific contexts” (Clarke, 2009, p. 194). For this to occur, continued follow-up and support for teacher learning and teachers’ identities as agentic, critical and reflective practitioners are essential (Evans, 2019; Gurney et al., 2014; Guskey, 2002).

6.4.6 Towards an inquiry approach to teacher professional learning

Drawing on the review of the literature and the findings of this study, a proposed framework for teacher professional learning was developed (see Figure 6.1).

Teacher learning needs to be studied holistically by linking teachers as learners, learning activities or approaches, and the context in which learning occurs (Boud & Hager, 2012). Also, teacher learning has to be located in the practices of teachers (Boud & Hager, 2012; Mason, 2007) and with collective participation (Borko, 2004; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Teacher learning, applying an inquiry approach, is a complex, interconnected, multi-dimensional process. First, teacher learning is based on inquiry-oriented and practice-based learning (Stoll et al., 2006). Teachers learn when they have opportunities to examine and reflect on their practical experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The framework suggests that teachers learn through experience and through considered and deliberate reflection about and inquiry into that experience. This is a process of active engagement with experience (enactment) and reflection. In this process, knowledge construction (thought) and knowledge application (action/enactment) are linked

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). When teachers can provide a descriptive and critical account of what they do in the classroom, they are likely to question and potentially adopt a critical distance to their own habitual behaviours (MacBeath, 2013a).

This learning process of inquiry is mediated by personal, contextual, and socio-cultural factors. Personal influence includes teachers’ learning needs, motivation, preferences, their agency, their existing knowledge, initial beliefs and prior experience. Contextual factors include students’ characteristics, and the characteristics of the institution where they are employed. Wider social and cultural factors are also supporters or inhibitors of teacher learning, especially in relation to collective learning when teachers engage in, become members of, and interact with each other in social learning settings.

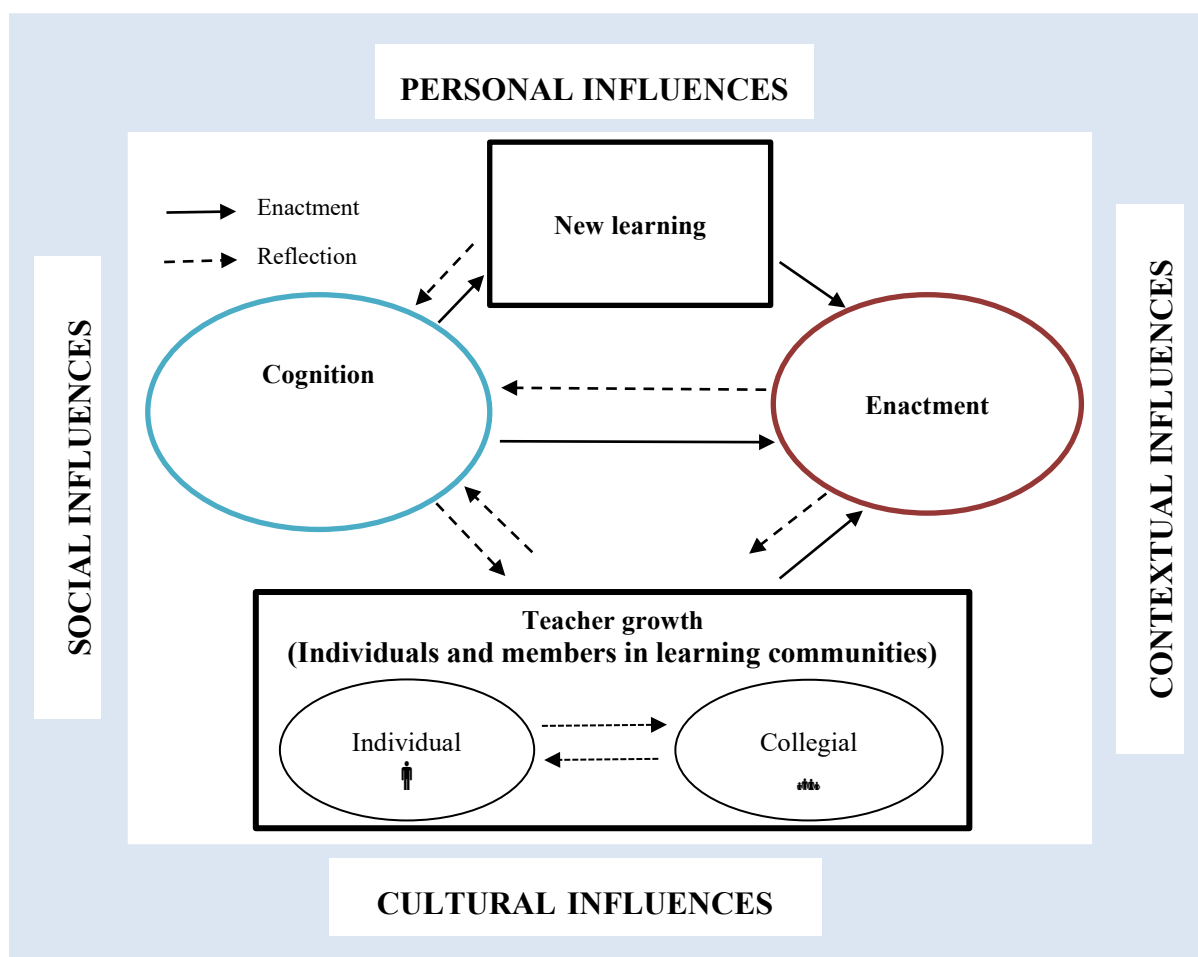


Figure 6.1 Recommended framework for teacher professional learning

An inquiry process of teacher learning should create opportunities for both individual and collective learning, because they are interrelated (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004; Sfard, 1998). Learning conceptualised at an individual level reflects teachers’ recognition, realisation or awareness of something as a different way or ‘better way’ of ‘doing’ (Evans, 2019).

At this level, individual teachers may perceive and interpret new learning differently because of the diverse influences mentioned above. At a collective level, the framework suggests that teachers learn through social interaction. This perspective on learning reflects its social and distributed nature and shifts the emphasis away from the mind of an individual toward socially constructed learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). Participating in collective learning gives teachers opportunities to share their instructional problems and seek possible solutions together. Collective reflection prepares teachers to critique their own lessons, evaluate effectiveness and share future intentions. While examining new learning in connection with the classroom context and their enactment, teachers have opportunities to reconsider their beliefs and practices (Guskey, 2002). Furthermore, new knowledge can be created (Loughran, 2010; Meijs et al., 2016), existing understandings can be enhanced (Simoncini et al., 2014), and beliefs can be negotiated when teachers experience different perspectives (Meijs et al., 2016). All of these contribute to the process of learning and professional growth.

This proposed framework of teacher professional learning resulted from this study is not merely a theoretical exercise; it serves as a constructive process to aid understanding and guide creative action in teacher learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). The framework provides insights into the complexity and multidimensionality of the teacher learning process. It is therefore strategically important for supporting teacher learning initiatives. This recommended framework may provide policy makers, teachers' professional learning and development planners and EFL teachers with good insights into new ways of undertaking and supporting meaningful and ongoing professional learning located in practice.

6.5 Contributions and implications of the present study

This section discusses the contributions and implications of this study to academic research. These include theoretical, methodological and practical elements developed during the course of the study.

6.5.1 Theory

This study took careful consideration of social, cultural and policy contexts, and the outcomes provide a significant contribution to our understanding of the ways in which Vietnamese EFL teachers may learn and benefit from innovative professional learning

approaches. From constructivist and situative perspectives, teacher learning needs to allow teachers to engage in “self-directed, collaborative, inquiry-based learning that is directly relevant to teachers’ classroom lives” (Johnson, 2006, p. 243). This kind of learning has been confirmed to be beneficial to teachers’ professional growth in various contexts (Deni & Malakolunthu, 2013; Doig & Groves, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2010; Tsukui & Saito, 2018). However, this approach has only recently arrived in Vietnam and ambivalent outcomes had been reported in a few studies in the Vietnamese context, as explored in section 3.4.7 (Saito et al., 2008; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). The outcomes of this study clearly support a bottom-up process of teacher learning embodying both individual and collective learning opportunities. This approach is different from the transmission, deliver-and-apply model and the cascade model of teacher professional development that teachers generally, and Vietnamese EFL teachers particularly, have conventionally been familiar with, as discussed in Chapter One, section 1.3. It was apparent from this study that the teachers were active constructors of knowledge and their process of knowledge construction was inquiry-embedded, situated and socially constructed through individual and collective reflection on their practices and social interaction with others. They developed knowledge of SCA, translated new learning into practice, reflected on their practical enactment in connection with their existing beliefs and knowledge, analysed and evaluated the strengths and shortcomings of their teaching, and participated in critical reflective dialogues with other teachers. The results of the study support the idea that teachers (and EFL teachers in particular) can continue to learn and grow in their daily teaching practice while taking into account the expectations of institutional, social and policy contexts. This balance between accountability and agency is not only a challenge in teacher learning but also important in other aspects of professional life (Webster-Wright, 2009).

This study will also be beneficial in finding ways to support teachers’ engagement in critical inquiry and reflective practice, which help them gain insights into their learning and the beliefs and assumptions they hold about their practices. As explored in Chapter Three, section 3.4.6, teachers’ critical inquiry and reflective practice have the potential not only to facilitate transformative learning of teachers (Poekert, 2011) and improve teaching, learning and organisational cultures (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), but also to influence positive social change and improvement (Webster-Wright, 2009).

Engaging in collective reflection in group discussions suggests an important form of collective or community-based professional learning. Reflective practices among teachers could be carried out through collegial professional dialogues, writing collaborative teaching journals, engaging in participatory lesson study, or doing action research, as explored in Chapter Three, section 3.4.6. Such reflective practices would encourage teachers to challenge their own cognition in order to restructure and manoeuvre their praxis (Sarfraz, 2019). Indeed, collective professional learning should be encouraged and supported and is worthy of further investigation.

The suggested framework for teacher professional learning developed in this study can act as a theoretical model for teachers to gain more insights into practice-based learning, about their active and agentic roles in their professional learning throughout their career, and the complex and interrelated factors connecting their cognition, practice, and contexts in their learning process. Understanding the complexity and multidimensionality of this holistic process provides different perspectives on the nature of in-service teacher learning.

Finally, the findings in this study shed new light on the traditional binary assumption of effective teaching and learning between teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, or Confucian and Western teaching philosophies. Teachers' ideal teaching practices are sometimes superseded by pragmatic concerns about how they may best help students learn. This implies a paradigm of principled pragmatism, in which the relationship between theory and practices, ideas and actualisation can only be realised in practical applications informed by teachers' experience and cultural and contextual factors. Undertaking a hybrid approach with a re-orientation towards a 'learning-centred' focus for teaching and learning should be taken into consideration to achieve effectiveness and responsiveness because the tension of practical realities and theoretical complexities tends to collapse the binary rationales.

6.5.2 Methodology

This study has contributed to the research methodology relating to teacher professional learning in two areas – research methodology and multi-method analysis. The study used a unique combination of data collection methods in association with the inquiries as tools and SCA as content for learning. This served as a scaffolding framework to bridge the theory-practice divide and mirrored teachers-as-learners. With a logical and efficient use

of research methodology and analytical approaches, as discussed in detail in Chapter Four, the study gained in-depth insights and nuanced understandings of how the process of self-directed, inquiry-based and collective learning occurs and supports teachers.

The combination involved a questionnaire to obtain teachers' initial perceptions and understanding of SCA. The structure of critical reflection cycles, including the debriefs after observations, inquiry reflective questions as a preparation for the teachers before group discussions, individual reflection prior to collective reflection, and a recapturing interview reflecting on the entire learning experience, provided the teachers with opportunities for in-depth reflection and building on their construction of knowledge through cycles of engagement. Furthermore, the combination of interviewing, observing and debriefing captured genuine learning, thinking and actions, and allowed the teachers to negotiate differences between their espoused beliefs and their enacted ones. This complementary approach of data collection instruments suits and reflects the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the research focus.

Data analysis in this study adopted a qualitative inductive approach, except for the questionnaire in Phase 1. The collected data were analysed using multiple strategies that suited my purposes. The strategies included descriptive statistical analysis for questionnaire data to explore overall beliefs; thematic analysis for observation and debrief data to examine changes in cognition and behaviours; and vignette analysis for group discussions and interview data to ensure both individual and social contexts were examined. In analysis at the group level, attention was paid to group interactions, such as levels of agreement, consensus, conflict, negotiation, and changes in opinion, collegial sharing of experiences, and collective understandings of shared problems and solutions to the problems (Bazeley, 2013; Boeije, 2010; Wilkinson, 1998). In analysis at the individual level, the responses and behaviours of separate participants were examined in relation to contextual factors and personal factors such as prior experience and existing knowledge. The analysis of data in this study indicates the strength of multiple analytical strategies in interpreting meaning from the data. The approaches may be useful to other researchers in capturing a holistic and comprehensive understanding of researched phenomena. Finally, the combination of manual coding with the use of software packages can be seen as double loops of coding, which could be helpful for novice researchers or doctoral candidates when they engage deeply with their data.

6.5.3 Practice

As discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.6, the impact of current policy context on teacher professional learning and development is significant. Teachers in general, and the participating teachers in this study in particular, continue to work in institutions in which good teaching is defined in terms of standardised tests and standardised benchmarking. The politics of accountability result in attempts to regulate practice and maintain standards through professional learning and development, and are likely to increase, placing serious pressure on teachers, policy makers and authority. Therefore, learning activities and professional development are attached to measurable outcomes. For example, in the case of Vietnam, MOET has mandated the standardised benchmarking of language proficiency framework (CEFR and VSTEP) as a way to distinguish qualified teachers from unqualified ones (see Chapter Two, sections 2.6 and 2.7). However, while the short-term impact (achieving required levels of proficiency in this context) may be relatively easy to measure (Richards, 2008), the “measurement of activities and outcomes does not necessarily equate with learning” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 727). Critically, Evans (2019) argues that assumptions that teacher professional learning results in evident outcomes represents over-simplistic reasoning that fails to incorporate consideration of the complexity and the multidimensionality of professional learning and development. Professional learning involves meaning-making (as discussed in Chapter Three, sections 3.4.5 and 3.4.6). From an instrumental perspective, an effective intervention in professional learning is always amenable to measurement, forming a secure relationship between the intervention and its outcomes (Biesta, 2007). This study focused on the process of the teachers’ learning and provided evidence about how the teachers constructed knowledge within the opportunities and constraints prevailing in Vietnam, which stimulated teachers’ continuous learning and fostered their long-term growth. If the agentic roles of teachers in shaping their learning are taken seriously, a support framework at government or institution level needs to account for this learning process while working within the contextual constraints of the Vietnamese education system. It is hoped that the research may inform policy and practice regarding teacher professional learning and potentially narrow the gaps between research, policy and practice (Biesta, 2007).

Implications for the design and delivery of teacher professional learning practice are also provided. As mentioned in section 6.4.4, successful adoption of educational innovation

and effective teacher learning cannot be taken for granted. The reasons include the amount of risk involved, the communicability of the innovation, compatibility with existing practices, the number of stakeholders involved, the perceived benefits of innovation, and the organisational, political, social and cultural context (Richards, 2008). This study suggests that teachers play a key role in translating and participating in educational innovations and in their own learning. Therefore, consideration of teachers' needs, existing beliefs, knowledge, skills and agency and inclusion of teachers in forming educational policies are of great importance. This proposal is echoed in the critical assessment on English language policies in Vietnam by Bui and Nguyen (2016). They argue that understanding teacher agency, local needs, practices, struggles, and resources can help to construct sustainable practice and generate effective language policy for both teachers and students. Collective learning is difficult to sustain (Beck & Kosnik, 2014); hence, teacher learning practice must be carefully planned, designed, monitored, and supported (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Without the necessary supports, collegiality in professional communities can be contrived (Beck & Kosnik, 2014; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010). Policy may help by developing norms and cultures of collegiality, openness and trust within the institution, creating opportunities for teachers to participate in professional dialogues or peer-based or group-based learning, and providing meaningful recognition and rewards for success.

The study makes a unique contribution to the SCA literature by offering new insights into how SCA may be negotiated through teacher inquiry in an EFL tertiary context in Vietnam or similar contexts. It provides suggestions to teachers and educators who wish to employ SCA, with consideration of students' characteristics, physical classroom environments, institutional policies, and wider socio-cultural factors. Enactment of innovative teaching approaches in a new system should not be duplicated without consideration of factors such as physical classroom environment, student characteristics, students' needs and motivation, institutional policies, and socio-cultural supports as well as inhibitors. To address these factors, bridging and scaffolding measures may be helpful for students; for example, the potential use of a hybrid approach in this study. Also, besides language knowledge and skills, it would be helpful to introduce learning skills to support students' independent learning. In response to curriculum and instruction innovation goals set by the government's education initiatives and institutions' practical standards, the enactment of SCA in EFL classes will not be possible if the following

practical implications are not considered. The first is that both teachers and students need support to move beyond their current teaching and learning practices in English language education. The second is that assessments should be adjusted to reflect the change in student-centred orientation and achieve validity in assessments – i.e., whether they measure what they are supposed to measure in terms of student achievement. Finally, flexible curricula and materials may free teachers from textbook coverage requirements; ultimately, teachers could be empowered to facilitate student-centred instruction and take a trial-and-error approach to their classroom practice.

6.6 Limitations

Despite the study being thoroughly designed, analysed and reported, there are potential limitations associated with this research project.

The first limitation of the study is the small number of participants. The purpose of the study, however, was to gain a holistic understanding of the complex and multidimensional process of teacher learning in this particular group of six Vietnamese EFL tertiary teachers. The use of rich data from multiple sources (section 4.4.4) and the fact that previous studies have also involved a similar number of participants (section 4.4.1) attempted to counteract this limitation. Although the sample was not representative of Vietnamese university teachers of English more broadly, the attributes of the teacher learning community found in this study may be useful as indicators for identifying different categories of professional learning communities in other contexts.

The second limitation is that the study involves only teachers. While it was not within the scope of the study, different perspectives could have been captured if students, institutional authorities or policy makers had been involved in this project. Students' data and any consequent changes relating to their learning, as well as perspectives from other stakeholders, would be informative for institutions, leaders, and planners and designers of teacher learning practice.

Another limitation relates to the self-designed questionnaire at Phase 1 of the study. There may be many different explanations for the divergent views obtained, which cannot be captured on a Likert scale like this. It may have been useful to have an area in the questionnaire where the teachers could have explained their responses if they felt this was necessary. Alternatively, different data collection instruments such as focus group

interviews or participatory professional workshops prior to Phase 2 of the research project could have been considered. Such opportunities may have provided more comprehensive understanding of teachers' initial perceptions of SCA and may have assisted in the identification of SCA topics and activities relevant to these EFL teachers' context. In addition, when designing the questionnaire, I was thinking about a specific group of EFL teachers in this particular context of ELT in Vietnam. Within a qualitative research design, interpretive paradigm, and constructivist and situative theoretical lenses of learning, the questionnaire findings in this study are not expected to be replicated with the same results.

Finally, it may be questioned whether this study was considered as an intervention due to the nature of the inquiry approach. The approach used had elements of action research, focusing on enactment and reflection, which were shaped and informed by the teacher inquiry process. In this process, teachers were active agents in generating practical knowledge, which upheld their systematic and intentional reflection on their own practice. This reflective process also offered the teachers an opportunity to articulate their understandings and beliefs. However, unlike action research, this study did not either investigate one practical problem in the teachers' instruction or report transformation in the teachers' beliefs and practices as a consequence or outcome of learning, but rather aimed to examine the complex and multidimensional learning process of the teachers. In this process, teachers' change and growth in relation to SCA were observed and reported as part of the 'becoming' or 'being aware' of the learning process.

6.7 Recommendations for future research

The findings of this study suggest a number of opportunities for future research with regard to teacher professional learning process and the adoption of SCA in English language teaching.

In order to broaden understandings of how teachers grow in their profession, the research questions could be investigated with other groups of EFL teachers in similar Asian contexts or elsewhere. One of the key findings in this study was that teachers learn by inquiring into, reflecting on, and critiquing their experiences of classroom practice, and interacting with each other in a learning community, which was mediated by the context. Whether teachers from other contexts would share similar or different processes of how they learn, particularly in other learning environments with different student

characteristics, subject content, classroom and institutional contexts, and socio-cultural contexts, would be of interest.

There is a need for future research to engage with other stakeholders such as students, institutional authorities, and policy makers. Such studies may investigate teacher learning from students' perspectives and the consequent impacts of teacher learning on student learning. Furthermore, future research on teacher learning with the involvement of institutional authorities, policy makers, and teacher professional learning and development planners would be informative to these stakeholders. Such information may reinforce important messages regarding teacher learning practices to higher authorities and policy makers and may broaden the ways in which teacher learning is supported.

Findings regarding teacher change and growth as part of engagement in the learning process would also be valuable in longitudinal studies. Such studies would provide important data regarding how teachers sustain their professional learning and how resilient the changes would be. Such an investigation with other long-term learning measures, incorporating information technology, would provide teachers with virtual learning communities, enabling life-long professional learning.

Finally, the focus of current support for teacher development and the implicit assumptions about professional learning and development with a focus on change in either cognition or practice tend to overlook the implications of context and teachers' ontology and agency in their learning. Further use of the teacher learning framework recommended in this study would also be of help in the examination of teachers' agentic roles and of the crucial factors involved in the process of how teachers learn and grow throughout their career.

6.8 Final reflective thoughts

Follow effective action with quiet reflection.

From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.

(Peter Drucker, cited in Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2017, p. 33)

At the start of this research project, my knowledge base was that I knew about theories of linguistic knowledge and language skills but it was an idiosyncratic struggle for me to learn how to teach effectively. From my experience, I believed that reflection on and inquiry into lived practices could lead to learning and transformation of classroom practices. My aim was to examine how the process of inquiry in practice, focusing on

cycles of reflection and co-construction of knowledge, shaped teacher learning. The study used student-centred approaches as content for the teachers to engage in the inquiries. The study investigated how the teachers translated their new learning about SCA into practice via the process of enactment and reflection and explored the complexity and multidimensionality of this learning experience. The findings indicated that teachers learned from reflecting on their practice and having reflective dialogues when interacting with each other in the group. This process highlighted how teachers made sense of new learning, co-constructed and used knowledge that informed their practice.

From my experience as an EFL teacher, given limited accessibility to and opportunities for professional learning and development, I learned how to teach not from systematic connections between theory and practice, but from enquiring into and reflecting on my own classroom experiences, adapting to suit my students, and constructing my own theory of practice. The praxis of reflection and action helped capture how theory and practice inform one another and how practice and contexts influence one another. Together with my own experience, from the research findings, I truly believe teachers learn to grow in their teaching career by reflecting on and enquiring into their instructional practice and collegially interacting with others in learning communities or groups. To me, a reflective and enquiring teacher is an effective and transformative teacher.

Regarding my own professional learning during this research project, interacting with other experienced researchers such as my supervisors and other researchers in the area and participating in a learning community with my peers contributed to inspiration, enlightenment and growth for research. After the honeymoon phase, I fell into a stage of uncertainty when there was so much to learn. There was so much I wanted to include in my study that I sometimes got side-tracked. I assumed that if something did not fit, my supervisors would give warning signs. Following this phase, I reached a stage of independent judgement. This meant when I wanted to include a new idea or concept in my thesis, I critically thought and reflected on whether that idea was relevant to my study and fit the scope of the study. To me, that represented rational capacity development and professional growth. Growth was perceived when I had a clear idea of my goals; I knew what I was doing; I made steady progress every day; I felt positive about it day-to-day; I made my judgement and decisions; and I realised what could be done differently next time or what would be alternatives if I conducted the study again. My research experience

in this study developed self-reflection, self-doubt, critical and analytical thinking, and self-regulation skills.

The opportunity to interact with the participating teachers in this study gave me a growing sense of collaboration and group interaction. Cultural assumptions about a lack of working-in-group skills might be proved tenuous when wider factors are not considered. Interacting with the teachers during my fieldwork showed their strong desire for new knowledge, their passion for enhanced teaching practice, and their agentic position in undertaking professional learning. We have formed strong professional relationships and support and I believe they will flourish in the future. All of these made my years of study nourishing and fulfilling. Through the experience, both the participants and I have evolved personally and professionally.

Writing this thesis has been a rewarding learning journey for me. It has enhanced my theoretical knowledge of teacher professional learning, teacher cognition, English language teaching, qualitative research, and much more. This thesis marks the end of a journey and, I believe, it opens another one for me – a journey involving a lot more to explore and learn, and a journey of professional growth.

As my final note, this thesis looks like nothing more than a thick book, like many others. It does not purport to provide a definite answer to contemporary dilemmas of teacher professional learning and development; rather it provides a comprehensive picture of teacher professional learning in Vietnam and it starts a conversation about how teacher inquiry could shape teacher learning from a bottom-up approach to widen our understanding of EFL teachers' professional learning and development in the context of educational changes in Vietnam. It argues that understanding practice-based professional learning can be a starting point for an ongoing professional learning approach, rather than looking at instrumental values of professional learning and development. In a bottom-up approach, it is important for teachers to develop an understanding of their own processes of learning, in order to take increased responsibility for their own learning. This calls for two strategic developments in relation to teacher professional learning and development. First, it calls for teachers to develop their own skills, capacities and agency in directing their professional learning. Second, it calls for leaders to develop an understanding of the pedagogy and strategic planning of teacher professional learning and development, and to empower and support teachers in undertaking their professional learning.

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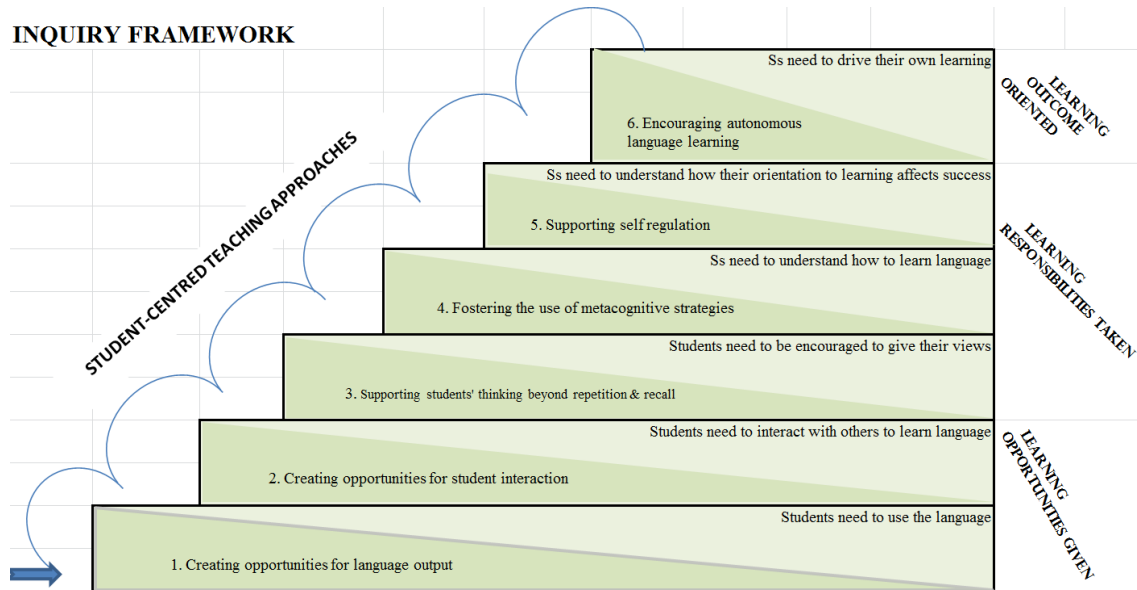
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Inquiry framework



Appendix B: Copy of Inquiry 1

INQUIRY 1

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LANGUAGE OUTPUT

OVERVIEW

In Vietnamese language classrooms it has been observed that teachers do a lot of talking, and students have few opportunities to speak. This means that few students have the opportunity to use English in the classroom because of large class sizes, limited in-class time, and overloaded instructional content (Butler, 2011; Q. T. Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen, Fehring, & Warren, 2015).

Why is it important for students to have opportunities to use English? Students need to use English in the classroom to interact with the teachers and with other students, to negotiate meaning and to complete learning activities (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). This results in success in classroom language learning because students have “sufficient opportunities to participate in discourse directed at the exchange of information” (Ellis, 2008, p. 825). Practice using English in the classroom will progressively enable students to achieve proficiency in English communication.

What are some ways of putting this into practice?

You could:

- reduce your TTT (Teacher Talking Time) in the classroom, by giving simple and clear instructions, by asking students to show by means of speaking that they understood the task instructions, and also by asking other students to answer a student’s question;
- increase STT (Student Talking Time) by asking other students to answer a student’s question, by showing pictures related to the topic of the class and eliciting students’ participation;
- avoid yes/no questions, and prefer those questions that make students speak in order to make themselves clear;
- encourage students so that they feel confident to talk. The content and fluency are more crucial than minor pronunciation and grammatical mistakes;

- be encouraging and constructive in the way of correcting students' mistakes. Implicit feedback to let their speech flow, for example providing a recast or making a clarification request. (Vaz, 2013)

TRY THINGS OUT

These are things that teachers may find useful to try out in the class.

1. Plan to ask at least 10 questions of students in your class.
2. At two points in the lesson, ask the students to summarize the main points of what you have just said. Ask all students to make notes, and ask some students to share with the class.
3. Ask students to think about at least one question that they want to ask you about the lesson content. Nominate at least 5 students to ask their question about the lesson content. Ask other students to answer these 5 questions.

Please add any of your own suggestions:

.....

REFLECTION

1. Which of these activities did you try out in your class? How did you find them?

.....

2. How do any of these activities relate to what you have tried before? Which one(s) did you find most useful in your class?

.....

3. What (factors) helped you to put these activities into practice?

.....

4. What activities did not work in your class? What challenges did you encounter? What solutions did you find to cope with these challenges in the application of these activities next time?

.....
.....

5. What are other ways you can create opportunities for students to speak in your class?

.....
.....

6. How successful do you think you were in providing students with more opportunities for language output? On what basis do you make that judgement?

.....
.....

Appendix C: Copy of ethical approval

Dean's Office
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: Canh Minh Thy Phan

cc: Associate Professor Margaret Franken
Dr Nadine Ballam

From: Professor John Williams
Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee

Date: 30 September 2015

Subject: Supervised Postgraduate Research – Application for Ethical Approval (EDU096/15)

Thank you for submitting the revisions to your application for ethical approval for the research project:

**Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching Context:
Implementing Collaborative and Inquiry-Driven Praxis**

I am pleased to advise that your application has received approval.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J Williams'.

Professor John Williams
Chairperson
Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D: Copy of information letter

Project: Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching

Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach

[Date]

Dear

My name is Phan Canh Minh Thy and I am a PhD student of the Faculty of Education of the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I wish to carry out a research project in classrooms of Faculty of Foreign Languages, [name of the university], as part of my doctoral degree. I would be grateful for your permission and support.

The title of my thesis is *Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach*. The thesis will investigate how professional learning is developed and sustained by applying an inquiry-based approach in a focus group of teachers as well as to argue that collegial professional learning can serve as a referent for promoting teachers' professional learning.

My data collection methods may include some of all of the following: questionnaires, observations, interviews, group discussions, research blog entries. I intent to invite several of my teaching colleagues at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, [name of the university] to collaborate, reflect and share their teaching practices.

The time framework of the project would cover six months of my field visit in Vietnam, involving me being in the teachers' classrooms and with the teacher focus group for one class session observation each week, one-hour focus group meeting and interview every fortnight and one inquiry response every fortnight, over a period of three to five months, which depends on the university semester schedule. Some 10 minute-debriefs may occur after classroom observations to clarify with teachers. From September 2016 to December 2016, data collection will be carried out online at the researcher's distance. Inquiries will be shared among this focus group of teachers as blog entries. An initial questionnaire will be sent to teachers to understand teachers' initial beliefs and conceptions of their teaching approach.

All data will be kept in a secure location and anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be protected as much as possible. The data will be transcribed, coded and analysed by me but I will ask for permission to share my data with my two supervisors

and a team of lecturers and postgraduate students. The findings will be published in a doctoral thesis and possible future publications as well as being presented at conferences.

If you allow me to conduct this research in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, [name of the university], I would like to ask your permission to send information letters to the teachers who will be participating.

I would be very grateful if you would allow me access to undertake the study at the university context. If you wish to discuss any issues please contact me or my supervisors through the following email or the telephone numbers.

Kind regards,

Phan Canh Minh Thy, PhD candidate

Contact details

Phan Canh Minh Thy, PhD student

Phone: (+64) 22 309 5533/(+84)913 188 918

E-mail: cmtpl@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact detail of my chief supervisor:

Associate Professor Margaret Franken

Phone: (+64) 7 838 4500 ext 6360

E-mail: franken@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix E: Copy of consent form

Project: Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching

Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the researcher for their records.

I agree to take part in this doctoral research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the cover letter, which I keep for my records.

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I give consent to have my teaching practices observed, interviewed, and inquired through the use of questionnaires, observations, interviews, video/audio recordings, inquiry responding, and inquiry blogging.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or the entire project and withdraw at any stage of the project.

I understand that the data from this research will be used in a doctoral thesis, conference presentations and possible future publications.

I understand that the data will be kept in a secure location and anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be protected as much as possible.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please feel free to contact me if any questions arise, either in person from 15 February 2016 or through email or telephone as listed below.

Phan Canh Minh Thy, PhD candidate

cmtpl@students.waikato.ac.nz

Tel : 0064 22 309 5533 / 0084 913 188 918

Appendix F: Copy of questionnaire

Project title: Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching

Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach

Dear Participant Teachers,

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. This questionnaire is a part of my PhD research project. I am interested in finding out about your ideas about language teaching approaches. This will provide some preliminary information for Phase 2 of my study. Completing the questionnaire will signify your consent. Even though you use your name here, when writing up my thesis, I will use pseudonyms to prevent your identification. If you have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact me at cmtpl@students.waikato.ac.nz.

PART A: GENERAL INFORMATION

ANSWERS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. What is your name? | |
| 2. What is your gender? | <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| 3. How long have you been teaching English? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-5 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 16+ years |
| 4. What highest qualification do you hold? | <input type="checkbox"/> BA
<input type="checkbox"/> MA/MEd
<input type="checkbox"/> PhD/EdD |
| 5. Which English language group do you teach? | <input type="checkbox"/> Linguistics and Skills
<input type="checkbox"/> ESP
<input type="checkbox"/> General English |

PART B: CLASSROOM GENERAL INFORMATION

6. What is the average number of students in your classes? under 30 students
 31 – 40 students
 41+ students
7. Which year do you mainly teach? first year students
 second year students
 third year students
 last year students

8. How often do you do the following activities in your classes?

	Rarely or never	A few times/semester	Once or twice/month	Every class
(a) Have students work in pairs or small groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Have class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Get students to ask questions in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Ask students to monitor and assess their own spoken and written English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Get students to think about or set learning goals before the lessons starts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Get students to work on individual tasks or projects in class which they then share with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Ask students to summarise or reflect what they have learned after each lesson and then share their summary with the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h) Other activities (please specify)				

PART C: TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

This part aims to understand your thoughts about language teaching approaches using Likert scale from 1 to 5. Please select the scale point as follows:

- 1- Strongly disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly agree

strongly strongly
disagree agree

9. It is important for teachers to use as much English as possible even if students don't understand everything they say. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I would use more of a communicative approach if I had smaller classes. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Teachers should manage the learning process as they know best how students learn. 1 2 3 4 5
12. One of the teacher's major roles is to provide an English language model. 1 2 3 4 5
13. It is the responsibility of teachers to determine the objectives of the lesson. 1 2 3 4 5
14. The best way for learners to correct their errors and improve their language is to have teachers provide an explanation of the errors. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Teachers should design and incorporate new learning activities to suit their students' proficiency levels and learning styles. 1 2 3 4 5

16. Students would participate more if they had more of a say in class. 1 2 3 4 5
17. It is important for students to reflect on their learning and engage in self-assessment. 1 2 3 4 5
18. Teachers cannot do a good job unless students are engaged in learning. 1 2 3 4 5
19. It is necessary for teachers to incorporate new activities to complement the topics covered in the textbook. 1 2 3 4 5
20. Activities in the textbook should be strictly followed. 1 2 3 4 5
21. Teachers should change the teaching methods and activities when they see that students are not engaged. 1 2 3 4 5
22. Communicative tasks can undermine a teacher's discipline. 1 2 3 4 5
23. Memorising rules will help students learn English better. 1 2 3 4 5
24. It is important for students to use language more even though they may have errors in their spoken language. 1 2 3 4 5
25. Student interaction is beneficial for low proficiency students because they learn from each other. 1 2 3 4 5
26. English teaching should exploit things that students like to use, e.g. technology. 1 2 3 4 5
27. Students should be encouraged to learn as much English as they can outside the classroom. 1 2 3 4 5
28. Exposure to English is an important way to learn. 1 2 3 4 5

PART D: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

29. How would you describe your role as an English teacher?

.....
.....
.....

30. How would you define a student's role in their learning process?

.....
.....
.....

---//---

Thank you for taking the time and effort to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix G: Sample of observational protocol

Project title: Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language
Teaching Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach

Teacher :

Course :

Lesson :

Lesson objectives:

Length of observation:

Observation aims: What are the opportunities for students to produce language output? What supports and hinders teachers in creating the opportunities for students?

Descriptive notes	Reflective notes

Appendix H: Sample of observational notes

LANH'S OBSERVATION 1

Class: English for Tourism 1 – first year students (25 present)

Lesson: Tour operators

Lesson objectives/topics: package tours, roles of tour operators, inclusive tours, designing a tour, introducing a well-known interesting destination.

Observation aims:

- What are the opportunities for students to produce the language output?
- What supports and hinders the teacher in creating the opportunities for students?

Warm up: (30 minutes)

At the beginning of each class, the teacher requires students to prepare a presentation, a game, a quiz to present in front of the class.

The teacher explained the activity: “Everyone needs to be quiet. Listen to your friends. You have five minutes to show the video clip. After that, you need to explain the main ideas of the clip and explain key vocabulary and structures in Vietnamese so that your friends can understand.”

This time group 3 showed a YouTube clip introducing Niagara fall in English. After that the teacher asked the group to translate main content of the video into Vietnamese.

The teacher asked the group if they understood the video [it was in English and quite difficult]. They said they didn't.

Another group presented about Hidden Beach in Mexico. Students presented in English. The presentation slides included:

- Geographic features
- History
- Transportation to get there
- What to do and see there

The last slide of the presentation had a list of new words. The teacher suggested that other students should write down the vocabulary and learn at home.

The teacher pronounced these words, explained in English, and got the class to repeat these words in the list.

Next class, two other groups would have to present about package tours/city tours.

Lesson: Reading Comprehension - An Inclusive Tour

The teacher read and translated the instruction in the book: “Look at the map. Look at the tour and connect the tour with the cities. Work in pairs”

The teacher asked one student to read and translate the first statement introducing the tour.

Students were given five minutes to read the text and do the matching activity and answer the questions in the book. [students worked in pairs but mainly used Vietnamese to talk to each other and the activity didn't require a lot of communication and interaction]

The teacher called on one student to read the question in English, translated the question into Vietnamese, and then answered the question in English.

Students were given a few more minutes to read the passage because they couldn't give answers to the next three questions.

After students' giving the answers to the questions, the teacher translated the reading passage [which contained the answer] in Vietnamese and gave students feedback [whether it was correct or incorrect] on their answers.

After finishing the activity, the teacher gave the class two minutes to ask questions, which could be about content of the reading or vocabulary. Students of each table as a group had to have one question. [the instruction might be vague and students would need more support/input from the teacher and students might wonder why they had to do this and whether they would have to ask in English or Vietnamese]

Timed up and each table had to ask questions. One student wondered if they would have to ask in English. [She looked a bit confused as she didn't know what to ask.] The teacher explained she could ask whatever she could think of.

She wanted to ask the meaning of one new word in the text but was unable to use the structure “what does.....mean?”. Also, the student was unable to pronounce out loud the word as she didn't know how to pronounce it. Finally, the student said in Vietnamese

“đoạn 2 dòng 4” [paragraph number 2, line number 4]. The teacher explained the meaning of the word “defensive structure” in Vietnamese “cấu trúc bảo vệ”.

Other groups asked the same type of question – vocabulary question. They wanted to know the meaning of “residence, former, similar, architecture, a beautiful baroque palace, medieval”. The teacher explained the meaning of the words in Vietnamese.

The teacher made students to repeat these words after him to practice pronunciation of the words.

Then the class had a break.

Appendix I: Sample of discussion prompts

Project title: Professional Learning in a Vietnamese University Language Teaching

Context: An Inquiry-Driven Approach

Date :

Time :

Place :

Facilitator:

Participants:

- Present :
- Absent :

Focus of the discussion:

- review unresolved issues of last discussion
- discuss the topic of the week
- raise the topic of the next discussion

GROUP DISCUSSION 2

Some questions I would like to explore in depth for two inquiries 2 and 3:

INQUIRY 2: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT INTERACTION

1. Could you please describe how each of these activities was applied in your class (if any)?
2. In your reflection, it appeared that some of these activities did not work well in your class. Could you please share the reasons for this ineffectiveness? What would you do differently to bring better outcomes of these activities in the class?
3. What are other activities that you often do in your class to foster student interaction?

4. Do you think the activities you applied have helped students not only to complete the tasks, but also to foster interaction and negotiation of meaning? On what basis do you make that judgment?

INQUIRY 3: SUPPORTING STUDENT THINKING BEYOND LANGUAGE REPETITION AND INFORMATION RECALL

1. Could you please explain how these activities were carried out in your class (if any)?
2. Some activities were not very successfully applied according to your reflection. Could you please tell the reasons and what made you think that they were not successful? What would you do differently next time and why?
3. Are there other ways to foster students' thinking beyond language repetition and information recall?
4. Do you often ask students to look at scripts while listening? How is it beneficial for students when looking at the scripts? What do you think about students' *scripted* and *unscripted speaking*?
5. Please have a look at the two scripts of the listening tasks below. What do you think about these two scripts? How different are they? What are the approaches that the teacher uses in these two scripts? What are the pros and cons of each approach? What would you do differently and why?

SCRIPT 1

Teacher: We are going to watch a video about a Thanksgiving holiday celebration in the United States. What do you think people will be talking about at such a party? (Students answer.) Have you ever been to a U.S. Thanksgiving meal? (Students answer.) What is it like? (Students answer.) How about your country? Do you have something like that? A day of giving thanks? Is it different than in the United States? (Students answer.)

Teacher: OK, very good. Now, here are some words that we've learned. (Points students to a vocabulary box on a worksheet) You have to group them according to three categories. (Gives students time to finish) What do you have under

beverages? (Students answer.) How about food? (Students answer.) What did you put into greetings? (Students answer.) What other U.S. traditions do you know of? (Students answer.) What could you add to each category? (Students answer.)

Teacher: Let's watch the video now. As you listen to the conversation, try to find answers to the questions on your handout. Let's read the questions together to make sure we understand them. (Students read and discuss questions.) OK, let's watch it.

After watching

Teacher: What did you choose for the first question? Does everybody agree? What do you have, Fahd? What else do you have here? Oh . . . I think he said, delicious. Let's listen to this piece again. (Students again watch the segment they did not understand.) Did you hear that? (Students nod.) OK, question number two. (Students answer.) Right. How about number three? (Students answer.) Nobody got that? Let me go back there. (Plays the segment again) Did you get it? (Students shake their heads.) She says, the last harvest. OK. Number four. Why was he late? Tagrid, what's your answer? (Student answers.) Romina, what do you have? (Student answers.) Good job, everyone! We are going to watch it again. This time we'll focus on expressions they use at the table. Look at exercise number two on your handout. As you listen, circle the expressions they use. Did you find the exercise? (Students nod.) Any questions? (Students say no.) Are you ready?

After second viewing

Teacher: So, what can you say to invite everybody to have a seat at the table? (Students answer.) What else can you say? (Students answer.) PeiChan? (Student answers.) Good! What does Shelly say to get the gravy? (Students answer.) How about drinks? How do you ask for a drink? (Students answer.) And if you don't want it? (Students answer.) All right. What did the hostess say to offer food? (Students answer.) Yes. And how did the guests thank her? (Students answer.) Very good! You got it!

Teacher: Now that you've learned the phrases, let's role-play. Imagine that there is a Thanksgiving dinner, and you are invited. Two students will be the hosts, the others will be the guests. Try to use the expressions we've learned. I'll put them on the board. (Students work in groups.)

SCRIPT 2

Teacher: We are going to *listen to a 2-minute-long conversation about getting around the city. Before you begin, you are asked to *listen to sentences giving and asking for directions from the conversation and repeat them, paying attention to the intonation, meaning, and grammatical structure of each phrase (Students listen and answer). Then you do *a fill-in-the-blank exercise, choosing an appropriate form of the verb (Students answer). You *listen to a short monologue and trace the speaker's route on the map (Play the audio and Students answer). You practice *asking and answering questions about different locations on the map (Students work in pairs). You have *a class discussion about getting to campus by using different kinds of transportation (Students discuss in the class).

Teacher: Next, you listen to the conversation several times. You start by *listening to the first 15 seconds of the recording to make predictions about the topic and the setting of the conversation (Play the audio again and Students answer); you will *check their predictions after listening. You will complete other while-listening tasks include *summarizing the conversation, *answering comprehension questions, *ordering the possible routes mentioned by the speakers, *listening for the bus numbers, and *a cloze exercise (Play the audio several times and Students answer). After listening, you *discuss your predictions, *practice saying numbers, *act out situations asking for and giving directions, and *write a story based on a picture which clearly involves finding one's way in the city (Students work in groups).

Appendix J: Prompt questions in interviews

Purpose: To collect data about the teachers' perceptions of their role as a teacher, how the teachers learned and grew professionally in the inquiry process, and supporting as well as hindering factors the process of learning and of the enactment of SCA. The interview questions also explored their preferences, views of and future pedagogical intentions as well as desired support for their professional learning and development.

1. How do you define your role as a teacher in the class? How is it different from what you perceived before you participated in this study?
2. What did you do to facilitate students' learning and incorporate classroom activities in your classes during the semester? To what extent did you create student-centred opportunities in your lessons during the semester?
3. What are the key factors or principles based on which you design your lessons? How are these similar to or different from what you did in previous semesters?
4. What were the challenges as well as supporters when you took a more student-centred approach in your classes?
5. How did the questions in the inquiries and in the group discussions support your thinking?
6. How important was that when you thought about or reflected on what happened or was carried out in your classes?
7. How did you find the opportunity of joining the group discussions with other teachers in this study?
8. What do you usually do if have issues or difficulties in your teaching?
9. Could you share some of your teaching plans for the next semester?
10. For the professional learning and development of teachers in your context to work and sustain, what should be taken into account?

Appendix K: Example of attitudes, attributes and identity table

Factors identifies for exploration	Uni A teachers Lanh/Manh/Tien	Insider/Outsider	Uni B teachers Uy/Nhi/Trinh	Insider/Outsider
Gender				
Age				
Family background				
Professional class				
Status in org				
Type of qualification				
Motivation to teaching				
Prior learning experiences				
PD experiences				
Familiar approaches to teaching and learning				
Roles of teacher				
Roles of learner				
Attitudes to collaborative learning				

Appendix L: List of a teacher's role and a student's role

A teacher's role

Nouns and verbs (number of occurrences)	Phrases	
	Initial phrases	Representative equivalents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitator (10) • organiser (6) • helper (5) • guide (4) • friend (3) • instructor (3) • participant (3) • observer (3) • model (3) • supporter (2) • consultant (2) • controller (2) • tutor (2) • assessor (2) • evaluator (2) • counselor (1) • consolidator (1) • knowledge provider (1) • manager (1) • planner (1) • teacher (1) • coordinator (1) • mentor (1) 	A person who perform as a language model and provide instructions on how to approach and get things comfortable learning the language.	model instructor
	I find that at this level my role is primarily to encourage and help them gain confidence and not to be afraid to try and fail - as many times as it takes.	helper
	My role with mostly first year students is mainly to focus on getting students to feel comfortable speaking out loud and learning new vocabulary and using it.	helper
	In my class, I always try to facilitate the process of learning of my students. Sometimes, I am a model for them and other times, I am their friends.	facilitator model friend
	However, there are times I must behave like a "traditional" teacher to maintain class management or require my students to complete certain tasks.	manager monitor
	a facilitator: to orient students how to do in class discussions, or group discussions;	facilitator

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor (2) • leader (1) • learning enabler (1) • coach (1) • prompter (1) • designer (1) • educational designer (1) 	or give some explanations in the lesson (if needed).	
	an observer : to lead students to follow the topics and their tasks; to evaluate their ability of cooperating in working team and solving problems; to help students find their strength and give them a chance to prove themselves.	leader evaluator helper learning enabler
	An instructor, who teaches knowledge to students.	instructor/teacher
	A coach , who monitors students' progress, help them with project works and assesses their abilities.	coach monitor/helper assessor
	A facilitator , who uses different of methods and techniques to motivate students to study.	facilitator
	a prompter , who encourages students to participate and makes suggestions about how students may proceed in an activity.	prompter
	the organiser, who designs activities and gives instructions on what they are going to do.	organiser/ designer/facilitator
	as an organiser standing at the front of the class, dictating everything that happens and being the focus of attention.	organiser controller
	I share with my students the basic knowledge and they can develop and improve themselves from that.	guide

	I observe their learning process and point out what they need.	observer
	I should be a leader to guide them to the lessons step by step.	guide
	I may become their classmate to study with them . Low-proficiency students have a tendency to quit very easily when they cannot catch up the lessons, so to study with them may be a good way to make them more patient with my lessons.	classmate/friend
	I think the most important role is that you have to design interesting activities to attract students and make them speak.	educational designer

A student's role

Nouns and verbs (number of occurrences)	Phrases	
	Initial phrases	Representative equivalents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-directed learner (7) • participant (7) • self-assessor (2) • performer (2) • coordinator (1) • task master (1) • independent learner (1) • active learner (1) • autonomous learner (1) 	Core factors whose main jobs are to absorb the knowledge and to practice with questions to instructors yet easily distracted and bored.	knowledge absorber
	Overall, the student is absolutely responsible for their own learning . The best teacher will even fail miserably if the student does not take the effort and engage him or herself in the learning process to grow and develop.	self-directed learner

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creative learner (1) • friend (1) • activator (1) • problem-solver (1) • team member (1) • collaborator (1) • coordinator (1) • knowledge manager (1) • knowledge constructor (1) • knowledge sponge (1) • knowledge seeker (1) • knowledge absorber (1) • facilitator (1) • implementer (1) • self-monitor (1) • self-motivator (1) • negotiator (1) • practicer (1) 	<p>They themselves are the most decisive factor in their learning process. Teachers can support, help and instruct them but they must carry out the learning themselves.</p>	self-directed learner
	<p>Students should be responsible for planning, monitoring and assessing their learning process with their teachers' support.</p>	self-directed learner
	<p>Students are active to perceive knowledge through group or class discussions, presentations and debates. Students are able to learn from their peers' correction, discussion, etc. and they have a chance to be creative members in their group to show their ideas.</p>	knowledge constructor self-assessor participant
	<p>The students role is to act like a sponge and soak up everything of value they can from their teachers, textbooks and experience.</p>	knowledge sponge
	<p>They have to find knowledge/ skills (in general) by themselves. They should develop their autonomy/ self-study skills. They also should monitor, evaluate and adjust/modify their learning process</p>	knowledge seeker autonomous learner self-monitor/evaluator
	<p>Students have to do all tasks in class individually or in group on "learner-centred" teaching.</p>	task performer

	<p>In my opinion, students are "gift-opener". Teachers give them gifts which are new basic knowledge and students should open them themselves. When their basis is solid, they can go ahead to advanced level by self-study. If they refused the gifts, no one can help them. Overall, students should be responsible for their learning.</p>	<p>self-directed learner</p>
	<p>They have to try their best in learning and be eager to talk.</p>	<p>self-motivator</p>