

**School of Education**

**The Conceptualisation and Implementation of the Learner-centred Approach  
to TESOL at Tertiary Level in Vietnam: A Case Study**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
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## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'lehoang', written in a cursive style and underlined.

Cher, Thi Le Hoang

Date: March 24, 2014

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## Abstract

The goal of promoting students' active and independent learning features significantly in Vietnam's *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010* and *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020*. The measures proposed for the achievement of this goal reflect the principles of learner-centred education. The current study was conducted to investigate teachers' conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach to TESOL with the aim of gaining insights that can inform the development of appropriate pedagogy for tertiary English education in Vietnam.

The study was conducted as a case study at an English faculty of a public/national university. The study involved two stages of investigation and incorporated three data collection methods: questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The use of this range of data collection instruments made it possible to obtain a detailed and complex data set and to ensure that findings were triangulated. Findings from the study indicated that the pedagogical approach the teachers actually followed in relation to learner-centredness was characterised by a paradigm of principled pragmatism which was informed by the psychological and contextual factors to which the teachers were subject. The psychological factors comprised the teaching philosophies that the teachers had and which reflected their individuality; the contextual factors contributed to the uniqueness of their teaching milieu.

The findings of the study reveal that there is a complex interrelationship between the teachers' beliefs and practices and their teaching context, which has important ramifications for TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

BAK	Beliefs, Assumptions and Knowledge
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EF	Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
HE	Higher Education
L2	second language
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the study

English is now widely accepted as an international language. Its use permeates science, education, business, tourism, communication and entertainment. The hegemony of the language can be attributed to a range of factors many of which are responses to the particular circumstances of the country where English is used to communicate. In Vietnam, the country in which this study is conducted, the teaching and learning of English has gained momentum since 1986, the year in which the country officially implemented *đổi mới* (the renovation policy). The ‘adoption’ of foreign languages in Vietnam has always reflected political and historical events (Denham, 1998; Wright, 2002), but 1986 represented a particular landmark in Vietnam’s foreign language policy and in the development of the English language teaching (ELT) in particular.

Specifically, the implementation of *đổi mới* witnessed an exponential increase in the demand for English as the preferred foreign language for communication (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006; Lo Bianco, 1993). This accounts for the strong development of the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) within Vietnam as it is a means of catering for this learning need (Do, 2006; Ho & Wong, 2004; Wright, 2002). More importantly, it is a driving force behind the acknowledgement of the role of the English language in the national education system of Vietnam in general and accounts for the ascendancy of TESOL in the tertiary education sector (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006). A number of government directives, policies and statements of pedagogical strategy have been formulated to promote the teaching and learning of English at the national level (see, for example, Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1994; Ministry of Education and Training, 1994c, as cited in Do, 2006, p. 8). The most recent and ambitious of these is the project *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008-2020*, also called the *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project* for short (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2008), which aims at improving English language instruction in the school system throughout the country.

## 1.2 The research problem

The importance of context is well established in the literature on language teaching and learning. An early call for attention to the social context of language learning was made by Breen (1986, pp. 149-150), who explored the metaphor of the language classroom as a unique culture in order to capture the “social and psychological richness” in which language learning takes place. There has been recent advocacy for increased understanding of contextualised language learning and teaching (Bax, 2003b; Holliday, 1994; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; Tedick & Walker, 1994; Tudor, 2001; Widdowson, 2004).

The need to take into consideration the context of instruction is prominent in learner-centred teaching, which, as an approach, has been widely espoused in language education (Liu, Qiao & Liu, 2006; Nunan, 1999; White, 2007). Yet, some researchers consider learner-centred education as “ultimately a ‘western’ construct inappropriate for application in all societies and classrooms” (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 425). As the learner-centred approach is a complex, evolving and long-standing concept in TESOL (Benson & Voller, 1997; Nunan, 1999; Tudor, 1996; Wenden, 2002; White, 2007), it is of great interest to investigate how this Western concept is understood and implemented in Vietnam, especially in the context where the goal of promoting students’ active and independent learning features significantly in Vietnam’s *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010* (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001) and *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020* (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). However, little research has been conducted into the adoption of learner-centred approaches in Vietnam. An improved understanding of how a learner-centred approach is perceived and practised in Vietnam will necessitate a contextual investigation in which social, cultural and historical factors are examined and their impact on teaching practice assessed.

The importance of language teachers’ perspectives has been acknowledged (Borg, 2003, 2006a, 2009; Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 2001; Golombek, 2009; Hedge, 2000; Richards, 1998; Woods, 1996). Research suggests that underlying teachers’ selection of both their overarching teaching approach and specific

instructional practices are their teaching philosophies - the values and beliefs they hold about different aspects of language teaching and learning. Again, little research has been undertaken into Vietnamese TESOL teachers' conceptualisation and implementation of learner-centred teaching, despite the fact that some teachers of tertiary English are using a learner-centred approach. Therefore, this study aims to enhance knowledge about the adoption of learner-centred approaches in TESOL in Vietnam through an in-depth analysis of the philosophies and approaches of teachers within the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature (hitherto referred to as the EF) at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

### **1.3 Research objectives and research questions**

The study sets out to achieve four objectives. Specifically, it aims to: explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes a learner-centred approach to TESOL; identify the extent to which teachers believe they use a learner-centred approach in their teaching; investigate the degree of coherence between what teachers believe they do and what they actually do in their teaching; and examine implications for TESOL pedagogy at tertiary level that arise from that coherence (or lack thereof).

The research questions the study aims to address are:

- 1) What do TESOL teachers at the EF understand by a learner-centred approach to language teaching?
- 2) To what extent do TESOL teachers at the EF believe that they implement a learner-centred approach in their own classrooms?
- 3) To what extent do the classroom practices of TESOL teachers at the EF reflect their beliefs about their teaching approach?
- 4) What are the implications of the degree of fit between beliefs and practices for TESOL pedagogy at tertiary level in Vietnam?

#### **1.4 Research methodology**

The study has been conducted as an instrumental qualitative case study, an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context, using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The study was divided into two stages of investigation and incorporated three data collection methods: questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The use of these three data gathering instruments enabled the collection of a detailed and complex data set and the triangulation of findings. In the first stage of the study, data collection involved a questionnaire being sent to all staff who taught English in the EF, followed by in-depth interviews with a sample of respondents. In the second stage of the study, data were obtained from classroom observations and debriefing interviews with the observed teachers.

#### **1.5 Significance of the research study**

The theoretical significance of the study lies in the enhanced understanding it can provide about the implementation of a learner-centred approach in the Vietnamese context. The research-based interpretations and practices found in the study are lived meanings and practices that will contribute to improved knowledge about the concept of learner-centredness and, in particular, the use of learner-centred approaches in TESOL in a non-Western setting.

The findings from the research have the potential to inform the on-going development of appropriate TESOL practices at the EF and at similar tertiary institutions in Vietnam. Moreover, the insights gained from a case study “can inform professional practice or evidence-informed decision making in both clinical and policy realms” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544) and influence “educational policy-making” (Nunan, 1992, p. 78) and “educational innovations” (Merriam, 1988, p. 33). As the research findings will be made readily available to the review by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Vietnam, of the *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020* and the *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*, they will, hopefully, help guide future policy-making.

Within the discipline of TESOL, this study will contribute to the body of research that has been conducted into language teaching and learner-centred approaches to language learning. In particular, it will broaden the current understanding of theoretical perspectives on, and the actual practices of, learner-focused approaches to ELT in the Vietnamese context.

### **1.6 Limitations of the study**

The current study has three main limitations. The first is that the study is a single-case study, and, therefore, the results are case-specific, not generalisable. While the purpose of the study is to gain depth rather than breadth of understanding, case study research does provide readers with the opportunity to make “naturalistic generalizations” based on the links they can establish between the case researched and the cases they know or the contexts in which they find themselves (Stake & Trumbull, 1982).

The second limitation is that the study involves only teachers, not all the other agents that participate in the educational process - students, parents, policy makers and educational authorities. Therefore, only part of the story, not the whole story, has been uncovered. Given the time constraints and the scope of the study, the exclusive focus on teachers is defended by their key role in structuring, delivering and innovating a course. Any innovation to be implemented in education - be it a change in methodology, materials or assessment - always places classroom teachers at the forefront of the change.

The third limitation relates to the fact that the researcher is a staff member of the EF. The researcher’s familiarity with the institution and its teachers, despite the quality assurance measures put in place, had the potential to compromise the integrity of this research. For example, it has been suggested that insider researchers may not ask questions and raise issues they find obvious (Hockey, 1993) or sensitive (Preedy & Riches, 1988) and may not explain the norms (Platt, 1981) or experiences (Kanuha, 2000) they share with participants. On the other hand, participants may be reluctant to disclose certain information “for fear of being judged” (Mercer, 2007, p. 7) or

because of their wariness of an insider researcher, “someone so intimately bound up with the life of the institution and so enmeshed in its power relations” (Dimmock, 2005, as cited in Mercer, 2007, p. 7). However, this limitation gave the researcher some advantages. She was able to gain access to, and informed consent from, the institution and the informants easily (Duff, 2008; Mercer, 2007), and she had the benefit of a sound understanding of the context in which the study was located (Hannabus, 2000; Mercer, 2007).

### **1.7 Ethical issues**

The researcher took every step possible to reduce the bias that may have been a consequence of her role as an insider researcher. At the very start of the study, the researcher made it clear to the teacher participants that her intent was to conduct a descriptive rather than evaluative investigation of their beliefs and practices. During the study, every possible opportunity was provided for the teachers to express their ideas in their own way, as evidenced by the use of open-ended questions on the questionnaire and responsive semi-structured interviews. Further, during data analysis, the researcher interpreted the teachers’ beliefs and practices based on the explanations given by the teachers themselves, not on insider information, and she remained conscious of, and vigilant in, ensuring that the stance she took on the issue did not influence analysis of the data.

The research study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Curtin University. The written permission to conduct the study at the EF was granted by the Dean of the EF. Participation by individual teachers was on a completely voluntary basis. Participants were provided with an information sheet that clearly described the purpose of the study and stated that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without subjecting themselves to any disadvantage, penalty or adverse consequence. Completion and return of the questionnaire via email implied informed consent. Participants signed a consent form before giving interviews and having their lessons observed. All participants were de-identified in data analysis and confidentiality was ensured. Access to data was restricted with only the researcher and her supervisors having access to the data during and after the study. The data

were retained in password-protected files and were transferred, on completion of the thesis, from the researcher's computer to a CD which would be kept confidential in a locked area at the School of Education, Curtin University, for a minimum of five years.

## **1.8 Organisation of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 describes the context of TESOL in Vietnam in general and the context of the study in particular. It outlines the social, cultural and historical factors that have led to the pre-eminence of the English language in contemporary Vietnam and of pedagogical trends towards learner-centredness. The approach to the teaching and learning of English at the EF - the case selected for the case study approach adopted by the current study - is also described.

Chapter 3 reviews and critiques the literature that is related to the topic of the research. The first part of the chapter presents a discussion on the key factors that influence the adoption of a teaching approach such as contextual factors, learner factors and teacher factors. The second part of the chapter provides a discussion on the concept of the learner-centred approach to TESOL, with particular reference to the role of the teacher, the role of the student, classroom practices and implementation issues.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology. It presents the rationale behind the adoption of qualitative research as the overarching research paradigm and of case study as the research framework. It also accounts for the selection of an instrumental single-site case study as the research design, the use of three data collection methods, namely, questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations, and the procedures for collecting and analysing data.

Chapter 5 reports the findings of the first stage of the study. Based on questionnaire data and interview data, findings are presented on (i) self-reported use of classroom practices and of a learner-centred approach, (ii) respondent and interviewee perceptions of a learner-centred approach, of the role of the TESOL teacher and of what makes a successful lesson, and (iii) interviewees' self-reported use of specific teaching approaches.

Chapter 6 reports the findings of the second stage of the study. It presents the teaching practices as recorded during classroom observations and as explained by teachers during post-observation interviews. These practices are described in terms of the actions teachers took.

Chapter 7 presents discussions on the findings and implications for TESOL pedagogy at tertiary level in Vietnam. The chapter also suggests directions for further research.

## **1.9 Definitions of terms**

The following provides definitions and the rationale behind the use of some key terms within this thesis.

Firstly, the term *learner-centred* rather than an alternative, such as *student-centred*, is used in this thesis. This is because the term *learner* can be understood in a broad sense as it is not limited to a particular age or group (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). Further, its meaning can be extended to include anyone who is involved in, and influenced by, the educational process, including students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). Finally, the term *learner-centred* has been selected as it draws attention to learners and their act of learning (Weimer, 2002). However, it should be noted that the term *student-centred* is sometimes used in contexts where reference is specifically made to students at university level.

The terms *learner-centred approach*, *learner-centredness*, *learner-centred education*, *learner-centred teaching* and *learner-centred instruction* are used interchangeably to embody the principles underpinning the concept of the learner-centred approach such as focus on the learner, active learning and collaborative relationships between teacher and students and among students.

Although the term *learner* is commonly used in language teaching and learning, and the term *student* in mainstream education, the two terms *learner* and *student* are synonymous in this study.

In this thesis, *learner autonomy* generally refers to learners' ability to take responsibility for their learning or to become self-directed learners. In this study, *learner autonomy* is discussed as distinct from, albeit related to, *learner-centredness*.

*Learner empowerment* is viewed as the ultimate goal of *learner-centredness* and as a manifestation of *learner autonomy*. In this thesis, it is defined as enabling learners to have control over their learning by means of *learner training* and *learner involvement*.

*Learner training* refers to procedures or activities used to help learners develop their ability to take an active role in their learning and to pursue effective learning strategies.

*Learner involvement* refers to the engagement of learners in decision-making processes inherent in curriculum development or course design, such as establishment of learning objectives, selection of methodology and materials, evaluation and assessment.

The term the *teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL)* is employed in this study although English is mainly taught as a foreign language in Vietnam. It is because *TESOL* as a cover term can avoid the pejorative meaning of the term "foreign" and the dichotomy between the *teaching of English as a foreign language* and the *teaching of English as a second language* (Paulston, 1992). It

should also be noted that, as used in this study, the term *TESOL* refers to the professional field, not the international professional organisation.

*Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)* is well recognised pedagogically within the TESOL field and although considered a ‘dated’ approach by some, it remains strongly connected to *learner-centredness* in the language classroom. It is pedagogy that attempts to address learner communicative needs and does so through the provision of communicative activities and the development of communicative competence.

*Task-based language teaching (TBLT)* is a teaching and learning approach in which tasks are taken to be the primary unit for syllabus design, lesson planning and assessment. It was developed from CLT, is currently acknowledged as the predominant approach to TESOL and has as its primary focus learner needs.

## Chapter 2: Vietnamese TESOL Context

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the broad and immediate contexts in which the study was conducted. The chapter is divided into six parts. The first part describes the influences of the social, cultural and historical factors on contemporary Vietnam. It highlights that the country's implementation of *đổi mới* (the renovation policy) in 1986 has resulted in an increased awareness of the role of education and the enhanced status of Higher Education (HE) in Vietnam. The second part outlines the emergence of English as the preferred foreign language in Vietnam in the wake of *đổi mới*. The third part identifies the pedagogical trends that have developed within education in Vietnam, indicating, in particular, the shift from traditional teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred approaches that have been occurring. Next, a brief overview of the development of TESOL curricula at HE institutions in Vietnam is provided. Finally, a description of the EF, selected as the case for the current research, is given. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### 2.1 Social, cultural and historical influences on contemporary Vietnam

Much research has been conducted into the educational contexts of language teaching and learning. Wedell (2003) observes that a substantial body of TESOL research has been undertaken on the implementation of TESOL curriculum change projects, examining in particular the effects of contextual factors on the change process. Some major studies in this area are those by Hall and Hewings (2001), Holliday (1994), Kennedy (1988), Rea-Dickens and Germaine (1998) and Waters and Vilches (2001). Increasing recognition has also been given to educational contexts in other TESOL research areas. Harmer (2003, p. 338) claims that “the social context in which learning takes place is of vital importance to the success of the educational endeavour”. Within a sociocultural perspective, particularly in relation to second language teacher education, Johnson (2009, p. 77) suggests that, “to fully understand the activities that L2 [second language] teachers and their students engage in, it is essential to understand the broader social, cultural, and historical macro-structures that shape those activities.” Similarly, Hayes (2009, p. 9) argues that “investigation of socio-cultural contexts in which classroom teaching is enacted is crucial to the understanding of local practices”.

A number of social, cultural and historical factors have exerted their influence on contemporary Vietnam. After the declaration of Vietnamese independence in 1945, the country's history can be divided into four main periods: the French War (1945-1954), the American War, also known as the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the pre-reform period (1975-1985) and the period of reform (1986-present). During the war against the French, the People's Republic of China was the main supporter of the Vietnamese Communist Party through the provision of military and civilian aid, the result of which was that the Chinese language supplanted French as the major foreign language (Wright, 2002). Following the defeat of the French in 1954 at Điện Biên Phủ, as a result of the Geneva Agreement and in anticipation of a general election, the country was temporarily divided into two regions. The north was managed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the south was administered by the Republic of Vietnam. However, the planned election failed to be held, and the conflict between the two regions of the country escalated into full-scale war, the American War of 1955-1975. Communist North Vietnam was supported by the former Soviet Union, and South Vietnam was backed primarily by the United States of America (USA). As a consequence of the political situation, the Russian language was promoted in the north and English in the south (Lo Bianco, 1993), where it was the principal foreign language taught in secondary schools and in HE (Do, 2006). However, English was not accepted as a school subject in the north until 1971 (Denham, 1992).

Since the end of the American War and the reunification of the country in 1975, Vietnam has been officially known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the pre-reform period (1975-1985), the country received aid and support from the former Soviet Union-led communist bloc (Kamibeppu, 2009; Lo Bianco, 1993; Wright, 2002), and its communication and co-operation with non-communist countries was limited (Denham, 1992). Vietnam remained isolated from the capitalist West largely due to economic sanctions imposed by the USA and its neighbours in Southeast Asia as a consequence of its intervention in Cambodia in 1978 (Wright, 2002). Although a communist country, Vietnam was alienated from China when a border war broke out in 1979 (Wright, 2002). As a result, the Russian language achieved a position of prominence in the education system of the country (Denham, 1992). The teaching of

English, French and Chinese was not a priority as they were not the languages of the nations with which Vietnam had diplomatic or trade relations (Wright, 2002). This was reflected in the national targets set for foreign language education in high schools in Vietnam post-1975, which were “to have 60% study Russian, 25% study English and 15% study French” (Denham, 1992, p. 62).

In 1986, Vietnam underwent a radical economic renovation known as *đổi mới*, which brought about a change from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented, but free market-based, economy. With the *đổi mới* policy in place, the country sought to establish political, economic and cultural relations with other countries, especially those in the West (Le, 1991; Lo Bianco, 1993). This encouraged business people and tourists from English-speaking countries to visit Vietnam (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006; Lo Bianco, 1993). In the meantime, the collapse of the Communist bloc in the late 1980s brought a complete halt to the supply of aid to Vietnam (Denham, 1992; Kamibeppu, 2009) and a fall in the number of experts and visitors from eastern bloc countries (Denham, 1992). Foreign languages such as English, French and Chinese assumed new importance in the pursuit of *đổi mới*, and, in particular, English became “the foreign language in greatest demand” (Lo Bianco, 1993, p. 27).

### *The role of education*

Since *đổi mới* was introduced in 1986, Vietnam has been shaped by a politico-social context which places a strong emphasis on the role of education. The Government’s view is that education has an important role to play in the development of the country and, in particular, in its socio-economic development. The principle to which the government subscribes is officially laid down in one of the MOET’s policy statements:

Renovation in education and training is an important part of the renewal of the state... Investment in education and training must be regarded as one of the main targets for development investment. Conditions must be created to allow education to serve socio-economic development even more actively. (MOET, 1995, p. 14, as cited in Duggan, 2001, p. 196)

As stipulated in the Law of Education of Vietnam, which was passed by the National Assembly, the role of education is to turn out well-rounded young people who are capable of contributing to the development and defence of the country (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005). The need for a knowledge-based society has been widely accepted in Vietnam, and more than ever before education has a significant role. Education is now seen as the vehicle for producing a skilled labour force that can meet the workforce needs of the nation as well as make Vietnam more competitive in regional and international arenas. The current high priority given to education is surprising to outside observers such as the World Bank (1993, 1996, as cited in Duggan, 2001, p. 194) as it is in stark contrast to feudal Vietnam, where the recognition of education as a prerequisite for socio-economic development was absent (Woodside, 1976, as cited in Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 202).

The central role of education has also been recognised by the public in general and especially by parents. This support emerges from the long history that HE has had in Vietnam (Fry, 2009; Pham & Fry, 2002). Many educational values in Vietnam have their origins in Confucianism, and these underpin people's respect for, and dedication to, education, their fondness of learning (Matthews, 2003; Nguyen & McInnis, 2002; Nguyen TH, 2002; Pham & Fry, 2004; Woodside, 1983) and the emphasis on morality in education (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002; Pham & Fry, 2004). Based on these ideals, formal education and academic achievement have been traditionally viewed as being "among the noblest human pursuits" (London, 2007, p. 416). Vietnamese parents demonstrate great concern about their children's advancement, and this may explain their interest in, and support for, educational reforms. One consequence of the support that education receives from both the Government and from society at large is that education provision is under pressure to live up to their expectations.

In the current period, there has been growing awareness of the need to improve the quality and efficiency of the nation's education provision if it is to provide high quality human resources needed for the process of modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation (Vu, Dang & Tran, 2007). Parents want to see their children have access to an education of the best quality possible in order to give them better opportunities in their future employment. The challenges for the Vietnamese

education sector, at all levels of education, are, therefore, improved access, the provision of high quality teaching and improved student learning outcomes.

Two significant education reforms have been implemented - *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010* (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001) and *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011- 2020* (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). These two policy documents establish a number of goals to be pursued by the education sector in order to attain international standards, and they also put forward the measures or actions that need to be taken if these goals are to be achieved. The goal that features most prominently is making Vietnamese students more active and independent in the learning process. Importantly, these educational reforms are financially supported by the Government, with increasing investment being made over the years. Specifically, the state budget for education increased from 8% in 1990 to 15% in 2000 (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001), and from 15.3% in 2001 to 20% in 2010 (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). Government spending on education as a percentage of overall public expenditure has been larger than on any other sector (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008, p. 143).

#### *The status of HE in Vietnam*

Vietnam is a one-party state under overall Communist Party control (Fry, 2009), and education is regulated by the Education Law. The MOET is the highest government agency responsible for directing all activities, managerial and academic, in education at all levels, including the tertiary level (Dang, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2007). This highly centralised management mechanism has been used since Vietnam's declaration of its independence in 1945 (Dang, 2012). The development of a diverse HE sector reflects the national goals instigated during different periods. Not only has the *đổi mới* policy of 1986 meant there has been an increasing need for higher education to reform itself in order to provide human resources for industry (Fry, 2009; Pham, 2008, as cited in Reddy, 2012, p. 4), but also to satisfy the social demand for tertiary education of reliable quality (Fry, 2009).

Consequently, the number of tertiary institutions has greatly increased over time. In 1977-1978, after the reunification of the country, there was a total of 70 universities and colleges (Fry, 2009); this number rose to 197 in 2001 (MOET, 2001, as cited in Fry, 2009, p. 244), and then to 255 in 2003-2004 (Ngo, 2006, as cited in Fry, 2009, p. 244). The types of tertiary institution are increasingly diverse. Today, there are seven types of institution: specialised universities, multidisciplinary universities, open universities, public junior colleges, private junior colleges, international universities and private universities (Fry, 2009). The emergence of the private sector in higher education has resulted from an important policy decision by the Government to provide further access to higher learning (Pham & Fry, 2002).

A number of factors have been identified as impacting on the quality of education that HE institutions have been able to provide: inflexible curricula, didactic instructional methods, lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities (World Bank, 2008), inadequate professional preparation of teachers and heavy teaching loads (Tran & Swierczek, 2009; Vu, 2009; World Bank, 2008). To address these issues, reform efforts have been outlined in the *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010 /2011-2020* and in the *Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA)*, which serves as a roadmap for reforms to be made by the year 2020 (Fry, 2009; Pham, 2010). As Pham describes, HERA “presents a vision of what higher education should be” (p. 51). Among the specific objectives formulated in HERA, and of interest to the present study, is the objective of providing teaching staff with training in advanced teaching methodology. In foreign language education, the shift to English from Russian and Chinese at universities and colleges is considered as a key innovation (Pham & Fry, 2004).

## **2.2 The emergence of the English language in Vietnam**

*Đổi mới* witnessed “the re-emergence of English as the language for broader communication and cooperation” (Do, 2006, p. 1) as well as “the re-emergence of English as the main foreign language” (Do, 2006, p. 7) to be studied. Foreign investment began to flow into Vietnam (Do, 2006) as did Western aid after the lifting of the USA’s trade embargo in 1994 (Kamibepu, 2009). Certain political

events also contributed to the increased importance of English, including the normalisation of relations between Vietnam and the USA in 1995, Vietnam's membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997, of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998, and of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2007. As English is the *lingua franca* of ASEAN and APEC countries and is the language of international trade and business, it is generally considered as the most desirable foreign language to be acquired (Wright, 2002). Knowledge of English is "an important asset" (Wright, 2002, p. 241) and is considered a prerequisite for the procurement of jobs and business deals in Vietnam (Do, 2006).

Consequently, there has been official and public acknowledgement of the role and status of English in academic and socio-economic domains. Of all the five foreign languages which are officially recognised and taught at universities in Vietnam (English, Russian, Chinese, French and German), English is the most studied with 94% of undergraduates and 92% of post-graduates learning English (Hoang et al., 2008, as cited in Hoang, 2010, p. 12). A working knowledge of English is an advantage, if not essential, for most job applicants as a competent command of English has become a prerequisite for professional advancement.

As a consequence, there has been "a massive demand" for English language study (Lo Bianco, 1993, p. 28) which has led to "the explosive growth" in the learning of the language in Vietnam (Do, 2006, p. 8). Public and social awareness and acceptance of the usefulness of English has led to increasing demands for TESOL courses. It was estimated that a few years after the implementation of *đổi mới*, hundreds of English-teaching centres were established all over the country, attracting large numbers of English language learners (Nguyen, 1993, as cited in Do, 2006). The situation is also captured by Ho and Wong:

When Vietnam embarked on economic reforms in 1986 ... it promoted a nationwide rush to learn English ... English classes were crammed with not just students but also professionals such as doctors and engineers, as well as retired government officials, senior police, army officers and diplomats. (2004, p. 1)

The growth of English resulted from “social needs” (Do, 2006, p. 7) and “popular demand” (Denham, 1992, p. 64), and problems arose when the demand for English tuition exceeded the supply of English language teachers. Do (2006) reported that the shortage of English teachers was so acute that a person who had no official training could become a teacher. Wright (2002) observed that the private sector played a large role in the provision of ELT. English programs offered at language schools established by international organisations or by other small enterprises in the larger cities differed in quality and were often short-lived; however, their business success attested to the great demand for English language courses (Wright, 2002).

Denham (1992, p. 63) describes the prominence that English achieved in the early 1990s as “the ascendancy of English”. She further argues that, as this ascendancy was due to economic and cultural influences, Vietnam qualifies as part of the Expanding Circle described by Kachru (1990). According to Kachru, countries in which English is used fall into three circles. The Inner Circle includes countries in which varieties of English are used as the first language; for example, the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The Outer Circle consists of countries where English is used as a second language; for example, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Zambia. The Expanding Circle comprises countries that use English as a foreign language; for example, China, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe.

The rapid expansion of ELT resulted in an acknowledgement of the importance of English language instruction (Do, 2006). A number of projects or directives were launched or issued by the Government to promote foreign language learning. For example, in late 1993, “A national strategy for foreign language teaching and learning throughout all levels of education” was formulated, based on the survey conducted by the MOET on foreign language needs (Ministry of Education and Training, 1994c, as cited in Do, 2006, p. 8). The survey reviewed previous foreign language education and resulted in proposals for the future. Order No. 442/TTg, issued by the Prime Minister on August 15 1994, required government officials under the age of 45 to learn a foreign language, preferably English (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1994). In Do’s opinion, there had never been “a stronger, clearer decision concerning foreign language policy and planning made by

the highest-level authority” (p. 8). To date, the most important initiative the Government has undertaken is the project *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008-2020* (also known as the *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*). The focus of the project is the teaching and learning of English. Nguyen and Dudzik (2010) emphasise this point by their reference to the project as *Vietnam’s National English 2020 Initiatives*. The ultimate goal of this 450 million-US dollar project is:

To renovate thoroughly the tasks of teaching and learning foreign language[s] within [the] national education system, to implement a new program on teaching and learning foreign language[s] at ... [all] school levels and training degrees, which aims to achieve by the year 2015 ... vivid progress on professional skills, language competency for human resources, especially at some prioritized sectors; by the year 2020 most Vietnamese youth, whoever graduate from vocational schools, colleges and universities [must] gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently. This will enable them to be more confident in communication, further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multi-cultural environment with [a] variety of languages. This goal also makes language ... an advantage for Vietnamese people, serving the cause of industrialization and modernization for the country. (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2008, p. 1)

### **2.3 Pedagogical trends**

#### *The teacher-centred tradition*

The long history of Vietnam has been characterised by its resistance to successive foreign invasions by the Chinese, the French, the Japanese and the USA (Denham, 1992; Nguyen TH, 2002). Among those foreign invaders, the Chinese managed to establish themselves in the territory of Vietnam for the longest period of time, more than one thousand years (from 111 BC to AD 939), compared to a century of French rule (1858-1954), a short-term Japanese occupation and a 20-year war between the Americans with North Vietnam (Denham, 1992; Nguyen TH, 2002).

By the year 939, when the Vietnamese eventually succeeded in sweeping the Chinese out of its land to regain its independence, Confucianism had been deeply rooted in Vietnam (Crites, 2005). Although the Vietnamese people strove to retain their national identity and not to be assimilated by the Chinese, the influence of Confucianism on different aspects of life in Vietnam was pervasive. As such, Vietnam is said to have had “a Confucian past” (Woodside, 1983, p. 412), characterised by a “Vietnamization of Confucianism” (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 201) and belonged to the Confucian world, like Japan, Korea and Singapore (Le, 1994, as cited in Fry, 2009, p. 240). It was in education that the influence of Confucianism was most evident.

By the fifteenth century, the Mandarin educational system had laid the foundation for the system of education in Vietnam along Confucianism lines (Crites, 2005; Lo Bianco, 1993). This adherence included the widely held Confucian belief that human beings are good by nature, and that they will remain that way as long as they are provided with education and a good example to follow (Crites, 2005). Further, in a strictly hierarchical Confucian society, people were required to set an example to those who were inferior to them while subordinating themselves to those who were superior. The acceptance of this view accounted for some traditions of the Vietnamese people, including their respect for education (especially for teachers), their love of study (Matthews, 2003; Nguyen & McInnis, 2002; Nguyen TH 2002; Pham & Fry, 2004; Woodside, 1983) and the heightened attention to morality in education (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002; Pham & Fry, 2004). It followed that teachers had to be a paragon of erudition and virtue to their students, and students were to hold their teachers in high esteem. This was the fertile soil in which teacher-dominated pedagogy took root and developed. Therefore, it is not surprising that teaching and learning in Vietnam has largely been teacher-centred.

Further, teaching was, and continues to be, viewed as a noble career, and teachers' work was and is highly valued. In the past, the hierarchy of *Vua-Sư-Phụ* (King-Teacher-Father) showed that the teacher should command more respect and loyalty from his students than the father from his children (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002). Such common sayings as “Without a teacher, you can do nothing” and “To cross a river,

you should build a bridge; to have your children well-versed in letters, you should love the teacher” reflected the spirit of the times. Even today, student teachers in Vietnam have their tuition fees waived as a token of appreciation for their future contributions to the community (Matthews, 2003). Teachers are accountable for the training of the student’s mind, both intellectually and morally. Popular images of the teacher as “expert scholar” (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002, p. 152) or “fount of knowledge” (Holliday, 1994, p. 59) are vivid illustrations of the expectations of the teacher as the distributor of knowledge. The contemporary expectation for teachers is that they, too, must be moral role models for their students, demonstrating high standards of behaviour in “their conduct, attitudes and speech” (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002, p. 152). For example, a common practice in schools is for teachers to brief students weekly on school activities or topical issues in an effort to improve standards of conduct and discipline among students.

The formal and hierarchical relationship between teachers and students emerged from the traditional education system. Traditionally viewed as a source of knowledge, the teacher had an authoritative role. Students were knowledge recipients: they came to class to listen to, and to take notes of, the “right words” of the teacher (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002, p. 152). One advantage of having such a relationship is that the teacher could encourage students to learn by setting good examples for them to follow (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002). The disadvantage, however, is that such a relationship breeds “unconditional obedience to authority” (Liu, 1998, p. 5). As students are supposed to think highly of the teacher’s expertise, they develop habits of passive learning and learning without questioning. This results in inattention to the development of critical thinking, self-confidence and communication skills for students (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002).

Traditional Vietnamese education also embraced essentialism, which, according to Sadker and Zittleman (2007), holds that knowledge derives from classic works and can be passed from one person to another. A learned man was one who had profound knowledge of the classics, especially those written or edited by Confucius. Success in the civil service examination system was predicated on the mastery of such ‘classical’ knowledge (Crites, 2005). The emphasis on book learning and examination-driven teaching led to the dominance of rote learning, lack of attention

to the development of analytical skills and the lack of practical or technological skills in the curriculum (Pham & Fry, 2004).

### *Need for innovation in teaching methodology*

Education in Vietnam is still dominated by rote learning of information from textbooks and passive approaches to learning (Phelps, Ha, Graham & Geeves, 2012). These traditional ways of teaching and learning have been identified as a fundamental weakness of the Vietnamese education system (Pham & Fry, 2002) and are evident at all levels of education. Pham and Fry maintain that the dominant way of learning at high school and at university is for students to take notes of what is taught by teachers, and university students have no opportunity to find information on their own and to put into practice what they learn.

In response to these circumstances, calls for change emerged. At the national level, the MOET expressed concern over the fact that teaching methods were “often obsolete and traditional” (Pham & Fry, 2002, p. 137). The MOET set itself the task of promoting alternative teaching and learning methods which it believed were more effective and up-to-date. The promotion of students’ active and independent learning and critical thinking features extensively in several of the Government’s policy documents (e.g. *Education Law*; *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*; *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010*; *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020*). Article 5.2 of the Education Law (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005, p. 3) states that “[m]ethods of education must bring into full play the activeness, the consciousness, the self-motivation, and the creative thinking of learners; foster the self-study ability, the practical ability, the learning eagerness and the will to advance forward”.

The *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001- 2010* state that it is important at tertiary level:

Đổi mới và hiện đại hóa phương pháp giáo dục. Chuyển từ việc truyền đạt tri thức thụ động thầy giảng trò ghi sang hướng dẫn người học chủ động tư duy trong quá trình tiếp cận tri thức; dạy cho người học phương pháp tự học, tự thu nhận thông tin một cách hệ thống và có tư duy phân tích, tổng hợp; phát triển được năng lực của mỗi cá nhân; tăng cường tính chủ động, tính tự chủ của học sinh, sinh viên trong quá trình học tập, hoạt động tự quản trong nhà trường và tham gia các hoạt động xã hội.

To innovate and modernise education methodologies: to change from passive knowledge transfer, which involves teachers lecturing and students taking notes, to guiding students towards active thinking in their knowledge acquisition; to teach students methods of self-study and self-directed information acquisition in a systematic manner that involves analysis and synthesis; to develop the abilities of each individual student; and to enhance students' initiative and independence in their learning process, in their self-managed activities at school, and in their social work. (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001, p. 15, researcher translation)

The *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020* propose:

Tiếp tục đổi mới phương pháp dạy học và đánh giá kết quả học tập, rèn luyện theo hướng phát huy tính tích cực, tự giác, chủ động, sáng tạo và năng lực tự học của người học.

Continuing innovation in teaching methodology and in assessment of study and practice outcomes with a view to capitalising on the activeness, self-motivation, initiative, creativity and self-study abilities of the student. (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012, p. 12, researcher translation)

The theme of enabling students to take charge of their learning also manifests itself in Vietnam's *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*. The project requires that teachers demonstrate three domains of knowledge: knowledge of the subject matter and the curriculum, knowledge of teaching, and, knowledge of students. One standard for the third domain is the development of students' self-directed learning, creativity and critical thinking skills (Nguyen & Dudzik, 2010).

Such innovations are being increasingly supported within Vietnamese society, and there is now a widely-expressed view that it is necessary to change the traditional teacher-centred ways of teaching in schools. This is clearly illustrated by the overwhelming response from the public to the 2008 forum on “*Đổi mới phương pháp giảng dạy*” (*Innovation in teaching methodology*) organised by the *Tuổi Trẻ* (*The Youth*) - the newspaper which is the official voice of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. Nearly 600 opinions and comments were sent in from readers, showing their support for the adoption of teaching methods that would make students more active and independent learners. The forum concluded with a seminar sponsored jointly by the *Tuổi Trẻ* and the Department of Education and Training, Ho Chi Minh City. In addition to educationalists and teachers from schools, universities and teacher-training institutions, some participants were high-ranking officials - the Deputy Prime Minister (who was also Minister of Education and Training), the Deputy Minister of Education and Training and the Director of the Department of Education and Training, Ho Chi Minh City, signalling the significance of the issues under discussion (see *Tuổi Trẻ*, 2008, November 5-17). Another forum on “*Đổi mới giáo dục - đòi hỏi cấp thiết*” (*Innovation in education - an imperative*) in 2012, also organised by the *Tuổi Trẻ*, generated about 100 articles and comments that discussed possible ways of changing the education system (see *Tuổi Trẻ*, 2012, October 16-25).

The need for innovation in teaching pedagogy was also felt by teachers themselves. At the classroom level, teachers were beginning to change their practices and examples of innovative teaching methods used by a number of teachers at junior and senior secondary schools were reported in a series of articles published in November, 2008 by the *Tuổi Trẻ*.

### *Shift to learner-centred approaches*

The promotion of active learning by the MOET and the changes introduced into some classes to better engage students reflect the principles underpinning a learner-centred approach to teaching. First, a learner-centred approach aims to encourage learner involvement and participation in the learning process (e.g., Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003; Nunan, 1988; Paris & Combs, 2006; Tudor, 1996). Second, although the two sets of *Strategies* (i.e., 2001-2010 and 2011-2020) make reference to the concepts of “active learner” and “active learning” rather than a “learner-centred approach”, the ideas are closely related to each other. Phelps et al. (2012) suggest that the term “active learning” is commonly used to refer to child-focused learning, noting that the move towards learner-centredness in Vietnam is mainly apparent in primary education, and that, like many countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is committed to improving the quality of its education by adopting a child-focused pedagogical approach. These authors suggest that there has been “an explicit focus on supporting a transition toward child-focused learning” (p. 290). With reference to higher education, Ngo (2011) comments that attempts have been made at promoting learner-centred instruction in colleges and universities but these attempts have been met with only limited success. Hoang (2010, p. 10) observes that a new approach to foreign language teaching has emerged since the early 1990s and, in particular, the teaching of English has demonstrated a tendency for the teacher to act as facilitator, making the learner “the focal point” of the teaching and learning process.

#### **2.4 TESOL curriculum development at the tertiary level**

In principle, HE institutions are under the management of the MOET. The mechanism by which the MOET exercises its power is through the provision of a curriculum framework that applies to almost all public universities in Vietnam. However, TESOL curriculum planners have relative freedom in their curriculum design. While the MOET controls the learning content of English as a school subject through the use of the mandatory textbooks, the learning content of English at tertiary level is decided by the individual institution. It is common practice for English departments in universities to develop a general curriculum reflective of that proposed by the MOET (Hoang, 2010) and to have syllabi for individual courses

designed by subject teams or experienced staff members (Dang, 2006a; Duong, 2007; Hoang, 2010). This practice has led to both diversity in, and lack of consensus about, the learning content for English in various institutions (Hoang, 2010). When developing a curriculum or syllabus, curriculum developers or course designers often make subjective judgements about learner needs based on their professional experience and socio-economic knowledge (Duong, 2007; Nguyen, 2003); rarely do they take into consideration student needs as identified by students themselves (Duong, 2007). As a consequence, what is offered in the course may not be an accurate reflection of learners' needs, interests and abilities (Duong, 2007; Nguyen, 2003). In short, course design in TESOL at tertiary level is largely based on institution-perceived needs and teacher-perceived needs, rather than student-perceived needs.

## **2.5 The Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature (EF) – The case**

The current research was conducted as a case study in which the problem-centred and situation-specific nature of case study research (Merriam, 1988) had the potential “to provide an in-depth elucidation” of the case chosen (Bryman, 2008, p. 54) or “to generate in-depth understanding” of the phenomenon under study (Simons, 2009, p. 21) and to yield useful insights with a wider applicability (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995, 2005; Stake & Trumbull, 1982).

The Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature (EF), University of Social Sciences and Humanities (also known as the University of Ho Chi Minh City in the period 1975-1996), Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, was selected as the site for this case study as it is an English department of a well-established public university in Vietnam and has, in recent years, experienced significant growth in the number of students studying English. There have been increasing calls for teachers within the EF to actively engage with new pedagogical practices. Thus, the EF constitutes what is considered by Yin (2009, p. 18, italics original) as a “*real-life context*” in which the phenomenon being investigated manifests itself.

During the time when Russian was acknowledged as the dominant foreign language employed in the national education system, the quota for English language majors at the University of Ho Chi Minh City decreased greatly, for example, from 60 people in 1975 to 12 in 1985 (Do, 2006). However, after *đổi mới*, in addition to students enrolled within the quota, tertiary institutions began to accept fee-paying students (Denham, 1992). In 1992, of those students majoring in English at the EF, 30 were quota students and nine were “non-quota, self-support students” (Berlie, 1993, p. 44).

As a faculty in a large public multidisciplinary university in the south of Vietnam, the EF offers training programs at different levels: bachelor degree programs for English language majors, programs for a Postgraduate Diploma and Master of TESOL and the Doctor of Education. Some of these postgraduate programmes are provided by the EF on its own and others in collaboration with a tertiary education provider from Australia.

To meet their degree requirements, undergraduate students take courses in general education and professional education. General education includes compulsory and elective courses in political theory, social sciences, natural sciences, physical education and military sciences, all of which are taught in Vietnamese. Professional education consists of compulsory and elective courses that are intended to enable students to achieve language competence as well as to deepen their knowledge of their specialisation. These courses are divided into three categories: compulsory foundation courses in language skills, compulsory and elective courses for the development of an inter-specialisation knowledge base, and compulsory and elective courses for the development of in-depth knowledge of one of three specialisations - Linguistics-Pedagogy, Culture-Literature or Interpreting-Translation. With the exception of a few electives taught in Vietnamese, these courses are delivered in English. Students complete the general education courses and courses in the first two categories of professional education before choosing their specialist stream. The present study is concerned with the compulsory foundation courses in language skills that undergraduate students take as part of their professional education during the first two years of their four-year bachelor degree.

At each year level, there is a class which is smaller in size but which studies an advanced program. This class is the honours class. To be offered a place in this class, students have to achieve a high score in the entrance exam and be successful in a selection examination organised one semester after the commencement of their studies at the EF.

The process of curriculum development at the EF can be described as follows. The EF Academic Council first decides on the general curriculum in line with the mandated curriculum framework from the MOET. Experienced members of the staff are then assigned the task of writing syllabi for different courses based on the directions given by the EF Academic Council.

These syllabi do not set any requirements for particular teaching methods or approaches nor do they explicitly state that English has to be used as the medium of instruction. The syllabi state what and how textbooks have to be used, put forward detailed teaching plans specifying the content that needs to be covered in the associated time frame and the times for tests and examinations to be administered. For example, at the time the study was conducted, the set textbooks for Year 1 English foundation level were *Interactions 2* (written for different skills by Hartmann & Kirn, 2007; Pavlik & Segal, 2007; Tanka & Baker, 2007; Werner, Nelson, Hyzer & Church, 2007) and *Mosaic 1* (by Hanreddy & Whalley, 2007; Pike-Baky & Blass, 2007; Wegmann & Knezevic, 2007; Werner & Spaventa, 2007); and those for Year 2 level were *Mosaic 2* (by Hanreddy & Whalley, 2007; Pike-Baky & Blass, 2007; Wegmann & Knezevic, 2007; Werner & Nelson, 2007); and the teaching plans listed the order in which the core content from each book chapter needed to be covered. In addition, the syllabi recommend reference material from different sources. However, the syllabi also state that teachers can use their own materials as long as they cover the themes, skills and sub skills, types of exercises and grammar points that are presented in the prescribed textbooks. There is no statement about the limit to the use of such supplementary material. While the mid-term test paper is constructed by classroom teachers, the final examination paper is set by the faculty for all the classes at the same year level. Once completed, course syllabi are approved by the heads of the units before they are endorsed by the Dean for implementation. Classroom teachers and students are not involved in this

process, and no student needs analysis is conducted prior to course design. At the classroom level, teachers are required to cover the syllabus in line with the prescribed course content in order to maintain comparability among different classes at the same level. Thus, the process of curriculum development and course design at the EF closely resembles the process followed by other tertiary institutions as described by Dang (2006a), Duong (2007) and Hoang (2010).

Thus, four factors emerge in relation to the teaching context at the EF:

- 1) A prescribed syllabus (Clark, 1987; Hyde, 1991; Meziani, 1991) is followed. Thus, it is top-down, centrally imposed, content-driven and subject-centred. It does not take into consideration the needs of the teachers and the students.
- 2) Time, especially with regard to the completion of the syllabus, is a prime concern. The syllabus outlines a detailed teaching plan which dictates the content to be covered from the set textbooks and the specific time frame in which this teaching should occur.
- 3) The teachers have some degree of freedom as the syllabus does not dictate the teaching methodologies nor the use of English as the instruction medium. The teachers also have the right to write their own test papers for the mid-term test.
- 4) The syllabus allows the teachers to supplement the content of the text book without imposing a limit to the amount of additional material.

TESOL teachers working at the tertiary level, such as those teaching at the EF, are well placed to respond to the call for change made by the MOET. Firstly, as TESOL teachers, they are exposed to learner-centred education as part of their training (for example, through their introduction to communicative and task-based approaches), and therefore there is an increased likelihood that they will be aware of practices required for the adoption of this. Further, because of the theoretical underpinnings of language learning, they may have the understandings necessary to shift from the traditional teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach.

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

The chapter has presented an overview of the broad and specific context that underpins this study. It indicates the prevalence of traditional teacher-centred pedagogy and the efforts that have been made to shift to a learner-centred approach. The learner-centred approach in TESOL has been actively promoted as appropriate pedagogy for English language education and, thus, the language classroom is more likely to be a site of learner-centred teaching approaches than those in other discipline areas.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the topic of the present study. The first part of the chapter analyses the sets of key factors that influence the adoption of a teaching approach: contextual factors, learner factors and teacher factors. The second part reviews the concept of learner-centred approach to TESOL, with special reference to four major issues: the role of the teacher, the role of the student, classroom practices and implementation issues. The third part of the chapter provides a summary of the literature review.

### **3.1 Key factors influencing the adoption of a teaching approach**

Research into contexts of language teaching and learning has highlighted the importance of the socio-cultural contexts in which classroom teaching and learning takes place (Hall & Hewings, 2001; Harmer, 2003; Hayes, 2009; Holliday, 1994; Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 1988; Rea-Dickens & Germaine, 1998; Waters & Vilches, 2001; Wedell, 2003). From this body of research, three key factors emerge as being influential in the adoption of pedagogical approaches: contextual factors, learner factors and teacher factors.

#### ***3.1.1 Contextual factors***

Context has been identified as a factor that has important effects on language teaching and learning (Bax, 2003b; Breen, 1986; Holliday, 1994; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; Tedick & Walker, 1994; Tudor, 2001; Widdowson, 2004). The primacy of context or methodology in TESOL has given rise to much debate.

##### **3.1.1.1 The primacy of context or methodology in TESOL**

The focus on context has often been contrasted with the focus on method. This can be seen through Tudor's (2001) distinction between two main perspectives on language instruction: the technological perspective and the ecological perspective. In essence, the technological perspective rests on the belief that a good methodology

“will lead in a neat, deterministic manner to a predictable set of learning outcomes” (Tudor, 2001, p. 9) or on the assumption that the best teaching methodology can claim universal effectiveness (Coleman, 1996). The technological perspective sees language learning in a classroom setting as a linear process and promotes general principles that it believes are applicable to all teaching situations (Tudor, 2001). Tedick and Walker (1994, p. 306) view “a paralyzing focus on methodology” as one of the major problems of second language education. As they observe, the focus on methodology is evidenced by the plethora of books and professional journal articles on methods and instructional techniques and by the special attention devoted to methodology at local, state, national and international levels, reflecting second language professionals’ search for “methods that work” or “the omnipotent method” (p. 307). They stress that this focus does not result in a critical examination of the theory underpinning an advocated approach or the social context in which the approach might be effective. Consequently, Tedick and Walker argue that the focus on methodology has a detrimental effect on second language education as it ignores the complexity of the classroom context in which language teaching and learning occurs.

In contrast, the ecological perspective focuses on the context of instruction. While acknowledging the fundamental role of methodology to language teaching, it emphasises that methodology cannot be divorced from the context in which it is used (Tudor, 2001). Tudor maintains that the classroom should be viewed as a “social as well as a pedagogical reality” which is “influenced by a variety of social agents: the management of a teaching institution, sponsors or parents, and various other political or social stakeholders” (p. 104).

This view points to the complex relationship between teaching methodology and teaching context - in their pedagogical decision-making, teachers need to consider not only practical concerns but also cultural expectations about the role of the teacher and students. By taking full account of the dynamics and complexity of the classroom, the ecological perspective can remedy the defects inherent in the technological perspective. Firstly, the ecological perspective distances itself from the assumption underlying the technological perspective that universally appropriate and effective methods of teaching and learning exist (Hu, 2002a). Secondly, it takes into

consideration not only the how - the focus of the technological perspective - but also the what, who and why. Tedick and Walker (1994) point out that the focus on methodology excludes from consideration both the teacher and the students for whom the method is selected, the social context in which the method is employed and the content that might best accommodate students' needs. Finally, the ecological perspective avoids transferring practices wholesale from one context to a completely different one. In Harmer's (2003) opinion, what is problematic with such wholesale transfer is not the methodology or the ideas it shares, but the way the methodology fails to be adapted to the needs of the students in the new educational setting.

Given the apparent advantages that the focus on context has over the focus on TESOL methodology, it is not unusual for the importance of context to be highlighted. Bell's (2007) study is illustrative. Bell found that the teachers in his study had a "highly pragmatic" attitude towards the methods they used (p. 142). When asked to respond to Brown's (2000, p. 170) statement that "[v]irtually all language teaching methods make the oversimplified assumption that what language teachers 'do' in the classroom can be conventionalized into a set of procedures that fits all contexts", the teachers argued that the use of a language teaching method depended on "the uniqueness of each teaching context" and "the individuality of the teacher" (p. 138). A majority of the teacher participants in Bell's study disagreed with a definition by Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 245) that "[a] method ... refers to a specific instructional design or system.... It is relatively fixed in time, and there is generally little scope for individual interpretation." Instead, these teachers stressed the need for "the mediating role of teachers" in their use of a method (p. 138). Moreover, nearly all the teachers viewed methods in a positive light, seeing them as "eclectic resources" or "useful resources" teachers could draw on to meet the demands of a specific teaching context, stressing "the uniqueness of each teacher" and, by extension, the "impracticality of applying a one-size-fits-all method" (pp. 138-139). They also expressed their resistance to the idea of 'copying' the practices of successful teachers advocated by "a best practices approach".

Bax (2003b) has called for the adoption of what he terms a 'Context Approach in TESOL'. He observes that, although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been successful in overcoming the shortcomings of other language teaching

approaches and methods, it has created a belief that CLT will work regardless of the context in which it is used. The criticism Bax levels against CLT is that it has attached primary importance to methodology while relegating to secondary importance the context in which the teacher is working. On this basis, Bax suggests the need for “a real paradigm shift” which will make context the very first thing to be addressed when decisions are made about methodology and learning content (p. 284). In his opinion, a context analysis identifies such factors as “individual students and their learning needs, wants, styles, and strategies ... as well as the coursebook, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, national culture, and so on ... at the time of teaching” (p. 285). Bax (2003a, p. 296) points out that his intention is not to separate methodology from context, but “to combine them more productively”, maintaining that an approach which prioritises methodological aspects over contextual factors will constrain teachers and their capacity to assess and respond to the context effectively. Bax (2003a, 2003b) asserts that his proposed approach will encourage and empower teachers to take account of the context in which language teaching and learning is conducted. This view is supported by Widdowson’s (2004, p. 369) assertion that as “the local contexts of actual practice are to be seen not as constraints to be overcome but conditions to be satisfied”, what matters is that “the pedagogy should be appropriate to local conditions”. Bax’s (2003b) call for a paradigm shift receives further support from Jarvis and Atsilarat (2006), whose Thai study suggests that a context-based approach may offer a more realistic framework than a communicative approach.

A major example where the focus on context occurs is found in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), an approach where tasks are used for program delivery and assessment purposes (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Cook (2010, p. 512) believes that TBLT “has attracted most attention in the past decade” from teachers, educational authorities and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers and has now been established as the predominant approach to ELT (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Ur, 2013).

TBLT is said to have emerged from CLT (Willis, 1996; Nunan, 2004; Ur, 2013). In essence, CLT is oriented towards developing learners’ communicative competence, instead of linguistic competence (Danesi, 2003; Richards, 2001). Therefore, it

embraces a view of language teaching and learning which is antithetical to the traditional view represented by the present-practise-produce model of language teaching (Brandle, 2008; Littlewood, 2011). According to this model, language learning is equated to mastery of language structures through a sequence of steps: structures of the target language are presented to learners, and then controlled practice is conducted so that students can eventually reproduce them accurately (Foster, 1999; Gower & Walters, 1983). Learners' attention is focused on form rather than on meaning (Willis & Willis, 2007), and the syllabus is synthetic in the sense that learners are expected to master linguistic elements, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and functions (from easy to more complex ones) and pull them together (i.e., synthesise) to achieve communicative aims (Long & Crookes, 1992). In contrast, the development of CLT has led to an approach to language curriculum in which the ends (learners' ability to communicate in the target language) and the means (classroom procedures that contribute to this ability) and content and process of language teaching are incorporated (Breen, 1984; Nunan, 2004). TBLT is believed to be "an implementation of the communicative approach" (Ur, 2013, p. 469) as it was initially developed based on "pedagogical proposals for a greater emphasis on communicative activities in language teaching" (Robinson, 2011, p. 4).

TBLT takes a task as the main unit for syllabus design, lesson planning (Ellis, 2003; Robinson, 2011) and assessment (Long & Norris, 2000; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). A number of definitions of 'task' have been formulated (e.g., Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004; Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996), with attention being paid to the distinction between target tasks and pedagogical tasks (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004). While target tasks are concerned with actions and uses of language in the real world outside the classroom, pedagogical tasks are those undertaken inside the classroom. Characteristics that a task or a language learning activity must demonstrate have been identified by Ellis (2009) and Nunan (2004) and focus on communicative language use in which learners' attention is concentrated on meaning rather than on form, on establishing an information gap that leads to a need to communicate, on learners' reliance on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources for task completion, and on task outcomes achieved by means of language

use. Although TBLT gives primary focus to meaning-making (Long & Norris, 2000; Nunan, 2004), it does not ignore form. Long (1991, pp. 45-46) argues that intervention can provide “a focus on form” to direct “students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication”.

Some reasons for the emergence of TBLT are provided in the literature. One is that it can make instruction compatible with second language acquisition processes (Ellis, 2005; Foster, 1999). Prabhu (1987) made an early attempt at TBLT with his procedural syllabus, in which a number of tasks were sequenced according to levels of difficulty. He argued that it was impossible to determine what learners would learn in terms of linguistic elements, so he suggested specifying teaching content in terms of tasks or units of communication. A second reason for the development of TBLT is that it can provide learners with “tasks to transact, rather than items to learn” and “an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process” (Foster, 1999, p. 69). Ellis (2005) suggests that, by engaging students in meaningful and interactive tasks, such as problem-solving, information gaps, discussions or narratives, tasks can involve and motivate students cognitively while Foster (1999) sees it as encouraging students’ inter-language system to develop. Lastly, according to Long and Crookes (1992), Long and Robinson (1998) and Robinson (2009), tasks replace grammatical structures, language functions and vocabulary items as an appropriate unit of syllabus design.

Richards (2001) and Tudor (1996) advocate a close connection between TBLT and learner-centredness, arguing that TBLT originated from CLT, which in turn supported the development of a learner-centred approach in second language learning. Further, a needs analysis serves as the starting point of TBLT and this means the development of relevant and purposeful learning tasks (Long, 2005a; Nunan, 2004). As Long highlights:

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) ... is radically learner-centered not only in its reliance on NA [needs analysis] findings to determine syllabus content, but also psycholinguistically, in the steps taken to cater to the learner’s internal developmental syllabus, e.g., in its rejection (unlike almost all so-

called ‘task-based’ commercially published materials) of externally imposed linguistic syllabuses of all kinds, overt or *covert*, in favour, among other things, of learner-driven ‘focus on form’. (2005a, pp. 23-24, italics original)

The emphasis that TBLT places on needs analysis results in a real focus on context. By conducting a needs analysis as the first step in syllabus design and the development of learning tasks, TBLT takes learner needs into early consideration. The focus on context is sharpened when it is realised that specific groups of students have different needs for language skill development. Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste and Exell (2012, 2013) show how a task-based needs analysis was undertaken to identify the language and literacy tasks that Australian Indigenous students participating in their study would need to perform in their future workplaces. Account was taken of the situation in which the students found themselves: they entered Vocational Education and Training from Western Australia’s remote communities and spoke a traditional Aboriginal language as their first language and English as an Additional Language.

Kumaravadivelu developed the notion of principled pragmatism (1994) and has described a postmethod pedagogy (2001, 2006). Kumaravadivelu (1994, p. 29) emphasises that the postmethod condition signals a shift away from the limiting and limited concept of method and “a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method”. He suggests that principled pragmatism is a defining feature of the postmethod condition, and he distinguishes it from eclecticism, making the point that eclecticism has been promoted in language teaching as a measure against the limitations of a single method. Eclecticism has been described in the literature as a flexible and adaptable approach due to the use of a variety of techniques from various teaching methods and approaches, used with a view to bringing about effective and successful learning (Hammerly, 1991; Hubbard, Jones, Thornton & Wheeler, 1983). However, Kumaravadivelu (1994, p. 30) argues that eclecticism can become “unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy”. In support, Hubbard et al. (1983, p. 38) suggest that an eclectic approach can be vague and theoretically unsound and urge caution in “the blind adoption of techniques”. Prabhu (1990, p. 168) argues against “indiscriminate blending of methods” while Stern (1992, p. 11) highlights the lack of criteria and principles by which one can “determine which is

the best theory” and “include or exclude features which form part of existing theories or practices”. Kumaravadivelu , on the other hand, makes it clear that principled pragmatism builds on the concept of pragmatics of pedagogy suggested by Widdowson (1990, p. 30), in which “the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realized within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching”. In this way, principled pragmatism has as its main focus the shaping and management of classroom learning as a result of informed instruction and critical evaluation.

Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006) has developed a postmethod pedagogy which has three operating principles that interrelate and interact with each other: particularity, practicality and possibility. In this approach, the principle of practicality closely corresponds with principled pragmatism and aims to address the perceived dichotomy between theory and practice or between professional theories and personal theories. Kumaravadivelu (2001) quotes O’Hanlon (1993), who defines professional theories as ones which are developed by experts while personal theories as ones which are espoused by teachers through their interpretation and application of professional theories in practical situations. A pedagogy of practicality aims to involve teachers in theorising from their practice and practising what they theorise (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006). In addition, Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 69) advocates the development of “a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy” which allows for consideration of “local exigencies”, “lived experiences” and “local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 539). Further, he indicates that a pedagogy of particularity is “antithetical to the notion that there can be one set of pedagogic aims and objectives realizable through one set of pedagogic principles and procedures” and identifies “a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action” as a means to achieving a pedagogy of particularity (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, pp. 538-539).

Contexts in which language teaching and learning takes place are the broader social contexts in which teachers and students operate - such as the wider society and the education system - together with those of the educational institution and the immediate classroom environment in which teaching is conducted (Harmer, 2003; Hayes, 2009; Holliday, 1994; Hu, 2005; Johnson, 2009).

### 3.1.1.2 Socio-cultural contexts

Tseng and Ivanic (2006, p. 142, italics original) assert that “learning and teaching are *political acts*” as they are performed in a setting that is governed by particular educational policies which are spelled out in policy documents or guidelines, or influenced by the availability of resources or funding for teacher training, teacher development (Tudor, 1996) and institutional infrastructure (Tseng and Ivanic, 2006). In addition, apart from teachers and learners, social actors such as educational authorities, parents, sponsors, future employers and the community have attitudes and expectations that strongly influence the status of foreign languages in a society and in the curriculum and educational traditions of language education (Richards, 2001; Tseng & Ivanic, 2006; Tudor, 1996). For example, in a society which traditionally holds teachers in high esteem teacher-dominated approaches to teaching are more likely to be expected than learner-based approaches.

### 3.1.1.3 Education system

In general, the education system of a country can be understood as the system of schools, universities and institutions that provide education to the people at all levels, from kindergarten upwards. A description of the education system of a country may involve a description of the composition, the function, the role and responsibility of the teaching institutions of the country. As defined by London (2011, p. 1), education encompasses, in a broad sense, “social activities that impart knowledge, skills, or morality”; therefore it can “take place in innumerable guises and settings”. Vietnam’s education system can be understood as “the entire set of processes and institutions that govern formal schooling, training and research activities in Vietnam, and their social and educational outcomes” (London, 2011, p. 1). The question of what is an education system is too broad for the scope of this thesis, so rather than a detailed discussion about the impact of an education system on the implementation of teaching approaches, its impact will be discussed at the institution and classroom levels.

#### 3.1.1.4 The institutional context

The institutional context exerts influence through its human and physical dimensions. The administrative level - which is responsible for management, decision-making and the distribution of roles and responsibilities (Richards, 2001; Tudor, 1996, 2001) - determines the form of curricula, syllabi, teaching materials, methods of assessment (Tseng & Ivanic, 2006) and the types and levels of teacher training and development (Tudor, 2001). Tomlinson (2005) provides a brief overview of what he terms “school culture”, suggesting that schools seem to adopt a culture of conservatism and control that promotes convergence and conformity, hard work and analytic skills.

The implementation of a particular teaching approach by an institution depends, to a large extent, on resources available both for teachers and learners such as equipment, teaching aids, library resources and classroom facilities and is strongly influenced by class size and teacher salaries (Richards, 2001; Tseng & Ivanic, 2006; Tudor, 1996; Tudor, 2001).

Thus the human and physical aspects of institutional context fit the description of what Tudor (2001, p. 133) calls “the pragmatic component of context”. He refers to “the objectively observable pragmatic features of a given teaching situation” (p. 18) and argues that an analysis of these pragmatic conditions can shed some light on the feasibility of certain methodological choices. For example, Liu (1998, p. 5) has demonstrated how large class sizes, limited resources and didactic teaching traditions prevent English teachers in China from following “process and discovery-oriented” ways of teaching that are possible in small and well-resourced classes where “[i]nteraction, group work, and student-centredness are the order of the day”. Andrews (1999b, pp. 148-151, as cited in Andrews, 2001, p. 83) comments that contextual factors such as time constraints and the need to implement a mandated syllabus affect English teachers’ application of teacher language awareness in their pedagogical practice in Hong Kong secondary schools. Some institutional factors have been identified as being capable of impeding the use of TBLT in several English as a foreign language (EFL) settings in Asia: assessment and examination in China (e.g., Chow & Mok-Cheung, 2004; Gorush, 2000; Hu, 2002b; Shim & Baik,

2000; Zhang, 2007), large class sizes and mixed ability classes (e.g., Carless, 2002; Chao & Wu, 2008; Jeon, 2006; Zhang, 2007).

#### 3.1.1.5 The classroom culture

Richards (2001) asserts that culture is reflected in patterns of behaviour and interaction and in the beliefs and attitudes that people in an institution such as a school, a university or a language institute demonstrate, and that the culture within the institution affects the communication people have, the decisions they make and the roles they take on. Within a school, the classroom, too, has its own culture. Classroom culture is viewed as the psycho-sociological environment of the individual classroom in which beliefs, attitudes and behaviours reflect social norms and values (Cavanagh & Romanoski, 2008) and is represented in the teaching processes adopted (Cavanagh & Dellar, 2003). Perceptions of classroom culture converge at the point which identifies it as unique, complex, implicit and dynamic (Garner, 1989; Holliday, 1994; McDonough, 2002). McDonough (2002, p. 410) comments, “[e]very class is unique and dynamic. It develops and changes over time as all participants adapt, usually co-operatively, to build an individual classroom culture”. In Holliday’s (1994, p. 23) view, the culture of the classroom “provides tradition and recipe for both teachers and students in the sense that there are tacit understandings about what sorts of behaviour are acceptable and these understandings are strengthened by common acceptance by peers”. Holliday further suggests that classroom culture helps create the kind of bonding described by Breen (1986) as something that can resolve the conflicts between teachers and students in their asymmetric relationship. This conception of classroom culture implies a sense of stability and resonates with the seminal work of Prabhu (1987), who describes the way in which teachers maintain their relationship with their class. According to Prabhu (p. 140), teachers achieve stability in their class by following “classroom routines which support shared expectations of behaviour and act as a framework for some balance between conflicting motives and self-images”. Classroom routines, therefore, enable teachers and learners “to play their appointed roles and regulate their relationship with one another” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 104). Wright (2006) suggests

that when these manifest as highly routinised classroom learning, it contributes to a sense of security for both teachers and learners.

In his brief review, Wright (2006) observes that a number of empirical studies have uncovered the complexity of the language classroom in terms of the internal and external forces that come into play. He quotes Nigussie (2004) and Rahman (2003) to illustrate how teachers and students manage classroom life and the socio-cultural, psychological and institutional factors that impact upon it.

### ***3.1.2 Learner factors***

As observed by Allwright and Bailey (1991, p. 18), teachers and learners do not go to the classroom “empty-handed”. Instead, they bring with them a host of factors that may impact what goes on in the classroom: their needs, wants, interests, attitudes, assumptions, expectations, life experience and teaching and learning experience (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Richards, 2001; Tseng & Ivanic, 2006; Tudor, 1996). An understanding of learner factors is critical in understanding a given education setting. Three learner factors of particular relevance are learner needs, learner characteristics and learner beliefs.

#### **3.1.2.1 Learner needs**

The term ‘learner needs’ is open to various interpretations (Richards, 2001; West, 1994). However, the discussion in this section is limited to those interpretations that pay heed to Nunan’s (1999, p. 11, italics original) idea that within a learner-centred philosophy of language instruction, learner needs should provide “information about and *from* learners”, and to the distinction made by Brindley (1989), Hoadley-Maidment (1983) and Richterich (1973/1980, p. 32, as cited in West, 1994, p. 4) that learner needs can be student-perceived, teacher-perceived and company-perceived.

Language learner needs have generally been defined in relation to the target language and the target use of the language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Munby, 1978; Richterich (1973/1980, p. 32, as cited in West, 1994, p. 4). For example,

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, pp. 54-56, italics original) distinguish “*target needs* (i.e., what the learner needs to do in the target situation)” from “*learning needs* (i.e., what the learner needs to do in order to learn)”, and they further divide “target needs” into “necessities”, “lacks” and “wants”. They identify “necessities” as “the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation”; “lacks” as the gap between “what the learner knows already” and “the target proficiency”; and “wants” as learners’ “view as to what their needs are”. The emphasis on language needs can be seen in what Tudor (1996, p. 66) calls “functionally-oriented communicative needs of learners in their target situations of use” and in what Richards (2001, p. 55) more specifically describes as “language skills needed to survive in an English-dominant society”.

Needs are commonly, and especially within a TBLT perspective, categorised as objective needs and subjective needs, and the interpretations of these are wide ranging. The distinction between these needs was first made by Richterich (1973/1980, p. 32, as cited in West, 1994, p. 4), with objective needs being those which “can more or less be assumed to be general from an analysis of typical everyday situations” and subjective needs being needs “which cannot be said to be general ..., are quite unforeseeable and therefore indefinable”. According to Nunan (1988), Richterich’s (1972) distinction was expanded by Brindley, who stated that

[t]he ‘objective’ needs are those which can be diagnosed by teachers on the basis of the analysis of personal data about learners along with information about their language proficiency and patterns of language use ... whereas the ‘subjective’ needs (which are often ‘wants’, ‘desires’, ‘expectations’ or other psychological manifestations of a lack) cannot be diagnosed as easily, or, in many cases, even stated by learners themselves. (1984, p. 31).

Hoadley-Maidment (1983) identified three types of needs: teacher-perceived needs, learner-perceived needs and company-perceived needs, depending on who provides information about or who has perceptions of needs. Berwick (1989, p. 55) viewed needs in terms of “felt needs”, i.e., needs the learners have themselves and

“perceived needs”, i.e., needs as perceived by such stakeholders as the teacher and the institution.

It has been widely accepted in language education that needs analysis is an essential first step towards effective course design (e.g., Graves, 2000; Jordan, 1997; Long, 2005a, 2005b; Pillay, 2002; West, 1994). Needs analysis provides input for syllabus development, thus making course content, learning materials, teaching methods and forms of assessment relevant to learners. Different approaches to language teaching (Celce-Murcia, 2001) and different approaches to needs analysis have evolved (Jordan, 1997; Long, 2005a, 2005b), and some resulting syllabi (e.g., the structural syllabus and notional-functional syllabus) have been expressed in terms of linguistic elements (e.g., structures, notions, functions and lexical items) that a particular group of students are very likely to encounter in their (current and future) use of the target language (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Long, 2005b). However, as language learning does not follow a linear pattern, Long (2005a, 2005b) argues for a task-based approach to needs analysis in which task is used as the unit of analysis in needs analysis. According to Long (2005a, p.22), if powerful arguments have been put forward for TBLT, which has now established itself as the predominant approach to ELT (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Ur, 2013), there is reason to believe that “task-based NA [needs analysis] will allow coherence in course design”. As Long points out,

...it is often not lack of linguistic competence *per se* that renders learners unable to perform adequately at work or on an overseas university course.... Rather, it is learners' inability to accomplish the *tasks* required of them, for which language use is often highly differentiated and both field- and context-specific, and for which much more than L2 linguistic knowledge is needed... (2005b, p. 4, italics original)

Within the context of TBLT, a learner needs analysis has been proposed as the first essential stage of syllabus design (Long, 2005b; Nunan, 2004). Of primary importance is the distinction between target tasks and pedagogical tasks (Long, 1985), with the former referring to the tasks learners are very likely to do in the real world on completion of their learning program and the latter to the tasks teachers and learners engage in for teaching and learning purposes in the classroom. While target

tasks can be identified by means of a learner needs assessment, pedagogical tasks can be designed in such a way that they can reflect the demands of target tasks (Long, 1985; Long & Crookes, 1992; Long & Norris, 2000). Commenting on the methodology of needs analysis, Long (2005a) observes that needs analyses are not always valid and reliable as learners may not have the expertise needed to articulate their needs, and the intuitions of some stakeholders (other than domain experts) are used as sources of information about learner needs. Long provides an overview and evaluation of sources of information for a needs analysis (e.g., learners, teachers and applied linguists, domain experts and triangulated sources), methods of collecting that information (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations) and possibilities of combining those sources and methods. In summary, for a course to be meaningful and relevant to the group of learners for which it is intended, it is necessary for learner needs, both objective and subjective, to be taken into consideration. It is also imperative to take account of the methodology of needs analysis so that valid and reliable information about learner needs can be obtained.

### 3.1.2.2 Learner characteristics

A profile of learners is not complete without a description of their characteristics. Some learner characteristics are derived from basic biographical data such as learner age, gender, nationality, level of language proficiency, educational and cultural background and previous, current and intended occupation (Graves, 2000; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001). Other characteristics can be identified from affective and cognitive factors such as personality traits, interests, experiences, confidence, anxiety, motivation, self-esteem and preferred learning styles and strategies (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Brindley, 1989; Graves, 2000; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001).

It has been suggested that these characteristics have variable influence on learners' SLA. For example, the effects of affective factors such as attitudes, motivation and anxiety have been reported by Arnold (1999), Dornyei (1990, 2005), Gardner (1985), Masgoret and Gardner (2003), and the effects of learning strategies by Hedge (2000), Oxford (1990), Rubin (1987) and Wenden (1987). Long (2005a) notes that information provided by learners about their characteristics such as their learning

styles and preferences constitutes input for a means analysis, which, as an approach to needs analysis, is intended to adapt language courses to local contexts (Holliday and Cooke, 1982).

### 3.1.2.3 Learner beliefs

According to Wesely (2012), Horwitz's (1988) work on learner beliefs is one of the seminal works that have laid the foundations for research into learner attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. In Horwitz's (1987, p.120) *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI), learner beliefs are generally defined as "student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning". In the literature, learner beliefs have been thought to be broader than learner perceptions, which are usually based on specific experiences (Wesely, 2012). Learners have their own beliefs about different aspects of language learning such as the nature of language learning, learner roles, teacher roles, teaching techniques, learning activities, learning situations and target language culture and community (Richards, 2001; Wenden, 1986; Wesely, 2012). Beliefs that learners hold about themselves as language learners, for example, are referred to as learner self-beliefs, which have been associated with self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy (Mercer, 2008). Learners' beliefs are informed by their previous learning experience (Peacock, 1998; Tomlinson, 2005; Tudor, 1996; Wenden, 1986), by their personal characteristics (Tudor, 1996), by the influence of their actual needs (Peacock, 1998), by their cultural norms (Peacock, 1998; Tomlinson, 2005), or by their "unthinking acceptance of popular wisdom" (Tudor, 1996, p. 53).

Learners' beliefs in general, and self-beliefs in particular, are assumed to influence their behaviour and attitudes (Mercer, 2008; Wenden, 1986). Wenden posits that learners' beliefs can affect their approach to learning. In her words, learners' beliefs can function as "a sort of logic" that determines "consciously or unconsciously" what learners do to learn English (p. 4). Their impact can be seen, for instance, in the learning strategies learners use and in the way they react to learning activities and teaching methodologies. For example, in his review of TBLT research and implementation in EFL settings in Asia, Shehadeh (2012, p. 7) observes that "many

students in these settings express doubts about the effectiveness of TBLT” under the influence of “a preference for traditional methods of teaching that promote accuracy over fluency, individual or independent work over pair- and group work, and reliance on the teacher as an authority figure over taking risks through speaking, as favoured by TBLT courses”. More importantly, learners’ beliefs have been found to have more influence on their actions than those of their teachers and colleagues (Block 1994, 1996). Therefore, violations of learners’ views, assumptions and expectations in the choice of a teaching approach by teachers or administrators may lead to negative consequences. For example, learners may lose their motivation to invest time and effort in learning what is taught, as a result of which, learning will be hindered rather than facilitated (Cortazzi, 1990). It follows that it is necessary for both teachers and learners to understand what beliefs learners have and how these beliefs can affect learning (Wenden, 1986).

### ***3.1.3 Teacher factors***

Teachers are a decisive factor in the successful implementation of a teaching approach because they are directly responsible for implementing it in the classroom. A number of teacher variables determine what actually takes place in the classroom. Of interest to the current study are teachers’ personal characteristics and their philosophies of teaching: teacher characteristics reveal the individuality of teachers in adopting specific teaching methods while underpinning a teacher’s adoption of an approach to English language teaching is an individual philosophy which embraces his/her beliefs, assumptions and knowledge about teaching.

#### ***3.1.3.1 Teacher characteristics***

The characteristics of TESOL teachers have been described from the perspectives of teachers and learners in different ways (e.g., Bell, 2005; Brown, 2001; Harmer, 1998; Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006; Vélez-Rendón, 2002). Some have been identified as distinctive characteristics of language teachers which highlight what is involved in being language teachers as opposed to being teachers of other subjects (e.g., Borg, 2006b; Hammadou & Bernhardt, 1987; Lee, 2010); others are the

characteristics of a 'good' or effective language teacher (e.g., Bell, 2005; Brosh, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006; Vélez-Rendón, 2002).

Hammadou and Bernhardt (1987) described the distinctive characteristics of foreign language teachers. In their view, there are five factors that make the work of a foreign language teacher discipline-specific: (1) the nature of the subject matter, which is exemplified by the unity of content and medium, (2) the interaction patterns necessary to provide instruction, (3) the challenge for teachers to continue to increase their knowledge of the subject, (4) isolation, which teachers may suffer as a result of the absence of colleagues teaching the same subject, and (5) the need for outside support in extracurricular activities capable of creating naturalistic environments for language learning. Other empirical studies have also identified the distinctive characteristics of language teachers (e.g., Borg, 2006b; Lee, 2010). In Borg's study, these characteristics were defined by both practising and prospective teachers of English (who predominantly were non-native speakers of English). Borg noted that the distinction between language teachers and language teaching was blurred in the research design as well as in the participants' descriptions. Lee's (2010) study built on the work of Borg, but investigated distinctive characteristics of EFL teachers from the perspective of Japanese learners. Apart from identifying a number of teacher characteristics, the findings from both studies reflect those characteristics of language teaching recognised by Hammadou and Bernhardt more than 25 years ago: the interrelatedness of content and medium, the interactive nature of language teaching (Borg, 2006b; Lee, 2010) and the challenges of broadening teacher knowledge of the subject matter (Borg, 2006b).

The characteristics of 'good' or effective teachers have also been described theoretically and empirically. Based on his "experience of teaching and observing in classrooms in more than 40 countries", Tomlinson (2005, p. 148) proposed the idea of the universally "good" teacher as one who is "positive, supportive, and sympathetic and, above all, has a good sense of humour" in addition to being "cheerful, approachable and dedicated". This accords with Dat's (2002, as cited in Tomlinson, 2005) hypothesis about what constitutes a good teacher in the Vietnamese context. In his book on teaching methodologies, Brown (2001) presents,

from unpublished sources, a checklist of thirty characteristics of a 'good' language teacher which he suggests teachers use as a self-check to identify the areas they need to work on for professional development purposes. The attributes are divided into four sets: technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills and personal qualities.

Park and Lee (2006) categorise the characteristics of an effective language teacher as those relating to subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills. A teacher's command of the target language appeared to be the most commonly mentioned characteristic of an effective teacher (Vélez-Rendón, 2002). English proficiency was chosen as the most important from a list of twenty potential characteristics of an effective teacher by foreign language teachers and students participating in Brosh's (1996) study. This proficiency or competence refers to the teacher's knowledge of English as the subject matter (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Mullock, 2003), aligning with the teacher's knowledge of the target language - be it English, French, Arabic, Hebrew, German or Spanish - identified in other studies (Bell, 2005; Brosh, 1996; Park & Lee, 2006). It was suggested that this is an expectation students have of their teachers (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), and that language competence and a thorough understanding of the subject matter results in teachers delivering their lessons "without inhibitions, fear, and insecurity" (Brosh, 1996, p. 131).

With respect to pedagogical knowledge (i.e., teaching skills and techniques amenable to effective teaching), an effective teacher is believed to have the capacity to make the lesson interesting (Harmer, 1998), to arouse the students' motivation and self-confidence (Park & Lee, 2006) and to have the ability to share with and to pass on to students the knowledge s/he has about the subject matter (Brosh, 1996; Mullock, 2003). In Brosh's (1996) study, it was found that the ability to motivate students to study and to do their best was ranked second only to language competence. It was also found that effective teachers demonstrate the ability to communicate knowledge in such a way that it is easy to understand and remember (Brosh, 1996). In more specific terms, an effective teacher is believed to be able to provide students with interesting activities (Park & Lee, 2006) or concrete tasks (Bell, 2005), to use authentic materials, to illustrate the target language and its culture and to give students grades partly based on their actual use of the language

(Bell, 2005). An effective teacher is also seen as one who is well-prepared (Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006), well-organised and skilled in teaching techniques and methods (Mullock, 2003) and keeps up-to-date with the language and language teaching methodology (Mullock, 2003). Within a Vietnamese context, ‘good’ teachers should know their students’ needs, levels and learning styles; should design interesting activities and adapt syllabi to their students and their teaching context; and should provide their students with strategies for independent study (Dobinson, 2013).

The socio-affective behaviours teachers can display include having a sense of humour (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), showing personal involvement in, or enthusiasm for, the target language and culture (Bell, 2005) and showing their love for teaching and their personality through the lesson (Harmer, 1998). Central, however, is building the relationship between teachers and students in the language classroom. The key skills and qualities are being patient (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), being an entertainer in a positive sense (Harmer, 1998), treating students fairly and equitably, ensuring teacher availability after class (Brosh, 1996), knowing and understanding students’ needs, strengths and weaknesses, treating students with courtesy and respect and showing empathy towards students (Mullock, 2003), and setting a good moral example (within a Chinese context) (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

### 3.1.3.2 Teachers’ individual philosophies of teaching

Consideration of teachers’ philosophies of teaching is important because the ideas teachers have about teaching in general and about learner-centredness in particular are drawn from their philosophies of teaching. A philosophy of teaching is defined by Sadker and Zittleman (2007) as a set of views teachers hold about fundamental issues in their teaching profession - the purpose of education, teaching content, teaching methods and teacher and learner roles. In a broad sense, teaching philosophies represent teachers’ cognition about teaching: what they think, know and believe (Borg, 2009). It is “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching” (Borg, 2003, p. 81) or “teachers’ mental lives” (Borg, 2009, p. 163). A substantial amount of second and foreign language teacher cognition research was conducted in the 1990s (Borg, 2003; Golombek, 2009), and this field of research has continued to

grow (Borg 2009) as it is recognised that, to thoroughly understand teachers and their act of teaching, one must acknowledge the impact of their thoughts, knowledge and beliefs on their classroom practices (Borg, 2009).

The term 'beliefs' as used by Richards (1998) and Breen et al. (2001) and the term 'credo' as used by Hedge (2000) indicate the ideas, the views, the attitudes, the expectations and the values teachers hold about such aspects of teaching as the nature of language, the nature of language teaching and learning, the teaching process, teaching content, teaching context, effective teaching practices and respective roles of teachers and learners. These beliefs or credos are reinforced over time (Richards, 1998) and are informed by the experience accumulated (Breen et al., 2001) or by teachers' understanding of their teaching situation (Hedge, 2000). Hence, teachers' beliefs are considered as their implicit theories of teaching in the sense that they do not often verbalise what their beliefs are unless they are given a chance to do so (Richards, 1998). Beliefs thus form an important area of knowledge teachers possess in addition to their understanding of curricular goals and content (Richards, 1998).

Many terms have emerged from research into language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; Golombek, 2009), and a number of them can be taken to be alternative ways of looking at philosophies of teaching. The discussion about conceptualisations of teaching philosophies will be confined to terms that are related to language teaching and the management of language learning. As Woods (2006) points out, the term 'management of language learning' was first used by Allwright (1981) to describe the process by which teachers make decisions and take actions to achieve a lesson's goals while managing the constant interaction between teacher and students. Gaies (1980, as cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 18) uses the metaphor of the classroom as the crucible, a place where teaching and learning take place as a result of the reactions between teacher and learners. Allwright and Bailey (p. 19) maintain that interaction between teacher and learners in the classroom is a kind of "co-production". In their opinion, this interaction needs to be managed so that opportunities for learning the language are created. They suggest that the management of interaction and the management of learning are intertwined.

Teaching philosophy is also concerned with “a teacher’s *sense of plausibility*” (Prabhu, 1990, p. 172, italics original), the theory the teacher develops about how learning occurs and how teaching assists or contributes to learning. As Prabhu describes it, this sense of plausibility results from “teachers’ subjective understanding of the teaching they do” (p. 172). Prabhu goes on to stress that “[t]eachers need to operate with some personal conceptualisation of how their teaching leads to desired learning - with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them” (p. 172). Hargreaves writes of the ethic of practicality,

[a] powerful sense of what works and what doesn’t; of which changes will go and which will not - not in the abstract, or even as a general rule, but for *this* teacher in *this* context. In this simple yet deeply influential sense of practicality among teachers is the distillation of complex and potent combinations of purpose, person, politics and workplace constraints. (1994, p. 12, italics original)

While there has been a considerable amount written on the meaning of beliefs, assumptions, knowledge and other similar constructs as exclusive concepts, Woods (1996) argues that they can also be seen as inclusive concepts since it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. This approach has been taken in the current study, adhering to Woods’ contention that beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) can be placed on a continuum ranging from knowledge (conventionally accepted facts) and assumptions (temporarily accepted facts) to beliefs (propositions that are not demonstrable and which are subject to disagreement). Using an integrated BAK, researchers can now concentrate their efforts on finding out, from teachers’ verbal accounts, how they use their BAK as a basis for their thinking and behaviour, rather than on determining what beliefs or assumptions or aspects of knowledge alone serve as the basis for their decisions (Woods, 1996).

Teachers develop their philosophy of teaching from different sources of information. Research on teacher learning has shown that individual teachers establish their beliefs about language and language teaching and learning from their previous learning experience as students or as language learners themselves (Freeman & Richards, 1993; Pajare, 1992; Turner, Christensen & Meyer, 2009). The tendency for

teachers to attach themselves to the models of teaching and learning they were exposed to during their schooling is called “the apprenticeship of observation” by Lortie (1975, as cited in Freeman & Richards, 1993, p. 210) or “a sense of loyalty to the past” by Prabhu (1987, p. 103). In his review, Borg (2003) outlines examples of the adoption or avoidance of certain teaching strategies by teachers, pre-service, in-service, novice and experienced, due to their positive or negative prior language learning experiences. The findings from Numrich’s (1996) study show that teachers want to incorporate a cultural component in their teaching program because of an enjoyable experience of learning about the second language (L2) culture they have had, and that they refrain from teaching grammar and correcting mistakes because of their humiliating experience of being corrected in their school days.

Although Borg’s (2003, 2006a) reviews find some conflicting evidence about the impact of teacher education on teacher cognition, there is evidence that methodology courses can have (variable) influence on teachers by shaping the beliefs they hold and by changing the ones they bring with them to the courses (e.g., Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001; Richards, Ho & Giblin, 1996). Similarly, the professional experiences teachers gain from their teaching can influence their BAK (Crookes, 2009). Crookes and Arakaki (1999) found that teaching experience was chosen by their teacher participants as the most common source for their teaching ideas. However, it should be noted that teachers may sometimes adhere to widespread beliefs in their profession despite their convictions only to have a “sense of security such conformity provides” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 103). In addition, teachers derive their beliefs and assumptions about their profession from their socio-cultural background (Tseng & Ivanic, 2006) or the established educational practice of (Peacock, 1998), or the influence of, their institution (Crookes, 2009). Based on the variety of influences from their “unique experiences, individual conceptions, and ... interactions with local contexts” (Cumming, 1989, pp. 46-47), it is not surprising that teachers construct an individualised pedagogy.

### 3.1.3.3 Teacher perceptions of the roles of a TESOL practitioner

One way in which teachers’ perceptions of the role of a TESOL practitioner have been expressed is through metaphor. It is not uncommon for teachers to express what

is called “instructors’ self-perceptions” by Danahy (1986, p. 228) through their use of metaphor (Munby, 1987; Provenzo, McCloskey & Cohn, 1989; Tobin, 1990). The confirming empirical evidence is that 1053 metaphors have been generated by teachers participating in 23 studies in the literature on teaching and teachers (Alger, 2009). Metaphor plays an important role because it is a means by which teachers express their beliefs about teaching and learning, their roles and learner roles - the essence of their teaching philosophies. Metaphors also exert a strong influence on teachers. Considered “as ‘archetypes’ of professional knowledge” or “blueprints of professional thinking” (Martinez, Saulea & Huber, 2001, p. 966), metaphors guide or affect teachers’ behaviour in the classroom (Danahy, 1986; Martinez et al., 2001; Tobin, 1990). With reference to foreign language teaching and learning, Herron (1982, p. 235) proposes that “what we teach (or think we are teaching) and how we teach it, along with the complementary perceptions of the value of language study, are intimately linked to a metaphor”. Munby (1986, p. 201) claims that an effective way of understanding teachers’ thinking is “to attend carefully to the metaphors that appear when teachers express themselves”. One of the most influential studies on metaphor (Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh, & Longhini, 1998) involved the analysis of personal narratives from 250 written or oral responses from students, former students and teachers, narratives selected from case studies conducted by other researchers and comments made by a number of authors in the fields of language teaching and general education. Oxford et al.’s study is particularly influential because the typology it produced was used as a frame of reference by those studies that followed. These researchers classified the metaphors that emerged from their study according to four philosophies of education which they found had long prevailed in education: Cultural Transmission, Learner-Centred Growth, Social Reform and Social Order. Three of these philosophies are relevant to the present study due to the association between some of the metaphors they exemplify and some of the tenets of learner-centredness. Some of the metaphors highlight those features of a learner-centred approach (e.g., the role of the teacher as a facilitator, an increased role for the learner and an element of partnership between teachers and learners). Specifically, Cultural Transmission views the teacher as a gatekeeper whose task is to initiate learners into the practices or canons of a given society or culture. It depicts, through the metaphor of the teacher as a conduit, the unidirectional giving of information “from the teacher as expert to learners as empty

receptacles” (Oxford et al., 1998, p. 24). As such, it is closely related to the role of knowledge provider in a teacher-dominated approach. In contrast, Learner-Centred Growth promotes the sharing of control between teachers and learners and the fostering of the innate abilities with which learners are endowed. The role of the teacher is to provide facilitative conditions so that learners’ potential is nurtured and can flourish. The role of the teacher in this situation is illustrated by such metaphors as the teacher as a gardener, a nurturer, a lover or spouse, a scaffolder, an entertainer and a delegator. Social Reform encourages learner engagement in cooperative work in democratic environments that allow for the development of individuals’ abilities and creativity, learning through experience and the use of scientific methods. Two metaphors that reflect this perspective are the teacher as an acceptor and the teacher as a learning partner.

Two studies that applied Oxford et al.’s (1998) typology were those conducted by Farrell (2006) (among three pre-service teachers in secondary schools in Singapore) and by Zapata and Lacorte (2007) (among a group of 41 graduate teaching assistants and adjunct instructors of Spanish as a second language at two state universities in the USA and a group of 10 EFL teachers in Argentina). Metaphors to emerge reflecting the Cultural Transmission perspective were those of the teacher as a cultural broker (Farrell, 2006), gatekeeper of knowledge, bridge, open door, contact with a new world, prophet, transmitter, vehicle, channel, lighthouse, window, captain of a ship and promoter of knowledge (Zapata & Lacorte, 2007). In line with the Learner-Centred Growth philosophy were images of the teacher as a mother/parent, facilitator (Farrell, 2006; Zapata & Lacorte, 2007), motivator, mentor (Farrell, 2006) and entertainer (Zapata & Lacorte, 2007) while the Social Reform perspective was illustrated by the metaphors of L2 teacher as a learner and as travel companion (Zapata & Lacorte, 2007).

Although the studies carried out by de Guerrero and Villamil (2002) (among English as a second language (ESL) teachers in Puerto Rico) and by Wan, Low and Li (2011) (among a group of EFL teachers and two groups of English major students at a university in China) followed different methodologies for metaphor analysis, some of the metaphors that emerged still reflect, or at least appear to be related to, these metaphors. For example, metaphors such as teacher as a provider (de Guerrero &

Villamil, 2002; Wan et al., 2011), instructor (Wan et al., 2011) and repairer (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002) describe the role of the teacher from the Cultural Transmission perspective whereas metaphors linked to the Learner-Centered Growth perspective include those of teacher as a nurturer (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Wan et al., 2011), provider of tools (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002), interest arouser and co-worker (Wan et al., 2011).

These teacher-generated metaphors about the roles of a TESOL teacher are particularly important as they clearly illustrate that teachers' perceptions of their roles are part of their teaching philosophy. Moreover, metaphor played a large role in the language of the teachers who took part in the current study.

#### 3.1.3.4 Teacher perceptions of what constitutes a successful lesson

Due to the paucity of literature about what constitutes successful teaching in language education, the discussion mainly draws on research in general education. Although teachers' ideas of a successful lesson are diverse, six recurrent themes have emerged from the research literature.

The first theme is students' behaviour. As a university academic participating in Dunkin and Precians' (1992, p. 492) study puts it, "the best test is student reaction". A range of indicators of positive student behaviour have been identified including enjoyment, interest, enthusiasm and involvement (Borko, Lalik, Tomchin, 1987; Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Ellwein, Graue & Comfort, 1990; Macleod, 1988).

The second theme is student learning. To some teacher participants, successful learning is when students understand the topic (Farrell, 2003), understand what the teacher has explained, learn something and/or know how to do the tasks (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010; Borko et al., 1987). To other teachers, student learning is measured by post-lesson performance, testing and written work (Macleod, 1988; Dunkin & Precians, 1992). Learning outcomes can also be measured more generally, for example, by the broadening of students' mind and their experiences after course completion (Dunkin & Precians, 1992).

Planning and preparation are seen as essential to a successful lesson. Prabhu (1990, p. 171) in his seminal work asserts that good teaching is “an activity in which there is a sense of involvement by the teacher”. The student teachers in Borko et al.’s (1987) study saw the time they devoted to planning as the time for them to learn the teaching content and to structure the lesson. Some student teachers even thought that planning gives them a chance to anticipate possible problems and to suggest counter solutions before they enter the classroom. In Dunkin and Precians’ (1992, p. 493, italics original) study, the amount of planning and preparation teachers make for teaching is called “*preactive teacher behaviours*”.

According to the literature, instructional uniqueness is another strong contributor to a successful lesson. Prabhu (1990, p. 173) observes that “teaching is subject to great pressures of routinisation” over time, so instructional design presents teachers with an enormous challenge. All the fourteen student teachers in Borko et al.’s (1987) study knew that teaching entails more than following steps or ideas suggested by teachers’ books or establishing routine teaching activities of their own. They reported that the use of creative activities and methods, supplementary materials and experiences relevant to the skill or concept being taught and the trying out of their new ideas or their own ideas were all contributing factors to the success of a lesson. Their ideas were supported by those of the teacher participants in Ellwein et al.’s (1990) study.

The fifth contributor to a successful lesson is the personal feelings of the teacher, albeit that these feelings do not lend themselves easily to description. In Macleod’s (1988, p. 399, italics original) early study in this area, these feelings are labelled “*intangible*” to refer to their indescribable nature. The teachers interviewed talked about “an indefinable feeling of pleasure and achievement accompanying the successful lesson or teaching episode” (p. 399). As one teacher in the study put it, “There’s a feeling of satisfaction within yourself ... that wonderful feeling of almost being up in high heaven when it’s been a good lesson” (p. 399). The lecturers in Dunkin and Precians’ (1992) study frequently used the image of acting to liken their feeling of having had a successful lesson to that of an actor who knows he has just completed an outstanding performance.

This brings the current discussion to the role and contribution of teachers. According to Pica (2000), in spite of the differences in the ways educators define and measure effective teaching across the fields of policy and practice, the emphasis they place on it demonstrates the important role of teachers in successful teaching, including second language teaching. Ellwein et al.'s (1990) study is oriented towards this research focus. It was based on attribution research, which is concerned with teachers' beliefs about the causes of student performance, and used and extended the concepts of ego-enhancing and counter-defensiveness in the analysis of teachers' reflections about success and failure in the classroom. The study found three attribution types. The first type is self-referencing, which applies when the teacher takes responsibility for the outcome of the lesson, whether it is a success or a failure. The second type, ego-enhancing, applies when the teacher takes credit for a successful lesson and puts the blame on the students in a failed one. In contrast, the third type, self-effacing, is employed when the teacher emphasises the role of the students in a successful class session and bears personal responsibility for an unsuccessful lesson.

### 3.1.3.5 The relationship between a teaching philosophy and classroom practices

Teaching is a complex and multi-dimensional activity (Fang, 1996; Roche & Marsh, 2000; Tudor, 1996, 2001). The complexity of the teaching job is more vividly captured by the portrayal of the teacher as "a dilemma manager" (Lampert, 1985). Teaching requires the teacher to make many decisions within a single class period (Chan, 2004) and in the process of course design, lesson planning and material selection (Hedge, 2000). Richards (1998, p. 11) considers classroom teaching as a constantly changing process in which the teacher has to make decisions "that are appropriate to the specific dynamics of the lesson they are teaching". Further, the pedagogical dilemmas with which teachers are faced in their everyday teaching often involve decision-making with dichotomous choices. Fang (1996) presents a list of dichotomous choices such as whether to ensure equality or to promote excellence, whether to enable students to become learners or knowers and whether to encourage student independence and creativity or to establish common standards for everyone to reach. Research into teachers' conceptualisations of teaching and their effects on

practice suggests that underlying all teacher decision-making is a teacher's philosophy of teaching.

There is consensus in the literature that a teacher's philosophy of teaching has a great impact on his/her classroom practice (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002). Pajares (1992) comments that few would argue against this, and Borg (2003, 2006a) finds confirming evidence in the studies he reviews. Borg (2009, p. 166) suggests that the positive relationship between teaching philosophy and practice has become "the uncontested view today".

Teachers' philosophies of teaching underpin everything they do in their lessons (Breen *et al.*, 2001; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Hedge, 2000; Hird, 2003; Richards, 1998; Woods, 1996). The view that teachers' acts are principled, rather than random, is captured by Hird (2003, p. 24): "what teachers do 'on the floor' are not capricious acts but are the result of an interplay of numerous factors, not the least of which have to do with the teacher's own personal belief systems about pedagogic matters". For example, according to Shehadeh (2012, p. 7), one of the challenges to the adoption of TBLT in several EFL settings relates to teachers' belief that TBLT is "an alien concept not applicable to their specific teaching context or educational setting because it is incompatible with their own experiences of language learning and teaching". Williams and Burden (1997) advance the view that teachers' beliefs exert more influence on classroom action than any methodology or course book while Tomlinson (2005) suggests that classroom activity can reflect teachers' support or lack of support for a methodological change.

Research into teacher decision-making indicates that not only does teacher cognition determine teachers' 'pre-active' decisions (i.e., decisions made before the lesson), it also guides their 'interactive' ones (i.e., decisions made during the lesson), a distinction made by Jackson (1968, as cited in Fang, 1996, p. 49). This poses a challenge for teachers because interactive decisions are often crucial to the success of a lesson (Richards, 1998). In order to arrive at interactive decisions or to produce "improvisational teaching" (Borg, 2003, p. 93), teachers are said to depart from their lesson plans in principled ways. From his review of relevant studies in the field,

Richards (1998) finds that teacher beliefs play an important role in the thought processes teachers go through in making their instructional judgements. When faced with the need to gauge students' understanding and participation in the lesson, teachers more often than not rely on their beliefs to make interactive decisions which serve to redirect the course of the lesson (Richards, 1998).

Similarly, Breen et al. (2001) propose that teachers' decision-making and actions are regulated by their "pedagogic principles" (i.e., principles for guiding their classroom actions). These principles are derived from the personal beliefs or theories teachers have about language and language teaching and learning. In turn, these principles mediate between teachers' beliefs and their classroom actions and decisions (Breen et al., 2001). Therefore, pedagogic principles in Breen et al.'s use of the term are characterised as being reflexive and responsive: they do not just determine but also modify what teachers do in the classroom in response to the demands of the lesson. Other relevant guiding principles for teachers' actions in the classroom have been identified: accommodating student learning styles and promoting student involvement (Bailey, 1996), considering student understanding, student motivation and involvement and the appropriateness of a teaching strategy (Johnson, 1992).

Two important points need to be made about the relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practice. The first is that this relationship is not linear or unidirectional in the sense that the former shapes or guides the latter. There is evidence of a "symbiotic relationship" (Foss & Kleinsasser, 1996, p. 441) between thought and action in language teaching, and that the two are "mutually informing" (Borg, 2009, p. 166). Breen et al. (2001, p. 473) also suggest the two-way nature of teacher thought and action when they describe the relationship between teachers' classroom practices and their pedagogical principles as "interactive". According to their explanation, principles do not just dictate practices but they can also emerge from the trialling of practices.

The second point is that there is not always congruence between teachers' cognition and practices. This phenomenon is highlighted in Fang's (1996) review of teacher cognition studies in general educational research and in Kane et al.'s (2002) review of the teaching beliefs and practices of university academics. In his reviews of

language teacher cognition research, Borg (2006a, 2009) discusses mismatches concerning communicative language teaching between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom action. For example, mismatches were found in both Sato and Kleinsasser's (1999) and Karavas-Doukas' (1996) studies. Borg (2009) suggests that there is a lack of consistency between what teachers say and what they do in their teaching. Further, Borg (2003) argues that inconsistency should not be seen as a flaw or a shortcoming in a teacher's performance; rather, it should be examined in connection with the educational context in which the teacher works and whether the social, psychological and environmental realities of the school and classroom prevent the teacher from adopting the practices that reflect their beliefs. Borg (2003) cites an example from Ulichny's (1996) case study, in which the teacher started out with a learner-centred plan for a reading lesson, but ended up being very teacher-centred after making modifications to her lesson plan when faced with the learning difficulties experienced by the students. Borg's contention is substantiated by Fang (1996, pp. 7-8), who makes a distinction between "the consistency thesis", in which a teacher's beliefs direct his/her practices and "the inconsistency thesis", in which a teacher's practices depart from his/her beliefs. He further observes that the reported inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their practices may be due to the fact that "contextual factors can have powerful influences on teachers' beliefs and, in effect, affect their classroom practice" (p. 8). Borg (2009) also advances the point that a teacher may have a set of beliefs that do not always match one another. What the teacher did in class may seem to be in line with one belief, but may be found to be incongruent with another because the circumstances mean one exerts more influence than the other.

#### 3.1.3.6 Vietnamese TESOL teachers' teaching philosophies - An overview

Based on a review of the literature, the following sets of teaching philosophies are found among Vietnamese TESOL practitioners in Vietnam. Some of these philosophies are not directly stated but seem to underpin the pedagogical practices described. In the first set of philosophies, the teachers show a tendency to combine Western and Vietnamese pedagogies. For example, the high school teachers in central Vietnam indicated through their journal entries that they retained traditional

views and methods in their approach to CLT (Lewis & McCook, 2002). Specifically, the teachers focused on teaching not only oral skills, as required by CLT, but also on the written language. Further, under the influence of the cultural traditions that value memorisation and perfection, they thought that memorising and understanding played a significant role in language acquisition and, as a consequence, placed particular stress on fluency and accuracy of form. The teachers' incorporation of traditional aspects of language teaching into their approach to CLT illustrates the need for continuity by teachers. Louden (1991, p. xiv) stressed that educational reforms cannot be successfully implemented without "respect for the power of continuity" in teachers' work. This need can also be seen in discussions about the "problem of encouraging teachers to do what they are not used to and not comfortable doing" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 142). In the case of CLT, Ellis (1996) and Holliday (1997) argue for cultural continuity between CLT and more traditional approaches. More recently, Ellis (2009, p. 221) makes a similar point when he suggests that TBLT "need not be seen as an alternative to more traditional, form-focused approaches but can be used alongside them".

The two university teachers in Phan's (2004) study asserted that they were functioning well in the roles that were ascribed to them by adopting the teaching methods they followed. The teachers stated that they were "good teachers of English" (p. 55) because they acted as learning facilitators who created activities to involve the students and encouraged them to express their own ideas or feelings and engage themselves in reflective and critical thinking. One teacher thought she was a "very flexible" teacher, and the other said she wanted to be "a facilitator, a companion, not a controller" (p. 54). At the same time, the teachers viewed themselves as "good Vietnamese teachers" as they took on the role of "behaviour educators" or "moral guides" in accordance with the cultural expectations (p. 55). One teacher said that when the students misbehaved, she would explicitly tell them what "proper behaviour" was (p. 55) while the other teacher revealed she would implicitly give the students a moral lesson through the literary works she selected.

Phan (2004, p. 52) uses evidence of "harmonious combination of global and local pedagogies" by the two teachers in her study as support for her argument against the cultural stereotype that TESOL pedagogies in the West are superior to those in Asia.

As Pennycook (1994, p. 159) observes, it is not an uncommon assumption that Western methodologies are “developed, modern, efficient and scientific” while Asian teaching practices are “backward, traditional, inefficient ... [and] unscientific”. In Hayes’s (2009, p. 9) words, this represents “a monolithic view of ELT based on western conceptions of idealised practice”. Phan argues that as long as they are effective, Vietnamese teachers’ ways of teaching should be acknowledged as different to Western norms and should not be deemed as inappropriate or deficient. She points out that, although the practice of educating students morally in an explicit manner is not valued in the West, it is a cultural expectation in Vietnam, and what is important is the fact that teachers have acted in line with both the cultural norms of the target language and those of their native culture.

In Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) study undertaken in Vietnam, the observed teacher was found to assume the role of “mentor” or “moral leader”, which bears close resemblance to the role of “behaviour educators” or “moral guides” found in Phan’s (2004) study. The teacher seemed to show that he was aware that, in Vietnam - a society with a rich Confucian heritage - he was expected not only to act as “an expert knower of the language”, but also “to uphold the moral values of the community” (p. 206). On this basis, Kramsch and Sullivan suggest that appropriate pedagogy should be used as an alternative to the norm of authenticity in language teaching and should include pedagogy of appropriation. As they reason, appropriate pedagogy enables non-native speakers of English to conform to the standard or conventional use of the language so that they can function properly in global contexts whereas pedagogy of appropriation grants them the privilege of teaching and learning the language in accordance with their own cultural norms.

Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) suggestion and Ellis’s (1996) call for attention to cultural continuity (in the application of CLT in Vietnam) provide support to Phan’s (2004) claim that TESOL teachers in Vietnam have their own ways of teaching that merit respect and appreciation in their own right. They also raise awareness of the necessity of taking into consideration the influence of local factors, especially the influence of Vietnamese culture on ways of teaching or on teachers’ adoption of approaches from the West. Ellis (1996) recommends the use of mediation to make a Western notion of “good teaching – in this case the communicative approach” (p.

218) suitable for Asian settings. In this process of mediation, the teaching approach is attuned to the local conditions and, therefore, made culturally acceptable. One way in which the teacher can act as a cultural mediator is to discover “points of congruence” between different cultural norms to make Western ideas more accessible to Asian cultures (p. 217). Ellis observes that although traditional teaching practices in Vietnam are predominantly teacher-centred, acceptance of learner-centred approaches from the West will be easier if it is pointed out that the same principle of delegating responsibility to learners can be found in Confucian ideology.

A second set of pedagogical philosophies relates to views about ‘good’ students. The teachers in Dobinson’s (2013) study identified ‘good’ learners based on their personal traits and learning strategies. In their opinion, the innate characteristics of students and the tactics they used for language learning were equally important. While the teachers described many strategies that are likely to be used by successful learners in the West, they did not attach much importance to strategies that are thought to be typical of Asian learners - such as memorisation, obedience and hard work. This finding conflicts with the finding that the teachers in Lewis and McCook’s (2002) study did value memorising and accuracy, rather than fluency, appropriateness and spontaneity (valued in CLT). These teachers also indicated that they appreciated students’ hard work, as measured by the amount of study students did outside the classroom.

A third set of teaching philosophies includes additional values, beliefs and expectations teachers have. In Tomlinson and Dat’s (2004, p. 212) study, a majority of the teachers welcomed the suggestion that “learners need deeper relationships in the classroom”. They agreed that it was necessary to design classroom activities that could encourage learners to interact and communicate with each other openly and comfortably. Similarly, the teachers in Lewis and McCook’s (2002) study showed that they valued pair work and they organised pair activities so that their students could cooperate and learn from each other. They thought that an important task for the teacher was to create a positive learning environment and to encourage less able students to learn. In addition, the teachers in Tomlinson and Dat’s study believed that disparity between teacher expectations and learner expectations might exist, and that it was problematic to allow students to express their expectations prior to course

commencement. In their view, not all students knew what they wanted from a course, and it was a demanding task to satisfy all learner expectations.

The section has provided an overview of the teaching philosophies that underlie current pedagogical approaches used by Vietnamese TESOL teachers, revealing their tendency to incorporate the influences of local traditional teaching into Western pedagogies, their perceptions of the characteristics of ‘good’ learners and the influence of other beliefs and expectations they hold about language teaching and learning.

### **3.2 The learner-centred approach to TESOL**

The learner-centred approach has been acknowledged as a key and influential concept in education and language teaching in particular (Nunan, 1999; White, 2007). However, as a broad, flexible and evolving concept (Nunan, 1999; Tudor, 1996), it has been subject to multiple interpretations (Benson & Voller, 1997; Nunan, 1999; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005; Paris & Combs, 2006; Wenden, 2002) and has meant different things to different people (McKeachie, 1954; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). Further, there has been “little agreement on its meaning” despite its widespread use in education (Paris & Combs, 2006, p. 571). In his review of research into university academics’ conceptions of teaching, Kember (1997) identifies two broad orientations: teacher-centred/content-oriented orientation and student-centred/learning-oriented orientation. One conception of teaching subsumed under the student-centred/learning-oriented orientation recognises the teacher as a facilitator of knowledge rather than a presenter of knowledge (as exists within the teacher-centred/content-oriented orientation).

The following themes have emerged in the literature on learner-centred education: the role of the teacher, the role of the student, the impact of classroom practices and implementation issues.

### ***3.2.1 The role of the teacher***

The learner-centred approach and the teacher-centred approach have been viewed as being antithetical in the sense that the former is considered to be an innovative and progressive way of teaching and learning while the latter is conservative and traditional (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Cuban, 1983; Pulist, 2001; Zophy, 1982). Constructivism and positivism have been suggested as the underlying philosophies. The constructivist view that underpins the learner-centred approach maintains that knowledge cannot be transmitted from teachers to learners (Sadker & Zittleman, 2007), and that individual learners must construct their own meaning and knowledge by transforming the information they receive (Sparkes, 1999) or by constantly assimilating new information (Sadker & Zittleman, 2007) in the light of “their unique world view” (White, 2007, p. 322). Dewey (1934, p. 64, as cited in Richards, 2001, p. 117), a key figure in the development of constructivism, argues that “there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some reworking”. Carlile and Jordan (2005) and Paris and Combs (2006) suggest that a learner-centred approach seems to identify itself with a constructivist view of learning due to the emphasis it puts on activity, discovery and independent learning. In the context of language learning, it is claimed that learner-centred teaching can facilitate the process by which learners make meaning for themselves (Nunan, 1999), helping them make “meaningful connections between language content and the lived experience and world of each learner” (White, 2007, p. 322). White posits that the teacher’s commitment must be to the learner’s knowledge construction process. Semple (2000) highlights the role of learners’ beliefs, experiences and values in their construction of knowledge and interpretation of the world, the achievement of learning in situations relevant or meaningful to them, the value of reflection as an important part of learning and the recognition of learning as a collaborative process in which multiple viewpoints are acknowledged.

These views stand in contrast to positivism, which asserts that knowledge is a reflection of an objective reality (Benson, 1997; Emes & Cleveland-Innes, 2003) and is associated with a view of education which sees learning as the direct transmission of knowledge from teachers to students (Brown, 2003; Hargreaves, 1982; Schuh, 2004; White, 2007). Semple (2000) highlights that, from both psychological

constructivist and social constructivist perspectives, learning is viewed as an active process, not a passive one as positivists assume it to be. According to Kain (2003), a marked difference between the learner-centred paradigm and the teacher-centred paradigm is that the responsibility for the construction of knowledge in the former is shared between teacher and students, not assumed by the teacher alone, and that learning is achieved through students' involvement in activities organised for them. Thus, the predominant role of the teacher in a learner-centred approach is that of a facilitator or a guide (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Kember, 1997; King, 1993; Nunan, 1999; Sadker & Zittleman, 2007; Tudor, 1993; Weimer, 2002). Teachers are expected to relinquish the authority that rests with them and to focus on offering learners help and guidance as they go along (King, 1993, p. 30). Some metaphors that describe the role of facilitator in the literature are summarised in Weimer (2002): gardener, midwife, guide, coach and maestro. Others characterise the teacher as a prompter, a tutor (Harmer, 2001) or a resource (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Brown, 2003; Harmer, 2001). Brown (2003) emphasises the role of the teacher as a resource, the person who provides diverse teaching methods and techniques with a view to assisting students with the construction of knowledge and the application of knowledge and theory. "Learning counsellor" is another metaphor suggested by Tudor (1993) because the fundamental duties of the teacher in any teaching situation are to decide the content and the form of the study program. In Tudor's analysis, the responsibilities that the teacher has to shoulder in the role of learning counsellor point to the necessity to centre language teaching both on the needs of students as language learners and language users and on appreciating and accommodating learners' potential to make meaningful contributions to program development within the constraints of the teaching-learning context. In contrast, Harmer (1995) discusses teacher roles in terms of teacher performance, describing the ways in which a teacher might perform in different activities, for example, "clearly", "fairly", "quietly", "passionately", "energetically" or "encouragingly". Thus, Harmer asserts, "The teacher never stops performing. It's just the kind of performance that changes" (p. 343).

### ***3.2.2 The role of the student***

Within a learner-centred system, while the teacher acts as the facilitator, the learner is at the centre of the learning process (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Pillay, 2002; Pulist, 2001; White, 2007). The focus on the learner in language teaching emerged in the 1960s and 1970s under the influence of the humanistic language teaching movement, initiatives by the Council of Europe and programs such as English for Specific Purposes and CLT (see, for example, Danesi, 2003; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001; Trim, 1980; Tudor, 1996). More recently, the focus on the learner is reflected in task-based approaches (Long, 1985; Long, 2005b; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998). The educational philosophies underlying these precursors stress the importance of learners' needs, experience and potential, the individuality of learners and the diversity among them and the impact of learning environments on learners (see, for example, Long, 1985, 2005b; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2001; Stevick, 1990; Tudor, 1996; Underhill, 1989). The focus on the learner intensified in the 1980s through the work of Brundage and MacKeracher (1980), who stressed the need to recognise adult learners' learning styles and abilities and the independent role they can play in the learning process; through Brindley's (1984) focus on the use of a learner-centred approach rather than a subject-centred approach to language curriculum design; and through the emergence of the "negotiated curriculum" suggested by Breen (1984), Breen and Candlin (1980), Candlin (1984) and Barlett and Butler (1985, as cited in Nunan, 1988, p. 36), which placed emphasis on negotiation and consultation between teachers and students in all phases of curriculum design. Nunan's (1988) development of a learner-centred approach to curriculum design marked a turning point in the thinking on learner-centredness in language teaching with its establishment of the principle of taking the learner as the reference point at the beginning of the process of curriculum development and at every stage thereafter. Finally, Long's (1985) focus on the needs of the learners as part of a task-based approach clearly places learner-centredness at the forefront.

#### **3.2.2.1 Learner as the centre of the learning process**

A major argument that has been put forward in the literature (Brown, 2003; Long, 1985, 2005b; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Nunan, 2004; Pillay, 2002; Pulist, 2001;

Pomuti, Leczel, Liman, Swarts & van Graan, 2003; Tudor, 1996; White, 2007) is that a learner-centred approach must have learners at the centre of the learning process, something that is achieved by paying attention to their needs and characteristics such as their abilities, personal traits and cultural background. Brindley emphasises that the development of a learner-centred approach to language curriculum requires that

... the learner should be seen as being at the centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher it means that instructional programmes should be centred on learners' needs and that learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility. (1984, p. 15)

One key distinction Nunan (1988) makes between a traditional curriculum and a learner-centred curriculum is that consideration and satisfaction of learner needs is of paramount importance in learner-centredness. Similarly, Pillay (2002, p. 93) posits that learner-centred education considers "learners' needs to be central to the design and delivery of instruction". On the basis of the learner-centred curriculum developed by Nunan, Tudor (1996, p. ix) formulates his definition of learner-centredness as "a broadly-based endeavour designed to gear language teaching, in terms of both the content and the form of instruction, around the needs and characteristics of learners". Tudor emphasises taking the learner as the starting point when making decisions concerning the selection of teaching methods and learning content.

The position of the learner at the centre of the learning process also entails taking the learner's characteristics into consideration. Some learner characteristics are listed in McCombs and Whisler's definition of learner-centredness as

... the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners - their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs - with a focus on learning - the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners.

This dual focus then informs and drives educational decision making. (1997, p. 9)

A knowledge of learner characteristics is believed to help teachers make their courses attuned to their students' interests, experience, learning styles, etc. in terms of content, methodology and evaluation (Brown, 2003; Pillay, 2002; White, 2007). The focus on learners is encapsulated by White (2007, p. 322) as the principle of "responsiveness" of learner-centredness, which emphasises the need for the teacher to consider learner characteristics when creating learning opportunities for students and providing them with scaffolding.

Learner needs can be classified as learner-perceived, teacher-perceived and company-perceived (Hoadley-Maidment, 1983) or as objective and subjective needs (Brindley, 1989; Richterich, 1973/1980, p. 32, as cited in West, 1994, p. 4). Research into teachers' and learners' beliefs about language learning and teaching, together with perceptions and evaluations of classroom events and activities, has revealed discrepancies between teacher and learner needs, aims, goals, preferences and expectations (e.g., Barkhuizen, 1998; Bloom, 2007; Cohen & Fass, 2001; Davis, 2003; Jing, 2006; Long, 2005a; Nunan, 1988, 1995, 1999; Peacock, 1997, 1998; Spratt, 1999). Differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of their preferred activities have been found in some studies (Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh, 2004; Nunan, 1988; Spratt, 1999). Spratt (1999) noted that teachers' and learners' views of the latter's preferred learning activities matched only in half of the cases investigated in his study. In the Australian context Nunan (1988) noted that students were supportive of traditional activities such as error correction and grammar exercises while teachers were more interested in communicative activities such as pair work and group work. Peacock (1998) reported a similar finding in his Hong Kong research. Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) found that students in General English courses in public universities in Iran demonstrated stronger preferences for communicative activities than their instructors believed they did.

Mismatches have also been found between teacher and student perceptions and evaluations of classroom activities (Brown, 2009; Cohen & Fass, 2001; Hawkey, 2006; Ilins, Inozu & Yumru, 2007; Tavakoli, 2009). For example, in some

elementary, middle and high schools in Italy, while students believed that grammar exercises featured more strongly than pair discussions among the thirteen learning activities being investigated, teachers gave a reversed ranking for these two types of activities (Hawkey, 2006); although there were similarities between the criteria EFL teachers and learners at a college in London adopted for identifying and defining task difficulty, differences were found between their perceptions of task difficulty (Tavakoli, 2009). Also, research has shown that teachers and students have differing opinions about the amount and the types of feedback that should or can be given and the kinds of errors that should be corrected (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Kaivanpanah, Alavi & Sepehrinia, 2012), with feedback being understood as information about aspects of a learner's performance or understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) study, ESL teachers showed a preference for a form of correction that was more selective and less explicit than the one students expected to get; in Kaivanpanah, Alavi and Sepehrinia's (2012) study, ESL learners in Iran viewed peer feedback more favourably than did their teachers.

Similarly, gaps have been reported between teacher and student beliefs about the nature of language learning and the relevance of particular teaching and learning methods. In two different contexts, EFL and ESL students in a higher education institution in Iran (Harati, 2011) and in the USA (Siebert, 2003) expressed similar beliefs when they indicated that they put greater emphasis on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and translation than their teachers did. In another context, teachers and students of Chinese-English translation courses in Macao had differing beliefs about some aspects of language learning (Davis, 2003). Unlike their teachers, the students firmly believed that the sooner a second language is taught, the better; that grammatical rules should be presented and practised one at a time; that early error correction is needed to prevent students from developing bad habits; and that teaching materials should expose students only to those structures that are the learning points.

Some causes for the discrepancies between teacher and learner perspectives on preferred or useful classroom activities have been identified. One possible explanation is that teachers or syllabus designers make impressionistic rather than informed decisions about what students need based on their own beliefs, values,

knowledge, intuition and experience (Spratt, 1999). Teachers may also have misconceptions about needs due to a lack of information about students' views, expectations and preferences (Kaivanpanah et al., 2012). Teachers and learners may have "different mind sets" or "different agendas" (Nunan, 1995, p. 140) or "personal agendas" (Slimani-Rolls, 2003, p. 230) that determine their needs, interests, concerns and perceptions of valued learning activities (McDonough, 1995; Nunan, 1995; Slimani-Rolls, 2003; Yorio, 1986). Kumaravadivelu (1991, p. 98) identifies ten "potential sources of mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation": "cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, and attitudinal".

The existence of a gap between teacher perceptions and beliefs and those of learners can lead to issues for teachers, learners and the teaching and learning process (e.g., Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1998; Schulz, 1996). When needs and expectations are not satisfied, learners may lose their interest in the course and confidence in their teacher, which can result in poor learning outcomes, course dissatisfaction, learner resistance and discontinuation of study (Bloom, 2007; Canagarajah, 1993; Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; McCargar, 1993; Peacock, 2001; Schulz, 1996). As a consequence, the job of teaching becomes harder when teachers encounter diffidence, resentment, frustration and lack of cooperation and participation from their learners (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995). Peacock (1998, 2001) comments that when teacher beliefs and learner beliefs conflict, learners may have mistaken ideas about, or poor perceptions of, their teacher. In Peacock's (1998) study, teachers voiced their concern that their students might think they were lazy or incompetent when the communicative activities of their choice failed to satisfy the students' desire for error correction or grammar practice. Kaivanpanah et al. (2012) warn that teachers' reliance on their own values and perceptions and their failure to incorporate those of learners may cause them to avoid using teaching techniques that can benefit learners. Moreover, Kumaravadivelu (1991, p. 100) maintains that a gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation is "almost inevitable" in learner-centred, task-based pedagogy, but "the narrower the gap ..., the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes". With emphasis being placed on satisfaction of learner needs, a learner-centred approach can minimise or avoid conflicts between real learner needs

and teachers' perceptions of them. The principle of "relevance" in learner-centredness, as summarised by White (2007), stresses the importance of the identification and consideration of learner needs in relation to the goals and contexts of language use and tasks performed.

Another theme that has been advanced in the literature is that students can become active and independent learners in a learner-centred approach by means of learner training and learner involvement (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). Tudor refers to learner training as the induction or initiation of the learner into the learning process; learner involvement means learner participation in the shaping of the program of study. Tudor maintains that both learner training and learner involvement lead to learner empowerment, which is the ultimate aim of learner-centred education.

### *Learner training*

Learner training is also known by different names such as "strategy learning", "learning-to-learn training", "learner methodology training" and "methodological initiation for learners" (Oxford, 1990, p. 200). Different authors show preferences in their choice of terms - while Oxford (1990) prefers the term "strategy training" for its descriptive and direct meaning, Wenden (2002) opts for the general sense expressed by the term "learner development". Research into learner strategies has explored the possibility of how learners can be helped to become more active or self-directed learners (Hedge, 2000). As not all learners have the skills needed to take control of, or responsibility for, their learning (Hedge, 2000; Holec, 1981; Little, 1995; Tudor, 1996; Wenden, 2002), learners need to go through a "process of awareness development and preparation" which is commonly known as learner training (Tudor, 1996, p. 35). Tudor (1996) and Hedge (2000) consider learner training to be a number of procedures or activities which serve to enhance learners' understanding of what is involved in language learning, to develop their ability to assume an active and independent role in their learning and to enable them to employ effective learning strategies.

There are two main approaches to learner training (Wenden, 1998). The direct approach is "deductive and didactic" in that it starts with "theory about what is to be

learned and then applying it” (Wenden, 1998, p. 17). Strategy training, as an example, involves explicitly teaching learners how, when and why they should use language learning strategies in their efforts to achieve learning goals (Cohen, 1998; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). In contrast, the indirect approach is “a form of inductive or discovery learning” in which learners are engaged in reflection upon their “past learning experiences or acquired knowledge in order to seek insight into their approach to learning and their beliefs” (Wenden, 1998, pp. 14-15). However, it has been suggested that a combined approach of explicit teaching and reflection can make learner training practice more effective (Benson, 2001).

Some writers claim that learner training contributes to learner empowerment. Cohen (1998, p. 70) states that “the ultimate goal of strategy training is to empower students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process”. Tudor (1996) maintains that learner training allows students to reflect on their beliefs and expectations about language learning and current learning strategies, which, in turn, provides reference for the planning of strategy training. Without this initial understanding, teachers cannot help students learn more effectively (Oxford, 1990), or teachers may encounter difficulty exposing learners to alternative learning approaches and options (Tudor, 1996). Tudor also maintains that in learner training there is two-way communication between the teacher and learners which, through sharing of knowledge and ideas, allows the teacher to increase his/her understanding of the students and forms the basis for student involvement in the designing of the course.

### *Learner involvement*

Learner involvement has been suggested as a means by which learners can assume an active and participatory role in a learner-centred system (Nunan, 1988; Paris & Combs, 2006, Tudor, 1996). Nunan (1988) asserts that learners should be involved in all decision-making processes of curriculum development by having their needs attended to and by having their voice heard during all phases of curriculum development - during goal and objective setting, implementation of methodology and materials, evaluation and assessment. Tudor (1996) also adopts student involvement as an organising principle for his approach to learner-centredness. In his

view, learner involvement provides for varying degrees of learner participation in the development of the study program ranging, for example, from materials design for a learning activity to negotiation over assessment procedures. In this sense, Tudor's idea of learner involvement as a matter of degree coincides with Nunan's (1996) view that learner-centredness is not an all-or-nothing concept. One image of learner-centredness emerging from the implementation of a learner-centred approach by the teachers in Paris and Combs's (2006) study illustrates this principle of learner involvement by demonstrating teachers' efforts to have "intense student engagement with curriculum" in which "students' active intellectual and emotional involvement" is expected (p. 585).

The principle of learner involvement has also been raised by Clarke (1991) in his discussion of the negotiated syllabus, which attaches importance to learner needs and allows for full learner participation in course design. Clarke suggests that learners need assistance in participating in the process of negotiation, so it is necessary to put in place a more pragmatic model with an element of negotiation being built into each component of a syllabus, even an externally imposed one. Clarke proposes encouraging and facilitating active involvement and negotiation by learners in different ways. For example, learners can help modify the existing syllabus content or materials and tasks appropriate to their interests and can negotiate the preferred ways of working and forms of assessment and even the content of test materials. This is consistent with the approaches suggested earlier by Breen (1984), Breen and Candlin (1980) and Candlin (1984).

The extent to which the principle of learner involvement has been put into practice can be seen in a number of pedagogical practices and learning projects that have been reported in the literature. Some learning projects report involving students in almost all stages of curriculum design (Littlejohn, 1983; Mahmoud, 2013; Thomson, 1996). In one early project, Littlejohn (1983) implemented a gradual approach to increased learner involvement occasioned by a reduced authoritarian teacher role - a set of three activities was organised to enhance learner involvement in course management while the teacher's role was restricted to providing reference materials and giving guidance and help when necessary. Littlejohn noted that the value of the approach, especially the component of the student-directed lessons, lay in the

enhanced skills, more positive attitudes and the sense of responsibility learners developed throughout the course. In a later project, Thomson (1996) aimed to foster self-directed learning and implement a learner-centred curriculum among a group of third-year Japanese language learners at a university in Sydney. Thomson found that the overall student feedback was very positive. Recently, Mahmoud (2013) reported how EFL students in a university in Oman were involved in all stages of an essay writing course. He distinguished direct involvement from indirect involvement on the basis that the first was learner-centred while the latter was learning-centred. Direct involvement engaged students in the development of writing topics, error correction and course evaluation and demanded that students make the necessary and relevant decisions through group or whole-class participation. In contrast, indirect involvement occurred in grammar instruction and the provision of feedback and was utilised when the lesson focus was on strategy-based teaching in order to “approximate the natural hypothesis formation process where the students rely on previous linguistic correction to facilitate the task of learning and using another language” (p. 682).

Other projects report engaging students in one of the phases of course design, particularly in the selection and generation of learning tasks, activities and materials: in the development of one single task (Thomson, 1992) or a number of activities (Campbell & Kryszewska, 1992; Deller, 1990; Nunan, 1997). In the activities presented by Deller (1990) and Campbell and Kryszewska (1992) in their resource books, students can directly participate in the development and organisation of learning activities by providing learning materials and engaging in preparation for examinations and self- or peer-diagnosis and evaluation of language.

A specific example of encouraging learner engagement in designing and adapting materials is given by Nunan (1997). In his scheme, learners progress through five levels of involvement - namely, awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence - with increasing demands being made on their linguistic, metacognitive and affective resources at each level. Support for the practice of learner involvement in materials development has been given by Burnard (1999, p. 244), who states that in a learner-centred approach, “students might not only choose what to study, but how and why that topic might be an interesting one to study”. Hall

(2001, p. 232) asserts that “students themselves are in a unique position to look for relevant resource materials. They know what their own needs and interests are”. He argues that as a result of their involvement in materials selection and development, students change from being passive recipients or users of set materials or teacher-prepared materials to being responsible for their own learning materials. Hall asserts that this illustrates the concept of “active accountability” on the part of the students, which supports learner empowerment during the learning process.

Emphasis has also been placed on learner involvement in assessment, particularly in the form of self-assessment and peer assessment (Little, 2005; Miller & Ng, 1996; Tudor, 1996). Self-assessment is defined by Oscarson (1989, p. 1) as “assessment in the form of self-report; ... assessment seen in the learner’s own perspective; assessment seen as an internal or self-directed activity”, distinguished from “external or other-directed” assessment which is administered “in the form of examinations and ... tests” from “the perspective of an ‘outside agent’, typically a teacher or trained examiner”. Peer assessment refers to “an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners. *Equal-status* can be interpreted exactly or with flexibility; in the latter case, a peer can be anyone within a few years of schooling” (Topping, 2009, pp. 20-21, italics original). Peer assessment involves students giving feedback on and/or giving grades (Davies, 2006) to their peers on their “writing, portfolios, oral presentations, test performance, and other skilled behaviors” (Topping, 2009, p. 21), with or without using a set of criteria that teachers and students agree to (Falchikov, 1995).

The rationales for self-assessment and peer assessment that have been presented in the literature converge at a point where they are seen as an important aspect of learner-centred education (Benett, 1999; Black, 1999; Little, 2005; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). Little (2005, p. 322) argues that a learner-centred curriculum “falls short of its definition” if learners are involved in the specification of the goals, content, methods and materials of a course, but excluded from the evaluation of learner progress and curriculum outcomes. It has been argued (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Brown, 2004; Ekbatani, 2000; Harris, 1997; Miaoa, Badger & Zhen, 2006; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005) that peer and self-assessment can lead to the

development of a sense of student autonomy. O'Neill and McMahon (2005) maintain that when students are involved in self- and peer assessment, they are given some degree of control and responsibility, thus having the enhanced sense of autonomy that features in Lea et al.'s (2003) definition of student-centred learning. It has been further argued (Bullock, 2011; Dickinson, 1987; Nunan, 1988; Oscarson, 1997) that self-assessment offers students a means of developing self-awareness and self-evaluation that enables them to become skilled in judging their own performance, setting realistic goals for themselves and directing their own learning. Apart from the learning benefits that students enjoy in terms of student autonomy, peer assessment can contribute to the development of good relationships between students. Brown (2004) points out that peer assessment is characterised by cooperative learning among students while Lynch (1988) observes that peer assessment in public speaking can bring about a better rapport between the speaker and the audience when the former's work and performance is subject to the latter's evaluation.

Learner involvement in assessment and evaluation at the classroom level can contribute to learner empowerment in a number of ways. First, peer and self-assessment are believed to allow learners to enter a realm that is traditionally reserved for teachers (Miller & Ng, 1996; Oscarson, 1989; Tudor, 1996; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). Conventionally, teacher assessment and standardised tests are considered as reliable assessment measures as teachers have expertise in testing due to their professional training and experience (Tudor, 1996) whereas learners are looked upon as merely "untrained testers" (Miller & Ng, 1996, p. 143). Although doubts have been expressed about the reliability and validity of self-assessment (Blue, 1988; Janssen-van Dieten, 1989; Dickinson, 1992; Ekbatani, 2000; Weaver & Esposto, 2012) and peer assessment (Kennedy, 2005), a high degree of correspondence between learner-directed assessment and teacher-directed assessment has been reported in ESL/EFL contexts (e.g., Miller & Ng, 1996; Peng, 2010) and in higher education contexts (e.g., Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Sadler & Good, 2006; Topping, 1998). Oscarson (1989, p. 3, *italics original*) advances the point that with the establishment of learner self-assessment as a complement to teacher evaluation, assessment can be considered "a *mutual* responsibility" between teachers and learners and is an important source of feedback complementary to

teacher feedback (Nunan, 1988; Topping, 2009; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). Second, self-assessment is believed to enable learners to make use of their decision-making powers (Little, 2005). Little highlights the importance of the development of learners' capacity for self-assessment, without which they can never make sound judgements when participating in the decision-making phases of the learning process; and also stresses that learners can never know what learning objectives they should set themselves unless they reflect on their language ability and judge the extent to which they can already function in the target language. If learners are equipped with well-developed self-assessment skills, they can put their powers of reflection and decision-making to a good use, which will, hopefully, result in "raised level of awareness" and "improved goal-orientation" (Oscarson, 1989, p. 4). Accordingly, students can heighten their awareness of the assessment process if they have the right to determine the what, the how and the when of assessment procedures instead of accepting assessment as the sole responsibility of the teacher (Oscarson, 1989). In addition, students have a chance to further their understanding of the linguistic and communication expectations of the task at hand (Tudor, 1996) and to explore their learning situation and choose activities that meet their communicative needs rather than subjecting themselves to the assessment goals imposed by their teachers (Oscarson, 1989) when involved in self- or peer assessment exercises.

The diversity of peer assessment approaches in education research has been recently described by Gielen, Dochy and Onghena (2011) based on an update of Topping's (1998) and van den Berg, Admiraal and Pilot's (2006) typology of peer assessment. Gielen et al. maintain that their inventory of peer assessment activities can serve "as a source of inspiration or as a checklist of important decisions" that teachers need to take when using peer evaluation (p. 137). Research has been undertaken (Little, 2009; North, 2000) on the use of language portfolios as a form of learner self-assessment and as a means of developing learner autonomy. In North's (2000) study, the portfolio contains a checklist of what learners think they can or cannot do and a record of their exam results and language-learning achievements. Thus, the portfolio empowers learners by enabling them to self-assess their language competence and to describe their learning progress and achievements.

### 3.2.2.2 Learner autonomy

Learner-centredness is a broad and evolving concept (Nunan, 1999; Tudor, 1996) that has gone through different stages of development (Benson & Voller, 1997; Wenden, 2002). One aspect of learner-centredness to be highlighted in more recent times is learner autonomy (Allwright, 2006). The issue of how to develop students' ability to learn, especially to learn independently and to make decisions concerning their learning, has been the concern of researchers in this area (Benson, 2007; Holec, 1981; Little, 2004; Littlewood, 1996). In general, learner autonomy is seen as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3) or "a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p. 4). This ability involves taking responsibility for decision-making in all areas of learning such as objective setting, selection of content, tasks, learning materials, teaching methods and pace of the course and appraisal of learning outcomes (Holec, 1981). In this sense, learner autonomy reflects the principle of learner involvement in decision-making processes in learner-centred education. Further, learner autonomy appears as a multidimensional concept (Benson, 1997; Holliday, 2003; Oxford, 2003; Ribé, 2003; Smith, 2003), multi-faceted (Littlewood, 1996; Macaro, 2008) and multi-level (Benson, 2001; Littlewood, 1999; Nunan, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000).

With regard to language learning, some researchers find justification for the pursuit of learner autonomy as a core course objective due to its importance to language learners (Cotterall, 1995; Little, 1995). According to Little (1995), when learners are ready to take responsibility for their learning, they stand a good chance of achieving their learning goals and maintain a positive attitude towards their learning. Cotterall (1995) reports that adult learners in particular are more likely to learn effectively when they are consulted about such aspects of the program as the pace, content, sequence and form of instruction.

Language learner autonomy must include autonomy of language use as an indispensable component (Little, 2004). Towards this end, some ways of developing a sense of autonomy in language learners and their language abilities have been suggested in the literature. Little (1995) advocates involving learners in pedagogical

dialogues with teachers. To start and to maintain the process of negotiation, teachers should rely on their “disciplinary expertise” - a term used by Gardner (as cited in Little, 1995, p. 179) - to decide on, among other things, the right balance between exposition and practice. Teachers should make sure that the target language is the medium of teaching and learning, and that learners are allowed to achieve communicative purposes and initiate and use different forms of classroom discourse.

Little (2004) also focuses on three additional principles; namely, learner empowerment, learner reflection and appropriate target language use. Learner empowerment focuses on giving learners control over their own learning and the learning process. However, the amount of responsibility learners can take depends on the extent of their learning which, in turn, depends on their proficiency in the target language and the development of their study skills. Learner reflection aims to enable learners “to think about their learning both at a macro level and at a micro level” by means of self-assessment (p. 22). Learners are expected to assess their learning outcomes and to identify their strong and weak points so that they can channel their efforts appropriately in the next phase of learning. Appropriate target language use aims to give learners opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes. Teachers scaffold learners’ speech so that they can participate in the construction of meaning from spoken language which may be beyond their current level.

The methodology that is used for fostering autonomy is closely connected to the methodology of language teaching (Littlewood, 1996). For this reason, general strategies employed for developing three broad domains of autonomy - autonomy as a communicator, as a learner and as an individual - serve to achieve the main goals of language education. As such, Littlewood recommends that strategies are not specific to each of these domains but instead overlap to enable learners to increase their motivation, confidence, knowledge and skills.

Little (1995, 2007) has identified a number of teaching techniques that are useful for fostering learner autonomy - the effective use of project work, group work and pair work. As Little (2007) points out, the basis for this recommendation lies in the Vygotskian theory of internalisation, which holds that social speech in a target

language can be gradually transformed into the capacity for inner speech or discursive thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly, when engaged in tasks designed for pairs, groups or teams, students first use the target language out of the necessity for social interaction with other learners and then accumulate linguistic knowledge or experience through increased interaction. In addition, Little views the appropriate use of writing, particularly collaborative writing, as a means of enabling learners to reach higher level of language proficiency. He emphasises that when group work involves collaborative writing, writing and speaking can support each other, and that the use of writing can help give an early appropriate focus to linguistic forms.

### *Research into learner autonomy in Vietnam*

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the concept of learner autonomy in the context of Vietnam. Trinh (2005) introduced a new EFL curriculum in an effort to increase the autonomy and communicative competence of prospective secondary school teachers. One of the conclusions he reached was that it is possible to stimulate learner autonomy in Vietnam if students are given the opportunity to get involved in their learning.

Nguyen (2009) investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning outcomes. In one phase of her study, she examined the effectiveness of strategy-based instruction in promoting learner autonomy (see also Nguyen & Gu, 2013) by incorporating a metacognition training package into the academic writing course for an experimental group of third-year English major students. The cognitive skills that were emphasised included planning, monitoring and evaluating in the writing of English. The findings from her study show that students' level of autonomy was correlated with their academic achievement and task-specific training for self-regulation resulted in improved writing skills and enhanced learner autonomy.

Dang (2012) adopted a more exploratory approach drawing heavily on the perception and performance of learner autonomy of EFL undergraduate students in online and offline learning environments. In his adoption of a sociocultural perspective, personal and cultural factors were treated as mediating factors on

students' learning behaviours. Preference, motivation and attitudes strongly featured as factors that contributed to the development of students' learning autonomy.

Le (2013) investigated the development of learner autonomy among students in their English study. The emergence of a close association of learner autonomy with "taking the initiative" in learning, especially in self-learning from teachers' and students' perceptions gave rise to the implementation of Sinclair's (2000) teacher-guided/learner-decided approach to the promotion of learner autonomy to provide students with metacognitive strategies to enable them to manage their own learning, to raise their awareness of themselves as learners and of the learning context and to explore the English language and its learning strategies. It was found that the program was able to develop students' ability to take the initiative in learning and enhance their willingness to engage more in self-directed learning.

In their action research, Humphreys and Wyatt (2014) aimed to stimulate the use of autonomy-supporting practices among English for academic purposes learners in Vietnam. The students' views about and experience of learner autonomy were collected to provide input for the development of an intervention in which the students kept an independent learning journal to report on their use of autonomous practices, especially those that focused on self-reflection and goal setting for their learning. After a five-week trial, the students' journals were evaluated by the participating teachers. Given the fact that the student participants may have had low levels of autonomy as they came from a Confucian heritage culture, the researchers found that, if autonomy is "socially mediated with the support of teachers, other learners, and resources" (p. 60), Vietnamese university students can take greater responsibility for their learning.

In Nguyen's (2012) project, instead of delivering lessons in which she herself chose learning activities and materials, she shifted to a more learner-centred approach in which the students had scope to exercise their autonomy. Accordingly, the practice of peer teaching was used for arousing students' interest in learning English and for encouraging their independent learning. The findings from the project indicate that the students were more motivated to learn and to engage in activities organised by their peers.

### 3.2.2.3 Teacher-student relationships

A learner-centred approach aims to foster certain types of relationship between teacher and students and between students themselves. The relationship between teacher and students in a learner-centred system is characterised by a sense of equality, partnership and collaboration. Tudor (1996, p. 41) highlights this by suggesting that there exists “a more equal relationship between teacher and learners than is the case in traditional approaches to teaching”. He points out that such a relationship is possible due to the negotiation between teacher and students over the content and the form of language instruction. Similarly, Dupin-Bryan’s (2004, p. 42) definition of learner-centredness is one of “a style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centered teaching, and democratic in which both students and instructor decide how, what, and when learning occurs”. In Barr and Tagg’s (1995) view, a learner-centred approach allows power to shift from the teacher to the learners due to its focus on what has been described by McCombs and Whisler (1997, p. 9) as the “dual focus” on learners and their learning. Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003, p. 322) list “an interdependence” between, and “mutual respect” for, teachers and learners as one of the tenets of learner-centred teaching.

The element of partnership and collaboration in the teacher-student relationship has been exemplified by Nunan (1988, p. 2), who suggests that “a collaborative effort between teachers and learners” features within a learner-centred approach to curriculum development due to learners’ involvement in the process of selecting teaching methods and teaching content. Tudor (1993) observes that the teacher-student relationship in a learner-centred system reflects the partnership model proposed by Eisler (1987, p. xvii, italics original), who states that “the *partnership* model” incorporates social relations that represent the principle of “*linking*” as opposed to “the *dominator* model”, which follows the principle of “*ranking*”, and that within the partnership model, diversity is not viewed as inferiority or superiority. Tudor’s (1996) ideas of learner-centredness fit in with the partnership model described by Eisler with his emphasis on negotiation between teachers and students over the content and the form of language teaching and learning and his appreciation for diversity among learners. Finally, humanistic education is one of the educational philosophies that underlie learner-centred teaching, in which the teacher

must be a “facilitator, helper, and partner ... in a humanistic education setting” (Elias & Merriam, 1984, p. 125). This is illustrated by the teachers in Paris and Combs’s (2006) study who suggested that teachers and students are co-participants in the learning process as they share the tasks of curriculum planning and evaluation of teaching and learning outcomes.

#### 3.2.2.4 Student-student relationships

Supportive student-student relationships are essential in a learner-centred class. As early as 1954, McKeachie observed that learner-centred teachers tended to achieve “a high degree of inter-student participation” and develop a class group “with a high degree of cohesiveness” (p. 145). Brandes and Ginnis (1986) described the relationship between learners in a learner-centred class as being equal and capable of promoting growth and development.

The common or increasing use of pair work and group work which are the main modes of organising learning activities in the language classroom (Fushino, 2010; Storch, 2009) also contributes to the development of supportive relationships between students. These modes of organisation give students opportunities to work collaboratively towards the same goals (Flowerdew, 1998; Harmer, 2001; Littlewood, 2000) and assume a range of learner roles during collaborative tasks such as tutors, co-authors, sounding boards and critical readers (Weissberg, 2006). Pair work and group work also provides students with opportunities to help and learn from each other (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Brown, 2003; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). The help that students give to and receive from peers constitutes what Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and his concept of Zone of Proximal Development deem the scaffolding essential to their cognitive development (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Cazden, 1988; Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2002, 2009).

During pair and small group activities, peers can provide each other with scaffolded assistance to achieve improved learning outcomes. Research has indicated that, through pair and group work, students are engaged in the type of interaction that is

conducive to language development (Fushino, 2010) as these modes of organisation provide opportunity for comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), comprehensible output (Swain, 1985), negotiation of meaning (Long, 1983), feedback (Long, 1996), collective scaffolding (Donato, 1994) and deliberating about language use to best express meaning (Swain, 2000, 2006). Through pair work and group work undertaken during collaborative writing activities, students can produce more accurate written texts (Storch, 2005; Wiggleworth & Storch, 2009), which can be attributed to the provision of collective scaffolding and mutual feedback.

Some studies suggest that students prefer to receive help from peers rather than from adults. In Vaughn, Schumm, Klingner and Saumell's (1995) study, the students stated that "students explain it better". In Brooks and Swain's (2009) study, the students believed that peers provided more effective input, suggesting that peers were better able to understand needs. Klingner and Vaughn (2000) reported that as a result of mutual assistance during collaborative strategic reading strategies in ESL content classes, a group of bilingual students of fifth grade significantly improved their scores on an English vocabulary test.

Patterns of interaction among students also contribute to the productivity of pair and small group work. Storch (2001), Storch and Aldosari (2012) and Wanatabe and Swain (2007) suggest that in spite of the different proficiency levels in the second language of students in a pair, the collaborative relationships they establish have a greater impact on their learning than any dominant/passive relationship between them.

The main factors impacting on student-student relationships in a language class include learning attitudes of students, student roles and student types in the evolution of a class as a group. In his study, Littlewood (2000) discovered that, despite the differences in their countries of origin, students from three European countries and eight Asian countries indicated that they liked activities where they could: function as members of a group in which they had common goals to achieve; help maintain a friendly and harmonious atmosphere when working in a group; and, see that their own success would be beneficial not only to themselves but also to other people (for example, their family and other students). One of the conclusions drawn by

Littlewood (p. 34) was that, like European students, Asian students want to learn with their friends in a “friendly and supportive” environment.

Senior (1998, 1999, 2006), in her development of a socio-pedagogical theory of effective classroom teaching, emphasised the evolution of a language class as a group and the significant roles that students played in the development of class cohesion. Senior found that, when studying in a cohesive class, students felt more comfortable, found it easier to relate to their peers and were more prepared to participate in class discussions. Senior (2006) also identified the types of student that contributed to the social development of the class group: students as organisers were those who were in charge of setting up social activities for a class; students as facilitators were those who helped their peers with learning tasks; and students as class characters were those who attracted the attention of the class thanks to their innate ability to create laughter, thus drawing the class together.

### ***3.2.3 Classroom practices***

Learner-centredness is not a method, and it cannot be reduced to a set of teaching techniques or activity types (Tudor, 1992). However, a number of classroom practices are believed to promote the type of teaching and learning that is more learner-centred (Flowerdew, 1998; Johnson, Kimball, Melendez, Myers, Rhea & Travis, 2009; Littlejohn, 1983; Smith & Martin, 2005; Taylor, 1983). Initially, CLT was identified as one way of enabling the development of a learner-centred approach in TESOL (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001; Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). More recently, task-based approaches have been promoted. Tasks involving role play, simulation, information gap filling and problem-solving activities, usually organised as pair work and small group work, are common in a learner-centred communicative classroom. If teaching practices are broadly defined as particular ways in which teachers organise the teaching and learning process (Benson, 2001), pair work and small group work can be considered the main “patterns of activity” (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009, p. 158) in a learner-centred lesson. Storch (2007, p. 143) asserts that pair work and small group work are “a common feature in learner-centred second language (L2) classrooms”.

A number of theoretical and pedagogical arguments support the use of pair and small group work (McDonough, 2004; Storch, 2007). Arguments derived from theories about SLA stress the importance of providing opportunities for language learners to interact by way of pair and small group activities. Long's (1996) updated interaction hypothesis maintains that when working in pairs and small groups, learners receive meaningful input, opportunities for output (as defined by Swain, 1985) and feedback on their attempts (i.e., information about what is ungrammatical in the target language) which together promote SLA. Pedagogical arguments have also been mounted supporting pair and group activities on the basis that students have more time to speak the target language than during teacher-dominated activities, and that students have opportunities to enhance their autonomy and self-directed learning (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Long and Porter, 1985). Studies that provide empirical support for the use of pair and small group activities in language classrooms include those by Mackey, Oliver and Leeman (2003) and Storch and Aldosari (2012). For language learners in particular working with peers and getting ample opportunities to use the target language is vital because "the classroom may provide the sole opportunity to practice using the L2" (Storch & Aldosari, 2012, p. 46). This is particularly important when students have "limited access to input and feedback from native speaker (NS) teachers and to interaction with NSs outside the classroom" (Pilar, Mayo & Pica, 2000, p. 35).

In their study, Pilar, Mayo and Pica (2000) found no significant difference between learner-learner dyads and learner-native speaker dyads participating in communication tasks in terms of generation of input, feedback and output. The study also found that learners used interactional strategies such as scaffolding, completion and self-completion to provide the input, feedback and output that learners need for SLA. In Swain and Lapkin's (2002) study of collaborative dialogue between French immersion students, it was found that pair work enabled learners to notice suggested language changes and to reflect on the language they used. The high percentage of correct post-test structures attested to the positive effects that peer-peer interaction, especially metatalk - "talking it through" as the students described it - had on language learning in general and on problem-solving and knowledge-building in particular.

From a cultural perspective, after drawing on her own group work approach to the teaching of Chinese students and on previous research into the learning styles of Chinese students, Flowerdew (1998) concluded that group work was a potentially appropriate methodological tool for learners of both Chinese and other backgrounds. As she explained, group work would, at its best, correspond to the key Confucian values of cooperation and face. Flowerdew also suggests that with due consideration being given to the influence of culture on learning style preferences, one can develop a “culture-sensitive pedagogy” whose importance has been long acknowledged by Reid (1987).

However, there is empirical evidence that shows that pair work and group work can be greeted with dislike, disinterest, reservation and even doubt (Reid, 1987; Hyde, 1993; McDonough, 2004; Slimani-Rolls, 2003; Thomson, 1996). Based on his research into the affective reactions to pair work by twenty ESL students, Hyde (1993) called into question the value of pair work because of the problems it might cause: personality clashes due to differences in learners’ cultural and behavioural expectations, especially when they came from different cultures; learners implicitly showing approval for the teacher’s authority through their acceptance of partner selection made by the teacher; given the limited number of proficient students in the class and the teacher’s hesitation to move learners around, it might be difficult to cater for learners’ need to change partners or to work with partners with a higher level of proficiency in order to be exposed to “superior data” - a term Hyde borrowed from Prabu (1987); teachers might run the risk of imposing their will on learners when not considering when, why, how, with whom and about what learners wanted to talk; and, of the four modes of interaction surveyed - individual work, pair work, group work and teacher with whole class activity - pair work was rated the least favoured while teacher to whole class activity rated the most popular.

More recent research has supported the negative attitudes of some students towards pair and group work. The students in some studies did not believe that their peers could provide them with the linguistic knowledge beneficial to their language learning (Mackey, McDonough, Fujii & Tatsumi, 2001; McDonough, 2004; Slimani-Rolls, 2003). Some students in McDonough’s (2004) study stated that they did not view pair and small group activities as being useful for their English study, claiming

that it was not helpful talking to their classmates because their friends might “know very little English” or “use the wrong grammar”. Similarly, in their discussion about their perceptions of, and feelings about, working with their fellow classmates some students in Slimani-Rolls’ (2003) study said that they did not think that they could learn from their peers, or that their peers had anything of value to offer. These students expressed their concern about the negative influence that a single member might have on the learning attitude and enthusiasm of a whole group in that the behaviour of the student might demotivate the other students in the group. Taiwanese students participating in Chang’s (2010) study expressed a similar feeling. Although they acknowledged that the class group played an important role in their learning as more motivated classmates and classmates with whom they had a good relationship could impact their motivation positively, they commented that unresponsive and uninterested classmates could impact their motivation negatively.

In her seminal work, Storch (1999, 2002) found four patterns of dyadic interaction amongst students: collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-dominant and dominant-passive, with the first two patterns being more conducive to learning. There were more instances of a transfer of knowledge among students who established collaborative and expert-novice relationships. Dominant-dominant dyads had the largest proportion of instances where there was no transfer of knowledge, and dominant-passive dyads had the largest proportion of instances of missed opportunities for knowledge transfer. There were few requests and explanations among dominant-dominant dyads and very little negotiation of meaning in dominant-passive dyads, suggesting there was little chance for co-construction and extension of knowledge and scaffolded assistance.

In addition to pair work and group work, a number of other learning activities have also been suggested as effective ways of making a class learner-centred (Taylor, 1983; Altan & Trombly, 2001; Johnson et al., 2009). Some activities relate to hands-on activities, writing assignments (Johnson et al., 2009), process writing and awareness-raising of learning strategies and styles (Altan & Trombly, 2001). Other activities focus on the development of learners’ communicative competence. Taylor (1983), for example, recommends activities that allow students to make choices and suggestions so that they exercise both their communicating initiative and learning

initiative. Altan and Trombly (2001) follow the balanced activities approach suggested by Crookes and Chaudron (1991), in which learners go from controlled to guided, then to free activities. Project work has also been promoted as a learner-centred learning activity due to its ability to create “opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a realworld environment by collaborating on a task which they have defined for themselves and which has not been externally imposed” (Fried-Booth, 2002, p. 6).

Other task types that were used in the studies on pair work and group work include collaborative dialogue in oral and writing tasks - talk that involves students in problem-solving and knowledge-building (Swain, 2000). Students may be engaged in collaborative talk or peer-peer interaction to compose together (Storch, 2001) or to discuss a jointly produced text with a reformulation of it (Swain & Lapkin, 2002) or in editing a task in pairs (Storch, 2007). Information gap tasks are also promoted in L2 classes due to their ability to enhance modified interaction among students and to focus attention on form, function and meaning (Pica, Kang & Sauro, 2006). However, for dyadic interaction between learners to be of optimal use, the age of the learner (Oliver, 2000) and the interactional context (Oliver & Mackey, 2003) must be taken into consideration.

At university level, a list of ideas for student-centred teaching has been offered by the University of Glasgow (2004, as cited in O’Neill & McMahon, 2005, pp. 30-31). Some examples at the lecture level are buzz groups (brief student discussions in pairs), pyramids/snowballing (buzz groups developing into larger group discussions), role play and student presentations in class. In addition, student-centred teaching is promoted outside the lecture through group discussions, debates, field-trips and independent projects. Ideas also include making assessment student-centred through more use of formative assessment which informs both teachers and students about learning outcomes so that teaching can be adjusted to assist students in achieving the objectives of the course (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007) and in focusing their remedial attention on problem areas (O’Neill & McMahon, 2005).

At a pre-university entry level, the international students in Smith and Martin’s (2005) study were prepared for Australian academic life by being involved in peer

teaching and evaluation. In the researchers' judgement, the program was truly learner-centred because it was designed to hand over to the students the responsibility to decide the skills they needed to focus on. The learning arrangement allowed the teacher to retreat from centre-stage and to be able, therefore, to devote more time to respond to student needs, strengths and weaknesses. The course was successful in increasing communication and interaction among the students, facilitating student comprehension of new concepts and building up a supportive student network that extended beyond the course.

However, most research cautions that, whatever the activities may be, it is important to consider: implementing a gradual approach in order to win students over, especially those who are used to a teacher-dominated system (Altan & Trombly, 2001) and placing more emphasis on the learning process self-directed learners go through than on the learning outcomes (Thomson, 1992). It has also been recommended (Cuban, 1983; Johnson et al., 2009) that the physical setup of a classroom allow for flexibility and mobility so that students can get together quickly, and teachers and students can move around freely.

Some studies have been carried out into the use of CLT, which is believed to have contributed to the development of learner-centredness. Although the provision of meaningful communicative activities to students was "unrealistic and impracticable in most Vietnamese settings" in the 1990s (Le, 2001, p. 35), more recently there has been a trend towards the adoption of the communicative approach in ELT (Huynh, 2006, as cited in Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012, p. 38; Utsumi & Doan, 2009). A number of studies have investigated teachers' beliefs and practices concerning CLT (Lewis & McCook, 2002; Pham, 2007) and their attitudes towards CLT (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Nguyen THA, 2002). With reference to learner-centredness, these studies report that students express preference for pair work and group work over traditional whole-class settings (Huynh, 2006, as cited in Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012, p. 38); that both teachers and students show favourable attitudes towards pair work and group work (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012); and that learner-centred activities and increased teacher-student interaction have been suggested as solutions to teaching problems faced by teachers in their daily work (Utsumi & Doan, 2009). It has also been found that teachers and students believe that it is important for teachers to develop in

students a sense of autonomy and responsibility (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012), and that teachers show respect to students as individuals and accept feedback and disagreement from students (Nguyen THA, 2002).

### ***3.2.4 Implementation issues***

The educational values and pedagogical advantages of learner-centred teaching have been acknowledged (Benson & Voller, 1997; Nunan, 1999; Wenden, 2002). Lambert and McCombs (1998) assert that the approach should be adopted if a progressive and participatory approach is to be put in place to benefit learners. It is believed that the approach will work for any learning context and for any group of learners (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986), and that the approach is the way forward for schools of the future and for the learner of the twenty-first century (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). The learner-centred approach has been adopted in a number of countries: in the USA, learner-centred education has long been embraced and is often referred to as individualised instruction (Allwright, 2006; Altman & James, 1980); in a wide range of developing countries, learner-centred education is often seen as “a policy panacea” which can offer solutions to a variety of educational issues in differing contexts (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 427).

The reasons for shifting to a learner-centred approach differ widely. For example, in Namibia a learner-centred curriculum was implemented because it was seen as “an effective antidote to the stifling teacher-centred practices used in the previous apartheid system” (O’Sullivan, 2004, p. 585). The introduction of a learner-centred approach was considered to be a necessary reform to provide an education for all due to its aim of meeting the learning needs of all learners. O’Sullivan’s case study reported the extent to which a learner-centred curriculum was adopted in primary schools, a great majority of which were in rural and isolated areas. In Thailand, the introduction of the learner-centred approach was considered as an important educational reform that could help turn the country into a knowledge-based society and economy (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf & Moni, 2006). The National Education Act of 1999 made it mandatory to shift from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness in the instruction of all subjects, including English (de Segovia &

Hardison, 2009; Nonkukhetkhong, et al., 2006) and to apply CLT to the teaching of EFL in schools (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009). In Lesotho, the requirement for a learner-centred approach was also laid down in the revised curriculum for primary and secondary education that called for a move from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach in the teaching of all subjects (Matsau, 2007). With regards to language teaching, the syllabus for Sesetho as the first language and for English as the second language dictated what learner-centred strategies were to be used.

In the Vietnamese context, the concept of the active learner and active learning is believed to be related to the concept of the learner-centred approach (Dang, 2006a). Dang stated that his study was conducted in response to the call made by the *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010* for more active and self-directed learners. The tertiary class Dang (2006b) observed was taught as part of a pilot project undertaken in compliance with the university's commitment to learner-centredness.

Empirical data from these studies show that the implementation of a learner-centred approach is not without problems. There can be a discrepancy between curriculum policy and classroom practice - a gap between "rhetoric and reality" (Nunan, 2003, p. 604) - the existence of which reflects a loss of coherence in Johnson's (1989) model of the coherent curriculum. For example, even though the use of CLT was made compulsory in Thai schools, hardly any communicative interaction between teachers and students or between students and students was observed (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009), and traditional teaching techniques prevailed (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006). Similarly, in the Namibian context, research evidence indicates non-implementation of a learner-centred approach with the practice of rote learning predominating (O'Sullivan, 2004). Schweisfurth (2011) suggests that ESL teachers in Uganda have had difficulty breaking away from didactic teaching partly because of inadequate skills in English as the language of instruction and they have, therefore, chosen to keep the classroom under control through a teacher-centred approach.

A second implementation issue relates to the teacher's ability to acquire the skills needed to adopt a learner-centred approach (Altman, 1980; Brandes & Ginnis, 1986;

Johnson et al., 2009; Pillay, 2002; Tudor, 1992, 1993). The skills designated vary: of special significance to Brandes and Ginnis (1986) are communication skills; Tudor (1992, 1993) finds it essential for language teachers to acquire skills covering personal, educational and course planning; Johnson et al. (2009) emphasise the need for individual teachers to equip themselves with planning skills because any shift from a traditional approach to a non-traditional approach requires careful planning to implement the intended change and to assess the progress made; Altman (1980, p. 15) argues that teachers need skills as “diagnosticians” to identify learner needs, learner characteristics, learner preferred learning styles and to respond to learner demands for teacher attention and direction. A teacher’s ability to diagnose is important because “any learner-centred design cannot assume universality of needs of the learner” (Pillay, 2002, p. 97). As learners of different cultural backgrounds have varying conceptions of learning, it is a dilemma to design a learner-centred program that can satisfactorily meet the needs of all cultural groups (Pillay, 2002).

Although a direction forward for teachers has been proposed for some time (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Schweisfurth, 2011; Strevens, 1980), they are still lacking the requisite skills. Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006, p. 8) suggest that teacher training and teacher development are the only effective solutions to avoiding a mismatch between “intent and practice” and between “knowledge and outcome”. What is needed are teachers who are “dedicated, highly organised, able to plan ahead and willing to spend a great deal of extra time in preparatory work” (Bennett, 1976, p. 160, as cited in Brandes and Ginnis, 1986), or who are “more sophisticated, better trained, more thoroughly aware of what and why [they are doing] than before” (Strevens, 1980, p. 17), or who “must be more than an expert in the subject matter of the course; they must master social dynamics, multitasking, goal establishment, and performance assessment” (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 148). Brandes and Ginnis (1986) observe that the training in these skills is a rare component in teacher education.

Therefore, the optimal course of action is to train teachers so that they can use the learner-centred approach effectively (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Strevens, 1980). Brandes and Ginnis (1986) assert that these skills can be learned because they are not innate abilities. Other measures recommended include: improving teachers’ English proficiency level (O’Sullivan, 2004; de Segovia & Hardison, 2009), developing their

understanding of methodologies (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Matsau, 2007; Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006) and using “cascade training” as a form of on-site development with teachers in the same area where they can share ideas among themselves (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009) through teacher networking in a school, region, district and even across the whole country (Matsau, 2007).

A third implementation issue is thought to arise from teachers’ and learners’ conceptualisation of their roles in the learner-centred approach (Harmer, 1995). Teachers and learners may have difficulty making the transition from their culturally or traditionally defined roles to their newly assigned roles in a learner-centred system (Zophy, 1982). Some teachers fear that their role as facilitator in a learner-centred approach will take away from them the power and authority they deserve (Harmer, 1995). They may, therefore, have great trouble resolving the conflict between “the claims of authority of the teacher on the one hand” and “the claims of autonomy of the learner ... on the other” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 191). Similarly, if learners are accustomed to viewing themselves as sitting and receiving and the teacher as standing and delivering (Johnson et al., 2009; Zophy, 1982), they may not be prepared to take on an independent or self-directive role as it is expected of them in a learner-centred class (Tudor, 1996; Zophy, 1982). They may also express anxiety or scepticism, feeling that teachers working as facilitators are not doing their teaching job properly (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986). Peeke (1993) and Felder and Brent (1996) report some student resistance to, and student disappointment with, the use of a learner-centred approach which may be due to a gap between student expectations and student learning experience.

If teachers and learners are not ready to assume their new roles, they will not undertake new kinds of tasks and activities because “roles dictate tasks” (Lee & van Patten, 1995, p. 4). Three measures have emerged as keys to positively predisposing teachers and learners towards the learner-centred approach: awareness-raising, providing a supportive environment and teacher and learner training. It has been suggested (Allwright, 1978; Altman, 1972, as cited in Logan, 1980, p. 108; Harmer, 1995; Nunan, 1999) that it is important for teachers to realise that the fundamental tenet of sharing power and responsibility does not necessarily weaken their role, but on the contrary, can strengthen it. Early on Allwright (1978) indicated that the

teacher's management task involves provision of samples of the target language, guidance about the nature of the target language and management activities. In his view, the task is so complex and onerous that it is an act of irresponsibility on the part of the teacher either to exclusively assume responsibility or to abdicate responsibility altogether; rather, the teacher's balancing act is to share responsibility with the learner. As the demands made on the skills of the teacher are so great, the teacher is not devalued or disempowered; instead, their role is enhanced or simply changes in a learner-centred classroom (Altman, 1972, as cited in Logan, 1980, p. 108; Nunan, 1999). It has been recommended that learners be initiated into a learner-centred approach in order to develop their understanding of it. Holec (1981, p. 27) suggested a gradual "deconditioning process" and a gradual "process of acquiring" through which learners first critically examine their beliefs about language learning and their roles and then acquire the knowledge that enables them to accept responsibility for their learning.

Secondly, communication can be used to create a supportive environment for both teachers and learners (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Johnson et al., 2009). Teachers may find constructive and supportive feedback from colleagues by sharing with them ideas, experiences, failures and successes in their implementation of a learner-centred teaching style (Johnson et al., 2009); they can also consult other professionals and educational research when necessary (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986). Teachers should discuss with learners their respective roles, expectations and responsibilities, preferably early in the course (Johnson et al., 2009). When teachers spend time talking with learners who are not ready for, or suspicious of, new approaches, their doubts are often dispelled (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986).

Finally, training to prepare teachers and students for their new roles is critical (Dickinson, 1992; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Scharle & Szabo, 2000). Learners need training to enable them to take on an active and independent role (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). To this end, many learner development activities have been suggested (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Dickinson, 1992; Matsau, 2007; Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006; O'Sullivan, 2004; Scharle & Szabo, 2000). In addition, empirical data show that it is imperative that students change their negative attitude towards English resulting from their lack of interest in the language as a school subject or their failure

to recognise its usefulness in and outside the classroom (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009), and that students be given practice in learner-centred types of learning such as problem-based learning (O'Sullivan, 2004). Teacher preparation, including teacher evaluation and teacher development (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1993), is central. Although Nunan (1988) suggests teacher self-analysis and evaluation of their teaching as a general principle for professional self-development, this is equally applicable to teachers who are learning to take on their new roles in a learner-centred classroom. Self-assessment gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on their management of a lesson or even a segment of a lesson to see what they should build on or compensate for in order to improve their performance (Nunan, 1988).

At a more specific level, Tudor (1992, 1993) proposes that teachers develop three sets of skills as the key to the successful implementation of a learner-centred approach to teaching: interpersonal skills, which stress the role of maturity and intuition; educational skills, which see language teaching as an educational endeavour rather than skills training; and specialist or course planning skills, which call for greater tolerance of uncertainty when course planning cannot be predefined. Tudor also highlights the facilitative role of institutions in helping teachers acquire these skills through teacher development programs and ongoing support.

The final implementation issue is concerned with the contextual factors or constraints in which a learner-centred approach is used: cultural factors (O'Sullivan, 2004), learning resources and facilities (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Matsau, 2007; Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006) and stakeholder involvement, especially that of teachers (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006). Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006) emphasise that teachers' voices must be heard, and de Segovia & Hardison (2009) argue that other education stakeholders should be consulted about the formulation and implementation of policies on learner-centredness. Felder and Brent (1996) stress the significance of stakeholder involvement in their study which indicates that, if academics at universities are not effectively engaged, they may not invest time and effort in using innovative teaching methods such as student-centred teaching. Although the students in Lea et al.'s (2003) study had clear expectations of what student-centred learning was, some of

their expectations were not satisfied due to the limitations of the existing pedagogy and constrained resources.

Within the Vietnamese teaching-learning context, Dang (2008) suggests that the constraints on the development of a learner-centred curriculum may be due to the shortcomings of the learning tasks used. He indicates that the shortcomings stem from a failure to design learning tasks in accordance with the five basic constructivist principles set out by Boyle (2000); namely, authenticity, interaction, voice and ownership in the learning process, knowledge construction process and metacognition. In a different context in Vietnam, Dang (2006b) found that a learner-centred approach was successfully implemented because of the favourable conditions that existed exclusively in the class he observed, not in other mainstream classes, and because of the expertise of the four well-trained and experienced teachers. Further, the freedom the teachers and students had in syllabus design and selection of tasks, materials and assessment forms, the teachers' and learners' awareness of their respective roles and the good physical conditions of the classroom were instrumental in supporting the implementation.

Despite such successes, there remains some disquiet about the ways in which the approach has been conceptualised and implemented. O'Neill (1991, p. 293) suggests that the dichotomy between learner-centred and teacher-centred approaches is "simplistic and misleading" and challenges the widely held belief that the former are superior to the latter. From his observation of an ostensibly learner-centred lesson, he points out that sometimes a lesson can neatly fit the description of a learner-centred model, but totally fails to respond to the learner's needs, interests and abilities at a basic level. In his analysis, he describes "a worrying lack of evidence", "scientific or empirical" (p. 301) that a learner-centred lesson with its open structure, minimal teacher intervention and group activities is better or more effective than a teacher-centred lesson. On this basis, O'Neill argues that it makes more sense to describe good teaching in terms of "good lessons" and to do "*ordinary things extraordinarily well*" rather than to tolerate student neglect under the guise of learner-centredness (p. 301, italics original). These "*ordinary things*" include factors such as the teacher's choice and use of "content, presentation, and phasing ..., body language, ... verbal

language, ... questions and various tasks to arouse and then to sustain [student] interest in a lesson” (p. 301).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Holliday (1994) are concerned that the learner-centred approach does not pay attention to the wider context in which learning takes place. Hutchinson and Waters state that the learner-centred approach is often “misleading” in that it stresses the role of the learner and overlooks the roles of other people involved in the learning process (p. 72). They argue that learning should not be divorced from the context in which it occurs, since “learning is not just a mental process, it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society” (p. 72). This process of negotiation is seen in terms of the means that learners use to reach the target set by society, and individual learners may follow different paths at different speeds to reach that target. Simon (1999) points out that the extreme focus on the individual learner runs the risk of the teacher not being able to respond to the needs of all the students in the class. Holliday (1994, p. 9) highlights the need to consider “the wider context outside the classroom”. In his opinion, the concept of learner-centredness is a “myth” due to its vagueness (p. 175): it fails to specify with any rigour or clarity its ideals and intentions and the ways these can be achieved. Holliday divides the ELT community into two sectors: one including Britain, Australia and North America (i.e., the BANA sector) and the other encompassing tertiary, secondary and primary English language education in the rest of the world (i.e., the TESEP sector). He points out that the lack of direction as to how to implement a learner-centred approach may induce ELT teachers in the TESEP sector who are more familiar with didactic teaching to think that a learner-centred approach can be realised by giving learners complete freedom. He is also of the opinion that a learner-centred approach assumes a great deal of understanding about learners whereas little is virtually known about them and the diverse cultures they come from. He observes that learner-centredness has as its tenets “a set of naive ideas which belongs to the BANA pro-academic culture and which inhibits technological transfer to TESEP situations” (p. 175).

### **3.3 Chapter summary**

Two main issues have been considered in the literature review. The first concerns the key factors that can influence the adoption of a teaching approach. Three sets of factors have been discussed: contextual factors, learner factors and teacher factors. In particular, teachers' individual philosophies of teaching, which reflect their systems of beliefs and values about language teaching and learning, have been examined in depth as they guide teachers' teaching practices and interactive decisions in the classroom.

The second issue is the conceptualisation and application of a learner-centred approach to TESOL. Conceptualisations of learner-centredness focus on the role of the teacher, the role of the student, classroom practices and implementation issues. A learner-centred approach to language education can be defined as one which is based on the learner and is for the learner. In general, the approach puts learners at the centre of the learning process and aims to provide them with a learning environment in which learner variables such as needs, characteristics, beliefs, diversity and individuality are taken into consideration and learner involvement, participation and independence are encouraged. It has been shown that, to create such a learning environment, the teacher needs to take on a facilitative role whilst maintaining a collaborative relationship with learners. A number of classroom practices are believed to be capable of promoting a learner-centred approach, but issues that may be encountered during the implementation of learner-centred education must be taken into account.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to guide the present study. The chapter is divided into seven sections: the first section gives an overview of qualitative research as the research paradigm of the study; the second section presents the rationale behind the selection of case study as the overall framework for the study and the specific strategies used in conducting it; the third section provides demographic information about the research participants; the fourth section describes the three data collection methods employed for the case study: questionnaires, interviews and observations; the fifth section provides a description of the data analysis process; the sixth section addresses the ethical issues inherent in the study; and the seventh section gives a summary of the chapter.

### **4.1 The research paradigm**

This study is located within an overarching qualitative research paradigm, underpinned by the ontological belief that there are multiple truths or realities resulting from the different ways in which reality is perceived by people - in this instance, researchers, research participants and readers of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2007; Glense & Peshkin, 1992; McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Within this paradigm, reality is considered to be socially constructed by the meanings people give to the events they live through or the observations they make (Bryman, 2008; Glense & Peshkin, 1992). Knowledge is created by people whose interpretations of the world are influenced by personal tastes, experiences and opinions (Glense & Peshkin, 1992; McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Knowledge is, therefore, not only subjective but also inter-subjective as it incorporates a number of varying and contradictory perspectives (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Therefore, within the qualitative paradigm is the axiological assumption that a qualitative study and the information it collects from the field are always value-laden, and that both researchers and participants bring their own values to the study (Creswell, 2007; McGregor & Murnane, 2010).

The qualitative paradigm is particularly suited to the present study, which sets out to explore TESOL practitioners' conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach to teaching. A qualitative methodology allows the study to account for the different meanings that teachers give to the concept of learner-centredness. It identifies their beliefs about a learner-centred approach and the different ways they translate those beliefs into everyday teaching practices, both as individual teachers and as members of a group. Thus, the methodology enables the study "to capture authentically the lived experience of people" (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2010, p. 720). In addition, qualitative research uses natural inquiry as an effective means to acquire a thorough understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and is particularly pertinent to a case study approach.

## **4.2 Case study**

A case study approach was selected based on the premise found in the literature that a case is a "bounded system" (Merriam, 1988, p. xiv; Stake, 1995, p. 47). In Stake's (1995, p. 2) words, "the case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing" or "an integrated system". Bounded systems involve "those in which the boundaries have a common sense obviousness, e.g., an individual teacher, a single school, or perhaps an innovatory programme" (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1983, p. 3, as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 10). Simons (2009, p. 4) argues that policies and processes can also be considered as cases when focus is given to "the singularity and uniqueness of the policy and or process".

The present study utilises these aforementioned definitions of case study as they point to the ability of case study research to uncover the uniqueness of the case being investigated. For instance, Stake (1995; p. xi) states, "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances". Stake's viewpoint is similar to that of Merriam (1988, p. 16), which defines the qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit". A case study can also provide a thorough or deep understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Gerring, 2007; Richards, 2003; Simons, 2009; Swanborn, 2010).

As Yin comments:

*A case study is an empirical inquiry that*

- *Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when*
- *The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.* (2009, p. 18; italics original)

However, unlike Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995), Yin observes that it is not always possible to identify the phenomenon and the context in which the phenomenon manifests itself. Therefore, the operational definition that has been adopted in this research is that a case study is an in-depth investigation of a bounded system undertaken with a view to gaining a rich understanding of the possible phenomenon central to the research questions.

A case study approach was adopted for two main reasons. Firstly, in principle it can generate in-depth understandings of the phenomenon being investigated; that is, a case study approach is appropriate to the finely-grained analysis needed to address the research questions adequately. As an approach to qualitative research, the case study identifies itself with natural inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995) and intensive research (Swanborn, 2010), through which thorough understandings of a phenomenon can be acquired. In the present study, teachers were observed in their classroom (their natural working environment), and their actions were faithfully recorded and their views obtained through interview (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). In this way, data reflected the meanings, understandings and lived experiences participants brought with them to their working life. Interpretations were based on an analysis of all the data collected. No data was dismissed as irrelevant or insignificant (McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Stake, 1995), and no prior assumptions were made about the importance of, or about the relationships between, sets or categories of data (Patton, 2002).

Secondly, the case study is an appropriate way of addressing the research questions. The first and second research questions (i.e., what do teachers understand by the term “a learner-centred approach to TESOL” and to what extent do they think they

use a learner-centred approach) are “what” questions and are exploratory in nature while the third question (i.e., in what ways do teachers’ actual practices reflect their beliefs about their teaching approach) is a “how” question. Both these types of questions can be soundly answered by means of a case study (Yin, 2009). The fourth research question, which is intended to examine the implications of the degree of fit between teachers’ stated beliefs and teachers’ observed practices, can also be effectively addressed by a case study. As Merriam (1988) argues, the case study should be employed as a research design in studies that aim to deal with critical problems of educational practice and to widen the knowledge base of different aspects of education so that insightful understandings gained from a case study can inform policy-making, improve practice and direct future research.

An interpretive and instrumental case study was specifically selected as most appropriate for the study. According to Stake (1995, p. 77), in an instrumental case study “the case serves to help us understand phenomena or relationships within it”. Therefore, an instrumental case study allows for a focus on the phenomenon of teachers’ conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach to TESOL. The researcher is able to gather “as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 28), thus an interpretive case study matches the purpose of this study. On the basis of analysis and synthesis of the data collected, the study enabled interpretation of the meanings and the practices teachers attributed to the concept of learner-centredness and allowed the phenomenon to be seen from the perspectives of research participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This leads to a profound understanding of the phenomenon observed.

A single site case study design was used, adopting the principles of purposive sampling described by Creswell (2007), Patton (2005), Simons (2009) and Stake (1995, 2005). The case site selected was the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature (EF), University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. As a faculty of a well-established public university, the EF has developed a specific context for ELT. Investigation into the research phenomenon within the particularity and complexity of the EF was predicted to yield interesting insights into teachers’ perceptions and uses of learner-

centred approaches. The EF thus qualifies an “information-rich case for study in depth”, as required by the principle of purposive sampling (Patton, 2005, p. 2). It was anticipated that much could be learned from the chosen case to illuminate the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2005; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2005), to provide readers of the case study with the “opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2005, p. 451) or to help “maximise what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4).

The case was examined at three levels consistent with Creswell’s (2007) guidelines. The site level was the EF; the participant level was the examination of the teachers at the EF, especially the group of teachers who were observed and interviewed; and the event or process level was in the classroom where observations were recorded and interview sessions conducted. The extent to which attention was focused on these three levels varied according to the purpose of each stage of the study. From the outset of the study, attention was paid to the EF so that a detailed profile of the EF as the research site was developed. During the first stage of the study, close attention was given to teachers at the EF as they completed questionnaires and participated in follow-up interviews. In the second stage, when classroom observations and post-observation interviews were conducted, attention was directed to both teachers and classroom events.

The study adopted the following measures to ensure trustworthiness for qualitative research proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was established through triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field with an audit trail. Data triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was achieved through the use of multiple data sources and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978) through the use of diversified methods to study a phenomenon - questionnaires, interviews and observation. According to Denzin, the reason for data triangulation is that, to understand a social phenomenon, it is necessary to involve more than one individual. In this sense, data triangulation can “develop a robust ‘fix’ on the case while at the same time allowing for the subtle nuances of interpretation and insight that multiple perspectives can provide” (Richards, 2011, p. 213). Denzin (p. 302) also adds that the rationale behind methodological triangulation is that “the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another; and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while

overcoming their unique deficiencies”. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were two other means employed to ensure the robustness of the data. The observation of teachers took four months; during this time, efforts were made to build up trust with the teachers to facilitate the elicitation of rich data from them about the phenomenon under study. Moreover, an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was left to ensure the transparency of the study, clearly indicating where the information came from (e.g., from the questionnaires, the interviews or the observations of the lessons taught).

Member checking, also called member validation, was not adopted in this study. This is, however, one measure that is believed to be capable of guaranteeing the credibility of a case study (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The transcripts of the interviews, the preliminary findings of the study and the draft interpretations of the findings were not sent to the teachers for comments as they indicated that they could not participate further in the study due to the commitments they had to fulfil in their private and professional lives. (Three teachers were busy with their new born babies; four with their post graduate studies abroad; and the other three with their studies and teaching in Vietnam.) Therefore, every effort was made to ensure that the transcripts were accurate reproductions of what the teachers said, and that the interpretation of the findings was data-driven.

The case study was designed to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Simons, 2009, p. 3) which was a “rich description” (Simons, 2009, p. 153) to achieve transferability. The steps taken towards this end included the keeping of a research diary and detailed presentation and reasoned discussion of the findings. These measures allow a vivid description of the data and a thorough analysis of the research issues and are able to provide readers with “vicarious experience” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). In this way, readers should feel as if they were having the experience themselves and so make “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake & Trumbull, 1982) when relating aspects of this case to their own context or to other cases they know.

The research diary also supported the study’s dependability. In the diary, records were kept of the researcher’s “thoughts, feelings, reflections, ideas, plans” (Richards,

2003, p. 252) and “the researcher’s actual behaviour” (Swanborn, 2010, p. 75). The entries in the diary were written up as notes or complete paragraphs or tables to best present what was thought, felt and done.

To establish confirmability, caution was exercised to maintain the researcher’s impartiality so that other researchers would have seen and heard the same things if they had been in the field, or would have reached comparable conclusions if they had been involved in data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Despite the fact that there was an element of subjectivity involved in the conduct of this qualitative case study, the researcher aimed to remain objective by not allowing her experience of teaching at the EF to influence the way she carried out the research. As the interviewer, the researcher asked pertinent questions (i.e., questions relating directly to the issue discussed) and followed the principle of “listening carefully to the people who are being researched” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 2). As the observer, the researcher took Simons’ (2009) advice: observers should stay open and see differently so that their previous knowledge and preconceptions will not prevent them from seeing what is actually there in the field and what is worth recording. Accordingly, the researcher did not have a pre-determined number of lesson observations she needed to conduct, and she invited the teachers to account for their classroom practices rather than making assumptions about their motives. As the data analyst, the researcher used inductive reasoning or inductive analysis (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007; McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002), not serendipity of choice, in the analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

The selection of case study as the overarching framework for this study means that its findings cannot be generalised (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009). However, this is not a limitation as it is. Because the intent of the study is to achieve in-depth rather than broad understandings of the phenomenon being researched, the case study is an appropriate research approach due to its problem-focused and context-specific nature (Merriam, 1998). In addition, as noted above, case study research does allow for “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake & Trumbull, 1982).

### 4.3 Participants

This section gives a brief description of the research participants. During Stage One of the study, the teaching staff at the EF were invited to complete either Version 1 or Version 2 of the questionnaire. Version 1 (Appendix 1) was used for the teachers who were teaching language skills-based classes for Year 1 and Year 2 students at the time the study was conducted; Version 2 (Appendix 2) for the teachers who had taught skills-based classes but were currently teaching specialised subjects, such as Culture, Literature and Linguistics, to Year 3 and Year 4 students. For this reason, the statements about teachers' classroom practices in Section 2 of the questionnaire are in the present tense in Version 1 and in the past tense in Version 2. The returned questionnaires that were used for data analysis were completed by 36 teachers. Table 4.1 gives a brief description of the respondents and Appendix 3 provides detailed demographic information about them.

Table 4.1: Number of teacher respondents

	Female	Male	Total
Year 1 & 2 Teachers	15	2	17
Year 3 & 4 Teachers	12	7	19
Total teacher respondents	27	9	36

Drawing on the cohort of teachers who completed the questionnaire (n=36), a smaller group (n = 10) of Year 1 and Year 2 teachers participated in self-selected face-to-face interviews (see Appendix 4 for a detailed description of these participants). This group of teachers (Table 4.2) also participated in Stage Two of the study; specifically, they had their lessons observed and participated in individual interviews.

Table 4.2: Number of teacher interviewees and observed teachers

	Female	Male	Total
Year 1 Teachers	4	1	5
Year 2 Teachers	4	1	5
Total teachers	8	2	10

#### 4.4 Data collection methods

The case study was conducted from February to May, 2010, involving two stages of investigation. The figure below outlines the processes of data collection and data analysis of the case study that allowed the research questions to be answered.

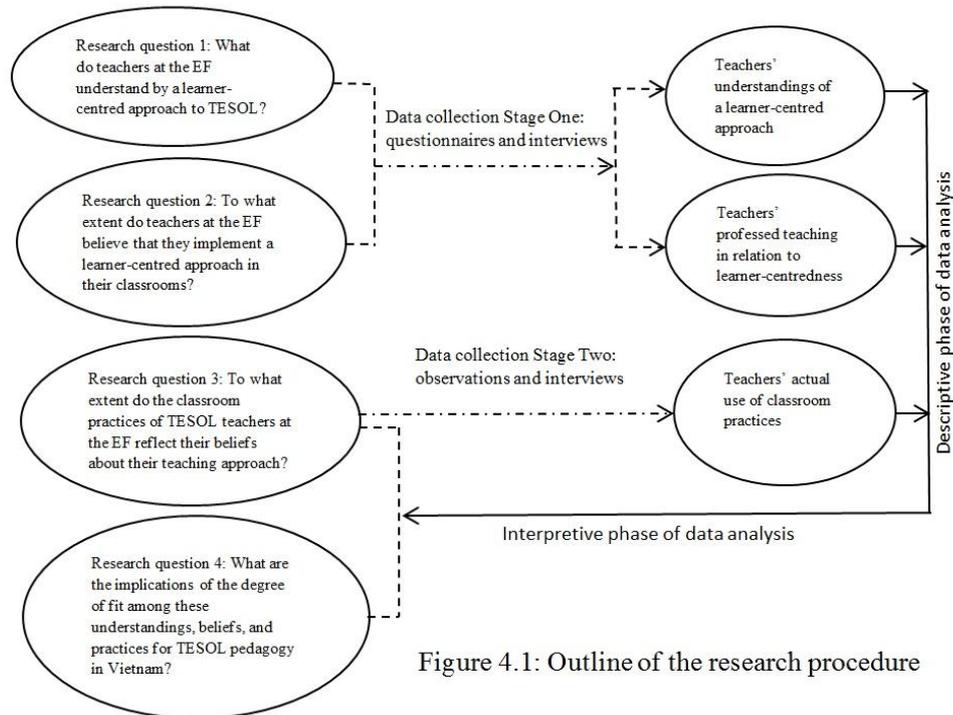


Figure 4.1: Outline of the research procedure

The study followed a mixed methods design involving questionnaires and interviews during Stage One. Mixed methods research has been defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 17) as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study”. The use of a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods in case studies has been supported by Merriam (1988), Simons (2009), Swanborn (2010) and Yin (2009). Although a survey is a common method of collecting data in quantitative research, it can be used in the case study (Yin, 2009). Merriam (1988, p. 10) states, “Any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used in a case study, although certain techniques are used more than others”. Similarly, Yin (2009, p. 19) indicates that “Some case study research

goes beyond being a type of qualitative research, by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence”.

While the combination within a single research project of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their associated methods has been criticised, such as by Howe (1988), more recently support for mixed methods has grown based on the premise that the integration of mixed methods can produce a more complete picture of the research problem (Denscombe, 2008; Feilzer, 2010). Feilzer points out that mixed methods provide researchers with different means to examine different aspects or layers of a phenomenon, thus resulting in a more thorough or enriched understanding of the phenomenon than can a single method. Yin (2006, p. 41) stresses that the integration of mixed methods within a single study can produce “converging evidence, presumably more compelling than might have been produced by any single method alone”.

During Stage One of the study, the questionnaires were sent via email to all teaching staff at the EF. Following the practice of concurrently collecting quantitative data and qualitative data from the same survey (Bryman, 2006), both types of data were gathered from the questionnaire. Qualitative data were obtained from respondents’ answers to the open-ended questions in Section 3 of the questionnaire while quantitative data were obtained from Section 1, which collected demographic information about respondents and from Section 2, which asked respondents to indicate how often they used the classroom practices under investigation.

Following submission of the completed questionnaires, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of staff. These interviews were semi-structured - “the type of interview [that] entails more structured questions, along the lines of a formal survey” (Yin 2009, p. 108). The intent of the interviews was to obtain qualitative data that can add depth and richness to quantitative data (i.e., questionnaire responses) (Adams, Fujii & Mackey, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Neuman, 2011). In this way, the interviews provided the complementarity characteristic of a mixed methods approach (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

Stage Two of the study employed two qualitative methods that are commonly used in case studies: observations and interviews (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995; Swanborn, 2010), with interviews being conducted right after lesson observations.

Taken together, the use of three data collection methods for this case study - questionnaires, interviews and observations - guarantees triangulation as more fully discussed earlier (pp. 106-107). Different sets of data derived from different data collection methods are brought together in order to minimise the chance of making errors or reaching wrong or hasty conclusions (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Another reason for triangulation is that, if data from different sources converge, it enhances the confidence with which data are analysed and interpreted (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Swanborn, 2010). The degree of coherence between what the teachers believed they did and what they actually did in their teaching was assessed by pulling together the data sets collected. In addition, triangulation was used for “completeness”, as identified by Jick (1983): the data collection methods were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Data gathered by one instrument could inform the use of another instrument at another stage or at the same stage of the study. For example, observation suggested questions that needed to be included in the interview. As one method obtained one kind of data that another method could not, the use of several methods meant a wide range of data was amassed. Meanings that were obscure in classroom observation were followed up during interview (Simon, 2009), and issues that were not discussed in interview could be pursued through observation (Patton, 2002).

#### ***4.4.1 Questionnaires***

The self-administered written questionnaire had two versions: Version 1 and Version 2; and each version was divided into three sections. Section 1 and Section 2 consisted of a number of closed-choice questions which, according to Fowler (2009), offer an efficient way of collecting data as respondents are asked the same set of questions and are given the same set of answers to choose from. Section 3 consisted of open questions that gave respondents the option of answering the questions in

their own words. This type of question has, in Fowler's (2009) opinion, the potential to generate answers that cannot be predicted by researchers. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that it presented respondents with a range of simple through to more demanding tasks. As a consequence, a high rate of response was anticipated. The questions for the questionnaire were based on a systematic literature review.

The questionnaire was trialled before it was used in the research. Three Vietnamese TESOL teachers who were doing their Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Education at a university in Australia, and four teachers at the EF participated in the trial. After due consideration was given to the feedback, changes were made to the questionnaire. One change related to the instructions to make them clearer and more exact. The other change was made to the wording of some questions (e.g., the phrase "activities using a teacher-with-whole-class mode" was used as a replacement for the term "lockstep activities").

Section 1 of the questionnaire was intended to seek demographic information that could help construct a profile of respondents as well as information, if any, about respondents' exposure to a learner-centred approach. The questions in Section 1 asked about respondents' gender, age group, teaching experience, qualifications, the level they were currently teaching and whether or not they had learned about learner-centredness. As such, these questions fit into de Vaus' (2002) category of questions about respondents' attributes or characteristics. Following Stes, Gijbels and Van Petegem (2008, p. 262), the present study used an interval of five years for asking about teachers' teaching experience, with less than five years of teaching experience meaning "little experience", five to ten years "medium experience", and more than ten years "high experience". If teachers start teaching right after graduation from university (commonly at the age of 22 in Vietnam) and have less than five years' teaching experience, they usually fall in the first age group (27 or under) whereas teachers with 5-10 years' experience usually belong to the second age group (28-37), and teachers with more than 10 years' experience to the third age group (38 and over).

Section 2 of the questionnaire consisted of 30 statements that aimed to investigate respondents' use of classroom practices in general and practices related to a learner-

centred approach in particular. A majority of these statements were written by the researcher based on review of the relevant literature. Several statements focussed on the key ideas of learner-centredness, such as attention to students' needs, characteristics and feedback (e.g., Statements 3, 8, 20, 22 and 28), opportunity for student choice and autonomy (e.g., Statements 6, 7, 21 and 27) and the relationship between teacher and students (e.g., Statements 5, 11, 14 and 23). Some other statements were concerned with practices that can promote learner-centredness: organising pair work, small group work and project work and using activities such as games and role play (e.g., Statements 13 and 30). Other statements referred to general classroom practices in which the role of the teacher (e.g., Statements 1, 2, 9, 12, 16, 18, 19, 24 and 25) or the degree of flexibility of the teacher (e.g., Statements 4, 15 and 17) featured strongly. Three statements were based on an understanding of the EF (as presented in Chapter 2). For example, Statements 26 and 29 were formulated based on the knowledge that course objectives and materials were set by the EF. Statement 10 was developed on the understanding that teachers at the EF could use teaching materials of their own choice. As no needs analysis was conducted at the faculty level, no statements that pointed to a possibility that teachers could get to know students' needs by means of an official needs assessment by the EF were included.

The statements focused on six common aspects of teaching that teachers had to attend to in their teaching; that is to say, course and lesson objectives (Statements 4, 5 and 26), needs analysis (Statements 20, 22 and 25), lesson planning (Statements 1, 15, 24 and 28), teaching techniques (Statements 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 18, 27 and 30), teaching materials (Statements 10 and 29), testing and assessment and evaluation of teaching (Statements 2, 7, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21 and 23). Statements related to the same aspect of teaching were not grouped together or put next to each other. Such an arrangement served the purpose of making respondents think more carefully before choosing an option. The statements contained verbs denoting actions rather than beliefs or states of mind. Respondents were asked to indicate their choice by ticking the appropriate box (Always/Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never). Written in this way, the statements enabled the collection of information about teachers' behaviour (de Vaus, 2002) and about the extent to which teachers used or had used the classroom practices under investigation.

Section 3 of the questionnaire was composed of five open questions that were intended to investigate teachers' understandings of general TESOL issues and of learner-centred approaches in TESOL in particular. Questions 1, 2 and 4 asked for teachers' views about the main role of a TESOL practitioner, the nature of a successful lesson, and what represented a learner-centred approach to TESOL. The inclusion of Questions 1 and 2 anticipated that, if respondents were asked to give a description or definition of a learner-centred approach only, they might realise what the study was looking for and then give answers that they thought would sound 'right' rather than those that best reflected their opinions. Moreover, the inclusion of these two questions allowed for the possibility that some respondents did not follow a learner-centred approach, adopting instead a teaching approach that was congruent with their views about what constitutes successful teaching and their self-perceptions as TESOL teachers. These two questions also served as a good starting point for the interviews. Question 3 was a yes-no question that asked whether or not respondents thought they used or had used a learner-centred approach in their skills-based classes. Question 4 asked respondents to give their own definition of a learner-centred approach. Question 5, which asked whether respondents had any other comments on any issue raised in the questionnaire, was included with a view to obtaining additional information that might be useful to the study.

Permission to conduct the study at the EF was granted by the Dean of the EF. The two versions of the questionnaire, together with the information sheet for participants (Appendix 5), were sent via email to the specified teaching staff. Respondents were de-identified when the questionnaires were returned, and the completed questionnaires were printed off and stored separately from the email contact details of respondents to protect their anonymity.

#### ***4.4.2 Interviews***

Qualitative interviews are designed to elicit the understandings that participants have of an issue or the meanings they attribute to a concept. The epistemological belief of qualitative interviewing is that the interviewee's perspective is significant and can be made known (Patton, 2002), and the lenses through which people view their world

should be taken into account when analysing and interpreting human affairs (Yin, 2009). As Patton comments, qualitative interviewing gives the researcher opportunity “to enter into the other person’s perspective . . . , to find out what is on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (p. 341).

Thus, responsive in-depth interviews were used in this study. The procedure used was semi-structured, based on a number of topics with the questions being determined prior to the conduct of the interview (Bryman, 2008). By asking participants the same set of questions, it was possible to pursue what Yin (2009, p. 106) calls the interviewer’s “line of inquiry” and to maintain what Patton (2002) sees as consensus. The semi-structured nature of the interview meant that the interview was undertaken in a flexible manner. Apart from “main questions” that were asked to scaffold the interview, “follow-up questions” or “probes” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) were put to participants. This enabled participants to elaborate on emergent issues relevant and/or important to the research. Thus, the researcher could garner rich and detailed answers that provided insights into participants’ ways of viewing the world in general and the research topic in particular (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), resulting in “active engagement and learning” for both interviewer and interviewee (Simons, 2009, p. 43).

Care was taken so that the technique was used to its full potential. First, the questions asked fitted Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) description of main questions, follow-up questions and probes, embracing Patton’s (2002) description of experience and behaviour questions, opinion and values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions and background or demographic questions. For example, during interviews in Stage Two of the study, the main questions posed to the teachers were concerned with their overall impression of the lesson, factors that made their lesson successful or unsuccessful and what constituted the main learning activities of the lesson observed. Second, interviews were conducted in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere to help participants feel comfortable and secure and less inhibited to talk (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This assisted the interviewer to tap into feelings or to reconstruct events that could not be observed (Simons, 2009). An illustrative example can be found in the interview with Teacher 10: on reflecting on the changes in his teaching approaches over time, the teacher commented that his

shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach was “a dramatic change” and described how “the boredom” he observed in his students became the driving force behind that shift. Third, the researcher asked questions in a clear and gentle manner, listened carefully to interviewees, refrained from cutting them off or dominating the interview and remained ethically sensitive (Bryman, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

As stated above, a group of 10 Year 1 and Year 2 teachers participated in face-to-face interviews during Stage One of the study as well as had their lessons observed and participated in one-to-one post-observation interviews during Stage Two of the study. Participation was voluntary and might reflect personal interest in the research topic. A possible methodological issue that should be acknowledged is that the teachers’ ideas could be coloured by how strongly they felt about the research topic in general and about the points under discussion during the interviews. The teachers were asked to sign two consent forms, one at the beginning of the first interview and the other at the beginning of the first observation, which allowed their interviews to be audio-recorded and their lessons videotaped. (See Appendix 6 and Appendix 7 for copies of the two consent forms.)

#### ***4.4.3 Observations***

Observation was used for enriching and validating the other data collected. Observations provide first-hand information (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002) while some of the survey and interview data may be filtered by respondents with selective perceptions being reported. Chmiliar (2010, p. 126) points out that as a form of self-reported data, survey data may reflect “only what individuals think, or think they should report, at that particular point in time”. Therefore, observations are essential as they can verify data acquired from interviews or surveys and identify the consistencies and inconsistencies between teachers’ “espoused beliefs” and their “beliefs-in-action”, terms used by Borg (2001, p. 187). Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002, p. 177) argue that studies that examine teachers’ stated beliefs without observing their actual teaching practice run the risk of “telling half the story”. Breen et al. (2001) note that sometimes what is said is the polar opposite of what is done.

The case study incorporated the features of naturalistic observation, direct observation, simple observation, non-participant observation and prolonged observation. The main reason for the use of these different types of observation was that they could result in an accurate understanding of the context and the people and events in that context. Naturalistic observation enables observation of people, especially their behaviours in a familiar environment (Merriam, 1988). Direct observation helps to establish first-hand experience with the context, people and events (Patton, 2002). Combined, these two forms of observation provide an understanding of the environment in which the participants teach. Such an understanding is a prerequisite to a holistic approach in the analysis and interpretation of people's actions, behaviours and perceptions (Patton, 2002). In addition, through simple observation and non-participant observation, it was possible to capture the normal behaviour of those involved in the study and to reduce any possible "reactive effects" (Bryman, 2008, p. 266) or "observer effects" (Waters, 2012, p. 440), which result in people changing their behaviour when they know that they are being observed. Furthermore, observation was repeated a number of times so that a deep understanding of the complexity of the context, the people and the events being studied could be developed, thus avoiding any possible misunderstanding and misrepresentation (Simons, 2009).

Classroom observations were conducted in Stage Two of the study. Care was taken so that these observations did not cause any problem or disruption to the lessons observed. At the beginning of the first observation session, the teachers introduced the researcher to their students and explained to them the reason for the researcher's presence in the classroom. After the brief introduction, and subsequently, the researcher tried to make her presence as unobtrusive as possible.

The majority of the observations lasted for three class periods, each of 55 minutes or as a single session of 165 minutes. All activities were observed in their entirety. In some cases, extra observations were needed to follow-up on an activity or to thoroughly understand a classroom practice used by a teacher. When a teacher taught more than one class at the same year level, one lesson observation was conducted in the second class in addition to the lesson observations that had been carried out in

the first class to see whether there was any difference in the way the teacher handled the two classes.

No observation protocol was designed in advance. This decision was taken because it was anticipated that teachers did not follow the same lesson format. Instead, detailed notes were taken of what went on in the classroom: descriptive notes of what took place - for example, notes of the activities organised by the teachers and of what was said by the teachers or the students (which served as a useful backup or source of reference); and analytic notes that suggested questions that should be asked during follow-up interviews.

All the lessons observed were videotaped. The purpose of this was to investigate the interaction between teachers and students (Goldman, Pea, Barron & Derry, 2007) and to collect data on both the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of teachers and students (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & Culloch, 2012). Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010) suggest that video data can be used as the main form of data or as a resource of data capable of augmenting field research or enriching analysis. They also observe that the popularity of video lies in its ability to capture events or interactions faithfully as they take place in real time to allow for repeated viewing and close scrutiny, and to allow different viewers and researchers to focus on different aspects of a single event. It can be inferred from Heath et al. that while observation is fleeting, video is permanent, and that video can present details that may become relevant later but that were not recorded in field notes. In addition, the video data served as a source of data that complemented other data (questionnaire, interview and observation data), and they were used in two main ways. For descriptive purposes, video recordings recreated an observed lesson with vivid sights and sounds. The exact capturing of a classroom scene (including such features as the seating arrangement, the mode of classroom organisation, exchanges between the teacher and the students and the classroom atmosphere) helped ensure the accuracy of the description of the teacher's actions. For analytical purposes, video data were compared with questionnaire data and interview data so that consistencies and inconsistencies between what teachers actually did and what they believed they did were uncovered. For video data to serve these purposes, the teachers' dialogue was transcribed because whatever they said in their interaction with the students was part

of what they actually did in the classroom. In addition, notes were made of the teachers' non-verbal behaviour.

#### 4.5 Data analysis

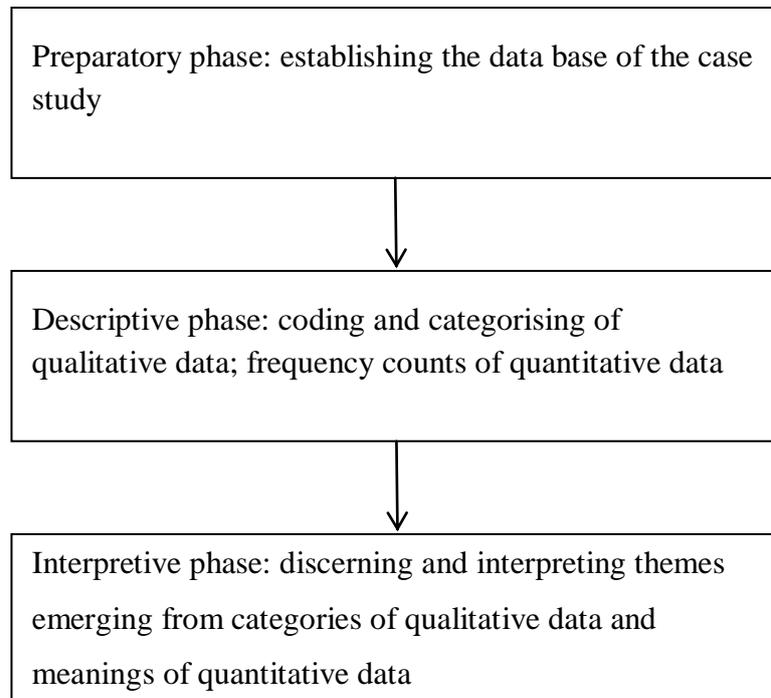


Figure 4.2: The phases of the data analysis process

The first phase of the data analysis was the preparatory phase. It established the “case study database” (Yin, 2009) or the “case record” (Patton, 2002) containing all the data that had been collected, and it involved gathering the questionnaires that had been returned and transcribing interviews and observed lessons. The transcription of interview data and video data used standard orthography rather than phonetic transcription with the focus being on thematic analysis rather than on language analysis. The meanings of the symbols used in the transcription can be found in Appendix 8 together with examples from the data base. The transcription of video data (see Appendix 9 for the protocol used) had teachers’ speech as its main focus. However, teachers’ actions were also recorded in the transcription. In summary, the data base of the case study reported in this thesis contains completed questionnaires, the research diary, observation notes, audio recordings of interviews, transcripts of

interviews, video recordings of observed lessons and transcripts of teachers' talk during lessons.

A holistic approach was adopted for the analysis of the data, which was subjected to two phases - description and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002), or analysis and interpretation, which are “not discrete processes” but “interactive and iterative throughout the research” and in the researcher's thinking (Simons, 2009, p. 118). The descriptive phase commenced with frequency counts of the quantitative data for this study (i.e., respondents' answers to the closed questions in Section 2 of the questionnaire). Two separate sets of results were obtained: one from Version 1 and another from Version 2 of the questionnaire. However, only the results from the teachers who said they used or had used a learner-centred approach were presented (see Table 5.1).

The coding and categorising of the qualitative data for this study adopted the following principles:

- 1) Consistent with the principle of constant comparative analysis, segments of data were “constantly revisited after initial coding” until no new codes or themes were identified (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001, p. 39) to guarantee that data were thoroughly understood and codes and themes were exhaustively extracted.
- 2) Codes and categories were generated from the data rather than pre-determined. Attention was paid to *in vivo* codes, i.e., “codes of participants' special terms” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). *In vivo* codes are useful in that they “help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55); they are “not just catchy words; rather they pinpoint exactly what is happening, or what the meaning of a certain experience or event is” (Boeije, 2009, p. 101). “Facilitator”, “conductor” and “learner” were some examples of *in vivo* codes found in the data about the main role of the TESOL teacher. Conceptual labels generated by the researcher were also used. For example, “teacher roles and relationships” and “student roles and relationships” were two labels that were selected by the researcher for two overarching categories of participants' conceptions of learner-centredness.

- 3) The principles of convergence and divergence (Guba, 1978, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 465) were applied to make sure that categories were internally consistent and distinctly different from each other. For example, although participants used different terms to refer to the role of teacher as facilitator - such as “facilitator”, “helper”, “guide” and “instructor”- they had much in common, so these terms and their descriptions were grouped together under the category of “facilitator”. Care was taken so that the roles of a TESOL teacher that were identified by participants as “facilitator”, “organiser/conductor”, “learner”, “fire lighter” and “pail filler” were conceptually different from each other.

Specifically, the coding and categorising of the qualitative data obtained from participants’ responses to Section 3 of the questionnaire, interview transcriptions and observation transcriptions, was conducted as follows. Responses to each of the open questions (Questions 1, 2 and 4) in Section 3 of the questionnaire and responses to the same question in interviews were coded together in order to provide depth and richness to survey responses. These responses were gathered together in a source file, and coding was done electronically on the computer. Similar ideas conveyed by words, phrases and sentences were identified and given the same codes. After the coding was finished, codes that had some features in common were put together to form categories.

The following example (Table 4.3) shows how respondents’ and interviewees’ answers were coded together. The segments of their answers were given the code of ‘attention to learner needs’.

Table 4.3: Examples of the code ‘attention to learner needs’

<i>Segments of answers assigned with code ‘attention to learner needs’</i>
<p><i>From respondents</i></p> <p>A learner-centred approach to TESOL is the one which aims to better accommodate learners’ needs (T9);</p> <p>The teacher is supposed to take the students’ needs into great consideration (T15);</p> <p>To teach what the students need (T19);</p> <p>Catering for students’ needs ... as much as possible (T24);</p> <p>We need to analyse the learners’ needs when designing a course for them, when teaching and evaluating them (T25);</p> <p>Their needs ... are acknowledged by the teacher (T30)</p>
<p><i>From interviewees</i></p> <p>T7<sub>1</sub>: The very needs of the learners should be acknowledged in advance</p> <p>T9<sub>1</sub>: A learner-centred approach is ... the approach in which ... the learning programme should be responsive to learner needs</p>

The coding of the data collected from Stage Two of the study went through the same process. Teachers’ practices, as captured by the video recordings and as explained by teachers in post-observation interviews, were coded together. It was decided that teachers’ practices were categorised in terms of actions that reflected their practices.

The last phase of the data analysis process was the interpretive phase, the aim of which was to discern and interpret themes that emerged from the categories of data that had been identified in the descriptive phase. Relationships between the categories were explored so that salient themes, meanings, assertions or lessons could be derived (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The meanings of the quantitative data obtained from the frequency counts were also considered. Inductive

logic as described by Bryman (2008), Creswell (2007), McGregor and Murnane (2010), Merriam (1988) and Patton (2002) was used during this stage as it allows a credible representation of the lived experience of participants to be generated from the data. Teachers' stated beliefs and classroom practices were compared and contrasted with each other and with the theory about learner-centredness that has been reported in the literature. Consistencies and inconsistencies between the teachers' beliefs and practices were identified, and possible explanations offered.

#### **4.6 Ethical issues**

There are a number of ethical problems inherent in case study research including those relating to interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and those issues pertaining to observation and survey (Bryman, 2008). The following measures were taken: the researcher sought informed consent from participants by clearly outlining the purpose of the study, its time frame and scope and the nature of the questionnaires, interviews and observations; no form of deception or coercion was used; and permission to access the school/classroom was obtained before the field work started. The information sheet (Appendix 5) to which the questionnaire was attached provided respondents with essential information about the research, and the consent forms (Appendices 6-7) were signed by the teachers before the first interview and the first classroom observation took place. The anonymity of the participants was protected - participants were de-identified in data analysis, and access to the data was only granted to the researcher and her supervisors during and after the study. The data were kept strictly confidential in password-protected files on the researcher's computer. On completion of the research, the data were transferred to a CD which would be kept in a secure place at the School of Education, Curtin University, for at least five years.

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the theoretical justification for the choice of qualitative research as the research paradigm and qualitative case study research as the overarching framework of the study. Strategies for conducting the case study in

terms of selecting the case, collecting and analysing data have been described. Strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of the case study and addressing ethical issues have been presented.

## Chapter 5: Findings Stage One

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section reports the results of the closed questions used in the questionnaires and includes information about respondents' self-reported use of classroom techniques and of a learner-centred approach. The second section presents the results of the open questions in the questionnaires and of the interview questions, identifying participants' conceptualisations of a learner-centred approach, their perceptions of the major role of a TESOL teacher and their ideas of what constitutes a successful lesson. The third section presents information relating to interviewees' use of a learner-centred approach.

Participants identified some teacher roles that exist within the context of a learner-centred approach and others that are relevant to a more generic context. There was a clear tendency among participants to describe their roles by means of metaphorical language, and this is reflected in the choice of category description. (Appendix 10 lists key words and phrases that contributed to the categorisation of the roles.) Two preliminary observations can be made about the categorisation of the data. First, the terminology used by participants does not necessarily correspond to the concepts encompassed in category description - it was not uncommon for participants to use several terms to refer to a role or to use a single term to refer to roles that were conceptually different. As participants used a second language to express themselves, it has been assumed that their explanations for what they meant were sometimes more important than the labels they used for the roles they were describing. For example, some of the terms participants used to describe the role of a facilitator included "facilitator", "helper", "guide" and "instructor", whereas the single term "instructor" was used by some participants to refer to both the role of a facilitator and the role of a "pail filler". Second, while the categories were mutually exclusive in terms of their meaning, the roles were not mutually exclusive in terms of teaching practice. The participants' answers, both written and spoken, show that they perceived themselves as having more than one role within the classroom. This understanding of multiple roles was actualised in their teaching practices.

## **5.1 Quantitative results: Responses to the closed questions in the questionnaire**

The first set of findings comes from Section 2 of the questionnaire: the self-reported classroom practices of the participants. The second set is drawn from responses in Section 3 and describes the participants' self-reported use of a learner-centred approach.

### ***5.1.1 Classroom practices***

Teachers reported the classroom practices they employed in skills-based language classes. As this research focuses on a learner-centred approach, only the responses of those teachers who self-identified as using or having used a learner-centred approach are described. The findings are based on the responses of 30 teachers, 17 of whom were teaching language skills, and 13 of whom had taught language skills in the past.

Table 5.1 presents the classroom practices the teachers claimed to use or to have used in their language skills-based classes. The practices are grouped under six headings representative of aspects of teaching with which teachers are concerned in their day-to-day-teaching.

Table 5.1: Self-reported classroom practices by learner-centred teachers

Quest No.		Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
<b>Course objectives:</b>											
26	I follow(ed) the stated objectives of the course.	10	3	70	21	13	4	7	2		
4	I modify(ied) the stated objectives of the course.	20	6	27	8	43	13	3	1	7	2
5	I make/made the learning goals clear to my students.	53	16	40	12	3	1	3	1		
<b>Needs analysis:</b>											
20	I elicit(ed) from my students information about their needs.	10	3	60	18	23	7	7	2		
25	I work(ed) out my students' needs from my experience.	17	5	53	16	23	7	3	1	3	1
22	I gather(ed) information about my students' learning styles.			13	4	70	21	13	4	3	1
<b>Lesson planning:</b>											
1	I closely follow(ed) my lesson plan during a lesson.	3	1	60	18	30	9	7	2		
15	I modify(ied) my lesson plan (e.g., drop or add activities) during a lesson.	23	7	33	10	40	12	3	1		
24	I anticipate(d) the teaching load when making lesson plans.	17	5	73	22	7	2			3	1
28	I anticipate(d) my students' difficulties when making lesson plans.	27	8	60	18	13	4				
<b>Teaching techniques:</b>											
9	I use(d) the teaching techniques that I am familiar with.	27	8	73	22						
17	I try(ied) out new teaching techniques.	7	2	37	11	53	16	3	1		
3	I observe(d) how my students respond to the lesson.	73	22	27	8						
13	I use(d) activities such as games, songs, puzzles and role play.	10	3	50	15	33	10	3	1	3	1
30	I organise(d) activities such as pair work, group work and project work.	50	15	50	15						
11	I play(ed) an authoritative role in the classroom.			23	7	50	15	20	6	7	2
18	I use(d) activities using a teacher-with-whole-class mode.	3	1	33	10	60	18	3	1		
8	I allow(ed) my students to work individually in class.	7	2	46	14	37	11	7	2	3	1
27	I allow(ed) my students to choose their own topics.	7	2	33	10	46	14	10	3	3	1
6	I encourage(d) my students to discover learning opportunities outside the classroom.	46	14	40	12	13	4				
<b>Teaching materials:</b>											
10	I bring/brought my own materials into the classroom.	13	4	53	16	33	10				
29	I use(d) the set teaching materials.	13	4	60	18	23	7	3	1		
<b>Testing and assessment, and evaluation of teaching:</b>											
2	I use(d) in-class tests to reinforce my students' learning.	13	4	23	7	43	13	17	5	3	1
12	I use(d) in-class tests to evaluate my effectiveness as a teacher.	3	1	10	3	53	16	27	8	7	2
7	I allow(ed) my students to assess their peers' work.	17	5	46	14	37	11				
21	I allow(ed) my students to assess their own work.	7	2	40	12	50	15	3	1		
19	I establish(ed) the assessment criteria for my in-class assessment tasks.	23	7	46	14	17	5	7	2	7	2
14	I negotiate(d) the assessment criteria with my students.	3	1	17	5	46	14	30	9	3	1
16	I judge(d) the effectiveness of my teaching practices.	37	11	43	13	13	4	3	1	3	1
23	I get/got feedback from my students about my classroom practices.	13	4	37	11	37	11	10	3	3	1

The following trends emerge from the self-reported practices of the teachers. First, a majority of the teachers reported using practices that took into consideration their students' needs, feedback, response and difficulties. For example, at least 60% of the respondents claimed that they *always* or *often* elicited from their students information about their needs (Statement 20), anticipated their students' difficulties when making lesson plans (Statement 28) and observed how their students responded to the lesson (Statement 3). A very high percentage of the respondents (87%) also said that they *always*, *often* and *sometimes* got feedback from the students about their classroom practices (Statement 23). However, the teachers seemed to pay much less attention to their students' learning styles as 70% and 13% of them respectively said that they *sometimes* and *rarely* gathered information about this student factor (Statement 22).

Second, the teachers indicated that they used practices that engaged their students in independent learning and in making choices and judgements. Specifically, a large proportion of the teachers stated that they *always* and *often* encouraged their students to discover learning opportunities outside the classroom (Statement 6), and that they *often* and *sometimes* allowed their students to choose their own topics (Statement 27), to assess their peers' work (Statement 7) and to assess their own work (Statement 21). These practices suggested that the students had opportunity to develop their autonomy.

Third, the teachers claimed that they frequently used practices that focused on student-student relationships and teacher-student relationships. With reference to interactions among students, while 50% of the teachers said that they *often* used activities such as games, songs, puzzles and role play, 10% said that they *always* did so (Statement 13). Meanwhile, one half of the teachers said that they *always* organised activities as pair work, group work and project work, the other half indicated that they *often* did the same (Statement 30).

With respect to the relationship between teacher and students, the teachers seemed to suggest that they used two sets of practices that appeared to be contradictory to each other. One set of practices suggested that the teachers were not a figure of authority in the classroom: they did not impose their ideas, their plans and their power on the

students. As can be seen from Table 5.1, a large percentage of the teachers indicated that they *sometimes* and *rarely* (and even *never*) played an authoritative role in the classroom (Statement 11), used activities with a teacher-with-whole-class mode (Statement 18), used in-class tests to reinforce their students' learning (Statement 2) and used in-class tests to evaluate their effectiveness as teachers (Statement 12). At the same time, a high percentage of the teachers also indicated that they *always* and *often* allowed the students to work individually in class (Statement 8), made the learning goals clear to the students (Statement 5) and modified the lesson plan during the lesson (Statement 15).

In contrast, the other set of practices seemed to stress the role of the expertise, experience and concerns of the teachers in their decision-making. For example, a large percentage of the teachers claimed that they *always* and *often* worked out their students' needs from their own experience (Statement 25), closely followed their lesson plan (Statement 1), used teaching techniques with which they were familiar (Statement 9), established the assessment criteria for their in-class assessment tasks (Statement 19) and judged the effectiveness of their teaching practices themselves (Statement 16). A high percentage of the teachers also said that they *sometimes* and *rarely* (and even *never*) tried out new techniques (Statement 17) and negotiated the assessment criteria with their students (Statement 14). A large majority of the teachers (90%) said that they *always* and *often* anticipated the teaching load when making lesson plans (Statement 24). The respondents indicated that they themselves judged the effectiveness of their teaching practices (Statement 16) more often (93%) than they got feedback from their students about their classroom practices (Statement 23) (87%).

Fourth, while the teachers suggested that they satisfied the requirements of the syllabus, evidenced by following the stated objectives of the course (Statement 26) and using the set teaching materials (Statement 29) to a large extent, they also claimed that sometimes they modified the stated course objectives (Statement 4) and brought their own materials into the classroom (Statement 10).

In summary, the practices the teachers believed they used or had used focused on: 1) consideration of students' needs and learning characteristics; 2) promotion of student

autonomy; 3) building relationships between teacher and students, and between students and students; and 4) the accordance with the requirements of the syllabus.

### ***5.1.2 Use of a learner-centred approach***

A majority of respondents (83%) said that they used or had used a learner-centred approach. Among the six respondents who indicated that they did not use this approach, one was a Year 1 teacher and five were Year 3 and/or Year 4 teachers.

Table 5.2: Respondents' self-reported use of a learner-centred approach

	Number of teachers	Use of a learner-centred approach	
		Yes	No
Year 1 & Year 2 teachers	18	17	1
Year 3 & Year 4 teachers	18	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>
Percentage		<b>83%</b>	<b>17%</b>

Thus, in the cohort of teachers investigated, a majority believed that they were either using or had used a learner-centred approach, and more Year 3 and Year 4 teachers than Year 1 and Year 2 teachers said that they did not use such an approach. It should be remembered that at the EF, Year 3 and Year 4 teachers are usually more mature and experienced than Year 1 and Year 2 teachers.

## **5.2 Qualitative findings: Responses to the open questions in the questionnaire and to the interview questions**

Questionnaire responses and interview responses were analysed together as the latter were able to add depth and richness to the former. This section is divided into three sub-sections: teachers' conceptualisations of a learner-centred approach, teachers' conceptualisations of the main role of a TESOL teacher not directly associated with learner-centredness, and teachers' conceptualisations of a successful lesson.

### *5.2.1 Learner-centred approach - Teacher roles and relationships*

As described by teachers, a learner-centred approach has two dimensions: teacher roles and relationships and student roles and relationships. This section presents the views participants hold about the roles and relationships of the teacher: teacher as facilitator, teacher as organiser/conductor and teacher relationships with students.

To capture the voice of the participants, wherever possible their words have been incorporated into the descriptions provided. The participants have been de-identified through the use of a numbering system. The teachers who identified themselves as using or having used a learner-centred approach were referred to as T1 to T30 with the first ten teachers, T1 to T10, being the ones who were interviewed. Thus, the information provided by T11 to T30 comes from the questionnaire only, and the information by T1 to T10 comes from both the questionnaire and the interview. To facilitate an audit trail, the information taken from the questionnaire completed by T1 to T10 is referenced as *Q*, and the information from the interview given by T1 to T10 is referenced as *I*. So, for example, a quotation from the questionnaire filled in by T5 will be referenced as (T5<sub>Q</sub>) and from the interview with T5 as (T5<sub>I</sub>).

#### 5.2.1.1 Teacher as facilitator

According to the participants, one role a TESOL teacher should assume in a learner-centred approach is as “a facilitator” of learning, a role sometimes referred to by different names - “facilitator”, “helper”, “guide” and “instructor”<sup>1</sup>. This conception attributes two main tasks to the teacher: providing a nurturing learning environment and promoting autonomous learning by students.

Several participants believed that, in order to provide a nurturing environment, the teacher must be seen to offer “help” to students so that their knowledge and language skills are developed (T3<sub>Q</sub>; T4<sub>Q</sub>; T15; T21). For example, T22 said that a teacher

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<sup>1</sup> Teachers were interviewed in English, and these are the exact terms they used. The term “instructor” seems to be at odds here, but as noted on page 126, according to the explanations given by the respondents and interviewees, it was used to convey a meaning similar to that expressed by the term “facilitator”.

should be a “linguistic supporter” based on students’ “real need[s]”. The teacher must also provide students with “space” (T1<sub>I</sub>), “time” (T1<sub>I</sub>; T8<sub>I</sub>), “chance” (T6<sub>Q</sub>) and “opportunity” (T7<sub>I</sub>) for language practice and language use. Here, language practice refers to that in which students’ language is guided or controlled by the immediate teaching and learning points whereas language use occurs when students put their language to freer and more creative use. Participants specified that a TESOL teacher can “help students learn the language effectively by knowing their needs, interests and expectations” (T25) and help them overcome their learning difficulties by understanding their “weaknesses and ... strengths” (T8<sub>I</sub>).

A teacher can also do a number of things to provide students with the learning opportunities they need such as by using activities that engage students as well as develop their language skills and communicative abilities. For example, T5<sub>I</sub> said that activities such as “games”, “songs” and “grammar activities” are acceptable as long as they are “communicative” in the sense that they help students “learn how to communicate with each other”. The participants also suggested organising pair work, group work and project work so that students had “chances to practise and interact with each other ... rather than listen to the teacher all the time” (T14). A number of participants believed that teachers should reduce their talking time and increase student talking time. For example, T3<sub>I</sub> said that a teacher “should not talk a lot in the lesson”, and T4<sub>I</sub> stated:

I try to balance the teacher talk, which is often said to make up two-thirds, or even more in a lesson. I create activities or chances that can encourage the students to talk more and participate more during the lesson, depending on the subject I am teaching. (T4<sub>I</sub>)

However, T10<sub>I</sub> argued that a teacher “still can give [a] lecture ... but maybe he or she needs to ... take into consideration ... the students’ feedback”.

A teacher can help language skill acquisition by using appropriate teaching methods and learning activities in order “to engage students in the learning process” (T8<sub>Q</sub>), to “support effectively their students in language learning” (T12), to help students

“acquire” English (T11; T17) and “to solve any problem” that students may have due to the influence of their mother tongue on their English study (T11).

Participants acknowledged the necessity for creating a supportive learning environment. For example, T10<sub>I</sub> explained that a positive learning environment was necessary for Vietnamese students who did not have “an environment” or “much chance” “to use the language outside [the] class”. T7<sub>I</sub> considered that a teacher must create an environment which was “real” or “realistic” in the sense that “circumstances or situations” used for practice purposes were “similar to” those students would encounter outside the classroom. T4<sub>Q</sub> suggested that the environment created should enable students to “learn and share in a comfortable fashion”.

A nurturing learning environment also demanded the provision of resources which would assist students to learn. T9<sub>I</sub> indicated that a teacher was in a position to act as “a resource person” as s/he had “more knowledge, more experience, and more information” than students. The participants enumerated a range of resources that a teacher could bring to the classroom and make available to students: advice, information, knowledge, materials and experiences. T1<sub>Q</sub> also said that a teacher was able to recommend to students some “good and reliable websites for English learning”.

The task of a facilitator in providing advice and resources is not an end in itself; rather it was seen as a means of helping students with their learning, especially independent learning. T1<sub>Q</sub> commented that when students had further practice “beyond the classroom walls” by using websites a teacher may have suggested, they could “somehow gain their learning autonomy”.

Participants viewed the second and key task of a teacher-as-facilitator as promoting student autonomous/independent learning. In addition to studying in the classroom, students should have chances to study outside the classroom or at home. For example, T5<sub>I</sub> viewed pair work, group work and project work as chances for students to “actively learn ... by themselves and also with friends” and T22 suggested that a teacher should provide students with “a frame” which they have “to explore and apply ... in various ways”, having been given the guidance to enable this to happen.

T2<sub>I</sub> maintained that learning activities should help students “feel free ... to practise the skills”.

Underpinning the efficacy of autonomous learning was the belief of teachers that students can discover knowledge for themselves. T4<sub>I</sub> described how she thought that students were likely to engage in self-directed learning when the information they needed or were interested in was readily available outside the classroom. The teacher was in the position to help the students make self-discoveries about topics that interested them and implement ways of learning that could increase their language skills and to help them “be able to work independently” (T2<sub>I</sub>).

Participants maintained that a teacher should allow students to enjoy a degree of freedom in their learning. For example, T2<sub>I</sub> said that students should not be forced to do something that they did not enjoy doing. She said, “I don’t force them to speak with this pattern or that pattern but I give them ... the opportunity, ... the freedom to speak ... according to their knowledge”.

It was seen as important that a teacher model to students how they can learn. Some participants believed that a teacher must act as a “guide” in this respect. T4<sub>I</sub> observed that “nowadays, with the development of technology and with the appearance of an ocean of books”, students attended classes “in order to be guided on the way of learning effectively and scientifically rather than to listen to the lessons passively” so a teacher should be “a good guide” to students so as “to lead them ... throughout their learning process”. Another perspective was offered by T2<sub>Q</sub>, who believed that a teacher should “instruct his/her students the way to study English [*sic*]” as “success is subject to the learners’ self-study”. Generally, participants saw a teacher’s job as being a guide to show students effective or alternative ways of learning and providing strategies for learning and metacognitive strategies for thinking. The teacher should also provide feedback on the effectiveness of the student’s approach to learning. T2<sub>I</sub> pointed out that by giving advice to students during an activity, she made it “easy” for them “to go on with their practice”. T3<sub>I</sub> suggested that a teacher should give advice by not simply teaching a lesson but by showing students how to approach the lesson content in particular and knowledge acquisition in general. The development of how-to-learn skills and language learning skills benefits students in

several ways, according to participants. Specifically, students will know how to study effectively, and with the acquisition of independent learning skills, students have the potential to improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

#### 5.2.1.2 Teacher as organiser/conductor

The job of a teacher as an organiser is to manage classroom activities. Participants expanded on the role of the teacher as organiser to incorporate a larger role, identified as “teacher as conductor”. The concept of “teacher as conductor” comprised ideas participants held about the work the teacher had to undertake to ensure that the lesson took place efficiently and effectively. T5<sub>Q</sub> equated the major role of a TESOL teacher to that of “a conductor in an orchestra”. The metaphor seemed to highlight the teacher’s skills in organising the learning process in such a way that it ensured cooperation and harmony between teacher and students. The participants described the role of the “conductor” in three main ways: what the teacher did to set up tasks and activities, to manage the class and student learning and to evaluate student work and performance.

Participants maintained that teachers should equip themselves with such organisational skills as giving instructions and setting up class activities such as individual work, pair work and group work. T22 indicated that, in her teaching context where the class size was large, teachers had to “cleverly and flexibly” get all the students involved in the set activities. In relation to managing the class and student learning, some participants claimed that the duty of a teacher is to control the class and to make students learn. Linked to this, the teacher was identified by some participants as an “evaluator” whose task it is to give feedback on students’ work and performance and to teach them to evaluate their own and their peers’ achievements.

#### 5.2.1.3 Teacher - student relationships

The participants described the optimal relationship between the teacher and students as one based on democracy and flexibility, with the teacher not having an authoritative role in the classroom. “A TESOL teacher using this [learner-centred]

approach should never ‘dominate’ their class” (T27); “the teacher is not a dictator in the class, nor has the ultimate authority” (T1Q). T3<sub>I</sub> claimed that, if the teacher remained “hidden behind the role of the teacher”, students would become “their own teacher” and the teacher “their classmate”. By way of illustration, T2<sub>I</sub> described one of her own classroom practices in which the students were “the people who find out the answers”. She also said that she did not “correct” students by saying whether their answers were “wrong or right”, but by asking them whether the answers were “appropriate or not”, and by giving them “some reasons” so that they could “think about their own ideas”. She added that, if the students thought that their answers were appropriate, she would “somehow ... accept their answer[s]”.

A second key feature of interaction between the teacher and students is the development of rapport. In T8<sub>I</sub>’s opinion, there exists a close relationship between teacher as “director” and students as “main actors”. According to T8, as the director, the teacher has the “script”, which students have to understand to fulfil their roles as main actors. T4<sub>I</sub> pointed out that she places great “importance” on the relationship between the teacher and students because when she has their trust, they share their learning difficulties and their personal problems, and because of this, she can encourage them or better motivate them to learn.

### ***5.2.2 Learner-centred approach - Student roles and relationships***

When participants spoke about students, three beliefs emerged: the first was the position of the student at the centre of the learning process; the second related to the roles that students played within this paradigm; and the third involved student - student relationships.

#### **5.2.2.1 Students as the centre of the learning process**

Comments from participants highlight the key role of students in a learner-centred approach. The comments uniformly illustrate that it is the student, not the teacher, who is at the centre of the lesson, the class and the learning process. This is manifest in the way attention focuses on student needs and characteristics and other student-

related factors which must be taken into consideration during every phase of the learning process - such as course design, lesson planning, development of classroom activities, lesson delivery and assessment.

The participants identified a number of student factors such as “needs” (T3<sub>Q</sub>; T6<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>Q</sub>; T9<sub>Q</sub>; T9<sub>I</sub>; T10<sub>Q</sub>; T13; T14; T19; T21; T23; T24; T25; T28; T30), “interests” (T1<sub>I</sub>; T4<sub>Q</sub>; T4<sub>I</sub>; T6<sub>I</sub>; T7<sub>I</sub>; T9<sub>I</sub>; T13; T21; T23), “backgrounds” (T4<sub>Q</sub>; T4<sub>I</sub>), “English proficiency” (T1<sub>I</sub>) or “linguistic competence” (T1<sub>Q</sub>), “learning styles” (T1<sub>Q</sub>; T1<sub>I</sub>; T3; T19; T21; T23; T24), “what they [students] enjoy” (T24), “what they [students] really want” (T7<sub>I</sub>), “expectations” (T4<sub>I</sub>), “motivation” (T1<sub>Q</sub>), “suggestions” (T4<sub>I</sub>), “hypotheses” (T21), “feedback” (T4<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>Q</sub>; T10<sub>Q</sub>), “response” (T4<sub>Q</sub>), “problems” (T4<sub>I</sub>; T6<sub>I</sub>; T23) and “difficulties ... learning the subject” (T4<sub>I</sub>). T9<sub>I</sub> used the term “affective aspects” to refer to learner factors that included “preferences”, “attitudes”, “beliefs”, “motivation”, “feelings” and “opinions”. T30 stated that, in a learner-centred classroom, students’ “needs and concerns are acknowledged by the teacher and their dignity and humanity are respected and cultivated”. All confirmed that students’ needs and characteristics and other student-related factors must be accommodated so that appropriate teaching programs, teaching methods, lesson plans and activities can be designed or chosen.

Participants thought it necessary to consider the differences among individual students. Because of this, in T22’s opinion, students need to be handled differently as they may be studying for different purposes and have different levels of motivation. In her own words, a teacher should have “different methods of treatment” if s/he wants “to have a successful learner-centred class”. T1<sub>I</sub> maintained that a teacher should consider differences in English proficiency and learning styles. She had observed that while some students in her class were “very active”, others were “shy” because “their linguistic competence” was “not good enough for them to be able to communicate fluently in English”. T1<sub>I</sub> added, “because each student will have different learning style ... I think I should pay attention to ... how they learn, what activities ... they prefer and then we design the activities that are suitable for them [*sic*].”

Some interviewees provided examples of how they took action to focus attention on and to meet student needs. Four interviewees (T1; T4; T6; T7) said that they directly asked the students about their “needs”, “problems”, “wishes”, “previous learning experience” and “expectations for the course” on the first day or session of the course. In so doing, the interviewees said they were able to complete a “learner analysis” (T7<sub>1</sub>) or to “analyse the students informally” (T4<sub>1</sub>). T9<sub>1</sub> said that she asked the students to complete a short questionnaire before they had a discussion together as a whole class. The students were asked such questions as “What are your strengths?”, “What are your weaknesses?”, “What did you enjoy most or benefit most from in the last course?” and “What are your suggestions for this course?”. T9<sub>1</sub> claimed that by asking such questions, she was able to give the students, especially those who “are very shy” and “don’t dare ... to talk in front of the class”, a chance to express their ideas.

#### 5.2.2.2 Active and participatory roles for students

Participants believed that in a learner-centred classroom, student involvement and engagement should be encouraged. They described three aspects of an active and independent role that they thought students are entitled to: having the opportunity to make choices, having their voices heard and developing their autonomy.

The first aspect is illustrated in comments concerning students’ choice of topics, activities, materials and assessment. Participants pointed out that students decide or discuss and negotiate with the teacher the: choice of topics; learning content; tasks; activities and ways of learning; amount of class work and homework; and, assessment criteria. For example, students provide “most of the input in class” (T30), and the topic of the lesson is “open to changes” (T23); students evaluate their learning process (T18); and they decide whether to sit for the mid-term speaking test individually or as a group (T8<sub>1</sub>).

The second aspect is associated with students’ right to have their voices heard. As T3<sub>1</sub> put it, students have

the right to ... have a voice in our teaching methodology, and if they do not agree with the way we [teachers] evaluate their work or even the homework we assign, they have the right to say something and we should listen to them. It means we have to adjust our teaching, to change our way. (T3<sub>I</sub>)

Other teachers said that students can present “their own opinions through the use of four skills” (T18) or “freely discuss ... their point[s] of view” (T20), and that, during and after the lesson, student feedback, both verbal and non-verbal, can be sought so that the teacher can modify her/his lesson plan accordingly (T4<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>Q</sub>) or make an improvement in her/his performance (T4<sub>Q</sub>).

The third aspect of an active and participatory role for students is exemplified by comments about the development and encouragement of autonomous learning, the aim of which is to help students become “self-directive” (T9<sub>Q</sub>) or “independent” (T9<sub>I</sub>; T21) language learners. This was also suggested as the “ultimate goal of a learner-centred approach” by T9<sub>I</sub>. In participants’ views, students must be allowed “to take the initiative” (T27) and “to take more control of their studies” (T8<sub>Q</sub>) and must be encouraged to learn by themselves (T12). According to participants, students develop their autonomy in a number of ways. As suggested by T5<sub>I</sub>, students must “learn how to learn” in addition to learning the subject matter, and they must have projects to carry out to have a chance to “actively learn ... by themselves” (T5<sub>I</sub>). As argued by T3<sub>I</sub>, students should be “their own teachers” because even excellent teachers cannot teach all that needs to be taught and similarly, students cannot learn all that needs to be learnt, especially if they are not intrinsically motivated to do so.

#### 5.2.2.3 Student - student relationships

The teachers saw the interaction among students in a learner-centred class as one in which students help and learn from each other. T5<sub>I</sub> made it clear that apart from learning by themselves, students do “help each other” or “learn from each other” when doing pair work, group work and project work. Similarly, T3<sub>I</sub> presented the argument that students “must be their own teachers”. In her opinion, students teach each other through such activities as giving presentations and having discussions.

### *5.2.3 Additional roles of a TESOL teacher*

The participants identified other roles associated with being a TESOL teacher (i.e., roles not necessarily associated directly with the concept of learner-centredness). These additional roles were: teacher as a ‘fire lighter’, teacher as a ‘pail filler’ and teacher as a learner. Although these roles are not directly linked to learner-centredness, they have been included in this thesis because the participants were invited to present their views about what they believed the major role of a TESOL teacher to be.

#### 5.2.3.1 Teacher as a ‘fire lighter’

Some participants advanced the argument that the inspiration and passion, encouragement and motivation provided by the teacher acts as a stimulus to students in their English studies. The image of a teacher “lighting a fire”, a metaphor T30 borrowed from the Irish poet Yeats, was applied to these teachers. ‘Fire lighters’ provide encouragement and motivation to students. T1 and T6 stated that the teacher encourages students as they may be “shy”, “timid” (T1<sub>I</sub>) and “not active” (T6<sub>I</sub>), or did not have “enough confidence” (T1<sub>I</sub>) or did “not feel encouraged” (T6<sub>I</sub>) to participate in classroom activities. T10<sub>I</sub> observed that “without the motivation” provided by the teacher, students may lack “the drive ... to use” the language. T1<sub>Q</sub> argued that the “stimulus” and “encouragement” from the teacher encourages students to engage with in-class activities and home assignments. The teacher can motivate students to learn by praising them, making the class as much fun as possible, using certain kinds of learning activities and establishing a good rapport with students. In T18’s opinion, once students have fun with learning activities, they “acquire the language as naturally as possible”. T10<sub>I</sub> maintained that the use of “short stories”, “daily activities” or “real-life activities” like “writing letters or writing a description” motivates students to use English. T4<sub>Q</sub> sought to establish a close relationship with students as she thought that the better the relationship is, the more likely it is that the teacher will communicate effectively with students and encourage them to learn. The comment she made was: “the closer the distance between teacher and students, the better the teacher can help them to maybe open their minds or open their hearts to share their problems when they study”.

The ‘fire lighter’ imbues students with inspiration and passion for learning. T27 stated that “[a] TESOL teacher should be able to motivate and inspire their students”. T12 argued that the teacher can “help germinate and nourish their [students’] love for learning the language, so that they are able to further study by themselves”. T2<sub>Q</sub> indicated that a teacher should be “an inspiring instructor”. She said that with four years’ teaching experience, she knows that she cannot help students improve their skills if they are not “inspired” to study English by themselves. T30 argued that teachers should see themselves as an example to make students feel excited and passionate about learning, especially learning on their own. As he put it,

I think Yeats once wrote that “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” In TESOL, however, I think the role of the teacher should be about both lighting a fire and filling up a pail. Not only should he/she try to transmit knowledge to the students but should do it in such a way as to inspire in students a love and respect for learning. A TESOL teacher is nothing short of an educator and how can they call themselves a true educator if they don’t concern themselves with truth, beauty and goodness - things that inspire students to seek out knowledge for themselves by their own effort? (T30)

#### 5.2.3.2 Teacher as ‘pail filler’

This role focuses on the teacher as a knowledge provider, creating the image of a teacher “filling a pail” as used by T30, who quoted Yeats. In this metaphor, teachers are portrayed as experts whose job is to fill students with their knowledge of English and students, implicitly compared to empty pails, are consequently seen as passive recipients of knowledge.

For T30, the role “reflects the mechanical aspect of teaching a foreign language, i.e., teaching grammar rules and language skills”. For other participants, the role also includes the teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation, the generation and exploration of the rules of the language through reading, listening, speaking and writing activities and the correction of misspellings and grammatical mistakes. The participants also viewed the teacher as a source of knowledge of the language as well as a source of knowledge about language-related areas like culture and literature.

T14 stated that in terms of language skills, the teacher is “a good model for students to follow”.

The image of a teacher “filling a pail” also appears to incorporate the notion of teacher as “instructor”, which some participants used to mean the simple transmission of knowledge from giver to recipient. For example, T8<sub>I</sub> said that sometimes a teacher needs to instruct students first before giving them time for practice. Similarly, T10<sub>I</sub> pointed out that a teacher in his teaching context sometimes needs to provide students with knowledge of English because of their lack of language knowledge or exposure to the language.

#### 5.2.3.3 Teacher as a learner

Several participants espoused ideas that attribute the role of a learner to a TESOL teacher. T19 directly said that, along with students, a teacher should also be a learner. T22 was less direct, stating that nowadays students have access to a great deal of reference material and, as they are not “passive learners”, they might ask their teachers about the “words, idioms, structures” they have “discovered” for themselves. As a result, the teacher has “to do a lot of research” to deal with students’ questions.

#### ***5.2.4 A successful lesson - Teacher perceptions***

The beliefs of participants about a successful lesson are not necessarily directly related to learner-centredness, but they have been included as they provide valuable data and contextualise those beliefs that do pertain to learner-centredness. Teachers identified the factors contributing to a successful lesson, lesson characteristics and the achievement of teaching objectives or learning outcomes as three of the most essential issues.

#### 5.2.4.1 Factors contributing to a successful lesson

In participants' views, there are three fundamental elements of a successful lesson: thorough lesson planning, a motivating learning environment and sound pedagogy. Participants proposed that a successful lesson was one that was well-prepared. They understood "well-preparedness" (T2<sub>I</sub>; T2<sub>Q</sub>) in terms of having a "careful" (T14), "well-designed" (T7<sub>Q</sub>), "carefully prepared" (T3<sub>Q</sub>) and "well-structured" (T2<sub>I</sub>) lesson plan. They also believed that the lesson plan must state the aims and objectives of the lesson (including the key issues to be explored in the lesson), specify the activities and materials to be used and explicitly anticipate the difficulties students might encounter.

A few participants made some suggestions concerning the amount as well as the type of material presented in a lesson. As T18 put it, if the amount of new material to be covered in a lesson is judiciously chosen, "students can learn something" but "not too much" and the "teacher does not feel overload[ed]". T7<sub>Q</sub> believed that students should be "left hungry" rather than "overloaded" at the end of the day "so that they feel motivated" for the next lesson. He also asserted that it is not necessary for the teacher to "cover all of the related aspects of a particular language item" in a lesson. T16 believed that the lesson input should be "comprehensible input", reflecting how much students already know about the point the teacher is going to present. T12 suggested that, when a teacher makes the right decision about the amount of information to present to students, the students will find the lesson "interesting and worth spending time studying". T7<sub>Q</sub> claimed that the focus of the lesson should be on the students' language practice and production, rather than on the teacher's presentation, arguing that the classroom should not turn into "a stage on which the teacher shows superiority over the learners in terms of knowledge", and that a successful lesson must help students increase their understanding by leading them "to a higher step on the ladder of knowledge".

Uniquely, T4<sub>I</sub> talked about the preparations she made for the whole course, not just for a specific lesson. She said that before a course started, she established "a set of goals or objectives for the course" based on "the requirements of the syllabus" developed by her department. She did this because she found it necessary to make

some goals “specific” so as to “create more practical, interesting and creative activities for the students” and to “think of some assessment tools ... besides the tests given by the department”.

An inspiring learning environment was also seen as necessary for a successful lesson. This environment is created through the appropriate choice of topics, activities and teaching methods. The participants held that learning topics should be interesting to get students involved in the lesson. T3<sub>I</sub> suggested that, where the topic of the lesson is “not very interesting”, the teacher has the responsibility to make the students appreciate the value or the purpose of the lesson. The example she gave was that the teacher can make her/his students aware that the topic is good for their “language competence”. Other participants described activities used in a successful lesson as “interesting” (T3<sub>Q</sub>; T3<sub>I</sub>), “exciting and attractive” (T6<sub>Q</sub>) and “game-like” (T7<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>I</sub>). In T7<sub>Q</sub>’s view, the use of “game-like activities” motivates students to “learn both consciously and subconsciously”. In T3<sub>I</sub>’s opinion, exercises and homework assigned to students also have to be “interesting”. Some participants argued that the lesson in general and the activities and materials used should be “based on ... students’ real needs and levels” (T22); otherwise, as T1<sub>Q</sub> put it, the lesson would be “irrelevant and not productive”. As for the teacher’s use of teaching methods and approaches, T22 claimed that “good teaching methods” are “the most important factor” contributing to the success of a lesson. T12 offered the view that an “appropriate approach” makes both teacher and students “feel relaxed when dealing with the topic of the lesson as well as discussing with each other”.

Lesson delivery and classroom management were seen as important. Specifically, a successful lesson must be taught in such a way that it is “understandable” to students (T1<sub>Q</sub>). It should also be delivered in “a very active way” (T3<sub>I</sub>) in order to enhance student involvement (T13; T15), to “stimulate ... enthusiasm” and to “promote ... thinking” (T3<sub>Q</sub>). Success also depends on the teacher’s class management expertise (T14).

Key pedagogical skills that the participants identified include: an ability to elicit from students what they know, providing scaffolding to increase what they can do, giving clear instructions, providing useful feedback and rewarding achievement.

Discipline must also be maintained. For example, T10<sub>I</sub> believed that giving clear instructions is “a requirement” that helps students know how and what to do to “accomplish the mission easily”, and that providing rewards is a way to ensure that students know “what they do really matters”. Teachers should be “enthusiastic” (T8<sub>Q</sub>) and “wholeheartedly” carry out the lesson to “encourage students to continue their learning” (T3<sub>Q</sub>). The participants also stated that the teacher should be flexible when combining different techniques and when handling different classes. T7<sub>Q</sub> compared a teacher who has different groups of students to teach to “a performer” who has “different groups of audience” to “entertain”. In his view, the spontaneity and flexibility of the teacher will help her/him deliver “unique” lessons.

T3<sub>I</sub> said she knows she has had a successful lesson when the students want to learn more about the topic and other related topics. Some participants suggested that the teacher should make the students “feel confident ... in doing any activity”, and that s/he should not make the students feel “bored” or “discouraged” (T10<sub>I</sub>) or compelled to learn (T8<sub>I</sub>). A number of the participants were of the view that teachers should be “flexible” (T7<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>I</sub>; T22; T24), “adaptable” (T24) and “spontaneous” (T7<sub>Q</sub>; T7<sub>I</sub>), making changes to the lesson plan based on the atmosphere of the class, the students’ attitudes and motivation or in response to some unexpected problem occurring in the classroom.

Participants identified three contributory factors in relation to the quality of the teaching outcomes. The first is professional support in devising appropriate curricula and syllabi. The second is the physical conditions of the classroom: the need for modern equipment and sufficient facilities. The third is those elements that impact on teaching performance, such as providing teachers with feedback.

#### 5.2.4.2 Lesson characteristics

The participants described some characteristics of a successful lesson one of which is that a successful lesson is useful and practical. Another characteristic is that there is a rapport between teacher and students in terms of “interaction” (T15) or “good interaction” (T22) or “cooperation” between teacher and students (T3<sub>I</sub>; T8<sub>I</sub>; T10<sub>Q</sub>;

T20), and “contribution” (T27) or “active contribution” (T5<sub>Q</sub>) from both teacher and students. A third characteristic is illuminated by a number of comments that indicate that a successful lesson is one where the lesson is “interesting” (T5<sub>I</sub>; T26), “enjoyable” (T7<sub>Q</sub>; T24), “creative and fun” (T4<sub>Q</sub>) and “engaging from the start” (T3<sub>Q</sub>). Participants described students in a successful lesson as “interested in the lesson” (T24), “willing to participate in classroom activities” (T23), taking part in the lesson “actively” (T5<sub>I</sub>; T24) or looking “happy” (T21) and “satisfied” (T10<sub>I</sub>).

#### 5.2.4.3 Achievement of teaching objectives or learning outcomes

Some participants considered that a successful lesson meets “the requirements of the curriculum” (T1<sub>Q</sub>) and achieves “the set goals” (T4<sub>Q</sub>) of the lesson. A number of participants stated that there are signs by which they can recognise the attainment of particular learning outcomes, one being students’ level of comprehension of what the teacher wants “to transfer” (T8<sub>Q</sub>) or “to convey to them” (T20). T21 said that she found a lesson successful when students understood what they had covered. Others claimed that other signs of comprehension are the students’ acquisition of skills and knowledge and their retention of that learning. They remarked that after a successful lesson, students’ English will have improved and “their minds and consciousness somehow get broadened” (T30), and that students will be able to use what they have learned after class (T18; T23). For others, a successful lesson is one in which students’ ability to learn independently develops. T9<sub>I</sub> thought that a successful lesson provides students with some “strategies or techniques” intended to “improve learner autonomy” or to help them “improve by themselves in the long term”.

### 5.3 Interviewees’ beliefs about their use of a learner-centred approach

A particular focus of this study is the learner-centred approach to teaching: teachers’ perceptions and use of it. The interviews with T1-T10 provide information about the teachers’ beliefs about their use of a learner-centred approach.

All ten teachers (T1-T10) believed that they were using a learner-centred approach, at least to some extent. Three teachers (T3; T6; T10) said they thought they were

using it; three other teachers (T2; T4; T7) indicated that they were using it to a great extent: “a lot” (T2), “the approach is always on my mind and I try to stick to it” (T4) and “I myself apply this approach in my class . . . , in fact this is my purpose” (T7); four remaining teachers (T1; T5; T8; T9) stated that they were “trying” to adopt a learner-centred approach.

The interviewees provided a variety of reasons why they adopted a learner-centred approach. Four interviewees (T2; T6; T8; T9) attributed their use of a learner-centred approach to their learning experience at university. T2 said that she has been following a learner-centred approach because, from her own experience as an undergraduate student in a learner-centred environment at the EF, she believes that the approach is good for her students. T8’s decision was informed by her experience of studying abroad: “when . . . self-learning, I gain more . . . because you learn the most when you feel comfortable in your mind, [and when] it’s not compulsory”. On seeing that “a lot of students” were “shy” and did “not want to speak anything in class” due to their lower level of English than that of their classmates, she tried to create “opportunities for all the students and to make them more confident”. T6 and T9 said that they were not educated in a learner-centred system at university. T6 said, when introduced to the principle of learner-centredness during the teaching methodology course she took during her undergraduate studies, she thought that it was “a very successful way of teaching”, and she wished that her teachers had cared much more about her. T9 recalled that many of her university teachers had come to class simply to impart knowledge and had not discussed with their students ways to improve their learning. When she became a teacher, she wanted to help her students to be more active and independent.

Two interviewees (T3; T7) maintained that their decision to follow a learner-centred approach was made based on their professional learning, knowledge and judgement. T3 indicated that the theory she learned in her Master’s program “convinced” her that the learner-centred approach was “a good approach”. She said that after trying it and finding that it worked, she was still using this approach. For his part, T7 said that he drew on his experience of teaching children at another institution, observing that some of the activities he had used to engage his young learners would be useful for his more mature students at the EF.

Two interviewees (T5; T6) indicated that their change to a learner-centred approach was motivated by their concern for their students' acquisition of language and other skills. T6 stated that she tried to make her teaching "more effective" when she saw that the students had not learned much after finishing the course. T5 pointed out that she uses a learner-centred approach because it is her aim to help her students to have a good command of English and the skills necessary for their future life and jobs - such as working-in-teams, time management and decision-making. On hearing complaints about students' inability to use English competently when they went to teach or to work, she felt "very sad" and wanted "to try more" or "to think of more effective ways" to help her students.

Three participants (T1; T7; T10) also described other reasons for their choice to implement a learner-centred approach. T7 said that he felt a need for change because he did not want his students to remain "passive" in class. He realised that when he lectured, the students had nothing to do except listen, and that it was "not their fault" because he did all the work. T1 commented that a learner-centred approach showed her "an easier way ... to work with the students". As she reasoned, if the teacher gives the students the "opportunity and right and freedom" to have their voices heard, they will feel "happier" and "willing to cooperate" with her/him; in contrast, if the teacher assumes an authoritative role, giving the students "no power" and "no voice" in the class, they will "lose ... interest" and offer no co-operation. T10 reported that the driving force behind his adoption of a learner-centred approach was his "students' reaction" - he could not "bear" to see his students "look sleepy" in spite of all the careful preparations he had made before coming to class; he felt that he had to find a way which allowed him to teach what he needed to and to "keep them [the students] alive" simultaneously.

Some interviewees reported success in their use of a learner-centred approach; others said that they have had some difficulties; and some described other feelings. Three interviewees directly stated that they have had varying degrees of success: "kind of successful" (T6), "a little bit successful" (T2) and "quite successful" (T5).

Interviewees also recounted how they formed that sense of success - from what students told them informally (T2; T6), by asking students directly (T3) and from the observations they made about their students (e.g., T2 and T9 related success to

student improvement). Some interviewees also indicated that a sense of success came from the applicability of a learner-centred approach to certain classroom conditions (e.g., T5 remarked that she is satisfied with her use of the approach in small classes, but not in large classes).

Interviewees indicated that they encounter a number of difficulties when using a learner-centred approach. One difficulty is the low competency level of the students (T1; T8; T10). Due to this difficulty, it takes a “longer time” for teachers to “explain the same things” in “a class of lower level” (T10); teachers “need to instruct them [students] first to provide them [with] some basic knowledge, so ... the time spent for the students to practise is not much” (T8). According to T1, as students in “lower level classes” “are shy” and “not ... familiar with ... expressing what they want to do”, they fail to tell her what they really need and, as a result, she did not really know whether the activities she used worked for them or not. Another difficulty is student expectations. T8 reported that, in a listening and speaking class, the students expect the teacher to teach them how to speak and how to listen rather than trying to do so themselves. In her opinion, the students have such expectations because of the didactic way of teaching prevalent in Vietnam, and to which they have been exposed from an early age. Generally, Vietnamese students are not in the habit of negotiating with their teacher or of learning by themselves. Interviewees also reported the inadequacy of the educational facilities, which do not allow the teacher to use technology in support of learning or “to explore all the creativity and the ability of the student[s]” (T8). Big class sizes and the limited time they have to teach are further limitations. This, according to T5, compromises a learner-centred approach. An additional difficulty is the changes to the curriculum which, in T3’s view, are so frequent that the teachers have little time to adapt themselves to the new content.

In addition, interviewees expressed a belief that it is necessary for all teachers to follow a learner-centred approach. As T7 argued, above all else, a lesson is carried out for the students, not for the teacher’s benefit - the aim of the lesson is to help students to learn what they need to, and to do this, teachers must reduce their talking time so that the students are the ones who work more in the class. T4 stated that even though it is time-consuming to come up with engaging activities, she felt “very happy and inspired” when designing activities for a learner-centred class.

#### **5.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented two sets of findings from Stage One of the study: teachers' self-reported use of classroom practices and their beliefs about a learner-centred approach to TESOL.

The findings derived from the quantitative data relate to the teachers' beliefs about what they do in the classroom. A number of classroom practices which the teachers believe they use often focus on the satisfaction of student needs and the development of student autonomy and interpersonal relationships. The findings also indicate that a high percentage of the teachers believe that they use or have used a learner-centred approach.

The set of qualitative findings encapsulate the teachers' understandings of the main role of a TESOL teacher and the nature of a successful lesson as well as the teachers' definitions and descriptions of a learner-centred approach. The beliefs that the teachers have about a learner-centred approach have been categorised in terms of teacher roles and relationships and student roles and relationships. Within the framework of a learner-centred approach, the teacher is believed to be a facilitator, an organiser and a non-authoritative figure, who must work to develop rapport with the students. Three additional roles have been identified for the teacher: 'fire lighter', 'pail filler' and teacher-as-learner. The students are the centre of the learning process and, therefore, are seen as needing to have active and participatory roles and to build supportive relationships among themselves. Perceptions that the teachers have about what contributes to a successful lesson are described in terms of factors contributing to a successful lesson, lesson characteristics and the achievement of teaching objectives or learning outcomes.

The next chapter presents the findings that describe the teachers' actual practices; that is, what the teachers do in their classroom, establishing the degree of coherence between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices.

## Chapter 6: Findings Stage Two

The chapter describes the findings from the second stage of the research. It focuses both on what the teachers were observed doing in their lessons and the description of their actions offered by the teachers during post-observation interviews. A wide range of teacher actions was examined, including those that took place for a brief period of time and those that occurred for an extended time and those that were planned and others that were spontaneous.

Three overarching categories of teacher actions were identified: those being related to classroom management, to teaching and to relationship building. Each broad category comprised a number of subcategories which described different sets of actions undertaken by the teachers (Table 6.1).

Ten teachers (T1 to T10) participated in this stage of the study. Fourteen language skills-based classes taught by T1 to T10 were observed during the research, totalling 37 lesson observations and post-lesson interviews, plus two additional interviews.

Below are some examples of the ways lesson observations and follow-up interview statements are referenced in this chapter. If the information is taken from the first lesson observation (L1) conducted in T7's class, it is referenced as T7(L1). If the information is obtained from a series of lesson observations, for example, from the first, second and third lesson observations (L1-3) made in T7's class, it is signalled as T7(L1-3). If the information is derived from the first post-lesson interview (P1) given by T7, its source is indicated as T7(P1). As two classes were observed for T5 and T8 and three classes for T9, the subscript number <sub>2</sub> or <sub>3</sub> is used to denote that the observation and the interview relate to their second or third classes. For example, T9(L<sub>3</sub>) means that the lesson observation was carried out in the third class taught by T9, and T9(P<sub>3</sub>) means that the interview was given by T9 after the lesson observation. The fourth interview given by T1 and T6 is referred to as (P4).

Table 6.1: Categories of teacher actions and illustrative examples

Category	Subcategory	Actions	Examples (taken from observation data and interview data)
Classroom management	Organising the learning environment	<p><b>Setting up tasks and activities for students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using individual, pair, small group and whole class groupings</li> <li>- Setting a time limit for tasks</li> <li>- Giving an outline of the lesson</li> <li>- Giving instructions, checking students' understandings and checking whether students were ready to do tasks</li> </ul>	<p>T9(P3): by asking the students to listen to peers in small groups and identify one kind of mistakes they made, she wanted the students "to help each other ... to improve ... speaking skills", "fluency and accuracy"</p> <p>T7(P2): when the students knew that they had to finish a task by a certain point of time, they would "force themselves to work"</p> <p>T1(P1): through the lesson outline, students could see whether the activities were "of their interest" or not, "anticipate the difficulties" and get "prepared" or "ready"</p> <p>T4(L2): "We listen and we choose the best answers ok. Is that clear to you?"</p>
	Managing the class and student behaviour	<p><b>Actions undertaken by more than one teacher:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nominating individual students to</li> </ul>	<p>T7(P2): if the teacher let the students self-select their turns to talk, "maybe</p>

		<p>speak</p> <p>- Instructing students to speak English in class</p> <p>- Intervening or interrupting students in order that the lesson could return to the plan intended by the teacher</p> <p>- Interrupting students while they were doing tasks or waiting until they had finished tasks to point out to them where they had not carried out tasks in accordance with instructions</p> <p>- Giving rewards</p> <p><b>Actions undertaken by a sole teacher:</b></p> <p>- Asking the student who wanted to go home early to organise a vocabulary game for the class</p> <p>- Allowing all</p>	<p>just some individuals” would “work” and the others would “remain silent all ... the time”</p> <p>T1(L2), T3(L1), T6(L1), T7(L2-3): “No Vietnamese please.”</p> <p>T8(L1): “No Vietnamese next time, ok.”</p> <p>T6(P3): “I had to ask them to stop at that point and begin a new one. Maybe ... it won’t lose ... time first and it will help them concentrate on the topic.”</p> <p>T10(P1): He was aware that he “should not ... interrupt too much”, but he felt “a need to interrupt them” to show them the way he wanted them to do the task.</p> <p>T2(P1): gave the best-performing group a short story, “something unusual” that could inspire their interest in reading</p> <p>T3(P1): “to remind her that ... she should not go home early”</p> <p>T4(P2): “I don’t wanna let them</p>
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		<p>volunteers to give presentations</p> <p>- Allowing students to start the lesson</p>	<p>down.”</p> <p>T9(P2): wanted the students to be the ones who “will start the lesson”</p>
<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Input</b>	<b>Providing input to students as required by the objectives of tasks and activities</b>	<p>T4(L2): “I mean here to check for clarification just to make sure that the listeners are following the speaker ok not whether the listener[s] agree or disagree. It’s different ... and as listeners we can use some expressions in order to interrupt the speaker to stop for a while to explain something to us right ... Page eighteen please. So we have some polite expressions ... Then one of these we can say, ‘Could I interrupt?’, ‘Can I interrupt?’, ‘May I interrupt?’ Then we continue with one of the sentences like, ‘Would you mind repeating that?’, ‘Could you repeat that please?’, ‘Would you repeat that please?’ etc. ...”</p>
	<b>Scaffolding</b>	<p><b>Providing help or assistance to students so that they could perform tasks or follow and understand the lesson:</b></p> <p>- Providing basic information or background knowledge</p>	<p>T8(L4): “In this chapter the radio program [is about] the rise of rock’n’roll. So they play rock and roll... Because rock’n’roll is a combination of blue, jazz, country music and gospel music. And sometimes ... it’s very difficult for</p>

		<p>- Giving students prompts or clues or asking guiding questions</p> <p>- Demonstrating to students how to do tasks in accordance with instructions given</p> <p>- Taking notes of lectures students were listening to and putting them on the board</p> <p>- Using Vietnamese</p>	<p>you to distinguish the music because it's a combination [of] four different kinds of music. Sometimes we listen to it and we think it's jazz and sometimes we think it's blue or gospel music. Do you know gospel music? Yeah the music that people sing in the church ok."</p> <p>T1(L2): "So what is the second option, the second opinion?"</p> <p>T7(L3): "To help you now I would like to give you some modelling first ... and this is my comic strip and I will show you can do this one ok [sic]."</p> <p>T1(P2): taking notes of the lecture herself to "help the students to ... follow the flow of the lecture easier [sic]"</p> <p>T2(P3): the use of Vietnamese was "to facilitate the understanding of the students"</p>
	<p><b>Teaching materials</b></p>	<p><b>Selecting learning topics, activities and materials:</b></p> <p>- Using the prescribed textbooks</p>	<p>Teachers: followed the textbooks "strictly" or "closely" [T1(P2); T6(P1); T10(P1)] or to "a great extent" [T4(P1)], or used "eighty per cent" [T3(P1)] or "seventy to eighty per cent" [T5(P3)] of the textbook</p>

		- Using materials outside the prescribed textbooks	T7: the materials he used for the first lesson were “not from the textbook”; he “didn’t follow the textbook” in the second and third lessons
	<b>Student options</b>	<p><b>Giving students option of selecting topics, activities and materials:</b></p> <p>- Asking students what activity they would like to do first or how much time they thought they would need to do the task</p> <p>- Allowing students to select topics offered by teachers or textbooks</p> <p>- Allowing students to select their own topics, activities and materials</p>	<p>T1(P1): when the students were “in the mood” for an activity, they would have “more energy, ... more interest and ... more effort in fulfilling that activity”</p> <p>T10(P3): “let them [students] choose their own favourite picture” so that they could write about “the one that they like best” or had most ideas about</p> <p>T5(P3): allowed the students to change their topic “because the students said that ... they did not have ... enough idea[s] for the essay ... so I think that, if they do not know very clearly, they cannot write a good essay”</p>
	<b>Organising the assessment of student learning</b>	<p><b>Organising feedback:</b></p> <p>- Giving brief, quick and spontaneous comments as well as long and also planned feedback</p> <p>- Giving compliments</p>	<p>“Good” [T9(L1-2)], “Wow, that’s interesting” [T1(L2)], “It sounds great” [T7(L2)]</p> <p>T6(P2): “I decided to ... compliment</p>

		<p>before/and pointing out to students their mistakes and shortcomings</p> <p>- Using peer assessment</p> <p>- Administering mid-term tests by end or after end of course</p> <p>- Allowing students to prepare for mid-term tests at home</p>	<p>them first and then ... give them some weak points that should be improved in their presentations just to encourage them ... to let them know that ... I appreciate what they do.”</p> <p>T1(P3) and T5(P4): wanted to be “fair” or to avoid being “subjective” by listening to the opinions from the students</p> <p>T6(P4): students would have “more time” to acquire “more skills” and “more knowledge” to prepare for the test</p> <p>T7(P4): if students had “good preparation”, they would “feel more confident” and he could “examine their speaking skills better”</p>
<b>Relationship building</b>		<p><b>Actions that contributed to development of relationships between teachers and students:</b></p> <p>- Using humour in classroom</p> <p>- Sharing experience with students or drawing upon experience they both shared</p>	<p>T10(L1): “How many of you have read it? Raise your hand. Higher. Wow I’m so proud of you ... You ... read twice? (asking a student). You read twice right ... you raise two hands” (the class laughed)</p> <p>T4(P1): “sharing ... our own personal experience is also a very important part in teaching”</p>

		- Maintaining contact between teachers and students via email	T3(L2): “And I will send you via email the treaty. You have to read it at home and summarize the main contents of the treaty in about two or three paragraphs ... and you have to email it to me.”
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Each of the categories and subcategories identified in Table 6.1 are described in detail below with the actions being initially presented according to the observation data, followed by the interview data.

## **6.1 Classroom management**

The category of “classroom management” incorporated all those actions the teachers undertook in order to organise the learning environment and to manage the class and student behaviour.

### ***6.1.1 Organising the learning environment***

The actions demonstrated by teachers relating to the organisation of the learning environment were mainly concerned with setting up tasks and activities for the students. These were structured so that they were undertaken either individually, in pairs or small groups or as a whole-class.

The students worked individually in a limited number of reading, writing and speaking tasks and activities and in almost all listening tasks and activities. Their individual work was often followed by small group or whole-class discussions in which they exchanged their ideas with the group or the class.

Almost all speaking and reading tasks were organised as pair or small group work and some writing tasks were also set up in this way. In these settings, the students shared ideas and worked together. For example, one small group work activity

occurred when the students were asked to pick out one kind of mistake their friends made while they were reporting the news they had listened to. T9(P3) stated that by asking the students to do so, she wanted them “to help each other ... to improve ... speaking skills”, “fluency and accuracy”. In some listening sessions, pair and small group work was used when students exchanged the summaries they had made [T1(L1); T7(L2)] or the notes they had taken during a listening activity [T4(L2); T7(L1-3); T8(L3)] before they described to the class what they had heard. The rationale behind setting writing tasks as pair and small group work, as expounded by the teachers, can be summed up as the practice of “scaffolding”. (This term was used by T5(P3) and differs slightly from that used in the literature.) Three teachers [T2(P1); T5(P3); T10(P3)] said that they set writing tasks for groups and pairs to provide the students with opportunities to get help and assistance from their friends. T10(P3) claimed that, if the students were to write individually, they would have many things to do on their own: understanding the topics, finding ideas and arguments, making an outline, writing the first draft and making revisions. The students would, therefore, need “a lot of time” and face “a lot of difficulties” [T5(P3)], and some would “struggle” with the task [T2(P1)]. Thus, it was argued that, by working in pairs or small groups, the students could help each other generate and express ideas and check their grammar [T10(P3)].

The whole-class approach was mainly employed when instructions were given to students about the tasks and activities the teachers were organising or when the teachers got the class together as a group after individual, pair and small group work to check their answers, to collect their ideas and to give feedback on their work.

Teachers set a time limit for the tasks they organised and let the students know this fact. T2, T3, T4, T5 and T7 did this every time they set reading, speaking and writing tasks. In listening activities, the teachers often informed the students what they were going to listen to, for example, the whole lecture, half or part of the lecture or some conversations (T1; T4; T7; T8; T9) or approximately how long they would listen [T1(L1)]. T7(P2) argued that when the students knew that they had to finish a task in a set time, they would “force themselves to work”; otherwise, they “may ... not do anything. They may just be silent all ... the time and it is not really good and effective”.

Also as part of organising the learning environment, the teachers gave an outline of the lesson to students [T1(L1-3); T8(L3); T9(L2)] or said what the focus of the new lesson would be [T4(L1); T10(L1)]. For example, T1 outlined what the students would be doing at the beginning of all three of her observed lessons. T1(P1) said she did this because she wanted the students to have an idea of the activities they were going to do during the class so that they could see whether the activities were “of [their] interest” or not, “anticipate the difficulties” and get “prepared” or “ready”.

All the teachers gave instructions when organising activities, but some teachers also checked whether the students understood these, and others also checked whether the students were ready to do the tasks. In one instance, T5(L<sub>2</sub>) asked the class to repeat what their task involved. The questions asked by the teachers are listed in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Questions asked by teachers to check students’ understanding of task instructions and readiness to do tasks

Questions asked	Teachers asking questions
“Is it ok?”	T10(L3)
“Got it?”	T8(L2)
“You got it?”	T1(L2); T8(L <sub>2</sub> )
“Do you get it?”	T4(L2)
“Understand?”	T7(L3)
“Understand everyone?”	T7(L1-3)
“Do you understand?”	T8(L <sub>2</sub> )
“Is it clear?”	T5(L <sub>2</sub> )
“Is that clear to you?”	T4(L2)
“Do you know what I mean?”	T1(L2); T8(L1); T10(L3)
“Ready?”	T1(L1); T2(L2); T6(L1); T6(L3); T8(L3)
“Ready everyone?”	T7(L2)
“Are you ready?”	T1(L2); T7(L2); T8(L2); T9(L2); T9(L3)

### ***6.1.2 Managing the class and student behaviour***

The actions undertaken in the management of the class and student behaviour by more than one teacher included nominating individual students to speak or adopting practices that prevented some students from having too many self-selected turns. For example, T7 said, “Somebody new please” [T7(L1)] and “No, not you, already” [T7(L2)] and asked the groups to choose another speaker. T2(P3) and T7(P2) said that, although they both preferred the students to volunteer to talk in class, they had reasons for nominating students to speak, one of which was that as some students were “shy” and “not confident enough”, if the teacher let them self-nominate their turns to talk, “maybe just some individuals” would “work” and the others would “remain silent all ... the time” [T7(P2)]. Another reason indicated by some participants was that by calling upon the students “randomly”, the teacher could make all of them pay attention to the lesson because they did not know who would be asked to talk next. T2(P3) argued that this practice was “more effective” than allowing the students to nominate themselves to speak.

Students were instructed to speak English in class. “No Vietnamese please” was a statement repeated in a number of the classes [T1(L2); T3(L1); T6(L1); T7(L2-3)]. In a speaking activity, T7(L2) made it a “rule” that the students would “be punished” by being given a minus mark if they spoke Vietnamese. In one lesson, while making some comments on the class debate, T8(L1) remarked that she had heard some Vietnamese during the discussion and said to the students, “No Vietnamese next time, ok”. However, in one activity in T8’s class, once divided into two groups, the students spoke quite a lot of Vietnamese during their group discussion. When asked what she thought about the students’ use of Vietnamese, T8(P4) said that it was her intention “to minimise ... the time” the students spoke Vietnamese in class, but after observing the students for some time, she found out that it was “very difficult” for them to “use English alone” “to discuss especially ... something ... very academic or scientific”, so she sometimes “let them ... speak Vietnamese in the discussion”.

Teachers often intervened or interrupted students while they were speaking in order that the lesson could return to the intended plan. For example, T6(L3) was seen on some occasions to interrupt her students as they presented their arguments during a

debate and to ask for their next ideas. After the lesson, she explained that her purpose was to save class time and make the students concentrate on the debate at hand instead of getting lost or getting carried away with their own opinions. She said,

Sometimes when the students ... stand here ... and argue with each other ... they may get lost. Sometimes ... the reasons they give ... may get them ... too far from the topic. So that's why sometimes I had to ask them to stop at that point and begin a new one. Maybe ... it won't lose ... time first and it will help them concentrate on the topic. [T6(P3)]

In two other observations, after putting an end to an argument between some students, T1(L3) continued eliciting ideas from other students. Similarly, T8(L4) interrupted one group to ask another to take its turn. In another observation, after the class had discussed for ten minutes the statement of whether or not the motorcar was the most catastrophic invention in human history, the presentation group in T9(L<sub>2</sub>)'s lesson changed the word "motorcar" to "gasoline-using vehicles". One student protested saying that the new term was too broad, and that the class did not have enough time to change their minds at such short notice. However, the class started the discussion after T9 told them to "discuss from different points of views [*sic*]".

Teachers sometimes interrupted the students while they were doing their tasks (or waited until they had finished) to point out to them where they had not carried out the tasks in accordance with the instructions given. The teachers then took different measures, ranging from clarifying the previous instructions, giving further instructions and explanations and organising the task again with some modification to organising another task, to redress the problem. For example, T2(L1) explained to the students the guidelines for summarising a reading passage given in their textbook, checking the students' comprehension by asking them to briefly tell her what they should do according to the guidelines. After that, she asked the students to write a summary of the reading passage that they had read the previous week and the main ideas of which they had analysed at the beginning of the session. After the students had discussed this in groups for seven minutes, T2 stopped them to go through the steps listed in the guidelines again. She explained to the students that the

way some of them had written was not “a good way to write” a summary and gave some suggestions for the writing task. In a second case, T10(L1) simply told the students “to look at activity number six” in the textbook, which gave the instructions they needed to follow. After the students had been discussing in pairs the assigned questions for eight minutes, T10 stopped them to explain more about what they were expected to do to achieve the objective of the activity. He pointed out to the students that the way to have an academic conversation was similar to the way to write an academic essay, something they had already studied. He told the students that they should not simply enumerate their ideas and agree to everything their friends said, but that they should argue their views, giving reasons and examples and rebut their friends’ opinions. After the lesson, T10 said that he was aware that he “should not ... interrupt too much”, but that after observing the students for some time, he saw that only two groups of students were carrying out the task “the correct way”, so he felt “a need to interrupt them” to show them the way he wanted them to do the task. In a third case, after the students had finished a speaking activity in which “a runner” from each group told another group about the animal her group had read about, T7(L2) got the students together as a whole class and pointed out to them where their actions were not in line with the instructions given. For instance, he said that the runners read from the notes they had taken rather than talked to the other groups about the animals, and that the other students just looked at the runners’ notes and jotted down the information rather than listening for the information themselves. T7 then asked the groups to send new runners to the other groups and required the new runners not to take their notes with them. In a final example, T8 organised an alternative task when the objective of the first task was not achieved. T8(L3) organised a jigsaw listening activity for the advanced class she taught. After the students finished the activity, T8 said that they should listen again but look at the script of the tape provided in the textbook at the same time. However, the students said that they did not have the tape script with them as they were using photocopied materials. (It was discovered later that as the original textbook was expensive, some students borrowed their friends’ books and just photocopied the units they studied). After the lesson, T8(P3) explained that she had wanted the students to look at the tape script to identify the gist of the lecture because student summaries focused too much on details rather than on general ideas being presented. In the next lesson, she brought some copies of the tape script to class. After pointing out the problems with

their summaries the previous week and the difference between listening for major ideas and listening for specific details, T8 asked the students to read the transcript and make a summary of the part they had listened to. However, after listening to the students, T8 commented that, as their summaries still contained “too many details”, she analysed the contents of the lecture with them and showed them the steps to follow if they wanted to produce a better summary within the time limit.

Teachers also used rewards to manage classroom behaviour. For example, T2(L1) gave a short story to the best-performing group in a crossword puzzle activity. She later explained that she gave her students short stories, “not ... a pen or candy”, as gifts because she wanted to give them “something unusual” that could inspire their interest in reading. T7 and T10 awarded bonus marks as an incentive for the students’ participation in classroom activities. For example, T7(L2) gave bonus marks to the groups who did well in the group interview activity, and T10(L3) gave rewards to the groups who were able to identify mistakes in their friends’ paragraphs. Some teachers made it known that the bonus marks they gave would be counted towards final course marks. For example, T3(P2) told the students that they would be given extra marks for their individual reading projects about their favourite short stories; T6(P2) explained that the students would receive a bonus to their participation marks if they completed the assignment of transcribing the audio files she set before the break; T4(P2) said that she reminded the students to send her the power point slides of their presentations so that she could look at them and would give them some bonus marks later, such as by rounding up their final mark.

While each of the actions described above were undertaken by more than one teacher, the following actions were carried out by a sole teacher. For example, T3(L1) (when she asked the student who wanted to go home early to organise a vocabulary game for the class) said to her class, “Anyone in this class who wants to leave early has to do something for me”. In a lesson observation, T4(L2) allowed all the volunteers to give their mini-individual presentations on the two topics she had provided in the previous lesson. Eventually, there were five presentations on that day instead of the usual three. Speaking after the lesson, T4(P2) explained, “I did not regret allowing the students to present”, adding, “I somehow ... indulged my students a lot today”, noting that she always tried to encourage them to talk in class

when they volunteered to do so and she did not want to “let them down”. In the next lesson observation, before the students volunteered to give their presentations, T4(L3) informed them that there would be “exactly” three presentations, and that she would be “quite strict” about that. When asked about this in the post-observation interview, T4(P3) said that she had “made some improvement” that day by “learning something from the previous week”, when she had been “so easy-going” that she had “let a lot of volunteers ... present”. One other action was seen in the lessons taught by T9(L1-3). When T9 entered the classroom at the beginning of the lesson, the students started to tell each other the news they had listened to at home, without being told to do so by the teacher. T9(P2) later explained that it was a habit she wanted her students to develop so that they are the ones who “will start the lesson”, not her.

## **6.2 Teaching**

The category “teaching” consisted of those actions that the teachers employed as part of their teaching practice.

### ***6.2.1 Input***

Input that was provided by the teachers related to the objectives of the tasks and activities taken from the textbooks or selected or developed by the teachers themselves. Input here refers to examples of, and information and explanations about, language skills, language components (such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation), language learning skills and the learning strategies specified in the textbooks. Examples of this include when the teachers explained a grammar point or concept and gave illustrative examples; asked the class to repeat words or expressions after them; confirmed whether the students’ answers were right or wrong; told the students what the answer was in case they could not come up with one; corrected the mistakes the students had made; and explained why and how the students should use a vocabulary item, a sentence structure, a language function or a learning strategy. All the teachers (T1-T10) were seen to do this at least once in all the lessons observed.

### ***6.2.2 Scaffolding***

Teachers provided the students with ways of scaffolding for their learning. The term “scaffolding” is used here to refer to the help or assistance the teachers offered to the students so that the students could perform their tasks or follow and understand the lesson. One action was to provide basic information or background knowledge that facilitated the students’ understanding of the tasks and their requirements. In some cases, the teachers briefly told the students the meanings of some vocabulary items that had been used - words such as “fantasy” (as in “a fantasy job” in T1(L2)’s lesson), “indifferent” (used for talking about people’s attitudes in T10(L1)’s lesson), and “puppet” (as in the belief that human beings were like puppets in T9(L1)’s lesson). In other cases, the teachers provided explanations about the concepts embedded in the tasks; for instance, T1(L2) pointed out what the difference was between white-collar and blue-collar jobs before the students started their discussions about whether white-collar jobs should have more prestige than blue-collar jobs; T6(L3) explained what a retirement home was in reference to a topic about whether or not it was acceptable in their culture for them to send their old parents to a retirement home; T7(L3) defined what a comic strip was before asking the students to create a comic strip; and T8(L4) described what ‘rock and roll’ was prior to asking the students to listen to a radio program about the rise of this type of music.

Teachers often gave the students a prompt or a clue or asked them a guiding question. All the teachers were seen to do this at least once [T1(L1-3); T2(L2); T3(L2); T4(L2); T5(L1-4); T5(L<sub>2</sub>); T6(L2-3); T7(L1); T7(L3); T8(L2); T8(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L1-3); T9(L<sub>2</sub>); T10(L1)]. In the second lesson of T1, for example, the students listened to a six-minute lecture about American and Japanese management styles - at times, T1 told the students to listen for verbs and nouns; at other times, she asked questions to focus the students on the details they needed to grasp such as, “So what is the second option, the second opinion?”, “What is the belief behind this kind of management?”, “Why do these differences exist? So what are the explanations?”, “So in response to such a situation what ... should the American government do?”. T1’s post-lesson comments confirmed that, when the students listened to the lecture for the second time, she did not “let them listen to the entire lecture”, but she stopped

the tape and asked questions to “help” or “direct” the students “to catch up with the main ideas or the details” that she wanted them to understand.

Teachers also demonstrated to the students how to do the tasks in accordance with their instructions or the instructions given by the textbooks. Some teachers gave an example before the students started doing their tasks: T1(L2) looked at the first question together with the whole class and asked the students to answer the remaining questions in groups; T7(L3) showed the class a comic strip he had drawn himself to illustrate what was required. Other teachers modelled their approaches to the tasks throughout the activity. For example, T3(L2) showed the class her own summaries of different sections of a reading passage and pointed out the differences between her summaries and the summaries produced by the students; T9(L1) put her own notes on the board while the class listened to the lecture again for specific information; T9(P1) said that her notes served as “suggestions” to show the students, “especially lower level students”, one way of taking notes. Several teachers [T1(L1-3); T2(L2-3); T3(L3); T5(L1-4); T5(L2); T6(L2); T9(L1-3); T9(L2)] provided the students with, or reminded them of, a relevant learning strategy during the lesson: T1(L3) told the students to guess the words from the tape by associating the sounds they heard with the sounds of the words they already knew; T6(L1) reminded the students to maintain eye contact with the audience while speaking instead of looking at the projection screen all the time; T2(L2) told her class to try working out the meanings of some unknown words in the reading from the context given; and T5(L3) showed the students how to rearrange the ideas of an essay to make its organisation clearer.

The interviews revealed some other actions the teachers used to help the students to follow the lesson. While the students listened again to the lecture for specific details, T1(L1-3) took notes simultaneously with the students and put her notes on the board. The reason given by T1(P2) was that, by doing this, she could “help the students to ... follow the flow of the lecture easier [*sic*]”. She said that the students could “look back and forth” at her notes on the board and the summary notes in their own books. T3(L3) and T5(L3) asked the students to write down their answers on the board instead of answering the questions verbally. The reason cited was that this would make it “easy” for other students to follow their answers. For example, T3(P3) said

that the diagram in the reading passage that day contained a lot of new medical terms, so if the students mispronounced the words while reading out their answers, their friends could not “follow their answers easily”.

Teachers’ use of Vietnamese, according to the explanations provided by the teachers in the follow-up interviews, was to facilitate the students’ understanding. The instances in which the teachers used Vietnamese were few, but involved providing the students with, or asking them for, the Vietnamese equivalents of some English words during activities related to vocabulary preview [T6(L1); T3(L3)], scanning for specific words [T10(L1)] and vocabulary focus [T2(L2-3)]. When asked why they had done so, T6(P1) said that she singled out two words, “association” and “innate”, from a list of ten words given in the textbook because she knew from her experience that they were often misunderstood by Vietnamese students. T10(P1) believed that it was “not easy to find equivalents” in the two languages, so he thought that it was acceptable for the teacher to provide the students with “precise equivalents”. T3(P3) reasoned that the medical terms used in the text such as “gene”, “DNA”, “chromosome”, “mutation” and “screening” were complicated, so the students needed to understand their meanings in Vietnamese first before they could use them for communication in English. T2(P3) argued that the use of Vietnamese was “to facilitate the understanding of the students”, observing that it was not always easy to explain the meanings of some words in English nor to give examples to illustrate their meanings; that as the students were still young, they might have comprehension problems with abstract explanations and illustrations and might be confused as a result. She concluded that, in this case, giving the students “the Vietnamese translation is the best choice” because “the exact word in Vietnamese ... somehow ... helps them to get a clear definition, a clear image, and it ... doesn’t waste our time”.

T5 taught two Year 1 classes, one of which was the honours class and was, therefore, of a higher level than the other. At no time during the four lessons observed in the honours class did T5 speak Vietnamese. However, T5(L<sub>2</sub>) spoke Vietnamese sometimes during the first half of the lesson with the second class, when she guided the students to do one vocabulary exercise about the reading passage and mainly during the second half, when she looked at the thesis statements and topic sentences

of the essays the students had written. T5(P<sub>2</sub>) explained that her use of Vietnamese was due to the “lower level” of language skill of that class as compared to the advanced class. She stated that the students in this class did not have “good marks” in their entrance examination to the university, that they still made “a lot of mistakes, even basic grammar mistakes” when writing sentences, and that they did not know how to write a paragraph and an essay. T5 said, “when I corrected the students’ essays I thought that I should explain ... in Vietnamese so they can understand it more easily, and I hope that, when they can understand more easily, they can improve their writing skills in the long term”. In answer to the question of what she thought would be the students’ reaction to her use of Vietnamese, T5 said she thought that the use of Vietnamese was “useful” for the students, and that they felt “comfortable” with her use of Vietnamese in the classroom.

### ***6.2.3 Teaching materials***

Teachers were involved in the selection of learning topics, activities and materials. Some actions observed were concerned with the teachers’ use of the set materials. At the EF, the prescribed textbooks were *Interactions 2* and *Mosaic 1* for Year 1 level and *Mosaic 2* for Year 2 level. All the teachers followed the textbooks, but to varying degrees - some seemed to use more material from the textbooks than others, and some seemed to use more from the books in one lesson than in another. With the exception of T7, all the teachers were seen to cover the core content prescribed by the syllabi.

These observations were confirmed by the teachers’ post-lesson comments. Some teachers said that they had followed the textbooks “strictly” or “closely” [T1(P<sub>2</sub>); T6(P<sub>1</sub>); T10(P<sub>1</sub>)] or to “a great extent” [T4(P<sub>1</sub>)], or that they had used “eighty per cent” [T3(P<sub>1</sub>)] or “seventy to eighty per cent” [T5(P<sub>3</sub>)] of the textbook, explaining that they did so because the activities in the textbook were “suitable ... with the objectives of the lesson” and “useful” for the students [T5(P<sub>1</sub>)] or because the discussion topics were “good enough” [T4(P<sub>1</sub>)]. T10(P<sub>1</sub>) said that he carried out “all or nearly all the activities” in those chapters where he found the topic “quite relevant” to the students but fewer in other chapters when he did not think he had

time for all of the activities. This is consistent with other teachers who said that they had used some of the activities from the chapter [T6(P1); T10(P2)] or “fifty per cent” of the textbook [T1(P3); T3(P2); T5(P3)].

Of all the teachers observed, T7 appeared to use the textbook least. He confirmed that the materials he used for the first observed lesson were “not from the textbook” [T7(P1)], that he “didn’t follow the textbook” in the second and third observed lessons [T7(P2); T7(P3)]. When asked to judge the extent to which he thought he used the textbook, T7(P1) stated that he followed the topics and the techniques taught by the textbooks, and that he “sometimes” used “the recording in the textbook”, but “most of the time” he used “materials from different sources”.

The range of extra activities and materials the teachers used from outside the textbooks included news, games, mime, songs, quizzes, pictures, contests, video clips, radio programs, crossword puzzles and reading passages (from other books and sources or activities and materials designed by the teachers). With the exception of T4, who said that she would use additional materials after the class had finished the prescribed content in the textbook [T4(P1)], all the teachers brought topics, activities and materials of their own selection into the class. The teachers cited a number of reasons for their use of activities and materials of their own choice. Some teachers said that they would use their own materials when they found that the textbook materials were “not really interesting” [T9(P2)], “not of interest” [T1(P1)] or “not ... suitable” [T10(P2)] or “challenging” [T1(P1)] for the students. Other teachers said that they used their own materials when they wanted to attract the students’ attention with something new: for example, when asked why she had replaced the warm-up activity suggested by the textbook with her own activity, T8(P2) replied that it was because the format of the textbook was “quite consistent” and might therefore become “boring” to the students over time.

T7, the teacher who selected and designed all his own teaching materials, argued that his selection of topics that were “meaningful” to the students “in real life” and his use of materials that were “new” and “different” from what was presented in the textbook made his lesson “memorable” [T7(P1)]. He also stated that, as the students

listened to “something ... real” in a way that was different from the way they usually undertook listening exercises, the lesson was made “closer to them” [T7(P1)].

Some teachers indicated that they selected supplementary activities and materials based on their knowledge, experience and preference. For example, when asked about the technique of ‘shadowing’, which she used in two of the three lessons observed and which involved the students reading the tape script aloud at the speakers’ speed, T4(P2) stated that since she learned this technique at a conference, she had used it to help the students “to improve their fluency”. T4 also related her adoption of this technique to her previous learning experience. She recalled that, when at high school, she was asked to practise reading aloud every text in the textbook, and she found that it helped improve her pronunciation, reading speed and speaking skills. Similarly, when T9(P<sub>2</sub>) was asked about the speaking activity where she read out a short dialogue and asked the students to finish it with one “amusing” or “surprising” sentence in the last few minutes of a lesson, she said that it was a ‘warm-down activity’, a kind of activity she had learned at a workshop. T9 added that, as opposed to a ‘warm-up activity’, a ‘warm-down activity’ was “a small interesting activity to end the lesson” and to make the students “feel happy when they go outside”. T3(P2) explained that her practice of calling some students to read out loud parts of the reading passage was based on her personal experience. She said that, when someone read a text aloud, she would follow by moving her eyes along the words, but that, if she was asked to read something silently to herself, she might not care to do the reading. When asked about the two articles she had brought in for the class, T2(P2) asserted that she had chosen them based on her own interests. She said that she felt interested in them and believed that her students would be interested in them, too.

Some teachers suggested that they used activities and materials that gave the students practice in the skills they thought the students needed. T6(L2-3) and T9(L3) brought into their classes listening materials other than those from the textbooks. Their explanation was that, as the textbooks they were using were intended to train learners for the Test of English as a Foreign Language – Internet- Based Test (TOEFL-iBT), the use of the extra materials gave the students practice in the skills required by the test [T6(P2); T9(P3)]. In one lesson, T2(L3) delivered a review lesson on paragraph

writing at a time when the students were supposed to learn about essay writing according to the syllabus. To account for this, she said that she thought it necessary for the students to review paragraph writing before they proceeded with essay writing, and that, although the students had learned how to write a paragraph in the previous semester, she found that some of them could not even write a topic sentence. In one lesson, T8(L2) employed a warm-up activity of her own rather than following the one in the textbook. She showed the students two sets of slides of people doing their jobs and the vocabulary items for the names of the jobs. She told the students to remember as many words as possible without taking notes. T8(P2) said that she designed the activity “to help [the students] to improve their short-term memory”. T8(P3) further explained that according to the format of the listening paper of the TOFEL-iBT test, students listen to the recording before they are given the questions to answer, so they have to “remember all the details and know how to take notes”. She said that the students’ performance in the mid-term test indicated that “they do not have very good short-term memory [*sic*]”, so “that needs to be trained in the class”.

One type of activity that was used by all the listening and speaking teachers was to ask the students to give presentations of some kind. Some were individual presentations such as in T4’s and T8’s classes, group presentations as in T1’s, T6’s, T8’s and T9’s classes or mini-projects as in T7’s class. The teachers explained their rationales for the presentations: T1(P3) and T6(P2) said that, in addition to enhancing the students’ speaking skills, the task helped them develop reading skills and research skills as they had to read, collect, select, organise and synthesise information; T1(P3) commented that the task gave the students an opportunity to learn some team work skills, like cooperating and negotiating with group members, and provided the students with “some space for individual performance” while working together in a group in order to earn individual scores for their participation. In addition, T1(P3) claimed that she could “pay equal attention to every student” during a presentation, which was impossible otherwise given the large size of her class. T1 said that she could “spend about five to ten minutes listening to one student presenting his or her ideas” and give comments on “his or her strengths and ... weaknesses” so that the student could “improve it later on”.

T3 also asked the students to give a group presentation in her reading, writing and grammar class. In the second observed lesson, the students gave a group presentation in which they asked the class to discuss three questions and to do one vocabulary exercise about a reading passage from a chapter in the textbook, to play a vocabulary game they designed and to look at the amendments they had made to a paragraph written by a class member in the previous lesson. In the writing activity, the class and the teacher discussed the changes the group had made, asked questions for clarification and raised further queries. T3(P2) gave her reasons for asking the students to give a presentation in this way: she said that she wanted the students “to have something to do in the class” - as she put it, she did “not want them to sit passively and listen” to her and “feel that ... they are not active ... and they are not the centre in the class”; that “the other students can learn a lot of things” from the presentation group, “even more things [than] from the teacher”, reasoning that the students might “have to ... agree” with her even though they did not clearly understand or agree with what she said whereas if they disagreed with what their friends said, they would “feel free to argue back”. She also believed that, as the students were “very creative”, they could give successful and informative presentations as long as they were given “time and good instruction”. T3 explained that the writing activity could be described as ‘the principle of three times teaching’ - when the group members got together and discussed the paragraph amongst themselves, they were “teaching each other the first time”; when the group presented the corrections or amendments they had made to the paragraph, the class might agree or disagree with them and this arguing for and against was “the second teaching”; finally, when the teacher joined in the discussion and made suggestions, “the third time” teaching took place.

The students in the three different classes taught by T9 each received a different type of activity: in one class, a group of students held a discussion about a topic related to the theme of the chapter [T9(L<sub>2</sub>)]; in another, students had to summarise a film they had watched, express their feelings about it and dub the actors and actresses in a short scene [T9(L<sub>2</sub>)]; and in the third class, a group of students had to report back to the class on the field trip which they had made to a historical site and during which they interviewed some English-speaking people about their feelings regarding the place [T9(L<sub>3</sub>)]. T9 recounted how she and her students had decided on these three

types of tasks. She said that, on the first day of the course, they examined possible options such as role playing, giving a presentation and interviewing foreigners; they also considered what they had done in the previous courses; and after analysing the advantages and disadvantages of each activity type, they agreed on the three task types. When asked whether she thought the task types were suitable for the classes or not, T9(P<sub>3</sub>) said that she thought they were. She said that from her observation, the film review was a “controllable” and “manageable” task for the students in the first class, who were “at a lower level” than their counterparts in the second class and “not as active” as those in the third class; that the group-led discussion was “challenging enough” for the second class, which was the best of the three classes as judged by their entrance examination results; and that the “active” students in the third class “liked the task” of going on a field trip.

The two Year 2 classes taught by T8 were seen to give two different kinds of group presentations. While the students in the honours class gave a talk on a topic related to the general theme in the chapter and then held a class debate about an issue related to the topic chosen [T8(L1-2)], the students in the other class organised games and activities related to the assigned theme [T8(L<sub>2</sub>)]. T8 explained that she had two different sets of requirements for the group presentations of the two classes: the honours students’ presentation allowed her to see “how they interact with their classmates and how they understand and exploit the chapter” [ T8(P1)] and helped them develop their debating skills, which she thought were lacking [T8(P2)]; on the other hand, T8(P<sub>2</sub>) said that her requirements for the standard class were that they “bring activities to the class”, “show ... the solidarity among ... the group members” and “bring ... some fresh atmosphere into the class”, where some students might be “very sleepy and tired” when they had to study in the afternoon. T8 added that she would “try to make them relax when they study” and “not ... force them too much like the other class.”

A group task called a mini-project was observed in the fourth lesson observation conducted in T7’s class. A group of students presented its project to the class, in which they organised activities for the class to practise listening and speaking while the teacher became an observer. T7(P4) confirmed that, on that day, “the main teachers” were the students and he was “just an ... observer” or “just a member in

the class”, adding that when the students worked on their mini-project, they had a chance to work together and when they presented their project, the class had a chance to learn from other students rather than from the teacher.

#### **6.2.4 Student options**

The students’ choice of topics, activities and materials were seen in such tasks as individual presentations (as in T4’s and T8’s class), group presentations (as in T1’s, T6’s, T8’s and T9’s classes) and mini-projects (as in T7’s class). The students explored, in their own way, the theme of the chapter or the topic set by the teachers. For example, the theme of Chapter 8 in *Mosaic 2* for Year 2 classes was *Breakthroughs*, and the students came up with different topics for their group presentations. The students in T1(L3)’s class talked about the telephone and the light bulb; the students in T8(L3)’s class about video games; and the students in T9(L<sub>2</sub>)’s class about the motorcar. The two corresponding discussion topics selected by the students were whether or not traditional games were better than modern games and whether or not, as Churchill said, the motorcar was the most catastrophic invention in human history. In T4(L<sub>2</sub>)’s class three students brought different focuses to the central theme of loan words in English. One student examined definitions of ‘loan words’, reasons for English’s vast borrowing of words from other languages and the origins of some interesting ‘loan words’. A second student looked at some English words borrowed from Arabic and Italian. A third student gave an overview of borrowed words in English, the re-borrowing process and ten most common borrowed words. In T7(L<sub>4</sub>)’s class, when carrying out their mini-project on the topic of the universe, a group of students organised four activities: vocabulary enrichment about the outer space and the solar system, discussion about what planet other than the earth the class would choose to live on, listening to a recording about super moons and a game about the vocabulary presented earlier. The materials used were taken from different sources: vocabulary items, definitions from dictionaries, images and video clips from the Internet. T7(P<sub>4</sub>) later confirmed that when working on their projects, his students could use and design any activity and any materials related to the topic of their choice as long as they could help their classmates practise listening and speaking. In fact, all the listening and speaking teachers confirmed that the

students in their classes were free to choose the topics and content of their presentations. In some instances, teachers gave students the option of selecting learning topics, activities and materials. For example, in all three observed lessons in her class, after giving an outline of the new lesson, T1 asked the students which activity they would prefer to do first. To explain the rationale behind this action, T1(P1) said that she always informed the students of “the agenda of the activities” and asked them to tell her what activity they wanted to do first. She believed that when the students were “in the mood” for an activity, they would have “more energy, ... more interest and ... [make] more effort in fulfilling that activity”; otherwise, they would “just be like zombies in the class”. The students also chose the way or the number of times they wanted to do the activities; for example, T1(L1), T4(L3) and T8(L<sub>2</sub>) asked their students whether they would like to listen to the tape one more time. When asking students to share with the class the news they had listened to at home, T1(L1-3) always asked whether they would like to come to the front of the class or stay at their desk and speak. T5 asked her students how much time they thought they needed to do the exercises or to write the essays - opinions that were accepted [T5(L2); T5(L4)] or reconsidered by the teacher [T5(L3)]. In T6’s class, one group of students gave two presentations on two occasions while one student gave an individual presentation in one lesson and participated in a group presentation in another [T6(L1); T6(L3)]. T6(P3) explained that in her class the students could give a presentation individually or in pairs or in small groups, and that they could make a second attempt if they thought that “their previous presentation was not satisfactory enough” or they wanted “to get higher grades”.

Students chose the topics they would like to study. In some instances, the students selected from what was offered by the teachers or the textbooks. For example, the students were told to choose one from the two writing topics given by T3(L1), one or two from the six questions listed in the textbook in T8(L4)’s class, and one from the four pictures given in the textbook in T10(L3)’s class. Commenting on the options the students had, T10(P3) said that he could have assigned each student one of the pictures but he “let [them] choose their own favourite picture” so that they could write about “the one that they like best” or had most ideas about. On other occasions, the students decided their own topics. For example, in a writing activity, T5(L3) told the students that they could describe the ceremony they had read about at home.

After discussing this for a few minutes, a group of students asked T5 whether they could change their topic and she agreed. Speaking after the lesson, T5(P3) said that she allowed the students to change their topic “because the students said that ... they did not have ... enough idea[s] for the essay ... so I think that, if they do not know very clearly, they cannot write a good essay”. Another example was that at the end of the second observed lesson, some students were seen to submit their papers to T3 without being told to do so. T3(P2) later explained that these were the students’ individual reading projects in which they summarised their favourite short story and made sentences with the words in the vocabulary index they compiled. T3 further explained that she designed the project because the students indicated in the questionnaire she used to discover their reading interests that they loved short stories. In a similar way, in some listening and speaking classes, the students decided what they would listen to and talk about. For instance, the students in T1’s and T9’s classes were seen to share with their friends at the start of the lesson the news they had listened to at home. In T1’s class, three students reported to the class the news about a spaceship completing its mission, a comparison between bilingual people and monolingual people and some health risks of using mobile phones. T1(P1) and T9(P2) said that to do this kind of home listening assignment, the students would listen to a piece of news they were interested in and tell other students about it when they came to class.

However, some of these teachers added that they looked at the outlines of the students’ presentations and projects to check the relevance of the topics chosen to the general theme of the chapter [T6(P3); T8(P2)], gave comments on the word choice and the organisation of ideas [T6(P3)], or suggested necessary changes and revisions [T7(P4)].

### ***6.2.5 Organising the assessment of student learning***

Organising the assessment of student learning comprised actions related to the way the teachers organised their feedback, such as by giving brief, quick and spontaneous comments (e.g., “Good”, “That’s good”, “It’s very good”, “Wow, that’s interesting” and “It sounds great” [T1(L1-3); T2(L3); T3(L1-2); T5(L1-2); T5(L<sub>2</sub>); T6(L1 & L3);

T7(L1-2); T8(L2); T8(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L1-2); T9(L<sub>2</sub>); T10(L3)]. A couple of teachers said, “Congratulations” to the group who won a game [T4(L3)] or a quiz [T8(L2-3)]. T4(L3) phrased her congratulations to the group who did not win a game this way: “Congratulations to the second winner”.

The second kind of feedback was longer and more planned. The teachers prepared their feedback while listening to the students’ presentations [T1(L3); T4(L2-3); T6(L2); T7(L3-4); T8(L1-2); T8(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L2); T9(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L<sub>3</sub>)] or reading sentences, summaries and paragraphs as they were being written down on the board [T2(L2-3); T3(L3); T10(L3)]. Some teachers indicated to the students that they had looked at their paragraphs and essays at home [T3(L2); T5(L3-4); T5(L<sub>2</sub>)].

When commenting on the students’ performance, all the listening and speaking teachers adopted the same approach: they started by complimenting the students on what they were able to do well before pointing out their mistakes and shortcomings and suggesting ways for improvement [T1(L2-3); T4(L2-3); T6(L1-3); T7(L3-4); T8(L1-2); T8(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L2); T9(L<sub>2</sub>); T9(L<sub>3</sub>)]. In the post-observation interviews, the teachers expressed a belief that they could encourage the students to learn as well as show appreciation for their efforts by complimenting the students on their strengths first and commenting on their weaknesses later and by consciously avoiding using words such as “bad” or “negative” when discussing student weaknesses [T1(P3); T6(P2); T9(P<sub>2</sub>)].

Unlike the listening and speaking teachers, the reading, writing and grammar teachers did not always give positive feedback first. However, their comments covered the same ground: what was good about the paper, what the problems were and what could be done to improve the writing [T2(L2); T3(L2-3); T5(L3-4); T5(L<sub>2</sub>); T10(L3)]. In one feedback-giving session, T5(L4) invited a pair of students to read out loud their essay to the whole class. When asked for the reason why she had done so, T5(P4) explained that she wanted to “encourage the students ... to learn how to write”, and that, if the students were able to write a good essay, they “should be praised in the class”.

Teachers sometimes used peer assessment, inviting students to comment on their fellow students' presentations [T1(L2); T6(L1-3); T7(L3-4); T9(L2); T9(L3)] or to identify and correct mistakes in their pieces of writing [T2(L2-3); T3(L3); T5(L4); T5(L2); T10(L3)]. They also invited students to make suggestions about how to help fellow students make improvements. T1(P3) and T5(P4) explained their reasons for allowing peer assessment among the students: that by listening to the opinions from the students, they ensured that they were "fair" or avoided being "subjective".

T1(P3) and T7(P4) believed that peer assessment provided a source of feedback that was no less important than that given by the teacher. T7(P2) maintained that it was "not really good" if the students got feedback from the teacher only, and that it was "important" for them to hear feedback "from different directions"; and T1(P3) claimed that it was essential for students "to know how their friends feel about their performance". Some teachers also claimed that peer assessment gave the students opportunities to learn from their friends' mistakes [T5(P4); T7(P2); T10(P3)].

T7(P4) held that involving the students in peer assessment saves the teacher from exerting "authority" over them. He argued that when the students got feedback from the teacher, they might be "under the pressures [*sic*]" [T7(P2)] or would "automatically think that what the teacher said is correct" [T7(P4)], but that they would "feel better" when receiving comments from their friends [T7(P2)]. T7(P4) added that he encouraged peer assessment among his students because of his preference for "comments or ... evaluation from friends" over those "from teachers".

One strategy that was employed by some teachers within the framework of peer assessment was to delegate to students or to share with them the task of giving a mark for student work or performance. In one lesson, T8(L1) announced the marks three students got for their individual presentations the week before according to the number of votes they received from other students. She told the class that only three marks - ten, nine and eight - were given, with ten being awarded to the student who got the most votes. T8(P1) explained that there were three individual presentations a session in her class and the students would vote for the best presentation of the day. In one lesson in T1(L2)'s class, after having given her comments on a presentation, the teacher told the students to write down the scores they would like to give to the presentation group and hand them to her. In another lesson in T7(L4)'s class, after a group had presented its mini-project, the teacher asked another group to evaluate the

preparation of the group as a whole (in terms of aims, activities and procedure, time allocation and visual aids) and the performance of each group member (in terms of vocal delivery, body language, interaction and others). T1(P3) and T7(P4) said that the final score was then the mean of the marks they gave and the marks the students gave.

Two teacher actions were found to be related solely to student self-assessment. When returning the papers to the students, T5(L4) asked a group of students in one class to look back at the first paragraph of their essay as she could not identify the topic sentence of that paragraph. In the other class, T5 told the students that they had to correct the grammatical mistakes she had highlighted in their essays on their own at home, and that they could ask her about those mistakes the coming week if they had any queries [T5(L<sub>2</sub>)].

Other actions were concerned with the way the teachers administered the mid-term test. Some teachers gave the mid-term test at or after the end of the course. For example, the students in T6's class took their mid-term test in the last week of the course, and T1 and T9 arranged the date for the mid-term test for their classes after the course had finished. T6(P4) maintained that, if the students took the test at a later date than the mid-point of a nine-week course, they would have "more time" to acquire "more skills" and "more knowledge" to prepare for the test. T1(P4) claimed that, if the students took the test halfway through the course, they might not care to practise speaking and listening skills anymore while waiting for the final examination. T6(P4) argued that as the format of the mid-term test and that of the final examination were "quite similar", administering the mid-term test at the course's end would help the students prepare for both the test and the examination.

In class, T7(L2) told his students that they should prepare for their mid-term test at home. He told them to choose any topic they would like to talk about on their test day, make an outline of their mini-talk and submit it to him in the coming two weeks, after which he would "consider the outline and ... modify [it] if necessary". When asked for the basis on which it was possible for the students to prepare their talks at home, not during the test as required by the standard test at the EF, T7(P4) explained that what he did was "to encourage them to study". He said that he knew

that, in a speaking test, teachers should ask students “to have some impromptu speech”. However, he said that, as the students in his class were “shy” and their level was “not as high as” he expected, if they were “so nervous to speak” and got “a failing grade” as a result, he did not think it was “really fair” for them. T7 believed that, if they had “good preparation”, they would “feel more confident” and he could “examine their speaking skills better”.

### **6.3 Relationship building**

Teachers were concerned about the development of the relationship between themselves and their students. One strategy was to use humour in the classroom. It was seen that the teachers integrated humour into their classes in three main ways. One was to tell jokes (T1; T2; T3; T4; T8; T9; T10). Often a simple joke was able to set the whole class laughing. For example, after asking the students to raise their hands if they had read the passage at home, T10(L1) asked a student if she had read it twice because she was raising both of her hands. A second way was to play along with the students’ jokes. For example, in a listening session, the students in T4(L1)’s class were listening to a lecture about learning somebody else’s language and one question raised by the lecturer on the tape was, “Where does language come from?”. In response to the answer “from the mouth” given by one student, T4 said, “Ok thank you for your discovery”, and the students laughed. A third way was to follow up on what the students said or what the speaker said on the tape (T1; T4; T5; T9). For example, at the beginning of a lesson, some students in T5(L<sub>2</sub>)’s class said that they did not like football, but after reading the autobiography of David Beckham, they made some inquiries about him. The teacher then reminded the students of what they had said earlier and said that she was “happy” about their newly found interest in football, and the class laughed at her remark.

Teachers often shared their experience with the students or drew upon an experience they had shared. One example was found in the first lesson observation in T4’s class. After encouraging the students to talk about how their study of English had changed them, T4(L1) told the class her own experience when she summed up the discussion. T4 maintained that

... sharing ... our own personal experience is also a very important part in teaching ... because in that way, we can make our lessons so vivid and we can create a connection or a link between us and the students. [T4(P1)]

She explained that through the shared experience, students could see that teachers were “just like them” in that they had the same “problems or difficulties”. T4(P1) went on to say, “I don’t want to create an isolation or ... a big gap or a long distance between the teacher and the students [*sic*]”. Another example was found in the first lesson observed in T10’s class, where it was noted that the atmosphere of the class that day was very relaxed and many of the students were amused by what happened during the lesson. There was a lot of laughter when the teacher reminded the class of the power cut they had had the previous week. T10 concurred, commenting that understanding should be two-way:

I usually ... try to understand ... the classes I teach, for example, some details about them, for example, where they live, ... where they come from, what they like, ... their age, their hobbies, their personal interests... And the teacher sometimes also share ... their taste, their habits ..., the teacher’s activities ... So, that ... will make ... the student understand more about the teacher and they more cooperate [*sic*]. [T10(P1)]

A majority of the teachers maintained contact between teacher and students via email. In the observed lessons, some teachers told the students that they would send via email their exercises and assignments [T3(L2); T4(L3); T6(L2)] or materials and resources for further home listening and reading [T1(L1); T3(L3)]; other teachers asked the students to submit their exercises and assignments or power point slides of their presentations through email [T3(L2-3); T4(L2); T5(L4); T6(L2); T10(L2)].

In the post-lesson interviews, the teachers confirmed that they sent email messages to their students for different reasons: to send them tasks or homework to do [T1(P1); T3(P2); T4(P2); T6(P2); T10(P2)], to make announcements such as a class cancellation [T1(P1); T8(P2)], to remind the students of upcoming tests [T6(P2)], to send references for independent study and to share resources with the students

[T1(P1); T3(P3); T8(P2)]. The teachers asserted that they used email as a channel of communication between teacher and students [T1(P1); T3(P2); T4(P2); T5(P4); T6(P2); T8(P2); T10(P2)] as email was a convenient and effective means of communication during the week, especially because they met their classes only once a week on campus [T5(P4); T1(P1); T10(P2)].

#### **6.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the findings about the teachers' classroom practices in terms of the actions they undertook in their everyday teaching. These actions have been described first by the observation data and then by the interview data. The teachers' actions fall into three broad categories: those related to classroom management, those related to teaching and those related to relationship building. The range of the teachers' actions reveals the variety of the practices the teachers used in their actual teaching as well as the multidimensional aspects of the teachers' work.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of the chapter is to discuss the findings of the research. The chapter begins with a restatement of the premise of the study; that is, the importance of context in the adoption of pedagogical approaches, learner-centred approaches in particular. A discussion follows about how teachers' beliefs correspond with their practices in relation to the four key themes that have emerged in the findings; namely, the centrality of student needs, the need to acknowledge and accommodate student characteristics, the cultivation of student autonomy and the development of interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Next, the chapter presents the implications that arise from the findings and outlines directions for further research. Finally, the chapter ends with a conclusion that summarises the main points of the study.

### **7.1 The importance of context and learner-centred teaching**

The study is based on the central tenet that context is a highly influential factor in the adoption of pedagogical approaches. In Vietnam, because of certain historical, social and cultural forces that came into play during the various periods of development of the country, teacher-dominated pedagogy and a centralised education system evolved and continue to the present day.

Vietnam has had a long history of foreign invasions and wars of independence. Feudal times were characterised by the dominance of the Chinese, and the history of pre-modern Vietnam is characterised by its political allegiance to China, the former Soviet Union and the USA. The languages and cultures of these countries impacted not only the political, but also the socio-cultural life, of Vietnam. However, the most far-reaching effects come from the Confucian ideology, which was transported to the country by the Chinese and which underpins the traditional Vietnamese philosophy of education. Confucianism considers teaching to be a noble profession, and teachers are, therefore, held in high esteem. Thus, as keeping with these attributes and in a Vietnamese hierarchical social system, teachers are role models in terms of their acquired knowledge and outstanding moral behaviour; and students are subordinates who must respect and obey their teachers. A common image of the traditional

classroom is one in which the teacher stands and delivers and the students copy down every word the teacher says. Such a teacher-dominated pedagogy prevails in the education system of Vietnam. The teaching methods still emphasise book learning, and knowledge is conveyed from teachers to students, with an emphasis on passive learning by the students.

In addition to this underlying belief system is a centralised management structure that has been in place in Vietnam since its declaration of independence in 1945. In education, authority is concentrated in the MOET, the highest-ranking government agency that directs all activities in education. The MOET exercises its control through prescriptive curricula for different levels of school education and through its curriculum frameworks for HE institutions. Even so, these curriculum frameworks do not dictate the 'how' but rather the 'what' HE institutions should cover and what learning outcomes they should achieve. As a result, universities have some degree of freedom or flexibility in curriculum development. Although syllabi must be based on the curriculum frameworks imposed by the MOET, HE institutions can also decide on the resources they will commit to teaching and learning. For example, they can determine the physical facilities to be provided, how teacher employment and development is undertaken and what class sizes are maintained.

HE institutions also have flexibility in relation to the pedagogical approaches they adopt. As a result, pedagogical approaches vary in response to the context in which teaching is conducted. For example, didactic teaching traditions predominate in classes where teachers have 50 students or more in poorly equipped classrooms and must cover the syllabus within a tight time frame. However, perhaps because of the element of flexibility accorded by the MOET, some teachers and educational leaders have begun to implement a number of teaching innovations - one example being the learner-centred approach.

Learner-centred teaching has many advantages, including that it encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. To achieve this aim, the teacher takes on a mediating or facilitating role so as to support students' independent learning. Therefore, it is pedagogy antithetical to teacher-centred teaching as it focuses on the learner rather than on the teacher. It is also highly influenced by context. Learner-

centred teaching is based upon an understanding of the uniqueness of each classroom as a teaching and learning context, due to the differences in the needs, characteristics and beliefs that students bring to that classroom.

The development of learner-centred approaches in language teaching resonates with a strong tradition in TESOL of student involvement and engagement. Teaching approaches that take into consideration student needs such as CLT and TBLT have gained wide currency in TESOL, and their connection and contribution to learner-centred teaching have been significant. Yet social and cultural influences in Vietnam, which support a preference for teacher-centredness, have the potential to negate the advances in TESOL pedagogy.

Learner-centred approaches are essentially a Western concept, not an Asian construct. Given the prevalence of teacher-centred approaches in Vietnam, arguably it would not be expected that learner-centred approaches will have gained much traction. There are various constraints operating in Vietnamese TESOL contexts that inhibit the adoption of learner-centred teaching such as perceptions of teaching as a knowledge transmission process, teachers as knowledge providers and students as passive knowledge recipients. However, there is also reason to believe that there may be an institutional 'readiness' for learner-centred teaching in TESOL, particularly at the EF.

The EF - a faculty of a prestigious public/national university - has considerable curriculum flexibility. It can develop its own curriculum as long as it is in line with the MOET-mandated general curriculum framework. Moreover, it can design its own course syllabi, select learning materials, devise assessment methods and decide learning outcomes. The teaching staff of the EF are highly qualified: of a total of 36 teacher participants in the study, 11% have a PhD, and nearly 60% have a Master's degree; several teachers have obtained their qualifications abroad. About 80% of the teacher respondents indicated that learner-centredness was one component of the teaching methodology courses they undertook as part of their teacher preparation. In language classes, the class size range is from 20-40, which is relatively modest by Vietnamese standards. Further, adequate resources are provided to facilitate teaching and learning. These factors represent positive influences that have the capacity to

predispose the EF teachers towards a range of progressive pedagogical approaches, including learner-centred teaching. Therefore, the EF provides a unique context in which to assess the implementation of this approach in Vietnam.

## **7.2 Learner-centredness - Teacher beliefs and practices**

The current study was conducted to investigate TESOL teachers' conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach. Of all the TESOL teachers at the EF participating in the study, the majority (83%) claimed that they used or had used a learner-centred approach. However, the findings suggest that, while many of the teachers' beliefs reflected the characteristics of a learner-centred approach as described in the literature, there were some incongruence between these and even more inconsistencies between the teachers' beliefs and their practice. This was particularly the case in regard to the centrality of student needs, the acknowledging and accommodating of student characteristics, the cultivation of student autonomy and the development of interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

### ***7.2.1 Centrality of student needs***

The teachers' beliefs about a learner-centred approach highlight the centrality of student needs. There was a strong feeling among the teachers that students' needs should be taken into consideration in educational decision-making pertaining to course design, lesson planning, lesson delivery and selection of classroom activities and assessment methods. They believed that student engagement impacts positively upon their learning and learning outcomes. In this way, the teachers' beliefs closely match the views of a number of authors regarding the importance of focusing on learner needs (e.g., McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Nunan, 1988; Pomuti et al., 2003; Pulist, 2001; Tudor, 1996; White, 2007). These beliefs also reflect the principle of having student needs as a source of reference for the decision-making processes during curriculum development or course design in language teaching (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996) and in TBLT in particular (Long, 2005b; Nunan, 2004).

Analysis of the findings in this study shows that the teachers did employ some practices that responded to the needs, especially the target language needs, expressed by the students - such as not imposing any pre-planned activity on the students, allowing them to nominate the kind of activity they would like to do for group work tasks (T9) and presentations (T1; T3; T4; T6; T7; T8) and agreeing to the change in essay topics the students wanted to make (T5).

Some other teacher practices were claimed to provide students with what they needed, but on closer examination, these practices responded to teacher-perceived needs rather than student-perceived needs as described in the classification by Brindley (1989), Hoadley-Maidment (1983), Richterich (1973/1980, p. 32, as cited in West, 1994, p. 4). The analysis of the teachers' accounts of their actions shows that some teachers made assumptions about what students needed and their actions were based on their professional experience and judgement and their understanding of curricular objectives rather than active assessment of student needs. Further, it was evident that some teachers made pedagogical decisions without considering the students at all. Heavy reliance on the textbooks, giving lesson overviews without negotiating the plan with students, nominating individual students to speak, requiring the students to speak only in English and the extensive use of Vietnamese as the instruction medium are all examples of teacher-centred behaviour.

Overall, there was not a high degree of coherence between the teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to student needs. Although the teachers indicated a deep awareness of the importance of responding to student needs, evidenced by the fact that their beliefs closely reflected the priorities outlined in the literature, the way the teachers put their ideas into effect shows that they practised the principle of "relevance" in learner-centred teaching (White, 2007) only to a modest degree. A limited number of practices were followed that truly responded to student-perceived needs while a greater number of teacher practices served teacher-perceived needs and some did not take into consideration any student needs at all. Moreover, the repertoire of teacher practices was limited and did not reflect the wide range of practices that has been described in the literature to take account of student needs - such as needs analysis (Nunan, 1988; Pillay, 2002; Tudor, 1996), consultation with students (Long, 2005a; Nunan, 1988, 2004; Tudor, 1996) and a negotiated

curriculum (Breen, 1984; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Candlin, 1984; Clarke, 1991). For example, there were only a few instances of student needs assessment, negotiation and consultation with the students at the classroom level and no instances of a negotiated syllabus or lessons. There was also no clear indication of how the results from any teacher-conducted needs assessment that was implemented were systematically incorporated into the teaching program.

One possible explanation is that the teachers were limited by the circumstances in which they worked. The curriculum used at the EF is constrained by the curriculum framework, and no needs analysis was conducted prior to its development. Similarly, no needs analysis was carried out prior to course design at the faculty level. Consequently, needs analysis - one important phase of curriculum development or course planning described in the literature - was missing, and student-perceived needs failed to be taken into consideration. Although a small number of the teachers conducted their own student needs assessment in their own classes, testament to their understanding of the centrality of student needs in learner-centred education, there is no substantial evidence that the teachers in the EF were aware of the significance of identifying student-perceived needs as the corner-stone of a learner-centred approach.

As Nunan (1999, p. 11, italics original) indicates, a learner-centred approach must accommodate student needs by considering “information about and *from* learners”. The practices of a number of the teachers in the study suggest an underlying belief that, as long as they meet student needs in terms of positive student outcomes, they do achieve learner-centredness regardless of the fact that it is teacher-perceived needs rather than student-perceived needs that are being met. Although the teachers may be aware of the difference between student-perceived needs and teacher-perceived needs and the importance of addressing the former in a learner-centred approach, the constraints of their teaching context does not facilitate them doing so. Under pressure to follow a syllabus that dictates what and when to teach, the teachers can ill-afford the time to conduct on-going needs analysis and, consequently, fall back on their professional experience and curriculum knowledge to make reasonable judgements about student needs.

Many of the teachers' practices reflect their adherence to a top-down curriculum and the strict limitations this imposes. Teacher practices can be best understood in light of the time constraints placed upon them (e.g., the necessity to interrupt or intervene in student discussions to save time or to ensure the completion of the lesson plan; a limited number of student presentations), or as the actions the teachers took to ensure that the students achieved the best possible learning outcomes within the time available (e.g., nominating individual students to speak; requiring the students to speak only in English; using Vietnamese as the instruction medium to facilitate the students' comprehension). Other practices are a consequence of the teachers' responsibility to cover the established syllabus, such as strictly following the textbook and imposing a course plan without negotiation. Therefore, the evident disjuncture between the teachers' beliefs and practices appears to be significantly impacted by their teaching context and the obligation to follow the curriculum framework and its derivative syllabi.

### ***7.2.2 Acknowledging and accommodating student characteristics***

Despite the constraints imposed by context and curriculum, the teachers did espouse beliefs about the need, in a learner-centred approach, to acknowledge and accommodate individual student characteristics. A wide range of student characteristics were identified by the teachers as factors that must be taken into consideration: interests, backgrounds, preferences, attitudes, beliefs, motivation, feelings, opinions, expectations, suggestions, feedback, problems, difficulties, levels of proficiency and learning styles. Some of these learner characteristics (e.g., background and language proficiency) refer to biographical data about learners, as identified by Graves (2000), Nunan (1988) and Richards (2001); others point to learners' affective and cognitive variables, as described by Arnold and Brown (1999), Brindley (1989), Graves (2000), Nunan (1988) and Richards (2001). The range of learner characteristics identified by the teachers is as extensive as the range suggested in the literature by Brown (2003), McCombs and Whisler (1997), Pillay (2002) and Tudor (1996). In this regard the teachers' beliefs align closely with discussions in the literature about the necessity for a learner-centred approach to cater for student characteristics and other student-related factors (e.g., McCombs &

Whisler, 1997; Nunan, 1988; Pomuti et al., 2003; Pulist, 2001; Tudor, 1996; White, 2007). The teachers' beliefs also highlight the importance accorded to the need to give attention to, and show respect and appreciation for, diversity among students (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Pillay, 2002; Tudor, 1996). In addition, the teachers reiterated the point made by some authors (e.g., Long, 2005b; Nunan, 1988, 2004; Tudor, 1996) that, together with student needs, student characteristics provide a source of information that needs to be fed into the process of curriculum and course design in ELT and in TBLT in particular.

The teachers acknowledged and accommodated student characteristics within their teaching in a number of ways. They allowed the students to express their likes, wants, preferences and opinions and created conditions and opportunities for them to learn what they were interested in. Some notable examples included designing a reading project so that the students could pursue their interest in reading short stories (T3); telling the students to choose their favourite topic, question and picture from all the options offered by the textbooks or the teachers in class (T3; T4; T8; T10); giving the students the freedom to select their own topics, activities and materials for their assignments, presentations and projects based on their interests and perspectives (T1; T3; T5; T6; T7; T8; T9; T10). Some teachers (T5; T8; T9) also responded to the differences in students' proficiency levels and personality characteristics, demonstrating practices that showed diversity was catered for.

Although these findings about how teachers responded to individual student characteristics and other student-related factors indicate some convergence of the teachers' beliefs and practices, the degree of fit is not high. More often the teachers' practices (e.g., the teachers' selection of extra learning topics, activities and materials relevant to the students' interests and levels) were guided by their knowledge, experience and preference rather than by an expression by the students of their interests and preferences and mainly focused on a limited range of student characteristics, such as student interests and proficiency levels, rather than the comprehensive range described above. The teachers appear to operate at a relatively superficial level in this regard when the strategies they adopt are compared to the possible repertoire of actions they could undertake to respond to student characteristics and diversity. It is perhaps because student interests and proficiency

levels are the characteristics that are most closely related to the teachers' every day work, and success (or lack of success) in catering for these characteristics is 'visible', easily demonstrated through the students' attitudes and facial expressions. Other student characteristics, such as learning style preferences, received much less attention. Predominantly, two modes of lesson delivery were used - oral and visual - and other learning modes such as aural, tactile and kinetic were rarely in evidence, or even considered. It is possible that the teachers are not aware of the range of learning preferences students bring with them to the classroom, or may not have the skills to respond to them even if they do have an understanding of the issue, or simply do not have time to customise activities to accommodate a variety of learning styles. There is also a notable lack of fit between teachers' views and actions about the necessity to consider student beliefs. It may be because that student beliefs are "intangible and difficult to address", as Pillay (2002) has observed. In conclusion, the teachers did not apply the principle of "responsiveness" (White, 2007) to any significant extent.

### ***7.2.3 Development of student autonomy***

The teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the need to foster student autonomy were aligned with core views about learner-centred learning that have been summarised by O'Neill and McMahon (2005) - such as active learning, choice and increased responsibility.

As part of a learner-centred approach, the teachers placed considerable importance on developing student autonomy, particularly the active and participatory role of the learner in the learning process. A majority of the teachers stressed the need to encourage student involvement in the classroom. The point made by these teachers is in line with many of the views expressed in the literature indicating that student participation in the learning process and in curriculum design is the overriding principle in learner-centred education (e.g., Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Lea et al., 2003; Nunan, 1988; Paris & Combs, 2006; Tudor, 1996). The teachers also believed that students should have opportunities to make choices about the topics, activities and materials they would like to explore as well as be provided with opportunities to have their voices heard in matters related to methodology and assessment. Thus, the

teachers' views seem to resonate with key principles of learner-centredness theory: that is, the responsibility of learners to take charge of their learning (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Lea et al., 2003), the need for an increased level of student participation (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996) and the importance of developing a sense of accountability in learners (Lea et al., 2003; Little, 2005; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005; Paris & Combs, 2006).

Learner training and learner involvement are recognised as two principal measures necessary for developing students into active and independent learners (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). It is argued (Cohen, 1998; Hall, 2001; Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996) that either of them can contribute to learner empowerment. From examination of the findings, it appears that a large number of practices conducive to the development of student autonomy were used by the teachers to give the students a role to play in directing their learning. This is exemplified by practices that involved the students in peer assessment, in which the students made comments or gave feedback on their peers' projects, written work and oral presentations. In some classes, the students also had the right to grade their peers' work and performance, and the marks they gave would count on their own (T8) or would be incorporated into those given by the teachers (T1; T7). It is also evident in student involvement in the selection of learning topics, activities and materials, indicating the freedom the students had to decide the topics, activities and materials for their assignments, presentations and projects. Also observed were practices that enabled the students to take charge of their learning, and these included encouraging the students to develop the habit of starting the lesson themselves by discussing the news they listened to at home without the teacher even giving instructions; engaging the students in individual tasks, pair work, small group work and project work in which the students made their own choices and decisions while defining their topics and selecting learning activities and materials.

These practices are consistent with the beliefs the teachers expressed about what should be done to promote student learning autonomy. In essence, the practices match the teachers' beliefs about the need to give students a sense of freedom, the scope for independent learning, opportunities for self-discovery, the opportunity to act on their initiative and chances to develop meta-skills and critical thinking. The

consistency between teacher beliefs and practices was also manifest in the students' involvement in assessment and materials selection, two spheres of activity that are conventionally reserved for teachers due to their professional knowledge and skills (Miller & Ng, 1996; Tudor, 1996; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). In this way, assessment and materials selection became what Oscarson (1989, p.3) has described as "a mutual responsibility" between teachers and students, and there was "active accountability" on the part of students (Hall, 2001, p. 232).

However, the range of practices that the teachers adopted to promote student autonomy is more limited than that suggested in the literature. Peer assessment and student selection of materials are the two main strategies for learner involvement used by the teachers in this study. The use of pair work, small group work and project work, collaborative writing activities and communicative activities also featured strongly in the teachers' practices. Nevertheless, other strategies for learner involvement identified in the literature as fostering student autonomy were not taken up by the teachers, such as learner involvement in the setting of learning goals, the choice of teaching methods and mutual course evaluation (Clarke, 1991; Littlejohn, 1983; Mahmoud, 2013; Nunan, 1988; 1997; Thomson, 1996; Tudor, 1996). Significantly, several practices promoting autonomy in language use were not observed at all: self-assessment (e.g., Brown, 2004; Ekbatani, 2000; Little, 2005; Miaoa, Badger & Zhen, 2006; Nunan, 1988; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005; Tudor, 1996), opportunities for students to exercise their reflective and decision-making power (Little, 2004), use of language portfolios (Little, 2009; North, 2000) and student engagement in pedagogical dialogue with the teacher (Little, 1995). In addition, learner training did not constitute a significant or distinct component of the teaching program and, when used, only a direct approach to learner training (Cohen, 1998; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Wenden, 1998) was adopted in which language learning strategies were directly taught to the students as part of the input or scaffolding provided.

However, it must be reiterated that the curriculum of the EF is a prescribed one and there is no scope for student involvement in the curriculum design process. While authors such as Nunan (1988) and Tudor (1996) promote the principles of student involvement at the curriculum level, discussion about, and adoption of, learner

involvement strategies are limited to the classroom context, a finding similar to that reported by Nonkukhethong et al. (2006) addressing Thai teachers' use of a learner-centred approach. Although it is not clear whether the teachers are aware of all the practices, strategies and techniques that have been identified in the literature as being capable of giving students an increased role in the learning process, it is highly likely that they are not, and in this respect there is clearly a need for further teacher professional development. However, it remains that the practices they choose to use are constrained by the straightjacket of the prescribed curriculum.

Because of the importance of student autonomy in a learner-centred approach, the teacher participants in this study strongly believed that the teacher should take the role of facilitator or guide. Overall, the conceptualisation of the teacher's role reflected the widely accepted view in the literature that a learner-centred approach involves the teacher assuming the role of facilitator, learning counsellor or a guide at a student's side (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Kember, 1997; King, 1993; Nunan, 1988, 1999; Sadker & Zittleman, 2007; Tudor, 1993, 1996). The teachers' descriptions of the facilitator also coincide with the point that has been made by a number of authors (e.g., Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Brown, 2003; Elias & Merriam, 1984; Harmer, 2001; Weimer, 2002) that teachers provide help, guidance and advice in the form of knowledge, information, experience and materials. A number of the teachers also stressed the responsibility for organising communicative tasks and activities, which also concurs with the level of teacher responsibility identified in the literature (Jonhson et al., 2009; Littlejohn, 1983).

There is a high degree of congruence between the teachers' beliefs and practices concerning the role of the teacher as a facilitator. In a majority of the scaffolding practices, the teachers were seen to provide the students with what was necessary for, or useful to, the tasks they were undertaking. The teachers limited themselves to providing the students with the kind of help and assistance needed so that the students could start or complete the task at hand.

However, a degree of incongruence between the teachers' beliefs and practices was also identified. Analysis of the findings shows that the practices used by the teachers for developing student learning strategies do not feature as prominently as those used

for giving students help and guidance or enabling students to take responsibility for their learning. The pressure to complete the syllabus within the time limit may be a reason for this discrepancy, with teachers being more concerned with students' task performance and task completion and the achievement of the immediate objectives of the lesson than with the development of learning strategies for long-term purposes.

Overall, there is not a perfect fit between the teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to student autonomy. If learner autonomy is the ultimate aim of learner-centred education as argued by Tudor (1996), the teachers in the present study were successful, to some extent, in reaching this goal by allowing for student participation in the learning process (mainly through peer assessment and materials selection). However, because of the restrictions driving their pedagogical practices, the teachers have not empowered students to the degree they believe a learner-centred approach warrants (and which is promoted in the literature).

#### ***7.2.4 Interpersonal relationships in the classroom***

Teachers' beliefs about interpersonal relationships within a learner-centred classroom refer to both teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships.

##### *Teacher-student relationships*

Many of the teachers suggested that a learner-centred approach involves the teacher assuming a non-authoritative role and having a rapport with his/her students. The relationship between teacher and students was conceived as one in which the teacher is neither a dictator nor the ultimate authority in the classroom; instead, the teacher is an observer or a member of the class, even acting like a classmate to the students. There are similarities between the descriptions given by the teachers and those provided in the learner-centred literature - namely, that teachers in a learner-centred classroom have an equal, collaborative and democratic relationship with their

students (Dupin-Bryan, 2004; Elias & Merriam, 1984; Nunan, 1988; Paris & Combs, 2006; Tudor, 1996).

There is a degree of fit between the teachers' beliefs and their practices. A kind of partnership or collaboration between the teachers and the students was established through teacher practices that gave the students an active and participatory role, such as peer assessment and student selection of materials. The teachers appeared to recognise the students' potential to take responsibility for, and make contributions to, learning events. They gave the students options and opportunities to become the co-authors and co-owners of learning events. This interdependence between, and mutual respect for, teachers and students reflects Lea et al.'s (2003) prescription for such a relationship between teacher and students in a learner-centred classroom. This kind of partnership also reflects the principle of learner involvement that underpins a learner-centred approach.

However, there is a mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and their practices, particularly when the teachers made pedagogical decisions without consulting the students. The teachers have, in these instances, taken on an authoritative role: setting strict time limits on tasks, not responding to student-perceived needs, nor allowing for student choice. In their capacity as language experts and classroom teachers, they have acted as if they know what is good for the students - they have decided what and how the students will learn and how they will be assessed, thus exercising a strong level of control and authority.

For some teachers, although there is congruence in their beliefs and practices about teacher-student relationships, these often do not align with the literature on learner-centredness. These teachers were of the opinion that a learner-centred approach involved establishing a rapport between the teacher and the students by using humour, sharing their experience with the students and maintaining contact with the students outside class time. However, these beliefs and practices are not specific to a learner-centred approach; rather, they reflect general principles and practices of effective teaching. Authors such as Senior (2006) propose that establishing rapport is a practice conducive to successful teaching and learning while Prabhu (1990, p. 173) observes that rapport is an "elusive but highly regarded condition in the classroom"

which can foster an enjoyment of classroom activity and lead to a true enhancement of learning. The participants in this study echoed these views when they identified rapport as a characteristic of a successful lesson. However, rapport is not a condition that is exclusive to learner-centredness, nor in fact, central to it.

The way that the teachers characterised rapport as a key part of a learner-centred approach demonstrates, to some extent, that they have developed their own ‘theory’ of learner-centredness appropriate to their teaching context. The emergence of this subjective dimension of meaning provides supporting evidence to claims in the literature that the notion of learner-centredness is susceptible to many interpretations (Benson & Voller, 1997; Nunan, 1999; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005; Paris & Combs, 2006; Wenden, 2002) and shows teachers’ ability to construct their own theory about teaching based on their interpretation of professional theory in the field and their understanding of their teaching environment (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006; O’Hanlon, 1993; Prabhu, 1990).

In conclusion, the coherence between the teachers’ professed beliefs, their actual instructional practices and theory with respect to the teacher-student relationship is not strong. Incongruences were found in the data about the teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to the non-authoritative role of the teacher in teacher-student relationships, and, more often, the teachers’ beliefs and practices highlight the principles of effective teaching rather than those of a learner-centred approach.

#### *Student-student relationships*

The teachers’ definitions of a learner-centred approach suggest the importance of supportive relationships in which students help and learn from each other. Pair work, group work and project work were seen by some teachers as activities that help students develop and maintain positive relationships. In these teachers’ views, the “scaffolding” among students or students’ ability to draw on their linguistic knowledge to accomplish the task together was the rationale behind their organisation of this type of work.

The teachers' beliefs that students can help and learn from each other through pair, small group and project work echo the views that have been expressed by such authors as Brooks and Swain (2009), Brown (2003), Klingner and Vaughn (2000), Mackey et al. (2003), Oliver (2000), Storch (2005) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2009); and also exemplify the point made by Brooks and Swain (2009), Cazden (1988), Ohta (2001), Storch (2002, 2009) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) that students can offer each other scaffolding, especially collective scaffolding, while jointly working on pair and small group activities. Supportive relationships among students, in the teachers' view, point to the role that close bonds or relationships between students have in creating a coherent functioning class unit (Senior, 1998, 1999, 2006).

Teachers' beliefs about student-student relationships and their practices do align strongly with, and also reflect, theory about learner-centredness, and in this regard there is a very high degree of fit between the teachers' beliefs and practices.

Teachers' use of pair work, group work and project work fosters student engagement and collaborative and supportive relationships and provides opportunities for the students to help and learn from each other (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Brown, 2003; Flowerdew, 1998; Harmer, 2001; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Littlewood, 2000; Storch, 2002, 2005, 2009; Weissberg, 2006; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009).

Teachers' use of peer assessment also allows for cooperative learning and rapport building among the students (Brown, 2004; Lynch, 1988).

### ***7.2.5 Principled pragmatism***

TESOL teachers at the EF are using a learner-centred approach although perhaps not to the extent they believe. This finding is not very surprising given the characteristics of the teacher participants, the discipline they teach and the context in which they are working.

The teachers' implementation of a learner-centred approach has been possible due to a number of enabling conditions, the first of which is that the teachers have a good understanding of what constitutes a learner-centred approach. This was demonstrated

by the definitions they gave about the core values of learner-centredness, most of which are in close alignment with how these are captured in the literature. This background knowledge can be attributed to their teacher education, with almost 80% of the teacher respondents (including nine out of the ten observed teachers) indicating that learner-centredness was a component of the methodology course they took. The teachers suggested that their theoretical insights have been augmented by teacher development seminars and by the reading they have done in the field. In addition, the teachers had favourable attitudes towards a learner-centred approach. In their description of their motivations for adopting this approach, the teachers indicated that their experience as language learners and as practising teachers has convinced them of its effectiveness. They expressed a strong belief that a learner-centred approach is a “good” or “successful” way of teaching, and that it can help students become active and independent learners and achieve positive learning outcomes.

Another factor that appears to have contributed to the teachers’ use of a learner-centred approach is the relative freedom they have. Although a prescribed syllabus is used at the EF, it does not dictate the teaching methodologies nor the medium of instruction the teachers have to use. The syllabus also allows the teachers the option to choose resources, without limit, to supplement the set textbooks and the right to write their own test papers for the mid-term test. The teachers make use of the freedom they have to put into practice their ideas about learner-centred teaching, albeit that these ideas operate under a number of constraints.

The personal characteristics of the teachers are likely to be a factor in the promotion of learner-centredness at the EF. The ten observed teachers are relatively young and well-qualified. All of them are under 40 years of age, with six of them being 27 years old or younger. Four of these teachers have an MA degree and six a BA degree. Because of the nature of the discipline, the teachers are often exposed to Western ideas due to the common practice of using materials for TESOL teacher education courses imported “wholesale” from the inner circle of English-speaking countries like the USA, the UK and Australia. As the teachers are young, they may be more inclined to experiment with the new theories they learn, one of which is learner-centred education. For example, T3 said that she learned about the concept of

learner-centredness during her MA course and since then, she has been using a learner-centred approach because it seems to work for her students.

While there is a very strong likelihood that these enabling conditions predispose the teachers at the EF towards learner-centredness, other factors may limit their uptake of this approach. The time constraints and the lack of response to student-perceived needs emerge from the current data as the two main limiting factors. According to some of the teachers, the only source of information they have about their students' needs derives from the needs assessment they themselves conduct within their classes during the first lesson.

Taking these enabling and limiting factors into consideration, the teachers' use of a learner-centred approach at the EF can be characterised as pragmatic. Both the alignment and inconsistencies between the teachers' stated beliefs and their observed practices suggest that the pedagogical approach that the teachers follow can be described as a type of 'principled pragmatism' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). The teachers' classroom practices appear to be selected in principled, not random, ways, informed by the psychological characteristics and the contextual factors to which the teachers are subject. In specific terms, the teachers' practices appear to be shaped by their teaching philosophies (i.e., the beliefs they hold about language teaching and learning and about learner-centredness in particular) and by the teaching context in which they work.

Within a system that both constrains them and gives them some freedom, the teachers do what they feel is necessary to ensure that the students learn the content and skills in an appropriate way. They bring to their decisions beliefs developed from their professional knowledge, teaching experience, previous learning experience and personal experience and preferences. These sources are the same as those reported in the literature: prior experience as learners (Borg, 2003; Crookes, 2009; Freeman & Richards, 1993; Lortie, 1975, as cited in Freeman & Richards, 1993; Prabhu, 1987), professional training as pre-service and in-service teachers (Borg, 2003, 2006a) and professional experience (Crookes, 2009; Crookes and Arakaki, 1999).

In line with other research (Borg, 2003, 2006a, 2009; Fang, 1996; Kane et al., 2002; Pajare, 1992), this study has found that, for some teachers, their beliefs strongly underpin their practices while for others, there is inconsistency between them. Analysis of the inconsistencies supports Borg's (2003) view that contextual factors exert powerful influences on teachers' classroom practice or action. Further, the findings suggest that, influenced by their teaching context, the teachers act in ways contrary to their beliefs about learner-centredness and rely instead on their beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching and learning practice. This provides confirming evidence for Borg's (2009) argument that inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices should not be viewed as deficiencies in teacher performance, but rather they reflect the interaction between teachers and their circumstances. In this way, the study reinforces previous studies that highlight the important role a teacher's philosophy of teaching can play in his/her professional life (Borg, 2001; Breen et al., 2001; Hedge, 2000; Hird, 2003; Richards, 1998; Woods, 1996) through his/her ability to construct highly individualistic teaching philosophies or pedagogies based on his/her own knowledge and experience (Borg, 2003, 2006a; Crookes, 2009; Cumming, 1989; Freeman & Richards, 1993; Prabhu, 1987).

In terms of the adoption of a learner-centred approach, it is clear that contextual factors influence teachers' classroom practices. The English syllabus followed at the EF both facilitated and inhibited the teachers' use of this approach. The teachers have found ways to counterbalance the restrictive effects of their context in order to do what they believe will benefit their students. For example, they have made use of the freedom they have to bring into the classroom supplementary materials of their own choice, postpone the mid-term tests to the end of the course, allow the students to prepare for their mid-term test at home, to code-switch between English and Vietnamese or even use Vietnamese as an instruction medium; that is, the teachers have relied heavily on their perceptions of what is needed to be done.

Overall, teachers' beliefs and practices about what constitutes learner-centredness are generated from personal theory developed from their interpretation and implementation of this approach, influenced by their experiences and teaching context. This aligns with the ethic of practicality described by Hargreaves (1994), which espouses that teachers' beliefs and practices are based on what they believe

will work, particularly within their teaching situation. The teachers in this study seem to have developed what Prabhu (1990) calls ‘a sense of plausibility’ (i.e., a personal conception of effective teaching) or what Kumaravedivelu (1994) describes as ‘principled pragmatism’. The teachers thus achieve pedagogy of practicality which allows them to theorise from their practice and also to practise what they theorise (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006). The individuality of the teachers in this study may have had a “mediating role” (Bell, 2007, p. 138) in the way their beliefs and practices and the theory come together. The teachers seem to have found scope for interpreting a learner-centred approach and implementing it in ways appropriate to them and their teaching situation. The mediating role that the teachers have adds credibility to Ellis’s (1996), Humphreys and Wyatt’s (2014) and Kramersch and Sullivan’s (1996) suggestion about using mediation as a means of facilitating the introduction of Western notions of effective teaching into Asian contexts.

In summary, ‘principled pragmatism’ highlights the impracticality of adopting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ teaching method in Vietnam and supports the position advocated by Bell (2007) and Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006) that teachers are pragmatic in their use of teaching methods. The present study provides empirical data to support the adoption of an ecological perspective as described by Tudor (2001), the promotion of a context approach advocated by Bax (2003a), the call for attention to the sociocultural contexts in which language teaching and learning takes place made by Harmer (2003), Hayes (2009), Holliday (1994), Johnson (2009), Tedick and Walker (1994), Tudor (2001) and Widdowson (2004), and the need to consider local factors as proposed by Ellis (1996), Humphreys and Wyatt’s (2014) and Kramersch and Sullivan (1996).

### **7.3 Implications of the study**

This study was conducted as a case study with full awareness of the very limited possibility for the transferability of its findings. Rather, this case was chosen because it provided a unique opportunity to examine learner-centred practices in a HE setting, an opportunity that might not be available elsewhere in Vietnam. Even so,

some of the insights gained from the study may be useful to TESOL professionals elsewhere as they are ‘institution-independent’.

Such insights include the pivotal role of the teacher as the change agent in educational innovation (Riley, 2000; Woods, 1996) and in the successful implementation of any new teaching approach (Bullock, 2011). This has already been acknowledged in the literature and is reflected again in this study. The findings particularly reinforce the importance of the teacher as the major initiator of change at the classroom level. Learner-centred approaches may be promoted nationally, within the HE sector and at institutional and faculty levels. However, successful implementation depends very much on the preparedness of the classroom teacher to adopt the proposed changes. Asynchrony between policy and practice is very likely if classroom teachers do not subscribe to the principles of learner-centredness, and even though they may employ the rhetoric of acceptance, they will continue to use a teaching approach, even a teacher-centred one, with which they feel comfortable. The ‘black box’ of the classroom ultimately provides teachers with control over teaching processes, and they essentially remain unaccountable for their methods as long as students demonstrate the expected learning outcomes. In this sense, the classroom represents the point of divide or disconnect between policy and practice, and, for this reason, classroom teachers’ beliefs and practices are the fundamental starting point for any policy initiative.

The finding that the teachers’ practices are guided by their beliefs suggests a need for policy makers and education bureaucrats to have a much better understanding of teachers’ personal philosophies than they do currently. A thorough understanding of the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices would highlight ‘where, why and how’ these beliefs guide practice as well as the ways in which their practices are at odds with their beliefs. This information could underpin curriculum policy and teacher education. Such an understanding is particularly important given that a shift from the traditional teacher-dominated approach to a teaching approach that is learner-centred has been accepted by the MOET and is reflected in Vietnam’s *Strategies for the Development of Education 2001-2010* and *2011-2020*.

This is not to suggest that educational policy must align entirely with teachers' beliefs because this, in Orafi and Borg's view (2009, p. 252), "would make reform impossible". Instead, there is a need to recognise that only when the decisions made by the educational authorities are informed by classroom teachers' understandings will the proposed educational reforms have potential for success. As Gu (2005, p. 18) puts it, "[a]ny attempt to indoctrinate teachers with imported and decontextualized teaching theory and practice ignores the personalized and contextualized nature of teachers' schemata and is unlikely to result in success". By analysing teachers' existing beliefs and practices in relation to their teaching context, the educational authorities can identify the gaps between what is intended and what is currently practised in order to develop appropriate support systems which can at least minimise or at most eliminate the gap between policy and practice.

One key issue for the adoption of a learner-centred approach in curriculum development and course design is having a learner needs analysis as the starting point. This involves provision of training to teachers and policy makers to ensure that needs analysis is conducted properly and is able to inform the development of learning content, teaching methods and assessment forms that are relevant to learner needs. As TBLT has become the predominant teaching approach in TESOL (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Ur, 2013), task-based needs analysis as advocated by Long (2005a) may be the way forward.

Redressing institutional factors that impinge on learner-centred instruction is another mechanism that can support implementation. These factors include improved physical classroom facilities, particularly those that enable activities such as pair, small group and project work (for example, movable study desks that allow students to work together easily) in addition to the provision of reference materials and access to the Internet to assist students with independent learning.

Teachers need to be convinced of the efficacy of the approach even when it may mean extra work for them. Change management - to prepare teachers for the implementation of a learner-centred approach - is central to changed classroom practice. It is possible to draw on the extensive literature on innovation in ELT (e.g., Lamie, 2005; Murray, 2008; Waters, 2009; Wedell, 2003, 2009) to select an

appropriate model of change management for the Vietnamese context so that teachers can be supported to bring about the desired change at the classroom level. In essence, it is essential to take measures that can ensure the success of each of the three main stages of an innovation project: initiation, implementation and institutionalisation (Waters, 2009). Innovation initiation requires a thorough understanding of the rationale for the proposed change, the characteristics of the intended change and the contexts in which the change is to be introduced (Waters, 2009). Wedell (2003, p. 452) indicates that curriculum change implementation should not be seen as involving the acceptance of “a different language teaching technology”, but the adoption by change planners and policy makers during the planning process of “a more locally sensitive, ‘ecological perspective’” described by Tudor (2001, 2003).

Waters (2009) outlines the process of innovation implementation as including the selection of an approach to change, the configuration of the roles assumed by various innovation participants and the evaluation of the implementation process. Kennedy (1988, p. 341) suggests that evaluation “should be built in throughout the planning process” so that it can “monitor progress, adjust plans, and provide warning signals of problems ahead (formative evaluation)”.

Innovation institutionalisation considers “whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears” (Fullan, 2001, p. 50). A necessary condition for sustainable innovations is that they must be “designed and implemented in such a way that there is as thorough an understanding as possible of the factors likely to affect long-term take up” (Waters, 2009, p. 448).

Wedell (2003) acknowledges the complexity of the implementation of any TESOL curriculum change and calls for the provision of support to teachers - “key players” in the change process - who have to make cultural and professional adjustments to achieve the innovation objectives in their teaching environments (e.g., diffusion of new practices). Lamie (2004) proposes a model of change in which six “impact areas” are identified as having the potential to affect the process of change: personal attributes (attitudes and confidence of teachers), practical constraints (textbooks, class size, school type and examination structures), external influences (socio-

cultural contexts), awareness (knowledge/understanding of the innovation), training and feedback. Her model indicates the importance of teacher development to the successful implementation of innovations. The same emphasis on support for teachers and the role of teacher development is found in Markee (1997), who distinguishes primary from secondary innovations, with the latter providing resources (e.g., teacher development) to ensure the achievement of the former (e.g., a new pedagogical approach).

Given the importance of teachers' philosophies of teaching to their adoption of a particular pedagogical approach, it is important to facilitate teachers' understanding of learner-centredness and the teaching practices that emerge from this knowledge. Not only is it essential for teachers to enhance their repertoire of teaching skills, but this repertoire can only be put to optimal use when it is grounded in a philosophy of learner-centredness. Professional learning is the key to the development of both a philosophy of learner-centredness and the teaching strategies that are most effective in meeting its objectives. This professional learning will involve sound leadership from the faculty and relevant teacher development but can be further enhanced through reflection, collegial support, mentoring arrangements and work-shadowing plans with staff within the same university or from other universities. These measures are cost effective and can be adopted by local institutions without waiting for directives from the MOET.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for further research**

This study is small scale and situated in one particular context. Further research is required on a larger scale to get a deeper understanding of the conceptualisation and implementation of a learner-centred approach to TESOL at tertiary level. Multiple case studies conducted at different universities across Vietnam would enable the generalisability of teachers' perspectives on, and performance of, learner-centred teaching practices to be investigated. Studies of such depth and breadth may help uncover different facets of learner-centredness in TESOL, determine how widespread learner-centred practices are in the discipline or whether the historical and social forces that have directed education approaches for centuries still prevail.

Learner-centred teaching has been advocated as a practical, progressive, effective and rewarding way of teaching. Some research has shown that learner-centred teaching improves learning outcomes in the West (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Weimer, 2002). Further research in Vietnam is needed to determine whether learner-centred teaching can really make a difference when compared to the traditional teacher-dominated teaching style. It is possible that, as Vietnamese students have a Confucian cultural heritage, they may prefer to be told what to learn (Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006) rather than relishing the prospect of being given the freedom to take control of their learning.

A study that sets out to test the assumption about the effectiveness of learner-centred teaching in TESOL at tertiary level could be undertaken to compare and contrast the learning outcomes achieved by two cohorts of students who are taught in a learner-centred way and in a moralistic way. Such a study can be conducted at different types and locations of universities with a view to identifying the extent to which contextual factors impact on student learning outcomes. Such research may also help identify factors that operate to facilitate or constrain teachers' implementation of preferred teaching approaches so that appropriate measures can be taken to maximise or minimise the effects of those factors. Other stakeholders such as students, parents, policy makers and educational authorities can be involved as research participants to obtain an enriched understanding of the issue.

In addition, research into learner-centred teaching in Vietnam can be extended to research into TBLT. As has been indicated in Chapter 2, TBLT is currently the predominant pedagogy that has emerged from CLT, and it is one where learner needs are primary. It can be seen from the lesson observations conducted for this study that teaching was mainly task-oriented, suggesting that TBLT is a pedagogy already widely used in the Vietnamese teaching context. Some studies have been conducted into TBLT in Vietnam by Dang (2008) and Nguyen (2013); however, more research is warranted in this area.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The goal of developing students into active and self-directed learners features significantly in Vietnam's *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020* and *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*. This study was designed to see whether TESOL at tertiary level can achieve this goal, specifically by examining teachers' beliefs about and use of a learner-centred approach.

Analysis of the findings indicates that the teachers' beliefs reflect the core elements of learner-centredness as reported in the literature: the centrality of student needs, the need to acknowledge and accommodate student characteristics, the development of student autonomy and the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom. The analysis also reveals that the teachers' beliefs are translated into teaching practice, with some core areas receiving more attention than others.

Although there are inconsistencies between the teachers' beliefs and practices, there is a degree of fit between them. It has been argued that both the concordances and discordances between the teachers' stated beliefs and observed practices can be explained in terms of principled pragmatism. According to this type of pragmatism, the pedagogical approach to which the teachers adhere is underpinned by the teaching philosophies they have and the teaching situations in which they operate.

The insights gained from the study into the way a group of TESOL teachers perceived and practised a learner-centred approach at a public university in Vietnam contribute to the understanding of learner-centredness within the discipline of TESOL and in Vietnam in particular. Although the study is a single case study and the findings are not generalisable, the complex interrelationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and teaching context has some important implications for TESOL pedagogy at the EF and other tertiary institutions in Vietnam.

The implications of the study highlight the key role of teachers who have the potential to determine the successful implementation of any policy innovation. For this reason, teachers' beliefs should be taken into consideration in curriculum and syllabus planning. A thorough understanding of teachers' beliefs can inform reform initiatives and determine the mechanisms needed to support the reform process.

Professional learning suggests itself as an effective and practical measure that can be taken up by local institutions to drive implementation.

It is suggested that further larger scale research be undertaken into the implementation of a learner-centred approach within TESOL, particularly given the promotion of student autonomy and independent learning by the *Strategies for the Development of Education 2011-2020* and the *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*. It is recommended that research be conducted into the effects of learner-centred teaching on students' achievement of learning outcomes in order to ascertain the advantages of learner-centred teaching over didactic or teacher-centred teaching in Vietnam. Given its prevalence in Vietnam, there is also a need for further research into TBLT as a pedagogy that gives priority to learner needs.

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## Appendices



## SECTION 2:

Please indicate how often you do the following for your class(es) at the DELL. Please tick in the box as appropriate.

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I closely follow my lesson plan during a lesson.					
2	I use in-class tests to reinforce my students' learning.					
3	I observe how my students respond to the lesson.					
4	I modify the stated objectives of the course.					
5	I make the learning goals clear to my students.					
6	I encourage my students to discover learning opportunities outside the classroom.					
7	I allow my students to assess their peers' work.					
8	I allow my students to work individually in class.					
9	I use the teaching techniques that I am familiar with.					
10	I bring my own materials into the classroom.					
11	I play an authoritative role in the classroom.					
12	I use in-class tests to evaluate my effectiveness as a teacher.					
13	I use activities such as games, songs, puzzles and role play.					
14	I negotiate the assessment criteria with my students.					
15	I modify my lesson plan (e.g., drop or add activities) during a lesson.					
16	I judge the effectiveness of my teaching practices.					
17	I try out new teaching techniques.					
18	I organise activities using a teacher-with-whole-class mode.					
19	I establish the assessment criteria for my in-class assessment tasks.					
20	I elicit from my students information about their needs.					
21	I allow my students to assess their own work.					
22	I gather information about my students' learning styles.					
23	I get feedback from my students about my classroom practices.					
24	I anticipate the teaching load when making lesson plans.					
25	I work out my students' needs from my experience.					
26	I follow the stated objectives of the course.					
27	I allow my students to choose their own topics.					
28	I anticipate my students' difficulties when making lesson plans.					
29	I use the set teaching materials.					
30	I organise activities such as pair work, group work and project work.					

**SECTION 3:**

1. In your view, what is the main role of a TESOL teacher? Please write your answer in the space provided below.

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2. In your view, what makes a successful lesson? Please write your answer in the space provided below.

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3. Do you think that you apply a learner-centred approach in your class(es) at the DELL?  
 Yes       No

4. How would you define or describe a learner-centred approach to TESOL? Please write your definition or description in the space provided below.

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5. Do you have any other comments on any issue raised in the questionnaire?

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Thank you for completing the questionnaire. If you are willing to take part in the next stage of the research or would like more information about what this involves, please provide your contact details below. These details will be stored in a separate location from the questionnaire.

Name: .....  
Email: .....  
Phone number: .....



## SECTION 2:

Please indicate how often you *did* the following for your class(es) at the DELL. Please tick in the box as appropriate.

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I closely followed my lesson plan during a lesson.					
2	I used in-class tests to reinforce my students' learning.					
3	I observed how my students responded to the lesson.					
4	I modified the stated objectives of the course.					
5	I made the learning goals clear to my students.					
6	I encouraged my students to discover learning opportunities outside the classroom.					
7	I allowed my students to assess their peers' work.					
8	I allowed my students to work individually in class.					
9	I used the teaching techniques that I was familiar with.					
10	I brought my own materials into the classroom.					
11	I played an authoritative role in the classroom all the time.					
12	I used in-class tests to evaluate my effectiveness as a teacher.					
13	I used activities such as games, songs, puzzles and role play.					
14	I negotiated the assessment criteria with my students.					
15	I modified my lesson plan (e.g., drop or add activities) during a lesson.					
16	I judged the effectiveness of my teaching practices.					
17	I tried out new teaching techniques.					
18	I organised activities using a teacher-with-whole-class mode.					
19	I established the assessment criteria for my in-class assessment tasks.					
20	I elicited from my students information about their needs.					
21	I allowed my students to assess their own work.					
22	I gathered information about my students' learning styles.					
23	I got feedback from my students about my classroom practices.					
24	I anticipated the teaching load when making lesson plans.					
25	I worked out my students' needs from my experience.					
26	I followed the stated objectives of the course.					
27	I allowed my students to choose their own topics.					
28	I anticipated my students' difficulties when making lesson plans.					
29	I used the set teaching materials.					
30	I organised activities such as pair work, group work and project work.					

**SECTION 3:**

1. In your view, what is the main role of a TESOL teacher? Please write your answer in the space provided below.

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2. In your view, what makes a successful lesson? Please write your answer in the space provided below.

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3. Do you think that you *applied* a learner-centred approach in your class(es) at the DELL?  
 Yes       No

4. How would you define or describe a learner-centred approach to TESOL? Please write your definition or description in the space provided below.

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5. Do you have any other comments on any issue raised in the questionnaire?

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Thank you for completing the questionnaire. If you would like more information about what this involves, please provide your contact details below. These details will be stored in a separate location from the questionnaire.

Name: .....  
Email: .....  
Phone number: .....

### Appendix 3

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Table 1: Number of respondents (by gender)

Gender	Number of respondents		
	Version 1 (Year 1 & 2 Teachers)	Version 2 (Year 3 & 4 Teachers)	Both versions
Male	2	7	9
Female	15	12	27
Both genders	17	19	36

Table 2: Number of respondents (by age groups)

Age groups	Number of respondents								
	Version 1			Version 2			Both versions		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
27 or under	2	8	10	1	6	7	3	8	11
28-37	0	7	7	1	5	6	1	12	13
38 and over	0	1	1	5	6	11	5	7	12

Table 3: Teaching experience of respondents

Teaching experience	Number of respondents								
	Version 1			Version 2			Both versions		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
less than 5 years	2	8	10	0	0	0	2	8	10
5-10 years	0	5	5	1	3	4	1	8	9
more than 10 years	0	3	3	6	8	14	6	11	17

Table 4: Highest qualifications completed by respondents

Highest qualification completed	Number of respondents								
	Version 1			Version 2			Both versions		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Bachelor	2	9	11	0	0	0	2	9	11
Masters	0	6	6	5	10	15	5	16	21
PhD	0	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	4

Table 5: Levels taught by respondents

Level(s) teachers were teaching	Number of respondents			Level(s) teachers were teaching	Number of respondents		
	Version 1				Version 2		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Year 1	2	7	9	Year 3	2	5	7
Year 2	0	6	7	Year 4	2	0	2
Year 1 & Year 2	0	3	3	Year 3 & Year 4	2	6	8
Total	2	15	17	Total	7	12	19

Table 6: Time when respondents to Questionnaire Version 2 last taught skills-based classes

Had last taught a skills-based class	Number of respondents		
	Version 2		
	Male	Female	Total
less than 3 years before	2	5	7
3-5 years before	1	3	4
more than 5 years before	4	3	7
Total:	7	11	18

Table 7: Whether or not respondents had undertaken a TESOL methodology course

Had undertaken a TESOL methodology course?	Number of respondents								
	Version 1			Version 2			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes	2	16	18	6	11	17	8	27	35
No	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1

Table 8: Whether or not the learner-centred approach was a component of the TESOL methodology course respondents had undertaken

Learner-centred approach covered in that methodology course?	Number of respondents								
	Version 1			Version 2			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes	2	13	15	6	8	14	8	21	29 (80%)
No	0	3	3	1	3	4	1	6	7

## Appendix 4

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF TEACHER INTERVIEWEES AND OBSERVED TEACHERS

Table 1: Number of the teachers (by gender)

Gender	Number of teachers
Male	2
Female	8
Total	10

Table 2: Number of the teachers (by age groups)

Age group	Male	Female	Total
27 or under	2	4	6
28-37	0	4	4

Table 3: Teaching experience of the teachers

Teaching experience	Male	Female	Total
Less than 5 years	2	4	6
5-10 years	0	3	3
More than 10 years	0	1	1

Table 4: Highest qualifications completed by the teachers

Highest qualifications completed	Male	Female	Total
BA	2	4	6
Masters	0	4	4

Table 5: Levels taught by the teachers

<b>Level(s) teachers were teaching</b>	Male	Female	Total
Year 1	1	3	4
Year 2	1	4	5
Year 1 & Year 2	0	1	1

Table 6: Whether or not the teachers had undertaken a TESOL methodology course

<b>Had undertaken a TESOL methodology course?</b>	Male	Female	Total
Yes	2	8	10
No	0	0	0

Table 7: Whether or not the learner-centred approach was a component of the TESOL methodology course the teachers had undertaken

<b>Learner-centred approach covered in that methodology course?</b>	Male	Female	Total
Yes	2	7	9
No	0	1	1

## Appendix 5

### INFORMATION SHEET (Attached to the questionnaire)

#### **An investigation into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam**

My name is Thi Le Hoang Chu and I am a PhD student at the School of Education, Curtin University, Western Australia. I am conducting a research project into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam. I would like to invite you to participate.

If you choose to participate, please complete the questionnaire that is attached. It will take you up to 30 minutes.

Your name and personal details will NOT be recorded on the questionnaire and all questionnaires will be kept in a secure and private place for the duration of the research. All information obtained from the questionnaire will be collated and presented in an aggregate combined form only.

Please be advised that participation in this project is completely voluntary. There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you want more information, you can contact me by email on [chuthilehoang@gmail.com](mailto:chuthilehoang@gmail.com) or my supervisor, Associate Professor Katie Dunworth by email on [k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au](mailto:k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au)

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. When you send the questionnaire to this email address, the questionnaire will be printed off and stored separately from your email contact details. If you prefer, you can print off this questionnaire and send it in an envelope to:

Chu Thi Le Hoang  
Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature,  
University of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City  
10-12 Dinh Tien Hoang Street, District 1,  
Ho Chi Minh City,  
Vietnam

Note: This project has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number EDU-39-10). If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784.

## APPENDIX 6

### INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM (For interviews)

#### **An investigation into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam**

My name is Thi Le Hoang Chu and I am a PhD student at the School of Education, Curtin University, Western Australia. I am conducting a research project into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam. I would like to invite you to participate.

If you choose to participate, you will attend an interview which will last between 30 and 45 minutes. Please note that for data analysis purposes your interview will be tape-recorded.

Your name and personal details will NOT be recorded in the interview and all the tapes of the interviews and their transcripts will be kept in a secure and private place for the duration of the research. All information obtained from the interview will be collated and presented in an aggregate form only.

Please be advised that participation in this project is completely voluntary. There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you want more information, you can contact me by email on [chuthilehoang@gmail.com](mailto:chuthilehoang@gmail.com) or my supervisor, Associate Professor Katie Dunworth by email on [k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au](mailto:k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au)

Note: This project has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number EDU-39-10). If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784.

## Consent Form

### An investigation into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam

I confirm that I have been informed about this project and understand what my participation involves. I understand that I can withdraw at any time, and that no information which could identify me will be used in published material.

I agree to participate in the study as described to me.

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **Appendix 7**

### **INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM (For classroom observations and follow-up interviews)**

#### **An investigation into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam**

My name is Thi Le Hoang Chu and I am a PhD student at the School of Education, Curtin University, Western Australia. I am conducting a research project into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam. I would like to invite you to participate.

If you choose to participate, you will have your class observed and will be interviewed for about 30 minutes after each classroom observation session. Please note that for data analysis purposes, your observed lessons will be videotaped and your interviews tape-recorded.

Your name and personal details will NOT be recorded in the interview and all the tapes of the interviews, their transcripts and the videotapes of your lessons will be kept confidential in a secure and private place for the duration of the research. All information obtained from the interviews will be collated and presented in an aggregate form only.

Please be advised that participation in this project is completely voluntary. There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you want more information, you can contact me by email on [chuthilehoang@gmail.com](mailto:chuthilehoang@gmail.com) or my supervisor, Associate Professor Katie Dunworth by email on [k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au](mailto:k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au)

Note: This project has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number EDU-39-10). If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784.

## Consent Form

### An investigation into teaching approaches in TESOL at tertiary level in Vietnam

I confirm that I have been informed about this project and understand what my participation involves. I understand that I can withdraw at any time, and that no information which could identify me will be used in published material.

I agree to participate in the study as described to me.

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix 8

### KEY TO THE TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS AND CONVENTIONS USED IN DATA TRANSCRIPTION

Meanings	Symbols	Examples
<p>1. Turns at talk</p> <p>1.1. Discrete turn at talk by a single person</p> <p>1.2. The same turn at talk by two persons</p> <p>1.3. One person speaks while someone else is speaking</p> <p>1.4. One turn at talk followed immediately by another</p>	<p>name of person:</p> <p>name of person 1: [[ ]] name of person 2: [[ ]]</p> <p>overlapping speech put in square brackets and vertically aligned</p> <p>name of first person = name of second person =</p>	<p>T1: in my opinion I think a TESOL teacher first of all is a facilitator</p> <p>I: [[yes]] T1: [[ah]] yes of course</p> <p>I: you allowed [your] students to work in pair first T10: [yeah]</p> <p>T2: ah so we say you say we focus on students but in what way= I: =yeah in what way</p>
<p>2. When what was said is</p> <p>2.1. inaudible</p> <p>2.2. not clear</p> <p>2.3. an unfinished word</p>	<p>(indecipherable)</p> <p>What is not clear is put in single brackets ( ).</p> <p>hyphen at the end of part of the word said</p>	<p>T7: so (indecipherable) we should get started right now huh.</p> <p>T3: (They need) the exact number and the number is expressed through their test score.</p> <p>T6: ok the par- participation is twenty per cent</p>
<p>3. Pause</p>	<p>(.)</p>	<p>T5: yes that's also one of the criteria (.) what what what criteria that I choose (.) the same topic, the same level</p>

<p>4. teacher activity other than speaking, for example laughing, coughing and others</p>	<p>((laughing))</p> <p>((coughing))</p>	<p>T4: and I also interview them a kind of let's say analyse ((laughing)) the students informally</p> <p>T10: uh I think it's ok yes but you know ((coughing)) most ((coughing)) most of most of the members in the class they enjoy</p> <p>T6: ((laughing)) but uh can I look at ((looking through the papers)). So ok one thing was about the space programmes.</p>
<p>5. Intonation</p> <p>5.1. Falling intonation</p> <p>5.2. Rising intonation</p>	<p>full stop</p> <p>question mark</p>	<p>T8: as much as possible in order to help them.</p> <p>T2: in what way can you use language to do justice?</p> <p>T7: can you tell me what they are doing.</p> <p>T6: do you have the same opinion? Yes or no?</p> <p>T7: can you give me your ideas?</p> <p>T2: ah change. You say changes?</p> <p>T6: any other suggestions or comments from the audience?</p>

<p>5.3. Rising tone after an item in a list</p> <p>5.4. Names of people, books, TV programmes</p>	<p>comma after the item</p> <p>capital letters</p>	<p>T9: and and their attitudes, their opinions.</p> <p>T2: one is uh <i>The Lottery</i>.</p> <p>T2: I don't remember the the author. The second one is <i>Last Leaf</i> by O' Henry.</p> <p>T3: ok class have you ever watched Intelligent Debate on Bloomberg?</p>
<p>6. teacher talk preceded by student talk</p>	<p>(...)</p> <p><i>Note:</i> This symbol is exclusively used in the transcribing of teacher talk in classroom observations.</p>	<p>T1: why why is it impossible for you to do so.</p>

## Appendix 9

### PROTOCOL FOR THE TRANSCRIPTION OF VIDEO DATA

<b>OBSERVATION – TEACHER</b>
Date:
Time:
Teacher:
Class/Level:
Topic/Theme:
Number of students present:

<b>Stage/ Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Transcribed teacher language and notes of teacher activity if any</b>	<b>Remarks made by observer</b>

## Appendix 10

### LISTS OF KEY WORDS AND PHRASES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE CATEGORISATION OF THE MAIN ROLE OF A TESOL TEACHER

Table 1: List of key words and phrases that contributed to the creation of the category of 'facilitator'

Category	Lexical items contributing to category
Facilitator	facilitator helper instructor guide facilitator of class activities facilitator of learning to facilitate students' learning activities create a facilitative environment provide resources necessary for the learning process helps to develop students' autonomous learning support effectively their students in language learning help their students acquire the language help students learn the language effectively show the students to learn how to learn (metacognition/ metacognitive strategies/thinking)

Table 2: List of key words and phrases that contributed to the creation of the category of ‘organiser/conductor’

<b>Category</b>	<b>Lexical items contributing to category</b>
Conductor	conductor in an orchestra organiser evaluator of students’ performance to teach students how to evaluate their peers and their own work equip themselves good methods of classroom organization and control make them learn make the students learn about a particular topic or a particular subject get students use the four skills in class

Table 3: List of key words and phrases that contributed to the creation of the category of ‘fire lighter’

<b>Category</b>	<b>Lexical items contributing to category</b>
Fire lighter	lighting a fire provider of sources of inspiration for students stimulator inspiring instructor to motivate and inspire their students encourage students to learn provide them with the motivation to inspire students to go on with their learning inspire in students a love and respect for learning help germinate and nourish their love of learning the language

Table 4: List of key words and phrases that contributed to the creation of the category of ‘fire filler’

<b>Category</b>	<b>Lexical items contributing to category</b>
Pail filler	filling a pail mechanical aspect of teaching teaching grammar rules and language skills help the students with [...] some language skills like [...] grammar, speaking or pronunciation to provide students with the knowledge of English and to develop their skills of using the language to teach students how to generalize and explore rules enlarging students’ knowledge in different fields like linguistics, culture or literature you have to correct [mistakes]

Table 5: List of key words and phrases that contributed to the creation of the category of ‘learner’

<b>Category</b>	<b>Lexical items contributing to category (key words and phrases)</b>
Learner	learner do a lot of research