

**EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Formative Assessment:
Case Studies of Vietnamese University Teachers**

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Abstract

The effectiveness of formative assessment in student learning has been acknowledged and gained much attention since the series of publications of Black and Wiliam in early 2000. Since then, many educational institutions have initiated efforts to use formative assessment in the classroom to improve instruction and help students become independent learners and thoughtful evaluators of their own learning. However, this approach has not been well understood nor heartily embraced by many English as foreign language (EFL) teachers in post-secondary settings.

This qualitative case study research, paired with a confessional ethnographic approach, investigated four EFL instructors' beliefs about formative assessment and their instructional practices in a post-secondary English program in Vietnam. The overarching question of the study was "how do four Vietnamese university EFL teachers perceive 'formative assessment' and how is formative assessment implemented in their classrooms?" To this end, I used theoretical frameworks from sociocultural theories, the Constructive Alignment perspective (Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011) and formative assessment, suggested by Black and Wiliam (2009), to collect and analyze the data from three sets of interviews, observation notes, and artifacts such as lesson plans, course outlines, and students' work. Findings showed that the EFL instructors in the study had different perspectives on student learning, teaching, and assessment. These participants indicated two conflicting teaching philosophies: viewing learners as active collaborators in constructing knowledge and viewing instructors as knowledge providers in the student learning journey. However, they all shared the same articulated beliefs about assessment procedures and employing standardization for their teaching and student learning. Findings also showed that the EFL instructors' beliefs were not always congruent with their actual practices. There was limited

use of formative assessment, and the formative assessment principles were not implemented effectively in their actual practices. Findings also indicated that their stated beliefs and practices were affected by many internal and external factors, such as the mental model of learning, teaching experiences, testing culture, workload, and program requirements. Three key issues were discovered: First, there was a lack of understanding of learning theories informing pedagogy. Second, there was a lack of general formative assessment theories and limited use of formative assessment in the classroom. Third, cultural values and societal pressure affected instructors' beliefs and instructional practices regarding formative assessment.

This study makes significant contributions to our understanding of higher education instructors' beliefs and formative assessment in terms of research and educational practice. Notably, it adds to the growing knowledge of teacher cognition and formative assessment. It also suggests solutions for re-educating instructors and school teachers, including EFL/ESL teachers, about formative assessment and what should be reconsidered when implementing formative strategies in the classroom to enhance student learning. This research offers the following elements: (a) equipping teachers with underpinning learning theories informing pedagogy and assessment; (b) providing assessment knowledge and improving assessment literacy for teachers; (c) making formative assessment principles and strategies explicit to teachers and students; (d) training and practicing in providing constructive feedback that promotes student learning; (e) personalizing students' learning to enhance students' autonomy, self-directed skills, and long-life learning skills; and (f) utilizing student learning evidence to make instructional adjustments to meet students' needs.

Keywords: formative assessment, higher education, post-secondary EFL program

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Abbreviations

CA	Constructive Alignment
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESP	English for Special Purposes
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
HE	Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1: The Researcher's Journey and Context

This study investigated four Vietnamese university teachers' beliefs about formative assessment and the influence of their beliefs on the ways they teach and assess students' learning in EFL classrooms. As an instructor, I came to this topic from a personal journey and concerns with the Vietnamese educational system, which mainly uses assessment to control students rather than enable learning.

I was born and raised in Vietnam, where a teacher-centred and testing culture dominates the educational landscape. In the classroom, the typical pedagogical methodology was, and continues to be, deductive. Students were expected to listen to the teachers' lecturing, and they were only passively involved in the instruction. There was a lack of active learning, "engaging students in higher-order thinking tasks (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation, reflection) through various activities so that students achieve more than merely the passive part of learning" (Tabrizi & Rideout, 2017, p. 3202). The usual form of assessment was high-stakes standardized tests, and there was a lack of meaningful feedback during students' learning process. My school life involved many rote learning and memorization strategies to reproduce the factual knowledge transmitted by teachers on examinations. Passing the end-of-term examination with high marks became an obsession for many students, such as myself. As I was concerned about the grades, I spent much time doing sample tests with the hope of passing the exam with high marks. Upon receiving good results in the examination, I would be awarded compliments from my teachers and parents; otherwise, I would receive punishments, even corporal punishment. In high school, teachers' warning of failure in examinations if students had not memorized the knowledge was frequent. Instead of equipping students with problem-solving or self-directed learning skills, teachers encouraged them to do more tests, hoping they could pass the university entrance

examination. With this kind of instruction and assessment, many students (myself included) attended a cram school with the desire to reach the goal of entering a university.

When entering the university 25 years ago, I continued experiencing a teacher-centred pedagogy and high-stake testing as the dominant form of assessment at this level. In the classroom, lecturers were ‘actors’ on the stage controlling the instruction, and students were the ‘audience’ listening to them respectfully. After finishing a module or course, I was required to attend an exam to prove my ability. My mission was considered to be completed if I passed the exams; otherwise, I would re-sit another examination to get the required mark. During my studies, I never heard about the concepts of learner-centeredness and formative assessment. I rarely received feedback from my instructors and peers, except for grades for my work.

After graduation, I was employed as an instructor at a university. Like many teachers who were the products of behaviourist education theories, I experienced the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). I adopted a teacher-centred approach to teaching and followed a “form-focused instruction,” with grammar-translation pedagogy as a prior language learning experience (Borg, 2003). The reason was that this approach “is highly systematic” (Cook, 1996, p. 14), and therefore, it could help equip students with the knowledge to confront the end-of-term examination. Regarding assessment methods, as the dominance of the testing culture still existed, I employed testing and high-stakes examinations to evaluate students’ progress and achievement. The test format consisted of short answers, true-false statements, and multiple-choice questions focused on the lexicogrammatical knowledge that I introduced to my students.

My perception of teaching and learning changed when the Vietnamese Government promulgated the *Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education* in 2005. The resolution emphasized the necessity of implementing a foreign language enhancement training program and

innovating the pedagogy and assessment to meet the competitive market and globalization. Accordingly, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focusing on learner-centeredness was introduced in EFL courses of instruction. This approach aimed to provide students with a proper foundation of knowledge, real-life scenarios, and communicative skills they may encounter in the real world.

Being aware of the need for educational reform, I attended many workshops and conferences about the innovation of instruction and assessment to improve my pedagogical skills and classroom assessment. However, transforming ideas from theory into practice was not an easy task. Though I strongly believed in the value and benefits of learner-centred teaching and other assessment methods to assist students' learning, I did not know how to apply them effectively to my instruction. I tried to create a new learning environment, encourage student discussions, or use portfolios for assessing students' progress. However, I failed in achieving the change. The reasons were that the professional resources for teaching and professional training and development were not available; or, even if they existed, they were not accessible. Also, contextual obstacles, such as institution policy, testing culture, workload, and a lack of learning and teaching resources, impeded my ability to do that. According to Borg (2003), these factors influence teachers' decisions to implement active learning and new teaching methodologies.

However, my teaching philosophy once again changed when I pursued my higher education in Canada in 2017. During my time in Canada, I have truly experienced a learning-centred approach to teaching and assessment. I have noticed that, in Canadian classrooms, students are put at the center of the instruction, whereas instructors serve as facilitators who encourage students to interact with others to make sense of new ideas and construct knowledge. Students are required to collaborate with their peers to do projects, deliver a presentation, and

lead discussions in the classroom. Students are also encouraged to engage in collaborative learning and assessment for learning, in which they receive valuable feedback from instructors and peers. The assessment tasks are integrated into learning activities and linked with the intended learning outcomes. Students are required to do quizzes and assignments during the course without grading, and if grading exists, it relies on low-stakes marks. The Canadian experience truly changed my mind about the concept of instruction and assessment, and I came to realize that students' interests and efforts for learning were all driven by the way assessment tasks were given by their instructors. I have noticed that, in Canadian schools, "learning is thought of as a social event taking place as a result of interaction between the learner and the environment" (Fahim & Haghani, 2012, p. 693). I have also realized that assessment is not a tool for teachers to judge students' work in a cold and technical manner but rather an instrument to help both teachers and students inform the process of learning and teaching, thereby improving instruction and student learning (Fu, Hopper & Sanford, 2018; Jang, 2014). I realized that there should be a need to apply an alternative assessment, such as formative assessment, which emphasizes the students' role in constructing knowledge, negotiating their learning expectations with teachers, and engaging in self and peer evaluation (Black & William, 1998; Black & William, 2009; Sadler, 1989; Shepard, 2005).

Nevertheless, there are considerable challenges in implementing and developing new approaches within a system where high-stakes forms of examinations are dominant (James, 2017). Therefore, teachers' beliefs should be the starting point of the research process. Over the past few decades, teacher cognition or teachers' beliefs have emerged as a research avenue in second language education. Empirical studies in this research avenue indicate that teachers' beliefs are shaped by their personal beliefs and, therefore, rooted in their socially situated

experience (Borg, 2003). While teachers' beliefs in various aspects of teaching have been studied consistently, teachers' beliefs about formative assessment in second language learning (SLL) have remained under-explored. Therefore, an investigation of teachers' beliefs about student learning and formative assessment could help reveal what teachers think about student learning and assessment and how they teach and assess students in their instructional practices. This constitutes the rationale for this study.

Vietnamese Context

Vietnam: Brief History and Culture

As education cannot be understood thoroughly without its historical and cultural features, the Vietnamese context will be elaborated on in this section as the essential point of departure for my investigation.

Vietnam was established more than 2,000 years ago with its first name, "Van Lang," and the King of the Nguyen dynasty named the country "Vietnam" in 1804, after gaining independence from the 1000 years of colonization by the Chinese (Huong & Fry, 2004; Le, 2011; Le, 2022; London, 2011a). The French took control of the country and established the economic exploitation of Vietnam for almost a hundred years from the early 20th century. With the interference of the French and Americans later on, Vietnam was then divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam during the Vietnam War in the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, the country ended Western imperialism and became a unified country in 1975. Vietnam today is a developing country with a rapidly-growing economy and membership in many global organizations (Hanh, 2018; Huong & Fry, 2004; Le, 2014).

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have strongly impacted the Vietnamese culture since the Chinese colonization that lasted for more than 1000 years (Huong & Fry, 2004;

Nguyen, 2002). These philosophies have become a vital part of Vietnamese people's lives. Children are required to accept orders from their parents, teachers, and the elderly in the family. They are also required to gain academic success as a way to express their gratitude to their parents and show filial piety (Le, 2011). Additionally, children are affected by Confucian standards to maintain their self-respect and their family's honour (Nguyen, 2017; Tran, 2015). The education system that applied Confucian principles was well established in Vietnam from the 11th century and continues to this day. Teachers are considered sources of reliable knowledge, admired and respected by learners. In this type of Confucian-based society, a high "power distance," as Hofstede (1997, p. 28) describes, is expected to be present. Power distance indicates social distance and authority levels between people with higher positions and those with lower ones (Hofstede, 1997). This type of social interaction is widely accepted as the norm and creates the framework for all social interactions. For example, lower-level people must respect their directors, and students must obey their teachers.

Chinese colonization was later followed by French colonialism, American involvement, and globalization, and Vietnamese culture was affected by Western influences. This outcome is reflected in science and social science, such as information technology, arts, music, architecture, fashion, and education (Nguyen, 2002).

In general, these historical and cultural factors influence every aspect of Vietnamese people's lives, including the educational system, which will be elaborated on in the following parts.

Education in Vietnam

Vietnamese education has some unique features due to its culture and long history. First, Confucian philosophy has heavily affected Vietnamese people's lives and code of conduct,

resulting in the knowledge transmission approach in the educational system at all levels (Canh, 2022; Huong & Fry, 2004; Le, 2011; London, 2011b; Ngo, 2015; Nguyen, 2002; Tran, 2015). By adopting the hierarchical principles of Confucian ideology, teachers were regarded as a reliable source of knowledge to deposit knowledge into students' minds. This instructional model has been described as "passive transmission of information in the lecture format" (Harman et al., 2010, p. 68), where teachers deposit knowledge into students' minds and students passively listen to the teachers without questioning or interaction.

Teacher-centeredness and the examination-based system lasted for decades during French colonialism and US involvement (1858-1975). During the colonial period, Confucianism coexisted with the French-style educational system. However, the French mainly focused on designing and developing the curricula to serve the French colonists and train their children to become functionaries and administrators (Huong & Fry, 2004; Le, 2011). As this educational system was not widely accessible to the people, 95% of Vietnamese were illiterate during this period (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training [VMoET], 1995). In addition, tertiary education did not receive much attention, leading to a weak foundation for high-quality higher education institutions (Wilkinson & Vallely, 2008).

From 1954 to 1975, two different systems dominated Vietnamese education during the separation of the North-South war. Students in the South were trained with the American education model, which focused on practice and skills. In contrast, in the North, students received the educational model of the Soviet Union, which heavily emphasized theory. This discrepancy between the two education models led to differences in teaching and learning. After national reunification in 1975, the Vietnamese education system implemented the Soviet model uniformly nationwide, and it was restructured with five levels: pre-school, elementary (grade 1-

5), middle (grade 6-9), secondary (grade 10-12) and post-secondary (college/university level). Nevertheless, higher education institutions' quality was still under-developed due to "the era of heavy-handed socialist rule" (Wilkinson & Vallely, 2008, p. 3). The educational system changed after the Vietnam government issued the innovation "market-oriented economy" policy in 1986 (Huong & Fry, 2004; Trines, 2017). Significantly, in 2005, the Vietnamese government promulgated the resolution on the *Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education*, in which education and training reform at the tertiary level, science and technology development, and infrastructure and human resources innovation were the focus of attention (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training [VMoET], 2005).

Higher Education (HE) in Vietnam

Vietnam had the first institution of higher education in 1076, namely the *Temple of Literature* (Harman et al., 2010; Huong & Fry, 2004). However, due to historical factors, tertiary education in Vietnam was not invested in; therefore, it lagged far behind other institutions in the same regions (Wilkinson & Vallely, 2008). The tertiary level made a significant change in 1986 with the policy *Innovation* (Huong & Fry, 2004; Trines, 2017). One of the changes was moving away from "narrow specialization to allow for broader and multiple academic fields and related professions" (Huong & Fry, 2004, p. 209). In addition, in 2005, the Vietnamese government promulgated a Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), in which the renewal of higher education (HE) was considered one of the foremost priorities (VMoET, 2005). In HERA, responsibilities related to HE teaching and learning focused on significant aspects, including (a) renewing and developing the curriculum that has a strong applied and professional orientation; (b) upgrading training methodologies by applying interactive teaching methods and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to learning and teaching and introducing various

learning styles; (c) developing instructors' professional qualifications and improving the quality of master's and doctoral degrees; and (d) promoting international integration of the tertiary system (VMoET, 2005). Eventually, these reform objectives paved the way for the innovation of English language teaching and learning at the tertiary level, which will be discussed in the following section.

English Language Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

English has become an essential foreign language that has been widely taught at all educational levels to meet the demand for internationalization and globalization since 1986, when the Vietnamese government reformed the *open-door* policy (Duong & Chua, 2016; Harman et al., 2010; Le, 2011; Ngo, 2015). In 2008, Vietnam's National Foreign Language 2020 Project was implemented at all levels of the educational system. The new policy also emphasized the importance of English education in Vietnam (Trines, 2017). Its foci are to “construct and implement a teaching program in a foreign language for some subjects at basic and major levels within college and university systems, and also select some key sectors at the senior college level to apply for a teaching program in a foreign language” (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training [VMoET,], 2008, p. 3). Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), aiming at developing students' capacity to communicate in English, was introduced in the EFL course of instruction (Nunan, 2013). English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is encouraged in academic institutions to equip students to use English in the working environment. Blended learning, which incorporates both face-to-face and online learning modes, is also a new trend in English teaching and learning in the age of globalization and digitalization (Hoang, 2015). This model aligns with the objectives of higher education reform, where the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to learning and teaching should be

fostered at the tertiary level (VMoET, 2008). This project also allowed foreign institutions to cooperate with Vietnamese universities in exchange programs or establish branch campuses. British University Vietnam, Australia's RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, University of Greenwich Vietnam, and La Trobe University are evidence of this reality. The increasing number of international instructors and scholars working in educational institutions is another effect of the policy (Hanh, 2018).

However, the English proficiency level of Vietnamese students has not remarkably increased despite the effort and initiatives of the government. According to the English Proficiency Index released by Education First (2021), Vietnam's English proficiency dropped from 52nd in 2019 to 66th out of 112 non-native English-speaking countries in 2021 and is still in the low proficiency level group. Its position is 12 out of 24 Asian countries and stands behind Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Nepal, and Pakistan. According to education specialists, the reason is that the traditional grammar-translation teaching method and memorization strategy have had adverse effects (Phan, 2018). In classrooms, teachers spend much time explaining grammar structure rules and students are required to practice grammar exercises for examinations (Le, 2011, Oanh & Hien, 2006; Phan, 2018). This kind of grammar teaching emphasizes parts of speech in sentences and does not help the learner master communicative or pragmatic competence (Cook, 1996). The inappropriate curriculum design and standardized testing might be another reason for this situation (Canh, 2022; Luong, 2016).

The Assessment of English Language Learning in Higher Education

Assessment is an integral part of the educational process, and it significantly influences what and how learners learn (Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011). However, in the past, the curriculum

developers in Vietnam paid little attention to assessment in general and language assessment in Vietnamese HE institutions due to historical and social factors (Tran, 2015).

Before 1858, due to the influence of Confucian culture, assessment in Vietnam was mainly based on Mandarin examinations, which were organized at two levels, regional and national, to select the best students to enter the civil service. In this kind of examination, students were required to interpret and compose Chinese philosophical writing, literature, history, and sciences. The language used was Chinese, and the language assessment was adopted from Chinese imperial examinations. During this period, formal examinations were used for bureaucracy recruitment and regulation (London, 2011a). Mandarin examinations ended when Vietnam experienced French colonization in 1883. To serve colonial administrations, French was the main language used in schools. As a result, language assessment was adapted from the French examination system in which the assessment focused on summative evaluation for certification and selection purposes. However, this kind of assessment existed for a short period. It was then followed by an educational innovation that set up the French-Vietnamese political program to unify local and colonial education (London, 2011b).

After the national reunification in 1975, the curriculum developers focused more on examinations as a condition for entry into secondary and tertiary education. After 1986, the field of assessment became the focus of attention as it was considered “one of the measures to improve educational quality essential for national industrialization, modernization and international integration” (Tran, 2015, p. 49).

Language assessment has received much attention since the implementation of the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) in 2005 and the National Foreign Language Program (NFLP) between 2008 and 2020 (VMoET, 2008). In these projects, higher education has been

tasked to train students to become global citizens and meet the demands of national industrialization, modernization, and international integration. Specifically, higher education has been tasked to “renovate methods of assessment and grading in language training; construct an electronic data bank that helps assess and grade students better; be active in applying IT in language training; and improve ability in testing and assessing language training quality” (VMoET, 2008, p. 3).

As a result, updated curricula and a new form of assessment and evaluation have been introduced and implemented in many HE institutions. For instance, instead of following the “school-year training,” a “credit-training system” has been carried out, thus giving students flexibility and independence in their learning (Hanh, 2018; Tran, 2015). Specifically, the assessment has moved from a 10-point grading system to the letter “A, B, C,” and student attributes have been considered to assess the student’s progress during a course, such as students’ participation and engagement in the classroom. Concerning ELT education, recently, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been adopted and used as a reference for designing curriculums, lesson plans, and assessments. CEFR provides the indicators to define competency and capacity in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills on six levels: A1- beginners; A2-elementary; B1, B2-intermediate; C1, C2- advanced. The national foreign language system requires non-English-majored students at the university and college to obtain a B1 level, the third of six levels under CEFR, while the English-major students should obtain a C1- the advanced level (VMoET, 2008). Nevertheless, obtaining a B1-intermediate level upon graduation is not feasible for most undergraduate students. The reason is that this scale requires students’ competence in four language skills. However, English language teaching in Vietnamese higher education is focused more on equipping students with the knowledge to cope

with examinations, such as vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, rather than providing them with skills in practical applications, such as listening, speaking, writing skills (Nguyen, 2017).

Despite the changes mentioned above, post-secondary education and EFL education quality have been slow to respond, and summative assessment focusing on standardized testing continues to dominate the Vietnamese educational climate. The teacher-centredness and norm-referenced assessment approaches have continued in many institutions (Luong, 2016). Though the Vietnamese government's decisions paved the way for instructors to adopt alternative assessment methods to assess students' progress, Confucian ideology and other contextual factors have influenced instructors' perceptions of educational reform. The hierarchical relationship between teachers and students generates a barrier, limiting students' skills to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills for the current dynamic labour market.

Overview of the Current Study

In this study, due to the nature of the construct of formative assessment, I work inductively towards one of many truths for a particular context by employing qualitative case-study research paired with a confessional ethnographic approach rather than testing hypotheses. The study aims to explore how four EFL instructors in a post-secondary institution in Vietnam perceive student learning, teaching, and assessment within their teaching programs and how those beliefs are transferred into their instructional practices.

I have chosen four EFL instructors in two programs—English majored and non-English majored programs—as four cases for my research. More specifically, for each instructor, I conducted three interviews and three observations at three different times during the fifteen-week

Fall semester (August - November) in 2019. I supplemented these interviews and observations with documents related to their teaching courses and my field notes.

I used theoretical frameworks derived from sociocultural perspectives, constructive alignment, and formative assessment theories to collect and analyze the data from three sets of interviews, observation notes, and documents such as lesson plans, course outlines, and students' work. Specifically, I used sociocultural perspectives, which view learning as a socially mediated process, to examine the instructors' perceptions of student learning and interpret how they used formative assessment tasks to support student learning in their actual practices. These perspectives also helped investigate the nature of internal and external factors affecting their beliefs on student learning and instructional practices. At the same time, I adopted the strategies for implementing formative assessment in the classroom, as suggested by Black and Wiliam (2009), for collecting and analyzing the data from instructor interviews and classroom observations. Therefore, my research foci focused on specific evaluations, such as 1) how do teachers know where students are at in their learning; 2) how do teachers establish where students are aiming to go; 3) what can teachers do to get them there. In addition, I employed the Constructive Alignment perspective (Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011) to assess an aligned system of teaching in which teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the objectives of the course and instructional unit. This perspective was considered to evaluate how instructors used the teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks to support students in their learning journey and how these activities meet their learning intentions. The perspectives on sociocultural views of teaching and learning, formative assessment, and constructive alignment helped me identify the complexity and interconnectedness of factors affecting the interaction between and amongst instructors and students.

The context for the current research is four university EFL instructors and their classes in Vietnam. The participants in this study have been teaching English as a foreign language for more than five years; they all held MA degrees in English studies or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Despite the efforts and initiatives of the Vietnamese Government on Educational Reform since 2005, higher education and English education quality have been slow to respond, and standardized testing has still dominated the Vietnamese educational landscape. Moreover, EFL Vietnamese students continue to underperform compared to Asian test-takers (Education First, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to research how EFL instructors perceive student learning, teaching, and assessment and how their beliefs are transformed into action in this context.

Research Questions

This study investigated university teachers' beliefs about student learning and formative assessment and the influence of their beliefs on the way they teach and assess students' learning in EFL classrooms. The results obtained may provide beneficial ideas and valuable information for any university instructor working with EFL students. The insights from the study will have particular significance for instructors in countries where many of the traditional teaching practices are of similar concern.

The primary research question was: *How is formative assessment perceived by four Vietnamese EFL university teachers, and how is it implemented in their classrooms?*

The following subsidiary questions were addressed to answer the main research question:

1. What are four Vietnamese university EFL teachers' beliefs about student learning, teaching, and assessment?

2. How do their beliefs about student learning influence their instructional and assessment practices?
3. To what extent do their beliefs about student learning converge and diverge from their classroom practices regarding formative assessment?
4. How do contextual factors influence teachers' understanding of formative assessment and the implementation of formative assessments in their instruction?

In the next chapter, I will review the literature on philosophical grounds of second language learning, the theoretical framework formed by sociocultural theories, formative assessment, and constructive alignment. I then present previous studies on formative assessment in English language learning (ELL) contexts. Finally, I will review the literature on teachers' beliefs and contextual factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices to unpack the relationship between what teachers' perceptions and their actual practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Framing the Research

I have structured the chapter into four main sections. The first section reviews the philosophical grounds of second language learning, which provides an essential backdrop for understanding teachers' beliefs about student learning, teaching, and assessment as a whole. The following section introduces the theoretical frameworks formed by three general concepts: sociocultural theory, formative assessment, and constructive alignment. I then present previous studies on formative assessment in higher ESL/ EFL contexts, followed by a literature review on teachers' beliefs and contextual influences shaping teachers' beliefs and practices to unpack the relationship between teacher beliefs and pedagogical acts. These theoretical perspectives are reviewed since they are well established in educational research and second language learning studies. They complement each other, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic I am researching and holding out a considerable promise for assisting me in responding to my research questions.

Philosophical Grounds of Second Language Learning (SLL)

Early theories in Second Language Learning

Before the 1990s, second language learning was addressed and inspired by two learning theories taken from psychology. The first theory is behaviourism, explaining behaviour concerning external features in the environment. The second theory is cognitivism, which views learning as a mental process and emphasizes the internal factors in minds (Atkinson, 2011). Given that these two theories developed separately, they connected closely during this early theory period.

Behaviourism. Behaviourism, or behavioural learning theory, originates from Pavlov's dog experiments with the stimulus-response sequence. This theory emphasizes the importance of external stimuli triggering observable behaviours while ignoring the internal mental states that are unobservable. Ontologically, behaviourism acknowledges positivism, which "recognized natural phenomena or properties of knowable things, along with their lawful relations of coexistence and succession" (Boghossian, 2006, p. 715). Epistemologically, behaviourism assumes objectivism and a realistic view. According to behaviourists such as Watson and Skinner, knowledge is construed by a repertoire of behaviours and outside recourses (Atkinson, 2011; Boghossian, 2006; Cooper, 1993; VanPatten & Williams, 2014). In this view, all kinds of learning, including Second Language Learning (SLL), are the results of transmitting information from teachers to students. Initially, learners passively absorb knowledge transferred by teachers and replicate the information through a specific stimulus. Educators who base their instruction on behaviourism believe that assessment should be separated from teaching to avoid subjectivity and ensure fairness, and that objective assessment should be employed in classroom practice (Shepard, 2000). This belief led to standardized testing, which was dominant in the educational landscape in the early 20th century.

Within behaviourism, SLL is closely associated with structural linguistics and describes a language task as the imitation of models and the internalization of patterns (VanPatten & Williams, 2014). Behaviourism portrays language learning in three stages: (a) repeating the models correctly, (b) practicing a novel behaviour, and (c) receiving appropriate feedback. Behaviourists hold the belief that students "should be exposed to several target examples of language; they should imitate these models repeatedly and receive appropriate feedback: positive feedback for accurate imitations and correction of inaccurate ones. This process should be

repeated until these behaviours have become automatic and error-free” (VanPatten & Williams, 2014, p. 20). For this reason, language teachers who are informed by principles of behaviourism typically stress the use of the target language and model behaviour in the classroom to help learners directly imitate.

The critical constructs in this learning theory are reinforcement and punishment. They are considered the core principles in motivating students to learn extrinsically by showing them how to respond to a particular stimulus. When students receive positive reinforcement, they will repeat the response and continue their learning. Conversely, if they receive a negative reinforcement or punishment, they will be more likely to stop the response or behaviour. These constructs have been applied to SLL and continue today in some traditional teaching contexts.

Cognitivism. Cognitive theories, rooted in psychologists’ and psycholinguists’ work, appeared as a rejection of behaviourism in the mid-20th century. Ontologically, like behaviourism, cognitivism acknowledges positivism and a realistic view. Epistemologically, cognitivism is grounded in objectivism, seeing the world from an external view. It means that “knowledge is stored as internal representations of the external world” (Atkinson, 2011, p. 4) and the learner’s mind is considered an information processor, that takes input of data, then processes it, and produces an output at the end (Cooper, 1993). The metaphorical image of cognitivism is the digital computer model, which stores and processes the input based on its structures, not its meaning (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Learning, in this frame, is “the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 133) and is related to the learner’s cognitive mechanism or information processing (Atkinson, 2002, 2011, 2014; Doughty & Long, 2003; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; McLaughlin, 1987; McLaughlin et al., 1983; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In this respect, second language learning involves “the acquisition of linguistic skills” (McLaughlin,

1987, p. 150) by focusing on the shift from controlled to automatic processing. This means that second language learners (L2 learners) gain knowledge by first building up general information about the language they want to produce. Once this knowledge becomes automatic after many practice times, they will be able to produce the information they want without much attentional control and gradually tackle more complex language during their learning. Another concept in the information processing model is restructuring. Restructuring refers to the stage that “may account for what appear to be bursts of progress when learners suddenly seem to ‘put it all together,’ even though they have not had any new instruction or relevant exposure to the language” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 110). In other words, this step indicates the learners’ ability to restructure what they learnt in their own ways.

Two cognitive-oriented scholars having influential models in SLL were Stephen Krashen and Richard Schmidt in the 1990s. Stephen Krashen is well-known for Monitor Theory, which seems to be linked with Chomsky’s language theory, stating that linguistic knowledge is a human endowment and is triggered by data input. Monitor Theory emphasizes *comprehensible input*, which is referred to as the *input hypothesis*. Comprehensible input is “input that contains language slightly beyond the current level of the learner’s internalized language” (VanPatten & Williams, 2014). By defining comprehensible input, Krashen introduced the formula $i+1$, in which i is a learner’s current language proficiency, and $i+1$ is a slightly higher language level. According to him, comprehensible input is the necessary and sufficient condition for learning a language. When comprehensible input is assured (i.e., teachers do not use complex language for low-level students), learners will acquire the language and use what they need (Krashen, 1982). Another construct in this theory is *the affective filter*. Krashen claimed that a stressful learning environment would raise *the affective filter*, inhibiting students’ input processing. He emphasized

that language acquisition will automatically occur when the input is comprehensible and the affective filter is low (i.e., less anxiety, supportive learning environment). However, Krashen's input hypothesis appears to limit learner production on language acquisition. This theory emphasizes linguistic data as comprehensible input, and students' production is the language they have learnt or acquired (VanPatten & Williams, 2014).

Meanwhile, Schmidt (1990) developed the concept of noticing or the *noticing hypothesis*, which has had a powerful impact on the field of SLL. Schmidt stated that "subliminal language learning is impossible, and that intake is what learners consciously notice" (Schmidt, 1990, p. 149). He claimed that nothing is learnt without noticing, so learners can only obtain language knowledge when they know the specific language feature in the input. Krashen and Schmidt's approaches have significantly influenced practitioners, such as Merrill Swain, Catherine Doughty, Michael Long, and Rod Ellis, in the early 2000s. Remarkably, Merrill Swain (1995) developed the term 'noticing' in the *output hypothesis (OP)*, a prerequisite for language acquisition. In this hypothesis, Swain noted that once learners need to communicate or compel to produce a target language, they will acquire language forms when they notice language gaps or holes in their interlanguage; thereby they may conduct an analysis to mend those gaps resulting in modified output. If they can not find a solution, they may search for more relevant input to form a new output. This does "force the learners into thinking about the form of their linguistic output" (Swain, 1995, p. 386). Swain's noticing function is closely related to the concept of negotiation of meaning in Long's Interaction Hypothesis.

In the Interaction Hypothesis (IH), Long (1996) agreed with Krashen that comprehensible input is essential to acquiring the target language. However, he emphasized the vital role of interaction in making data comprehensible for the negotiation of meaning. He argued that

learners have adjustments to promote meaning negotiation through conversations, thereby fostering the comprehension of input. Simultaneously, he added factors such as corrective feedback and noticing during the interaction. He supposed that second language learners might notice their errors and language deficiency when communicating with other speakers. This way would help them manage themselves to express their ideas. The IH approach was advocated by Ellis (1999), who stated that interaction is central to SLL as it is seen as “one way in which learners can obtain the input needed to trigger parameter setting and resetting” (p. IX). The IH also emphasized the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) approach and was revised by Doughty and Long (2003). The updated version of IH showed that language learning occurs in the social environment and may be affected by the social context. Although recognizing this point and emphasizing that learners’ comprehension will be maximized when making use of interaction for negotiating meaning, they insisted that “language learning, like other learning, is ultimately a matter of change in an individual’s internal mental state.” (Doughty & Long, 2003, p. 4)

Although interaction in Long’s IH encourages communication with external factors (Matsuoka & Evans, 2004), cognitivism is criticized for focusing on language per se and exclusion of sociocultural contexts. Socio-oriented researchers claim that language is situated and socially constructed (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). In what follows, I will briefly review the alternative approach, social constructivism—a prevalent theory in SLL that concerns language use and values the socio-cultural factors in accumulating knowledge.

Alternative Approaches to SLL

The debate on whether SLL follows cognitive-constructivism or socio-constructivism has been a topic of concern for many SLL researchers. This debate is irresolvable as the assumptions of these perspectives depend on the way the world is viewed. The cognitivist acknowledges the

positivism paradigm and sees the world externally to the knower, with the mind acting as a computational system. By contrast, sociocultural theories are based on socio-constructivism, where learners construct meaning by interacting with the social environment and determining reality through shared experiences with other knowers (Atkinson, 2011; Cooper, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Their ontology is relativistic, and epistemology is subjective and socio-constructivist, foregrounding sociocultural-based learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lantolf, 2011; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Several theories emerged from socio-constructivism and are applied in the field of SLL, such as sociocultural theory, sociocognitive theory, complexity theory, and language socialization (Pham, 2019). In what follows, I will review one of the socio-constructivist theories, sociocultural theories, which are considered one of the cornerstones of my study's frameworks.

Theoretical Frameworks for the Study

Sociocultural Theories in SLL

Sociocultural theories (SCT) in SLL are grounded in Vygotsky's psychological theory, which emphasizes the influence of social interactions on a learner's cognitive growth. These theories view human' cognitive development as a socially mediated process in which learning occurs through social activities and interaction with knowledgeable members of the community, such as adults, teachers, peers, and mentors, via means of mediation, such as historical and cultural activities, artifacts, concepts, and language (Fahim & Haghani, 2012; Lantolf, 2011; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2009; Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). These theories assume that social and cultural factors play a vital role in accumulating knowledge, and these elements shape learners' cognitive development. Sociocultural approaches to second language learning were advocated and developed by James Lantolf, a second language acquisition (SLA)

scholar, in the mid-1990s, and it has recently become a dominant view in SLL. Learning in this frame considers both the social environment and the individual. Learning is a socially mediated process where learners first collaborate with others and then construct their knowledge and perform it individually (Ellis, 1999). The central constructs of social theories, mediation and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), are explained in the following paragraphs.

Mediation. The concept of mediation is defined in a general sense as “an involvement of a third factor (mediator) into the interaction between two objects, events, or persons” (Kozulin, 2018, p. 23). Lantolf (2008, 2011) defined mediation as tools or indirect activities, such as socio-cultural activities, artifacts, concepts, forms of technology, and language that form some capabilities of higher mental processes such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and learning. From this perspective, the second language, considered a higher form of mental activity, is mediated by various tools such as teachers, students, cultural-social context, materials, curricula, educational policy, and technological devices. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2009) stated that meaning does not reside in the individual’s mind; rather, it is the result of interactions with others and with the self/individual. Learning within this perspective, including SLL, encompasses two forms of mediation: interpersonal activities during face-to-face collaboration and intrapersonal interactions related to an individual’s mental process (Ellis, 1999; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In other words, it is the process of internalization “progressively decreasing reliance on external mediation and increasing reliance on internal mediation” (Lantolf et al., 2014, p. 212).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* is a central notion in L2 research, conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky (1978). It refers to “the domain of knowledge or skill where the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can

achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 196). In other words, ZPD is a zone where an individual can accomplish a particular task or perform a range of abilities with appropriate assistance or scaffolding from a more capable interlocutor. *Scaffolding* is the metaphorical term that refers to how interlocutors assist learners in achieving a goal they could not perform by themselves (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2009). Ellis (1999) also noted that “the study of scaffolding, then, provides a way of demonstrating how an ‘expert’ assists a ‘novice’ or performs a difficult task through interaction, and also how learners, interacting among themselves, can collaboratively manage a task that would be beyond any of them acting as individuals” (p. 19). In other words, such scaffolding activities help learners produce some forms of linguistics beyond their existing knowledge and encourage the mutual relationship between learners and interactants via collaborative tasks. Vygotsky’s ZPD has not only been emphasized in the domain of instruction, but its implication has also been in the context of assessment, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

There have been concerns about the ZPD approach and Krashen’s input hypothesis. Some wonder whether Vygotsky’s ZPD is similar to Krashen’s *i+1* (*i* is an individual’s current level of language proficiency and *i+1* is a slightly higher level of language). However, Dunn and Lantolf (1998) pointed out the profound difference between the two notions by mentioning Krashen’s and Vygotsky’s work. In Krashen’s input hypothesis, they claimed that comprehensible input is “language that contains a structure that is ‘a little beyond’ where we are now” (Krashen, 1982, p. 21), and the *i+1* formula is what learners can achieve in the next stage. In sharp contrast to this perspective, ZPD “permits us to delineate the child’s immediate future and his [sic] dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what has already been achieved developmentally, but also for what is in the course of maturing” (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998 cited in

Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). In other words, learning in Vygotsky's theory is "learning-leading-development" (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998, p. 420) while learning in Krashen's perspective places emphasis on the precondition for acquisition, such as good input and what learners can achieve when having low *affective filter* (i.e., less anxiety, more confidence, etc.). In addition, Dunn and Lantolf (1998) indicated that Krashen considers the development from the interlanguage to the slightly higher-level stage as a predictable process since it is required before learning and it focuses on the level of language. In contrast, Vygotsky emphasizes that social-cultural elements mediate learning, and development is unpredictable as the focus is on activities' dimensions, not only the language level. In other words, within SCT, "we do not wait for development to occur; rather, instruction and learning are the means by which we can encourage development to occur" (Swain et al., 2015, p.21).

The issue of interaction in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Long's Interaction Hypothesis (IH) has also been compared and debated in SLL. Like the mainstream cognitive perspectives in SLL, sociocultural perspectives acknowledge the role of interaction and the role of interlocutors in helping learners gain an understanding of a language. However, the different views of interaction between IH and SCT are apparent. The role of interaction in IH is to "supply the black box with the right kind of data for internal mechanisms to set to work on" (Ellis, 1999, p. 17). Conceptually, IH researchers emphasized interactions, but this approach is concerned merely with the type of meaning negotiation, which makes the input comprehensible to meet learners' data needs (Ellis, 1999; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In other words, this kind of interaction assists learning and does not make the learning take place. By contrast, SCT views the role of interaction more broadly and, therefore, treats it as a social and private practice that helps shape, construct, and promote learning. Interaction in SCT "is not just a device that

facilitates learners' movement along the interlanguage continuum, but a social event which helps learners participate in their development, including shaping the path it follows" (Ellis, 1999, p. 20). ZPD has captivated practitioners and educators because of the 'ZPD-oriented assessment,' (Lantolf et al., 2014, p.212), which helps assist learner performance and identify learner's development potential.

In sum, sociocultural theories are based on socio-constructivism, which is represented as a theory of learning and teaching. In the following section, I present the second cornerstone of the theoretical framework for my study, 'Constructive Alignment,' an outcomes-based teaching and learning (OBTL) model, emphasizing that learners construct their knowledge through their own activities.

Constructive Alignment

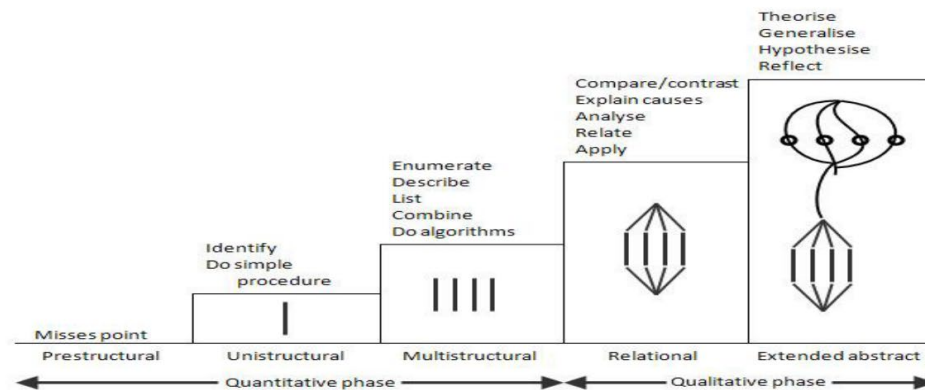
Constructive alignment, proposed by Biggs (1996), is a framework for designing effective teaching at the tertiary level. Initially, it came from a 1994 experiment in which Biggs employed portfolio assessment for his students, who were in-service teachers in a Bachelor of Education program, in the course *The Nature of Teaching and Learning* (Biggs & Tang, 2007). The experiment with portfolio assessment worked so well that Biggs wanted to discover the reasons for this phenomenon. He realized that "it was because the learning addressed in the intended outcomes were mirrored both in the teaching/ learning activities the students undertook and in the assessment tasks" (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 52). He called it *constructive alignment*.

Constructive Alignment was based on two principles: constructivist learning theory and instructional design (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011). The term *constructivist* derives from the constructivist learning theory. It indicates that knowledge is constructed through students' learning activities, not from what teachers deposit into students' minds. The concept of

alignment in this framework refers to an aligned system of teaching in which the teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with in most objectives of the course to help learners reach their goals (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In other words, teachers should design teaching/learning activities to help students achieve the learning expectations effectively rather than lecturing or providing knowledge to students (Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011). The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) refer to “statements, written from the student’s perspective, indicating the level of understanding and performance they are expected to achieve as a result of engaging in the teaching and learning experience” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 55). This term emphasizes what students can perform after instruction or the guidance of knowledgeable people. Teachers are consultants in helping students understand the standard of the outcome learning of a course or program. However, before assisting them to understand that standard, according to Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 72), making a statement about the course ILOs should be focused on:

1. deciding what kind of knowledge is to be involved.
2. selecting the topics to teach and deciding the level of understanding desirable for students to achieve and how it is to be displayed.

Kinds of knowledge involved in *knowing what* (declarative knowledge) and *knowing how* (functioning knowledge) and level of understanding are based on the SOLO taxonomy, the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome, which was proposed by Biggs and Collis (1982) and later developed by Biggs and Tang (2007). SOLO provides a description system of increasing levels of structural complexity in the understanding that students may obtain through the course. They are pre-structural, uni-structural, multi-structural, relational and extended abstract, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1*A Hierarchy of Verbs to Form Intended Learning Outcomes*

Source: Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 79)

The verbs in this taxonomy, from the quantitative phase (e.g., identifying, producing, describing, listing, etc.) to the qualitative phase (e.g., explaining, analyzing, applying, theorizing, reflecting, etc.), help teachers and learners to have an appropriate selection for their teaching and learning activities. It can be seen that SOLO is different from Bloom's taxonomy. In Bloom's taxonomy, the six levels of cognitions, from low order to high order levels, are: 1) remembering, 2) understanding, 3) applying, 4) analyzing, 5) evaluating, and 6) creating (Arievitch, 2020). In SOLO, verbs such as "understanding" or "comprehending" do not exist. According to Biggs and Tang (2007), these verbs are unclear for students to meet the goal and do not help define ILOs. Instead, another set of hierarchical verbs, such as "identifying," "discussing," or "explaining," is used to indicate three different SOLO levels: uni-structural, multi-structural, and relational. Biggs and Tang (2007) explained that though Bloom's taxonomy suggested a list of verbs that help for learning activities, it "was not based on research on student learning itself as is SOLO, but on the judgments of educational administrators, neither hierarchical, as is SOLO" (p. 80). The verbs in SOLO encourage students to achieve the levels of understanding indicated in the intended learning outcomes.

The second important element in Constructive Alignment is the teaching/learning activities (TLAs). Biggs and Tang (2007) also emphasized that the teaching/learning activities should focus more on the “deep learning” approach that indicates higher understanding, such as the relational and extended abstract levels in SOLO taxonomy. To reach a “deep learning approach,” Biggs and Tang (2007) suggested that formative assessment should be encouraged in a program/course as “self and peer-assessment are particularly helpful TLAs for training students to reflect on the quality of their own work” (p. 164). In other words, the teaching/learning activities (TLAs) should focus more on students’ application, creativity, problem-solving, and lifelong learning rather than the teacher-directed TLAs. The TLAs design is based on a higher level of understanding that helps students reach their learning outcomes and prepares them to enter the professional world (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

The last component in this framework, a selection of assessment tasks (ATs), would be done based on the ILOs. Biggs (1996) pointed out that “in deciding the assessment tasks, it is necessary to judge the extent to which they embody the target performances of understanding, and how well they lend themselves to evaluating individual student performances” (p. 356). This means that assessment tasks, depending on the learning outcomes, would be assessed, from reproducing the factual knowledge to high levels of cognition—analysis, application, and evaluation (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). In other words, the same verbs specified in ILOs would be addressed in this phase.

It is noted that constructive alignment is different from other outcomes-based approaches, such as the competency-based approach (Biggs & Tang, 2007). While the three components in the former are intrinsically aligned, the latter focuses on the alignment between the ILOs and ATs. With the alignment of three issues in Constructive Alignment (CA), the backwash of

assessment is no longer seen negatively as both TLAs and ATs may be intertwined to direct toward ILOs (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

How students apply their efforts to their learning depends on how they will be assessed. In particular, their choice of learning approaches (the surface or deep learning approaches) depends much on the appropriate assessment tasks provided (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). For example, students may adopt a “deep learning approach” when they receive performance assessment tasks representing authentic knowledge of real life. In contrast, a “surface learning approach” such as memorization or rote learning would be adopted when perceiving a job that requires them to reproduce factual knowledge. Therefore, “assessment practices must send the right signals to students about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 163). Formative assessment is considered an essential practice related to Biggs’ (1996) notion of constructive alignment. It will now be elaborated on in the next section.

Formative Assessment

The concept of formative assessment can be traced back to the distinction between formative assessment and summative assessment by Michael Scriven in 1967, Bloom’s (1971) work on the evaluation of student learning, and Sadler’s (1989) theory of assessment (cited in Taras, 2007; Yorke, 2003). The summative assessment was defined as a type of assessment carried out at the end of a unit or program to see how well students achieved what they have learnt, thereby making decisions about their future possibilities (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2003; Black et al., 2004; James, 2006, 2017; James & Lewis, 2012; Mumm et al., 2016; Taras, 2005, 2007). However, since summative assessment aims to judge students’ achievement, it has been blamed for many shortcomings. Boud (2000) reported that “summative assessment acts as a device to inhibit many features of a learning society” (p. 155) as it provides activities controlled

by teachers, assessors, and organizations to those who are students and novice employees. He contended that it limits the learner's independent learning capacity and ability to control their learning progress. Logically, summative and formative assessments complement each other to make a continuous process (Taras, 2007). However, "if assessments were designed only for summative purposes, then formative information could not be obtained, since the summative assessments occur at the end of a phase of learning and make no attempt at throwing light on the educational history of the pupil" (Black & Wiliam, 1996, p. 544 as cited in Taras, 2007).

Recently, there has been an increasing concern about formative assessment because of its benefit in improving student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Taras, 2007; Yorke, 2003; Shepard, 2000, 2005).

Formative assessment has begun to take an important place in the education climate since the meta-analysis work of Black and Wiliam in 1998. It inspired the reform of assessment in the United Kingdom and many countries and has significantly influenced assessment in schools and higher education. Adopting a sociocultural perspective on student learning and assessment, Black and Wiliam (1998, 2003, 2004, 2009) emphasized the role of students in negotiating learning intentions with teachers, engaging in collaborative learning, and enhancing their self-directed learning. Drawing on the ideas of Zessoules and Gardner (1991), Black and Wiliam stated that such kind of assessment "is to be seen as a moment of learning, and students have to be active in their own assessment and to picture their learning in the light of an understanding of what it means to get better" (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 30). In 2009, based on the definitions in earlier work, Black and William redefined formative assessment concerning the pedagogical process and dynamic assessment:

Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (p. 9).

In this definition, Black and William used the term “instruction” instead of “teaching” to emphasize the link between teaching and learning activities. According to them, “instruction refers to any activity that is intended to create learning” (Black & William, 2009, p. 10). In this way, different assessment agents (teacher, learner, individual learner) are involved in the assessment process, and the student-teacher and student-student interactions in terms of levels of feedback are emphasized. Thus, formative assessment is highly embedded in instruction, and the student’s achievement is determined by not only teachers but also peers and the individual learner. Another vital feature in this definition is the action leading to instructional adjustments. These authors emphasized that the evidence gathered in the assessment process should be used to modify teaching and improve student learning.

Black and William (2009) located formative assessment within broader teaching pedagogy theories. They noted that assessment should be a cycle of three stages: establishing where students are now in their learning, establishing where they are aiming to go, and establishing what teachers do to help them get there. They also developed five strategies for implementing formative assessment in the classroom setting (Black & William, 2009, p. 8):

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success.

2. Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding.
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward.
4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another.
5. Activating students as the owners of their learning.

Black and Wiliam (2009) provided a framework to implement formative assessment in the classroom with broader headings in this work (Figure 2). They replaced the five activities identified in earlier work (i.e., sharing success criteria with learners, classroom questioning, comment-only marking, peer- and self-assessment and formative use of summative tests). They explained that these five activities are tools to enact the five strategies.

Figure 2

Aspects of Formative Assessment (Source: Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8)

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
Teacher	1 Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success	2 Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding	3 Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer	Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	4 Activating students as instructional resources for one another	
Learner	Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	5 Activating students as the owners of their own learning	

In this framework, the authors emphasized the three processes and the four themes related to pedagogy theories through five strategies: teachers, students, and the subject matter; the teacher's role and the regulation of learning; the student-teacher interaction and feedback; and the student's role in their learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). They particularly emphasized the

student's role as, according to them, the learner plays a central role in their learning process, such as collaborative and self-directed learning. Another important aspect of this framework is providing feedback that helps students move forward. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), feedback is the central feature of formative assessment and the heart of effective teaching and learning. Many scholars (for example, Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007; James, 2006, 2017; James & Lewis, 2012; Mumm et al., 2016) agreed with Black and Wiliam in using feedback loops and activating students as another resource and for themselves to initiate formative assessment, ensuring effective teaching and learning. In this sense, feedback is information that students receive from their teachers, peers, and themselves in the reflective learning process.

It is noticed that although giving feedback is vital in the instructional process, not all feedback is valuable and practical to students' learning (Ketabi & Ketabi, 2014; Mumm et al., 2016; Voerman et al., 2012). Black et al. (2003) stated that meaningful feedback is embedded with learning objectives guiding students' future work, providing metacognitive skills to help students track their progress and encouraging students to improve their learning. In the same vein, Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) claimed that feedback would benefit students when developing learners' capacity to self-direct their learning, especially in higher education. They supposed that feedback should aim to enhance *internal feedback* (i.e., students' metacognition skills) to set up their goals, manage and monitor their learning process or recognize the *external feedback* from teachers and peers concerning their learning intentions. They provided seven principles of good feedback to empower students as self-directed learners. According to Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006), effective feedback should have clear goals, such as 1) helping students understand learning expectations; 2) providing students with reflection; 3) delivering

high-quality teaching and learning activities; 4) encouraging teacher and peer interaction; 5) enhancing positive motivation and self-esteem; 6) providing scaffolding, and 7) leading to instructional adjustment. In addition, effective feedback needs to be targeted, specific, timely, and supportive to improve students' future performance (Allman, 2019; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Taras, 2007).

In the study summarising the effect sizes from 12 meta-analyses assessing the influences of feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) pointed out that effective feedback is related to task performance and strategies to do a task. In contrast, feedback such as compliments, rewards, and punishment received smaller effect sizes for enhancing achievement. Drawing on Deci et al. (1999)'s work, they emphasized that these extrinsic awards provided little information and could not be considered effective feedback for student learning. They claimed that effective feedback should aim to “reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86) and help students to answer the three questions: *Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?* They proposed a framework of effective feedback for enhancing student learning: task-information feedback (how well a task is performed), task processing feedback (the processes underlying tasks), self-regulation feedback (self-monitoring of task performance), and feedback about the self as a person (learner's attributes). Similarly, Voerman et al. (2012) defined good feedback as “information provided by the teacher concerning the performance or understanding of the student, with reference to a goal and aimed at improving learning” (p. 1108); therefore, they proposed progress and discrepancy feedback to enhance student learning. According to them, progress feedback informs students about what they have already achieved, and discrepancy feedback refers to what they have not achieved yet. These authors also indicated the positive and negative feedback ratio to enhance effective

teaching. They claimed that negative feedback might positively affect student learning if used properly. They suggested a positive and negative ratio higher than 3:1 but not exceeding 11:1 to enhance student learning.

The Study of Formative Assessment in Post-Secondary ESL/ EFL Contexts

As indicated earlier in the literature review, theoretical and empirical research on formative assessment has been conducted mainly in K-12. Recently, there has been a concern about self-directed learning approaches, teacher-student communication, students' perceptions of assessment and feedback, and classroom-based assessment in ESL/ EFL programs at the tertiary level. These approaches harmonize with the alternative assessment practice, such as *dynamic assessment* (Poeh & Lantof, 2008) and *formative assessment* (Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007).

Cheng et al. (2004) researched classroom-based assessment methods of 267 ESL/EFL teachers in three universities in Canada, Hong Kong, and China. They used survey questionnaires to explore instructors' purposes, methods, and procedures. The findings showed no significant differences in providing feedback across the three regions. However, the instruction in the three settings was marked differently, leading to the complexity and multifaceted roles in the three situations. The differences in assessment practices were not only due to contextual factors such as culture, teaching experiences, and curriculum but also were "related to beliefs and attitudes held by the EFL/ESL instructors in the three settings (Cheng et al., 2004, p. 380).

Troudi et al. (2004) conducted a qualitative study on EFL instructors' views of language assessment in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The study examined 21 EFL teachers' perceptions of their assessment philosophies and roles of assessment using open-ended questionnaires. These authors found that teachers' knowledge of language teaching and learning

and the contextual and socio-political features informed their perceptions about assessment. They also indicated that instructors did not have a vital role in assessment because of the school policy and “concern for validity and quality assurance in large programmes” (Troudi et al., 2004, p. 546).

In another study, Wei (2010) conducted action research in college English classrooms in China using interviews, questionnaires, scripts of portfolios, and final reflections. The report revealed that formative assessment played a vital role in enhancing students’ motivation and self-regulation and improving instruction. However, this research did not provide specific strategies for implementing formative assessment in the classroom.

Varier (2015) investigated formative assessment practices in a postsecondary English language program in the USA. She employed a mixed method design with teacher interviews and classroom observations to explore the contextual factors and the ESL teachers’ techniques in their classrooms. She also used survey questionnaires to investigate the relationship between students’ metacognitive methods and their performance concerning formative assessment. Varier outlined in her findings that ESL instructors employed various formative assessment techniques, and their successful implementation was impacted by their pedagogy and student attributions such as student motivation, language learning, and attendance. She also pointed out a complicated relationship between student use of metacognitive judgments of learning and performance regarding formative assessment.

In terms of the Vietnamese context, little research was conducted on formative assessment in the EFL program at the tertiary level. Recently, Tran (2015) conducted a study to explore classroom-based assessment in EFL classes at two universities in Vietnam. This research employed qualitative case studies with interviews and class observations with six teachers, two

Executive Officers, and 36 students. She also used documentation, such as students' assignments, curriculum documents and test papers, to reveal how assessment can support EFL learning and determine factors impeding formative assessment implementation in the classroom. Findings indicated that assessment in the two universities was still dominated by summative assessment with high standardized testing. These were influenced by contextual factors, such as teachers' lack of high use of assessment knowledge, testing culture, face-saving culture, and teaching experiences.

Another study about formative assessment in EFL programs in Vietnamese higher education was conducted by Hoai (2021). He investigated the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students by employing a mixed-method design, implementing group oral presentations (GOPs) as a form of formative assessment techniques in classrooms. Hoai's findings showed that teachers had different views on using GOPs to enhance students' speaking abilities. Some advocated utilizing this kind of formative activity as they believed it benefited student learning. In contrast, the others indicated that employing this method made low-achieving students feel unconfident and struggle with speaking in front of the class. The findings also revealed students' positive attitudes towards collaborating with their peers and the teaching method. Hoai concluded that although formative assessment is new and challenging to implement, it is a helpful tool for students to enhance their language proficiency.

In short, formative assessment has emerged as an essential part of instructional practice to scaffold learners' knowledge, offer them opportunities to self-regulate their learning and encourage them to expand their knowledge (James & Lewis, 2012). Formative assessment is also the exemplification of Biggs' (1996) notion of constructive alignment. However, implementing formative assessment will take a long time, requiring teachers' efforts and support from

administrators (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Black and Wiliam (1998) also indicated that in order to implement formative assessment practices, there should be a need to profoundly change teachers' perceptions of their roles regarding their instructional practices. Giving special attention to teachers' beliefs about teaching and assessment should be the starting point of any educational reforms, as evidence shows that the beliefs about teaching, student learning, and assessment strongly impact the way they teach and what students learn (Barnes et al., 2017; Borg, 2003; Brown, 2003, 2011; Harris & Brown, 2009; Opre, 2015). Investigating teachers' beliefs on teaching, student learning, and assessment offers an insightful picture of teachers' classroom practices, thereby exploring the relationship between those beliefs and the learning outcomes of students (Opre, 2015). I now turn to the literature on teachers' beliefs and a summary of the study on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices regarding assessment.

Teacher's Beliefs and the Study of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Assessment

Teachers' Beliefs

Given that some scholars, such as Lewis (1990), stated that knowledge and belief are synonyms, others have made clear distinctions between the two constructs. According to Pajares (1992), knowledge is the "truth" or fact, while beliefs are faiths and judgements. Pajares assumed that two teachers with similar knowledge, but different teaching and learning beliefs, might lead to different teaching methods. *Beliefs*, according to Pajares, are terms that:

travel[s] in disguise and often under alias—attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives,

repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature (p. 309).

Meanwhile, Brown (2004) stated that “beliefs are the meanings connected to psychological objects or phenomena and are an environmentally contingent and culturally defined lens through which sense is made of events, people and interactions.” Basturkmen et al. (2004) defined the term *teacher beliefs* as the “statements teachers make about their ideas, thoughts and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what “should be done,” “should be the case” and “is preferable” (p. 244). Similarly, Borg (2003), based on the ideas from Wood’s work (1996), defined this term by using more comprising terminology *teacher’s cognition*, which refers to teachers’ knowledge, thoughts, actions and beliefs. From these definitions, the terms “belief,” “cognition,” “perception,” “conceptions,” or “awareness” are interchangeable and play an essential role in instructional practice (Basturkmen et al., 2004). Richards et al. (2001) indicated that beliefs are the process that helps to reveal the way teachers conceptualize their professional tasks, while Borg (2003) reported that beliefs “guide” teachers’ thoughts and behaviours. However, beliefs do not always coincide with practices. Phipps and Borg (2009) stated that sometimes there had been an incongruence between teachers’ beliefs and what they do in the classroom. The divergences between teachers’ beliefs and practices occur because of contextual factors such as curriculum, high-stakes examinations, time constraints, and personal factors such as teaching approach or inconsistent set of beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

In the context of assessment, teachers’ beliefs about assessment are pivotal as they shape the way teachers implement assessment tools and activities in the classrooms (Brown, 2003, 2011; Harris & Brown, 2009). An appropriately aligned assessment will send a clear signal for

students in terms of setting their goals, time, and efforts for their learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007).

The Study of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Assessment

To date, there has been a large body of general educational literature about teachers' beliefs or perceptions of assessment and its relation to their practices (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Brown, 2003, 2004, 2011; Harris & Brown, 2009; Moiiinvaziri, 2015; Gerami et al., 2020). Regarding second language teaching and learning, recently, there has been increasing research examining teachers' beliefs toward assessment and its effects on their practice (Gerami & Noordin, 2013; Kim, 2014; Palacio, 2012; Önalán & Karagül, 2018; Rogers et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2020). Rogers and his colleagues (2007) researched assessment and evaluation using a survey questionnaire to investigate the beliefs of 95 ESL/EFL instructors in Canada, 44 in Hong Kong, and 124 in Beijing. The authors revealed that instructors having positive beliefs about assessment led to various assessment activities in their classes; those with negative perceptions were likely to have poor assessment procedures. In addition, they pointed out that more similarities than differences were revealed among the instructors in the three contexts and their perceptions about assessment were similar and divergent at times. In another study, Muñoz et al. (2012) used interviews, surveys, and written reports to examine the teachers' beliefs about assessment, particularly the assessment systems used at a language center of a private university in Colombia. They found that there was a conflict between their beliefs and classroom practices, and therefore, they suggested there should have more guidance on formative assessment practices and create more chances for teachers for self-assessment. Önalán and Karagül (2018) investigated 70 Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions about the use of assessment in teaching English and how these beliefs relate to their instructional practices. The results from survey

questionnaires indicated that assessment for improvement received the most attention, with self-assessment procedures as the next focus for these teachers in the classrooms. Recently, Wang et al. (2020) revealed the congruence and incongruence between teachers' assessment beliefs and practices among university EFL teachers in their study. The research investigated teachers' beliefs and practices about classroom writing assessment in EFL contexts in China. The study surveyed 136 Chinese instructors and conducted ten interviews to examine the alignment and misalignment between teachers' assessment beliefs and practices. The result showed a degree of belief-practice congruence regarding assessment for learning; however, the belief-practice incongruence was also addressed. In addition, contextual factors at the micro-level, such as assessment training, teaching experiences, student attributes, and meso- and macro-level factors, such as school factors and assessment norms, were the constraints in implementing the assessment for learning.

In short, although there has been an increasing number of studies on teachers' beliefs about assessment, research on university teachers' views of assessment in general and formative assessment in Vietnam has been under-explored. Therefore, I conducted a thorough investigation among university EFL teachers in this regard.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

Methodologies employed in a study are not a matter of personal preference but the alignment among the components, such as research questions and the researcher's worldview. All research methodologies are underpinned by philosophical assumptions, which contain three elements: epistemology, ontology, and methodology. Therefore, the choice of a methodology should be approached from these philosophical stances (Duff, 2008). Hatch (2002) also stated that exploring philosophical assumptions to grasp worldview differences and their meaning for research is essential to the initial steps. Philosophical assumptions are like a compass that helps researchers find direction and avoid inconsistency in their research.

In the following section, I will present a brief overview of the general philosophical worldview – socio-constructivism paradigm before introducing the research approach and methods for collecting and analyzing data. Next, I will address the study's ethical considerations and trustworthiness before concluding the chapter with analysis strategies.

Philosophical Worldview

I have adopted qualitative research with a socio-constructivist worldview. Unlike the quantitative approach, which aims to explain causal linkages between variables and the real world, qualitative research emphasizes complex real-life and natural situations (Creswell, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Yin, 2003, 2018). This dichotomy comes from the philosophical assumptions of quantitative and qualitative inquiries, known as ontology, epistemology, and methodology. *Ontology* is defined as “the nature of reality, that is, whether reality is external to the individual (external) or the product of individual consciousness (internal-idealist, relativistic)” (Hopper et al., 2008, p. 216). *Epistemology*, on the other hand, is defined as

“assumptions made about the nature of knowledge, the claims we make about truth(s), and how we come to know (acquired or personally experienced)” (Hopper et al., 2008, p. 217). Regarding the ontological perspective, qualitative investigators hold a relativist stance. While quantitative researchers see that reality as objective and independent of people’s minds, qualitative investigators assume that reality is co-constructed by the inquirers and participants. They argue that a complex phenomenon must be understood within specific contexts, and such phenomena are influenced by the researcher, their interactions, and the contexts. For qualitative research, every phenomenon is embedded within the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural factors; hence, this phenomenon must be examined as complex “‘wholes’ that are inextricably bound up with the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded” (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 8).

Regarding epistemology, while quantitative investigators adopt a positivist stance, qualitative researchers propose a subjectivist and constructionist view. Qualitative researchers claim that truth is relative, and both the researcher and correspondents are responsible for co-creating knowledge. There is more than one reality for different individuals whose experiences are socially constructed in unique ways (Patton, 2002). In other words, the multiple realities are constructed by different participants’ experiences. The researcher attempts to see the world through the participants’ eyes, or more broadly, through the meaning-making processes of the participants. In addition, “the inquirer and the ‘object’ of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37, cited in Lodico et al., 2006). It means that knowledge is co-constructed by the inquirers and participants; therefore, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is inseparable. In doing that, “we enter the phenomenon to discover what is significant from the viewpoints and actions of people who

experience it in relation to time, place, context and situation – and people” (Charmaz, 2004, p. 14, cited in Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Since ontology and epistemology determine data collection methods, qualitative researchers employ a set of multiple data collection tools to have an insightful description of a phenomenon, such as in-depth interviews or unstructured interviews, participation observations, and documentation. Due to philosophical differences, quantitative and qualitative researchers have different ways of developing research designs. The following section will present the research approach and design using a qualitative and ethnographic approach, which aligns most closely with the constructionist paradigm.

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative Case Study Research. A case study is a mode of inquiry that enables the researcher to explore a real-life phenomenon within a specific context with limited participants and a narrow geographical area. Drawing on the ideas of Stake (1995) and Yin (2009, 2012), Creswell (2014) defined a case study as a design of inquiry “in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (p. 43). Yin (2018), a case study methodologist, also stated that “a case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundary between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15).

I employed a qualitative case study methodology and multiple sources of evidence for my research to understand multiple realities under the “truth” in a natural context – classrooms (Ma, 2015). The rationale for choosing this methodology was because of the nature of the cases and

the research questions (Luck et al., 2006; Johnson, 1992; Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2003, 2018), depending on the purpose of the research, we can define case study research into three types, with each type linking to specific research questions, such as (a) exploratory (to formulate new research questions); (b) descriptive (answering “What?” questions); and (c) and explanatory (answering “How?” or “Why?” questions). From Yin’s suggestions, the holistic multiple case studies were well-suited for my research, as they suited my research questions and research objectives. This approach aimed to investigate and explain how four English as a foreign language (EFL) university instructors perceived ‘formative assessment’ and how that assessment was implemented, thereby seeking the reality and understanding of the lives of participants. Moreover, this methodology enabled me to make use of the strength of the case study and qualitative approach. I employed a variety of data collection tools for my research, such as participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation (curricula, lesson plans, materials, and course outlines). I observed the cases as an insider participant, employed semi-structured interviews, analyzed documents, and wrote field notes during my research. It permitted me to explore EFL teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, thereby giving me valuable insights into EFL teaching and assessment context at the tertiary level. For instance, through the stories collected in interviews, participants could express their points of view of reality, enabling me to understand the phenomenon that happened in the classroom (Duff, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Johnson, 1992). These multiple sources of evidence also allowed me to triangulate the data, helping me better understand the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2003, 2018). In addition, I actively considered other features, such as cultural and historical characteristics affecting the instructional and assessment practices.

As my focus was on the cases' particularities, though case studies are not generalizable, they offer insights transferable to other similar contexts.

The Ethnographic Approach. Ethnography has its roots in the social anthropology of the early twentieth century and is often characterized as a form of realist tale; recently, it has been employed widely in education. Ethnography is a traditional form of qualitative research that seeks to understand behaviours and perceptions as well as social interactions within communities, institutions, organizations, groups, or teams. Therefore, the main goal of ethnography is to provide thick descriptions of social actions within the setting and location the people inhabit through a range of research methods (Creswell, 2014; Creswell et al., 2007; Hatch, 2002; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The ethnographer typically spends an extended amount of time in the fieldwork as a participant-observer, balancing the process of data collection between objective, subjective and reflexive insights (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hatch, 2002). Adapting the characteristics of ethnography, Pole and Morrison (2003) indicated that doing educational ethnography has “a primary objective to collect data that conveys the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit ‘educational’ locations and for various purposes” (p. 17). According to them, using ethnography for education enables the researcher to deeply understand what is going on in the educational context, such as teachers' careers, students' motivation, and school effectiveness, thereby helping the researcher interpret behaviours, meanings, situations, and events. In the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), Richards (2003) indicated that this approach is relevant to investigating a group of language teachers in an institution over a term or academic year to understand the phenomenon (e.g., learning engagement, formative assessment) happening in that institution and the relationship between the teachers and students.

Therefore, recognition of educational ethnography enabled me to gain a holistic view of the research informants. For example, spending a prolonged time in the field allowed me to establish a close relationship with research informants in a natural setting, thereby gaining a holistic perspective regarding their beliefs and behaviours about formative assessment. Besides, ethnography allowed me to employ a variety of data collection methods. With the various data sources, such as participant observation, interviews, and field notes, the ethnographic approach provided me with a ‘rich description’ of teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks employed in the classroom.

Confessional Tales. As a case study is a form of realist tale where the researcher represents the qualitative research data as an author evacuated text, the researcher’s voice seemed vague in the current study. Hence, I employed the confessional tale to present the research data besides the realist tale often promoted in case studies using an ethnographic stance. Since it is based on a sociocultural perspective, it is complementary to the realist genre by offering the researcher’s insights on the research process and their particular assumptions and opinions about the topic (Hopper et al., 2008; Kisfalvi, 2006). A confessional tale “draws on personal experience with the explicit intention of exploring methodological and ethical issues as encountered in the research process” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 59). Therefore, specific issues are revealed, mainly issues related to ethics, voices, and other problems faced while conducting the research, such as mistakes, confusion, vulnerabilities, and responsibility. From an ontological perspective, the confessional tale, which is a form of data representation, serves the reflexivity of the researcher, “in which researchers become aware of and critically self-reflect on their personal, political, cultural, social and theoretical assumptions, norms, beliefs, identities, positioning, values, behaviours and attitudes, with a particular focus on how these may impact

the research process” (Whitley & Johnson, 2015, p. 625). In other words, this tool allows researchers to acknowledge factors, such as their beliefs, life experience, and backgrounds, influencing the research process and production (Fortune & Mair, 2011; Kisfalvi, 2006). As such, the informants’ voices along with the researcher’s voice, are elaborated in this genre. In terms of epistemology, the knowledge in this genre is highly subjective since each researcher has their views and different feelings and attitudes about the world. Therefore, this genre supplements the limitation of the realist tale, which does not reflect the research process, and provides rich data when seeking the answers to the research questions. In addition, confessional tales “can also serve as cautionary tales—words of advice from one researcher to another about the possible dilemmas and hazards to be aware of in certain types of fieldwork” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 286).

Concerning the researcher’s stance in this study, the confessional tale paired with the qualitative case study approach permitted me to raise my voice and gave me an active role in the research. It also equipped me with the reflexivity to keep track of factors impacting the setting and monitor my behaviours and emotions to understand what happened in the field (Hatch, 2002). In other words, the feature of the confessional tale helped me reveal the connection between the researcher and participants and critically examine my values, beliefs, and behaviours that might impact the research process. Confessional tales can be presented in separate texts, articles, and chapters or integrated throughout the research to provide the researcher’s critical self-reflection (Hopper et al., 2008; Van Maanen, 1988). Therefore, I decided to highlight my confessional reflections in separate texts, using italic font, after each participant’s interviews and observations to illustrate what impacted my research process and how the research shaped me. I

was also aware that revealing behind-the-scenes information was a carefully considered ethical issue.

Site and Sample

Research Site

This study took place at a multidisciplinary institution of higher education located in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. The institution is one of the most prominent universities in Vietnam, with over 40,000 students majoring in different disciplines such as economics, accountancy, information technology, chemical engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, tourism, and English linguistics.

There were two reasons for selecting this institution as a research site. First, according to Duff (2008), one consideration is “being familiar with the site and participants, having an ‘insider’ status or having an ally on the inside, being clear about the research objectives and procedures, not placing unreasonable demands on one’s research participants, and offering some form of reciprocity all help a great deal when negotiating access and permissions” (p. 126). As I had worked in this institution for fifteen years, I could gain entry to access the institution and receive the meaningful assistance of the institution’s rector, administrators, faculty members, and my colleagues. Also, based on my existing knowledge, I had a great understanding of the context. Secondly, this institution offered two English programs for both English major students and non-English major students. The former program is for students who learn English as an academic discipline and pursue a bachelor’s degree in this discipline. The latter is for those learning English for the Occupational Purposes (EOP) program, such as English for tourism, information technology, business, and engineering. As a result, I have collected rich data from the participants teaching in these programs. However, having ‘insider’ status involved potential

dangers or pitfalls, such as anonymity, confidentiality and dispositions of power (Hatch, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, I paid much attention to the issues related to role relationships, such as tensions arising from my dual roles as the researcher and former colleague, insider knowledge, and form of participation.

Participant Recruitment

According to Hatch (2002), planning for recruiting and forming working relationships with participants is an essential part of research design, as they contribute to the effectiveness of the research project. In this study, I used the ‘purposeful sampling’ strategy because it “focuses on selecting *information-rich* cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 273). Therefore, participants would have a deep understanding of the critical issues for this inquiry. The participant recruitment was based on their teaching backgrounds and experiences, so the in-depth, relevant, and valuable information they provided would help me understand the research situation. In this strategy, the ‘snowball sampling’ technique or ‘nominated sampling,’ suggested by Patton (2002), was used to select the participants. I began by meeting with a key informant, who then recommended other instructors who fit the research requirements and provided helpful information for the investigation. This chain recommendation led to an increase in the number of participants. The study also employed the ‘convenience sampling’ techniques because the field contacts unfolded, and the data was collected as they arose. When utilizing this method, I got the benefits of ‘insider’ research, such as accessing and obtaining informed consent from participants to observe their classrooms and conduct interviews, understanding the context fully, gaining insider knowledge, and having intimate relationships with colleagues. However, it also involved some challenges that I was mindful of,

such as neutrality, anonymity, transparency, and disparities of power (Hatch, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

My participant recruitment was open to all EFL instructors of any gender as long as their ages ranged from twenty-eight to forty years old with an MA degree in English studies or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). I excluded The Dean and Vice-Dean of the Faculty because they did not teach classes, making it difficult for me to carry out observations. Based on the criteria, the participants selected in my study were four female EFL instructors aged twenty-eight to thirty-four, working in two different divisions in the Faculty. No male instructors were involved in the study because they did not hold an MA degree, which was one of the participant recruitment criteria. I then chose two participants who taught English to non-English major students and another two who taught English-major students. My rationale for this selection was that teachers' beliefs might be affected by institutional factors such as curricula and learners (e.g., elementary, intermediate, advanced) in teachers' task decisions and pedagogical approaches (Borg, 2003). Four participants seemed best suited for my research because "if there is attrition among participants, several cases will likely remain, providing multiple examples of the phenomenon under investigation" (Duff, 2008, p. 124). Moreover, according to Duff, more participants involved in the study are not likely to provide a significantly rich description of a phenomenon, particularly regarding participants' perspectives.

Initial Contact and Set-up for Data Collection

Before collecting data, I contacted the Head of the institution and the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages to gain permission to conduct the investigation. This meant that upon gaining access, I could observe the phenomenon (classrooms), access documents related to the research, use the facility, and interview participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After being

granted entry and access, I recruited participants by using the ‘snowball’ technique. First, I used my private contact information to contact the first instructor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, who has a depth of experience in teaching and assessment, to ask for her permission to participate in the investigation. I sent her an email attaching a brief description of the purpose and importance of the research and the data collection process. This participant was then asked to refer other instructors who fit the research requirements and might be willing to contribute to the investigation. This chain recommendation helped me recruit enough participants for the research. Once identified, these participants received an invitation to participate in the research. I sent a consent form to them in the first meeting and before each round of interviews and observations. In order to protect their anonymity, the participants’ names were pseudonyms, such as Ha, Mai, Ly, and Minh.

Data Collection

As Pajares (1992) indicated, “beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do” (p. 314). Therefore, I employed the following instruments to collect data: 1) Semi-structured interviews, 2) Digital audio-recorded classroom observations, 3) Documentation, and 4) Fieldnotes.

Sparkes and Smith (2014) describe the interview as a journey in which “the interviewer as a traveller, wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people she or he encounters, asking questions as they travel together, and inviting them to tell tales about their lives along the way” (p. 83). For this reason, I used semi-structured interviews, a set of pre-planned open-ended questions to guide the talk between the interviewer and interviewees and help the informants feel flexible in expressing their ideas, attitudes, knowledge, and experience.

In addition, these interviews were employed as they helped to delve into teachers' beliefs (Birello, 2012), the focus of this research.

Before conducting the research, the interview questions were piloted to gauge their effectiveness. I conducted the pilot interview with a colleague who did not participate in the study. She was an English teacher with rich knowledge and experience in English teaching and assessment, so she provided valuable ideas for the semi-structured interview questions. Each participant was interviewed three times during the Fall semester of 2019. The interview was one-on-one to develop the teacher's trust, which was essential to the quality of the findings. Moreover, one-on-one interviews helped participants feel more secure and comfortable for the observation afterward. The first interview (about 45 minutes) was conducted at the beginning of the term to grasp instructors' views of teaching, assessment in general, and formative assessment. Then the second round of interviews about their typical teaching was conducted before observing them the second time. The last interview was conducted before observing them the third time to add more information or clarify some points (see Appendix A). This procedure was applied to all participants. In total, I had 12 interviews with four participants; these were audio-recorded, and I used pseudonyms for the participants (e.g., Ha, Mai, Ly, and Minh). During interviews, I took notes to capture what emerged, such as the physical setting and evidence of participants' feelings and emotions, which are difficult to record (Jones, 2018; Osterman, 2014). Also, I communicated with participants in an open and friendly manner to help reduce their anxiety when being interviewed, thereby reducing interviewing problems. Participants had a choice of speaking in English or Vietnamese during interviews as their preference. Three participants spoke in English to me, and one participant chose Vietnamese.

In qualitative inquiry, observations tend to be tempered with interviews “to ascertain selected participants’ perspectives on their actions or behaviours” (Duff, 2008, p. 141). Strengths of observation are that the researcher would have a better understanding of the contexts in which the situation happens and the chance to witness unexpected things happening in the setting, thereby making “a careful record of what people say and do, and to make sense of how the participants make sense within that setting” (Hatch, 2002, p. 73). Regarding the investigation of teachers’ beliefs, it is a valuable method for understanding teachers’ beliefs on classroom assessment activities (Birello, 2012). My role in this investigation was as a participant-observer to gain an “emic” view (insider view). I also established membership in the classroom by attending the lesson and interacting with students and teachers. However, I did not participate in classroom activities to easily observe the teacher-student-student interactions. There were 12 observations for 4 participants conducted for 15 weeks, meaning that each participant was observed during three lessons throughout the term. Each week, two teachers’ classrooms were observed, and each observation was implemented after the interview one week. The main reason for timing and repeating observations was that I wanted to gather longitudinal data for my research, giving me a fuller picture of teachers’ instructional and assessment activities and helping me better understand teachers’ viewpoints and actions in the classroom.

Besides interviews and observations, I collected documents, such as curriculum documents, course outlines, lesson plans, materials, and students’ writing papers, as additional support to understand the context of the research and classrooms. I also used field notes as supplementary data to take note of exciting insights, things catching my attention, or other issues that may have arisen during the observations and interviews (Duff, 2008; Richards, 2003). Below, in table 1, is the observation and interview schedule.

Table 1*Observation and Interview Schedule*

Participants (pseudonyms)	Date	Interview (week#)	Observation (week#)
Ha	September - November (2019)	#2	#3
		#5	#6
		#8	#9
Mai	September - November (2019)	#2	#3
		# 5	#6
		#8	#9
Ly	September - November (2019)	#3	#4
		#6	#7
		#9	#10
Minh	September - November (2019)	#3	#4
		#6	#7
		#9	#10

Ethical Considerations

My study adhered to the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board guidelines. I got the ethics certificate approval by June 2019, three months before I collected the data. The documents included in this approval were an informed letter of consent, participant invitation letter, participant consent form, access to and use of student’s work, and interview guidelines (see Appendices). However, gaining the ethics certificate is merely the entry point as we may encounter many dilemmas or ‘ethics of practice, or situational ethics’ (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 212) when conducting the investigation. Therefore, I contemplated research procedures and was mindful of the challenges that could happen during the research.

Hatch (2002) noted that teachers “can be subtly coerced into participating in studies about which they have reservations” once their principals or deans agree with the invitation for educational research. Therefore, to avoid the power relation (e.g., manager-employee), I used my private contact information to contact one of the instructors after being granted entry and access to the research site. I sent her an email attaching a brief description of the purpose and

importance of the research and the data collection process. This participant was then requested to refer other instructors who fit the research requirements and might be willing to participate in the study. Once I had the number of participants I expected, I met with them to explain the research's objectives, confidentiality, and their rights as participants. Then I sent them the informed consent if they agreed to sign. I emphasized the right of participants to withdraw at any point during the investigation, and their names and schools were pseudonymized to protect their identities. The informed consent was negotiated and established as an ongoing process throughout the study to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality. All instructors willingly signed the consent form before each round of interviews and observations. My ethics application was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Board annually to ensure the progress on goals or any changes that may arise while conducting the research. The collected information was secured, stored, and accessed only by myself and my supervisor.

When I decided to conduct the research at my own institution, I wanted to get much more from the findings to inform and benefit current and future instructors and students in our program and have a broader impact on other similar contexts. The 'insider' research brought me some definite benefits (e.g. understanding the context, insider knowledge, intimate relationships with colleagues) but also involved some dangers or pitfalls (e.g. neutrality, anonymity, transparency, disparities of power). I followed suggestions by Creswell (2014), Hatch (2002), and Sparkes and Smith (2014) about ethics, power, representation, voice, and interpretation to think through the numerous issues related to insider research. I thoughtfully considered those issues during the investigation to balance the 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives as well as the anonymity and transparency. For example, I carefully considered the quotation that could lead to participants being identified, such as ethnicity, family members, co-workers, or remarkable

achievements. In addition, I took advice from Tracy (2010) about situational ethics and exiting ethics revolving around the question, “are the harms of the research practices outweighed by its moral goals?” (p. 847). I took care of how best I could present the research’s findings so as to protect the participants’ identities and avoid unintended consequences. For example, I often interrogated myself in my writing as a constructionist of the narratives with participants and anticipated how the readers, educators, and policymakers would receive and might misread the data (Fine et al., 2000, as cited in Tracy, 2010). The self-interrogation and critical self-reflection on the procedure of collecting and analyzing data offered me critical insights, highlighting the contradictions in participants’ thoughts and actions but not finding fault with these respondents.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is considered the criterion for judging the quality of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2018). They endorsed the criteria: dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability for evaluating qualitative research instead of conventional measures: reliability, validity, objectivity, and generalisability issues. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 242), as cited in Sparkes and Smith (2014), explained that ‘dependability is parallel to the conventional criterion of reliability, in that it is concerned with the stability of the data over time.’ According to them, the qualitative inquirer should convince the reader that the investigation process is appropriately documented, traceable, and logical. They also suggested a parallel notion of validity as credibility in qualitative research, which focuses on the match between the truths constructed by respondents or stakeholders and the realities represented by the researcher or evaluator. To achieve the criterion of credibility, researchers should consider the methods and strategies employed when conducting the research, such as prolonged engagement,

persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The objectivity criterion in science is related to neutrality, which is parallel with the criterion of ‘confirmability’ in qualitative research. It means that the data, interpretations, and findings are rooted in the contexts and by the data themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In other words, the results of the study should not be “the outcome of the biases and ‘rampant’ subjectivity of researchers or are simply based on figments of their imagination” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 181). These authors suggest the method of achieving the criterion of confirmability is using reflexivity, where the researcher can reflect on their research process, acknowledge bias, identify their perspectives as an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider,’ and anticipate how these views may affect their research procedure and findings. The last criterion to judge the quality of qualitative research is transferability, which is parallel to the notion of generalization. In qualitative research, the results cannot be generalized from cases to the population as its goal is to expand and generalize theories (Yin, 2018). In other words, the reader examines a study’s results and makes a judgment about whether to generalize this knowledge to different situations depending on their concerns without relying on statistical evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Within this research, I attempted to achieve trustworthiness by addressing the criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability. I provided readers with a detailed description of the setting, participant accounts, the research procedure, and my reflections on the study. Before collecting data, interview questions were verified with my supervisor to ensure their relevance to the research’s needs. I piloted these interview questions with my colleague, who did not participate in the study, to ensure the clarity of the questions. I triangulated various method instruments and analyzed the data with my reflexive self-awareness to certify the

validation procedures for data analysis. For example, besides the primary research tools, interviews and observations, I used journal notes to supplement data and remind me about special events or capture my feelings, thereby reducing my bias. Simultaneously, I tried to balance my insider and outsider views and acknowledged the challenges and tensions that could arise while collecting data. To illustrate, my insider view (emic) included my experiences as an EFL teacher and the voices of EFL instructors, as well as a detailed picture of their understandings and beliefs of teaching and assessment. My outsider view (etic) as a researcher helped me step back to see how those understandings and perceptions look within the larger context of second-language teaching and learning. Also, to help me reflect on my research process, I employed confessional tales in which I could acknowledge bias and recognize how I was confused about a dual role when communicating with participants. These methods were worthy of achieving the qualitative research's credibility, confirmability, and transferability. The section below elaborates more on the last criterion, dependability, to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis

In this section, I first introduce the interview data analysis process with transcribing, coding, and analysis, then present the observation data analysis process.

Interview Data Analysis Process

I started the analytical work by transcribing and translating the data. Totally, I had nine interviews in English and three interviews in Vietnamese. I used the YouTube caption feature to generate text data for nine semi-structured interviews and translated three interviews from Vietnamese to English. The reasons were that three participants communicated with me in English, and one spoke in Vietnamese during interviews. Next, I used the Window video

creation application to transform the mp3 audio files into mp4 videos since YouTube does not allow mp3 audio files. Then, I uploaded them on my private YouTube channel with subtitles and captions since the transcript text was automatically synchronized to videos. This ensured the quality of interview data, made it more valid, and saved my time. I then copied the transcript into a Word file and edited redundant words for data analysis. For the three interviews in Vietnamese, I could not use YouTube as Vietnamese was not allowed to generate automatic captions. I decided to translate these interviews as I am proficient in English and Vietnamese. In order to ensure reliability, I employed a professional translator who was good at English and Vietnamese to translate the three English versions back into Vietnamese. The only difference between their translating version and mine was the use of grammar structures to express ideas (e.g., compound and complex sentences); the two versions were similar regarding the content of the interviews. The transcripts were then uploaded to Google Docs with a password and shared with participants for checking and feedback.

In terms of coding, I drew on the ideas of Miles et al. (2014), using *First Cycle Coding* (initially summarizing segments of data) and *Second Cycle Coding* strategies (grouping those summaries into categories) for all the interviews. I decided to group the interviews by time (first, second, and last rounds) to better evaluate changes in each participant, from the first interviews to the last ones, and distinguish differences in the participants' opinions about the issues I investigated. Then, I started with the first set of interviews. The first interview aimed to get the participants' views on student learning and assessment as well as the teacher's role in assessing students' work. It also aimed to get background information on the current assessment used in their teaching and assessment methods they used in their classes. The follow-up interviews aimed to capture participants' philosophy on student learning and assessment, the assessment

methods they implemented in their instructional practices, and their suggestions for improving assessment and supporting student learning (see Appendix B).

I chose *Qualyzer*, an electronic software developed by McGill University (Canada), to help me code, sort, and analyze because of its advantages, such as data organization and management. *Qualyzer* proved to be a valuable means to display coding structures in a hierarchical model. In the *First Cycle Coding* stage, I used an inductive approach to see the codes occur, which were reevaluated after the second read-through. I chose one first-set interview that I thought could give me rich information to code. I read the whole data set carefully to have a sense of familiarity with the data. I used holistic coding to get general ideas and capture some possible categories to develop. Then, I used *Descriptive coding* (descriptive nouns) for the entire data after carefully reading it line by line. After the initial general coding, I reread the chunks to check the codes' meaning and clarification. Some codes did not work with the data segment, and then I went back to the theoretical framework and research questions to review the labels used and analyze what participants said. Sub-coding was generated during this time to make the codes more precise and detailed. Some codes were transformed from Descriptive codes (descriptive nouns) into Process codes (action-oriented).

At this stage, I also used the deductive approach based on the relevant literature and theoretical framework to develop a list of codes. For example, classroom assessment practice-related codes were developed from the formative assessment theory's framework. The feedback codes were developed from the literature on providing constructive feedback to students, such as the nature of feedback and feedback types.

Plus, to better understand each participant's opinions, I jotted down some ideas that emerged in the data when coding. As Miles et al. (2014) suggested, this step would help the

researcher avoid treating themselves as a ‘machine scanner’ of the data and keep in mind the critical information during the interview coding time. I applied these strategies to three sets of interviews. After creating codes, the steps *Structure and Unity in Code Lists* were applied to revise, group, remove, and reconfigure codes. This step aimed to ensure the coherence and unity of the codes generated.

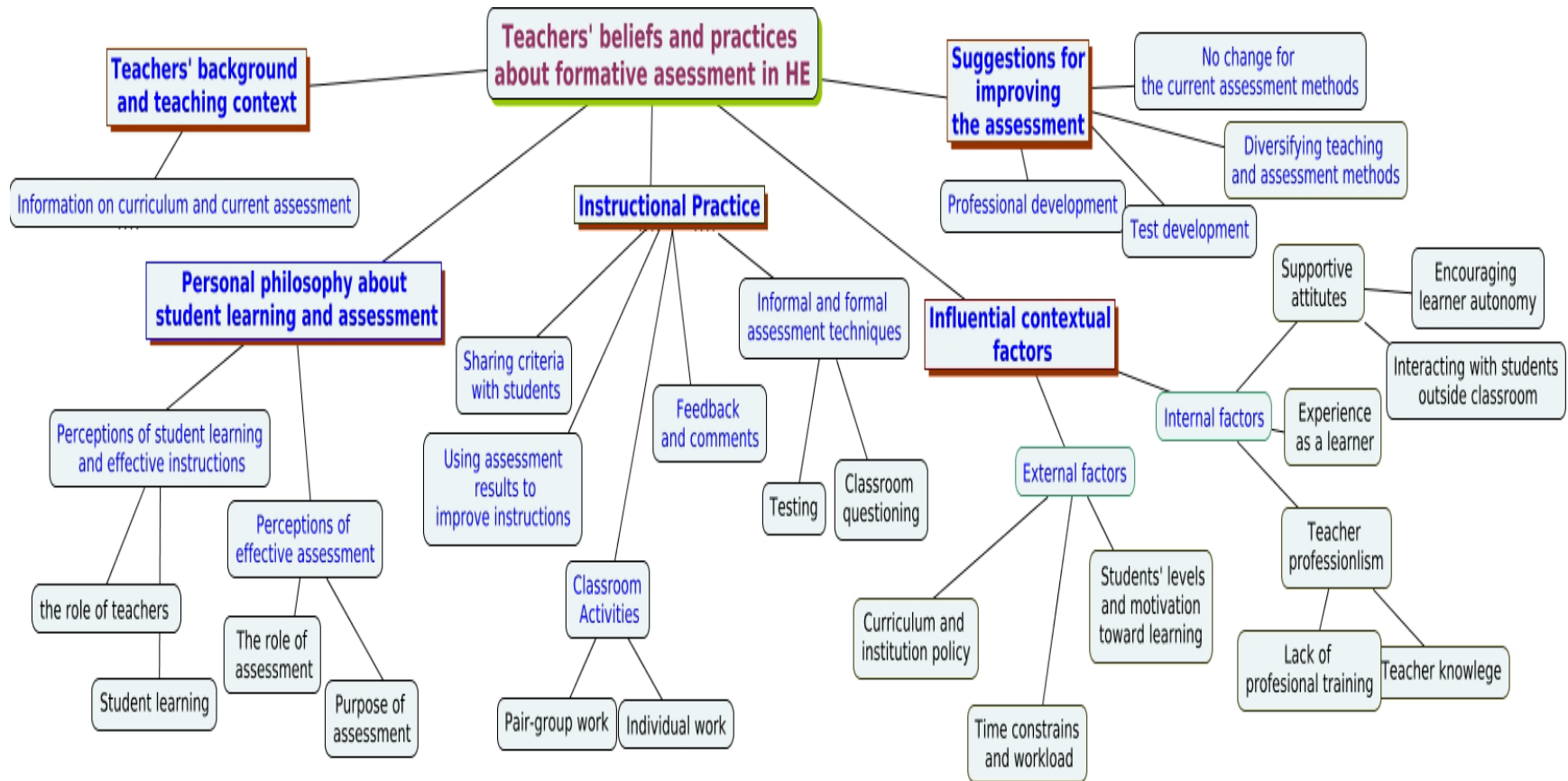
Next, I applied a Second Cycle method to find out the pattern codes (categories), which are “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 91). Codes with the same features went together at this stage; some particular clusters/domains were generated.

After coding the three sets of interviews, I searched for broad categories across the domains generated. I used a constant comparative method by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to identify the commonalities and differences among the clusters/domains and connect them. This process enabled me to refine the categories by reducing the overlap and redundancy, making them more coherent and related. For example, the domains of ‘*effective learning and teaching*,’ ‘*effective assessment in HE*,’ ‘*teaching methodology*,’ and ‘*student learning styles*’ were grouped into a broader category, ‘*philosophy of effective student learning and assessment*.’ All the ideas about assessment methods teachers used in the classroom and teaching and learning activities were grouped into the category ‘*instructional practice*.’ I adhered to Miles et al. (2014)’s advice to display the data using a network. I used CMAP, a management software, to show flows and connections between the domains. Below, figure 3 depicts the broad categories that have emerged: (a) teacher’s background and teaching context; (b) personal philosophy about student learning and assessment; (c) instructional practice; (d) influential contextual factors; (e) and suggestions for improving the assessment. Figure 3 displays the coding of the three interview

sets and the main categories that have emerged. The categories highlighted in blue were presented in chapter four-the teachers' background and teaching context and chapter five-research findings.

Figure 3

Categories Formed by the Three Sets of Interviews



Observation Data Analysis Process

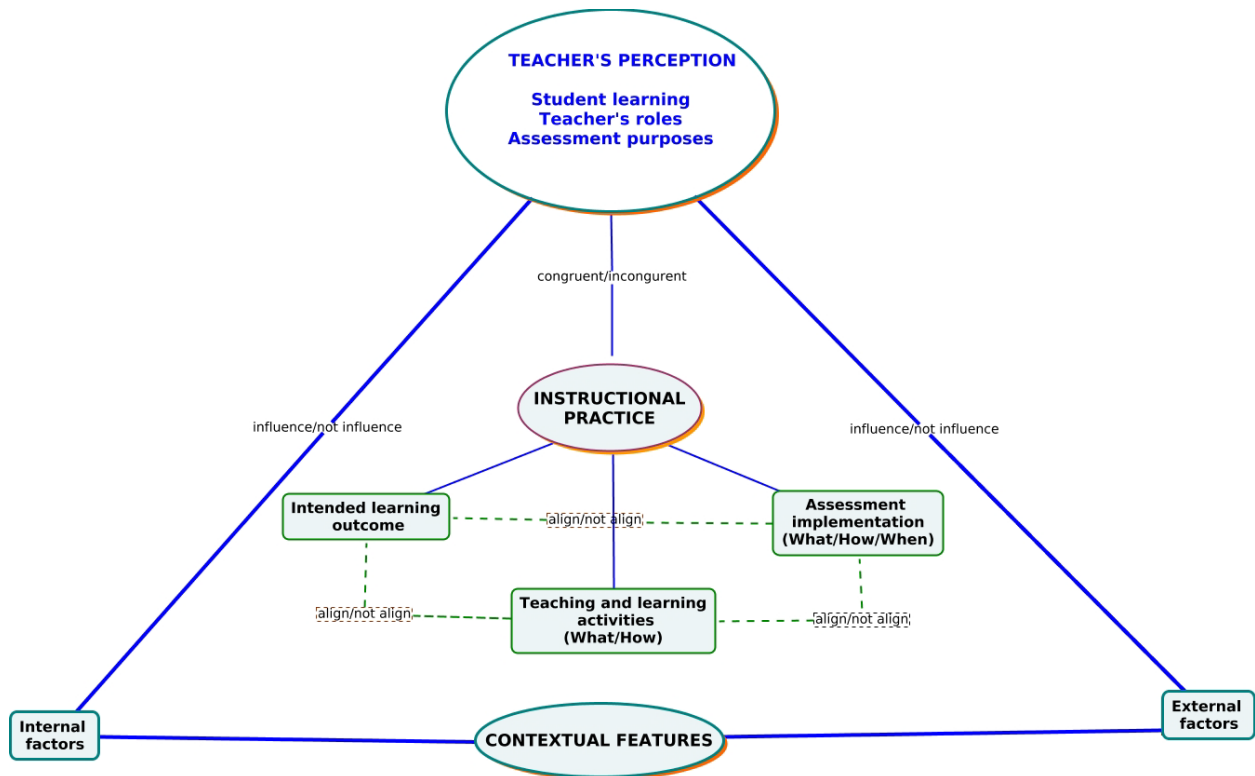
Based on the theoretical framework derived from the sociocultural perspective, constructive alignment, and formative assessment theory, I examined the recordings from classroom observations to identify key episodes of assessment practices related to participants' stated beliefs. I then translated and transcribed the most significant episodes as both teachers and students used English and Vietnamese in the classroom. Next, I selected texts regarding the intended learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment methods (constructive alignment). According to formative assessment theories (Black & Wiliam, 2004, 2009; James & Lewis, 2012; Taras, 2005, 2007), instructional and assessment activities are interwoven; therefore, the instructional activities category was merged with the formative assessment practice category. The classroom's assessment-related pedagogical activities fell into four subcategories that emerged in the interview analysis: (1) sharing learning expectations; (2) eliciting evidence of students' learning from class activities and assessment techniques; (3) offering feedback and comments; and (4) adjusting their instruction and student learning to meet student needs. I analyzed the observational data from each participant and then compared and contrasted them with the interview data. I applied sociocultural perspectives to interpret teachers' instruction-assessment practices concerning formative assessment.

Figure 4 below visually represents the model formed by interviews and observations. I used this model for each participant to see the link between the instructor's perception of student learning, teaching, and assessment, how the perception transformed into their practice, and the internal and external factors affecting their belief and practice. Specifically, for each case, I examined the participant' views about student learning, the role of the teacher, and their assessment purpose. Next, I looked at the three elements in their classrooms: intended learning

outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods and evaluated the alignment between these elements. Then I examined how their actual practices converge and diverge from their perceptions. Finally, I explored the internal and external factors affecting their pedagogical acts.

Figure 4

Model of Instructors' Perceptions and Instructional Practices



Chapter 4: Background of the Teachers and Contexts of Teaching

To have a holistic understanding of the teachers' perspectives and experiences, in this section I introduce the participant instructors' backgrounds and contexts of teaching, which include: (1) teachers' biographical, professional, and English language teaching experiences; and (2) their program of instruction and courses.

In the following part, I have grouped the participants who worked in the same division and program into two pairs: (1) Ly and Minh; and (2) Ha and Mai. This chapter is considered the backdrop for the next chapter, where I report on the findings and then compare and contrast the teachers' perspectives and experiences within the same programs.

Ly and Minh: Instructors in the English-Major Program

This section presents Ly and Minh's academic background and professional experiences, followed by an overview of the English-major program and the courses they oversee.

Ly's profile

Ly is a female instructor with a Bachelor's degree and a Master of Arts (M.A.) in English teaching methodology from one of the top-tier universities in Vietnam. She is twenty-eight years old and proficient in both Vietnamese and English. She has taught English as a foreign language (EFL) for five years. Before working at this post-secondary institution, Ly had experience as an English teacher in an English Center. She has worked at the Division of English linguistics for three years and taught Academic English language skills to English-majored students. She designed the progress and final-term tests assigned by the Head of Division and marked students' products during the term. She also attended scientific conferences held both on and off-campus. Ly was highly confident about her instruction and

assessment capabilities. Ly reported that she had received training in assessment and teaching methodology every semester and gained much knowledge from those workshops.

Minh's profile

Minh is the same age as Ly and is proficient in Vietnamese and English. She became an EFL instructor at this university right after she received her bachelor's degree. She has pursued a master's degree in applied linguistics from a prestigious university in Vietnam and worked in this institution's Division of English linguistics for three years. She taught Academic English language skills to English-majored students and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to non-English major students. She told me she had taught some other courses at the English center outside her school time. Like Ly, Minh said she had received training in assessment and teaching methodology every semester. All the workshops about assessment she attended related to test-writers and test specifications. Minh appreciated these workshops as they provided her with knowledge and skills in assessing students' language proficiency. Similar to Ly, Minh designed the progress and final-term tests assigned by the Head of Division and assisted in invigilating examinations.

An Overview of the English-Major Program

To attend this program, students must pass the national university entrance examination organized by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (VMoET), with English, Literature, and Maths subjects. Most of the students attending this program were at intermediate levels of English. However, their strengths seemed to be English grammar and structure since this knowledge was required in their exams in high school and English entrance exams.

The aim of the English-major program was to train students to become translators, interpreters, and English language specialists. The program provided fundamental principles and

aspects of English language features (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural components) and language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In addition, the program offered the essential skills and theory of translation/interpreting. English-majored students would have roughly 20 class hours per week in eight semesters to complete the program. They should expect to have high self-regulation levels and be motivated to work hard during class time. They should expect to spend double the contact hours, meaning that they should spend at least 40 hours studying for 20 class hours per week, doing the various listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks required to complete courses each semester successfully. In terms of assessment methods, the course grade was based on three tests or assignments and the end-of-term exams, which amounted to 50% and 50% of the course grade, respectively. The course grade was accumulated in the student's GPA. After completing the program, students must obtain level 5/6 reference English levels of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Table 2

An Overview of the English Major Program

Criteria	English Major Program
<i>Level of English proficiency</i>	Passing the university entrance examination, in which English is the main subject, is a prerequisite. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students' English proficiency level is intermediate
<i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program aims to train students to become translators, interpreters, and English language specialists. The program provides students with English language features (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural components) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and equips students with translation/ the theory and practice of translation/interpreting. Students have to learn English roughly 20 class hours /week x eight semesters

<i>Assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test results of each course will be accumulated in GPA. • After finishing six courses, students are required to obtain level 5/6, defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
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Ly and Minh's Courses of Instruction

At the time of data collection, Ly and Minh taught the designated courses for third-year English-majored students. These courses were intended to equip students with vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and language skills such as Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Reading skills. More specifically, Ly was in charge of the 'RS' course, which provided reading strategies to help students read long and complex texts related to different fields.

Simultaneously, Ly also taught the "WS" course, which intended to equip students with an extended essay on diverse topics with clear and coherent structures and arguments. Meanwhile, Minh was in charge of the 'LS' course, which provided students with listening strategies to listen to English lectures or long speeches on diverse topics related to various disciplines and fields. Minh also taught the course 'SK,' which equipped students with strategies to discuss social issues or opposing views.

Regarding the assessment methods used in these courses, the course grade was based on two progress tests, which accounted for 30%, one assignment worth 20%, and the end-of-term test, which amounted to 50%.

Ha and Mai: Instructors in the Non-English Major Program

Ha's profile

Ha is a female instructor of English; she was in her mid-thirty years old and has taught English for nearly twelve years at the tertiary level. She holds a Master of Arts (M.A.) in English studies from a top-tier university in Vietnam. She is a qualified and experienced instructor who

has taught General English (GE) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) to non-English-majored students. At the time of data collection, Ha taught English to students in the Faculty of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and the Faculty of Computer Science. The English courses she taught applied a blended learning approach, which equipped students with communicative competence and English language skills to work after graduation. She expressed her appreciation of this program since it was an integrated mode of face-to-face and online classes, which provided students with more flexibility in their learning. Ha reported that she received extensive assessment training and attended many workshops on teaching and assessment. She told me that this experience helped change her mindset toward teaching and evaluation.

Mai's profile

Mai is a female instructor of English with ten years of university EFL teaching experience, and she is the same age as Ha. She holds a Bachelor's (B.A.) and Master of Arts (M.A.) in English studies at a well-known university in Vietnam. She has taught General English (GE) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) to non-English-majored students. Mai taught English to students in the Faculty of Business Administration and the Faculty of Finance and Banking. These courses also applied a blended learning approach involving both face-to-face and online classes. Mai reported that this approach had been taught to all technical students in the institution since 2015. Given that this method helped students customize their learning and provided them more flexibility in accessing learning resources, she reported feeling nervous when applying this new method in her classroom. Mai told me that she was overwhelmed with the knowledge in the course since English for Business specializes in commerce and economics while her major was English linguistics. However, she also showed excitement with this new approach and got used to it. While Ha reported that she received and attended many workshops

about teaching methodology and assessment, Mai said she had minimal teaching methodology and assessment training.

An Overview of the Non-English Major Program

The program, also called English for Occupational Purposes, was designed for students majoring in different disciplines with relatively limited English proficiency levels, such as mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, computer science, economics, tourism, garment, and chemistry. The program aimed to enhance technical students' communicative competence and equip them with English language skills to work or complete further study after graduation. Students must complete six English courses related to their disciplines in six semesters. Students had three class hours of learning each week, and each course lasted ten weeks.

The program integrated asynchronous online instruction and face-to-face classes (F2F). The online learning was designed with self-guided modules for vocabulary, grammar structures, reading, and writing skills, which were followed by quizzes and mini-tests, thus allowing students to access them when best suited to their schedules. This learning platform system had no Discussion Forums, Blogs, or Media Tools. If students had inquiries about online learning, they were referred to an information technology (IT) technician for help. They could consult their teacher for assistance in proceeding with an assignment on that platform. All students were required to complete 100% of the online tasks ahead of F2F instruction. The F2F class provided a wide range of activities to improve students' speaking skills using asynchronous online lessons.

In terms of assessment methods, the course grade was based on three tests, which comprised 40% of the course grade, and the final exams, which accounted for 60% of the course grade. Students were forced to pass one course to have permission to attend another course. Failing one course meant students had to retake the entire course. Students were required to

obtain a final grade of at least 50% in five courses to have permission to attend the sixth course, whose course grade was accumulated in GPA. After finishing six courses, students were expected to obtain level 3/6 reference English levels, defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Table 3

An Overview of the Non-English Major Program

Criteria	Non-English major program
<i>Level of English proficiency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing the university entrance examination in particular disciplines (English is not mandatory) is a must for non-English students. • Students' English proficiency level is relatively limited.
<i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program aims to enhance technical students' communicative competence and equip them with English language skills to work or study after graduation. • Therefore, the English program is designed with blended learning. Online learning prepares students with English grammar, reading, listening, and writing, and face-to-face class helps students improve their speaking skills by using knowledge learned online. • Each week, students have 3 class hours of learning X 10 weeks per semester.
<i>Assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In six semesters, students must complete 6 English courses related to their disciplines (English for Occupational Purposes). However, test results of courses 1-5 are considered the prerequisite for the next course; the only test result of the 6th course will be accumulated in GPA. • After finishing six courses, students are required to obtain level 3/6, defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Ha and Mai's Courses of Instruction

Courses in Non-English Major Program were designed to meet students' needs in a particular faculty. Students were expected to acquire practical experience and professional communication principles related to their disciplines. More specifically, Mai taught the course *English for Business*. This course aimed to provide students in the Faculty of Business Administration and Faculty of Finance and Banking with vocabulary and structures in short technical documents, such as formal emails/letters, meeting agendas, business meetings, a minute/memo, presentations in a business meeting, and customer services. Meanwhile, Ha taught *English for Electronics* to students in the Faculty of Electrical and Electronic Engineering. This course aimed to develop English competencies in the working environment, such as companies in the electrical and electronics field, smartphones, maintenance and repairs, customer services, and career orientation. These courses were intended to equip students with general English and communicative skills in the working environment.

As indicated in the previous section, grammatical structures and other language skills, such as listening, reading, and writing, were provided in asynchronous instruction. In contrast, various activities were employed to enhance speaking skills in the F2F class. The courses offered multiple student engagement opportunities, such as group work, pair work or individual presentations. Teachers should begin by checking the vocabulary and online homework in the classroom, followed by small group activities based on the sample conversations in the material. Students could practice the language used in a particular situation and enhance collaborations.

Regarding assessment methods used in these courses, students had to attend at least 80% of in-person classes and complete 100% of the online tasks ahead of F2F instruction. The course

grade was based on two progress tests and one mid-term speaking test, which comprised 40% of the course grade and the final exams, accounting for 60% of the course grade.

In conclusion, this section introduced the four focal participants in two pairs by summarizing their academic backgrounds, professional experiences, and teaching contexts. These individual participants brought distinctive personal philosophies of teaching and assessment to their institution, which shaped their actual instructional practices, as I highlight in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: What I (Un) Expectedly Found

This chapter explores how EFL instructors perceived student learning, teaching, and assessment within the two programs, English majored and non-English majored programs, and how those beliefs were transferred into their instructional practices and the rationales underlying these pedagogical acts. Weekly for one semester, I observed instructors in the following courses: *English for Business*, *English for Electronics*, *Academic Reading and Writing*, and *Academic Listening and Speaking*. In this session, I use the terms ‘instructional practice,’ ‘instructional approach,’ and ‘classroom practice’ interchangeably to indicate how instructors interacted with students via instructional content. I used the conceptual framework from sociocultural perspectives, constructive alignment, and formative assessment theories to analyze the data, which came from three sets of interviews, observation notes, and documents, such as lesson plans, course outlines, and students’ work. Specifically, sociocultural perspectives were used to explore the instructors’ views of student learning and to interpret how they used formative assessment tasks to support student learning in their actual practices. These social theories also helped determine the internal and external factors affecting their beliefs on student learning and instructional practices. I made the data more accessible by adopting three formative assessment strategies suggested by Black and Wiliam (2009) for analyzing the data from instructor interviews and classroom observations: (1) how teachers know where students are at in their learning; (2) how they established where students are aiming to go, and (3) what teachers can do to get them there. The following categories emerged: (a) sharing learning expectations; (b) eliciting evidence of students’ learning from class activities and assessment techniques; (c) offering feedback and comments; and (d) adjusting their instruction and student learning to meet student needs. Constructive alignment was also utilized to assess an aligned system of teaching

in which teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the objective of the course to help learners reach their goals (Biggs & Tang, 2007). These perspectives on formative assessment, constructive alignment, and sociocultural views of teaching and learning helped me to identify the complexity and interconnectedness of factors affecting the interaction between and amongst teachers and students, which led to specific research questions.

Research Questions

The study responded to the main research question:

How is 'formative assessment' perceived by four Vietnamese university EFL teachers, and how is it implemented in their classrooms?

The following subsidiary questions were addressed to answer the research question:

- What are four Vietnamese university EFL teachers' beliefs about student learning, teaching, and assessment?
- How do their beliefs about student learning influence their instructional and assessment practices?
- To what extent do their beliefs about student learning converge and diverge from their classroom practices regarding formative assessment?
- How do contextual factors influence teachers' understanding of formative assessment and the implementation of formative assessments in their instruction?

Participant Evaluation

It should be noted that, in this section, I introduce participants in pairs, according to their division and program in which they were working, to compare and contrast their perspectives and experiences within the same programs. Based on the research questions, I introduce the following: (1) individual participants' viewpoints about learning, teaching, and assessment; (2)

participants' instructional practices regarding formative assessment; and (3) contextual factors influencing participants' understanding of formative assessment and the challenges they faced when implementing it in the classroom. As mentioned in chapter three, I employed confessional tales to offer the researcher's insights on the research process and opinions about the topic. After each participant's interviews and observations, my confessional reflections were highlighted in separate texts using italic font. These reflections helped reveal the research process and illustrated what had impacted my research and how the research had shaped me.

Ha and Mai: Instructors in the Non-English-Majored Program

As mentioned in chapter four, I grouped the participants who worked in the same division and program into pairs to compare and contrast their perspectives and experiences within the same programs. This section presents the first two instructors, Ha and Mai, teaching courses for non-English major students.

Participant 1: Ha

Ha's Perception of Student Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

Ha is an instructor of English with bachelor's and master's degrees from top-tier universities in Vietnam. She has been teaching English for nearly twelve years at the tertiary level. Ha expressed her excitement when talking about the nature of learning and teaching philosophy. According to her, students should have clear learning goals and be active and interactive. She claimed that student learning was optimized if they interacted with their peers in their learning and assessment process. However, Ha's thoughts about learning were still affected by behaviourism, which views learning as a conditional response to an external stimulus; therefore, she considered rewards and punishments powerful methods to establish habits (James & Lewis, 2012). Consequently, Ha created and encouraged a competitive learning environment

in her classroom to enhance learner engagement. In Ha's opinion, when engaging in collaborative activities and competing with others, students would create learning motivation and opportunities to learn from one another. During the second interview with me, Ha mentioned the following:

I usually divided them into groups in my classrooms, and then I asked them to work in assigned groups from the beginning to the end of the semester. When working together, students will discuss within the group, then give feedback on other groups' products. They will get scores for their group if providing feedback to others. It will create a competitive environment in the class. Students are encouraged to get scores for their groups by listening to other students' speaking or presentation more carefully and by giving comments and feedback.

When I asked Ha about the teacher's role in student learning, she emphasized that teachers should be mentors or facilitators rather than knowledge providers to students. She addressed the importance of the teacher's guidance in orienting student learning, participating in collaborative activities, and giving feedback. She commented that:

I think the teacher will be a mentor for students in the classroom. The teacher should have a clear direction at the beginning of the lesson and each task to help students clearly understand what they will do, why they will do it, and how they will do it. Also, if teachers want students to get peer feedback from other students and be aware of the teachers' feedback, they must guide students, such as why they have to assess this and evaluate it.

Despite mentioning in one interview that students constructed knowledge through interacting with each other, Ha showed a contradictory perspective on effective teaching. She

claimed that effective instruction was when students mastered the instructional content and achieved the lesson's objectives and the course. She elaborated:

I think effective teaching includes two main parts. Firstly, it is about the teaching methodology. Teachers should pay attention to their teaching techniques to help students understand the lesson. Besides, it depends on whether students can gain knowledge and the lesson's objectives or not.

Ha demonstrated her advocacy for cooperative learning. However, she also showed the high 'power distance' (Hofstede, 1997), highlighting the social distance and hierarchical authority between people with higher positions and lower ones as the acceptable norms guiding social relationships between instructors and students. In a large power-distance culture like Vietnam, people tend to obey hierarchical principles where people with lower positions must respect their directors. Therefore, learners tend to follow teachers' regulations without justification. Ha clearly emphasized the authoritative nature of the teacher's role in her classrooms when describing her instruction to me in an interview:

I encourage them to speak as much as they can. One of my rules is that students must speak English all the time in the classroom or when working in their group, and if they speak in Vietnamese, they will get some punishments. So, they have to think of a way to help them speak English in the classroom.

Ha's banning of using the first language (L1) in her classes made me ponder Swain and Lapkin (2000)'s work. They said that "to insist that no use be made of the L1 in carrying out tasks that are both linguistically and cognitively complex is to deny the use of an important cognitive tool" (p. 268). Similarly, Cook (2008) supposed that "stopping codeswitching in the classroom, which is what a ban on the L1 actually amounts to, is denying a central feature of

many L2 situations” (p.184). However, Ha explained to me that the treatment was used due to students’ passiveness. Many students were passive and silent in the classroom, even though she has created a democratic learning environment and has constantly encouraged them to interact with their peers. She claimed that not all students wanted to willingly give their own friends feedback if they were not forced to do that. Ha described what happened in one of the classes she taught:

When asking students to comment on other groups, a quiet environment appeared. I asked again, “can you tell him something about his talk,” no one said a word. Students are very passive, so I thought they would probably be more responsible for their learning if I gave them the grade.

Ha further noted that this happened because of different students’ levels in her class. She showed her thoughts on enhancing diverse learners and supporting diversity in the course. For her, learners with low levels should not be behind; hence, teachers would pay attention to their abilities and have different instructional approaches to meet students’ needs and motivate them to learn. Ha explained:

There are a variety of levels among the students in the classroom, and it is good to use different methods to meet students’ needs though I think it isn’t easy. Sometimes, to motivate and encourage student learning, I use various tasks, some for higher and others, to raise their voices and participate in the activities. It can make the learning environment better, and the students will find that learning English is quite interesting, and they will focus more on the subject.

Ha’s beliefs about student learning, which are optimized by interactions with others and are enhanced by the instructor’s guidance, guided her beliefs about assessment. She expressed

the view that teachers should use summative evaluation to collect the learner's achievement and performance and formative assessment to connect with and among learners and support their learning. Also, Ha emphasized that giving feedback and comments to learners and encouraging them to provide feedback to their peers are critical assessment methods in her classroom. She stated:

In my opinion, assessment, in general, does not mean that [the] teacher gives students tests and then assess[es] them based on the test results. In the classroom, teachers have to provide feedback to students and encourage students to provide feedback to each other – that means assessment may come from the feedback and comments the teacher gives to their students or that students give to their peers.

Ha explained that she asked students to provide oral feedback and comments on their peers' work for each classroom activity before she wrapped up the student's strengths and weaknesses. By asking them to speak up and identify their peers' products, she believed students would learn from each other and be mindful of what they should improve in their work. In Ha's opinion, the summative and formative assessments would enable teachers to reveal how much instructional content students mastered and allow students to monitor their learning and progress. She said:

The advantage of assessment is that students will be aware of their learning process and learning outcomes. If students know well about the assessment methods, they will quickly achieve their learning targets. Teachers can understand how much content of the lesson students can get.

Ha also pointed out the disadvantage of assessment, particularly the impact of summative assessment and testing on teaching and student learning. She explained that students learned to

receive high marks; as a result, they always felt stressed with high-stakes exams. This kind of assessment also puts pressure on teachers regarding equipping students with knowledge and skills for standardized tests. However, she reported that she did not rely on the teaching-to-the-test; instead, she wanted her students to engage in peer assessment. Hence, she asked them to provide comments and feedback on their peers' presentations or writing work in the class. She told me that she guided them to offer both weaknesses and strengths in their peers' work so that students learnt from their mistakes and understood where they were. She believed that receiving feedback from their peers would raise students' awareness of their learning and critical thinking. Ha elaborated:

I think that assessment is very good for students because they can improve critical thinking skills from peer feedback. So, they are not only listeners; they can be active in giving feedback and critically thinking about what they learned.

She further clarified the close link between assessment and teaching and learning. Her views on assessment were to collect learners' achievements in the summative evaluation and support their learning by providing feedback and commenting over the course. She also emphasized that students' test results and their progress during a semester were the main tools to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

Closely related to the perception of the teacher's role in student learning, this participant also noted the vital part of the teacher in guiding the student assessment process to achieve the learning goals. According to Ha, teachers would be facilitators and supporters in the student learning and assessment process. Ha's belief about assessment seemed to focus on learning and learning support. She pointed out:

Students need to learn about assessment – how teachers will assess them to follow step by step to achieve their goals. For example, when students are doing the peer assessment, they should give them the guidelines and assess their products based on the criteria or the lessons' objective. At the same time, the teacher should support them if they have any difficulties when giving feedback to their peers.

Ha reported that she also employed self-assessment in her instruction by fostering student learning outside school time. She explained that students had to equip their knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, via an online platform ahead of a face-to-face class. Also, students had opportunities to discuss in Class Forums or make weekly videos to build their skills. According to Ha, students should establish distinct learning goals and track their progress frequently. She suggested that the learning goals could be based on the course objectives, and students can assess themselves from the criteria given.

Confessional Reflection

Pini (2004) indicated that researchers whose experiences and backgrounds are similar to participants might find it easier to build close relationships and build trust and understanding. Perhaps my past experience working in the same institution and background as an English teacher might help me build a close relationship with Ha and explore her thoughts and expectations. I felt at ease initiating the conversation with her, extending topics concerning students' motivations for learning English and professional development besides her philosophy of student learning, teaching, and assessment. Her talks reminded me of the instruction and assessment methods I used when teaching in this institution. In retrospect, I realized that Confucian Heritage culture had influenced us, leading to the class's hierarchical principle and power relation between teachers and students. In addition, the institution's policy with high-

stake testing culture impeded us from applying new strategies to teaching and assessment. As I was her colleague and had the same experience as hers, I felt a sense of sympathy for her. While performing my background and experience gave me a ticket for entrée into her life, I felt confused about my role as a researcher and a former colleague when talking to her. At first, I wondered about what I should conduct in the meeting with her and how I should circulate the interview questions and interpret the participant's ideas without judging from my own experience. I was aware that immersing myself profoundly in the fieldwork might cause me to lose perspective (Patton, 2002; Sikes, 2001). For example, a few times during the interviews, I was concerned about her personal life and well-being in the classroom and realized that I should have asked something about her perspectives on teaching and assessment methods employed in her class. I was finally careful to balance my role as a researcher and a former colleague to avoid the personal stuff and emotions involved during the interview. At the same time, I discovered that using background information and experience must be done with caution; otherwise, I could question the participant and get the answers from what I experienced. For instance, I experienced testing culture as a student and teacher, so I might ask the respondent about this area and get the answer that I knew. Instead, I requested her to describe her typical instruction and her beliefs about effective teaching and assessment. This helped me understand her teaching holistically and get detailed information for the study.

Ha's Actual Instructional Practice (regarding Formative Assessment)

Sharing Learning Expectations. According to formative assessment theories, sharing learning expectations or intended learning outcomes refers to sharing the lesson's goals, unit's objectives or learning outcomes that students would achieve during their learning (Black, 2009; Black et al., 2003; Yorke, 2003). In the first interview, Ha emphasized that she constantly communicated the course's objectives, scale or rubrics of the units' tests, progress tests and final tests, and tasks' criteria to help students understand how their language ability would be assessed. She also claimed that this would guide her students in their learning path and track their progress, helping them become independent learners. Also, according to her, sharing the lesson and unit's objectives would save her time and reduce her workload as she did not repeat the task requirements to students many times, and students could check their progress on their own. Ha said:

Students need to learn about the course objectives to know where they are at the end of the semester. It will also orientate their learning, focus on, etc.

Besides, it is tough for the teacher to check each student's progress when she teaches 5-7 classes with 35 students in each class. Students can check themselves quickly in a group of five or six with the criteria given.

I recorded several instances of Ha sharing learning expectations with her students in my observation. I observed that her guidance seemed to match the unit's objective, which is "at the end of the lesson, students will be able to make a conversation to troubleshoot and repair a simple machine that is not working properly" (Ha, Lesson plan). Before the lesson, Ha reminded students of the overall learning objectives, went over the task requirements, and explained the assigned activities' purposes and contents. Also, she reminded them about the structures used to

express opinions. Ha instructed the students to “remember using structures you have learnt. For example, if there is no air coming out of the interior unit, check the fan or the fan needs to be cleaned” (Ha, Observation). She especially emphasized the scores they would get if finishing the task. These scores would be accumulated by the end of the semester to determine the winner group. In one observation, she told students:

We learned how to diagnose electric or electronic devices in lesson one. Today, we will focus on solutions for air-conditioning or washing machine problems. Now, we will move on to the first activity. You’re going to work in groups to watch a video and list the devices that the technician is maintaining and repairing. With one correct device, you will get 10/100 scores. The more score you have, the more chances to become the winner.

In other observation field notes, I noted that she heavily relied on rewards and punishments to form the students’ habit of learning. She continued by emphasizing the scores that the group would earn and the punishment if team members lacked engagement.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Informal and Formal Assessment Techniques. Ha described different ways she collected information to reveal students’ understanding of the course content in the interview. She said she often used informal conversations or dialogues to attract students’ attention, prompt their thinking, and check their understanding in her classroom. Ha employed closed and open-ended questions (e.g., what, where, who, why, and how) during her instruction, mostly when instructing students with a new task. Ha indicated that she often gave students time to think and prepare their work for the difficult questions. For her, class questioning is also a way to build rapport and boost the teacher and students’ interaction.

My notes about Ha's dialogues and questioning as evidence of student learning suggested that she frequently prompted questions to the whole class but rarely used the wait time between her questions and students' responses. The wait time recorded in the observation was often less than five seconds for the questions recalling the knowledge or low-order thinking skills. With complex tasks that required higher-order thinking skills, she provided students with more time. Students were not required to respond individually. Some students seemed quiet and responded softly, while some responded in chorus. If students were hesitant to respond, she answered by herself. The following extract is from the field notes for Ha's class observation.

T: We move to the next part, make a presentation by using graphs. Your duty would be as follows. Work in groups and describe the graphs describing three electronic devices (refrigerators, ceiling fans, and air conditioners) in Vietnam from 2006 to 2014.

Remember, before describing them, make an outline. What will you say first? (*no pause*).

Okay, you have to introduce those graphs generally. Look at the first graph. Is it a bar or line graph?

Ss (in the chorus): Line graph

T: So, you will see this is the line graph; it shows or represents..., represent what?

Ss and T (in the chorus): yes, it represents home appliance ownership in Vietnam from 2006 and 2014. Okay.

T: What will you do next?

(T pauses a second)

Ss and T: Yes, it is the general trend; it may increase or decrease. Look at this graph.

What can you see, and what will you describe for its general trend?

(T pauses a second)

S: (no responses)

T: In general, there is an increase in one device and a decrease in the two devices. So, what will you say?

Ss (in the chorus): There is, there was.

T (no pause): There is, or there was? Yes, okay, there was. This is the second sentence you should use to describe. From the third sentence afterward, you need to describe each device specifically.

In the classroom, Ha was often observed using questioning frequently at the beginning, during, and end of the instructional unit. The purpose of employing open-ended questions was to check student comprehension and review the content rather than enhance students' critical thinking skills. Ha was friendly during her instruction, allowing students to raise questions when needed. However, students seemed to follow her instructions or ask their mates rather than initially questioning the teacher.

Ha also reported using unit tests and quizzes to elicit student learning. According to her, test results would be a valuable tool for understanding students' levels and expectations. She said:

After the final tests, I want to get students' feedback to understand their expectations, whether they were over-expectation or under-expectation. Then, through their comments, I will know more about their levels or weaknesses and then help them reduce them.

Ha showed her enthusiasm in collecting students' feedback on their test results to understand where students were in their learning journey. Although Ha mentioned that she would assist students in improving their learning, she did not indicate the helping procedure nor adjust her next instruction.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Class Activities. In her interview, Ha reported that she often requested students to collaborate with their peers, both inside and outside the classroom, and encouraged them to become active partners and critical learners. She assigned them to work individually on the tasks in the online platform before attending a face-to-face class. She also asked students to work in a group on some tasks that were not covered in the class. However, Ha expressed that not all students would give their peers feedback and comments if she did not force them. Therefore, to motivate students' interactions, she rewarded points to the group with the most members giving feedback or comments and gave minus marks to those who did not. She explained to students that team members must be responsible for themselves and their projects.

My observational notes about Ha's instruction were that Ha made use of pair-group work in her classroom. She divided the class into five groups (with about seven or eight students in each group) at the beginning of the semester and then kept these groups unchanged during the term. Students were asked to complete the task to get points for their groups in every instructional unit. The group getting high scores would get a gift from the teacher at the end of the course. As indicated in her interview, she aimed to increase the group's responsibility, engagement, and learning motivation. One of the group work activities recorded in her classroom was a product development report based on the sample conversation and the given functional language. Students were required to describe a given chart/graph about home appliance ownership. Before providing time for students' work, she instructed students by analyzing the task requirements and reminded them of the main points needed in the presentation. After guiding students, she set the time for the activity. My notes at around ten minutes into a group work activity were as follows:

When students interacted, the engagement level occurred, conveying the content to other members. They discussed with others, and the team leader (or group representative) wrote down their ideas on a piece of paper. However, not every group member got involved in the activity. Some students still kept silent and listened to their friends, while some were highly active. They seemed dominant and sometimes used their first language in the conversation to explain to their friends. During this time, Ha went around the classroom and took notes of students' mistakes. She sometimes stopped near a group and asked questions or guided them when needed.

The observation noted that Ha corresponded with tasks designed in the material. All the activities given were covered with slight modifications in her instruction compared to the activities designed in the student's books. Another observation indicated that learner engagement occurred when students worked in pairs. In one activity, Ha asked students to role-play; some were hotline technicians, and others were customers who called to ask for help with their washing machine problems. This activity provided students with collaborative learning and peer assessment. The following is an extract from an observational field note:

S1 (technician): Hello, Samsung Electronics service hotline. How can I help you?

S2 (customer): Hello, er er, I have a problem with my washing machine. It don't work

S1: It doesn't work? What kind is your washing machine?

S2: It's a front window

S1: Okay, it's front load. What's its model?

S2: It's WF220ANW.

S1: What's the problem?

S2: It doesn't work, but it still makes noise.

S1: Are there any trouble signs on display?

S2: Trouble la co van de gi a (*in Vietnamese*) [Trouble means problem?] No, there aren't.

S1: Yes, it means problem. What did you do?

S2: Troubleshooting tips la gi nhi? (*in Vietnamese*) [What does troubleshooting mean?],
eh (thinking)... yeah, I read the troubleshooting tips, but I couldn't find anything.

S1: Well, have you checked the water supply valve? Is it turned on?

S2: Yes, I did

In this conversation, students exchanged their ideas and corrected mistakes. When they found it hard to understand the meaning of a word, they used their first language (L1) for negotiation. This code-switching seemed helpful in helping students to understand the vocabulary used in this context and maintain the dialogue, which would otherwise not have accomplished the task (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). However, I observed that students were reluctant to use their first language, mainly because Ha restricted students from using their mother tongue in the classroom; they would get minus points if they spoke Vietnamese. Her thoughts and actions about a ban on using the first language in a foreign language classroom seemed unnatural in a bilingual language class (Cook, 2018). Also, restriction from using the first language in a language classroom is the denial of “the use of an important cognitive tool” (Swain & Lapkin, 2000, p. 269).

Providing feedback. With a high priority on assisting student learning and moving student learning forward, Ha reported using a wide range of assessment methods. She paid particular attention to providing feedback to students to enhance students' critical thinking. According to her, offering feedback would scaffold student learning gaps, helping them know where they are, what areas they need to improve, and how to improve it. However, she noted that

not all feedback would enhance student learning, and for her, “the quality of feedback is that after the teacher gives feedback to students, they will open up to the teacher’s comments and learn from it” (Ha, Interview). She indicated that she always provided students with good points and compliments to make them feel confident and pointed out areas needing improvement.

Consistent with her interview, in my observations, I noted that Ha often offered feedback to students during her instruction. My classroom observations recorded some feedback types used in Ha’s teacher-student interactions. Depending on assigned tasks, evaluative, oral corrective, and cognitive feedback were the most frequently employed. Some of the recorded feedback terms praising students’ quality of work were: “good job, great ideas, or well done.” Simultaneously, she directly corrected the wrong pronunciation or grammar errors during her teaching. Also, Ha employed *cognitive feedback* — focusing on cognitive strategies and misconceptions (Jang, 2014) — in her conversations with students. She sometimes questioned to elicit students’ responses to gauge their understanding and encouraged them to figure out the solutions or answers. The below excerpt is the demonstration of Ha’s feedback to students.

T: Okay, now let’s check the answers. Our door fan is locked. What does it mean?

Ss: Quat thong gio bi khoa (*in Vietnamese*)

T: Yes, it doesn’t work. What about the valve? Look at the picture, and you can guess the meaning. So, what should I do if the water leak from the unit?

Group 2, do you have the answer?

Ss: Replace the valve.

T: Very good. If you want to give a solution, what structure we use? We learnt it before.

Ss: If and should.

T: very good. Remember you need a clause after “if.” For example, if you have this problem, you should do something. Or in the future, to avoid this problem, you should do this or do that. Okay?

I also noted in my observation that Ha’s students were often required to offer other groups’ work feedback. They were active and supportive; however, their feedback was prone to correcting peers’ mistakes rather than providing suggestions for improvement. Here is another excerpt describing students’ feedback to their peers.

T: Thank you for your presentation, Hiep. Now, other groups, please give comments. Group 4, tell me your ideas about his talk.

S1: He is good when volunteering though the time for preparation is limited. But he confused me when saying “using some problems” instead of “using air conditioner.”

T: yeah, it should be “when you think you have a problem with the air conditioner.” Any other comments?

S2: He is confident, and his talk is fluent. But sometimes, he speaks softly; it’s hard to hear.

T: yeah, thank you.

Although Ha allowed her students to support their peers, she did not guide them to use high-order questions such as analyzing or evaluating to enhance their peers’ critical thinking skills. Their comments focused more on grammar mistakes, word choice, or wrong pronunciation rather than providing suggestions for learning improvement.

Instructional Adjustments. Instructional adjustments refer to the teaching and learning modifications that adhere to the strategies for implementing formative assessment. I noted these

modifications via classroom observations or follow-up interviews with the participants. Ha claimed that if students could not demonstrate their learning, based on the assessment-elicited evidence, she would reteach the concepts, explain the task requirement intensively, or provide various activities that allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. She described in an interview that she grouped students into big groups at the beginning of the course and kept them unchanged till the end of the semester. However, if students of those groups did not make progress in their exams, she would change the teaching methods and provide them with more exercises for practice. In my observation field notes, I have highlighted the changes in her teaching methodology. Ha was flexible when applying vocabulary quizzes and review games in her next class, creating more chances for students to interact and learn from each other.

Influencing Factors

In this section, I discuss internal and external contextual influences on Ha's beliefs and practices in teaching and assessment. These contextual factors were identified through interviews, observations, and documentation. The internal factors in this study included a mental model of student learning, teaching experience, and teacher experience as a learner. The external contextual elements consisted of cultural norms, curriculum and institution policy, time constraints, workload, and student attributes. It is noted that these factors were applied to analyze the other participants.

Among the internally constructed contextual factors affecting Ha's perception of teaching and assessment, the mental model of student learning and teaching experience was the most preeminent. As Ha believed students could construct meaning and knowledge through interaction, she created collaborative activities to help students learn from each other. In addition, her nature of dissatisfaction with her teaching practice led to a change in her teaching

style. In an early interview, Ha confessed that she had had a conventional mindset, which revealed her instruction as more focused on depositing knowledge to students' minds and less on providing meaningful feedback or comments to students in the classroom. However, her perception changed when she attended the blended learning program for non-English-majored students. She was required to develop English communicative skills for students rather than provide them with grammar structures and vocabulary. Since the program aimed to equip technical students with English for occupation purposes, both online and in-person classes, Ha perceived herself as employing more peer assessment and activating students as learning resources for their peers. Therefore, students became more responsible for their learning processes and actively sought knowledge outside the classroom. Furthermore, the professional development with extensive training in teaching and assessment seemed to help Ha alter her teaching methods and implement some formative assessment strategies in her classrooms, such as creating collaboration activities in the class and encouraging students as a learning resource for themselves (e.g., peer-correction and pair work). This change was noticeable, with Ha revealing some new behaviours: she clarified learning expectations, used various teaching techniques and informal assessments to inform her instruction, sought evidence of student learning and errors when communicating in English, and made several modifications to instruction.

However, external factors, such as cultural norms, institution policy, and student attributes, constrained Ha from achieving the full potential of formative assessment, both in her perceptions and instructional practices. The evidence in her classroom showed that although she was aware of the role of the learner-centred approach, she presented herself as an authoritative teacher. For example, in one specific incident, Ha displayed a power-over culture influence when

she posed a class regulation to punish students who were not involved in the teamwork. In addition, the high-stakes testing culture, as described in the curriculum, was also an external factor impeding her from implementing assessments for learning in her instruction. Although Ha claimed that she taught for understanding, she still paid attention to test results and used them as the primary tool to evaluate the student's progress and achievements. In other words, she saw the benefits of test results in revealing students' strengths and weaknesses; therefore, test results played a pivotal role in her instructional decision-making. Other external factors impeding Ha from implementing a learner-centred approach were students' levels and motivation. She clarified in an interview that she felt she had a responsibility to help them achieve their goals since students' English level was low at the beginning, and their learning expectations were to get high marks to attend the next course.

Confessional Reflection

As I observed Ha's class right after her first interview, and this was the first observation of the research project, I was trying to set aside my own bias and tried to be as open as possible. My challenge was the struggle of the balance between building up the relationship with the teacher and students and distancing myself from observing the participant's actions in the class. I was first conflicted about getting involved in the class activities and helping the teacher get the students to enjoy their activities without compromising my observation. I came to the class early and had small talks with students to ensure that students were comfortable with my presence. However, they seemed to be vigilant until Ha came and introduced me as a former instructor and a researcher. Ha, as mentioned earlier, was my colleague, and we had an interview before; she seemed to be comfortable and enthusiastic. Ha was aware of my presence in her class as a researcher, so she wanted to provide much information on her lesson. During her instruction,

when Ha went around to help students work in groups, she stopped by and explained to me the purpose of setting fixed groups from the early semester and how they worked to gain scores for their groups. Ha also asked me if I would like further explanations for unclear points in her instruction. Though I appreciated her enthusiasm in helping me collect data, I was cautious about her help as I felt it might affect the nature of the research.

Ha's class management activity reminded me of the teaching methodologies I employed when I was an English teacher in my home country. Like Ha, I had students work in teams and compete with one another, hoping that this activity would motivate them to learn. I noticed that both my students and students in Ha's classes were interested in this game and had no concerns about rewards and punishments in the class. As having the same culture as Ha, I assumed that students must follow the hierarchical principle in the classroom, where the teacher was powerful and authoritative. While acknowledging my own personal experiences as filters for observations (Smith, 2013), I was aware that this experience might be a bias I had and could impact my interpretation of the situation. For this reason, I wrote journals to capture my thoughts and feelings during and after each participant's interview and observation. I also reminded myself of the researcher's positioning to understand the situation and critically unpack my simultaneous insider from my past teaching role and outsider as a researcher embedded with new ideas and insights.

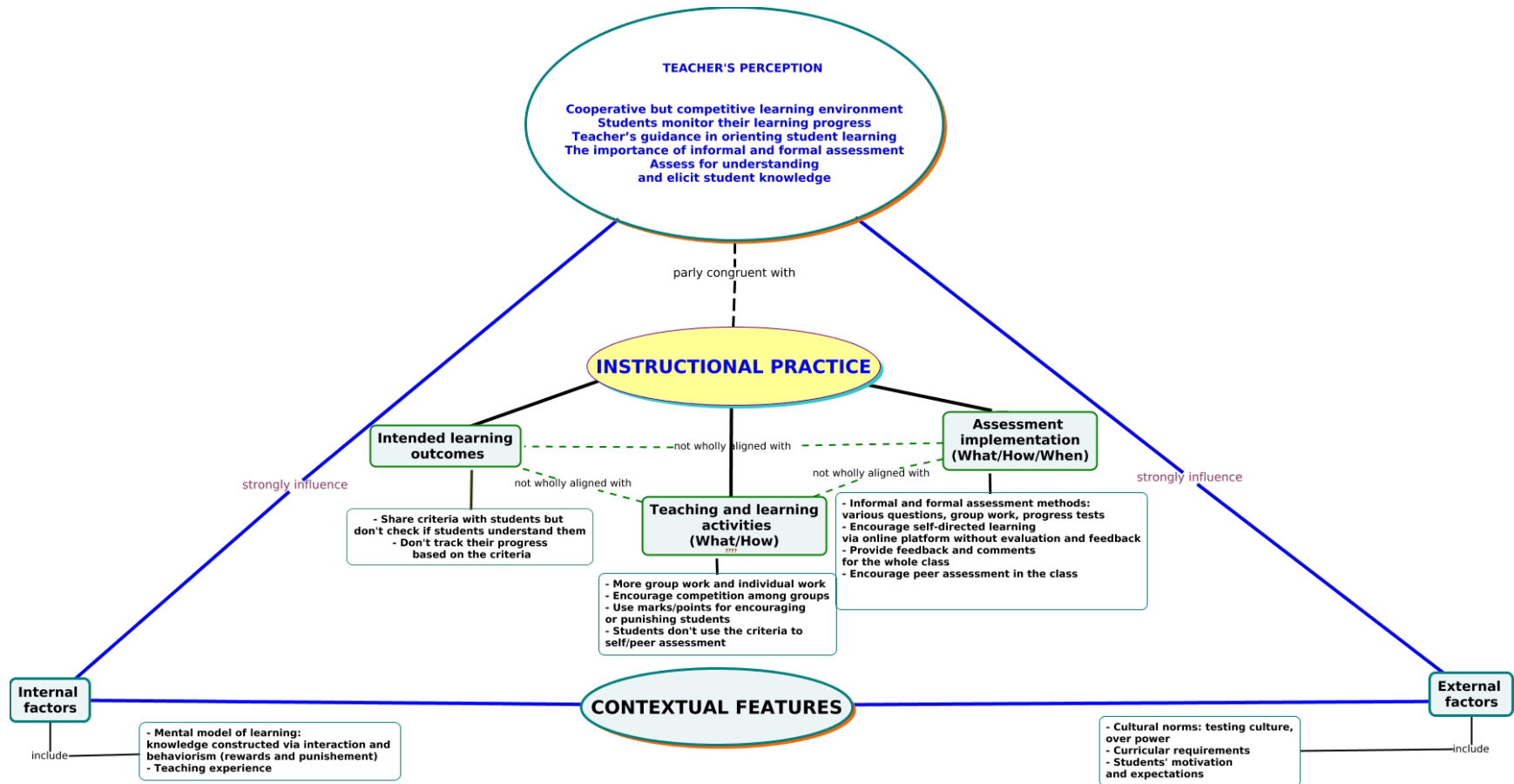
Summary of Ha's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment

As mentioned in chapter 3, I used a visual representation of the model formed by interviews and observations to see the link between the teacher's perception of student learning, teaching, and assessment, how this perception transformed in their practice, and the internal and external factors affecting their belief and practice. Below (Figure 5) is the summary of Ha's

perceptions and practice of formative assessment based on the research evidence. Ha's assessment decisions seemed to be guided by perceptions: (a) student learning is optimized when students engage in collaborative activities and compete with others, and (b) learning is enhanced by the instructor's guidance and support in their learning and assessment process. As a result, she demonstrated her advocacy for cooperative learning and involved students in various instructional activities. However, as her mindset was that competition might lead to learning motivation, she encouraged students to compete with each other in her classes. She used rewards and punishments as a method to encourage them to learn. Ha's perception of student learning was congruent with most of her instructional activities. For example, she made use of pair-group work and classroom questioning to build rapport and boost the teacher and students' interaction. She also used formal assessment methods, such as unit tests and quizzes, to elicit student learning. She provided feedback and comments to students but not individually. Although she shared learning expectations with students, she did not help them to track their progress based on the intended learning outcomes. As a result, her students did not use these specifications to monitor their own learning. My observation notes suggested that the teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks in Ha's classes were not wholly aligned with the intended outcomes. Regarding the contextual factors, Ha's instruction and assessment were impacted by internal factors, such as the mental model of learning and teaching experiences, and external factors, such as testing culture, overpower, and students' motivation and expectations.

Figure 5

Summary of Ha's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment



Participant 2: Mai***Mai's Perception of Student Learning, Teaching, and Assessment***

My interview with Mai revealed some different points from Ha's perspectives on learning, teaching, and assessment. Whereas Ha emphasized the vital role of interaction in the student learning process, Mai indicated that learners could demonstrate their learning in various ways. However, Mai highlighted self-driven learning as the most critical. According to Mai, self-directed learning skills enable students to control their learning process and development, giving them opportunities to monitor their learning pace and activities in fruitful ways. In Mai's opinion, students play a vital role in their learning success. She stated that:

Learners are essential in their education because teachers are just a small part of students' success, no matter how excellent they are. Self-study is the key to university because today, students must spend time studying at home more than four times in class.

Therefore, if they do not invest enough time in self-study, they will fail because in-class activities only account for one out of five of the total learning time. For instance, students need to spend 4 hours studying online. I realize that hard-studying students will spend four to five hours a day studying before going to school, and those students will comprehend the lesson more quickly than those who spend 30 minutes to one-hour studying.

Mai also emphasized that the teacher serves as an advisor and influencer rather than a formal instructor. Teachers should have in-depth knowledge and effective instructional strategies to prepare students for success in the labour market. She reported in the interview that she built a collaborative learning environment in which discussion-based and skill-based activities and comprehension quizzes were available to all students. She described:

My teaching methods are various, and I often use questions and quizzes to check students' understanding at the beginning of the lessons. Students work in pairs or groups during the instruction to share their understanding of the tasks given. Some students will then give presentations, and the other groups will analyze the performances to give feedback and comments. I supervise the whole class to determine students' strong points and drawbacks. At the end of the lessons, I often summarize them by raising questions and giving them homework to improve their English skills.

Considering students as active and independent learners, Mai reported that her responsibility was to encourage them to establish learning goals and track their progress toward those goals. Simultaneously, she helped students monitor their learning process by sharing intended learning outcomes and implementing various instructional methods to meet diverse student needs and motivate learning. She explained that high-performing students might feel demotivated if they were instructed the same way as the lower-achieving students. She clarified:

Students in the class having the same level is ideal. However, it is impossible; with a classroom of 35 students, maybe 20-30% are excellent, 40% are good, and the others are not good. Some students have good English with 6.0 IELTS before entering the university; they may feel bored with the program and not participate in in-class activities. Therefore, I often provide these students with more tasks; I have them work with students of the same level.

Mai also pointed out that while students wanted to master English to meet their personal goals, such as employment or studying abroad, many valued grades more than learning. They were much more concerned with test results and obsessed with high marks. However, she reported that she did not organize her instruction around the clones of test preparation strategies

or teaching-to-the-test. Instead, she employed instructional approaches to develop advanced cognitive skills and communication skills. Mai claimed:

Showing students tactics to get good marks is not my teaching style. If they study hard, they will receive good marks based on what they learned. However, as I said, communication skills and how they use English in life are more important. Students who focus on tests cannot develop their language communication skills. So, I will focus on developing students' abilities rather than providing them with the knowledge to pass the test.

As reported in her interview, Mai's assessment decisions were based on her views that student-directed learning is crucial in their learning, and teachers are advisors to help them reach their learning goals. Therefore, her assessment approach with students was learning goal-based assessment, enabling them to participate in, and benefit from, self-and peer evaluation. In her opinion, the assessment aimed to help students navigate their learning and achieve their goals. This, in turn, would inform teachers and educational managers about the teaching program's effectiveness, thereby providing timely solutions to improve learning quality. She said:

I think the assessment is important because it helps students learn better when they know where they are. Also, the assessment will help teachers adjust their teaching methods and encourage students to achieve their goals.

However, Mai noted that grades still received much attention since collecting students' test results would reflect students' progress against their learning goals. She also expressed the vital role of the teacher in the assessment process. As she perceived assessment as a navigation framework for student learning and performance evaluation, she demonstrated various activities organized in the classroom, such as quizzes, role-plays, presentations, and discussions. In her

opinion, via these tasks, she could gather information on students' performance and progress related to their learning intentions, helping them overcome their weaknesses to achieve their goals. Mai elaborated:

I believe teachers play an essential role in the assessment process because they directly interact with students and understand students' levels. So, when students work in pairs or groups, teachers and students themselves can detect students' strengths and weaknesses. As a result, teachers will have timely adjustments to diminish students' flaws once detecting these drawbacks.

Mai asserted that assessment was an integral part of education that benefited students, teachers, and educational makers. She said:

I think the assessment has advantages for three agents. First, it helps managers have an overall view of the subjects and learning program. Second, teachers can see how teaching methods work for students and help them adjust their teaching methods to achieve the course's goals. The last one is for students to know where they are and adjust their learning process.

While mentioning the benefits of assessment, she also pointed out its disadvantages, especially in the testing culture. Although acknowledging that testing was unavoidable in the higher education program, she showed her disfavour in this evaluation form. She claimed that testing might not precisely reflect students' competence and proficiency. She added that some students performed well but received low marks because they lacked adequate exam knowledge. Besides, it might make students exhausted when attending the examination, putting pressure on teachers regarding time and effort to design tests. Mai said:

Testing will make students stressed and does not reflect precisely the result. Assessment consumes a great deal of time for teachers, such as managing students, delivering workload, and designing tests.

Consistent with her teaching methods for understanding, she reported that she favoured giving feedback and commenting on student work, helping them internalize English skills and improve their learning. Simultaneously, she encouraged students to offer feedback and comments to their peers. She said she instructed them to provide compliments first, then point out their peers' mistakes and weaknesses. She believed this feedback and comments would help students know where they were; therefore, they could learn from other's mistakes and strengths to improve their learning.

Confessional Reflection

Before conducting the first interview with Mai, she seemed nervous and uncomfortable. She said she did not know how to answer my questions and requested to see the interview questions in advance. Understanding participants' worries when being interviewed, I endeavoured to develop my closeness with Mai and established my previous teacher identity, emphasizing my role not as a researcher but as a teacher and colleague. I comforted her by making informal conversations with her in relation to our teaching experience in this institution, even showing my vulnerability. I told her about my difficulties when teaching in a large class, with testing culture and workload pressure. I also showed her that I was sometimes stuck when designing the learning activities for students and how to help them achieve their learning goals. Because I positioned myself closely with Mai, the boundary between the researcher and participants seemed less visible (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I felt that I related to Mai's personal background and teaching experience when she opened up to me. We realized that we were

alumni at a university at the graduate level, and we had time to teach non-English major students at the tertiary level. In the second and third interviews, I spent more time interviewing Mai than other participants mainly because she wanted me to talk about my own experience as a teacher and researcher. Though I understood that using my own background and experience could help me absorb the participant's story easily, I confessed that I struggled to "take a critical stance and maintain empathic relationships with participants" (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005, p.102). I confessed that I lost myself as a researcher a few times during the conversation since I wanted to build closeness with her and put myself in her shoes. However, this "putting myself in her shoes" added a more emotional and connected insight into her struggles and intentions as a teacher. I was grateful to her as she reminded me of my responsibility as a researcher in the field when we entered the interview. Her words woke me up: "I am now a participant in your research, and I feel more comfortable answering any questions you want to know about my teaching career" (Fieldnote).

Mai's Actual Instructional Practice (regarding Formative Assessment)

Sharing Learning Expectations. Like Ha, Mai said she shared learning intentions with students at the beginning of the course and in every instructional unit by clarifying course objectives, the grading scheme, and assessment methods. She reported that sharing intended learning outcomes with students would help them monitor their learning and progress, making them independent and critical learners. Mai claimed:

From my perspective, I think it is tough for students to study if they do not know about the assessment criteria. So, teachers must instruct them to self-study based on the course's goal and the tasks' requirements. At the beginning of each lesson, I will show the lesson's objectives and help them achieve them. When having clear

goals and criteria, students know how to self-study or ask me for help to meet their needs.

In her class observations, I recorded she shared intended learning outcomes with students several times. In one observation, Mai introduced the objectives of the unit before starting the lessons and clarified what students needed to do in the lesson:

Today, we will move to unit 5 with three objectives: first, we will acknowledge and discuss meeting etiquette. The second one, making a conversation about a meeting agenda; the last one is creating an agenda for a business meeting. Perhaps you will do the last objective at home, but after this lesson, make sure you do three things as mentioned.

To ensure that students understood the learning goals, she translated them into Vietnamese. I noticed Mai used the first language quite often when she gave instructions or explained grammar structures to students. These actions seemed helpful to students as the mother tongue, in this case, served as a tool helping students understand clearly the task's requirements and reflected the normal process of bilingual classrooms, where students share the same languages (Cook, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Mai also set learners' expectations regarding term-end-speaking tests: "the topic for the speaking test, later on, would be related to meeting etiquettes and a business meeting." She continuously reminded students of these learning objectives through class activities. However, my notes recorded that though she discussed the lesson's learning goals with students, she did not check whether students understood them or discuss the importance of those learning goals. She rarely provided students with examples to illustrate the task requirements.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Informal and Formal Assessment Techniques. Mai reported that she checked students' understanding by using questions or

quizzes, and all questions from students were welcomed in the class or outside the school time.

When asked what types of questions she often used in her classroom, she responded:

I often use three types of questions to ask students. First, it is leading questions. I use this type to guide students in my lecture. Second, I raise questions to check whether students understand the task and teacher's requirements or not. Third, I pose questions to test students' background knowledge about specific topics.

Although Mai did not mention the specific kinds of questions, my observations noted that she used both closed and open-ended questions to check students' comprehension. The following excerpt showed that she created a rapport with students before starting the new lesson.

T: What should you do to prepare for a meeting?

Ss: (silent)

T: Minh, do you know?

S1(standing up): projects, computer, thu ky (*in Vietnamese*)

T: good, secretary. What else? Do we need other equipment?

S1: yes.

T: Thank you, he said we need types of equipment like a table, chairs, projector, etc.

Anything else?

T: Besides, we need handouts, agenda, minutes and so on. Do you know what agenda is?

T called on another student: Trang, what is an agenda?

S2: It is a procedure for the meeting.

She said in her interview that she would set the time for students' answers depending on the difficulty of the tasks and question types. Like Ha, the wait time recorded in the observation was less than five seconds for the questions recalling the knowledge, but she provided students

with more time for higher-order thinking skills, such as application activity. For example, she set four minutes for a role-play activity and six minutes requiring students to discuss the meeting agenda for the next business meeting. My field notes also recorded that most students were quiet and only passively participated in the lesson. Mai often appointed students to answer her questions; otherwise, she offered them the answers herself.

Mai used another type of assessment method to gather student learning via unit tests and end-of-term tests. Like Ha, Mai stated that test results are helpful information for her to understand students' levels, thereby adjusting her teaching methodology to help students achieve their goals. She said:

I often record their results to see what they have achieved. Based on my observation in class and comparison, I could understand how I assessed students. For example, some students do not get involved in the lesson and their test results are low, I will examine how students learn. Since their English program is blended learning, they need to spend time on online instruction and face-to-face classes. So, I will pay more attention to those students and ask them to complete the tasks before attending a face-to-face class.

Mai further explained that she found out some students made mistakes, not because they lacked the knowledge but because of their careless grammar or spelling. She told me that these students are at intermediate levels, and she assumed that they lost their marks because they did not prepare well or did not focus on grammar practice. Therefore, she communicated with those students and reminded them to pay more attention to these points.

As part of the learning process, students were required to complete the grammatical and language skills, such as listening, writing, and reading, in online instruction before practicing speaking activities in face-to-face classes. My field notes recorded that she often showed the

online progress test reports before starting the new lesson. She showed students' test reports to the whole class and checked whether any student did not complete the required task. She called out the students' names, checked their attendance simultaneously, and criticized students who had finished the online tests. Unlike what she mentioned in the interviews, there were no recommendations to help students fix their mistakes or suggestions for improvement. Instead, she complimented students with high scores and warned students with low test results. In this case, she tended to be a behaviourist since she emphasized high grades as a reward and punishment to stimulate student learning.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Class Activities. To help students achieve their learning goals, Mai employed various pedagogical strategies. She often requested students to collaborate with their peers and constantly encouraged peer correction and feedback in her instruction. Mai explained the importance of collaboration and peer assessment in her interview with me:

Students will learn from each other when they work in pairs or groups. I suppose teachers need to show them the importance of peer assessment. Teachers need to do that every week to help students form a habit, and students are also self-aware that assessing their friends is also a method to study.

Together with peer assessment, self-assessment was encouraged in Mai's instruction. She reported that she asked students to self-assess their products frequently. She reasoned that the students would develop their metacognitive and critical thinking skills when they were markers or assessors themselves. The following is an example she mentioned in the interview:

I often encourage students to use self-assessment for their work. For instance, when writing assignments, I ask them to write the first draft, then reread this writing and

correct the mistakes, as I guided previously. After that, they must send this writing piece to other students for peer-checking.

Perceiving the importance of collaboration and self and peer assessment, she considered this strategy one of the primary methods to boost students' learning. She reported that she instructed students on how to self-assess:

I will instruct students on how to do it. In the first lesson, I will try to show them the subject's content and objectives in the first period, and then I will introduce them to some sources and references for self-study and then guide them on how to self-assess and do peer-check. For instance, I instruct them on common mistakes, symbols, and abbreviations to assess their work and other students' writing.

Mai stated in an interview that another reason for encouraging peer assessment was reducing the teacher's workload, especially when teaching a large class. She expressed: "I think it benefits both teachers and students. It reduces teachers' workload, and students see the importance of self and peer-assessment to try harder."

However, Mai did not describe how she helped students understand the advantages of self-and peer assessment, although I recorded that she frequently requested students to work in pairs or groups. One of the group work activities I recorded in Mai's classroom was deciding the true/false statement of etiquette in a meeting. Students were required to work in two big groups, listen to nine meeting etiquette rules, and help their representative decide dos and don'ts in a meeting. My notes about this activity were as follows:

Students sat still and did not discuss with their peers. After listening to one etiquette rule, they spoke out to their leaders, who stood back-to-back in the front, and their leaders decided which one should or should not occur in a meeting. While some students were

active and excited about the task, some were not. It seemed they did not understand the listening content and kept silent. Though the learning atmosphere in this activity seemed democratic, it was messy as members of the two teams spoke loudly simultaneously, and students could not hear what their team members said.

However, in other class observations, students had more opportunities to interact, exchange, and assess their work with their peers. For example, the information exchange activity allowed students to work in pairs to exchange the missing information on the agenda. Students had six minutes to discuss the meeting agenda for the next business meeting for this task. My field notes recorded that Mai went around when students worked; she sometimes took notes on students' mistakes and corrected students' pronunciation. Then, she asked students to perform in front of the class and encouraged other students to assess their peer's work. However, it should be noted that, contrary to what Mai mentioned in the interview, she did not group students of the same level into one group to help them avoid demotivation when working with high-performing or lower-achieving students. Instead, she grouped them randomly, perhaps leading to the difference in learner engagement in each task. While some active students dominated the conversation, the shy and less competent ones seemed reluctant to talk and complete the task. These students sat in the back of the class and used their first language to seek information and exchange ideas. These students showed a lack of enthusiasm and confidence when negotiating meaning with their peers. However, Mai did not realize what occurred in the back. Perhaps, Mai could not cover all students with more than thirty students in the class. She merely went around, stopped by some groups, and asked if students needed assistance. She sometimes reminded students of their pronunciation and speaking volume, and she moved to another group to check-in.

Providing feedback. Like Ha, Mai stated in the interviews that giving students feedback is an effective strategy to support student learning. She contended that she frequently provided feedback, helping students know their actual levels and guiding students' further work.

I usually give feedback on students' assignments, prioritize peer feedback, summarize, and provide the final comment. When giving feedback, I try to point out as many good points as possible and show them their weaknesses.

According to Mai, the quality of feedback was when the teacher helped students recognize their strengths and weaknesses. She added that teachers should give them suggestions to overcome difficulties in their learning. She also stated that providing positive feedback, such as praise and positive comments, would motivate students to learn and pay much attention to their work. She claimed that students would prefer receiving positive comments and encouragement to improve their learning.

During observation of her sections, Mai expressed high power distance – the degree of hierarchy in an organization, institution, or society (Hofstede et al., 2011). This was revealed through the learning atmosphere, where she gave students directive comments or feedback. However, they were likely to obey her orders and listen to her judgments without questioning or debating. She used oral corrective feedback at almost every activity and focused on accuracy, such as grammar mistakes and pronunciation, rather than fluency. Though she used *genuine praise*, such as 'good job, well-done,' to motivate students and acknowledge students' strong points, she sometimes pointed out students' mistakes directly in front of the class. The following is an excerpt from the observation field notes about this incident:

T: Thank you, Trang; you did a good job, but some words you pronounced incorrectly. /'sɪs.təm/, not /'sai.təm/, okay? Now, the whole class, what were the other mistakes?

T (call on a student): Toan, what do you think?

S1(not confident): She spoke very well but softly, and... er er, many words wrongly.

T: Okay, thank you. Toan, speak faster next time, you take much time, don't you know about it (smile)?

T: Well, you had a good conversation and good comments and feedback for your friends. Most of you spoke loudly, but you need to improve your pronunciation. Many words were mispronounced. So now, look at the screen and pronounce those words again.

Though she offered feedback to students, this feedback was not constructive, and therefore, it often led students to stall in their learning rather than helping students move forward. She pointed out students' mistakes, such as 'pronounced incorrectly,' 'take much time,' and 'many words were mispronounced,' but did not provide solutions or suggestions for students to improve. This was contrary to what she mentioned in the interview, that she helped them with strategies to learn and develop self-directed learning skills.

However, one thing consistent with what she shared in the interview was the lack of feedback from all students. My observation recorded that not all students could receive her oral or written feedback in the class because of time constraints. With a class of 35 students, she typically took notes of the common mistakes, offered feedback in a whole-class setting, and referred students to learn the concepts, language patterns, or grammar structure in online

instruction. As indicated earlier, Mai reported in her interviews that “self-study is the key to university because today, so many students must spend time studying at home more than four times in class.” In her opinion, students played a vital role in their learning success, and teachers were “just a small part of students’ success no matter how excellent they are.” According to her, self-directed learning skills were essential to promote their learning process and development.

Instructional Adjustments. Mai often reflected on what she did in her class, which led to some changes in her teaching strategy during the semester. She said in an interview that she would change the pedagogical acts based on the areas where students were lacking or needed further information. Mai claimed: “if I see some skills they lack when answering the Reading Comprehension part, I’ll provide them with skimming and scanning skills to help get better results in the next exams.” Her willingness to change was also reflected occasionally in her instructional practice. In the first observation, she checked students’ previous knowledge by showing the online test reports. However, in the second observation, I recorded that she asked more open-ended questions to activate students’ prior knowledge, leaving room for discussions and for students to provide feedback to each other. Realizing that students were not always motivated to work in the same groups, she set the group work differently in another section, allowing them to move to find their preferred partners. I recorded that her follow-up actions in meeting students’ needs worked well in that section. When asked about the reason for changing the teaching methods, she told me in the follow-up interview that changing pedagogical acts would engage students in the lesson and motivate them to learn. Another essential aspect she shared with me was that “I don’t want to get bad feedback from students after each semester.”

It should be noticed that, although she was more comfortable and made connections with students quite often, she still showed her authority in the class by controlling students. Her

feedback and comments to students were still presented as verbal corrective feedback and evaluative feedback, such as ‘well done’ and ‘nice job.’ As explained by Allman (2019) in relation to learning English, feedback needs to be connected to a specific action; however, Mai’s evaluation statements, such as ‘great point,’ ‘good idea,’ or ‘not quite there,’ without explanations, did not help her students understand how well or poorly they performed and how they should improve in the next round to reach their learning goals.

Influencing Factors

One of the internal contextual factors that influenced Mai’s instructional practice was her reflective skills on student learning and her willingness to adapt other teaching methods to assist student learning. When the informal and formal assessment evidence was not as expected, she made minor adjustments to help students learn. Additionally, her teaching experiences with a blended learning program helped change her mindset. As mentioned in chapter 4, students were required to examine materials posted online in this program. They worked on exercises related to grammar structures and vocabulary before attending a face-to-face class. According to her, these mandatory tasks would force students to work independently and enhance their self-study and self-assessment.

However, her thoughts about student learning were not transferred to her instructional practice, which viewed students as the centre of their learning. Examining the reason for this incongruence, she confessed that she did not have opportunities to attend professional developments, allowing her to update the new methodologies and exchange knowledge with colleagues. She claimed that although she had been teaching for ten years in higher education, she had few opportunities for workshop training in teaching methodology and assessment. The teaching activities and methods in her instruction were from her teaching experience, other

teachers' observations, and teachers' monthly meetings. Mai also stated in an interview that she understood the benefits of active learning and alternative evaluation; however, she did not know how to implement them in the class, and she felt skeptical about the effectiveness of the formative assessment.

Class size, time constraints, and workload were the other external influences impeding Mai from fully implementing formative assessment strategies in her class. Given that the blended learning curriculum brought a new window to her instruction, she admitted she felt pressured since she did not cover all the tasks given in the material in 90 minutes in a face-to-face class. She reported being overwhelmed with the duty of exporting student online learning reports before in-person classes with five courses and over thirty-five students for each section. She claimed that this task consumed her time, and she did not have time to offer feedback to every student.

Another external factor that affected Mai's decisions about her teaching and assessment purpose was the pervasive testing culture and institutional policy. Although Mai mentioned that she did not teach to the test or prepare students with strategies for exams, she sometimes reminded students of the rubric of the speaking tests and asked them to practice the sample speaking tasks in her instruction. She added that "most of the students learn for grades, so I reminded them of the criteria so that they can have a plan to learn in the semester." She also showed power distance, the degree of hierarchy in the classroom and the unequal status relationship among teachers and students (Hofstede et al., 2010). It was illustrated through her wording and tone when communicating with students or offering feedback to them.

Confessional Reflection

Similar to what I did with Ha, before observing Mai's class, I was aware of setting aside my own bias and bringing a 'fresh mind' to her class. Mai texted me, showing her nervousness that she might not perform well in her instruction and asked me for advice. I comforted her and encouraged her to teach as usual and ignore my presence in the class. Mai invited me to join some activities in her class if interested, but I felt hesitant. Though I understand that an ethnographic researcher could participate in some activities in the field to have deep immersion in the world studied, I struggled with how much or how little to get involved in classroom activities while remaining the role of an observer (Fortune & Mair, 2011). To make students and the teacher feel comfortable with my presence and reassure them that they were not being studied, I decided to get involved in the first activity, "ice breaker," to introduce myself and get to know others. During Mai's instruction, I did not participate in any activities as I wanted to observe the teacher's actions and how she helped students with their learning. However, some students who sat beside me asked for help with new words and pronunciation a few times during my observation. While I was glad that they treated me as a class member, sometimes I felt distracted and confused about my role as a researcher.

My past experience interviewing and observing teachers could help me identify things to take notes and record. I paid attention to not only Mai's actions but her voice and attitude in her class. Mai had a very formal manner and tone when communicating with students or providing feedback. Her voice, compliments, and corrections reminded me of when I was a student; I got similar feedback and comments without recommendations for improvement. Though having students work in pairs and perform conversations, she focused more on sentence structures and grammar. She offered students more controlled practice than free practice, with few opportunities to enhance students' creativity. She first provided students with the conversation

sample, asked them to follow the structures, and corrected students' pronunciation and grammar mistakes if needed. Students precisely followed the way she instructed them. They performed a conversation by reading them aloud, similar to what I did and what my students did many years ago. Mai encouraged them to speak out without the material, but students were reluctant to do that. In my field note, I noted my question: whether students could make the conversation by themselves or communicate outside the classroom without the sample. Also, I noted how Mai could help build self-directed learning skills for students, as she mentioned in the interviews. Attending Mai's classes, I saw the sharp contrast between Mai's perception of student learning and her actions in her instruction.

Summary of Mai's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment

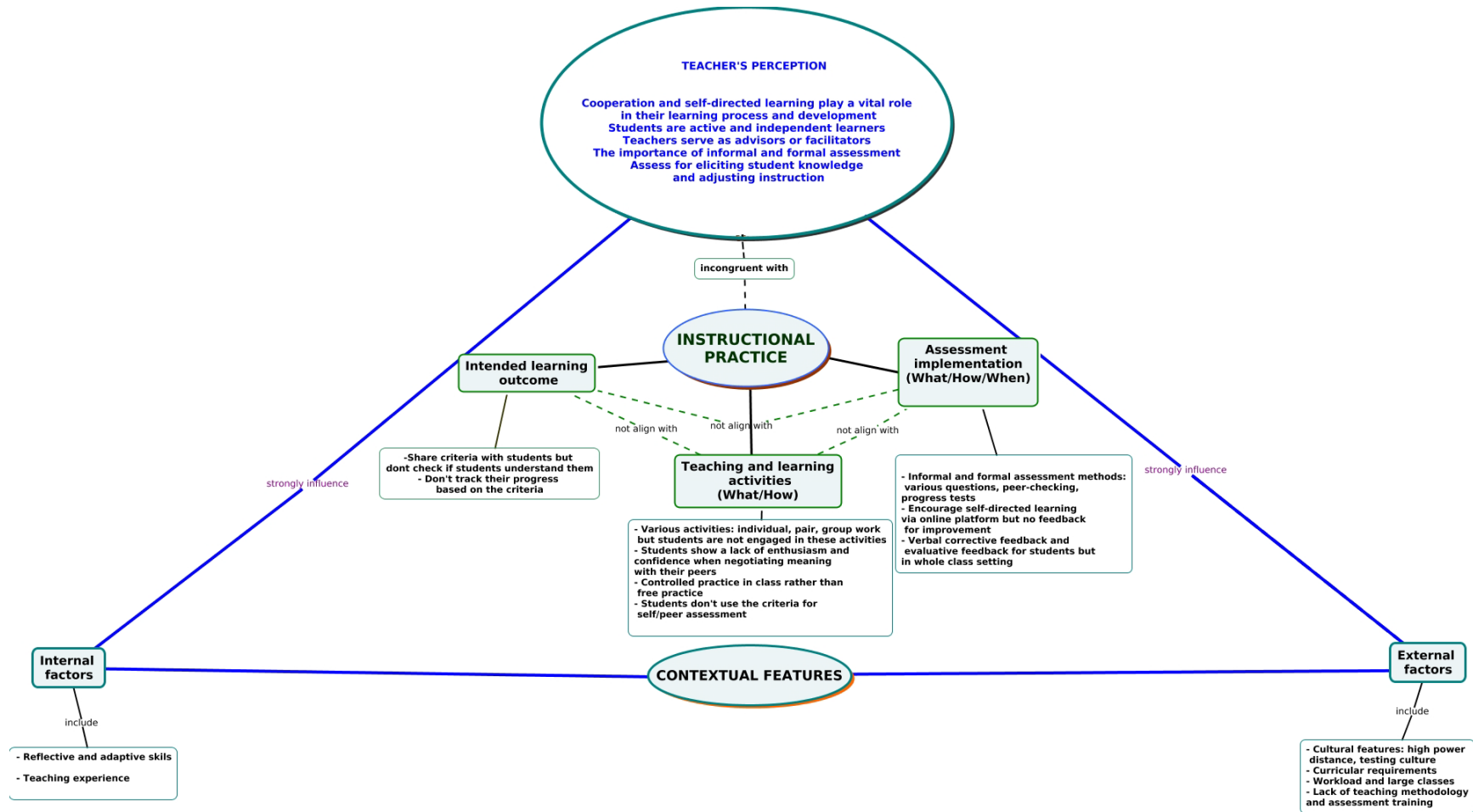
Mai's actual instructional practice was not congruent with her perception of student learning, teaching and assessment. Her views were that student-directed learning is crucial in their learning journey, and teachers are advisors to help them reach their learning goals. She explained that equipping students with self-directed learning skills would enable them to monitor their learning pace and progress; instructors served as advisors and facilitators to encourage learners to establish learning goals and track their progress toward those goals. Therefore, she shared the intended learning outcomes with students and implemented various instructional methods to meet diverse student needs and motivate learning. However, her actual instruction revealed that Mai discussed the learning goals with students, but she did not check whether students understood those criteria or provided students with examples to illustrate the task requirements and strategies to meet those learning intentions. Also, although she requested students spend time studying independently, she did not offer them feedback and comments. Instead, Mai provided feedback in a whole-class setting and focused on corrective and evaluative

feedback rather than cognitive feedback. In addition, her assessment methods were not aligned with the intended learning outcomes and her pedagogical acts. While she reported that she did not teach to the test or provide students with test preparation strategies, in reality, she still employed testing as a tool to assess students' ability and development. Also, she considered peer assessment a way to reduce the teacher's workload, especially when teaching a large class.

Mai's perceptions and practice of student learning, teaching, and assessment were affected by several contextual features. Although her reflective skills seemed to help her be aware of adapting various methods to assist student learning, the lack of training and teaching experience affected her in implementing alternative evaluation methods, such as formative assessment. At the same time, the external factors came from class size, time constraints, workload, and the pervasive testing culture and institutional policy that influenced Mai's teaching and assessment decisions. Those were the factors impeding Mai from fully implementing formative assessment strategies in her class.

Figure 6

Summary of Mai's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment



Ly and Minh: Instructors in the English-Majored Program

This section presents the results for the last two participants, Ly and Minh, who were teaching courses in the English-Majored program.

Participant 3: Ly

Ly's Perception of Student Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

Similar to Ha and Mai, Ly also expressed her belief that students should be active and independent in their learning. That way, students would achieve their learning goals and success with teachers' guidance. However, unlike Mai seeing teachers as facilitators, Ly emphasized the teacher's vital role in student learning. According to her, teachers made a significant contribution to their learning success; therefore, "teachers should help learners meet their needs and expectations and give them learning strategies to help them get learning outcomes." In her interview, Ly stated that she would prefer to use various instructional methods, such as individual work, pair-group work, or presentations, to help students access knowledge and develop their English skills. To encourage students to develop independent learning, Ly provided them with homework assignments, asked them to work independently, and scored for this task. Her mindset was that students would develop self-directed learning if assigned many tasks outside the classroom. She equated the development of self-study skills with working on many assignments. In addition, to encourage students to do homework, she offered them marks for their jobs. Ly illustrated it as follows:

One of the marks students get in the course is self-study skills. Students are required to complete assignments in three books that we gave them to learn at home. At the end of the course, we will design a written test by collecting readings randomly from these

books. Based on the test results, we can know whether the students did it and how the self-study is practical.

Ly added that another reason for asking students to practice self-study and self-assessment was because “there are only 90-minute in-class lessons per week; if we do not force them to study at home, they will be lazy.” She noted that although her students were at an intermediate level, their performances were not the same. To enhance their learning, Ly stated that she had her students work in collaborative activities, helping them develop teamwork skills and learn from each other. She also illustrated that she focused on developing self and peer assessments for students by asking them to write portfolios in the *Academic Writing* course. This, according to Ly, would be a valuable opportunity for them to enhance self-directed learning skills. Ly described:

Students are required to submit about eight essays during a semester. For each essay, they will have two to three versions. They have to seek information to fill in the sample test given for the first draft; for the second draft, they must analyze the sample test and then give it to their friend for peer-checking. Teachers will collect all papers, then provide them with some feedback. If it’s okay, the students won’t need to write the third version, but they will have to write it if it’s not good.

She revealed another reason for employing peer correction because these activities would help her manage her instruction and reduce her workload. She said: “the teacher cannot do everything at the given time, so students should be encouraged to work. I ask them to work in pairs or groups to check their products and give home feedback to each other.” She explained that cooperative activities were often used in the classroom to enhance ‘high-touch learning,’ and

she led the group discussion with test-oriented exercises. In one of the interviews, when asked to reflect on her instruction, Ly described:

In the class, we usually share with students some tactics to deal with some types of IELTS tests, and then they will practice them at home. Sometimes they can do it in the classroom, and I can see how many correct answers students have, but I don't focus too much on correcting all the tests because I think they need a detailed explanation for incorrect answers. That helps them in other tests.

Ly's explanations revealed cognitive dissonance regarding her teaching. Although Ly stated that she frequently organized various instructional activities to develop students' high-ordered level thinking skills, the outcomes achieved were to recall and reproduce the factual knowledge rather than developing problem-solving or critical thinking skills.

Ly's assessment decisions were guided by the perception that students learn to achieve high marks and that "teachers should help learners meet their needs and expectations." Her assessment approach was an examination-focused assessment that evaluated students' performance and achievement against the standard criteria and standardized tests. She reported that she shared criteria for success in every instruction unit and introduced students to how their work would be assessed, adhering to these objectives. She wanted to see whether students met the course's requirements or learning expectations and whether they knew what and how much knowledge they mastered, thereby adjusting the instruction. However, she equated the term 'assessment' with 'testing' when defining assessment, though sometimes she differentiated summative and formative assessments in the interview. Ly stated the benefits of the testing system as follows:

Through testing, teachers will know the students' level and knowledge, focusing more on the areas they lack. Students can know their abilities and concentrate intensely on what they need to do for the next test.

Ly believed that testing is a helpful tool for gathering information on student learning and a means for students to measure their progress. She claimed:

I depend on many test scores to understand students' levels. Based on the test results, teachers understand what knowledge students get and what they lack, focusing more on that aspect and reteaching it in the class. Students depend on test scores to understand what they are good or bad at. When they know about test scores, they will compare the results with other students and know whether they are as good as their friends, and then they will improve themselves later.

Perceiving that assessment evaluated students' ability based on the information in materials and instructed by the teacher, Ly relied on testing to determine the students' progress and autonomy. She reported that typical assessment tasks used to assess students' learning processes were quizzes and tests. Ly described the assessment tasks employed in her class as following:

Students will have four marks for the course "Reading skills." One mark for checking students' reading comprehension; one is for self-study. To get a score for self-study, I ask them to do twelve tests in four IELTS Cambridge books at home, and I'll create a test using several parts randomly in that book to check their achievements. At the same time, they will be given a form to fill in some vocabulary they have learned and explain those words. If they cannot do it, I will provide them with some sources to better understand that. The third score is for vocabulary checking, which includes 30% for a group

presentation and 70% for a test related to the vocabulary learned. The last one is the final test (end-of-term test) which accounts for 60%.

Ly heavily relied on testing and considered it a primary form of assessment in her instruction. Ly described the teacher's role as an assessor and test designer rather than an advisor in the assessment process. She claimed:

I think the assessment quality should focus on the validity and reliability of tests to ensure equality when assessing students. I think teachers play a crucial role in teaching and assessment. A teacher is a person who assesses students and a person who prepares tests for students.

Confessional Reflection

Like Ha and Mai, the conversations and discussions during a semester with Ly produced several insights about how our roles and personal backgrounds led us to the research. I was thankful to Ly as she did not see me as an outsider that would otherwise have been difficult to enter her world. As we both worked in the same division and taught the same course, we felt comfortable talking about teaching experience in Higher Education and changes in the Division and curriculum. Ly made an effort to provide me with as much information as possible during the interviews by answering all the questions I was concerned about and having no hesitation in sharing her stories with me. I listened to her with empathic listening, which is “an intuitive connectedness to others that, without words, communicates interest in and care about others” (Watts, 2008, p. 9). This approach helped me immerse in the participants' stories and place myself in Ly's shoes to understand what happened and how it affected her world. I had the same situation as Ly when I taught 30 hours a week with different courses. I even told her my vulnerabilities when it came to assessment methods. Like Ly, I heavily relied on testing to assess

students' knowledge and performance and believed that students' results reflected their abilities and proficiency. Therefore, I sympathized with what Ly shared with me and understood the workload she was suffering and why she assigned students group assignments just because of reducing her workload and stuck around giving students tests.

Positioning myself so close to the participant could gain the participants' trust, but it brought many challenges in maintaining the researcher's role, involvement, and distance (Fortune & Mair, 2011). I attempted to "find a meaningful balance of collaboration between the voice of the participant and the interpretive voice of the researcher" (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005, p. 101). Because I established a close relationship with Ly, the boundary between a researcher and a participant seemed vague. Although I understood that "using background information to build relationships must be done with caution" (Fortune & Mair, 2011, p. 474), I confessed that I lost my perspective a few times when discussing my background and teaching experience with Ly. For example, I may have been more concerned about Ly's emotions and feelings than being involved in the research's other aspects, such as exploring more about the changes in the curriculum or assessment methods. However, thanks to her stories, I reflected on myself as an insider and reminded myself of the bias I might have when observing her instruction.

Ly's Actual Instructional Practice (regarding Formative Assessment)

Sharing Learning Expectations. Ly reported in the interview that she often shared criteria for success with students at the beginning of the course and in almost all instructional units. According to her, this would enhance self-directed learning skills and help students become independent learners. As observed in her class, she shared with students the intended learning outcomes and clearly explained the marking scheme for assessing their assignments based on the IELTS band scores with four criteria: (a) Task Achievement; (b) Coherence and Cohesion; (c)

Lexical Resource; and (b) Grammatical Range and Accuracy. For example, before students wrote an essay, they were required to analyze the sample writing test and adhere to the marking scheme. She repeated many times in her instruction the importance of the criteria their assignments would be assessed upon and reminded students of the techniques to achieve high scores. Here is an example of Ly checking students' understanding of writing task criteria:

T: Okay, now we move on to the new lesson. Before starting the new lesson, can you tell me how many criteria for writing in IELTS task 2?

Ss (in chorus): four

T: what are they?

Ss: Task fulfilment, coherence, grammar range and lexical resource

T: Okay, now, I'd like you to work in pairs, follow the criteria and analyze the sample test. You should identify if the essay fully addresses the question or not; how many main points are well developed in the body; is there a clear thesis statement and a topic sentence for each paragraph, and so on.

Clearly, Ly cared about the marking scheme and wanted her students to understand well about the rubric before engaging in writing tasks. This action was consistent with what she mentioned in the interview: she shared criteria for success in every instruction unit and helped students know how their work would be assessed.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Informal and Formal Assessment Techniques. My observational notes recorded that Ly showed her enthusiasm for question prompts and conversations to check student understanding. It was noted that Ly stuck with her perception of teaching to the test; hence, every means of collecting student learning was related to test-oriented exercises. Depending on the situation, Ly used variously closed and open-ended

questions and made conversations with students. However, they were related to the course content, homework, and assignment rubric. The following is an excerpt from the observation field notes about using open-ended questions to elicit student's knowledge and remind them of the criteria of the task:

T: Okay, what is the task requirement here?

S1: Providing the reasons and solutions for the situation “many people in many countries are spending less time with their family.”

T: Yes, what problem can you see in the essay? What's wrong here?

S1: In the introduction, the writer provides reasons and solutions are not mentioned yet. So, does it fulfill the task?

Ss (in chorus): No

T: Good, another problem, can you find out?

S2: The writer mentions the solutions and doesn't mention any causes

T: Yes, good. How about the body, are the main points developed coherently?

Why and why not?

S3: The first paragraph lacks a topic sentence, and the supporting details in the second paragraph are not relevant to the main ideas.

T: Show me what are the grammar range and lexical resources in the essay? Show what you find out?

It can be seen that Ly asked many questions to recall the factual knowledge, a goal that was encompassed within the writing organization and assessing criteria. I recognized in Ly's instruction that although the tasks for students were test-oriented exercises, Ly often provided students time to prepare for complex tasks. For instance, in a group writing activity, students

were required to discuss with their peers for ten minutes and then report their group ideas back to the entire class. She challenged them with questions related to word choice and idea development and then asked them to explain the reasons for using them. Students in her instruction, as I recorded, were engaging and dynamic; they were active and excited to work with their peers. They seemed to be aware of the course's requirements and learnt for the test. Some students initially raised questions to the teacher when they wanted more clarification or explanations. However, in another observation, Ly seemed to be a controlling teacher with a teacher-centred approach to some tasks. For example, in the Reading skill instruction, Ly asked students to define new words she showed on the slides. She did not give time for them to cooperate with their peers. Instead, Ly posed questions to check students' prior knowledge and provided definitions if they were hesitant to answer. This showed inconsistency in her teaching methods, especially using questioning or conversations to elicit student learning.

Perhaps the key means of gathering student learning in Ly's classes was through unit tests, progress tests, and assignments. Ly said in the interview that tests are a valuable means for her to determine students' levels, adjust her instruction, and make changes for the next semester. She also mentioned that test results would help her find appropriate strategies to remedy students' weaknesses. Ly explained:

I often use the student test results to help them overcome their student weaknesses. For example, if students get low marks, I will give them more activities or tasks to help them get higher scores for the following tests or recheck the test's difficulty and have some changes. Besides, it is a way to collect information on students learning. I did do that and reported it to the Dean to find out the solutions and make changes to the next course.

According to Ly, helping students get high marks in the final exams was her responsibility and her students' expectations. This aspect was reflected in her teaching method with test-related tasks in her instruction.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Class Activities. Similar to other instructors, Ly reported using various instructional activities to encourage student-student interaction, helping them engage in the lesson and learn from each other. Students demonstrated their learning via individual work, presentations, role-plays, group discussions, quizzes, and progress tests during the semester. However, it was noted that these activities focused on preparing for tests rather than helping students construct knowledge. For example, one task in the Reading Skills instruction was that students were forced to administer weekly vocabulary quizzes or presentations. Ly was recorded to show slides with new words in the reading texts, ask students to think about their definitions and share what they remembered with the entire class. The following description illustrates a piece of the conversation that took place.

T: Today, I will show you some new words about “Family matters” on the slides to see if you still remember them or not. The first word is a widow. What does it mean?

S1: A woman whose husband died.

T: Yes, her husband died and now she is alone, okay! How about a man whose wife has died?

Ss: widower

T: Yes, we call “widower” for a man whose wife died. Okay, now I would like you to work with your friends, explain the definition related to the words shown on the slides and give examples using those words.

At times in her instruction, she shifted her pedagogy from teacher-centredness to student-centredness, giving more space for students to interact with others and forcing their deeper understanding of the topic given. In one lesson, she helped students explore the causes of freshwater shortage and seek out the solution to tackle the problem through a group discussion activity. She had students work in small groups to brainstorm and write down their thoughts on a large piece of paper. Two groups were assigned to discuss the causes while the other ones worked on giving solutions for the given problem. After the discussion, a representative of each group was invited to report the group's ideas to the entire class. She then worked with a class discussion to bring together what they had discussed.

T: Tell me what are the causes of freshwater shortage, group A?

S (group A): two main factors contribute to water deficiency. Overpopulation is the first reason, and the second one is water pollution.

S (group B): The main reason for the lack of freshwater is that a large amount of water is contaminated due to industrialization's increasing demand for water.

T: Great points. Okay, the whole class, do you agree with those ideas? Why does overpopulation cause the lack of freshwater? Can you explain?

Ss: More people, more water

T: Yes, and why water pollution? Because of the lack of people's awareness?

T: How about the solutions, groups C and D? Come to the front and present your ideas!

S (group C): First, the government should pose a strict policy. For example, many companies which release toxic chemical substances into the water should be penalized

S (group D): Individuals should be aware of the importance of fresh water and use it properly. Government should have a strict policy on this issue.

T: Good answers. Do you want to add more? Thank you for your work. Now you are going to practice group writing, group A and B, you guys will write a paragraph about the causes, and groups C and D will write a paragraph about solutions to freshwater shortage. Ten minutes for you, now go!

I noticed that in this activity, Ly applied a learning-centred approach to instruction. She created cooperation and collaboration among students and used open-ended questions to gather students' understanding. However, these questions were non-investigation that could not help students investigate the relationship between the facts they provided. The activity focused on setting a degree of knowledge construction rather than conceptual understanding. Although the students were generally praised for delivering the 'right' answers that the teacher expected, students provided regurgitating information rather than thinking deeply. Her instructional patterns reflected an instructivist approach, focusing more on the facts, knowledge content, and principles that help students deal with high-stakes examinations (Porcaro, 2011). The instructional activities aimed to recall low-level facts rather than conceptual levels.

Providing feedback. Ly stated in the interview that feedback was necessary for student learning and that peer review was helpful as students could learn from one another. However, during Ly's interview, she indicated that she did not frequently give students feedback because of workload and time constraints. Instead, she preferred correcting students' mistakes, explaining incorrect answers in their practice tests, and guiding students to follow the test samples. Ly claimed:

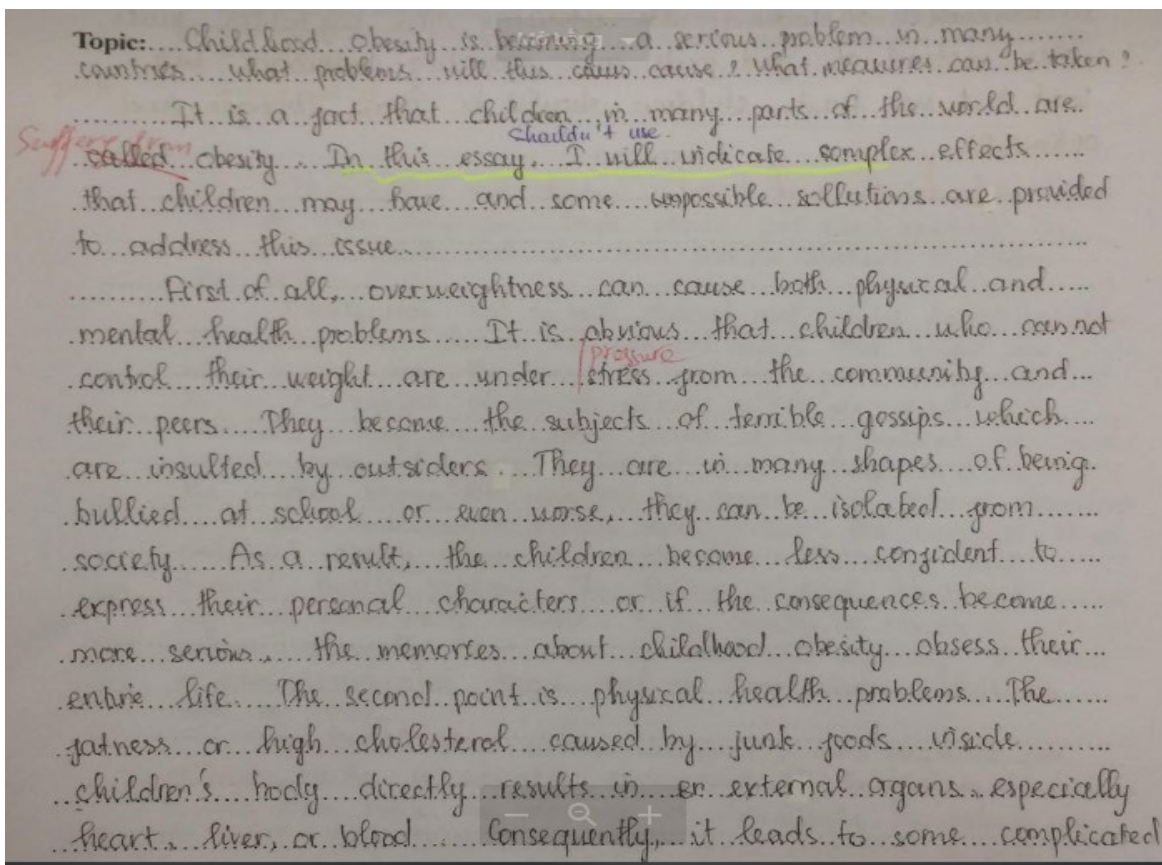
I often give oral feedback in the classroom and focus on serious mistakes students frequently make. However, I randomly pick up 4 or 5 students for students' writing to provide them with feedback or comments. I do not have much time to give feedback to all

students at the same time. Typically, I just pick up some main points or big mistakes students often have and write down on the board and remind them to avoid these mistakes. Students are required to do a peer check before submitting their papers to me.

Perhaps Ly's definition of feedback as "focus on serious mistakes students frequently make" led to her demonstrations in instructional practice. When assessing students' work in the classroom, she frequently provided oral corrective feedback and comments to students in a whole-class setting and explained the principles and format of the end-of-term tests. She also encouraged students to practice peer feedback to check their mistakes before submitting the final essay to her for students' assignments. She then commented on some of the students' papers, correcting word choice, fragments, or grammar mistakes. Her comments were short and general, such as "the writing should be more academic" or "explain your ideas when seeing me in the class." She did not provide students with information on what they did well and what they needed to improve. The following is a sample of Ly's feedback on a student's essay:

Figure 7

Ly's Feedback to a Student's Essay



It can be seen from the sample that there was an absence of detailed and meaningful feedback for the student's writing. What she did was offer a correction on word choice, suggesting using "suffer from" for "called" and "pressure" for "stress." There was no guidance for further development. In addition, it was noted that although Ly shared criteria for success with students, the IELTS band scores with four bars, Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy, there was no evidence she adhered to that rubric. Observing Ly's instruction focusing on academic IELTS writing and analyzing her feedback to students raised a question in my mind: what is academic writing and what is the purpose of language teaching? Examining the writing course outline, I found different

statements on the course's objectives. The goals of the writing course were to provide students with strategies so that students were able to write argumentative and opinion essays on various themes, such as problem-solving, cause and effect, etc. However, Ly's instruction was prone to help students tackle problems in the IELTS exam. Her scaffolding activities and feedback mainly focused on error correction, which was not aligned with learning intentions.

As mentioned in the interview, Ly frequently asked students to peer-check before submitting the final writing version to her. She told me that she taught students to correct their peer's products by using writing codes such as SP, WC, and Gr, which stands for spelling, word choice or grammar mistakes, and provide their peers with solid points and weak points. Her students seemed to work well on this task and showed enthusiasm for collaborating with their peers. Although this activity, on the whole, seemed to be a good exercise to trigger learners' engagement and interactions, they focused more on correcting the mistakes, such as grammar and spelling, as guided. They did not point out the areas for improvement, especially idea development, coherence, and task achievement, as indicated in the rubric. Also, Ly's students did not assess their peers based on the marking scheme given. Figure 8 below displays an example of students' peer correction in Ly's class:

Figure 8

A Sample of Students' Peer-Correction in Ly's Class

It show (unnatural) Not a ~~any~~ single area of the world has always confronted to fresh water scarcity. This alarming issue is believed to be the consequence of some solutions generated from modern society. To deal with fresh water scarcity, some measures should be taken by both authority and individuals.

sp ←

There are two main causes of this problem, which are overpopulation and industrialization. Pure water resource is under pressure of the rapid growing pop. population. As the more population increases, the greater deal of water is made use of, as well as the more likelihood of water pollution. One example of this point is Manila river in Philippines. It used to be an ordinary river, as time passed by, now it is an extremely contaminated polluted river with full of variety of refuse. As a result, water resource is shortened. What is more, industrialization is a partial reason for this problem as there are some factories illegally discharge sewage without treatment directly into river. For instance, in 2016, a Formosa factory in Ha Tinh, Vietnam spoiled a river by that inhuman action. Consequently, fishermen there had to live in miserableness because masses of fish had been killed. It is indicated that industrialization has negative effect on fresh water resource.

plural

In the terms of combating with ^{the} concern, the collaboration between government and residence should be executed as soon as possible.

sp

Since each person is the unit of society, of each one is realize the gr importance of fresh water, there will be huge amount of water is saved. Besides, people should reduce water by taking shorter showers or use reuse water and fix the leaking faucets. In respect of government, they should raise the aware awareness of all the people as well as raise the water price so that residence would use less water. Moreover, stricter policies must be made released to the factories in order to protect the lake, river and ocean. As a result, there might be no more tragic situation like in Vietnam in 2016.

sp

To conclude, the growth of population and industrialization are plural two major cause, which lead to fresh water shortage. Not only governments but also individuals should be responsible of this problem as take measures instantly to save clean water, save the world.

? structure: or

Comments:

- Your essay has a clear and logical organization to follow.
- You should pay more attention on some errors such as spelling, plural;

Signatures

In this sample, students in Ly's class copied Ly's working template, using writing codes such as SP, WC, and Gr to correct their peers' writing. They provided little detail about good and weak points, which were too general and vague. Also, they did not assess their peers' products based on the rubric shared and practiced in the classroom. This evidence showed the inconsistency of learning intentions, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods in Ly's class. It is also worthy of attention that students in Ly's class followed Ly's guidance without concerning how useful or useless they were. This indicated the hierarchical principle in Vietnamese classrooms, where students often followed what teachers said without questioning.

In addition to offering oral and written feedback to students, in my observation field notes, I recorded that Ly often enhanced students' motivation by giving them compliments, helping them become more confident in their learning. However, she noted in an interview that she was an authoritarian teacher when giving strict rules and "hard words" to students when they were distracted in their learning. According to Ly, this was her way of being 'cruel to be kind.' At this point, she seemed to have a similar view as Ha when using rewards and punishment to form students' learning habits. Ly said:

I always use compliments, especially for new and first-year students, because I don't want them to be shocked when they first enter university. Some students have distractions in their studies because of their part-time jobs, I often give them strict rules, and sometimes I give them hard words, even hurt them, to make them aware of what they are doing and ask them to focus more on the lesson.

The evidence from Ly's interviews and instructional practices showed a conflict in her thoughts as well as in teaching and assessment methods. On the one hand, Ly was aware of the benefits of formative assessment and wanted her students to become independent learners and

master knowledge and skills in the course. On the other hand, Ly's actions recorded in her instruction showed that she favoured the conventional examination-focused teaching approach and was still impacted by the behaviourist view of student learning.

Instructional Adjustments. When asked about the adjustment in teaching and assessment when gathering students' understanding, Ly said in the interview that she modified the activities for each section to assist them in achieving their goals. She explained that if students struggled with sentence structures and/or content of the lesson, she would translate them into the first language or prompt questions and ask high-performing students to provide examples for the whole class. For formal assessments like tests and assignments, she claimed that some parts of the final tests should be improved to evaluate what students learned during the semester. However, she showed conflict in her thoughts when saying that the testing and assessment system were working well and effectively and there was no need to change it in the future. Ly explained: "As I said, I think it works well, for me and my students as well. When teachers and students are familiar with one kind of method, it's gonna be easier to follow." This view was largely reflected in Ly's teaching practice, where her instructional activities were organized to equip students with tactics for examinations.

Influencing Factors

Theoretical knowledge, which provides successful techniques and theory of knowledge, influenced Ly's decision to embed strategies related to formative assessment into her instruction. Based on the research conducted for this dissertation, her mental teaching model appeared to be *instructivist*, which typically focused on transmitting principles and tactics followed by the drill and practice that helped students master essential academic skills (Katz, 1999). Although Ly expected her students to take ownership of their learning, she showed her control over students

and used grades to evaluate students' progress and achievements. She reported that attending many workshops about teaching and assessment helped change her mind about teaching and student learning; she knew the vital role of students in their learning. As she claimed in the interviews, she created space for students to discuss and exchange their ideas and left room for peer assessment as a source of feedback for students. However, it seemed that this reflected the effectiveness of workshops rather than the building teachers' long-standing practices and beliefs. The incongruence between her thoughts and instructional practice was obvious evidence of that.

Ly's instructional practices were also strongly affected by assessment norms and curriculum. Although she mentioned applying task-based and project-based activities to enhance student interactions and learning with understanding, she portrayed herself as a knowledge provider, helping students access adequate knowledge to pass the progress tests and end-term exams. The testing culture, asking English-majored students to obtain level 5/6 reference English levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), as a graduation condition, also put pressure on instructors, including Ly. Ly claimed that she felt she had a responsibility to help students achieve this goal. For this reason, she equipped students with tactics and techniques for doing tests during instruction and outside class time. The evidence in her classroom illustrated that most of the tasks designed were prone to reproduce factual knowledge. The principal assessment tool she used was the assessment of learning (i.e., summative tests) rather than assessment for learning or formative activities.

Additionally, Ly's instruction was somehow hierarchical since the Confucian ideology influenced her. She admitted in one interview that sometimes she needed to be 'cruel to be kind' to students to help them realize their mistakes. In addition, she mentioned that time constraints

were another external factor that impeded her from providing feedback to help students move forward in her instruction.

Confessional Reflection

Researchers often attempt to be immersed in their fieldwork to understand the participants' world when employing ethnography. However, immersing in participants' lifeworld may result in "going native" or losing their perspectives (Sikes, 2001; Patton, 2002). Therefore, balancing the "going native" and total distance is challenging for many fieldworkers (Lofland, 2006). The balance issue in this study involved deciding on whether and how much participation I should do in Ly's classroom activities. Ly knew that I had experience in teaching academic reading and writing to English major students, so she sometimes invited me to give a talk to students or asked me to offer feedback on their work. To ensure the account of the research and build a close relationship with students, I had informal talks with students rather than giving them judgements or comments. The more talks I shared with students, the more students seemed to begin relaxing with me. I decided not to participate in other activities to retain my role as a researcher. However, I had experienced a feeling of "coming back home" when I had time to talk to students and share with them some strategies to achieve the course's objectives.

Another issue that I struggled to overcome in the field was bias. Since I had experience both as an instructor at this institution and as a teaching assistant for an Academic English course at a Canadian university, I sometimes had a judgemental perspective on Ly's instruction. For example, Ly showed some new words in the Reading course and asked students to provide their definitions. Instead of requesting them to figure out solutions, she cold-called students by their names. When they did not provide exact answers, she showed the definitions she had prepared on the slide and explained them to the students. This gave me a sense of comparison. In

the course I worked as a teaching assistant in Canada, students were encouraged to interact with others to make sense of a new term or idea. In the classroom, instructors were facilitators and students were required to work in groups to share their thoughts and received scaffolding from their peers, teaching assistant, and instructor. The differences between the two educational environments I experienced made me somehow judge Ly's instruction. Although I always told myself that I should look at everything with a 'fresh mind,' I confessed that a few times in the observations, I let my personal thinking and feelings lead my mind and did not see things as they were.

Summary of Ly's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment

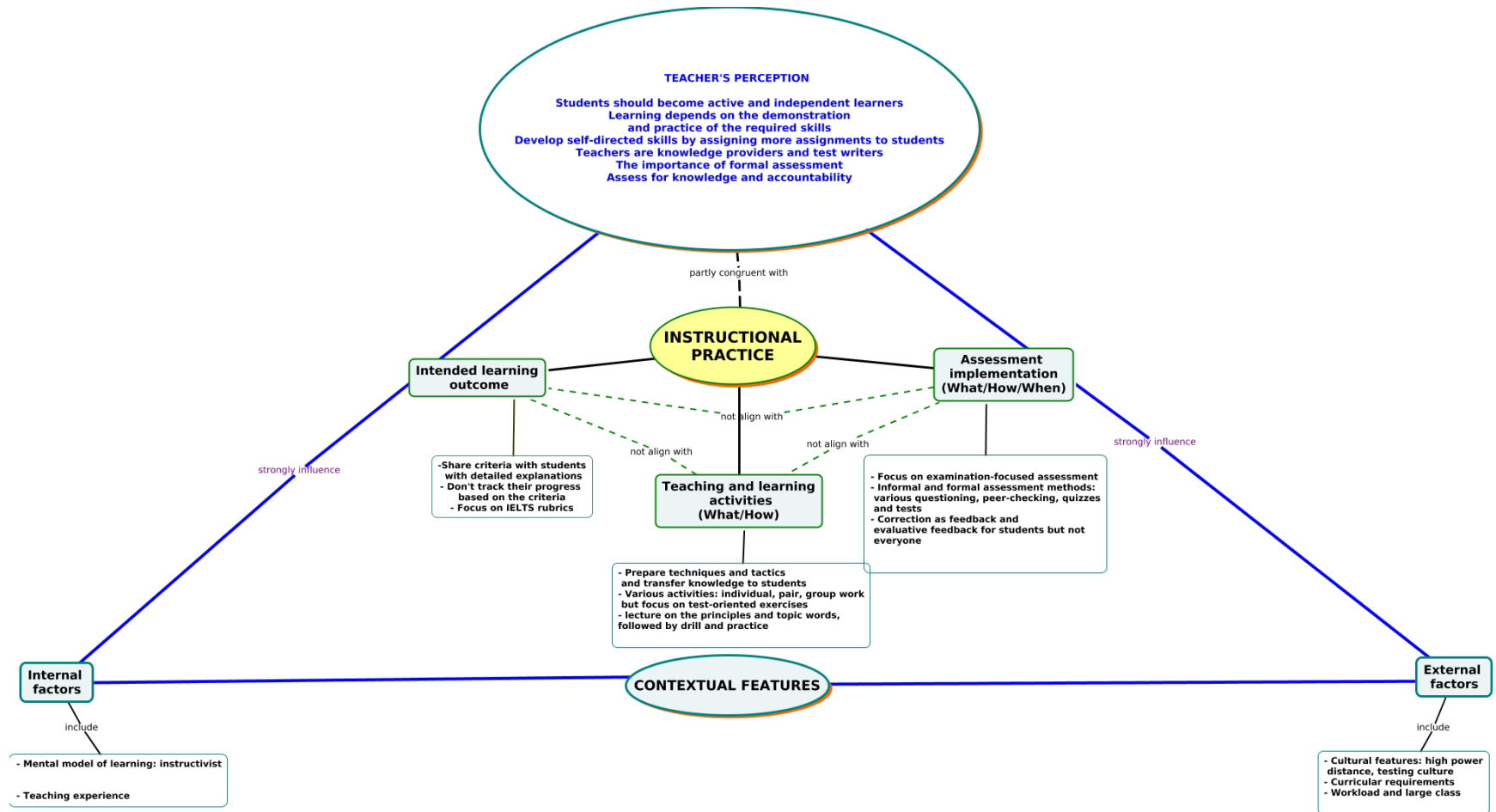
Figure 9 below shows a conflict in Ly's thoughts as well as in teaching and assessment methods. On the one hand, Lili was aware of the benefit of the learner-centred approach and wanted her students to become active and independent learners. On the other hand, she emphasized the teacher's vital role in student learning and portrayed herself as a knowledge provider, helping students access adequate knowledge to get high marks in the exams. Ly's actual practice showed that she favoured the conventional examination-focused teaching approach and was still a controlling teacher. According to her, teachers significantly contributed to students' learning success, and teachers were assessors and test designers rather than advisors in the assessment process. Ly's perception of the student evaluation was congruent with her conventional examination-focused teaching approach, in which she evaluated students' performance and achievement against the standard criteria and standardized tests. There was also inconsistency in intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods in Ly's class. While she shared the criteria for success with detailed explanations to

students, she did not track their learning progress or provide feedback on the individual student's progress. Her feedback mainly focused on corrective and evaluative feedback.

Ly's mindset of teaching and actual practice were strongly affected by internal and external factors. Her mental teaching model, which was prone to *instructivist* approach, led to the transmission of principles and strategies to master essential academic skills, followed by the drill and practice in her class. In addition, Ly's perception and instructional practice about student learning and assessment were also strongly affected by curriculum requirements and testing culture. Moreover, although she mentioned applying various instructional activities to enhance student interactions and learning with understanding, she was influenced by Confucian ideology, which emphasizes the hierarchical principles and high power distance in the class.

Figure 9

Summary of Ly's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment



Participant 4: Minh

Minh's Perception of Student Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

Minh's data was in sharp contrast with other participants: she perceived student learning as a process of recalling and reproducing knowledge explained and taught by the teacher. The evidence from interviews showed that her instructional approach adhered to instructivist-based pedagogy, which emphasizes the teacher-centeredness and controlling what should be learned and how to be learned (Katz, 1999) and which is based on the premises that "learning depends on the demonstration and practice of required skill" (Kesler et al., 2021, p. 5). For example, in an interview, Minh described that she helped students learn by providing the vocabulary necessary for the IELTS examination and quizzes to check their understanding of what they learned.

According to Minh, the teacher played a vital role in enhancing students' motivation and autonomy in their learning. She assumed that giving more tasks outside school time would promote students' self-study and help them remember their knowledge and improve themselves. Therefore, she asked students to revise the vocabulary learned by making a video portfolio weekly and preparing a new lesson's glossary. In the interview, she also reported various teaching strategies employed to create a productive learning environment and meet diverse students' needs in the class. Similar to Ly's perspective, Minh believed that pair-group working allowed students to be more confident and interactive in exchanging their opinions. However, she explained that she needed to employ them in her class just as they were designed in the course outline. She seemed to follow the course outline without reasoning why collaborative activities should be implemented. She said in an interview with me:

The courses' objectives are discussed and decided by a group of teachers in the Faculty.

We think that group work must be implemented in the class because it is one of the

course's objectives. Maybe it is based on our experience, but we discussed and decided what we should do for students.

Analyzing the syllabus, I found no alignment between the course objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. The course objectives aimed to provide students with listening strategies to listen to English lectures or long speeches on diverse topics related to many different disciplines and equip students with strategies to discuss social issues or opposing views. However, the student evaluation stressed summative assessment with several progress tests and a final examination. It was noted that there were no guidelines for teaching tactics for IELTS in this course outline. However, in almost all the interviews, Minh always mentioned the techniques for boosting the learners' achievement in examinations. She reported that she often instructed students on the tactics and strategies for doing two progress tests and a final test, which accounted for 30% and 50%, respectively, of the course grade. She said:

I wanted them to prepare themselves for the IELTS test that they might take part in. I showed them some 'traps' that usually appeared in the IELTS tests and some complicated structures to understand what and why they got wrong in the exam.

Regarding student assessment, Minh explained that the teacher played a role as a knowledge provider and helped the student obtain high results in examinations. Therefore, the principal purpose of the assessment was to assess students' quality of learning concerning the course's knowledge and skills. Similar to Ly, Minh equated the term *assessment* with the term *testing*. For Minh, assessment or testing benefited both teachers and students as it did not take much time to organize and simultaneously check students' abilities. Based on the test results, the teacher could understand students' levels of understanding and adjust their instruction. Minh reported that she assessed students by providing games, quizzes, and tests to check their

comprehension. She assumed that students knew where they were and what they needed to improve through assessment tasks by doing these activities. It is noted that Minh navigated students throughout the IELTS examination, an international benchmark for English proficiency, rather than helping them learn the underlying concepts. Minh described:

Students have an IELTS test every week, so they can track their progress when doing the reflection. For example, last week, they got 16 correct answers out of 40, but next week they reach 17 or 18, and they know that they've made some signs of progress.

Further examining the aim of the program for English major students, I found another conflict when it came to the program's objectives and assessment methods. While the English-major program aimed to provide fundamental principles and aspects of English language features (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural components), language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and essential skills and theory of translation/interpreting, the evaluation focused on students' achievements and summative tests. According to the syllabus: "After completing the program, students must obtain level 5/6 reference English levels, defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)." Minh explained that this framework was equivalent to academic IELTS; hence, "my colleagues and I decided to use IELTS, and the international marking scheme, to assess our students" (Minh, Interview). During the interviews, like Ly, Minh mentioned IELTS many times and was obsessed with helping students to get high marks in the examination. According to her, students who spent much time practicing sample tests and had good IELTS exam tactics would get the desired results. She told me that IELTS test scores indicated students' language proficiency, so high scores meant students might have academic competence, which was necessary for students who wanted to pursue higher education abroad. However, her thoughts about IELTS test results

seemed to be mistaken since “if language proficiency alone were sufficient for successful academic engagement in an English-medium university, all English-speaking students would be successful. Clearly, this is not the case” (Fox et al., 2016, p.44).

Regarding offering feedback to students during her instruction and outside the class, Minh reported that she did not give much feedback because of time constraints though she was aware of its benefits. She said she only provided feedback for those who asked for it, not all students. Minh noted that:

Some students come and ask me for feedback like, “Can you give me some feedback on my pronunciation?” or “Which area should I improve?” I just give feedback to students who ask me directly like that.

Minh claimed that, in the classroom, she focused only on correcting mistakes to help students avoid them in the future. She had ideas for designing peer-assessment activities, but she felt skeptical about their effectiveness. She explained:

I have a thought that students need to practice peer assessment, but they don't like this because they don't believe the others' feedback. I ask them to post a video they made on the classroom's Facebook group and give each other feedback, but many don't find it helpful. If I provide them with feedback, they seem to appreciate it because they believe in teachers rather than their peers. But I don't have time to give feedback for every product, so I just pick up some to give them feedback.

Despite seeing grades as a crucial means to inform her students' abilities and achievements, Minh reported that test results somehow negatively affected her teaching and students' learning motivation. She said that if students did not have good results in the examination, she felt guilty and awful. Minh also supposed that students who were learning just for grades would feel bad and

demotivated to learn. When asked about the teacher's role in the assessment process, she stated that teachers are test designers and assessors. For her, testing would be a valuable means to understand students' academic levels. More importantly, it was a mandatory part that students needed to complete by the end of the semester, and it accounted for 90% of a student's grade average tests and quizzes. Therefore, she saw her responsibility to provide students with knowledge and practice exam techniques.

Confessional Reflection

Of all the participants, Minh was young and had less experience teaching than the others. She was also the last participant in the interview rounds. In my mind, before meeting her, I expected to receive a new perspective from a young instructor concerning teaching methodology and assessment methods. However, I had different feelings and thoughts when approaching Minh and interviewing her. She was not as open as the other participants, mainly because she knew that I had experience teaching Academic English to students. I realized that my personal background might affect her willingness to share, and it might become a barrier to approaching the participant. Minh was concerned that the conversation between us would be informed to the Dean, though I explained clearly in the consent form that the interviews and observations I conducted were merely for research. I understood her thoughts and feelings as she was a new teacher in this Faculty, and she was influenced by the culture of 'high power' in this institution. To help her feel comfortable and have a sense of trust, I shared my stories when teaching Academic English to English-major students when I was very young. I even shared with her my vulnerabilities concerning the student-teacher relationship and the unfairness of assessment methods I used for my students. I strictly followed the rubric for assessing students' presentations and ignored the scaffolding techniques to help them improve. I felt discomfort

when mentioning it, but it seemed my stories could help her put down the shield, and she became relaxed. She was finally more open and provided me with valuable information in relation to her teaching experiences and expectations. She told me that besides the classes in this institution, she had to teach in an English center and work as a tutor to cover her living expenses. However, when asked about the policy or suggestions for curriculum development, she showed hesitance and avoided responding to those questions. She then referred me to the Dean or Division Head if I wanted to know more. I understood the overpowering in this society, where top-down leadership was the default: major decisions were made by the manager or director while employees were required to complete the tasks given. I understood and sympathized with her unwillingness to answer my questions.

Minh's Actual Instructional Practice (regarding Formative Assessment)

Sharing Learning Expectations. Minh expressed that she wanted to encourage independent learning, so she introduced the course's objectives in the first week and provided all assignments' marking schemes to the students. She believed that when students knew what they would be assessed on, they would be more cautious about their work and mindful of improving their products. Consistent with her interview, in my observations, I noted that Minh often shared success criteria with students before starting lessons. Below is an example of sharing learning intentions with students on her first instruction:

T: Are you ready to move to our lesson today?

Ss: Yes, we are.

T: Okay, so the lesson's objectives today are that by the end of the lesson, you will be able to use nominalizations, hypothetical future predictions, and strategies of managing

conversation to discuss the risks and ways to reduce risks in different situations. Also, you can talk about your own, and someone's risky experiences.

Minh often reminded students of the course's goal and learning intention during the semester. She emphasized the need to follow the end-term tests' requirements and had peer-checking adhere to the criteria given.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Informal and Formal Assessment Techniques. Like the other instructors, Minh reported that she frequently used various questions to elicit students' understanding in the classroom. She prompted appropriate questions and provided students with preparation time depending on the situation. She explained in her interview that "if the question is easy, I can immediately assign some students to answer, but I will ask them to work in pairs or groups to discuss difficult ones. More difficult, more time, less complicated, less time." In my observational field notes recorded, she frequently asked students but used lower-order questions (e.g., checking students' understanding or recall knowledge) to probe students' prior knowledge and directly respond to students rather than using higher-order questions (e.g., synthesis, analysis, or creating levels), to create critical thinking skills. The prompted questions were demonstrated in the following dialogue:

T: Now, let's talk about nominalization first; what is this?

Ss (silent for a few seconds)

T: What is nominalization? Now, look at this sentence "we realize that absolute safety is almost impossible to achieve. What is the part of speech of the verb *realize*?"

S: Realization.

T: So you can see, instead of using realize, we can use *realization*, and it's called nominalization. So, what is its usage?

Ss (silent)

T: Nominalization is more frequent in academic English, both speaking and writing. It focuses on the concepts rather than the actions or the people involved, making the writing more formal. Okay, now, we should practice this.

She continued to ask students the other words using nominalization and requested their definitions. To make them more accessible for students, she did not ask critical thinking questions to reveal students' level of understanding; instead, she offered them two options: providing the definitions in either English or Vietnamese. Often during lectures, when students were hesitant to respond, she answered her own questions and moved to another item. As described in the interview and observations, Minh's class students were relatively passive; they spent most of their time listening to the teacher's explanations and responded to Minh tentatively. Some students occasionally asked Minh some phrases or questions that she answered knowledgeably.

When asked about the evidence of student learning by using a formal assessment method, Minh claimed that testing was a valuable means of understanding students' levels. For her, test results could affect her teaching and student learning. She assumed that students learned for the grades, and consequently, if students failed an examination, they might feel bad and demotivated to learn, and she, as a teacher, felt guilty about that.

Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding from Classroom Activities. Minh spent most of her total class time leading whole-class discussions, explaining tactics for developing listening and speaking skills, and lecturing on the principles and topic words, followed by drill and practice. For example, after presenting the concept of nominalization, she introduced different ways to express possible, probable, and hypothetical future predictions by showing the

slides and explaining the phrases. She administrated whole-class discussion by raising and answering her own questions when students were slow to respond. The group work was then organized after providing input to students. Students in Minh's class demonstrated knowledge through small and large group discussions, debates, role-plays, and presentations during the study. However, evidence in this research showed that her instructional patterns appeared to be instructivist, aiming to recall low-level facts rather than conceptual levels and product-oriented activities (Katz, 1999). The outcomes achieved through these tasks tended to assess the student's ability to use the language and structures Minh had introduced during the lecture rather than developing their problem-solving skills.

Like Ly, Minh shifted her teaching methodology from teacher-centred to student-centred at times in her instruction. I noticed that the learning atmosphere changed when students were assigned to work in pairs or groups in my field notes. They were more engaged in the conversations with their peers, made arguments about the topic, and corrected their pronunciation to one another. Some students actively asked for new words and complicated structures with their team members, and they used both English and Vietnamese for meaning negotiation. Unlike Ha, Minh did not ban the use of the first language in her classroom. The use of mother tongue, in this case, seemed helpful for students as it assisted students "to understand and make sense of the requirements and content of the task; to focus attention on language form, vocabulary use, and overall organization; and to establish the tone and nature of their collaboration" (Swain & Lapkin, 2000, p. 268). Some students recognized me as a former instructor with the department; therefore, they did not hesitate to ask me some questions about the topic given. During this time, Minh went around the classroom, stopped by, and asked students in one group a question or guided them when needed.

I noticed that Minh's viewpoint of peer assessment in her interview was different from her instructional practice. She assumed in the interview that students did not trust their peers' evaluation, and they thought this kind of assessment was not helpful; thus, she rarely asked students to do a peer check. However, the evidence in her class showed that she sometimes organized peer-review sessions in which students liked sharing and asking their peers' comments in the group discussion.

When asked how to activate students in their own learning, Minh claimed that she often encouraged students to do self-assessments for their work. She illustrated her opinion by giving an example: "I often ask them to video themselves, and when they listen to their videos, they will know that it is not right, and they will change it." She believed that by assessing students' products by themselves, they could realize how well they did and what they could do to reach their goals. She also indicated that she shared the success criteria and guidance on the tasks to help them develop peer and self-assessment. I realized that this was an innovative method for enhancing student learning. However, Minh did not show specific strategies to help students develop self-directed learning skills, resulting in only a few students being interested in peer and self-assessment activities.

Providing feedback. Though Minh reported that feedback would benefit students as it was a tool to help them identify mistakes and learn from them, she did not typically provide feedback on individual student performance in the class because of time constraints. In an interview, she said to me:

In class, I only give feedback to some students, at least twice or three times, for a course of 15 sections. For their homework assignments, I pick up some randomly to give

feedback. Then in the class, I will show that product and ask students to provide comments and feedback.

Minh reported that she created a class group on Facebook for each class she oversaw and sometimes gave them written feedback for students' assignments. According to her, this platform could help students connect and create a learning environment. It was also a space for them to share and comment on their products when posted. Her thoughts of creating a Facebook class group were that she wanted to keep her students busy and get involved in the course as much as possible. However, she once again stressed that she would “sometimes go to this site and provide them with written feedback and comments” (Minh, Interview).

Her views on feedback-offering were congruent with her actions in her class. My notes recorded that she gave short responses to students' answers, usually compliments such as ‘okay,’ ‘good idea,’ and ‘great,’ when they performed well and used verbal corrective feedback to students' work. When students responded incorrectly, she encouraged other students to correct or offer feedback to their peers and then provided corrections and comments. The following is a sample of Minh's feedback in the whole class setting:

T: You've listened to the ideas from the Yellow team. Anything from the presentation you like? Is any good language used? What did she say?

Ss: There is a risk of severe accidents if the equipment malfunctions...

T: There is a risk of severe accidents if the equipment malfunctions or falls from a height, so we should check its functioning correctly.

T: Yes, it's a very good idea and good language here. Any other comments? Does she use nominalization in her speech?

Ss: Yes,

T: Good, any other things? Does something need correction?

Ss: Some words are pronounced incorrectly.

T: Yes. How do you say that word? You can check the dictionary, okay?

Ss (checking the dictionary)

T: can you find it? Yes, this word should be pronounced “/ˈberēər/- bar·ri·er-”.

It was noticed that cognitive feedback, a type of feedback that “targets students’ knowledge and cognitive strategies use by identifying their strengths and gaps in their knowledge” (Jang, 2014, p. 22), was occasionally used in her instruction. The typical feedback used in her teaching was corrective feedback. She frequently utilized lower-order thinking questions, such as checking students’ understanding and remembering, rather than enhancing their critical thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Moreover, my observation notes showed that Minh did not provide students time to think except for group work activities.

Instructional Adjustments. Minh claimed that she felt satisfied with her instructional methodology and had no thoughts of changing them. She said that whenever she wanted to adjust her teaching and assessment methods, she needed to consult her Head of Division and other colleagues. If there was a need to change, it should be the course adjustments for the next term.

She provided an example:

For each semester, we have a group of teachers who decide which activity should be used for this course. For example, we have discussed and adjusted the way to assess student presentations. Last year, after their performance, we gave them marks immediately.

However, this year, we decided to give them a second chance. So in class, we just gave them feedback and asked other students to provide peer feedback. The presenters can

redo their presentation by making a video of their presentation at home. We believe that they will improve their English when they have a second chance to practice.

My observation field notes recorded slight changes in her instructional methods throughout the semester. Although she slightly changed the group work setting to motivate the learning atmosphere, Minh was consistent with the teaching methodology she employed. She always started her lessons with learning intentions, leading questions, lecturing, practicing, and drilling. This coexisted without conflict with her thoughts expressed in the interview that she felt a need to cover the required curriculum to equip students with the knowledge and help them succeed on the end-term exams.

Influencing Factors

The most dominant internal contextual factors informing Minh's instruction and assessments were the mental models of student learning, teaching experience, and experience as a learner. As mentioned in the previous section, Minh's teaching philosophy was that the teacher was a decisive factor in student learning and responsible for explaining the concept and providing them with strategies and techniques for summative tests. This perspective was congruent with what she did during instruction. She portrayed herself as an active factor in student learning, pouring into students' minds new concepts, grammar structures, and tactics for tackling speaking and listening skills. Although employing pair-group work and peer assessment, students did not have many opportunities to take ownership of their learning. In addition, Minh's previous experiences as a learner served as an impediment to implementing formative assessment strategies into practice. She claimed that she did not see any differences in her instruction and assessment methods compared to those her teachers used some years ago. She created group activities organized in her instruction, such as pair-group discussions,

presentations, and practice summative tests, just as her teachers did when she was an undergraduate. Her instructional method was teacher-centred rather than learner-centred, and she taught based on the experience she was accustomed to during her university experiences. Minh was a new teacher; therefore, her five years of teaching experience and attending some training workshops about assessments did not help her change her mindset about how learners could be at the centre of their learning processes.

Many external contextual elements influenced Minh's understanding of formative assessment and her instructional practice regarding formative assessment. Like Ly, the testing culture, institution policy, time constraints, and workload were the main factors that served as barriers to applying the alternative assessment and active learning in her class. Examining Minh's course outline, I noted no alignment between intended learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment methods. While the course outline was quite open for teachers to adapt to a new teaching approach, it stressed summative assessment with two progress tests, one assignment, and an end-term test, which accounted for 50% of the course grade. Besides, after finishing the program, students must obtain level 5/6 point scales adhering to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These requirements put considerable pressure on Minh; thus, she admitted she felt the need to provide students with knowledge and tactics for conquering the test. She said that she felt so overwhelmed that she did not have enough energy to teach because of the workload and the required hours for a full-time teacher in the institution. These factors impeded her from giving feedback to each student and on how to guide students to self-evaluate. She added that student attributes contributed to the barrier to transforming a learner-centred approach into practice. She claimed that students learned for the tests, and she was responsible for preparing them with knowledge and skills for the high-stakes

exams. My observation field recorded that Minh designed pair-group activities and applied new tasks, such as debate and presentations, to enhance learner engagement. However, the outcomes achieved through these tasks were to assess students' understanding of the factual knowledge and skills they learnt and how they could apply them in the coming tests, not in the real world.

Confessional Reflection

Observing Minh's classes reminded me of the days I began teaching at the university level. I was both excited and nervous and did not have class management like Minh. Unlike the other participants, Minh was not authoritative and strict. She was so open to students that the boundaries between her and students were less visible. This, on the one hand, helped students feel at ease when engaging in her lessons; on the other hand, Minh's no strict regulations in the classroom led to the unbalance of class contribution among students in her class. I was not biased with her instruction but empathetic as I understood she was new to this institution. My personal background about the 'over power' society helped me understand why she was reluctant to talk about school policy and curriculum development. Being born and educated in a high-context culture where the message was coded and implicit and "nonverbal communication expressed by people, places, and events" (Westbrook, 2014, p.283), I understood how people communicated and preferred to communicate. This was beneficial for me in analyzing the situation and understanding the hidden meaning in instructors' and students' speeches, actions, and non-verbal cues. As a result, I was not shocked or surprised by what Minh talked about, how she instructed students, and her expectations. She used much nonverbal communication and implicit messages when communicating with students in the class and when she did not want to provide a response to my question in relation to leadership or policy. For example, when some students in the classroom made noise or were distracted, she stopped teaching, looked at them,

kept silent, and showed an annoyed facial expression. When she did not want to answer my questions related to the policy, she lowered her voice, implying that she felt uncomfortable sharing with me. Thanks to this background, I was empathic with the participant and sympathized when Minh did not want to answer the questions because she felt insecure. This personal background also helped me adjust my communication means and attitude with her, leading to successful interviews and observations. Instead of communicating with her via only interview questions, I focused more on her tone, gestures, and attitude so that I could grab her implicit messages that could be essential supplement data for my study.

Summary of Minh's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment

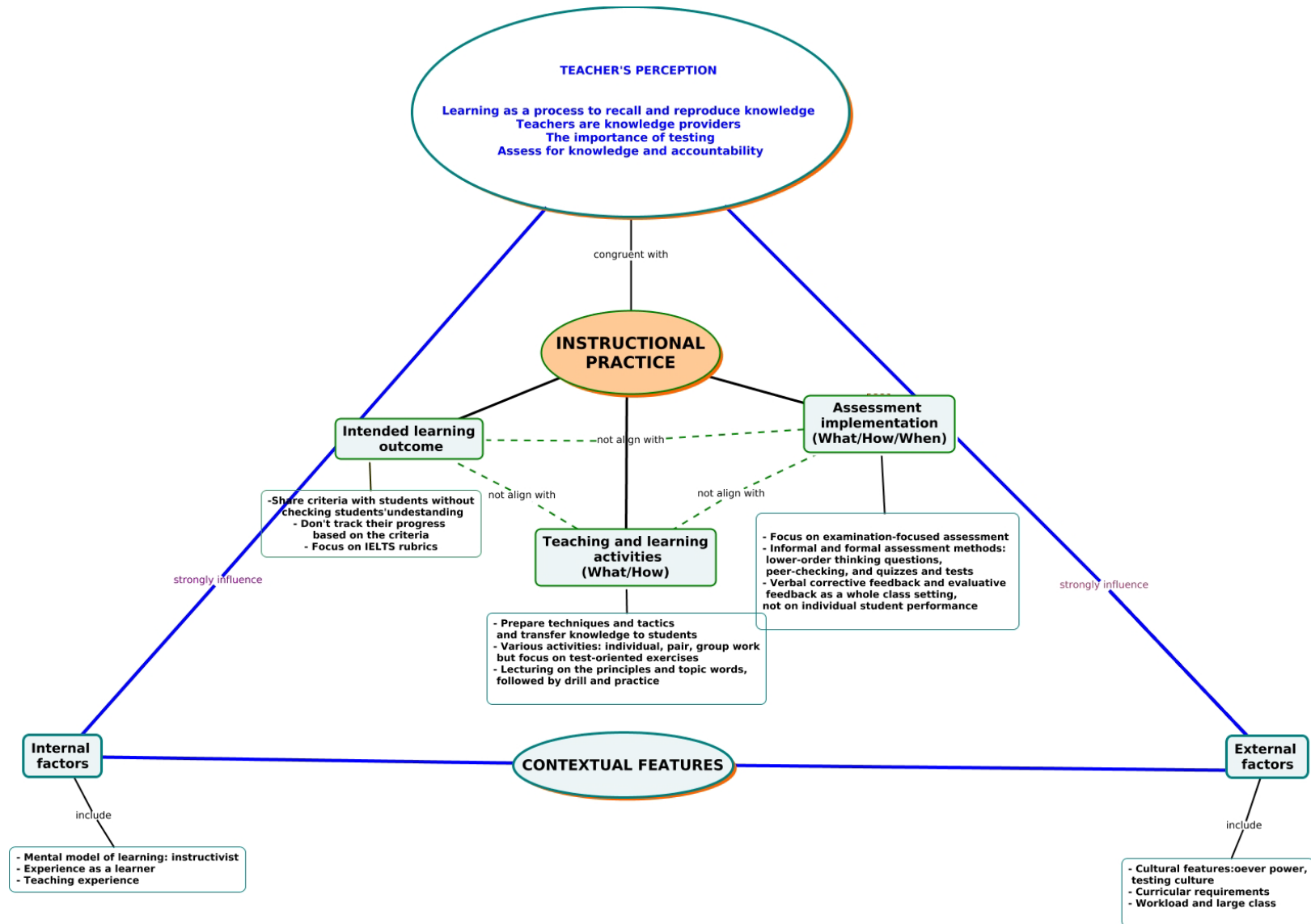
Figure 10 below illustrates a relationship between Minh's perception of student learning, teaching, and assessment with her actual practice. Minh's teaching philosophy was that (a) student learning is a process of recalling and reproducing knowledge explained and taught by the teacher, and (b) the teacher was a decisive factor in student learning and responsible for providing students with strategies and techniques for summative tests. This perspective was congruent with her instructional practice. In her class, she portrayed herself as an active factor in student learning, pouring into students' minds knowledge and strategies for tackling speaking and listening skills. There was no alignment between the course objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. Although Minh shared the learning expectations with students, she did not help them establish their learning goals and monitor their own learning. Minh designed pair-group activities, debates, and presentations to enhance learner engagement; however, most classroom activities were prone to test-oriented exercises, aiming to prepare students for examinations rather than helping them learn and take ownership of their learning. Also, she did not typically offer feedback on individual students. Instead, she provided feedback

and comments in a whole class setting, and her feedback was mainly oral corrective feedback without improvement solutions.

Many internal and external contextual elements influenced Minh's understanding of student learning and formative assessment. The teaching philosophy related to the instructivist approach and previous experiences as a learner impeded implementing formative assessment strategies. In addition, the testing culture, institution policy, time constraints, and workload were the main factors that served as barriers to applying the alternative assessment and socio-constructivist approach in her class.

Figure 10

Summary of Minh's Perception and Practice of Student Learning and Assessment



Synthesis and Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment and contextual factors affecting their beliefs and practices by observing four participants grouped into two groups (non-English and English programs). I have analyzed their insiders' viewpoints while also incorporating my classroom observations as well as my voice as a researcher.

The chapter has revealed some issues that will be elaborated on in the next chapter. First, the two groups of participants indicated two different teaching philosophies but shared the same views on assessment methods and focused on standardization and student accountability. Specifically, Ha and Mai (in the non-English program) viewed learners as active collaborators in constructing knowledge, and instructors played the roles of facilitators or advisors. In contrast, Ly and Minh (in the English major program) indicated that instructors were knowledge providers, and learning was a process of recalling and reproducing knowledge into examinations. However, their instructional practices were not that significantly different. They had the same beliefs about the importance of the role of teachers in student learning, and they employed summative tests as the primary assessment method to elicit student understanding and progress. The two most explicit illustrations of the behaviourist approach to teaching were Ly and Minh. During the interview, these participants described the students' role as the owner of their learning; however, in reality, they relied on testing to determine students' learning capacity and progress and showed their satisfaction with the assessment methods employed in the institution. They reported that they did not want to change the assessment methods as the assessment system in this institution worked well with them. One suggestion they provided was to innovate the test specifications and marking schemes so that teachers would easily evaluate students' products.

The teachers' beliefs about assessment and its effects on their practice have been extensively discussed in previous literature (Gerami & Noordin, 2013; Kim, 2014; Palacio, 2012; Önalán & Karagül, 2018; Rogers et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2020), and reinforced by this study. As analyzed in this chapter, the four Vietnamese university EFL teachers' instructional and assessment practices were not always aligned with their beliefs. These instructors highly valued the agentic role of the student and held positive thoughts about helping students learn and promoting learning autonomy. They especially wanted to employ interactive activities in their instruction and help students develop self-directed skills by taking ownership of their learning. Unfortunately, the observations revealed that although they employed various activities in the classroom, instructors took a dominant role more often than providing students with opportunities for critical engagement or creative thoughts. This evidence supported Shepard's arguments (2000) about the conflicts between teachers' perceptions of learning and assessment. Shepard argued that while teachers' approaches to learning were prone to move in the direction of socio-constructivism, approaches to evaluation remained inappropriate, with a clear focus on testing. Reasons for the incongruence will be discussed in the next chapter in light of current theories of learning, teachers' beliefs, and formative assessment.

Finally, the study showed that internal and external contextual factors strongly affected teachers' beliefs and practices. These contextual factors were identified throughout the participants' interviews, observations, and documentation. The internal factors in this study included a mental model of student learning, such as personal theory for practice, teaching experience, and teacher experience as a learner. The external contextual elements consisted of cultural norms, curriculum and institution policy, time constraints, workload, and student attributes. An interesting point found in this study is that the goals of the program and curriculum

affected their instruction and assessment the most. For example, Ly and Minh seemed to be obsessed with students' intended learning outcomes. Students were required to obtain level 5/6 reference English levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This explained why their instruction was preparing for the tests rather than providing students with language skills for the real world.

In conclusion, this chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data. These findings show EFL instructors' beliefs about student learning, teaching, and assessment within the two programs (English-majored and non-English-majored programs) and how those beliefs were reflected in their instructional practices and the rationales underlying these pedagogical acts. The issues emerging from this cross-case analysis will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Issues to be Addressed

This research aimed to investigate the perceived beliefs of EFL instructors about formative assessment and how it is implemented in their classrooms. To address this purpose, I used three theoretical frameworks, sociocultural perspectives, constructive alignment, and formative assessment theories, with multiple data resources such as interviews, observations, and artifacts to examine four English instructors' practices and beliefs/values of assessment in a post-secondary English program. Each instructor participated in three interviews with questions related to assessment and how they employed classroom-based assessments to assist student learning and improve their instruction. To support the information collected from the interviews, I made twelve classroom observations to understand the nature of formative assessment as it was implemented in the participants' classrooms. The data was then triangulated with other documents, such as course outlines, students' products, lesson plans, and program objectives, to understand the contextual factors engaged in their formative assessment practices. Findings showed that the EFL instructors had different perspectives on student learning, teaching, and assessment; however, they shared the same beliefs about the importance of assessment and standardization for their teaching and student learning. Results also indicated that the beliefs were not always congruent with their actual practices, and their stated beliefs and practices were affected by many internal and external factors.

In this chapter, my focus is to highlight the topics of concern that arise in the previous chapter, with reference to the main research question: *How is formative assessment perceived by four Vietnamese EFL university teachers, and how is it implemented in their classrooms?* In what follows, I present the significant themes emerging from the cross-case analysis: lack of underpinning learning theories informing pedagogy; lack of general theory of formative

assessment and limited use of formative assessment; and cultural and societal pressure. These themes will be elaborated on and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review.

Lack of Underpinning Learning Theories Informing Pedagogy

Pattalitan (2016) discussed how theories of learning underpin assessment methods and instructional techniques. Pattalitan wrote: “Learning theories, which provide a profound coherence and understanding in changing teaching practices and standards, are imperative to the choice and employment of assessment and instructional scaffolding techniques” (p. 695).

Pattalitan’s quote invited me to ponder what it might mean to the participants’ instructional practices when, during the interviews, they described their theory for practice by their experiences, not by the understanding of learning theories or second language learning (SLL). For instance, when being asked about their theories for practice, they showed no evidence of expert knowledge or scholars inspiring them in teaching, even when they held a master’s degree in English studies and TESOL. Rather, they showed a personal practical theory through exchanging personal experiences with their colleagues or prior knowledge as a student. An illustration of this point was the cases of Ly and Minh. When being asked how to maximize student learning and make learning explicit, they stated, without rationales for their points, that teachers should assign more assignments to students outside the classroom hours to help them consolidate knowledge and enhance their self-regulated learning. Or when I asked them about instructional techniques employed in the classroom, such as pair-group work or presentations, they said that “the courses’ objectives are discussed and decided by a group of teachers within the department. As summarized by Minh, “We think that group work must be implemented in the class because it is one of the course’s objectives. Maybe it is based on our experience, but we

discussed and decided what we should do for students” (Minh, Interview). Clearly, Minh’s behaviours, attitudes, and actions in the classroom were influenced by her experiences. This finding supported the Phipps & Borg (2009)’s finding that “the beliefs which exerted most influence on teachers’ work were ones firmly grounded in experience” (p. 388) and was in line with the previous studies about teachers’ beliefs and practices on English language learning (Borg, 2006; Borg & Burns, 2008; Le, 2011). One exciting point found from the observational notes is that teachers started their lessons with plans and principles in mind for promoting learner-centred activities. However, the outcome of the instruction did not reflect their principles but turned out to be a teacher-centred approach. Despite the fact that they held positive beliefs about student-centred learning, this inconsistency demonstrates where legitimate knowledge is not accessible, their personal experiences or learning from colleagues are significant features shaping their beliefs about teaching and learning, which, in turn, influence their instructional practices (Le, 2011).

Another noteworthy finding was a misunderstanding of their beliefs about learning motivation. The participants in the current study tended to use rewards and punishments for students to enhance students’ motivation. A prominent example of this point was illustrated in the cases of Ha (in the non-English major program) and Ly (in the English major program). According to them, competitive activities create interactions and discussion, enhancing learning motivation. The observation notes provided me with the same results. They often created a competitive learning environment to improve learner engagement in the classroom. This evidence indicated that although they intended to promote student learning and create social interactions, their thoughts about learning were still strongly affected by behaviourism, which views learning as a condition responsive to an external stimulus and considers rewards and

punishments as powerful methods to establish habits (James & Lewis, 2012). However, the reward system was not a tool promoting the spirit of authentic learning. The drawbacks of using punishments and rewards in student learning were pointed out by Harlen and Crick (2002). They noted,

those who learn in order to gain an extrinsic reward are unlikely to continue learning once the reward is obtained or the penalty avoided, and they will give up earlier if reward seems unobtainable. For continued learning, the motive needs to be intrinsic, the reward being within the process of learning and in the recognition of being in control of, and responsible for, one's own learning (Harlen & Crick, 2002. p. 2).

This quote emphasized that this extrinsic reward, i.e., grading, can result in teaching to the test and students are driven by a desire to learn only for the examination and get high marks.

Thus, it is possible to claim that the instructional practice decision in this study was made based on the teacher's personal practical theory, which was constituted from their teaching experiences and prior experience as a learner rather than theories of learning or second language acquisition (SLA). Although the role of learning theories provides a foundation for instructional practices (James, 2006; Koschmann, 2011; Pattalitan, 2016; Shepard, 2000, 2005), these were not fully developed by the participants in this study. It can be problematic if teachers do not use theories of learning to underpin their assessment but rely on past experiences and use their own experience as a theory for practice. As experience does not equate with expertise (Le, 2011), the decision of instructional strategies and their efforts to help students establish their learning goals and make decisions about their learning process may not be achievable.

Lack of General Theory of Formative Assessment and Limited Use of Formative Assessment

As mentioned in chapter three, I used sociocultural theories as a framework to explore participants' perceptions and practices of formative assessment. Therefore, in light of sociocultural perspectives, formative assessment is considered an instructional scaffolding strategy in helping students establish their learning goals and activate them as recourses for one another and themselves (James, 2006; Sadler, 1989; Shepard, 2005). Many scholars agree that there should be an alignment between assessment with learning, teaching, and content knowledge to enhance the quality of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 2018; James, 2006). This means that the reciprocity and interdependency of teaching, learning and assessment should be valued, acknowledged, and implemented. However, through this socio-constructivist lens, the results in the previous chapter suggested that student learning, teaching, and assessment were not intertwined. Also, the participants in the current study showed a limited understanding of the nature of assessment and a lack of instructional scaffolding activities to move the learning forward.

An important finding from my study was that participants adopted formal and informal assessment techniques, such as quizzes, tests, questioning techniques, pair-group work, and feedback. However, they seemed not to fully understand the purposes of assessment and the holistic concept of formative assessment. This was indicated when they equated 'assessment' with 'testing' and perceived that assessment was a measurement instrument and a tool to make students accountable (Brown, 2004). These participants also explicitly mentioned the differences between formative and summative assessments; however, my recorded observations suggested they conformed to the 'surface' understanding of formative assessments, or "the 'letter' of the concept" (Veugen et al., 2021, p.1). This means that, at first glance, the participants in this study engaged in the principles of formative assessment, such as sharing learning intentions,

organizing collaborative activities, and offering feedback. However, in reality, there seemed to be a lack of creative opportunities for creative thoughts, activating students as resources for one another and as the owners of their learning, and providing feedback to help students move forward, which are the core features of formative assessment.

Given that participants seemed to perceive the usefulness of criteria to keep track of students' achievement, they did not translate the criteria back and forth to "develop evaluative expertise in students so they could become proficient at monitoring their own learning" (Shepard, 2005, p. 67). Recorded observations showed that, although instructors shared learning intentions with students in almost every instructional unit, they did not make criteria and learning outcomes transparent and explicit to students. The intended learning outcomes were used in their instruction as an item in the instructional checklist rather than clarifying them and checking whether students understood and how they utilized those criteria to monitor their learning. Plus, the criteria focused on marking schemes for their assignments rather than helping them establish their learning goals. This activity failed to make it an instructional scaffolding strategy and foster intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning skills, as Sadler (1998) and Shepard (2005) suggested. This finding is different compared to the study conducted recently by Varier (2015), Xiao and Yang (2019), and Veugen et al. (2021), in which the strategy of clarifying learning expectations was valued and considered a means to promote metacognitive skills for students.

Another significant finding was that instructors engaged in many kinds of classroom activities; however, they were largely behaviourist-based and cognitivist-based activities rather than social interactions. Data showed that most pair-group work activities implemented were based on drilled practices, not aiming to develop critical engagement. Students were required to respond to the tasks given based on the sample provided by the instructor. Nevertheless, no

evidence showed students' application of skills learned in an actual situation or knowledge creation (see cases of Ha and Mai). Additionally, the collaborative work generally provided to students aimed to develop the tactics and techniques for test preparation rather than equipping them with problem-solving or analytical skills, which are increasingly valued in their future careers (see cases of Ly and Minh). As reported in the previous chapter, the group work activities were employed mainly because of the course outline's requirement (Minh, Interview) and reducing teachers' workload (Ha and Ly, Interviews). One instructor in the study showed her skepticism about peer-assessment activities. She perceived the learner as incapable of evaluating themselves or their peers. However, the actual practice, as evidenced by my observations, showed the contrary result: students showed their excitement when cooperating with their peers.

Furthermore, although interactive activities seemed to be employed in almost all classes, they served as an input for the negotiation of meaning or the practice of examination tactics rather than helping students co-construct knowledge. This result did not reflect the findings of Sach (2012), Varier (2015), and Veugen et al. (2021), who suggested that collaborating activities were effective instructional scaffolding to advance student learning. However, this finding supports some previous work that indicated the behaviourist model is still foundational with conditions in place that perpetuate reliance on this form of surface learning, and deeper and more complex interactions promoted by collaboration were not fully executed in the classroom (Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007; Luong, 2016; Tran, 2015).

Finally, the central feature of formative assessment also addressed in this study is the teacher's feedback to students. As identified in previous studies (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), feedback has a powerful negative and positive influence on student learning. Feedback is seen as conducive within the sociocultural paradigm when it can reduce the

discrepancy between the current understanding and the designed goals. In other words, feedback can help students know their actual capabilities, the following steps they need to take, and how to achieve their learning goals (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989; Shepard, 2005). Nevertheless, the present study indicated that although instructors perceived the usefulness of feedback in promoting students' learning, their actual practice showed a lack of providing constructive feedback and comments to students. Most of the feedback observed was general and holistic rather than specific and suggestive; therefore, it was ineffective in helping students reduce the gaps in their learning relating to the learning goals. For example, students received feedback on grammar and spelling mistakes when the criteria for success said, "develop argumentative skills" (Case of Ly). Another example of the feedback offered by instructors was the focus on mispronunciations and grammar mistakes, while the learning outcomes required students to enhance their fluency and communicative skills in a working environment (Case of Mai). Such feedback did not support the attainment of the learning goal or inform students about their progress or suggest how to move forward to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Plus, the evidence demonstrated that the feedback type given to students mainly was direct corrective feedback, with no room for indirect suggestive feedback, which should have been implemented as it provided students with "an opportunity to engage cognitively in editing as a problem-solving process" (Ferris, 2004, p. 59). This reflects the findings of previous studies, which emphasized that not all feedback is valuable and practical to students' learning (Ketabi & Ketabi, 2014; McCord, 2012; Mumm et al., 2016; Voerman et al., 2012), and feedback should be beyond the corrective tool to focus more on motivation and enhancement of learning (Evans, 2013; Nhan, 2015). Evidence also demonstrated that students were not training to be feedback providers and did not ensure their roles as "an active participant

and not as purely receiver of feedback and with sufficient knowledge to engage in feedback” (Evans, 2013, p. 79). Results from the study indicated that instructors did not provide students with many opportunities for enhancing peer assessment and self-assessment skills. This research finding is in line with those of Gonzales (2012), Veugen et al. (2021), Volante and Beckett (2011), and Kippers et al. (2018), in which teachers’ feedback, as well as peer feedback and self-judgment skills, were not commonly observed.

Cultural Values and Societal Pressure

Consistent with previous studies (Luong, 2016; Phan, 2018; Tran, 2015; Wang et al., 2020), this research indicated that the socio-cultural features were the main factors affecting teachers’ beliefs and the transfer of their beliefs into actual instructional practices.

Confucian philosophy, mentioned in chapter one, has been considered a strong cultural influence on the Vietnamese education system in general and the EFL program in particular, resulting in the application of the knowledge transmission model or the teacher-centred approach (Canh, 2022; Huong & Fry, 2004; Le, 2011; London, 2011a). By adopting the hierarchical principles of Confucian philosophy, teachers are regarded as a reliable source of knowledge to deposit knowledge into students’ minds, and students are considered passive agents in their learning process (Harman et al., 2010). Also, within the Confucian ideology, a high “power distance” – a term used by Hofstede (1997, p. 28), always exists and controls social relationships. It means that high distance and authority always happen between higher position people and lower ones, where people with lower positions must respect their directors, and students must be obedient to their teachers. This relationship is accepted as the norm in this society and is reflected in the earlier chapters.

Participants in this study remained focused on the teacher-centred approach and showing their authority or ‘power distance.’ A prominent example of the teacher’s dominant role in the classroom was Ly’s case when she forced students to take weekly vocabulary quizzes or presentations or gave strict rules and ‘hard words’ when they were distracted from their learning. According to Ly, this cruel-to-be-kind technique would help them realize their mistakes and avoid them in the future. The ‘power distance’ was also recorded in the cases of Ha and Mai, whereby students seemed to be voiceless when being given marks and mistake corrections. There was a lack of students’ voices; if they existed, it was through the negotiation of meaning with their peers rather than with teachers. Students were required to do what their teachers instructed without questioning or challenging their teachers. This obedience considered that respect for teachers was deeply rooted in Confucian ideology and “has long been accepted as a dominant moral value that embodies a teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning in the country” (Canh, 2022, p. 335). This kind of learning culture and the ‘power distance’ feature were also recorded in previous works of Harman et al. (2010), Le (2011), Luong (2016), Pham & London (2010), Phan (2018), and Tran (2015), indicating that although the Western educational approach has been applied in high education, the Confucian philosophy remains a powerful influence even today.

The grade-valued society is another cultural barrier affecting participants’ perceptions and use of interactive instruction and formative assessment in the study. As analyzed in the previous chapter, most participants were prone to teach-to-the-test though they perceived the negative washback of testing, a term referring to the impact of language testing, whether positive or negative, on teaching and learning (Cheng et al., 2004). Reasons could be the “achievement syndrome” (London, 2011b, p. 28) in Vietnamese education, whereby the student’s goal is to

pursue academic success, and the teacher must help them achieve that goal. Another reason might come from the teacher's pressure to meet the program requirement, meaning that after completing the program, English major students and non-English major students must obtain level 5/6 and 3/6 reference English levels, respectively, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For example, although teachers in this study perceived communicative language teaching as an approach to promoting students' English proficiency, they heavily relied on the curriculum's requirements, in which testing was used to assess students' progress and achievements.

Furthermore, the grade-valued society resulted in teaching-to-the-test because, in the Vietnamese learning culture, high marks were equated with student competence, which in turn was the tool to assess teacher competence (Canh, 2022). Understandably, most teachers in this study tended to teach to ensure students' examination success. They reported that based on the test results, the teacher could understand students' levels of cognition and help students know where they were and what they needed to improve. They also stated that they felt guilty and awful when their students got low marks in the examination, and students who were learning for grades would feel bad and lose learning motivation. This finding is similar to what Harman et al. (2010), Le (2011), Luong (2016), Phan (2018), and Tran (2015) found in their studies.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has summarized the current studies' issues and discussed them with reference to the research questions, the framework, and previously published work. Results from this study highlighted the incongruence and congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment and the contextual factors shaping the teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment. Of all these, the issues that emerged were a lack of underpinning

learning theories informing pedagogy, a lack of general theory of formative assessment, and the cultural norms and societal pressure, such as power distance and grade-valued society. These findings support the claim that learning theories, which provide a foundation for assessment and teaching practice, should be applied in our teaching practice if we are trying to change and help students promote their learning (Koschmann, 2011; Pattalitan, 2016). It also emphasizes the core principles in learning that “we construct knowledge, and that learning and development are culturally embedded, socially supported processes” (Shepard, 2005, p. 66). I now turn to the next chapter, where I present some concluding remarks, provide some pedagogical and research implications, and make further research recommendations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

Metaphorically, this chapter represents my return home after a long research journey. The journey aimed to investigate the four EFL university teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment, whereby I attempted throughout to uncover what instructors perceived about the student learning, teaching, and assessment, how these beliefs transferred to their actual practices, and what factors shaped their beliefs and instructional practices. To this end, I employed qualitative case-study research paired with an ethnographic approach and confessional tales, which helped me explore the research process and allowed me to raise my voice as a researcher and a 'traveller' in this journey. I used theoretical frameworks formed from sociocultural perspectives, constructive alignment, and formative assessment theories to collect and analyze the data from three sets of interviews, observation notes, and documents such as lesson plans, course outlines, and students' work. I collected data during the fifteen-week Fall semester (August - November) in 2019 and then analyzed them into themes to shed light on the research questions. The following sections are like the reflection of the overall journey, in which I offer a brief overview of the main findings, implications for research and practice, and suggestions for further studies.

Summary of Key Findings

The present study's findings show that the four EFL instructors had different perspectives on student learning, teaching, and assessment. These participants indicated two conflicting teaching philosophies: viewing learners as active collaborators in constructing knowledge and viewing instructors as knowledge providers in the student learning journey. However, they all shared the same articulated beliefs about assessment procedures and employing standardization for their teaching and student learning. In the interviews, these participants described the

student's role as the owner of their learning; however, in reality, they relied on testing to evaluate students' learning capacity and progress and showed their satisfaction with the assessment methods employed in the institution. This evidence supported Shepard's arguments (2000) about the conflicts between teachers' perceptions of learning and assessment. Shepard argued that while teachers' approaches to learning were prone to move toward socio-constructivism, approaches to evaluation remained inappropriately behaviourist and focused on standardized testing. This finding adds to the common understanding that learning theories are the foundation for instruction and assessment (Black et al. 1, 2003; James, 2006; Shepard, 2000, 2005). Without becoming more equipped with learning theories, teachers tend to rely on their personal experiences, which later transfer to their practice theory. Thus, there is a need that contemporary learning theories (e.g., socio-constructivism to SLL) should be introduced and practiced by instructors to reconstruct their existing beliefs. Also, instructors should renew their personal practice theories regularly to make them legitimate knowledge (Le, 2011).

Findings of the present study also indicate that the beliefs were not always congruent with their actual practices (Borg, 2006, 2018; Muñoz et al., 2012; Pham & Hamid, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Wang et al., 2020). The instructors in the study highly valued the agentive role of the student and held positive beliefs in helping the student learn and promoting learning autonomy. They especially wanted to employ interactive activities in their instruction and help students develop self-directed skills, taking ownership of their learning. Unfortunately, the observations revealed that although various activities were used in the classroom, instructors took a dominant role more often than providing students with opportunities for critical engagement or creative thoughts. For example, although instructors organized group work activities, they focused on practice drills to help students memorize and use the vocabulary and

structures provided by the teachers rather than providing them with practices to develop student problem-solving skills. Also, these collaborative activities were designed to meet the testing requirements rather than providing students with interactive opportunities to co-construct knowledge.

The results also indicated that formative assessment was not embedded into daily instruction, and formative assessment principles were not implemented effectively in their actual practices. For instance, the intended learning outcomes were shared with students, but the criteria mainly focused on the marking scheme rather than helping students establish their learning goals and “develop evaluative expertise in students so they could become proficient at monitoring their own learning” (Shepard, 2005, p. 67). In addition, teachers used formal and informal methods to elicit student understanding; however, questions and conversations for knowledge activation and checking did not help students develop their metacognitive abilities and self-regulation skills but merely deposited information in their minds. Feedback is considered the heart of effective instruction; however, there was a lack of meaningful feedback that moved students forward in this study. The types of feedback teachers used in their classrooms were mainly evaluative feedback (i.e., praise or punishment and explicit correction).

Finally, the study showed that internal and external contextual factors strongly affected teachers’ beliefs and practices (Borg, 2006, 2018; Borg & Burns, 2008; Le, 2011; Phipps & Borg, 2009). These contextual factors were identified through participants’ interviews, observations, and documentation. The internal factors in this study included a mental model of student learning or personal theory for practice, teaching experience, and teacher experience as a learner. The external contextual elements consisted of cultural norms, curriculum and institution policy, time constraints, workload, and student attributes. However, the most significant factors

that influenced the teachers' beliefs and practices were the lack of underpinning learning theories informing pedagogy; lack of a general theory of formative assessment and limited use of formative assessment; and cultural values and societal pressure.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study has significant contributions to the understanding of higher education instructors' beliefs and formative assessment in terms of research and educational practice.

Implications for Research

The findings of this study have implications for the theory of teacher cognition. The investigation imposes the necessity of uncovering teachers' beliefs and how they transform them into their instructional practice (Borg, 2006, Borg & Burns, 2008; Gerami & Noordin, 2013; Kim, 2014; Phipps & Borg, 2009). As indicated in the previous chapter, there was a considerable gap between teachers' use of learning theories and teachers' personal practice theories. Teachers transferred the ideas accumulated from their own teaching and colleagues' teaching rather than the second language learning theories. They rarely used technical terms, such as constructivism or cognitivism, to circulate their thoughts on learning and rationales for their pedagogy acts. Additionally, they seemed not to be aware of the dichotomies of formative assessment and summative assessment and the primary purpose of assessment: assessment for learning or development and assessment of learning or judgement. Therefore, if there is an inadequate understanding of the belief-practice relationship, any educational innovation, such as curriculum reform and even formal training, would bring few positive results (Le, 2011). This study is an important addition to the growing body of literature on EFL teachers' beliefs and practices.

The findings of this study also contribute to the existing literature on formative assessment using the lens of sociocultural, particularly in a post-secondary EFL setting. As

learning at the tertiary level requires students to take ownership of their learning and develop lifelong learning skills, framing formative assessment principles and strategies with a social constructivist lens can fulfill those objectives. Within the EFL learning context, making the process of formative assessment explicit with clear strategies for implementation to teachers and students can change the learning culture, thereby helping students become resources for one another and take responsibility for their learning.

In terms of research design, this study offers a framework for collecting, analyzing, and presenting qualitative data in contexts beyond a post-secondary English program in Vietnam. More specifically, the techniques for transcribing using YouTube and coding and analyzing data using free software, *Qualyzer*, would benefit graduate students and researchers who cannot afford the other computer-assisted qualitative software, such as *NVivo* or *QDA*. Also, the combination and triangulation of multiple resources confirm the trustworthiness of qualitative case study research in exploring teachers' beliefs and practices, providing opportunities to triangulate different participants' perspectives and actions (Duff, 2008). As a result, researchers may deeply understand teachers' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviours as well as the factors that impact their teaching. In addition, the use of confessional tale ethnography stands out as valuable for similar studies to map out the research journey and deal with the fieldwork process, including potential errors and biases while observing. As mentioned in the section 'ethical considerations', one of the methods of achieving the confirmability (objectivity) of the study is using reflexivity, in which the researcher can reflect on their research process, identify their perspectives as an 'insider' and 'outsider,' acknowledge bias, and anticipate how these views may impact their research procedure and findings. The confessional tale genre meets these

requirements, helping the research offer critical insights. However, it should be used with caution as ethical commitment with participants, such as anonymity and transparency, may be revealed.

Implications for Educational Practice

For leaders, educators, and prospective teachers. The current study's primary finding is that instructors in this study had a limited understanding of learning theories informing their pedagogy and of formative assessment theories. This has vital implications for teacher education and professional development programs.

It is necessary to provide ongoing professional development programs focusing on learning theories and assessment literacy to instructors and schoolteachers. Since “teachers need opportunities to strengthen their abilities to improve student learning, and understanding the realities of dynamically evolving modern-day schools” (Sanford et al., 2020), there is a need for the increased development of professional learning communities and spaces in which teachers can share their expertise, apply acquired theories, and transform their professional knowledge (Hopper et al., 2016). This approach will help them understand the nature of student learning, the role of assessment that increases students' capabilities, and the interconnection between learning theories and assessment (James, 2006, 2017; James & Lewis, 2012; Koschmann, 2011; Pattalitan, 2016; Shepard, 2000, 2005). If teachers have already practiced, they should update the latest learning theories and renew their existing knowledge to make their personal practice theories become espoused theories. In chapter two, I mentioned sociocultural theories based on socio-constructivism as the alternative learning approach. In ESL/EFL education, other contemporary theories of learning, also based on socio-constructivism, should be considered and applied, such as the sociocognitive theory, complexity theories, identity approach, language socialization, and conversation-analytic approach (Atkinson, 2011). All these contemporary

language learning theories emphasize the social and cognitive features, interactions to make meaning and learning, and the roles of knowledgeable others in helping novice learners (Duff & Talmy, 2011).

Prospective teachers or teacher candidates should receive appropriate training about learning theories and formative assessment during their learning and practicums. Teacher candidates (TCs) need to shift from student mindset to teacher mindset (Hopper et al., 2016), i.e., developing “TCs’ teacher assessment identity, encouraging them to reconsider their complex and intertwined roles as “teacher” as well as judging students’ learning to enable them to progress and be motivated to learn more meaningfully” (Fu et al., 2022, p.1). Also, teacher candidates should have a space where they can develop assessment competency and teacher identity (Sanford et al., 2015), thereby improving their instructional practices. As formative assessment synchronizes with learner-centred instruction (Fox et al., 2022), the implementation of formative assessment needs a change in teachers’ perception of students’ role in their learning (Black et al., 2003, James, 2006). This implies that teachers should view formative assessment as an essential and inseparable part of their instruction, make students as active agents in their learning, and enhance their ownership of their learning (Black et al., 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Fox et al., 2022; James, 2006, 2017; Ndoye, 2017). To this end, teachers need to be equipped and develop assessment knowledge to shift from evaluating students for accountability to personalizing their learning and assessment (Fu et al., 2018, 2022). This means that teachers tailor learning around learners’ needs and abilities and guide students on how to learn and what they need to improve to move forward, thereby helping them achieve their learning goals and academic standards. In this way, learners will be the center of their learning, take responsibility for their own learning, and collaborate with their peers to share learning rather than competitive learning (Fu et al., 2018).

Another finding of the study is explicit correction, implying that students engage passively in the error correction process. This may not benefit students in developing metacognitive and critical thinking skills since it provides feedback and ignores feed-forward, which encourages students to develop self-regulation skills and creates opportunities for students to improve their learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Shepard, 2005). Therefore, teachers should consider offering students constructive feedback that creates critical thinking. For example, teachers should provide students with the rationales for their evaluation and assist them in identifying the gap and taking action to mend the gap (Nhan, 2015; Taras, 2002). Teachers should train students to provide meaningful feedback to their peers and encourage them to self-reflect on their learning and self-judgment. For these findings, my study offers the following elements to develop teachers' effective instruction and language assessment literacy: (a) equipping teachers with underpinning learning theories informing pedagogy and assessment; (b) providing assessment knowledge and improving assessment literacy for teachers; (c) making formative assessment principles and strategies explicit to teachers and students; (d) training and practicing in providing constructive feedback that promotes student learning; (e) personalizing students' learning to enhance students' autonomy, self-directed skills, and long-life learning skills; and (f) utilizing student learning evidence to make instructional adjustments to meet students' needs.

For curriculum developers and instructional designers. As evidenced in the current study, incongruence between the three elements—intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks—in the English program led to the teach-to-the-test approach. For example, students lacked active involvement in learning and evaluation; meanwhile, learning intentions said that the course would help them develop language

proficiency and skills for their future careers. At the same time, the borrowing of the CEFR framework as an assessment model for evaluating students' competencies in the English program in this study perhaps is not practical since "teachers may find themselves subscribing, uncritically or unwittingly, to the theories of learning on which they are based" (James, 2006, p.49).

This finding offers suggestions for using a constructive alignment framework for curriculum development and instructional design in higher education. In chapter two, I described the importance of students' involvement in the formative assessment process and the effectiveness of aligning learning intentions, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods in the curriculum at the tertiary level (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Biggs, 2014; Boud, 2007, James & Lewis, 2012). This framework is considered a *backward design*, which "starts from a specification of learning outcomes and decisions on methodology and syllabus are developed from the learning outcomes" (Richard, 2013, p.5). As a constructive alignment framework also starts with intended learning outcomes, which then inform pedagogical acts and assessment tasks to optimize students' opportunities to achieve their learning outcomes and required standards (Biggs, 1999; Fox et al., 2022; Whitehouse, 2014), it helps overcome the problem of a forward design, in which the course content is developed around the knowledge of the subject matter, and instructional methods are chosen based on this content. Therefore, adopting this framework in designing a curriculum or a lesson brings several benefits. First, as this framework focuses on integrating instructional activities and assessment tasks in instruction, it provides students with problem-based learning cases and prepares them with skills for solving problems they may encounter in their real-life and professional careers (Biggs, 1996). Second, adopting this model helps instructors and schoolteachers organize and develop appropriate instructional methods to

help students achieve their learning goals after completing an instructional unit, a course, or a program. Moreover, this model allows planners to avoid designing a course with the intent of covering the material content (Whitehouse, 2014). Especially in ESL/ EFL education, a constructive alignment helps move away from a mastery orientation, focusing on the linguistics content of a course and encouraging task competency, to an interactive orientation, focusing on active learning and communicative methods (Richards, 2013). Another positive impact of this curricular framework could be “the increased focus of language teachers on the development of assessment tasks and criterion-referenced rubrics (i.e., rating scales) as a means of providing evidence that a student has met, not met, or exceeded an outcome” (Fox et al., 2022, p. 125). In other words, teachers might be more concerned about collecting learning evidence from students’ work (e.g., quizzes, projects, assignments, oral practices, essays, portfolios), which will enhance learning development, rather than providing them with standardized testing.

For the Vietnamese government, the findings of this research may be of value in (a) informing the Faculty of Foreign Languages and other language teacher training institutions about helping instructors become more effective by changing their beliefs about learning and assessment practice (James, 2006); (b) designing a practical language teaching program/ a curriculum, or a course by applying a constructive alignment framework; (c) identifying socio-cultural gaps, such as test-driven teaching culture and passive learning culture, to bridge for designing and implementing an effective teaching program in higher education.

Suggestions for Further Studies

I used a case study research design to investigate four instructors’ beliefs about formative assessment and how these beliefs affect their actual practices, so my research aims not to generalize into a larger context but to an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014,

2018). Although the in-depth investigation of the EFL instructors affords credibility and reliability to that particular community, it was based on a single EFL context with the participants representing a distinct demographic of English language teachers in a city in Vietnam. Thus, the findings may indicate traits and behaviours unique to this demographic of teachers. This leaves room for further studies exploring the demographic features and teacher's characteristics that may shape teachers' beliefs and pedagogical acts. In addition, the students' academic backgrounds and cultural elements described in the interviews contribute to the teachers' beliefs and actions regarding formative assessment, but they were not sufficiently examined to be generalized to a broader higher education community. That being said, the case study approach does offer rich descriptive insights that may resonate with other similar higher education communities to promote the transferability of findings to inform issues surrounding assessment in higher education. There is a need to further explore the interplay and the alignment between the teacher's and students' cultures that guide teachers' and students' perceptions and behaviours in a higher education learning context, as the cycle of traditional, often outdated practices, remain, often unquestioned.

As mentioned in the previous section, since formative assessment is an essential and inseparable part of instruction, its implementation needs a change in teachers' perception of students' role in their learning (Black et al., 2003; Hopper et al., 2016; James, 2006). This change can be indicated in the way that teachers and prospective teachers develop assessment knowledge to shift from assessment for accountability to personalized learning and assessment (Fu et al., 2018, 2022). Also, the change may be indicated when teachers shift their mindsets from assessment for accountability to *learning-oriented assessment* (Turner & Purpura, 2016), which "is particularly concerned with how information from assessments can be used to close

learning gaps” (Fox et al., 2022, p. 125). An approach that might be considered is examining the effects of technology-supported assessment, such as the application of digital portfolios, or conducting a participatory research action regarding digital media in educational contexts and learning research hubs to see how these approaches value the learner-centred inquiry and maximize the personalized learning and assessment. These empirical investigations would be necessary for educators, instructors, and school teachers to activate learners as resources for one another and for themselves. However, any changes need an understanding of the transparent process of change (Fullan, 2007, 2010) and a change should be carefully considered in a complexity adaptive system since the process of change is based on interactions among multiples of agents (i.e., human behaviours, organizational systems), resulting in the interconnectivity of all features in the organization and unpredictable elements in the system (Stacey, 1996, 2007).

Last but not least, it might be helpful for EFL educators if they explore the reciprocal nature of engagement among learners and teachers to expand the understanding of the role of learners and teachers in formative assessment, particularly for EFL classrooms in higher education.

Closing Comments

So far, I have addressed key points of the journey research, including my impetus for this study, a gap in the literature, the study design, and critical findings. I have also acknowledged the implications for research and practice as well as suggestions for future studies. In terms of my contribution to the second language learning (SLL) scholarship, I believe that I succeeded in the following:

- Drawing critical constructs from socio-constructivism and formative assessment studies into a novel framework that can benefit EFL/ ESL teachers in understanding the two concepts,
- Contributing to the literature of formative assessment in EFL/ ESL contexts using the lens of a sociocultural perspective,
- Empowering the research design by adapting the qualitative methods, paired with the confessional ethnography approach,
- Offering an in-depth analysis of four Vietnamese EFL university teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment, thereby providing an understanding of teaching and learning culture in Vietnam.

After a long journey, I have grown and understood myself as a researcher and an educational practitioner. First, I am now more fully aware of the challenges embedded in the research journey, which equip me with the foundations to overcome the obstacles in my future research endeavours. At the same time, my personal growth has been highlighted, from struggling with bias and dual roles as a researcher and teacher to letting my voice be heard. As I mentioned in the ethical considerations section, balancing the 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives and ensuring anonymity and transparency is a big challenge for a qualitative researcher, especially for a researcher using confessional tales. However, confessional tales were like a "meditation" method for my research, in which I was aware of factors (e.g., personal experience and background, bias) that may impact the setting, acknowledged these factors, and monitored my behaviours and emotions to understand what happened in the field. I now thoughtfully consider issues during an investigation to, on the one hand, ensure confirmability (objectivity) and, on the other hand, to keep anonymity and transparency. In

addition, I feel I better understand the constructs of socio-constructivism and formative assessment in the teaching context and the necessity of implementing formative assessment in a post-secondary English program. In conclusion, I am confident to say that understanding formative assessment theory and implementing it in daily instruction might be a suitable solution to enhance EFL higher education quality in Vietnam and other EFL/ ESL contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guidelines

Interview guidelines I

PARTICIPANT ID:
INTERVIEW NUMBER:

DATE:

Questions	Purpose
1. Could you please tell me how long you have been teaching English in this institution and what is your highest educational qualification?	<i>General questions</i> Help participants feel relaxed and make them feel that they will be engaging in a conversation related to their interests and experiences. It will provide a basis for understanding each participant's teaching experiences.
2. What units (courses) do you teach currently, please tell me about your teaching experiences?	
3. What is your personal philosophy about EFL assessment? a. What is your definition of assessment? b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of assessment in your opinion? c. What is your understanding of the teacher's role in the assessment process?	<i>'Mini tour' questions:</i> Provide participants with an opportunity to explain their personal views on assessment and the role of the teacher in assessing students' work
4. Please describe how students are actually assessed in your current professional context. a. What methods of assessment do you use in your classes? b. What are your main assessment purposes? c. Why do you assess that way? d. Where do your ideas of your assessment come from?	Encourage the participants to describe their own assessment practices and to share insights with the researcher about their beliefs and assumptions of EFL assessment.
5. What do you think of the current assessment practices in your institution? How important are the assessment results to your students and to their learning? Do the results influence your teaching? How?	Seek the participants' opinions about the importance of assessment and the influence of current assessment practice on their instruction and student learning
6. What have you noted about changes in the way to assess students' work? Do you think your beliefs about assessment have changed over time? How are your assessment practices different from what you did ten years ago?	Seek the participants' opinions about the changes of language assessment (expect that they can express ideas about alternative/formative assessment).

7. What has caused you to change your ideas about assessment? Are there any assessment challenges that teachers face in your context?	Seek the factors influence their beliefs about assessment and factors affecting assessment practices
8. In your daily instructional practices, how do you know that students have understood the content/skills that you are teaching?	Seek pedagogical methods such as questioning students, giving homework or tests/quizzes
9. In your daily instructional practices, how often do you give students feedback on their work without marks? Could you describe your feedback practices in your daily interactions with students in this class? (such as written/oral; class/group/individual; immediate/delayed)	Understand if they use feedback, the main characteristic of formative assessment, to encourage student learning
10. In your opinion, how can the EFL assessment be improved to further assist student learning?	Seek the participants' suggestions for assessment that support learning

Interview guidelines II

(Follow-up interview)

Questions	Purpose
1. <i>Philosophy about an effective EFL teaching, learning and assessment</i>	
<p>a. In your opinion, what are the qualities of effective EFL teaching, learning and assessment in higher education?</p> <p>b. Do you think assessments can inform teaching and learning? Could you describe your plan for student assessments in your classroom is?</p> <p>c. Do you often use various instruction methods to meet diverse student needs in your classroom? Why do you do that?</p>	<p>Seek participants' philosophy about the nature of learning, teaching, and assessment.</p> <p>Seek their answers about the characteristics of formative assessment</p>
2. <i>Sharing success criteria with learners</i>	
<p>a. What do you think about establishing learning goals and tracking the individual student's progress toward those goals?</p> <p>b. Do you share the criteria with students and help them recognize the standards they should aim for? Do you allow students to track their own progress? Why do you do that?</p>	<p>Understand if they share criteria with learners and if they develop metacognition strategy or "learning to learn" skills equipping students with lifelong learning skills.</p>
3. <i>Questioning and classroom dialogue</i>	
<p>a. Do you often use questioning and conversations to prompt students to think of further ideas and to reveal your students' understanding? When do you usually do that, and how do you respond to their answers?</p> <p>b. What kind of questions do you often ask?</p> <p>c. What do you often do after raising questions to students? How long do you often wait for their answers?</p> <p>d. Do you promote participatory and democratic learning in your classroom? How do your students raise questions to you? How do you respond to them?</p>	<p>Seek to understand the procedure to implement the second activity of FA, <i>questioning</i> such as timing, type of questions and positive learning climate, etc.</p>
4. <i>Giving feedback</i>	
<p>a. How often do you provide feedback to students on their work? Why do you think you need/ needn't give them feedback?</p> <p>b. In your opinion, what is the quality of good feedback that enhances learning?</p> <p>c. What kind of feedback do you often use? (<i>corrective feedback/ in the form of praise feedback/ feedback with marks/comments only</i>)? Why do you do that?</p> <p>d. Could you describe your feedback practices based on performance in formal assessments with students in your class? (<i>written/oral; class/group/individual; spontaneous/planned; immediate/delayed</i>)</p>	<p>Understand if teachers provide feedback which helps students recognize and improve students' future work</p>

<p>5. <i>Peer and self-assessment</i></p> <p>a. How often do you ask your students to work in pairs/groups to give feedback to each other? Why (not) do you think they should work in that way? Can you give an example that you asked students to do?</p> <p>b. Do you often encourage students to use self-assessment for their work? Why(not) do you ask them to assess their work?</p> <p>c. What do you do to help them develop peer and self-assessment skills?</p>	<p>Explore how teachers help students get involved in their learning and assessment process</p>
<p>6. <i>Instructional Changes</i></p> <p>a. What do you often do after collecting student learning evidence (e.g., quizzes, tests, essays, etc.) Do you often change your teaching methods to help student learn?</p> <p>b. Do you often use students' test results to help them overcome their areas of weakness? How did you do?</p>	<p>Seek participants' ideas on the instruction adjustments as an element of formative assessment.</p>

Interview guidelines III
(Wrap-up interview)

Questions	Purpose
1. Based on our last interview, have your grading and assessment practices changed since the last interview? If yes, in what ways?/ If no, why?	Summarize participants' responses to the first interview and find any changes in assessment methods used in their classrooms
2. Do you have any suggestions about how students should be assessed? What are they?	Seek participants' suggestions for assessment in general and assessment that support learning
3. In your opinion, how can the EFL assessment be improved to assist student learning further?	
4. Do you think there should be a change in EFL assessment methods in your institution? Why(not)?	Seek their explanations for the change of assessment and factors that may affect that change in this institution
5. Would you like to talk about anything related that we have not covered in the interview?	Ask more information

Conclusion: Thank you for your participation in this interview. I may contact you to check if the transcriptions and interpretations from this interview are consistent with the ideas expressed. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this interview.

Appendix B: Interview Coding

The First Interview Coding

Hierarchy

Code	Count	Total
✓ Assessment implementation	14	104
Examine student test results	6	6
Making conversations with students	1	1
> Pair and group work	6	31
Questioning in classrooms	7	7
Self assessment	2	2
> Teacher feedback	4	26
> Testing	7	17
Factors affecting instructions and assessment	10	10
✓ Information on the course	5	11
Interest of the course	6	6
✓ Information on the current assessment	10	30
Changing in current assessment	8	8
Interest of current assessment	4	4
Interest of the course	6	6
Traditional assessment	2	2
✓ Personal philosophy about student learning instructions and assessment	31	140
> Advantages of Assessment	10	13
Disadvantages of Assessment	9	9
Impact of Assessment on student learning	6	6
Kinds of assessment	3	3
> Purpose of Assessment	16	51
Student learning styles	9	9
Teaching Methodology	18	18
✓ Suggestions for improving assessment for learning	15	17
Consistence between instructions and assessment criteria	1	1
Reproducing factual knowlege	1	1
Teacher assessment development	14	14
Teacher perception change	7	7

The Second Interview Coding

Hierarchy		
Code	Count	Total
▼ Personal philosophy about teaching learning and assessment	13	206
▼ Effective assessment in HE	2	134
▼ Assessing for factual knowledge	1	3
Correcting mistakes	2	2
Developing self and peer assessment skills for students	3	3
▼ Feedback and comments from teachers	12	47
Frequency of giving feedback for students	3	3
Giving compliment to students	7	7
Kind of feedback used	14	14
Lack of time in giving feedback	3	3
Reasons for giving feedback	8	8
▼ Peer assessment	12	25
Frequency of peer assessment	2	2
Peer feedback	5	5
Reasons for peer assessment	6	6
▼ Questioning in classrooms	10	24
Giving time to student to think	8	8
Kind of questions used in classrooms	3	3
Reasons for using various methods of instructions	3	3
▼ Self assessment	5	7
Reasons for self-assessment	2	2
▼ Sharing criteria with students	7	13
Assessing students based on criteria given	6	6
▼ Summative assessment	2	10
Testing	8	8
▼ Effective instructions and learning in HE	4	59
▼ Democratic learning environment in classroom	5	20
Pair and group work	8	8
Teacher and student interaction	2	2
Teacher reactions to student questions	5	5
▼ Student learning styles	5	13
Teacher role in student learning	2	2
The importance of establishing learning goals	6	6
▼ Teaching methodology	7	22
> Diverse teaching methods	1	5
Knowledge input	2	2
Strick rules for student learning	1	1
Technology intergrated teaching	1	1
Tracking student progress	6	6

The Third Interview Coding

Hierarchy

Code	Count	Total
✓ Factors affecting instructions and assessments	1	4
Lack time in giving feedback	3	3
Student learning styles	6	6
✓ Suggestions for assessment improvement	12	30
Assessing based on criteria given	1	1
✓ Interest of current assessment	4	5
No changes for current assessment	1	1
✓ Using various methods of assessments	7	12
Peer assessment	1	1
Reasons for using various methods	1	1
Teacher feedback	3	3
✓ Suggestions for improving assessment for learning	7	14
✓ Increasing learner autonomy	1	2
Reasons for increasing learner autonomy	1	1
Reasons for changing assessment methods	4	4
Spending more time for student learning	1	1
✓ Teacher perception change	5	25
✓ Summative assessment	1	7
Assessing for actual knowledge	3	3
✓ Assessment based on testing	2	3
Marking on student products	1	1
✓ Test development	6	12
Giving test strategies for students	2	2
Teaching for test	4	4
Using different methods for different student levels	1	1

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

TITLE: Investigating EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about language assessment - Case studies of university teachers

You are invited to participate in a study that is being conducted by Hanh Pham, who is a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Faculty of Education) at the University of Victoria. If you have further questions, you may contact her by email at phamxxxxxx@gmail.com.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Sanford. You may contact my supervisor by email at ksxxxxxx@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to investigate university teachers' beliefs about student learning and formative assessment and the influence of their beliefs on the way they teach and assess students' learning in EFL classrooms.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will inform educational policy-makers as well as instructors and university teachers about the importance of teachers' beliefs about the formative assessment and how it influences their teaching and students' learning, and the need to use assessment techniques effectively as a means of improving teaching and learning standards.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study as you were identified by (title+ name) as an EFL teacher who has had experience in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) for undergraduate students.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an audio-recorded interview estimated to last about 45 minutes to an hour. Also, you will be observed three lessons during the 2019 Fall semester. The time arranged will be at your convenience. The digital file and transcripts recorded will be stored in a password-protected computer, and the data will be seen only by my supervisor and by myself.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including your time and your willingness to share the information, review the transcript and review my findings.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the sharing and understanding of EFL teaching and EFL assessment and the opportunity to share your insights on teaching EFL with another EFL teacher (the researcher). The transcripts, at your request, will be shared with you for feedback and discussion and a copy of my dissertation will be shared with you after it is completed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences, or any explanation, provide that you notify me of your withdrawal 3 weeks in advance. You will have the option to remove whole or portions of what you have contributed to the study. If you withdraw from the study the data collected up until that point, including interview recordings, observation recordings, observation notes, and lesson plans, will be destroyed and will not be used for the study or other purposes.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher may have a relationship with potential participants as colleagues. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken.

1. Your consent for participation in this study will be gathered by a third person (primary participant).
2. You can withdraw from the project at any point by contacting the researcher in advance.

On-going Consent

To ensure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will contact you every two weeks to confirm that you still wish to participate.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity in any papers or presentations made about data collected in this project, your name will be changed, and any descriptions identifying you or people related to you will be changed to protect your anonymity.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by any recorded data being stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed data will be held in a password-protected computer storage device.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: Ph.D. dissertation, 'UvicSpace', possibly a presentation at a scholarly meeting and published articles in the future.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of in the following ways: electronic data will be destroyed by using electronic file deletion, and paper copies will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the primary researcher, Hanh Pham and her supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford. Contact information for these individuals is at the top of this page.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	2019 <i>Date</i>
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If you wish you can waive confidentiality

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

Future Use of Data

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a signed copy will be taken for course records

Appendix D: Request to access and use students' work through teachers

Dear Students [class...],

My name is Hanh Pham and currently, I am conducting research for my PhD in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria, BC, Canada. Title of my investigation: *Investigating EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment - Case studies of Vietnamese university teachers.*

My research is focused on teachers' beliefs about student learning and assessment activities in university EFL classrooms in Vietnam. I would like to ask for your permission to use your assignments (portfolios or written essays) and quizzes through your teacher, as these documents will serve as a source of data for my research. The originals will be copied and returned to your teachers. The name of your work will be pseudonyms in my research, and the data will be seen only by my supervisor and by myself. These documents will be destroyed within three years of the completion of the dissertation. There will be no academic repercussions if you do not want to volunteer examples of your work.

Your signature below indicates that you would give me permission to access and use your work. Should you have any questions, please contact me via email at phamxxxxxxx@gmail.com. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerest thanks,
Hanh Pham

Appendix E: Request for Approval to Access and Use Students' Work

Name/ Signature

Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter

Dear Dr. ()

My name is Pham Thi My Hanh, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, at the University of Victoria, BC, Canada. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Sanford. You may contact my supervisor via email at ksxxxxx@uvic.ca.

The title of my research is *Investigating EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment - Case studies of Vietnamese university teachers*.

My research investigation aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the beliefs and practices of several English language teachers in your institution. Its purpose is to investigate university teachers' beliefs about formative assessment and the influence of their beliefs on the way they teach and assess students' learning in EFL classrooms. In this regard, I would like to ask for your kind permission to conduct data collection in your institution.

In my Ph.D. research, I will interview four instructors by using semi-structured interviews about language assessment, particularly about formative assessment. Each interview should take up about 45 minutes to an hour. Also, I would probably ask these teachers for their permission to observe their teaching to seek some examples of their assessment tasks and grading methods. Each participant will be observed for three lessons during the term.

My plan is to audio-record interviews and all observed lessons. The names of all participants and the institution will be pseudonyms. The digital files and transcripts recorded will be stored in a password-protected computer, and the data will be seen only by my supervisor and by myself. The data will be destroyed within three years of the completion of the dissertation. The lectures participating in this project will be based on their willingness, and they can withdraw from this study at any time during the process of data collection if they are no longer interested, just notifying me of their withdrawal 3 weeks in advance.

I should be grateful if you would complete the consent form below. Should you have any questions, please contact me via email at phamxxxxxx@gmail.com.

I am looking forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,
Hanh Pham

Appendix G: Request for Approval to Conduct Research

The above research request has been considered by Dr.(), Rector of the University ABC, Vietnam and the request has been:

Approved	Denied
<p>I have read the information above and approve the application for the above research to be conducted at the University ABC, Vietnam.</p>	<p>I have read the information above and deny the application for the above research to be conducted at the University ABC, Vietnam.</p>
<p>Rector of the University ABC, Vietnam.</p> <p>Dr. ()</p> <p>Date:</p>	<p>Rector of the University ABC, Vietnam.</p> <p>Dr. ()</p> <p>Date:</p>