AN INVESTIGATION INTO WRITING PRACTICES

IN BARIA - VUNGTAU LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Acknowledgements

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

(Signature)

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List of Abbreviations

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

DOET: Department of Education and Training

EFL: English as a foreign language

IRF/E: Initiation-Response-Feedback/ Evaluation

L1: First language

L2: Second language

MOET: Ministry of Education and Training

NFL Project: National Foreign Language Project

PLCs: Professional learning communities

SCT: Sociocultural Theory

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

General Conventions for Presenting Transcripts

Below is the explanation of the symbols used in the transcripts

T	Teacher
S1	A student named as S1
SS	Many students or the whole class
[ ]	The researcher's comments or explanation for clarity
( )	Translation
(…)	Omission of some part of the talk
[…]	Pause between utterances
In bold	The speaker's emphasis

Referencing and Citation

In the reference list of this study, some authors with the same surname published their works in the same year. To enable reader to locate entries in the reference list, first initials of these authors are included in the relevant in-text citations according to APA style:

http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2014/01/when-to-use-author-initials-for-textcitations.html

Abstract

In this era of globalization, English is the dominant international language. Therefore, many countries have attached importance to the teaching of English. In Vietnam, the government has seen English as a tool for national development, and this has led to reforms in the English curriculum and then to the launch of a large-scale National Foreign Language Project. These reforms and policy directions aim to enable Vietnamese students to use English confidently and independently to be able to integrate into the international community.

This study investigates teachers' instructional practices of English writing at lower secondary level and examines the influences on instructional practices in one province in Vietnam. In response to the National Foreign Language Project, writing short texts was officially added to English examinations in 2016-2017 in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province where this study took place. Guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and Fairclough's conception of discourse, this study addresses the overarching question "What are the practices that influence the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau (Vietnam) lower secondary schools?"

The research employs a qualitative, multi-case study approach and draws on multiple data sources, including documents, classroom observations and semi-structured teacher interviews. This study was carried out at a rural, a suburban and an urban school located in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province. Six teachers, two from each of the schools, participated in this study. Classroom observations were conducted over a period of nearly four months and interviews were conducted with the teachers before and after classroom observations.

Study findings reveal a significant gap between government policies and classroom practice. The teachers faced several challenges influencing their instructional practices, including prescriptive teacher professional development, textbook-bound teaching practice, teaching as a paradoxical practice (i.e. conflicting instructional and institutional conditions) and traditional teaching and learning practices. The teachers were often unable to employ instructional practices that supported students in being independent and creative writers. This study provides implications for educational policy makers and the teaching of writing in English as a foreign language.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview of my study. It begins with a positioning statement that details my background and initial motivation for conducting this research. I then describe the research context, the research problem and the research questions for my study. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the research site, Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, followed by an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Positioning Statement

With the goal of providing better social outcomes for the Vietnamese population, the government of Vietnam has made a number of political, economic and educational reforms. For instance, in 2008, it launched a large-scale project that included a strong determination to improve English teaching and learning. As a Vietnamese lecturer of English with more than 20 years of experience at Ba Ria-Vung Tau Teacher Training College in Southern Vietnam, I feel a strong desire to contribute to enhancing the quality of English education in Ba Ria-Vung Tau, my hometown. In order to do this, I decided that it was necessary to engage in further study and undertake research in the area of English instruction, particularly writing, and hence I applied to Western Sydney University to pursue a doctoral degree.

In Vietnam, students officially start to learn to write short English texts when they go to lower secondary school (at the time of this study). As an EFL (English as a foreign language) learner, I know how challenging writing is. Writing, as Nunan (1999) points out, is a difficult skill that not even all native speakers can master, thus the challenges can be enormous for those who learn it as a second or foreign language. When I was a student, I experienced a feeling of fear in writing classes when facing a blank page and struggling with not knowing what and how to write. Although writing is challenging, I believe that with good writing instruction, teachers can help their students write better and develop a more positive attitude towards writing.

In my experience, literacy has been seen in Vietnam as a technical skill (Street, 2006), with a strong emphasis placed in English classrooms on teaching and learning grammar independently of the social context. I hold the view that literacy should not be seen as only a skill, since language occurs in a social context; people use language in ways that are subject to social conventions. I became intrigued by the social view of literacy that people read and write for particular purposes, and that literacy has an inextricable link with the social structure (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). When the Vietnamese government vigorously began promoting English education in the national education system, with the goal of making English proficiency become a strength of the Vietnamese people in the service of national development, I became interested to find out how Vietnamese teachers of English viewed literacy and what was happening in English classrooms.

My interest grew more intense when to further boost the quality of teaching and learning of English, *writing* started to be officially tested in 2016–2017 in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools. As a lecturer at the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Teacher Training College, a tertiary institution that trains lower secondary school teachers, I was motivated to understand what was really happening in lower secondary writing classes when there was a shift in the importance of English writing at the secondary level. Research in this area would offer me a great opportunity to gain insights into classroom practices and contribute to the growing body of Vietnamese research in the field of language education. It would also allow me to contribute knowledge that can be used to improve the teaching of English writing, in Ba Ria-Vung Tau particularly and in Vietnam generally.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Globalisation and English Language Education

It is widely acknowledged that English is the *lingua franca* of the modern world (Nunan, 2003; Sharifian, 2017). It is the language of United Nations summits, and the means of communication used in business, international conferences, and sports events such as the Olympics. Furthermore, it is the world's major language to communicate findings in research journals and books (Swales, 1990). English is seen as crucial for accessing the global knowledge economy and a resource that can contribute to personal, social and economic growth (Seargeant & Erling, 2013). In short, English is indispensable for communicating with the global community, accessing scientific and technical world knowledge, and integrating with the global market economy for increased

employability (Gil, 2016). The hegemonic forces of English have strongly impacted language education policies in many countries throughout the world (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016).

In Asia, where most countries are emerging markets with rapid economic growth, governments have made great efforts to develop their citizens' English proficiency to secure international competitiveness. Three nations in particular – China, Japan, and South Korea – are seen as "important players in the global spread of English because of the great inroads that English has made into their educational systems" (Hu & McKay, 2012, p. 345). In 1976, the Chinese government launched a national program which considered English important for modernisation. To improve students' English proficiency, the Chinese Ministry of Education kept lowering the starting age for formal English education in the national curriculum from year 5 to year 3 at the primary level. A further move in China's language policy was that English was used as the medium of instruction for non-language subjects in economically and socially developed regions. In addition, curricular time for English was increased and teaching materials were developed in the form of collaborative efforts between Chinese and foreign writers and publishers (Hu & McKay, 2012).

Considering English as a strategic tool to secure its competitiveness in the globalised world, the South Korean government required students to start learning English two grades earlier – at grade 3 from 2009 (Choi & Lee, 2008). To change English education practice, South Korea has recently introduced measures such as revising school-based assessment with a focus on productive skills; providing English native speakers to teach; and establishing infrastructure where students can have increased contact with English at each school (Choi, 2016).

Similarly, the Japanese government lowered the official age for compulsory English from grade 7 to grade 5 (Choi & Lee, 2008; Hu & McKay, 2012). To achieve the aim of developing learners' communicative skills, the Japanese government encouraged in-service English teachers to take standardised tests such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). It also started America-Japan teacher exchange programs and provided an English teaching resources website for teachers (Choi, 2016).

In such a globalised context, education in Vietnam has also undergone major reforms, particularly in foreign language education. The most remarkable is the birth of a National Foreign Language Project (NFL Project). This reform was put in place to enhance the competitiveness of Vietnamese labour as Vietnam entered new trade markets such as the Asean Economic Community in 2015 and the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2016.

To provide the context for this study, in the rest of this section I will present a synopsis of Vietnamese general education and the major cultural factors influencing it, and a description of foreign language education in Vietnam.

1.2.2 General Education in Vietnam

General education in Vietnam consists of 12 grades: grades 1 to 5 (primary education for the age range 6 to 11 years), grades 6 to 9 (lower secondary education for the age range 11 to 15 years) and grades 10 to 12 (upper secondary education for the age range 15 to 18 years). An academic year is divided into two semesters. For lower secondary education, in which I am interested, the first semester generally lasts 19 weeks and the second 18 weeks. Lower secondary schools are managed directly by the Office of Education.

General education management in Vietnam is described as 'top-down' (Le, 2015; Phan, 2015). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) decides on the curriculum, the textbooks, and the number of instructional hours for each subject for all levels of general education. In a paper on Vietnamese secondary education innovation, Le (2015), a prominent Vietnamese lecturer with more than 30 years of experience, argued that the curriculum is overloaded; student assessment is product-oriented, research about language teaching in Vietnam is limited, and pedagogies mainly focus on rote memorisation and passive learning. Le (2015) also pointed out further problems in Vietnamese secondary education. These include overcrowded classes with mixed levels or under-motivated students, a lack of sufficiently qualified teachers, and a widening gap in the learning environment between socially and economically developed and under-developed areas. These problems suggest more research is needed to further understand and improve the teaching of English in Vietnamese secondary education.

1.2.3 Cultural Factors Influencing Vietnamese Education

Vietnam was ruled by China for almost a thousand years and it is still influenced by Chinese ideologies, particularly Confucianism (Bui, 2015; Le, 2011; Truong, 2013). One of the Confucian values still strongly reflected in Vietnamese society is *hierarchy,* which manifests in the way people use language in communication or the way they build relationships. Hierarchical values include unquestioning obedience to parents, elders, teachers and superiors (Truong, 2013). Traditionally, students were supposed to respect their teachers in the same way they respected their King and father, which is clearly manifested in a Vietnamese saying *Vua, thầy, cha ấy ba ngôi. Kính thờ như một trẻ ơi ghi lòng* (translation: King, teacher and father are those whom children equally respect, which needs to be kept in mind.) Even in modern society, respect for teachers remains, as indicated in the saying *Không thầy đố mày làm nên* (translation: Without teachers, you can do nothing) (Bui, 2015). Teachers are seen as authority figures in Vietnamese classrooms. They communicate knowledge, and students are expected to listen respectfully as knowledge receivers. These ideologies promote the perception of teaching as one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to learners (Bui, 2015; Le, 2011).

Another factor impacting Vietnamese education is examinations. It is believed that success in high-stake examinations is a key to a good future life, and children's success in high-stake examinations can bring honour to their families (Bui, 2015; Le, 2011). Therefore, in order to please their parents and to secure their future lives, students work hard for examinations rather than for the sake of knowledge. In addition, students' scores are used as a major means to evaluate teachers and schools. To achieve best results, teachers carefully prepare learners for examinations. Good examination scores are the most important indicators of students' and teachers' capabilities as well as their school's efforts. All these factors result in examination-oriented teaching and learning (Le, 2011; Ngo & Trinh, 2011; T. H. Nguyen, 2015).

1.2.4 Foreign Language Education in Vietnam

1.2.4.1 Foreign Language Education Before 1986

In Vietnam, the history of foreign language education reflects historical, political and economic contexts. During the French colonisation, which started in 1858, French was brought to Vietnamese schools as a medium of instruction and English was taught as a foreign language. In 1954, the

French colonisation ended and Vietnam was divided into the North and the South, each having its own political ideology. The North, which was called *Democratic Republic of Viet Nam*, was supported by Russia, while the South, the *Republic of Viet Nam*, was supported by the United States. At this time, Russian and Chinese, the languages of two key socialist countries, were major foreign languages taught widely in the educational system in Northern Vietnam. In contrast, in Southern Vietnam, English was the main foreign language taught in secondary and higher education, although French and Chinese were also introduced into schools (Doan et al., 2018).

After Vietnam became unified in 1975, Russia was reinforced as the major foreign language due to Vietnam's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. The Ha Noi National Institute of Education set the targets for secondary schools as 60% studying Russian, 25% English, and 15% French. From 1975 to 1986, Vietnam suffered from economic stagnation. In this context, the Vietnamese government launched economic reform policy called Doi Moi (open-door policy) in 1986. Vietnam opened its door beyond the socialist bloc to the regional and global economy to boost the national economy. It was the Doi Moi policy that resulted in the rapid development of English in modern Vietnam (Doan et al., 2018).

1.2.4.2 Foreign Language Education Between 1986 and 2002

With the birth of the Doi Moi policy, Russian gradually lost its status as a dominant foreign language in the Vietnamese education system and English became a compulsory subject nationwide at upper secondary level (grades 10 to 12) and an elective subject at lower secondary level (grades 6 to 9). At that time, there were two sets of English textbooks: the 'seven-year' textbook for grades 6 to 12, and the 'three-year' textbook for grades 10 to 12. Both textbooks were mainly grammar based (Hoang, 2009). The dominant teaching method in English classrooms was the Grammar-Translation approach (Bui, 2015; Le, 2011; Hoang, 2009). As its name suggests, the Grammar-Translation method emphasises the teaching of grammar and translation of the written language. Little attention is paid to listening and speaking. Students learn the grammatical rules of the target language overtly and apply them when translating from one language to the other (Benati, 2018; Cerezal-Sierra, 1995; Liu & Shi, 2007). In brief, the teaching of English in Vietnamese classrooms focused on lexicogrammar, reading, and translation (Bui, 2015; Hoang, 2009).

1.2.4.3 Foreign Language Education from 2002 to the Present

In 2000 the Vietnamese government launched the *General Education Reform 2000*, and the secondary English curriculum underwent considerable reform. Specifically, from 2002 English became a compulsory subject at both lower and upper secondary levels, and an elective subject at primary level (Hoang, 2009). The aim of the new English curriculum was for students to be able to use English as a means of communication at a basic level of proficiency in four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, the new textbooks (the ones my research participants were using at the time of my research) placed equal emphasis on the development of these four language skills. Textbooks from grades 8 to 12 had four separate sections, each focusing on one skill (according to the curriculum, sixth and seventh graders were not required to learn to write short texts; therefore, writing was not included in grades 6 and 7 textbooks). The teaching method prescribed in the curriculum was Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which aims to achieve communicative competence by using authentic materials and activities that involve real communication through meaningful tasks such as information gap, role-play and problem-solving (Cerezal Sierra, 1995; Liu & Shi, 2007). Short in-service training courses were provided to help teachers change from the Grammar-Translation method to the CLT method.

Although the government placed importance on developing practical communication, in actual classrooms the emphasis was on the development of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and structural patterns (Hoang, 2009; Le, 2011). A substantial barrier to the application of the CLT approach was that teaching practice had been greatly shaped by examinations to measure learners' lexicogrammatical knowledge (Bui, 2015, Le & Barnard, 2009; Ngo & Trinh, 2011). To help students pass examinations, teachers tended to concentrate on teaching grammar and reading, and thus overlook skills such as writing (short texts), speaking and listening (Bui, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the product of this practice was students who were unable to communicate effectively either verbally or in writing. This view was shared by Mr Banh Tien Long, former Deputy Minister of Education and Training. In a *Viet Nam News* report (2008), Mr Banh Tien Long stated:

> Testing and evaluation of English was still based on reading and grammar exercises, and
> the use of English for communication was ignored. Most students were not able to use the

language to study, do research or even to communicate after learning at universities for up to six years. (*Viet Nam News*, 2008, Little Use section, para. 7)

In such a context, to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning of English in the educational system, the National Foreign Language Project was launched in 2008 in the service of international and regional integration. The general aim of the Project was that by the year 2020, most Vietnamese youths graduating from vocational schools, colleges and universities would be able to use English independently and confidently, and thus be able to study and work in multi-cultural and multilingual environments (Government of Vietnam, 2008). The project called for innovations in English teaching and learning at all educational levels. Accordingly, a series of in-service training courses were provided for teachers to improve their English proficiency and teaching methodology. However, in their critical analysis of English language policy reforms in Vietnam, Bui and Nguyen (2016) reported that despite the state's intensive effort to enhance the quality of teacher professional development programs, a number of scholars remained skeptical about their outcomes: "Teachers still report the lack of opportunities to attend these training sessions. Teachers also feel that most of the short courses were too general; consequently, they did not find them practical with respect to their current teaching" (p. 374). In addition, after considering the impact of globalisation on English language policy in seven Asian countries, including Vietnam, Hamid and Nguyen (2016) claim that the poor quality of English teaching in Vietnam resulted from the shortage of effective teacher training and professional development.

1.3 The Research Problem

In response to the calls of the NFL Project for innovations in the teaching and learning of English, the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training has attempted to make several changes. One of these was that in the school year 2016-2017, writing (together with listening), was officially included in semester-end English examinations across Ba Ria-Vung Tau province. Previously, these 45-minute examinations had used mainly multiple-choice questions and the rewriting of sentences to test students on grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. From 2016-2017, students were required to write a short text of 40 to 50 words (accounting for one out of 10 marks) in addition to the traditional parts of the semester-end examination. This has increasingly attracted lower secondary teachers' attention to teaching writing. In summary, the

cultural factor that teaching in Vietnam is examination-driven (Le & Barnard, 2009; Ngo & Trinh, 2011; T. H. Nguyen, 2015) has caused a shift in teachers' attitude towards writing instruction.

The lack of attention paid to writing at lower secondary level has resulted in a dearth of research in this area. When reviewing the literature on English writing in Vietnamese classrooms, I realised that there is an established body of empirical research related to English writing at the tertiary level in Vietnam but little is known about how English writing is taught at the secondary level. Research studies on English writing at the tertiary level have focused on investigating students' motivation for writing (e.g. Tran, 2007); the impact of process-based or genre-based writing approaches on learners' writing performance (e.g. Luu, 2011; Ngo & Trinh, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2012; Trinh & Nguyen, 2014); writing strategies used by learners (e.g. Nguyen, 2009); the use of wiki collaboration for English writing (e.g. Bui, 2015); and the effect of online peer feedback on students' motivation and performance (e.g. Huynh, 2008; Nguyen & Ramnath, 2016; Pham, 2010).

Of note is Nguyen and Hudson's (2010) investigation into Vietnamese pre-service teachers' attitudes, needs, and experiences in learning to teach writing before their practicum in Vietnamese secondary schools. Nguyen and Hudson surveyed 97 pre-service teachers using an open-ended questionnaire and found that out of the 10 difficulties the participants perceived for teaching writing during their practicum, 41% said that they lacked confidence and knowledge for teaching writing at secondary schools. Although the reasons for their perceptions were not presented in the study, I would argue that the lack of confidence and knowledge might be due to a lack of knowledge of English language teaching methodology, an existing problem indicated by Vietnamese researchers (Bui & Nguyen 2016; Hamid & Nguyen 2016; H. P. C. Nguyen, 2015). In particular, Pham (2001) found that EFL teacher education focused more on linguistics and literature, with little attention given to pedagogy. I concur with H. P. C. Nguyen's (2015) argument that effective pedagogy necessitates more sound pedagogical knowledge and contextual knowledge (English language teaching methodology) than the domains of English language proficiency and subject matter knowledge. These contextual factors and recent research provide a background for this study.

When looking into the Vietnamese context of teaching writing in English, I have identified two key problems. First, although EFL writing for undergraduates (especially English majors) has

attracted many Vietnamese researchers, there is little interest in EFL writing at the secondary level, especially at the lower secondary level, in Vietnam. This scarcity of research on secondary English writing is occurring not only in Vietnam but also in other second language (L2) contexts (Lee, 2016). Second, although the national goal of the NFL Project and the inclusion of writing in the recent semester-end English examinations have motivated secondary teachers to teach writing, several researchers have argued that Vietnamese teachers (both pre-service and in-service teachers) lack pedagogical training and support (Bui & Nguyen 2016; Hamid & Nguyen 2016; H. P. C. Nguyen, 2015). This raises the question of how teachers are coping with writing classes when they may not be well equipped with pedagogic knowledge. These two key problems have stimulated my investigation into what is happening in lower secondary English writing classrooms, particularly in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province.

1.4 Research Questions

My research explores lower secondary English writing in the Vietnamese context, particularly what shapes instructional practices in lower secondary writing classrooms in Ba Ria-Vung Tau. This thesis reports findings and makes recommendations that will contribute knowledge about writing classes in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province and possibly enhance writing instruction for lower secondary level in similar EFL contexts. This study seeks to answer the following overarching question:

What are the practices that influence the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau (Vietnam) lower secondary schools?

This overarching question is embodied in two sub-questions:

1. What are the discourses that dominate in the teaching of lower secondary English writing?
2. How do Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers institute their instructional practices of English writing?

1.5 Description of Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province

Ba Ria - Vung Tau province is located in Southern Vietnam. It is made up of two cities (Ba Ria and Vung Tau) and six districts (Tan Thanh, Long Dien, Dat Do, Xuyen Moc, Chau Duc and Con Dao). Ba Ria - Vung Tau occupies a total area of 1,989.5 square miles and has a population of

1,059,500 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2014). Its main economic activities include petroleum, tourism, commerce, electricity, farming and fishing.

As provincial cities, Ba Ria and Vung Tau has better infrastructure than the other six districts. Ba Ria city is the political and administrative center of the province; that is, almost all of the provincial administration agencies are located there. It is also a commercial center and an important transport hub for the province. The second city, Vung Tau, has crude oil and natural gas reserves and is the only petroleum base of Vietnam. It is also one of the most famous tourism destinations in Vietnam thanks to beautiful beaches and unique historical-cultural monuments such as Theravada Buddhist temple, the giant statue of Jesus and White Palace. Thanks to its economic development, Vung Tau contributes much to the provincial and national budget.

The remaining six districts are located in the suburban and rural areas of the province. Tan Thanh is an industrial zone and Chau Duc's economy is mainly based on agriculture. Fishing and farming are Xuyen Moc's and Dat Do's major economic activities besides emerging tourism. Con Dao, the only island of Ba Ria-Vung Tau, and Long Dien are the smallest areas. They are striving to improve young industries, particularly tourism and services.

Each city or district of Ba Ria-Vung Tau province has its own Office of Education which directly manages its lower secondary schools. These Offices of Education are managed by Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training. All lower secondary students within a city or district take the same semester-end English test written by the Education Office of the city or district. According to the local law, students go to school close to their house. Typically, schools assign each class one room; each student is given a fixed seat throughout the school year. The number of students in each class ranges from 30 to 50, depending on the school.

1.6 The Outline of the Thesis

This thesis has eight chapters. Chapter 1 has provided the background and rationale of this study. In this overview, I have described how the extensive changes in English education in Vietnam provided the impetus for my research on the teaching of English writing there. I have highlighted two research problems; that is, the dearth of research on secondary English writing and the

inadequacy of pedagogical training and support for teachers. I have introduced my research questions and given a brief description of Ba Ria-Vung Tau, the research site. I have concluded the chapter by describing the overall structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical lens that guides this study, namely Vygotsky's (1978) learning principles of sociocultural theory in combination with Fairclough's (2010) conception of discourse. In Chapter 3, I present the relevant literature pertaining to this study. I begin with an overview on second or foreign language teaching and writing instruction, and then elaborate on two key terms which underpin this study; that is, instructional practice and scaffolding. Chapter 4 details the qualitative methodology used in this study and provides justification for the case study method adopted, as well as the data collection and analysis. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of strategies used to help to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter 5 presents the discourses that dominate in the teaching of secondary English writing in Vietnam. This chapter analyses the two government policies related to secondary English education, the seven-year English curriculum, English textbooks, and in-service teacher training materials. Chapter 6 describes and interprets the instructional practices of English writing employed by Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers through an analysis of observation and interview data. Chapter 7 synthesises the key findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to address the overarching research question. In Chapter 8, I conclude this thesis with a discussion of contributions to theory and implications for practice that emerge from this study. I also outline the limitations of the study and put forward suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 presents the two theoretical lenses that have guided this study: Vygotsky' sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning, and Fairclough's conception of discourse. Both are socially committed paradigms. The SCT of learning is used to examine the teachers' instructional practices of English writing, and Fairclough's conception of discourse is adopted to scrutinise the language use that contributes to shaping these practices. This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first of these, Section 2.1, begins with an overview of SCT, presenting how this theory has been applied in the field of second or foreign language education and explaining why SCT has been adopted for this study. I then turn to the discussion of the major constructs of SCT, and how these offer an analytical and methodological framework for this study. In Section 2.2, I discuss Fairclough's conception of discourse and why I chose it as an additional lens.

2.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning

SCT emerged from the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s to explain how humans develop mentally via the mediation of tools and signs (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). After Vygotsky's death, SCT was taken up first by his colleagues and students, and later expanded and developed by scholars inside and outside Russia. Although his ideas were formulated long ago, they continue to be discussed in the 21st century, and they have influenced several fields, including second or foreign language (L2) learning (Lantolf et al., 2018; Ohta, 2017). In this thesis, following Hyland (2003), I use L2 as a generic form to refer to second and foreign languages.

Vygotsky was intrigued by human mental development. He focused on the mind and the 'tools' for thought (Lantolf et al., 2018) and claimed that human mental development is mediated through physical tools and signs. He argued that when humans engage in cultural and social activities and interact with others via speech, lower forms of psychological functions which humans share with other animals, especially primates, are transformed into higher forms of psychological functions that animals do not possess (Vygotsky, 1978). This means that higher forms of learning are social in nature. According to SCT, the environment and culture play a very important role in learning and development

(Vygotsky, 1994; Wertsch, 1986). SCT highlights that learning and cognitive development cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts (Lantolf & Thorne 2006).

Guided by his ideas, proponents of SCT argue that human consciousness and abilities develop through the mediation of tools, activities, and concepts. Learning happens when individuals participate in social and cultural contexts which are mediated by social interaction; that is, by interacting with others via speech and other tools. People communicate, socialise, learn, and develop via tools that are both symbolic (e.g. language and patterns of interaction) and physical (e.g. printed texts and computers) (Cumming, 2016). These tools are artifacts created by humans under specific social and cultural conditions and change over time (Masuda & Arnett, 2015; Turuk, 2008). They are shaped by humans and their social and cultural contexts and, in turn, they shape humans to the extent that humans form new ideas of phenomena previously unknown in the world (Lantolf, 2000).

Vygotsky's SCT began to attract L2 researchers' attention when William Frawley and James P. Lantolf's work was published in 1980s. They drew on Vygotsky's concept of private speech; that is, speech for oneself – a transition from social, communicative speech to inner speech for thoughts – to investigate the performance of L2 learners (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985). Since then, SCT has been increasingly influential in L2 contexts (Lantolf et al., 2018; Ohta, 2017), including adult educational settings (e.g. studies by Gánem-Gutiérrez & Roehr, 2011; and Lei, 2016 as presented below). Although Vygotsky (1978) stated that in order to research human consciousness, it had to be studied while it was in the process of formation, not in the adult form, Lantolf and Poehner (2008) argued that Vygotsky's developmental theory should not be restricted to the early years of life because his primary goal was to explain human consciousness rather than child development.

Guided by Vygotsky's social view of learning, researchers have regarded social interaction as a mediating tool and as scaffolding in various L2 learning environments. Scaffolding was first coined by Wood et al., (1976), who drew on Vygotsky's idea of social interaction to examine parent–child talk, and it was defined by Bruner (1983) as temporary guidance offered to a child by an adult during social interaction and then removed when the child is skilled enough. Swain and Lapkin's (2002) research, for instance, revealed that collaborative dialogues greatly contributed to the L2 learning

process. Specifically, discussion comparing a learner's original piece of writing with one reformulated by an expert effectively stimulated awareness and reflection on language.

Ohta (2001, as cited in Ohta, 2017) also documented interactions in which students having similar difficulties with L2 grammar were able to support (scaffold) each other by providing correct prompts. Ohta's findings were reinforced by Hanjani and Li's (2014) and Yong's (2010) studies, which showed that scaffolding is not one-way support from an expert to a novice, but can occur between novices mutually supporting each other. Drawing on the results of pre- and post-tests, Bassiri (2012) found that scaffolding instruction had a positive impact on L2 learners' reading comprehension and motivation. Gánem-Gutiérrez and Roehr's (2011) study revealed that the use of first language (L1) and metalanguage (that is, language to talk about language) as mediating tools in social interactions played an important role in regulating cognition of L2 adult learners when they were doing grammatical tasks.

SCT has also proliferated in L2 writing studies when the cognitive paradigm is seen as too 'narrow' to understand the complexity of written communication (Lei, 2008; Prior, 2006). The sociocultural approach has offered researchers new ways to conceptualise the social aspect of writing by examining mediation and scaffolding. For example, Lei (2008) investigated the mediating tools and resources that skilled and unskilled writers as university students used to mediate their writing processes. She found that although both the groups used the same mediating tools (e.g. literary works, the internet, first and second languages), how they accessed community (e.g. peers, teachers, and family) and how they used resources such as dictionaries were different. For instance, unlike their skilled counterparts, less skilled participants were found to communicate in writing only with their teachers and peers, and not with other social agents.

Lee (2014) investigated the effectiveness of teacher written feedback as scaffolding on a writer's development. She suggested that in order for more effective feedback to take place, traditional feedback activity needs to be transformed such that the teacher not only corrects errors but also provides formative feedback through dialogues to help students improve their learning and become autonomous writers in the long run. In this study, I have adopted SCT as a lens to examine both the tools mediating the teaching of English writing and the teaching strategies used to scaffold student

writing. Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2, and 2.1.3 present the key tenets of SCT that are particularly important to this study, namely *mediation, the zone of proximal development*, and *mediating tools.*

2.1.1 Mediation

Mediation is a central concept in SCT. According to Vygotsky (1978), human mental functioning (including learning) is a *mediated* activity, which means the human mind interacts with the world indirectly through tools. Vygotsky borrowed the concept of tools from Marx, who used working tools to refer to mechanical, physical, and chemical objects that humans use to affect other objects in order to fulfill their personal goals. However, according to Vygotsky, there are two types of tools: technical tools, and psychological tools or signs. It is via technical and psychological tools that human consciousness develops. Technical tools are anything human beings have invented to accomplish tasks or master nature, for example, hammers. Psychological tools are those that regulate the psychological or mental processes of humans, for example, language, concepts, signs and symbols. Psychological tools are also called semiotic tools (Kozulin, 1986). Vygotsky stated that humans use tools, in collaboration with others, to affect the world so as to achieve our goals. Of these tools, language is considered the most important.

Aligning with Vygotsky's arguments, this study conceptualises the teaching of writing as a mediated activity in which teachers and students interact with each other via tools. Accordingly, I examined social interactions between teachers and students and the tools that mediate the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau secondary classrooms. The next section discusses one of the best-known of Vygotsky's concepts, *the zone of proximal development*, which Vygotsky developed from his idea of social interaction.

2.1.2 The Zone of Proximal Development

One of Vygotsky's revolutionary ideas is the impact of social interaction on human intellectual development (Wertsch, 1986). Vygotsky (1978) stated that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social, and later on the psychological level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57). He proposed that children's mental development occurs through social interaction. This implies that learning is not an individual activity dependent mainly on what happens in the mind, but rather learning is social in

essence; that is, learning happens through interaction with others. Vygotsky also emphasised that both children and adults play active roles in the learning process (Cole & Cole, 2001). Based on this view, proponents of SCT argue that learning takes place when knowledge is co-constructed through participation. In educational settings, not only teachers but also students are active agents in the process of knowledge co-construction (Larson & Marsh, 2015; Verenikina, 2010).

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs best in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which he conceptualized as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). In other words, ZPD is the metaphorical distance between what learners can achieve on their own and what they cannot achieve without the assistance of adults, experts, or more capable peers. In the classroom setting, it is the teacher or more capable students who provide this assistance.

With the concept of ZPD, Vygotsky changed understandings of learning and development. Unlike Piaget (1926), who held that instruction should follow development and that introducing learning activities beyond a child's developmental level would result in failure, Vygotsky (1978) argued that instruction can precede and shape development. This implies that instead of simply correcting papers, teachers need to think about specific instructional strategies to support learners to reach their potential level of development (Larson & Marsh, 2015). In addition, since learning occurs best in the ZPD – the distance between the levels of actual development and potential development – instructional strategies need to draw on students' prior knowledge; that is, experience, information, and skills previously acquired (Hertzberg, 2015), to promote their learning processes (Cole & Cole, 2001; Larson & Marsh, 2015).

Despite acknowledging its great contribution to our understanding of learning and development, some critics of ZPD have stated that this concept is vague because it does not explain how to identify a learner's ZPD for each learning task and how to apply ZPD concept in the classroom (Chaiklin, 2003). Miller (2011), for instance, critiques ZPD in relation to measurement and suggests there is currently no common scale for determining the zone: "Knowing only the width of children's zone does not provide an accurate picture of their learning ability, style of learning, and current level of development

compared to other children of the same age and degree of motivation" (p. 198). Miller (2011) suggests that children who have narrow zones of proximal development may either have little learning ability or be successful independent learners who have nearly achieved their potential. Resnick (1996) also offers a critique of ZPD, pointing out that the contributions individuals may make to development seem to be underestimated when compared with social assistance, and that little or nothing is said about "the constraints that biological endowment might place on the directions of socially shaped cognitive development" (p. 41). For example, prodigies can excel in certain areas even though they may not experience much social interaction with more knowledgeable others yet have access to tools that aid their development.

Despite these critiques, ZPD has made significant contributions to education generally and L2 learning in particular (Lantoff & Thorne, 2006; Ohta, 2017). The realisation or measurement of students' ZPD is not the focus of this study, but ZPD provides a theoretical base for examining the concept of *scaffolding*, which will be studied in the context of secondary teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Literature Review. In the next section, I discuss semiotic tools, which mediate one's mental processes.

2.1.3 Semiotic Tools

2.1.3.1 Language as a Tool

According to Vygotsky (1978), language is the most important mediating tool. He pointed out that the early stage of a child's speech is social. This means that the child initially uses speech to communicate with adults and express feelings and desires. This original social speech has little connection to the child's thinking but gradually, at a certain stage, this social (communicative) speech becomes connected to the child's thinking and may be divided into egocentric or private speech; that is, speech-for-oneself, and communicative speech-for-other. Private speech is an intermediate stage of the transformation of communicative speech – an external symbolic action – into the psychological tool of inner speech. Therefore, inner speech is a late product of the transformation of a speech that earlier served the goal of communication into individualised verbal thought. Vygotsky sought to show that language is a vehicle of thought.

SCT implies that the development of cognition is itself the result of participation with others through talk (Vygotsky, 1986). In taking up this thinking in classroom contexts, it is important to consider how teachers and learners talk. Evidence suggests that when talking, we work to understand in response to a previous utterance and an anticipated response, in relation to what we already know and want to know (Sacks, 1992). There is a dialectical relationship between communicating and thinking which leads to the internalization of knowledge in social interactions (Negueruela-Azarola et al., 2015). Therefore, talk plays an important role in the learning process (Boyd, 2012). This study gives keen attention to types of talk and interactional patterns between teachers and students and between students and students.

Vygotsky (1986) saw L1 as a mediating tool to support L2 learning. This contrasts with the principles of behaviourism, which regards the learning of any kind of behaviour as involving stimuli, responses, and habits formed through repeated reinforcement (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). In L2 learning, behaviourism would suggest that the habits of L1 can restrain the formation of new L2 habits and that L1 therefore interferes with the development of L2. However, Vygotsky (1986) argued that we use the semantics of the native language as its foundation to learn a new concept in L2: "In learning a new language, one does not return to the immediate world of objects …but uses instead the native language as a mediator between the world of objects and the new language" (p. 161).

Guided by this view, a number of L2 researchers (e.g. Alshammari, 2011; Cianflone, 2009; Khuong, 2017; Latsanyphone & Bouangeune 2009; Lee & Maraco, 2013; Sharma, 2006) have studied the use of L1 in L2 classrooms and found that when used *judiciously*, L1 is beneficial to L2 learning. Evidence from these studies suggests that L1 use helps increase students' comprehension (Alshammari, 2011); reduce their anxiety and promote more interaction between teachers and students or among learners (Khuong, 2017); and enhance low-proficiency learners' vocabulary retention (Latsanyphone & Bouangeune 2009, Lee & Maraco, 2013). L1 is also a helpful mediating tool for giving instructions and explaining vocabulary or grammar rules (Cianflone, 2009; Khuong, 2017; Sharma, 2006). Other scholars suggest that avoiding the use of L1 in L2 classrooms may delimit language teaching possibilities (Cook, 2001) or result in student incomprehension and resentment (Harbord, 1992).

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In addition, the recent development of 'translanguaging,' a theoretical and pedagogical orientation that advocates for the use of learners' entire linguistic repertoire in L2 learning (García & Wei, 2014), continues to challenge the monolingual approach supported by Phillipson (1992) that L1 should be prohibited and only the target language be used in L2 classrooms. In line with SCT, which sees use of L1 as a mediating tool in L2 learning, translanguaging values the use of both L1 and L2 in L2 classrooms. Translanguaging was first coined by Williams (1994, as cited in García & Wei, 2014) to refer to a pedagogical practice in Welsh schools where two languages were used purposefully concurrently in a bilingual classroom. The term has since been developed and extended (Lewis et al., 2012) to mean "a process of establishing meaning, shaping experiences and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Jones & Lewis, 2014, p. 141). Translanguaging considers bilinguals as having one linguistic repertoire instead of two linguistic entities detached from each other. Bilinguals select features from their linguistic repertoire strategically to communicate effectively.

There is now much empirical evidence for benefits of translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014). For example, García and Leiva (2014) found that allowing learners to translanguage promoted student engagement in learning; students translanguaged to participate in the dialogue, to elaborate ideas, and to raise questions. In addition, the teacher used translanguaging to involve students, to clarify and reinforce what she said, and to extend the lesson. In the current study, the participants spoke Vietnamese as their L1 and English was taught as an L2; therefore, I am interested to pay attention to the ways language(s) mediated learning in classroom interactions.

2.1.3.2 Other Semiotic Tools

One of the commonly used mediating tools in the classroom is the textbook (C. T. Nguyen, 2015). According to researchers, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using textbooks. In terms of advantages, textbooks provide consistency within a program if all teachers use the same textbook (Gak, 2011). They offer a clear map for the teacher and learners to follow; textbooks help them know where they are, what they have done, and what needs doing to achieve the aim of a course (McGrath, 2002). Besides, textbooks support teachers, especially inexperienced ones, in terms of methodology and teaching content (along with supplementary materials such as worksheets, tests and game activities), and they save teachers much time on lesson preparation and materials production (Cunningsworth, 1995; Tomlinson, 2003).

On the other hand, textbooks have some limitations that can disappoint teachers and learners. First, textbooks may not meet learners' needs or interests if their content or activities are irrelevant to students (Jolly & Bolitho, 2011; Richards, 2001). Second, they may delimit teacher autonomy due to their implicitly prescriptive nature; teachers may be robbed of creativity when required to use a textbook, and heavy reliance on them may make teaching rigid and boring because no textbook caters for every learner's needs and interests (Allwright, 1981; Littlejohn,1992). Third, in language teaching, textbooks may not provide sufficient information about the communicative functions of language, for example, when, where, and why an expression is appropriately used (Crandall & Basturkmen 2004).

To make textbooks a useful and productive resource, Graves (2000) suggested that teachers should feel free to adapt them according to students' interests and needs. A textbook should not be used as the only resource but be combined with other kinds of materials from reference books, newspapers, or the Internet. Teachers should use a textbook as their servant, not their master (Cunningsworth, 1995). However, adapting a textbook to best meet students' needs is demanding and requires not only time and available resources but also training in how to modify them (Gak, 2011).

Building on the key tenets of the sociocultural theory, I examine mediation, the zone of proximal development, and mediating tools in the classroom context. In the next section, I examine *discourse*; that is, *language* in use, which is an integral part of the instructional practice of English.

2.2. An Examination of Discourse

This study draws on Fairclough's (2001) conception of discourse as referring to use of language in speech and writing seen as a form of social practice. From the perspective of *discourse as social practice*, Fairclough (2010) conceptualised discourse as having three dimensions: (1) text; that is, written and spoken language; (2) discourse practice; that is, a process of text production and text interpretation; and (3) sociocultural practice; that is, a social structure (see Figure 2.1). According to Fairclough (2003), social practices can be seen as articulations of the different types of social elements that are associated with particular areas of social life, namely, *action and interaction, social relations, persons* (with beliefs, attitudes, histories/backgrounds etc.)*, the material world*, and *discourse*.

Extending Fairclough's conceptions from social practices to instructional practices, the latter include action and interaction; persons (i.e. the teacher and students with their own belief, background, etc.), social relations (i.e. the social status of teachers and students and relationship between them); the material world (e.g. board, chalks and computers), and discourse (e.g. language used during teacher/student and student interaction or language contained in teaching materials). From a SCT perspective, as discussed in Section 2.1, in the classroom setting, teaching and learning is mediated by social interaction between the teacher and students via language and other tools such as textbooks, boards, and computers.

Figure 2.1

Dimensions of Discourse (adapted from Fairclough, 2010, p. 133)
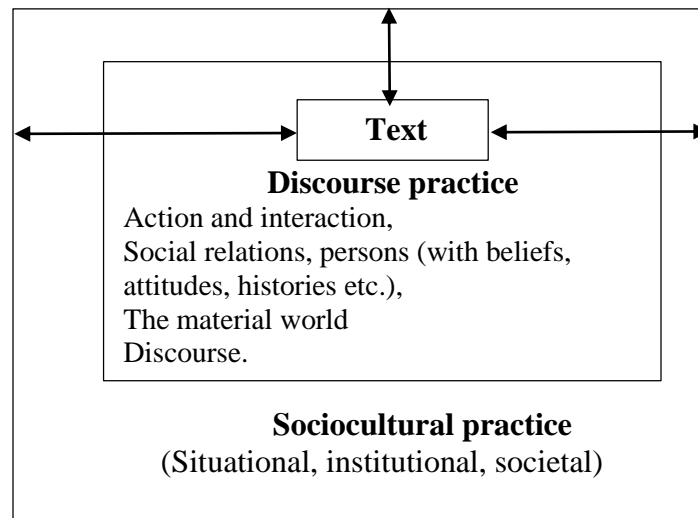
I take the view that that Fairclough's perspective and the SCT perspective both regard teaching and learning as having discoursal elements (i.e. language use), and non-discoursal elements (e.g. the teacher and students, and material-world tools). An examination of both Fairclough and SCT indicates that discourse is one of the constituent elements of instructional practice. In this study Fairclough's notion of discourse offers a further lens through which to view the instructional practice of English writing.

According to Fairclough (2003), the elements of social practices are dialectically related; that is, each element internalises or contains the others. For example, in the setting of classroom, how the teacher and students *talk* and *act* in the classroom is shaped by their *beliefs* and *social (power) relations* or

social status. The ways teachers teach are also influenced by their knowledge background and belief in teaching. In addition, the elements of social practices, including discourse or use of language text, contributes to shaping or being shaped by social practice (Fairclough 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The relationship between text and sociocultural practice, as implied from Figure 2.1, is not direct; it is mediated by discourse practice which involves how text is produced, interpreted, and consumed by social agents. The ways social agents shape texts are socially constrained, but not totally. Rather, social agents have their own causal powers. This implies that social values/norms or ideologies reproduced in texts are mediated or regulated by social agents (Fairclough, 2003). For instance, in classroom settings, the curriculum or textbooks may be interpreted in multiple ways by teachers, thus enhancing or constraining the way they deliver lessons.

In this study of instructional practice of English writing as a type of social practice, I was guided by Fairclough's conception of discourse to examine the dialectical relationship between texts, social agents and other social elements. Specifically, I scrutinised texts, mediating tools relevant to the instructional practice of English writing such as *language policies, curriculum, textbooks, teacher training materials, teacher interviews* and *talk* used in the classroom. I sought to understand

- how language policies, curriculum, textbooks, teacher training materials are shaped by sociocultural practice.
- how such texts are translated into the instructional practice of English writing through the mediation of social agents such as teachers; in particular, how texts shape the way English writing is taught, and how teachers' beliefs and backgrounds shape their instructional practices.
- how sociocultural practice influences the ways social agents act, for example, social norms influence the way teachers and students talk in classroom.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the educational principles of Vygotsky's SCT and Fairclough's conception of discourse. Both theories framed my study and helped me to uncover how English writing is taught in lower secondary classrooms in Ba Ria-Vung Tau and what shapes teachers' instructional practices there. How I used these in my research and data analysis will be explained in Chapter 4, the Methodology chapter.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.0. Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in this era of globalisation and English as an international language, many countries have attached importance to English education in general and the teaching of English writing in particular. Accordingly, research has emerged to support second or foreign language learners in learning to write. To inform this study, which investigates the instructional practice of English writing, this chapter starts by outlining distinctions between first language writing and second or foreign language writing. Next, the chapter describes two of the dominant approaches to teaching English in second or foreign language contexts that have been adopted in Vietnam. It then describes three main approaches to teaching second or foreign writing and defines *instructional practice,* a key construct of this study. The chapter centres on the concept of *scaffolding* proposed by Wood et al. (1976) and developed from Vygotsky's (1978) idea of social interaction to provide guidelines for teachers' instructional practices. The chapter concludes by outlining findings related to teacher cognition and the significant impact it has on teachers' instructional practices.

3.1. Distinctions Between First Language Writing and Second Language Writing

In this thesis, I use 'L1' and 'L2' generically to refer to first language, and second and foreign languages, respectively (Hyland, 2003). Much work has been done to explore differences between L1 and L2 writing practices. Broadly speaking, the field of L1 writing has informed much of what is known about texts and composition (Hyland, 2016), whereas the field of L2 writing has emerged only recently as a discipline (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). The activity of writing involves the texts writers produce, the actions writers engage in to produce such texts, and the socio-cultural contexts in which writers write (Hyland, 2016; Larios et al., 2016). Guided by this view, I group the differences between L1 and L2 writing into three categories: Text-related, writer-related, and context-related. Text-related aspects are concerned with linguistic features. Writer-related aspects refer to the writer's prior knowledge and writing processes, and context-related aspects are concerned with the context where the writing activity is situated.

3.1.1 Text-Related Aspects

While L1 writers may have a stock of vocabulary and an intuitive ability to handle grammar when writing, L2 writers often carry the burden of learning the language and learning to write at the same time (Hyland, 2003). Therefore, L2 writers' texts are often shorter, less fluent and contain more errors (Hedgcock, 2012; Hinkel, 2011). Drawing on a considerable number of research studies conducted to compare L1 texts with L2 texts, Hinkel (2011) demonstrated that the limited vocabulary and grammar of L2 writers disadvantage the quality of their written texts. He also summarised the differences between L1 and L2 texts by focusing on morphosyntactic and lexical features. L2 texts, for example, exhibit less lexical variety, employ less subordination and involve high rates of incomplete or inaccurate sentences or misused prepositions. They also employ more conversational intensifiers, higher rates of personal pronouns, and lower rates of impersonal or referential pronouns (see Hinkel, 2011, p. 529 for further information). Wang's (2011) study of Chinese students learning to write revealed that these learners felt they had good ideas but lacked the linguistic resources (vocabulary and grammar) to express themselves in a foreign language. Wang's research showed that even when students have interesting ideas to write about, they are likely to produce short, low-quality texts due to their grammatical errors and/or poor vocabulary. Such studies demonstrate that providing L2 learners with linguistic resources is crucial in writing instruction.

L1 and L2 texts may also differ in terms of organisational preferences; perspectives on reader orientation (i.e. writer-responsible vs. reader-responsible writing); uses of cohesion markers; and the ways the linguistic features of the text are used (Hinkel, 2011; Silva, 1993). For example, Hinds (1990) discovered that in their compositions, Korean and Japanese people utilised an inductive rhetorical pattern; that is, they delayed exposing their purposes until the end of their texts because in their culture, directness may offend readers who expect a subtler way of reasoning. In contrast, Anglo-American writers follow a deductive rhetorical pattern; that is, pre-revealing their purposes for writing at the beginning of their texts.

In a study of the major differences between Vietnamese and English academic writing, Phan (2011) pointed out that what is seen as "digressive" in English writing may be considered as "relevant" in Vietnamese writing; and what is seen as "linear" or "relevant" in English writing may be perceived as "abrupt' or "too straightforward" by Vietnamese readers (p. 26). Phan explained that the

"perceived digression of Vietnamese indicates that a writer has a broad and comprehensive view of the topic which allows or motivates him/her to integrate a variety of ideas, issues and/or emotional feelings into the text" (p. 26). In addition, while English writers are responsible for making everything clear for the reader, in Vietnamese writing the responsibility of the reader is to interpret the message underlining the text. This is manifested in the fact that English writers tend to use concrete and accurate words as well as explicit signposts with interpretations, whereas Vietnamese writers use abstract and "poetic" words to generate readers' interest and curiosity (p. 27). Vietnamese readers not only seek texts that are academic and formal, they also appreciate a piece of writing "that sounds nice to their ears, touches their hearts and pleases the sense of romance popular in Vietnamese poetry and literature" (p. 28). These findings inform L2 teachers of the importance of raising L2 students' awareness of differences in structuring texts to meet readers' expectations.

3.1.2 Writer-Related Aspects

L1 writers are not usually impacted by the schematic or rhetorical knowledge of another language, but L2 writers may have L1-related schematic knowledge that can support or inhibit the learning of L2 writing (Hedgcock, 2012). Rinnert and Kobayashi (2009) examined 12 studies conducted with Japanese students to explore possible effects of L1 experience on their EFL writing. They reported that novice writers' early L1 experiences in personal expressive writing throughout their elementary and secondary school years (when not combined with any other kind of training) led to frequent use of self-expression in their L2 essays. These studies also showed that novice writers with intensive L1 writing training who could organise L1 essays were able to write better-organised L2 essays. Likewise, Bennui (2008) confirmed that L1-related schematic knowledge interfered with 28 Thai EFL students' writing at three levels, namely words, sentences, and discourse. Bennui also indicated that these three levels of L1 interference represented more negative transfer than positive transfer in learners' pieces of writing. Such research signals the importance of teachers being aware of learners' prior knowledge so that they can design tasks that activate L2 learners' existing schemata or build new schematic knowledge.

In terms of research into composing skills, Beare (2000) and Matsumoto (1995) confirmed some similar composing processes in L1 and L2, while Silva (1993) showed that writers found it harder and less effective to generate content in L2 than in L1. This may be the reason that L2 writers make

use of L1 as a strategy in their L2 writing. Manchon et al.'s (2007, as cited in Larios et al., 2016) review of writing strategies shows that L1 has been used strategically for writing processes such as planning, formulating, and revising. L1 use may result in better essays in terms of content and textual organisation due to faster access to ideas stored in long-term memory and the richer associations between them (Larios et al., 2016). However, under time pressure, according to Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) and Pappamihiel et al. (2008), the use of L1 or translation when writing may have positive or negative effects on L2 writing, depending on the topic of the task and the writer's learning style preferences and proficiency level. These researchers recommend that teachers should neither encourage nor discourage students from using their L1 when preparing for timed writing tasks but instead let them make their own decisions on using it. However, teachers should emphasise that when using translation for L2 writing, learners should avoid word-by-word translation.

3.1.3 Context-related Aspects

L1 and L2 writers may have different expectations and preferences about teaching and learning. The first obvious issue is writing topics that are potentially culture-sensitive; personal or family issues, for example, may be appropriate for some groups of learners and inappropriate for others (Hyland, 2003). Researchers of context-related aspects of writing have cautioned teachers to be alert to students' feedback preferences. While peer feedback is claimed to help students gain a clearer understanding of reader expectations, it may be face-threatening for students from certain cultural backgrounds (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Yang et al.'s (2006) research showed that Chinese students recognised the importance of peer feedback, but they valued teacher feedback more highly because students trust their teacher. This research suggests that to help Chinese learners develop their L2 writing, peer feedback on drafts should be followed by teacher feedback on final texts: "If the teacher gives feedback first, the peer would feel the pressure and say nothing for fear of saying something wrong" (p. 194). The finding of Yang et al.'s (2006) research is consistent with Zhao's (2010) study, which also suggested that students view teacher feedback as much more reliable than peer feedback.

Apart from the issues just mentioned, a number of studies conducted in Asian countries show that contextual factors like big classes, exam-dominated educational culture, teachers' heavy workload, or prescribed curriculum may result in unsuccessful implementation of L1 context-based writing

instruction (e.g. Bhowmik, 2009; You, 2004). Such research suggests L2 teachers need to take contextual factors into consideration before making decisions on writing pedagogy.

Although not conclusive, the research literature offers some clear directions for practice. L2 learners need to be equipped with linguistic resources and awareness of textual differences between L1 and L2, and teachers should consider L2 students' prior knowledge and their expectations and preferences about teaching and learning. Differences between L1 and L2 writing suggests that L1 context-based writing theories cannot simply be applied slavishly to the context of L2 writing. Being aware of distinctions between L1 and L2 writing, teachers can maximise the advantage of similarities (e.g. general composing processes are similar in L1 and L2) and minimise the disadvantage of differences. In other words, understanding distinctions between L1 and L2 writing helps teachers make informed decisions in their writing instruction and avoid regarding L2 writers as deficient writers (Hyland, 2003).

As my study investigates teachers' instructional practices, it is important to review dominant teaching models in L2 contexts.

3.2 Dominant Teaching Models in L2 Contexts

Although there have been various L2 teaching models, the following section focuses on two major models that have been most influential in Vietnam: The Grammar-Translation method and the Communicative Language Teaching approach. The Grammar-Translation method was dominant in Vietnam from the 1970s to the 1990s. However, since the early 2000s, after the Vietnam government committed to open its door to the world, the Communicative Language Teaching approach has been promoted in Vietnamese schools (MOET, 2008).

3.2.1 The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation method was originally used to teach languages such as Latin and Greek and then widely applied in the field of L2 teaching in the 19th century. It views language learning as memorising grammatical rules in order to translate sentences and texts, with little importance attached to listening and speaking. An ordinary lesson would normally include a presentation of grammatical rules, followed by a list of vocabulary and translation exercises from L1 into L2 or vice versa. The focus of this method is on accuracy in translating sentences. Teachers play an

authoritarian role in the classroom and learners are passive in the learning process (Benati, 2018; Cerezal-Sierra, 1995; Liu & Shi, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The merit of the Grammar-Translation method is that it raises a learner's conscious awareness of the form and structure of the target language through explicit grammar instruction (Liu & Shi, 2007). However, this method has been criticised for not paying attention to the ability to communicate in the target language (Benati, 2018; Liu & Shi, 2007). According Richards and Rodgers (2001), the method created frustration for learners through "a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary (p. 4). Due to such criticism, the popularity of the Grammar-Translation method began to decline towards the end of the 19th century, and since then applied linguists and language teachers have embraced the communicative approach to language teaching (Celce-Murcia et al.,1995).

3.2.2 The Communicative Language Teaching Approach

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach draws on the work of British linguists such as M. A. K. Halliday and Dell Hymes. Since emerging in 1970s it has influenced language teaching throughout the world (Richards, 2006). Unlike the Grammar-Translation method, which focuses on rule memorisation, CLT places emphasis on providing learners with opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes (Littlewood, 1981). CLT is defined as 'an APPROACH to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE and which seeks to make meaningful communication and language use a focus of all classroom activities' (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 99, capitals in original).

3.2.2.1 Communicative Competence

The term *communicative competence* was coined by Hymes (1972) to show his disapproval with Noam Chomsky's (1965) notion of language competence that is purely grammatical knowledge. Hymes (1972) suggested that the socio-cultural aspects should not be ignored in any study of language use, and introduced 'communicative competence', which includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use this knowledge in a variety of communicative situations. Hymes's (1972) proposal for communicative competence was supported by applied linguists and

language teachers who were developing the communicative approach to language teaching (Celce-Murcia, 2008).

Among the earliest applied linguists to develop a model of communicative competence that course designers and language teachers could apply to teaching and assessment were Canale and Swain (1980). Elaborating on Hymes's (1972) proposal, Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as a synthesis of three inter-linked components needed for communication:

1. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, grammar and phonology. This competence involves the ability to use linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation to express the literal meaning of utterances.

2. Sociolinguistic competence refers to knowledge of socio-cultural rules of language use and of the rules of discourse. Both rules help learners to interpret the social meaning of utterances. This competence involves the ability to use language appropriately to achieve communicative purposes in a variety of social contexts.

3. Strategic competence refers to verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication, for example, using fillers (e.g. "Let me think").

Canale (1983) adapted this framework of communicative competence by transferring knowledge of the rules of discourse from sociolinguistic competence into a fourth component he labelled *discourse competence* to foreground the importance allotted to this competence. Discourse competence refers to the ability to produce a unified spoken or written text in different genres (Canale, 1983). Through the work of Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), communicative competence is generally understood as the combination of four components – grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Benati, 2009; Savignon, 2002). These components are closely related and equally important, and need to be developed simultaneously to produce an overall improvement in communicative competence (Savignon, 2002). This framework has become the most common for researchers in the field of L2 teaching (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018).

3.2.2.2 The Major Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is based on the belief that language is a means of communication and interaction between community members that is learnt through meaningful language use; it sees meaning as paramount and contextualisation as a basic premise (Cerezal-Sierra, 1995). It highlights the importance of learning a language in contextualised ways and using authentic materials and activities that involve real communication through meaningful tasks. Interaction is emphasised as a way of maximising the use of the target language (Nunan, 1991; Richards & Richards, 2002). In CLT classrooms, teachers are seen as organisers and counsellors, not as dictators. Cooperative and collaborative learning are promoted through the use of pair and group work; learners are expected to actively take part in learning process (Littlewood, 1981; Richards, 2006). Collaborative activities are seen as tools to increase the quantity and quality of language use and to practise or enhance learning opportunities, and thus help to develop communicative competence (Brown, 2007; Long & Porter, 1985). Fluency is seen as more important than accuracy, thus errors are tolerated (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

While CLT is commonly seen as a method that can help learners develop communicative competence, its implementation in Asian contexts, including Vietnam, has encountered difficulties due to mismatches between the ideas of CLT and cultural factors (Khuong, 2017; Littlewood, 2007; Vongxay, 2013). One of the most reported obstacles is the traditional idea of teachers as knowledge providers and students as passive knowledge receivers. Learner-centred pedagogies involving pair and group work, as advocated by CLT, are inconsistent with such traditional roles (Khuong, 2017, Littlewood, 2007; Vongxay, 2013). Factors such as time constraints and big class sizes also challenge the use of pair and group work (Le & Barnard, 2009; T. H. Nguyen, 2015). In addition, examinations that focus on assessing learners' grammatical competence rather than communicative competence can discourage teachers from adopting CLT (Vongxay, 2013; Mai & Iwashita, 2012). As the focus of this study is on the teaching of English writing, the next section discusses three major approaches to teaching writing in L2 contexts.

3.3 Approaches to Teaching Writing in L2 Contexts
The field of L2 writing has been shaped by its 'parent' disciplines, namely, applied linguistics and L1 composition studies. As a result, the theories and practices of teaching L2 composition have

mostly paralleled those of teaching L1 composition (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). This section focuses on the three approaches to teaching L2 writing that are most prominent in the literature: the product-based approach, the process-based approach, and the genre-based approach (Anastasiadou, 2013; Hyland, 2016; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). It details the theoretical orientations and pedagogical emphases of each approach and presents studies on their implementation to teaching writing in L2 contexts.

3.3.1 The Product-Based Approach

The product-based approach to teaching writing sees writing as a static object or textual product – a coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences formed according to a system of rules (Hyland, 2016). This approach has been influential throughout the world, especially in classes for L2 writing practices (Hyland, 2016; Silva, 1990). For example, it has been popular in Vietnam (Tran, 2007; Ngo & Trinh, 2011, Trinh & Nguyen, 2014). In the product-based approach, learning to write includes organising texts into rhetorical patterns and learning grammatical rules, vocabulary, and cohesive devices (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

This method of teaching composition has a linear form. The teacher introduces a model text and helps students analyse it by highlighting its grammatical structures, organisational patterns, and general stylistic characteristics. Students then do a controlled practice of identifying the highlighted features. The teacher then assigns a composition based on the source text, instructing students to prepare a linear outline. Finally, each student produces a writing product that is evaluated by the teacher (Hedgcock, 2012).

In short, the product-based approach focuses on learners' final written products, which are read and evaluated by the only reader – the teacher. There is no space for students to interact and discuss their writing with their peers and teacher to receive guidance or feedback during the processes of developing their writing. Students are required to unquestioningly apply the organisation of model texts to a similar piece of writing. Writing is seen as "simply imitation of input without any active involvement of the students in the formation of the written text" (Anastasiadou, 2013, p. 12).

A major critique of the product-based approach is that it pays undue attention to linguistic or rhetorical features and does not take purpose, audience, and the process of composing into

consideration (Eschholz, 1980; Silva, 1993; Zamel, 1982). Eschholz (1980) criticised it for offering models of imitation that inhibit student writers, rather than empowering or liberating them. By contrast, McDonough and Shaw (2003) maintained that the product-based approach offers learners, especially low-level students, advantages such as improving grammatical accuracy, enhancing the stock of vocabulary, and increasing the self-confidence of novice writers. However, Hyland (2003) argued that the emphasis on form is not sufficient to enhance learners' writing ability.

3.3.2 The Process-Based Approach

The process-based approach emerged as a reaction to the product-based approach and was highly influential during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. This approach focuses on composing processes through which writers formulate ideas to create texts, rather than on textual features. There are two broad teaching perspectives: expressivist and cognitivist (Hyland, 2016; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). The expressivist view suggests that writing is "a creative act in which the process – the discovery of the true self – is as important as the product" (Berlin, 1988, p. 484, as cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). It encourages teachers not to impose their views on or give models to students (Hyland, 2016), but to invite learners to write freely through pre-writing tasks such as freewriting, brainstorming, journal writing, and drafting personal essays (Hedgcock, 2012). Students choose their own topics and genres and write from their own experiences or observations (Raimes, 1983). This approach is more concerned with helping learners generate ideas by providing meaningful content for writing tasks than with producing grammatically correct prose. Peter Elbow, perhaps the most famous leader of the expressivist movement, published *Writing Without Teachers* in 1973 based on his observations from his own writing experiences and those of his students. Elbow pointed to the value of free writing and personal writing (self-expression) and denied any necessary connection between learning and teaching. He claimed that he could set up his own writing class as teacher-less by adopting more the role of a learner and less the role of a teacher (Elbow, 1973).

The reliance on individual expressiveness has received much critique, largely because it tends to assume student writers possess all the inner recourses necessary to write well and, once these have been awoken, little else is needed (Breeze, 2012). However, besides knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, writers need discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence if they are to be successful (Hyland 2003). When expressivism is adopted in L2 contexts, many students experience difficulties because these competences are not innate abilities:

they are achieved through conscious teaching and learning. In addition, although self-expression is a reason for writing, it is not the only reason. Writers also need to be able write in other genres, for example, reports and academic essays (Breeze, 2012).

By contrast, the cognitivist view goes beyond notions of creativity and self-expression in learning writing and focuses on the cognitive aspects of the task. Counter to the expressive approach, cognitivism draws on the planning-writing-reviewing framework of Hayes and Flower (1980), which suggests that writing is a "non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). The 'non-linear' or 'recursive' nature of this approach is manifested in the fact that writers can move back and forth between the stages of writing. For example, "writing of a draft may be interrupted by more planning and revision may lead to reformulation, with a great deal of recycling to earlier stages" (Krashen, 1984, p. 17). The stages of revising and editing are not individual but collaborative; when a rough draft has been created, it is polished as learners revise their writing based on peer and teacher feedback (Murray, 1992). Cognitivism gives students opportunities to improve their drafts to produce stronger final papers. The cognitivist approach has had more influence on research and teaching of English as a second language than the expressivist approach (Johns, 1990).

The process-based approach, according to Hyland (2016), offers "a useful corrective to preoccupations with 'product' and student accuracy … raising teachers' awareness of what writing involves" (p. 17). However, this approach neglects the social dimension of writing, seeing text construction as asocial and decontextualised (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland 2016). Scholars suggest a process-based approach can help novice writers to generate texts more effectively but it cannot help them understand what their readers expect to find in those texts (Hyland, 2008).

3.3.3 The Genre-Based Approach

While the process-based approach views writing as "lonely, autonomous cognition" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 6), the genre-based approach sees it as a socially recognised way of using language (Hyland, 2007). Classroom applications of the genre-based approach are an outcome of communicative approaches to language teaching that stress the role of language in helping learners achieve particular purposes in context (Hyland, 2007). The genre-based approach is grounded in

Halliday's (1978) functional model of language, which highlights the relationship between language and the social context, and based on Vygotsky's (1978) and Bruner's (1983) ideas which emphasise the importance of social interaction and scaffolding or adult-supported learning (Hammond, 2001; Hyland, 2007). Halliday's model of language states that the "systematic and predictable nature of language variation enables members of a society or community to recognise the common and recurring patterns of language use" (Hammond, 2001, p. 34). These patterns are recognised as genres. The term *genre* was defined by Martin (1987, as cited in Hyon, 1996, p. 697), one of Halliday's students, as "staged, goal-oriented social processes, structural forms that cultures use in certain contexts to achieve various purposes". The concept of genre is based on the idea that members of a community have little trouble understanding each other thanks to their shared culture. "This is, in part, because writing is a practice based on expectations: the reader's chances of interpreting the writer's purpose are increased if the writer takes the trouble to anticipate what the reader might be expecting" (Hyland, 2007, p. 149). In other words, writing is social; to achieve their communicative purposes, writers present their ideas in ways that connect with readers and make most sense to them (Bracewell & Witte, 2008; Hyland, 2007).

Each genre has its own organisational pattern and linguistic choices, examples being *descriptions* and *recounts*, whose structure and specific linguistic features are distinctly different from each other. While descriptions make use of 'be', 'have' and tend to use present tense, recounts usually use more action verbs and past tense (Hyland, 2008). Genre-based writing instruction helps raise learners' awareness of how language is structured to achieve communicative purposes in different contexts (Hyland, 2007). It has gained popularity in the teaching of writing and is seen as providing students with the confidence to handle real-world writing (Ahn, 2012). This approach has led to the development of the teaching and learning cycle (TLC), which can be seen as a scaffolding approach to teaching writing (Hammond, 2001). According to Zammit and Tan (2016), the TLC was first introduced by Callaghan and Rothery (1988), and then adapted and modified by various scholars such as Callow (1996), Derewianka (1990) and Macken et al. (1989). More recent versions of the TLC consist of four stages, generally labelled as building the field or building topic knowledge; deconstruction or modelling; joint construction; and independent construction (Gibbons, 2015; Hammond, 2001; Zammit & Tan, 2016). It is noted that students learn about the field throughout all the stages of the TLC, not just in the first stage (Zammit & Tan, 2016).

The first stage, building the field or building topic knowledge, emphasises the importance of building up background knowledge; that is, understandings of the topic (Hertzberg, 2015). This stage aims to provide learners with enough knowledge of the topic that they are going to write about by activating their prior knowledge. The focus is on gathering relevant content or information through speaking, listening, reading, and researching, including the use of technology. Underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) learning principles, the activities at this stage call on students' prior knowledge to build shared understandings of the topic. Interactive activities (e.g. mind maps, word banks and group discussions) are used to stimulate learners' prior knowledge (Derewianka & Jones, 2016).

The second stage, deconstruction or modelling, emphasises the importance of providing models of the genre to be learned and of raising learners' awareness of the characteristics of a focus genre. This is crucial because, as mentioned earlier, each genre has its own characteristics and communicative function. At this stage, the teacher guides learners to analyse model texts to identify the purpose, overall structure, and language features (e.g. vocabulary and grammar structures) of a target genre. When deconstructing the text, the teacher first guides students in thinking about the purpose of the text, asking questions such as *Where have you seen texts like this before? What is the purpose of the text? Who is the intended reader or audience?* The teacher then draws attention to the overall structure and function of each stage of the text. Finally, the teacher introduces vocabulary and grammatical structures that are important in the text (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Gibbons, 2015).

At the third stage, joint construction, the teacher and students work together to create a text in a topic similar but not identical to the topic the students will write about independently. The focus is on illustrating the process of writing a text. The teacher leads a joint construction activity by soliciting student responses, making suggestions, and shaping the text the students contribute to. Finally, independent construction is the stage when students apply what they have learned to plan, draft, then discuss drafts with peers or the teacher and produce their own texts individually or in pairs/groups. At this stage, they write about a topic that is similar but not the same as the one used in stages 2 and 3 (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Gibbons, 2015). It is noted that the TLC is a flexible

procedure: teachers can return to any stage where necessary for the purpose of best meeting students' needs (Zammit & Tan, 2016).

It may be seen from this description of the TLC that learners are provided with scaffolding that is gradually reduced throughout the cycle. The teaching process moves from teacher-led instruction at the stage of building topic knowledge and deconstruction to teacher-guided instruction at the stage of joint construction, and finally teacher support is withdrawn when learners take responsibility for independent use of the language at the last stage of the cycle. Students start to write independently only after they are provided with knowledge of topic and genre and instructions to create a text.

Some scholars have criticised genre-based instruction for inhibiting students' creativity through conformity and prescriptivism (e.g. Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002). However, Hyland (2007) points out that genre-based instruction does not dictate the way we write, instead "it enables us to make choices and facilitates expressions" (p. 152). L2 learners would be disadvantaged without explicit teaching of genres because they are often unfamiliar with L2 rhetorical conventions and the expectations of L2 readers (Hedgcock, 2012).

According to Hyland (2003), the various approaches to teaching L2 writing should be seen as complementary rather than as exclusive of each other. Hyland suggests that teachers should incorporate the strengths of each approach; that is, increasing students' experiences of texts and readers' expectations, as well as providing them with an understanding of writing processes, language forms and genres (2003). Similarly, Badger and White (2000) state that "an effective methodology for teaching writing needs to incorporate the insights of product, process, and genre approaches; one way of doing this is to start with one approach and adapt it" (p. 157). This view is also supported by Ivanič (2004), who suggested that the inseparability of the textual aspects of language from the mental and social aspects implies a comprehensive writing pedagogy.

The body of literature presented above has informed my understanding about major approaches to the teaching of writing. To inform and conceptualise my research, I will now discuss literature that

examines how the process-based and genre-based approaches to teaching writing are implemented in L2 contexts.

3.3.4 Implementation of Process-based and Genre-based Approaches in L2 Contexts

Several studies have explored the impact of the process-based approach on students' L2 writing performance and their attitude towards it in comparison with the product-based approach. Ho (2006), Meeampol (2005), and Sun and Feng (2009) found that students who received process-based teaching gained better scores than those receiving product-based teaching. Ho (2006), Meeampol (2005), Tyson (1999), and Wang (2014) also found that students had a positive attitude toward the process-based approach. Similarly, Ngo and Trinh's (2011) study conducted with Vietnamese upper-secondary students revealed that the use of the process-based approach in L2 writing classes resulted in positive gains in the students' writing performance and their perceptions toward writing. To facilitate the successful implementation of the process-based approach, they recommended that teachers provide time for writing and revising in the supported learning environment, in addition to training, tutoring, and support at the peer evaluation stage.

Although research suggests that the process-based approach has proven beneficial to L2 writers, implementations of it have been problematic. Dikli et al. (2014) reported that although they favoured process writing, they had to incorporate a product approach in their curriculum because they wanted to prepare their students for timed essays. Furthermore, process writing was not feasible for large classes due to the lack of time for teachers to provide timely feedback on every draft submitted by their students. To overcome this drawback, they suggested a combination of peer and tutor feedback to support process writing. In line with Dikli et al.'s (2014) research, studies on process writing and peer evaluation suggest that the application of Western methodologies can be problematic in contexts where group harmony is highly valued or where the teacher is viewed as an authoritative figure and peers are not considered reliable enough to make appropriate comments (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1993).

When investigating the pedagogical strategies developed by two L2 writing teachers in Hong Kong to engage their secondary students in peer responses, Tsui and Ng (2010) found that both teachers creatively exploited Chinese traditions such as self–group relationship, face saving and teacher authority, which were seen as constraints, and turned these into powerful learning motivators. Their

pedagogical strategies, developed out of profound knowledge of the sociocultural context, successfully engaged their students in peer feedback and effectively exploited opportunities for learning opened up by process writing. Tsui and Ng (2010) recommended that if teachers are to successfully use process-based approaches and peer evaluations, they need to respond to situated possibilities of learning when they engage learners in peer review.

Other researchers have investigated the effectiveness of the genre-based approach on different types of writing, such as email writing, letter writing, description, and argumentation in Asian tertiary contexts (Krisnachinda, 2006; Luu, 2011; Promwinai, 2010; Swami, 2008; Trinh & Nguyen, 2014; Udomyamokkul, 2004; Yasuda, 2011; Zare-ee, 2008). Their studies showed that after receiving genre-based instruction, undergraduate students' confidence in writing improved and as learners gained control over features of target genres, their writing quality also improved Research by Firkins et al. (2007, as cited in Lee, 2016) with Hong Kong low-proficiency secondary students similarly showed that the genre approach can be an effective way to teach secondary students to write.

Based on his research into applying the genre-based approach in a Thai university, Kongpetch (2003) underscored three points worth noting. First, the participating students perceived field-building activities and oral presentations in small groups as irrelevant because they were not actually writing. This highlights the essential need for teachers to explain the purpose of each activity and relate it to a specific writing goal. Second, the explicit teaching of L1 and L2 genres by using contrastive analysis greatly benefited students. Third, for students who are not accustomed to taking an active and collaborative role in study, teachers need to spend time at the beginning of the course introducing them to new ways of learning and providing them with opportunities and time to practise and become comfortable with their new responsibilities and roles.

In the following section, I provide a definition of a key construct in my sub-research question – instructional practice.

3.4 Instructional Practice

The term *instructional practice* has been defined as both the combination of teaching and learning elements (Henke et al., 1999) and as the approaches teachers use to support students (Svanes & Klette, 2018). Henke et al. (1999) described instructional practices as comprising four elements:

(1) the teaching and learning activities, (2) the roles of the teachers and students, (3) the use of teaching materials, and (4) the assessment of student learning. By contrast, Svanes and Klette's (2018) definition is more teacher-centric, focusing on the support provided by a teacher, namely instructional, organisational and emotional support. Instructional support refers to instructional approaches such as giving explanations, modelling or asking questions. Organisational support covers task and activity management and practical help, for example, finding an appropriate book for students, and emotional support refers to social, non-academic talk. While both definitions encapsulate the core aspects of teaching, they lack emphasis on the teachers' pedagogical moves that drive teacher–student or student–student interactions to promote learning in classrooms.

In this study, I have drawn on Fairclough's (2003) notion of practice to conceptualise instructional practice. By instructional practice, I mean teachers' instructional activities to support student learning via mediating tools in the classroom. As presented in Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework (Section 2.2), Fairclough (2003) identified four key elements of practices: (1) action and interaction, (2) social relations – persons with their own histories/backgrounds, beliefs, attitudes, etc., (3) discourse, and (4) the material world. My construct of instructional practices expands this set of elements to five elements:

1. actions and interactions between teachers and students and between students and students as part of classroom activities,
2. teachers' backgrounds and beliefs,
3. roles of teachers and students that reflect their social relations,
4. classroom discourse or talk,
5. teaching materials and aids used in the classroom (the material world).

In the classroom, teachers interact with students through activities. Teachers use activities to organise learning process, which can be teacher-centred or learner-centred. These activities are mediated by tools such as talk and teaching materials or aids, for example, textbooks, boards, and computers, which are part of the material world. Social relations between teachers and students, which are determined by social rules and ideologies, shape the ways they talk and interact or their roles in the classroom. Teachers' backgrounds and beliefs can influence their instructional choices.

I have added the element of the roles of teachers and students and their reflected social relations to Fairclough's framing of the four elements of practice, to foreground pedagogical moves and pay keen attention to the ways these roles may drive teacher- student classroom interactions. Classroom interactions are highly classified in the literature on practice and emphasized in this study. Classroom interactions can generally be categorised as teacher-fronted or student-centred in terms of the central role that participants play (Garrett & Shortall, 2002). In teacher-fronted interactions the teacher has a high control over the exchanges. In student-centred interactions students working in pairs or groups are the agents of the interactions (Garrett & Shortall, 2002). Gibbons (2006) classified classroom talk into four categories: teacher monologue, initiation-response-feedback (IRF) exchanges, dialogic exchanges, and participatory exchanges (p. 114-117). Teacher monologue describes an interaction where the teacher "holds the floor without interruption" (Gibbons, 2006, p. 114) for setting up tasks or introducing new information. IRF exchanges, which is also called IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) (Mehan, 1979; Mehan & Cazden 2015), refers to exchanges where typically the teacher asks a question, a student responds, often with short answers that simply report known facts, and then the teacher offers feedback or evaluates the student's answer. In the first slot of the IRF/E pattern – initiation – the teacher does not necessarily initiate the exchange with a question, but might use statements that call for student response. Teacher feedback or evaluation can occur explicitly, for example by saying 'good' or 'right', or implicitly by repeating the answer or moving on to the next question (Bloome et al., 2005). The teacher has control over the IRE/F interaction by deciding who, when and how to take turns, and thus students play a limited role in the interaction (Thoms, 2012). Such classroom talk is useful for clarifying knowledge quickly but is insufficient in language learning because it may limit the amount of student talking (Hertzberg, 2015) and thus provide little opportunity for learners to practise using the language for themselves or to jointly contribute to the construction of knowledge (Derewianka & Jones, 2016).

Dialogic exchanges, according to Gibbons (2006), refers to interactions in which students contribute to the content by providing extended answers or initiating individual exchanges related to a focused topic while the teacher remains in control of the exchange. Although dialogic exchanges are still teacher-led talk, unlike the traditional IRF/E exchange, they give students more freedom in the interaction and offer them more opportunities to have ideas clarified and to engage

in using the language themselves (Gibbons, 2015). Participatory exchanges refer to conversations co-constructed by all participants, with learners free to converse and co-construct knowledge with the teacher and to interact with other students in pair and group work (Brook & Donato, 1994; Gibbons, 2006). From a sociocultural perspective, cooperative and collaborative learning environments such as dialogic exchanges and participatory exchanges can benefit learners more than teacher-fronted interactions such as teacher monologues and traditional IRE/F exchanges (Li, 2018).

Despite the dissenting views on what constitutes instructional practice, a common thread underlying them is the intent to advance student learning. It is therefore defensible to argue that classroom actions and interactions between the teacher and students and between students and students, classroom talk, and teaching materials are instrumental in instructional practice. Through interaction with learners, the teacher provides *scaffolding*, a term I elaborate on in the next section.

3.5 Scaffolding

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.2), Vygotsky (1978) suggested that with the support from adults or more experienced peers, learners can do what they are unable to do on their own, provided the task is within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Inspired by this idea, Wood et al. (1976) examined parent–child talk and borrowed the metaphor *scaffolding* from the field of construction to describe the nature of parental support and guidance in the language development of young children and to explain the role that adults play in joint problem-solving activities with children (Hammond, 2001). Scaffolding is an essential but temporary structure that is erected in the process of constructing or repairing a building and taken down when work is finished (Gibbons, 2015). In education, Bruner (1983) defined scaffolding as setting up a situation that helps a child to gradually get control of an activity so that when skilled enough the child will take total control of that activity. This definition implies that scaffolding involves *gradual* removal of adult or expert *help* towards the child's independent completion of tasks. However, scaffolding is not simply another word for help, rather it is a special kind of help that assists learners in moving toward new skills, new concepts or new levels of understanding (Gibbons, 2015).

From a Vygotskyan perspective, scaffolding can be understood as a mediating tool, since the teacher affects student learning via scaffolding, just as people affect the world via tools.

Researchers suggest that scaffolding works best when it is within the ZPD; that is, when instructional activities are neither too difficult, thus leading to students' frustration, nor easy, resulting in insufficient learning (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Scaffolding is designed to assist students within their ZPD by drawing on their prior knowledge. When teachers are aware of this and attempt to activate learners' prior knowledge, they support students to develop new concepts and skills (Hammond, 2001; Hertzberg, 2015).

According to Van de Pol et al. (2010), there are six major tools or means the teacher can use to scaffold student learning. First, feeding back involves the provision of comments on students' performance. Second, giving hints refers to the provision of cues, prompts or suggestions that help students move forward. Third, instructing involves telling students what to do or explaining how something is done and why. Fourth, explaining refers to the provision of more detailed information or clarification. Fifth, modelling involves demonstration for imitation. Finally, questioning is asking questions that help monitor student thinking or deepen their understanding.

Van de Pol et al. (2010) also point out the three common characteristics of scaffolding shared by scholars: contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility. A teacher acts contingently when she adapts her support according to her students' current level of development. Fading is the gradual withdrawal of teacher support; the rate of fading depends on students' levels of competence. Transfer of responsibility involves responsibility for the performance of the task transferred to the learner. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) also noted that effective scaffolding should result in 'handover'; that is, students being able to transfer understandings and skills to new tasks in new learning contexts.

In the following section, I briefly outline findings from studies on teacher cognition in relation to teachers' classroom practices to provide some background information for the second element of instructional practices discussed above, i.e. teachers' backgrounds and beliefs.

3.6 The Relationship Between Teacher Cognition and Teachers' Classroom Practices

Teacher cognition was defined by Borg (2015) as 'what language teachers think, know and believe' (p.1). In other words, teacher cognition refers to teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning, and it is developed through their personal, cultural and learning experiences. According to Borg (2015), teachers' earlier experiences play a role in shaping later

ones. Research has purported that sources of teacher cognition include learning experiences, apprenticeship of observation (i.e. the period of time an individual spends watching teachers), teaching experiences and teacher training experiences (Borg, 2011; Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Tsui, 2003).

Research has also suggested that teachers' cognition significantly influences their instructional choices in the classroom (Borg, 2015; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Shi and Cumming (1995), for example, conducted a two-year study of cognition and practices in L2 writing instructions at a Canadian university. In the study, five experienced instructors implemented an innovative strategy called 'Thinking Prompts' which aimed to provide students with a set of questions to deepen their thought processes during a writing task (e.g. Is this the right word for this expression? How do I say it in my language? Does it make sense in English? What do I want to tell my reader? Does this part fit with the other parts?). The researchers interviewed these instructors and observed their writing classes. The study revealed that the three teachers who used the innovation of thinking prompts tended to emphasise composing processes more extensively in their interview responses than the two teachers who did not. The implications of the study were that the teachers interpreted and responded to the innovation in their own ways, and these ways were related to their existing beliefs and personal experiences.

Adopting a sociocultural lens to investigate shifts in a Vietnamese teacher's cognition about L2 writing and the resources that mediated those developments over time, Ngo (2018) found that three types of resources, human, concepts and artifacts, worked simultaneously and dialectically to mediate the participant teacher's cognition. The development of the teacher's cognition was mediated by her interaction with other humans such as her university teachers and members of communities of EAP (English for academic purposes) and ESE (English for standardised examinations). It is through human mediation, the assistance from her university teachers and members of communities of EAP and ESE that her L2 writing belief, e.g. what constitutes good writing and how it is taught, was formed. Her cognition was also mediated by the concepts from *language learner* literature, which helped her develop a balanced feedback cognition. Such mediation would not have been effectively internalised without artifacts such as learning materials and the Internet, which contributed to her developing knowledge about writing strategies, and

provided her with extensive information and numerous samples of different essay categories. The research also revealed that the participant' cognition played a powerful role in shaping her practices of teaching writing. For instance, her negative experiences with peers during her undergraduate program led her to think that group work was unfair to individuals' performance and she did not think that learning could be enhanced through human mediation. As a result, she avoided using group work even though it was specified in the course guide.

Studies on teacher cognition have provided some evidence that teacher cognition has a significant impact on teachers' classroom practice (Borg, 2015). This body of research has some resonance for one element of the five elements of practice I have drawn on and detailed above, i.e. teachers' backgrounds and beliefs. While not central to this study, teacher cognition is considered as one element that may have influenced and informed teachers' pedagogical practices.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed a selected body of literature that has informed my thinking about the differences between L1 and L2 writing, the dominant models of L2 teaching and L2 writing instruction. In addition, I have provided my definition for instructional practice, a key element of my research question, discussed the notion of scaffolding for guiding classroom practice and briefly considered the literature related to teacher cognition and teachers' classroom practice. The information presented in this chapter underpins the reporting of the instructional practices of English writing investigated and the presentation of findings. In the next chapter, I detail the research methodology I adopted in this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore how English writing is taught in Vietnamese lower secondary classrooms and what shapes teaching practices there. This chapter discusses why particular methods were selected to address the following overarching research question and two sub-questions.

Overarching research question:

What are the practices that influence the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau (Vietnam) lower secondary schools?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the discourses that dominate in teaching lower secondary English writing?
2. How do Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers institute their instructional practices of English writing?

I first describe qualitative research, and then discuss case study methodology. Next, I turn to the ethical issues, participant information, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study**.**

4.1 Qualitative Research

While quantitative research is guided by a positivist worldview that a single reality exists, qualitative research is based on the constructivist worldview that reality is socially constructed, and there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When individuals seek understanding of the world around them, they develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are varied and multiple (Creswell, 2009). This leads "researchers to look for complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories

or ideas" (p. 8). As a qualitative researcher, I too view reality as socially constructed, denying the assumption of the existence of objective reality. Informed by sociocultural theory, I believe that learning in general and learning to write in English in particular are socially constructed. The teaching and learning of English writing in the classroom setting are the products of the interactions of teachers, students, schools, and the wider social community including policies, social norms, and beliefs. Therefore, this study is designed to carefully examine the components involved in the process of teaching and learning of lower secondary English writing in Vietnam at the societal, structural, and local or classroom levels.

Qualitative research aims to describe, understand and interpret a social phenomenon by studying things in their natural settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These functions of qualitative research are relevant to my study, which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of teaching practices of secondary English writing in their natural settings. My intention is to give a rich description and interpretation of instructional practices of English writing employed in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools, rather than produce figures or facts about these practices, which would be typical of quantitative research. The design of this research conforms to the characteristics of a qualitative study: (1) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; (2) data analysis is an inductive process, and (3) the product of the study is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.2. Case Studies

In this study, I adopted a case study methodology for my research. Case studies produce in-depth descriptions and interpretations because they allow many different sources of data to be explored (Hay, 2004). Case studies examine "how and why things happen, allowing the investigation of contextual realities and the differences between what was planned and what actually occurred" (Noor, 2008, p. 1602). This description fits the purpose of this study, which is to investigate how the teaching of English writing takes place in Ba Ria-Vung Tau secondary classrooms, why it happens this way, the influences on writing instruction in this setting and whether there is disparity between the Vietnamese government's plan for English education and the observed classroom teaching of English writing.

I chose a multi-case study approach to maximise the richness of data and gain a fuller picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Cohen et al., 2011). I investigated three schools (one urban, one suburban, and one rural) located in three socially and economically different areas in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province to discover the English writing practices situated in these settings and provide a comprehensive picture of English writing practices in the province. I employed purposive sampling of six teachers, two of whom worked in each of the three schools. Purposive sampling is based on "the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). In this study, each lower secondary school was seen as a case consisting of two teachers, one from grade 8 and one from grade 9, and their students (see Section 4.3). The sources of data were those commonly collected as part of the case study methodology, including documents, teacher interviews, and classroom observations (Stake, 1995).

4.3. Ethical Issues

This study adhered to the ethical regulations of the University of Western Sydney Human Research Committee. The primary purpose of ethical principles is to protect "the welfare and rights of participants in research" (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans, 1999, p. 11). Therefore, volunteerism, risks, and burden of participation were taken seriously. Participant selection was determined by three criteria. First, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. Second, one school was selected from each of the rural, suburban and urban areas. Schools with the diversity of participant teachers in terms of age, gender and experience were preferred. Third, in each school, two participating teachers, one from grade 8 and one from grade 9, agreed to be observed in their classes for a semester and be interviewed before and after classroom observations (grades 8 and 9 were chosen because writing was a required part of English curriculum for grades 8 and 9, while it was not for grades 6 and 7). If more than one teacher for each grade volunteered, I chose the teachers who represented a range of experience.

I started participant recruitment by searching for school information on the website of the Office of Education (Vietnam), which manages the lower secondary schools. Next, I sent out email invitations to principals of the six largest schools in rural, suburban and urban areas. All aspects of the study (e.g. the purpose of research, data collection methods, length of participation, participants' confidentiality) were included in the email. Upon receiving the approval from the

principals, I emailed invitations to teachers in these schools to seek their participation in the study. After I obtained consent from the six participating teachers, each took me to one of their classes (chosen by the teacher) in the first week of the school year where I explained my research to the students and obtained their consent for my observations. Since these students were under the age of 16, I also asked their parents or guardians for consent. In the second week, I made use of a customary meeting between teachers and parents to share my research with these students' parents or guardians and to distribute information sheets and consent forms (in Vietnamese) to them. I obtained consent from all participating students and their parents or guardians. The first writing class of grades 8 and 9 started in the third week and fourth week respectively (see information sheets and consent forms for teachers, students and their parents in Appendices 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5).

During data collection, there was no coercion of either the participating teachers or students. Intervention in the participants' regular activities was minimised. The participants' greatest concern – confidentiality – was addressed with care. Specifically, pseudonyms were assigned to participants and used during the process of analysing and reporting the research data. Data was kept in secured places and shared only with my supervisors. To sum up, attempts were made to minimise the risks or burdens of this study to the participants.

4.4. Participant Information

There were six participant teachers in total: two from the urban school, two from the rural school and two from the suburban school. As mentioned in Section 4.3, pseudonyms were given to the participating schools and teachers for the sake of confidentiality. All the three participating schools were named according to their location; that is, *urban school, suburban school* and *rural school*. These were state-run lower secondary schools directly managed by the Office of Education. The six teachers are named *T4-urban-grade 8, T9-rural-grade 8, T13-suburban-grade 8, T3-urban-grade 9, T10-rural-grade 9,* and *T12-suburban-grade 9*. The pseudonym of T4-urban-grade 8, for example, means that the teacher named as T4 taught grade 8 in the urban school. The most experienced of these participants was T13-suburban-grade 8, who had taught for more than 20 years. Three teachers, T3-urban-grade 9, T4-urban-grade 8, and T10-rural-grade 9, had 16 to 20 years of teaching experience. The two youngest teachers, T9-rural-grade 8 and T12-suburban-grade

9, had approximately five years' experience each. All of these teachers had graduated from a teacher training college, majoring in English teaching.

I also considered the professional development the teachers had undertaken. Four teachers, T4-urban-grade 8, T13-suburban-grade 8, T3-urban-grade 9, and T10-rural-grade 9, had participated in the training courses of General Education Reform 2000. These courses instructed the teachers to use new English textbooks for grades 6 to 9 and were organised at different times from 2002 to 2008. T4-urban-grade 8 and T10-rural-grade 9 also took part in the first training course provided by the NFL Project in 2017 (round 1). This 2017 course took place before observations were conducted. The other four teachers had attended the second course provided by the NFL Project in 2018 (round 2), which was organised after observations ended in December, 2017. The participants' information is outlined in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 4.1

Participants' Backgrounds: Demographic Information

No.	Schools	Participants	Gender	Age range	Range of teaching experience	Qualification background
1	urban	T3 grade 9	Female	31-40	16-20 years	College graduation: 16-20 years ago Major: English Teaching
2		T4 grade 8	Female	41-50	16-20 years	College graduation:16-20 years ago Major: English Teaching
3	rural	T9 grade 8	Female	20-30	1-5 years	College graduation: 6-10 years ago Major: English Teaching
4		T10 grade 9	Female	31-40	16-20 years	College graduation: 16-20 years ago Major: English Teaching
5	suburban	T12 grade 9	Female	20-30	1-5 years	College graduation: 6-10 years ago Major: English Teaching
6		T13 grade 8	Female	41-50	over 20 years	College graduation: >20 years ago Major: English Teaching

Table 4.2

Participants' Backgrounds: In-service Teacher Training

	General Education Reform 2000	**NFL Project**	
Years of implementation	**2002-2008**	**August, 2017** (round 1)	**June, 2018** (round 2)
Teachers involved	T4-urban-grade 8, T3-urban-grade 9, T13-suburban-grade 8, T10-rural-grade 9	T4-urban-grade 8 T10-rural-grade 9	T3-urban-grade 9 T13-suburban-grade 8 T12-suburban-grade 9 T9-rural-grade 8
Number of teachers	4 teachers out of a total of 6	2 teachers out of a total of 6	4 teachers out of a total of 6
Notes		*Before classroom observation started in 2017*	*After classroom observation ended in 2017*

4.4.1 Teaching Context

Each teacher taught 14 or 15 teaching periods per week (45 minutes per period) and was in charge of five or six classes. The number of students per class ranged from 30 to 40. Details on teaching hours and the number of classes and students for each participant are presented in Table 4.3. All teachers, except T9-rural-grade 8, took on an additional role, either as a form teacher (T3-urban-grade 9, T4-urban-grade 8, T12-suburban-grade 9, and T13-suburban-grade 8) or as the leader of a group of English teachers (T10-rural-grade 9); because T9-rural-grade 8 had a one-year-old child she was given fewer duties.

As form teachers, the participants reported that they were required to take care of students' psychological and academic needs through a weekly class meeting and connection with families and other subject teachers. In addition, they sent students' report cards twice a semester to their parents, and entered the final results of all subjects in each students' academic record. These teachers also helped the classes they were in charge of as a form teacher with non-teaching activities. For example, they would help their students with the activities to celebrate special events such as camping for *The Foundation of Youth Union* and music performance for *Vietnamese New Year*.

As the leader of a group of English teachers, T10-rural-grade 9 took on four types of responsibilities: (1) creating a team action plan, (2) assigning duties to each teacher, (3) managing observation activities, and (4) checking teachers' required documents such as lesson plans, student result reports, and observation notebooks. As a rule, teachers were required to observe their colleagues' classes three to four times a semester, depending on the school. (The teaching and paper work of an English teacher, a form teacher or a leader of an English group, were evaluated by inspectors from the Office of Education when they visited schools.)

Table 4.3

Participants' Backgrounds: Teaching Information

No.	Schools	Participants	Additional roles	Periods per week	Number of classes
1	urban	T3 grade 9	Form teacher	15	3 grade 9 classes 3 grade 7 classes (around **40** students per class)
2		T4 grade 8	Form teacher	15	3 grade 8 classes 2 grade 6 classes (around **40** students per class)
3	rural	T9 grade 8	x	15	3 grade 8 classes 2 grade 6 classes (around **30** students per class)
4		T10 grade 9	Leader of a group of English teachers	14	4 grade 9 classes 2 grade 7 class (around **30** students per class)
5	suburban	T12 grade 9	Form teacher	14	1 grade 9 class 4 grade 6 classes (around **40** students per class)
6		T13 grade 8	Form teacher	15	3 grade 8 classes 2 grade 7 classes (around **30** students per class)

4.5. Data Collection

The data was collected in four phases during the period June 2017 to December 2018 (see Table 4.4 for an overview of data collection). Phase 1 began in early June 2017 and ended in early July

2017. In the first phase, six teacher interviews were carried out. Phase 2 entailed 30 classroom observations, which took place from late-August to mid-December 2017, falling in the first semester of the academic year. In phase 3, six post-observation teacher interviews were conducted from mid-January to mid-February, 2018. Phase 4 involved gaining current information on the latest teacher training course organised in June 2018. At phase 4 which took place in December 2018, four of the teachers who took the 2018 training course were interviewed (two of the teachers who took the 2017 training course were interviewed in phase 3). The data were collected from a range of sources, including semi-structured interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and documents (educational policies, English curriculum, English textbooks, in-service teacher training materials). The details of each type of data collection are presented in Sections of 4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.3.

4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

As Cohen et al. (2011) indicate, the interview is a powerful tool to provide access to what is inside a person's head. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) classify interviews as *highly structured, semi-structured* and *unstructured*. In highly structured interviews, questions and the order of these questions are predetermined. They are usually used to obtain demographic data like age, gender, ethnicity, and education. By contrast, in unstructured interviews there are no predetermined sets of questions. This kind of interview is helpful when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon. In other words, the unstructured interview helps the researcher to learn enough about phenomenon to design questions for subsequent interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For semi-structured interviews, the interviewer plans a general structure by deciding in advance the ground to be covered and the main questions to be asked. The interviewee has a fair degree of freedom in what, how much, and how to say what needs to be said (Drever, 1995).

In this study, I chose individual semi-structured interviews because they would allow me the flexibility of in-depth investigation while keeping me focused on my research purpose. More specifically, this type of interview would offer my participants opportunities to say what was particularly important to them and provide information that I might not have been aware of but could add to what I had planned to explore. All the teacher interviews took place in person in Vietnamese and were audio-recorded and translated into English for transcription.

Table 4.4

Overview of Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Research Questions

Time frame	June to July, 2017	June to August, 2017	August to December, 2017	January to February, 2018	December, 2018
	Phase 1		**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**	**Phase 4**
Data collection methods	- Individual interviews (Questions on teachers' background, perception on writing instruction)	- Document collection	- Classroom observations	- Individual interviews (Questions on classes observed, e.g. instructional choices)	1. Document collection 2. Individual interviews (Questions on the latest teacher training)
Types and amount of data collected	- 6 interview recordings (20 - 40 minutes long)	- Training materials (print manuals, instructor's PowerPoint slides - Language policies - English curriculum - English textbooks	-30 fieldnotes -30 audio recordings -Teaching materials: PowerPoint slides of 3 teachers, pictures, handouts	- 6 interview recordings (approximately one hour long)	1. Training materials (print manuals, instructor's PowerPoint slides) 2. four interview recordings (20-30 minutes long)
Data Analysis	- Iterative, inductive and comparative approach	- Informed by CDA	- Iterative, inductive and comparative approach	- Iterative, inductive and comparative approach	1. Informed by CDA 2. Iterative, inductive and comparative approach
Sub-research questions	1. What are the discourses that dominate in teaching lower secondary English writing?		2. How do Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers institute their instructional practices of English writing?		
Overarching question	**What are the practices that influence the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau (Vietnam) lower secondary schools?**				

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The phase 1 interviews with the six teachers were conducted in June and July, 2017, before my classroom observations. These interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. According to Peters and Halcomb (2015), data from interviews can provide "insights into the participants' experiences, perceptions or opinions" (p. 6). These one-to-one interviews aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching English writing and of their pre- and in-service training in teaching English writing. This information would be helpful for interpreting the current context and the data subsequently collected from observations (phase 2) and post-observation interviews (phase 3). Noticeably, after the phase 3 interviews ended in February 2018, the second training course for the sake of the NFL Project took place in June 2018 as stated in Table 4.2. This led to the phase 4 interviews, which focused on the 2018 training course. The participants' responses provided important information to help to understand more about their classroom practices.

The phase 1 interview included eight questions comprised of closed- and open-ended questions (Appendix 4.6). Questions 1 and 2 requested the participants' names and ages. Questions 3 and 4 explored participants' qualifications obtained from a college/university and their experiences in teaching secondary English. Question 5 aimed to discover the specific duties of the participants, for example, the number of their teaching hours or classes. Question 6 focused on exploring teachers' perceptions of teaching English writing. Questions 7 and 8 asked for the teachers' perceptions of pre-service and in-service training in teaching English writing, and of the quality of training provided by the NFL Project.

Phase 3 interviews were conducted after classroom observations (phase 2) from mid-January to mid-February 2018. The six teachers observed were interviewed again after their classes ended in mid-December 2017. These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. The phase 3 interview questions drew on primary findings derived from the initial analysis of phase 1 interviews, along with fieldnotes, and observational data. For example, after realising the teachers relied heavily on the textbooks, I decided to investigate their views on the textbooks. The purpose of phase 3 interviews was to explore what influenced or shaped the teachers' teaching practices as observed in the field. The information from post-observation interviews added depth to the observational data and helped to clarify my understandings of teachers' pedagogical decisions in their writing classes.

Phase 3 interview questions (see Appendix 4.7) consisted of seven questions. The first six questions focused on exploring obstacles to writing instruction, the teachers' viewpoints on the textbooks and on the use of technology, first language and peer interaction in the teaching of English writing, and their recommendations to improve the quality of teaching English in general and English writing in particular. Question 7 aimed to discover two participants' perceptions of the in-service training held in August 2017. (After the phase 1 interview ended in July 2017, I did not interview these two participants immediately after this training course ended, but delayed this until the post-observation interview to investigate their application of the in-service training to their own teaching.)

In the phase 4 interviews I continued to explore four participants' perceptions of the in-service training held in June 2018, using a similar question, particularly question 7 of the phase 3 interview. These interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes. The phase 4 interview was conducted in December 2018, which made it possible to explore whether the four participants were influenced by the in-service training and how they may have applied what they had learned to their previous semester's teaching.

Before providing the participants with interview questions, I tried out these questions with a lower secondary teacher of 22 years of experience who was not involved in this study. As a result, question 8 (phase 1 interview) and question 3 (phase 3 interview) were revised by adding more explanation. The interview questions of phases 1, 3, and 4 were sent to all six participants in person and/or by email at least two weeks before the actual interview date to help them with the recall and reflection that most of the interview questions would require. This enabled me to probe deeply into the issues raised. All the interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Vietnamese), so they were able to fully articulate their opinions. The use of native language helps interviewees to convey their identity and be themselves in the interview (Robert, 1997). These interviews were audio-recorded, using a professional recorder. Notes were also taken during the interviews. At each interview, I endeavoured to establish rapport with the interviewee by making eye contact, listening actively, and probing tactfully (Cohen et al., 2011); this strategy helped elicit answers from the interviewees.

4.5.2 Classroom Observations (Phase 2)

Observation allows the collecting of data by systematically noting people, events, behaviours, artefacts, routines and so on. It enables researchers to gather valid or authentic data by looking directly what is taking place in situ rather than relying on second-hand accounts. Observation provides comparison between what people do and what they say they do (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the two types of research instruments, observations and interviews, complemented each other; they were combined to discover (in)consistencies between what the participants might say and what they might do. Classroom observations took place from late-August to mid-December 2017. Eighth graders generally had a writing class every two weeks and ninth graders had a writing class every three weeks. Table 4.5 shows the number of classroom observations for each teacher.

Table 4.5

The Number of Classroom Observations for Each Teacher

Urban school		Suburban school		Rural school		Total
T4￼Grade 8	T3￼Grade 9	T13￼Grade 8	T12￼Grade 9	T9￼Grade 8	T10￼Grade 9	
6 sessions￼(units 1- 6)	4 sessions￼(units 1- 4)	6 sessions￼(units 1- 6)	4 sessions￼(units 1- 4)	6 sessions￼(units 1- 6)	4 sessions￼(units 1- 4)	
6	**4**	**6**	**4**	**6**	**4**	**30**

Note. I was not invited to the last sessions since the teachers used these last sessions to prepare their students for the examination. In compliance with research ethics, I did not observe all the teachers' last writing sessions.

As shown in Table 4.5, observations included six consecutive writing lessons for grade 8 and four for grade 9. This allowed me to track the teachers' changes in their teaching. All these classes were audio-recorded, using a professional recorder. The teachers wore a wireless microphone (connected to the recorder), so everything they said was recorded, no matter where they moved in their classrooms or how softly they spoke. These audio-recordings were transcribed after the observation.

I observed the writing classes through a sociocultural lens in order to carefully examine social interactions between participants and examine mediating tools used in this particular social context. Fieldnotes were recorded during observations. Observation sheets (see Appendix 4.8) consisted of two main columns; one column was used for descriptive fieldnotes and the other was for reflective fieldnotes (Creswell, 2012). Descriptive fieldnotes drew on Barton and Hamilton's (2000) four basic elements of literacy events and practices, which aligns with my sociocultural theoretical lens. These elements are *settings, participants*, *activities* and *artefacts* – participants interact with each other during activities via artefacts as tools in a social setting. I recorded a description of participants (teachers and students), settings (classroom settings), artefacts (e.g. teaching sources as mediating tools) and activities (e.g. activities and tasks used before, while, and after the students wrote). I used the space for reflective fieldnotes to record my personal thoughts and perceptions that emerged during or after the observation (Creswell, 2012). Fieldnotes and observation transcripts complemented each other to provide a thick description of the participants' instructional practices. While the fieldnotes complemented the transcripts by providing visual information (e.g. teacher and student behaviours, seating, what was written on the board), the transcripts also complemented the fieldnotes in terms of what the teachers and students said. As a nonparticipant observer, I sat quietly at the back of the classroom and did not intervene in the teaching and learning. At the end of the class, I collected teaching artefacts such as teachers' PowerPoint slides and pictures.

4.5.3 Documents

Documents, together with interviews and observation, are valuable sources of data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework, texts (i.e. written and spoken language) shape and/or are shaped by instructional (discourse) practice (Fairclough, 2003, 2010). Therefore, to understand the participants' instructional practices of English writing, I examined the texts involved in their instructional practices. The documents collected and analysed were two educational policies related to English education (General Education Reform 2000 and National Foreign Language Project), the English curriculum, English textbooks of grade 8 and grade 9, and three sets of in-service teacher training materials.

4.6 Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis is to make sense of data (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, data analysis was conducted along with data collection. For Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Data that have been analysed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating" (p. 197). The analytical method chosen for this research was informed by an iterative, inductive and comparative approach (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and by critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010). This analytical process was very complex; it was not linear but involved moving back and forth between bits of data and sets of data, between categories or themes within a case and across cases, and between the stages. To facilitate the presentation of the data analysis, I will provide an overview of the analytical process before explicating the coding process in detail.

Data analysis occurred in three broad stages. I started with the analysis of the documents that had been produced to influence or guide the teachers' instructional practices. These were (1) General Education Reform 2000, (2) National Foreign Language Project, (3) the English curriculum, (4) English textbooks of grades 8 and 9, and (5) three sets of in-service teacher training materials. The analysis of these documents was informed by CDA and is detailed below. Following this, all data sets of individual teacher cases (pre-and post-interviews and observations) were analysed using qualitative coding. The analysis of interview and observation transcripts was informed by the iterative, inductive, and comparative approach. When all six teacher cases had been analysed, these cases were cross-analysed and interpreted in a third stage. The findings derived from the analysis of the documents were triangulated with findings from the cross-case analysis of observations and interviews for discussion and interpretation.

4.6.1. Stage 1: Critical Discourse Analysis of Documents

CDA is a systematic means to approach the relationship between texts and social structure (Fairclough, 2010). It is a tool that helps to reveal hidden values, beliefs or ideologies, and power relations behind texts that contribute to shaping and/or are shaped by social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Meyer, 2001). In this study, I employed Fairclough's (2010) three-dimension analytic framework as illustrated in Figure 4.1 to uncover language (education) ideologies embedded in the five sets of written texts mentioned above. Ideologies have been defined by van Dijk (2006) as shared fundamental belief systems of a social collectivity that control and organise

other socially shared beliefs. Likewise, ideologies, according to Wodak and Meyer (2009), are coherently and relatively stable sets of beliefs or values that influence future texts and practices.

Figure 4.1

Analysis of Texts at Three Levels (from Fairclough, 2010, p. 133)

Dimensions of discourse   **Dimensions of discourse analysis**
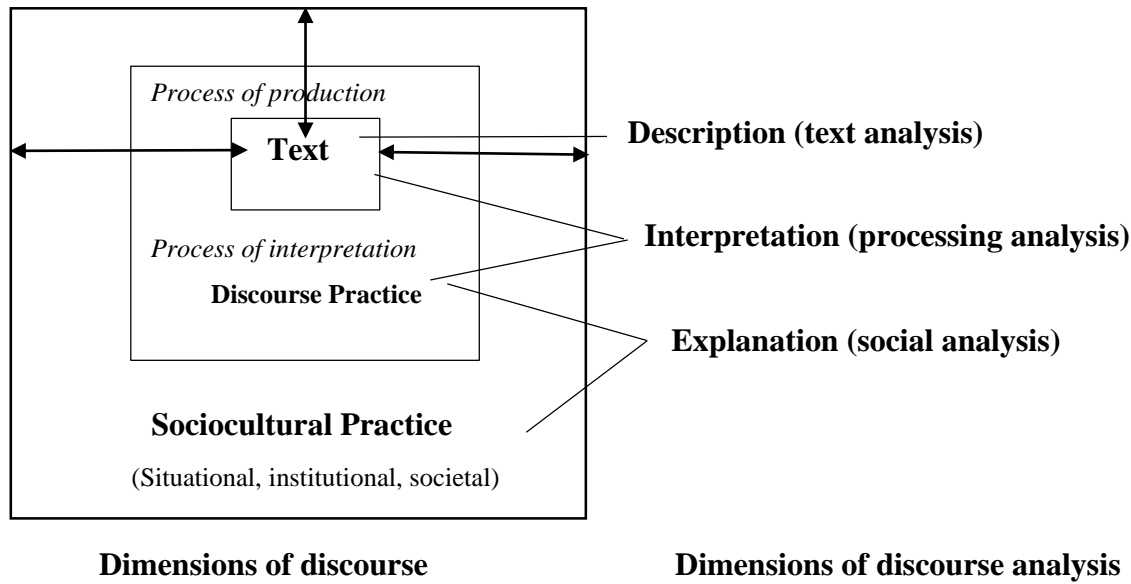
As illustrated in Figure 4.1, Fairclough's model suggests that analytical processes are tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse, namely, text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Corresponding to these three dimensions of discourse are three inter-related processes – *description* (text analysis), *interpretation* (processing analysis), and *explanation* (social analysis). Description is concerned with textual analysis, usually focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. Interpretation focuses on the relationship between texts and discursive processes; that is, how texts are produced and interpreted. Explanation is concerned with the relationship between discursive processes and social processes; that is, how social effects interact with text production and interpretation (Fairclough, 2001, 2010).

At the analytical level of description, I focused on vocabulary since words have experiential value that "is to do with contents and knowledge and beliefs" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 93). Specifically, I examined "ideologically significant meaning relations" between words (p. 92). After reading each

of the texts carefully to get a sense of them, I found that all of these texts communicated the idea of *changes* that implied 'renovation' in education in general and English teaching in particular.

When applying CDA to each text, I decided to adopt Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) discursive strategies called *nomination*; that is, nouns and verbs used to denote social actors, objects, and actions, and *predication*; that is, adjectives used to denote qualities attributed to social actors, objects, and actions. In other words, I examined nouns, verbs and adjectives (or adverbs) used to denote what needs renovating (*what* to renovate), who is targeted for renovation (*for whom* to renovate), why 'renovation' is needed (*why* to renovate) and how 'renovation' is described (*how* to renovate). This meant that at the analytical level of interpretation, I was able to examine the relationships between the texts in terms of *what, for whom, why,* and *how to renovate* as part of the process of exploring how the texts were produced. Intertextual links were interpreted to identify ideologies embedded in the texts. At the analytical level of exploration, I considered the sociocultural context with attention to ideology and power dimensions to understand how these texts are shaped.

4.6.2 Stage 2: Within-case Analysis

4.6.2.1 The Analysis of Interviews and Observations

All pre- and post-interviews and observations of each teacher were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English. After transcription, I read through each interview and observation transcript until I gained a sense of the data as a whole before breaking them into segments for coding. According to Charmaz (2006) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the coding of data consists of three phases: initial coding (open coding), focused coding (axial coding), and theme identification. I will now describe each of these three phases.

4.6.2.1.1 Initial Coding

This phase begins with reading, identifying useful segments of data, and jotting down notes and comments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used line-by-line coding for pre-and post-interview transcripts and incident-to-incident coding for observation transcripts and fieldnotes (Charmaz, 2006). Although Charmaz (2006) has provided guidelines for the coding process, she has not provided a specific definition of 'line' and 'incident'. In this study, line-by-line coding refers to the

coding of meaningful chunks as clauses, and incident-to-incident coding refers to the coding of activities, since I observed literacy events that can allude to literacy practice. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), literacy events refer to activities that repeat themselves in observable ways.

While reading the interview transcripts line by line, I noticed important words that struck me as interesting or potentially relevant to my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in terms of teachers' perceptions of pre-and in-service teacher training and of teaching writing (phase 1 and 4 interviews), their instructional choices, and other teaching-related issues (phase 3 interviews). I then assigned codes to meaningful chunks as clauses on each line. Table 4.6 shows the initial coding of an excerpt of a phase 1 interview transcript.

Table 4.6

Example 1 of Initial Coding for Interview Transcripts (T3-urban-grade 9)

Transcript	Codes
Interviewer: In your opinion, what should a teacher do to have a successful writing class? *Interviewee*: Teachers use the model texts to introduce organizational patterns, grammar and relevant vocabulary, then explain the writing task […] Teachers should also provide outlines. After that, students write similar texts based on the model texts or outlines. Outlines can be in the form of questions; students answer suggested questions, combine these answers to make a complete piece of writing. In short, students can write with the help of model texts or outlines. Teaching learners how to organize ideas and providing them with relevant vocabulary and grammar is necessary.	- Use model texts - Teach organization, grammar, vocabulary; explain the task; use outlines - Student writing similar texts - Example of outline - Questions as outline - Usefulness of model texts/outlines; necessity of teaching organization, vocabulary and grammar

I matched up observation transcripts with fieldnotes (observation sheets) made up of both descriptive and reflective notes. Reflective notes from the fieldnotes were helpful for the coding process. For example, the reflective note that *the teachers and students were free to use their first language* prompted me to examine the function of the use of first language. All the fieldnotes and transcripts of each teacher were read lesson by lesson. The fieldnotes were coded based on the meaning of a particular incident or activity taking place, which helped to identify patterns of instructional moves in subsequent analysis (focused coding).

I analysed all data through the lens of sociocultural theory. Aligning with Vygotsky's framing I conceptualize the teaching of writing as a mediated activity. In each incident I looked for technical and psychological (Vygotsky, 1978) or semiotic meditating tools used in this activity and paid special attention to how teachers used the observed mediating tools such as talk, scaffolding, textbooks, and PowerPoint slides to scaffold student writing. I drew on the teaching and learning cycle (which is presented in Section 3.3.3) as a frame through which to view teachers' writing instruction. The teaching and learning cycle is a scaffolding approach to teaching writing (Hammond, 2001) introduced by Australian scholars such as Callaghan & Rothery (1988), Macken et al. (1989) (as cited in Zammit & Tan, 2016). I used this cycle to scrutinise teaching strategies and how the teachers scaffolded student writing at each stage of the lesson. For talk, I turned to transcripts, and further analysed each incident to examine the roles of the teacher and students by identifying classroom talk and the interactional patterns the teachers used to deliver their instruction, for example teacher monologue, IRE/F exchange (Mehan, 1979) or dialogic talk (Gibbons, 2006), and to identify which language(s) were used and for what purposes during the interaction by examining discourse moves. Table 4.7 shows the initial coding of an observation transcript excerpt.

Table 4.7

Example 2 of Initial Coding for Observation Transcripts (Unit 1, T9-rural-grade 8)

Transcript	Codes
T: Chủ đề bài 1 là gì nào? What's unit 1? (What is the theme of unit 1? What's unit 1?) SS [chorally]: My friends T: Yes, hôm nay chúng ta học **mô tả bạn.** Now open your books, page 15. (Yes, today we learn how to **describe our friends**. Now open your books, page 15). […] T: Bây giờ cô sẽ cung cấp một số từ vựng về chủ đề này. (I am providing you with some vocabulary relevant to the topic) [T writes *appearance* on the board] T: Look at the board. What does 'appearance' mean, H? S [H]: Dạ thưa cô, hình dáng (appearance) T: Tell me adjectives for appearance, S1 S1: Tall, slim, thin, fat, short T: Ok [T wrote these words on the board while S1 was saying them. After five words, she said 'OK' to interrupt S1 and signaled S1 to sit down] (…)	- Introduce new lesson connected with broad theme of the unit - Vietnamese - English to introduce lesson - Teacher-class exchange - Provide vocabulary - Elicit from SS some vocabulary they learned - English for request and question - Vietnamese to explain the meaning of words - Teacher-individual students; IR(F-implicitly) - Teacher's interruption

Transcript	Codes
T: Có 2 câu hỏi trong sách mà các em có thể nhầm lẫn.What does he/she look like? and What is he/she like? [T writes these questions on the board] What does he/she look like? What does this question mean? Câu hỏi này nghĩa gì, N? (There are two questions in the textbook that may confuse you. What does he/she look like? and What is he/she like? [T writes these questions on the board] What does he/she look like? What does this question mean, N?) S [N]: dạ, anh ấy/chị ấy trông như thế nào? (What does he/she look like?) T: Đúng rồi, anh ấy/chị ấy trông như thế nào? Mình dùng câu này để hỏi về diện mạo (Right, what does he/she look like? We use this question to ask about appearance)	- Distinguish 2 questions with different grammar structures - Questions from textbook - Translate English question - Explain the meaning of grammar structures in Vietnamese - Teacher-individual students; IRF

4.6.2.1.2 Focused Coding

In the second phase of coding, the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes were classified under broader conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006). This phase of coding went beyond descriptive initial coding; it comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Charmaz (2006), "Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely" (p. 57). After working through the entire transcripts for initial coding, I went back over these codes, compared them and categorised similar codes. For observational data, apart from categories related to mediating tools, I identified common instructional moves that alluded to key instructional stages across the lessons. Codes that were irrelevant or redundant were removed. During this process, I revisited initial codes many times, categorising and recategorising them to ensure that all initial codes fitted well in their categories. Tables 4.8 is an example of focused coding for observation.

Table 4.8

An Example of Focused Coding (Observation, T10-rural-grade 9)

Initial codes	Focused code
- Use model text from textbook - Explain new words from model text - Explain organizational pattern of model text - Introduce formulaic chunks from model text - No introduction of model text when the textbook does not provide it.	Text deconstruction

4.6.2.1.3 Theme Identification

This third phase of coding aimed to explore the relationship between categories emerging from focused coding and synthesise them into more abstract categories (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which would help to address the research questions. An example of theme identification for observation is presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

An Example of Theme Identification

T9-rural-grade 8 (observation, units 1-6)		
Open codes	**Focused codes**	**Theme identification**
- Elicit from SS some vocabulary they learned - Elicit from SS grammar items they learned	Building topic knowledge focusing on vocabulary and grammar	Teaching writing as textual product
- Introduce the model text - Explain words from model text in Vietnamese - Introduce organizational pattern of the model text - No explanation on audience, purpose of the text.	Deconstruction focusing on textual characteristics	
- Students write individually - Do writing tasks from textbook - Controlled/guided tasks - No writing tasks outside textbook	Student writing focusing on controlled/guided tasks	
- Students writing on the board, teacher giving feedback -Teacher correction to vocabulary and grammar. - No student participation in giving feedback	Teacher feedback on grammar and vocabulary	

4.6.3 Stage 3: Cross-case Analysis

Cross-case analysis began when the analysis of each case was completed. Themes derived from interviews and observations were compared and contrasted, first across grade levels and then across schools. I looked for similarities and differences across cases. Categories that were related were

grouped into more abstract categories in order to develop common themes and patterns that cut across the data. Cross-case analysis enabled me to identify generalisations that fitted all the cases, while particular details of individual cases were also revealed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An example of theme comparison across grade 9 level is illustrated in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

An Example of Theme Comparison Across Grade 9 Level (Observation and Interview Data)

T10-rural-grade 9	T12-suburban-grade 9	T3-urban-grade 9
Textbook reliance	Textbook reliance	Textbook reliance with some adaptation
Related to textbook - Use model text from textbook - Explain new words from model text - Explain organizational pattern of model text - Introduce formulaic chunks from model text - No introduction of model text when textbook does not provide it. - Do writing tasks from textbook - Controlled/guided tasks - No writing tasks outside textbook. - Use all activities from textbook - No changes to the textbook content	*Related to textbook* - Use model text from textbook - Explain new words from model text - Explain organizational pattern of model text - Introduce formulaic chunks from model text - Introduce grammatical structures from model text - No introduction of model text when textbook does not provide it. - Do writing tasks from textbook - Controlled/guided tasks - No writing tasks outside textbook. - Use all activities from textbook - No changes to the textbook content	*Related to textbook* - Use model text from textbook - Explain new words from model text - Explain organizational pattern of model text -Introduce formulaic chunks from model text - Do writing tasks from textbook - Controlled/guided tasks - No writing tasks outside textbook. - Use all activities from textbook - No changes to the textbook content
Unrelated to textbook - Elicit vocabulary and/or grammar from SS (beginning of the class)	*Unrelated to textbook* - Elicit vocabulary and/or grammar from SS (beginning of the class)	*Unrelated to textbook* - Elicit vocabulary and/or grammar from SS (beginning of the class) - Introduce formulaic chunks outside the model text of textbook.

T10-rural-grade 9	T12-suburban-grade 9	T3-urban-grade 9
Time constraints	Time constraints	Time constraints
Limited class time - No much time for student writing in class - Little time giving feedback in class *Limited time outside class* - Busy with paper work - Second job - Unable to correct student papers at home because of no time	*Limited class time* - 45 minutes for instruction, student writing and feedback. *Limited time outside class* - Have to help students with non-teaching activities - Second job - Unable to correct student papers at home because of no time	*Limited class time* - Not enough time for group discussion - Hard to bring games, songs into class *Limited time outside class* - Busy with paper work - Second job - Unable to correct student papers at home because of no time

4.7. Strategies to Ensure Rigour in Qualitative Research

There have been debates about validity and reliability in qualitative research but the increasingly popular consensus is that the validity and reliability of quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 1995; Noble & Smith, 2015) because "qualitative methods are inherently different from quantitative methods in terms of philosophical positions and purpose" (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34). Accordingly, different researchers and scholars have suggested alternative terms to replace validity and reliability in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Creswell and Poth (2018) list some terms introduced by scholars: *internal validity, external validity, reliability* and *objectivity* by LeCompte and Goetz (1982); *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability* by Lincoln and Guba (1985); *credibility, authenticity, criticality* and *integrity* by Whittemore et al. (2001). Despite the diversity of terms, there is consensus on the strategies used to ensure high standards in qualitative research, namely, (1) *submersion in the research situation*, (2) *thick description*, (3) *member checking* (4) *peer review*, and (5) *triangulation* (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). For this study I adopted these five strategies, which weave together to enable the rigour of this study. I will now describe these strategies.

Submersion in the research situation is defined by Merriam (1995) as the collection of data over a long enough period of time to ensure a thorough understanding of a phenomenon. This prolonged engagement leads to the researcher repeatedly seeing or hearing the same things (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, "prolonged engagement serves to temper distortion by the researcher's presence" (Erlandson et al. 1993, p. 136). I submersed myself in the research situation with participants for approximately nine months, having informal visits and talks, official interviews, and observations of nearly four months. This enabled me to build trust and develop strong rapport with the participants, which helped me to probe deeply during the interviews or informal talks. Persistent observation of 30 sessions over a semester helped me to gain in-depth insights into the instructional practices of English writing employed by Ba Ria-Vung Tau teachers. Having become familiar with my presence as a researcher, not as an inspector, the teachers and students trusted me and acted as comfortably in their classrooms as if I had not been there. This enabled me to be as close to 'reality' as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These forms of submersion contributed credibility to the research.

Thick description refers to detailed description of the settings, the participants and the findings, with sufficient evidence presented in the form of quotes from interviews, fieldnotes, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This enables readers to determine how close their situations are to the research situation and thus decide whether findings can be transferable (Merriam, 1995). My submersion in the research situation helped me to collect data about research contexts, relevant documents, the teacher participants' backgrounds, teaching practices, feelings, perceptions and their opinions on teaching English writing, all of which enabled a rich description of every aspect of the research.

Member checking, as Creswell and Miller (2000) indicated, is a quality control process in qualitative research. This process involves taking the data collected and the interpretations of these data back to participants and to ask whether the interpretations are plausible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, two days after transcribing each of the pre- and post-observation interviews, I emailed participants the transcripts with my summaries/tentative interpretations in Vietnamese, asking whether I had accurately recreated their feelings, perceptions and views. I also discussed these summaries/tentative interpretations with the teachers in person during their break time at school, asking for more clarification (if any). Regarding classroom observations, after transcribing

all audio-recordings, I outlined the dominant teaching steps and synthesised the techniques or strategies utilised by each teacher, emailed these in Vietnamese to the respective teachers and then discussed the emails with them on the day the post-observation interviews were conducted. This served two purposes: (1) member checking; that is, checking whether 'authentic' representation of the participants' teaching practices had been made, and (2) supporting the participants to respond to the post-observation interview questions, which required recall and reflection. The participants reviewed my summaries and initial interpretations of interviews and observations, and elaborated on some issues I was a little vague about. For instance, one of the participants explained more about her opinion on the use of groupwork so that I could further understand what she meant to articulate. In short, member checks helped to establish trustworthiness of this study.

Peer review is the review of data and research process by someone familiar with the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, peer reviewing included working closely with my university supervisors during the research processes. I was required to review my own subjectivity in observation and analysis to be aware of my biases and my place as both an insider and outsider in this context. My supervisors frequently challenged my assumptions and asked hard questions about my interpretations, which helped me identify my biases. In this way, peer review helped to add credibility to this study.

Triangulation is a powerful strategy to ensure the credibility of a research study. It means the comparing and cross-checking of data collected from multiple sources to confirm the emergent findings (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this research, I used two types of triangulation: (1) multiple sources of data; that is, the comparing and cross-checking of data collected through observations in different places, and (2) multiple methods of data collection namely, interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The multiple sources of data allowed me to cross-check themes derived from observations across rural, suburban, and urban schools. Using multiple methods of data collection, I was able to triangulate data collected from sources such as documents, pre- and post-observation interviews, and classroom observations to gain a reliable, in-depth understanding of writing practices and the influences on the practices employed in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools. Participants' perspectives gained from the interviews were confirmed against each other and against the findings from the documents and the observations. Instructional practices were illuminated by data from documents representing

macro-level power relations, by pre-observation interviews that had explored teachers' perceptions of teaching English writing and of their training in writing instruction, and by post-observation interviews about what had shaped these instructional practices.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the methodology employed in this study. Specifically, I have discussed why the qualitative paradigm and case studies were adopted; how participants were selected; how data were collected and analysed, and how the rigour of this study was ensured. Findings derived from the data analysis will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Discourses of Teaching Lower Secondary English Writing

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents the findings of this study that respond to the first sub-research question *What are the discourses that dominate in teaching lower secondary English writing?* In this study, the notion of discourse draws on Fairclough's (2010) definition and is understood as (1) a spoken or written text; (2) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), and (3) sociocultural practice. As discussed in Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework (Section 2.2), texts contribute to shaping discourse practice. In the context of this study, I examined how government documents (written texts) contributed to shaping the participants' instructional (discourse) practices. Therefore, in this chapter, I analysed the five sets of texts that were important for mediating the participants' instructional practices. These texts are:

1. *General Education Reform 2000* (or Reform 2000): Its full name is 'The Renovation of the Program of General Education'. It was launched in 2000 by National Assembly of Vietnam to give the central and provincial governments directions on renovating general education.

2. *Seven-year English curriculum* (or curriculum): The curriculum was the outcome of General Education Reform 2000. It was designed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to provide textbook writers, syllabus writers and teachers with information on English curriculum for grades 6 to 12. This curriculum was put into practice, beginning with grade 6 in 2002-2003 (and grade 10 in 2004-2005). Its final version, the result of several revisions (as articulated in the curriculum document), was officially released in 2006. (This curriculum guided the design of the English textbooks being used at the time of this study.)

3. *National Foreign Language Project* (or NFL Project) with its associated texts as references, namely, the Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnamese Learners, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The full name of the NFL Project is 'Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, period of 2008-2020'. It was launched in 2008 by the Prime Minister to provide the central and provincial governments and academic institutions guidance on renovating foreign language education. In 2017, this NFL

project was revised and extended until 2025. In this study, I analysed two versions of the NFL Project and examined their associated texts.

4. *In-service teacher training materials*: Three sets of training course materials were analysed (see Table 4.2 for detailed information). The 2008 training course was held by MOET to instruct teachers to use the English textbooks produced for the seven-year English curriculum. The 2017 and 2018 training courses were organised to meet the requirements of the NFL Project and were run by two different educational organisations chosen by Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training.

5. *English textbooks of grades 8 and 9:* These English textbooks were designed by MOET and *prescribed* at the lower secondary level nationwide. The grade 8 textbook was put into use in 2004 and the grade 9 textbook in 2005.

These five sets of texts were written in Vietnamese. I chose them because they were designed to have direct or indirect influence on the teaching of lower secondary English in general and English writing in particular. They are related to each other to the extent that one text resulted in the birth of other texts. For example, General Education Reform 2000 led to the launch of the seven-year English curriculum and the National Foreign Language Project. The seven-year English curriculum in turn resulted in the 2002–2008 in-service teacher training and English textbooks of grades 8 and 9. Similarly, the National Foreign Language Project led to the 2017 and 2018 in-service teacher training. Figure 5.1 shows the relationship between the texts.

Figure 5.1

The Relationship Between the Five Texts
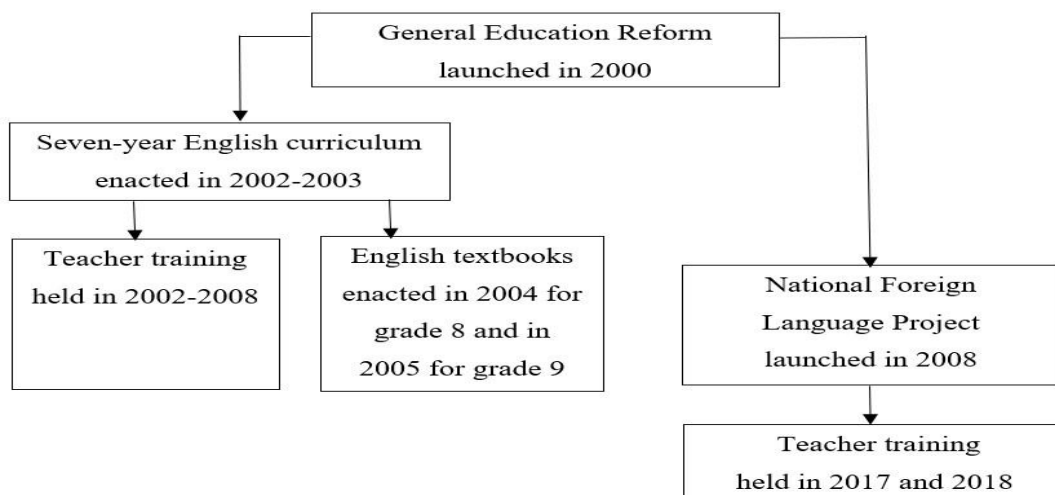
As explicated in Chapter 4, Methodology (Section 4.6), I adopted critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse these texts since CDA is a tool that can help to unveil hidden beliefs or ideologies and power relations behind texts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Meyer, 2001) that contribute to shaping and/or are shaped by instructional (discourse) practice (Fairclough, 2010). Using Fairclough's (2010) analytical framework, I conducted three processes of analysis, namely description, interpretation and explanation. At the descriptive analysis level; that is, textual analysis, I adopted Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) discursive strategies called nomination and predication to examine "ideologically significant meaning relations" between words (Fairclough, 2001, p. 92). I started with *General Education Reform 2000*, simply because this policy was launched before the other documents. My initial reading of this policy document revealed that it focuses on *renovation*, as its full name – the Renovation of the Program of General Education – indicates.

An examination of the texts following *General Education Reform 2000* (the curriculum, textbooks, NFL Project, and teacher training materials) revealed that all of these texts explicitly or implicitly communicate *changes*, which allude to 'renovation' in general education and in English teaching. Therefore, when conducting a close analysis of the selected texts, I paid attention to nouns, verbs and adjectives or adverbs attributed to, related to, or associated with the metaphor of 'renovation', specifically what needs renovating (what to renovate), who is targeted for renovation (for whom to renovate), why 'renovation' is needed (why to renovate) and how 'renovation' is described or realised (how to renovate).

In this study, the focus was on examining the meaning relations between words associated with the metaphor 'renovation'. While I read the whole of each text for content, I restricted myself to selected passages that had the most salience as discourse on teaching English and English writing in terms of *what, whom, why* or *how to renovate*. For the textbooks and teacher training materials, my focus was on analysing how 'renovation' is described or realised in these texts.

After the descriptive analysis, I moved to interpretive analysis where I put all these analyses together to search for intertextual links by identifying ideologies embedded in texts. Accordingly, the relationships (consistence or tension) between chosen texts were also revealed. Finally, at the

exploratory analysis level, I examined the social context with attention to ideology and power dimensions to understand how these texts are shaped.

The next section provides a brief summary of each of the texts just mentioned. Analyses of these texts are presented in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

5.1 Summaries of the Chosen Texts

General Education Reform 2000 is a three-page document with three sections. Section 1 presents the aim of the renovation of general education. Section 2 focuses on the schedule of implementing the renovated general education curriculum, and section 3 provides information on assigning tasks to specific organisations, e.g. the Ministry of Education and Training, and provincial governments (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2000). The analysis of this text focused on section 1.

Seven-year English curriculum is a 78-page document with six major sections. Sections 1 and 2 present the role of English and the aim of teaching English at secondary level, respectively. Section 3 describes the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum. Section 4 first provides general information on curriculum content for grades 6 to 12, including six themes (i.e. personal information/you and me, education, health, community, recreation, and the world around us), language skills (e.g. listening for general information, exchanging opinions, reading for detailed information, writing a description, etc.), linguistic knowledge (e.g. tenses, prepositions, simple sentences, etc.), and the time frames at each grade level. Then section 4 provides a detailed description of curriculum content. Section 5 provides guidelines for compiling textbooks, teaching methods and assessment. Lastly, section 6 provides a list of specific competences (in four skills) and language items for each lesson unit for grades 6 to 12 (MOET, 2006). The analysis of this text focused on all sections related to writing for grades 8 and 9.

National Foreign Language Project: The NFL Project aims to renovate foreign language (English) education at all educational levels, from primary to tertiary level. The document issued in 2008 has 11 pages and consists of four main sections. Sections 1 and 2 include a description of general and specific goals, two tasks of the NFL Project, namely, building Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnamese Learners, and the design of a 10-year English program mandated from

grade 3 instead of grade 6. Sections 3 and 4 present measures taken to facilitate the goals of the projects, for example, providing in-service training, the timeline for implementation, funding, and duties assigned to relevant organisations (Government of Vietnam, 2008). The analysis of this text focused on sections 1, 2 and 3.

Since several targets of the 2015–2016 period were not achieved, in 2017 the NFL Project was approved to be extended until 2025. The second version of the project has 10 pages and four sections. Sections 1 presents directions for foreign language education (e.g. creating foreign language learning environment). Section 2 presents the goals of the project. While the general goal stays the same, specific goals have changed. For example, the ten-year English curriculum has been scheduled to be implemented from grade 3 to grade 6 nationwide by 2025 instead of 2020. The last two sections present information on measures, funding and organisational duties (Government of Vietnam, 2017). The analysis of this text focused on sections 1 and 2.

Teacher training materials consists of three sets of texts. The 2008 training material is a 40-page booklet consisting of seven main sections. Section 1 presents views on innovative English teaching methodology. Section 2 is concerned with techniques to introduce new lessons (called *warm-up*) and techniques to explain new vocabulary and grammatical items. Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide instructions on how to teach speaking, listening, writing, and reading respectively. Section 7 provides six appendices: Appendix 1 presents general information on English teaching methodologies (Grammar-Translation method and Communicative Language Teaching). Appendices 2 to 5 provide four sample lesson plans. Appendix 6 provides a list of discussion questions related to teaching demonstration video clips (MOET, 2008). The analysis of this text focused on sections 1, 5 and part of section 7.

The 2017 and 2018 training materials include instructors' PowerPoint slides and handouts. These materials provide knowledge about English teaching methodology and the integration of information technology (IT) into teaching. In terms of English teaching methodology, these materials provide instructions on how to teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The analysis of this text focused on the materials on writing instruction and integration of IT into teaching.

English textbooks of grades 8 and 9: The grade 9 textbook consists of 10 units and the grade 8 textbook 15 units. Each lesson unit consists of seven sections in the following order: *Getting started*; *Listen and Read*; *Speak*; *Listen*; *Read*; *Write*; and *Language focus*. The section *Write* is designed according to three patterns. The first pattern is that *Write* consists of three components: a model text, controlled and/or guided practice, and independent practice. Drawing on Doff's (1988) and Lopez's (2012) classifications, controlled practice refers to the practice where learners focus on the accuracy of language forms, for example, completing incomplete sentences. Guided practice refers to the practice where learners are provided with support, for example, in the form of outlines and/or words/ideas cues. Independent practice is concerned with the practice where learners apply what they have learned to the new situation, without types of support such as words/ideas cues, or outlines. The second pattern is that *Write* starts with a model text, followed by controlled and/or guided practice. Model texts in both textbooks are provided in isolation; that is, without accompanying questions. The third pattern is that *Write* provides only controlled and/or guided practice (Nguyen, et al., 2008a, Nguyen, et al., 2008b). The analysis of the textbooks focused on the textbook topics and *Write* and *Language focus* sections.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I present the key themes that emerged across the texts I analysed.

5.2. English Competence: Tool for Global Participation and National Development

5.2.1 Descriptive Analysis

As the first document to initiate educational reforms after the economic renovation policy of 1986, the document *General Education Reform 2000* can be seen as a 'catalyst' for renovations in general education and in English education in particular. In looking for vocabulary associated with *what to renovate, for whom to renovate* and *why to renovate*, I focused my attention on the first paragraph of this policy document:

(Excerpt 1- General Education Reform 2000)

The goal of **renovating general education curriculum** is to **build new curriculum content**, **teaching methods** and **textbooks** for general education which aims to **improve the quality of all-round education for young generation**, to meet with the requirement for **human resource**

development, in service of the **industrialisation and modernisation** of the country (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2000, p. 1, bold emphasis added).

Excerpt 1 suggests what needs renovating is the *general education curriculum*; that is, the curriculum for grades 1 to 12. The phrase *build new curriculum content, teaching methods and textbooks* provides specific information on what needs renovating. Using the verb *build* and the adjective *new,* this phrase implies *curriculum renovation* includes *rebuilding curriculum content*, adopting *new teaching methods* and creating *new textbooks* for all subjects, including English. In relation to an examination of why this needs renovating, the excerpt suggests that educational renovation was to serve national development in terms of *industrialization and modernization.* In regard to whom this renovation was for, it was to *develop human resources*, particularly *younger generations,* by means of education.

The second paragraph of this policy document provides more information about *why to renovate* and *how to renovate.* It states:

> (Excerpt 2- General Education Reform 2000)
>
> The **renovation** of general education curriculum requires mastering its objective and requirements in terms of contents and methods of teaching at all levels of education and grades prescribed in the Education Law; **overcoming the limitations** of the **existing curriculum and textbooks**, **increasing practicality, practical skills** (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2000, p. 1, bold emphasis added)

The phase *overcoming the limitations of the existing curriculum and textbooks* from excerpt 2 implies that the existing curriculum and textbooks have shortcomings. Following this phrase is the phrase *increasing practicality, practical skills.* This implies that the existing curriculum and textbooks need to be renovated in a way that increases *practicality* and *practical skills.* The terms *practicality* and *practical skills* were not defined in the policy document; thus, this excerpt may call on an audience's own conceptions of *practicality* and *practical skills.* Commonly, *practicality* and *practical (skills)* refer to things that can be put into practice (Macquarie Dictionary Publishers, n.d.). (These terms *practicality* and *practical skills* will be revisited and discussed in the analyses of the subsequent texts.)

It is worth noting that in the document *General Education Reform 2000* special attention was paid to foreign language education in the process of educational renovation. This policy document states:

> (Excerpt 3 - General Education Reform 2000)
>
> **Build** a **project of teaching and learning foreign languages** for general education schools" (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2000, p. 1, bold emphasis added).

Excerpt 3 reveals more about *what to renovate*. The phrase *building a project* implies a plan to make changes in the teaching and learning of foreign languages at the general education level. Apart from the curriculum renovation, which includes content, teaching methods and textbooks as mentioned in excerpt 1, *General Education Reform 2000* attached importance to renovation in teaching and learning foreign languages: it resulted in a renovated English curriculum (commonly called the *seven-year English curriculum*) and later the *National Foreign Language Project* (NFL Project). My analysis of these two documents is presented as follows.

The *curriculum* document mandated that English as *a foreign language* be compulsory in the general education system. It states:

> (Excerpt 4 - Curriculum)
>
> English as a foreign language is a basic subject compulsory in general education; it is **indispensable** for general education. (MOET, 2006, p. 6. bold emphasis added)

As seen in excerpt 4, the use of the adjective *indispensable* implies that English is a very important foreign language. Therefore, the *curriculum* document prescribed English as a required subject from grade 6 (instead of grade 10) to grade 12 (MOET, 2006). This lowering of the official age of English learning was driven by the benefits of English that are articulated in excerpt 5 of the *curriculum* document:

> (Excerpt 5 - curriculum)
>
> English provides students a new communicative tool to **access scientific knowledge** and **advanced technology**, to **find out about varied cultures** in the world and **easily integrate into international community** (MOET, 2006, p. 6. bold emphasis added).

A careful look at the words in bold related to *why to renovate* from excerpt 5 shows that the phrase *access scientific knowledge and advanced technology* is in line with the phrase *industrialization and modernization* from excerpt 1. Apparently, industrialising and modernising a country requires understandings of science and advanced technology. This reveals a connection between the *curriculum* and *General Education Reform 2000* documents. Excerpts 1 and 5 imply that the Vietnamese government considered English as a mediating tool for industrialisation and modernisation of the country. In addition, the phases from excerpt 5 *find out about varied cultures* and *easily integrate into international community* show that English was also seen as an instrument for global integration and signal Vietnam's intention to look beyond Vietnam and associate with other cultures. Excerpt 5 reveals the promotion of English in the national education system and points to the hegemony of English for providing access to the international community, the global economy, and scientific and technical world knowledge (Gil, 2016; Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016)

It is worth noting here that the English curriculum was produced to meet the requirement of *General Education Reform 2000*; that is, the renovating of curriculum content. An analysis of the goal articulated in the *curriculum* document provides information on *how* the curriculum was *renovated*. The *curriculum* document states:

> (Excerpt 6 - Curriculum)
>
> The English curriculum for general education is built on Communicative Language Teaching approach.... **Communicative competence** is the target of the process of teaching and learning; linguistic knowledge serves as the means to the end. (MOET, 2006, p. 7, bold emphasis added)

As seen in excerpt 6, *communicative competence* is *how to renovate*. My analysis of excerpt 6 reveals that with the adoption of a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, *communicative competence* was chosen as the goal of English teaching and learning, and linguistic knowledge is seen as a vehicle to achieve communicative competence. The terms *CLT* and c*ommunicative competence* are not defined in the curriculum document and their interpretations seem to be left open to the intended audience of textbook writers and English teachers. However, through intertextual analysis, I found that the definitions of these terms were provided in section 7 of the 2008 training material intended for English teachers. The *CLT* approach was identified in

this training material as the most popular foreign language teaching method in the world; it was developed by a British linguist and focuses on communicative competence (MOET, 2008). CLT is often credited as being developed by the British Linguist D. A. Wilkins (1972). Reference to *communicative competence* can be found in excerpt 7, which provides an elaboration of *how to renovate*:

> (Excerpt 7- 2008 training material)
>
> *The target of foreign language teaching and learning does not orient students to the study of a linguistic system*, but rather aims to enable them to use this linguistic system as a means of communication; that is, training students in **communicative competence**. **Communicative competence is manifested in the ability to use the language *creatively* in communicative situations**. *The final goal of foreign language learning is not to gain an insight into a linguistic system, i.e. phonetic, lexical and grammatical rules* but rather to use this linguistic system **to achieve communicative purposes** (MOET, 2008, p. 3, italics and bold emphasis added).

It can be inferred from excerpt 7 that *communicative competence* mentioned in excerpt 6 refers to the ability to use the language creatively in communicative situations to achieve communicative purposes. This suggests that *communicative competence* involves knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language use. On closer examination, the sentence *linguistic knowledge serves as the means to the end* (excerpt 6) and the phrase *use this linguistic system to achieve communicative purposes* (excerpt 7) imply that linguistic knowledge is part of communicative competence. The analysis of excerpts 6 and 7 suggests that *communicative competence* includes linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language use.

The adverb *creatively* used in excerpt 7 implies 'far from imitation'. With this definition, the goal of communicative competence implies the disregard of language learning at an imitation level and the consideration of communicative purposes in the process of language teaching. A close look at two clauses in italics in excerpt 7 shows that they repeat the same idea for emphasis, which is that the aim of foreign language teaching and learning is not to master a linguistic system, but rather to gain *communicative competence*, which requires more than linguistic knowledge. The term *communicative competence* is further explained on page 22 of the 2008 training material:

(Excerpt 8 - 2008 training material)

The final goal of foreign language learners is not only mastering linguistic knowledge (phonetics, vocabulary and grammar) but also gaining *communicative competence*; that is, **developing all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)** and being able to use the language for **communication** (MOET, 2008, p. 22, bold emphasis added)

It appears that excerpt 8 emphasises that communicative competence is manifested in the four language skills – the abilities to listen, speak, read, and write. An emphasis on these four language skills for communication is also seen in the general goal articulated in the *curriculum* document:

(Excerpt 9 - Curriculum)

The teaching of English at secondary level aims to enable students to use English as a **means of communication** at a basic level of proficiency in **listening, speaking, reading, and writing** (MOET, 2006, p. 6, bold emphasis added).

Excerpts 6 to 9 from the *English curriculum* and *2008 training material* reveal that the focus of English teaching is on communicative competence – the ability to use the language creatively in communicative situations to achieve communicative purposes. This reflects a *utilitarian* approach to language learning. It can be argued through intertextual analysis that in terms of English teaching, the terms 'practicality' and 'practical skills' embedded in *General Education Reform 2000* document (as seen in excerpt 2) can be understood as communicative competence and the ability to listen, speak, read and write for communication.

When it comes to analysing the *NFL Project* document, a careful examination of the first paragraph of the document provides information on *what to renovate, whom to renovate for* and *why to renovate*:

(Excerpt 10 - NFL Project)

to **thoroughly renovate foreign language teaching and learning** within the national education system; to implement a new program on foreign language teaching and learning at every level of schooling and training, which aims **to achieve a vivid progress** on professional skills and **language competence for human resources**, especially at some prioritized sectors by the year 2015. By the year 2020, most **Vietnamese youths** who

graduate from vocational schools, colleges and universities will be proficient enough to **use foreign languages independently** in order to be able to **communicate, study and work confidently** in an **integrated, multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment**. **Foreign languages** will become **Vietnamese people's strength, in service of the industrialisation and modernisation of the country**. (Government of Vietnam, 2008, p. 1, bold emphasis added)

A close examination of bold words associated with *what to renovate, whom to renovate for* and *why to renovate* from excerpt 10 shows that the NFL Project centred on *making foreign languages Vietnamese people's strength*, which facilitates the *industrialisation and modernisation of the country*. Specifically, the project aimed to *renovate foreign language teaching and learning* to achieve a *vivid progress on language competence for human resources, particularly for youth*, who are seen as playing an important role in determining the future of the country.

The phrase *vivid progress* implies a considerable change in foreign language competence for the Vietnamese people. The exact phrases *human resources* and *in service of the industrialisation and modernisation of the country* were transmitted from *General Education Reform 2000* document to the *NFL Project* document. Lexical recurrence (*human resources, in service of the industrialisation and modernisation of the country*) is used to confirm the target of the government, which is improving human resources for national development. Excerpt 10 reveals a belief that foreign languages are seen as tools subservient to the government's goal of industrialisation and modernisation.

Further analysis of excerpt 10 shows that foreign languages are also seen as vehicles for global participation. The phrase *integrated, multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment* implies an environment where people coming from different cultures and parts of the world and speaking different languages use a shared language to communicate with each other. The phrase *use foreign languages independently in order to communicate, study and work confidently in an integrated, multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment* implies that the Vietnamese government aims to train its people to be bilingual/multilingual so that they can communicate, obtain knowledge through studying, and do business with multilingual and multicultural communities.

In acknowledgement of the importance of foreign languages, the NFL Project established English as the only foreign language mandated from grade 3 instead of grade 6 (MOET, 2008). Re-lowering the official age for learning English reveals a strong governmental belief about English as a powerful mediating tool for global participation and national development as discussed above. This signals the importance of English and a mandate for young people to begin to learn English early, at age 8. When examining excerpt 5 and excerpt 10 together, an interpretive analysis reveals an ideology that remains consistent from the *curriculum* document to the *NFL Project* document, namely that English has superior value and offers benefits for state building.

Communicative competence, which is defined as developing four language skills for communication (see excerpt 8), is also seen in the *NFL Project* document. To achieve *vivid progress* on language competence, the NFL Project decided to change how to measure language competence (assessment) by adopting international standards from *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) to build a Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnamese learners, which is called *KNLNN* (acronym in Vietnamese) (Government of Vietnam, 2008).

The CEFR examines language proficiency in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It consists of six levels known as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2; level A1 is ranked the lowest and C2 the highest. Being compatible with CEFR (as claimed in the policy document), KNLNN also tests learners in terms of the four language skills and is composed of six levels; level 1 (equivalent to A1) is lowest and level 6 (equivalent to C2) is highest. The general description of six levels draws on that of CEFR as shown in Table 5.1. In comparison with CEFR, it is found that KNLNN strictly follow the descriptions of CEFR.

Table 5.1

Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnamese Learners (MOET, 2014).

	Level 1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce himself/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided that the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
Basis user	Level 2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
Independent user	Level 3	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple, connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	Level 4	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Proficient user	Level 5	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express himself/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	Level 6	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express himself/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

A close look at excerpt 10 from the *NFL Project* document in terms of *how to renovate* reveals that *vivid progress on language competence* can be understood as *using the language independently*. Reference to the word *independent* can be found in the description of the level of language competence the NFL Project prescribed for secondary school graduates; that is, *level 3 – independent user* (Government of Vietnam, 2008) as presented in Table 5.1. Literally, *independent* means "not relying on another or others for aid or support" (Macquarie Dictionary Publishers, n.d.). The description of *independent user* (level 3) shown in Table 5.1 implies that after finishing secondary education, students are expected to understand and produce simple texts on familiar topics regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. *on their own*.

When looking back on General Education Reform 2000, I found an alignment between *General Education Reform 2000* and the *NFL Project* documents. General Education Reform 2000 aimed to develop *human resource* in service of *the industrialization and modernization* by *increasing practicality* of what is taught. Likewise, the NFL Project aims to develop *human resource* in terms of *foreign language competence* in service of *the industrialization and modernization.* It can be argued that 'practicality' in terms of foreign language education can be understood as *using language independently* in communicative situations (e.g. at work, at school or for leisure).

5.2.2 Interpretive Analysis

An interpretive analysis of English competence described in the *curriculum* and *NFL project* documents reveals that both descriptions; that is, using the language *creatively* and using the language *independently* in communicative situations, are related in the sense that they are far from language learning at the imitation level. The words *creatively* and *independently* imply 'self-control of language use'. The implication is that English teaching and learning at the general education level needs renovating in a way that increases creative or independent language use. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show ideologically significant meaning relations embodied by words from the four texts – General Education Reform 2000, the English curriculum, the NFL Project, and the 2008 training material. The rectangles with words in bold print are the texts under investigation. Words taken from texts are shown in ovals. The arrows represent direct transfer of words from one text to another. The dotted lines symbolise 'matching' between words taken from different texts.

Figure 5.2

Links Between Words in Terms of What *and* Why *to renovate*
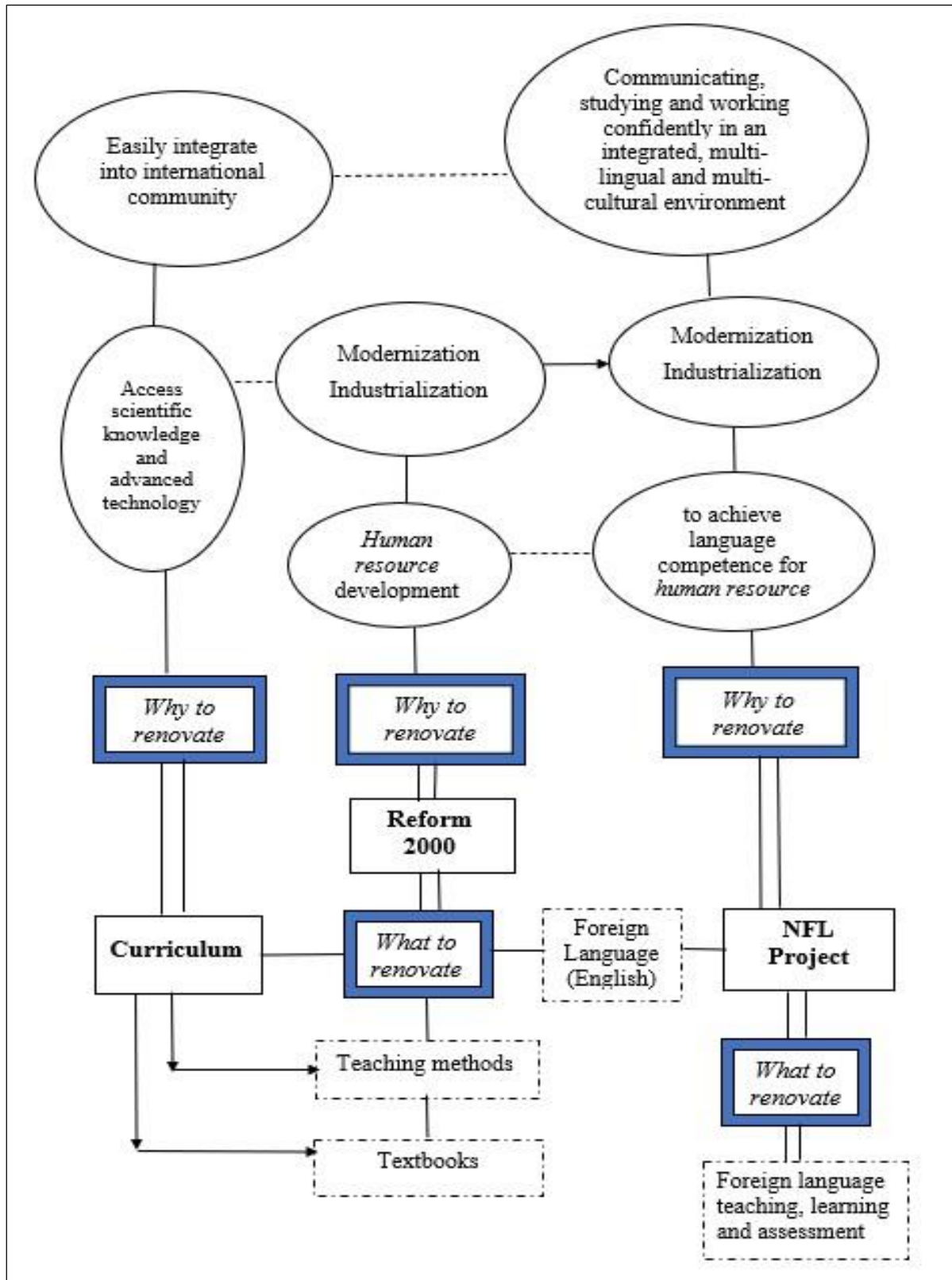
Figure 5.3

Links Between Words in Terms of For Whom *and* How *to renovate*
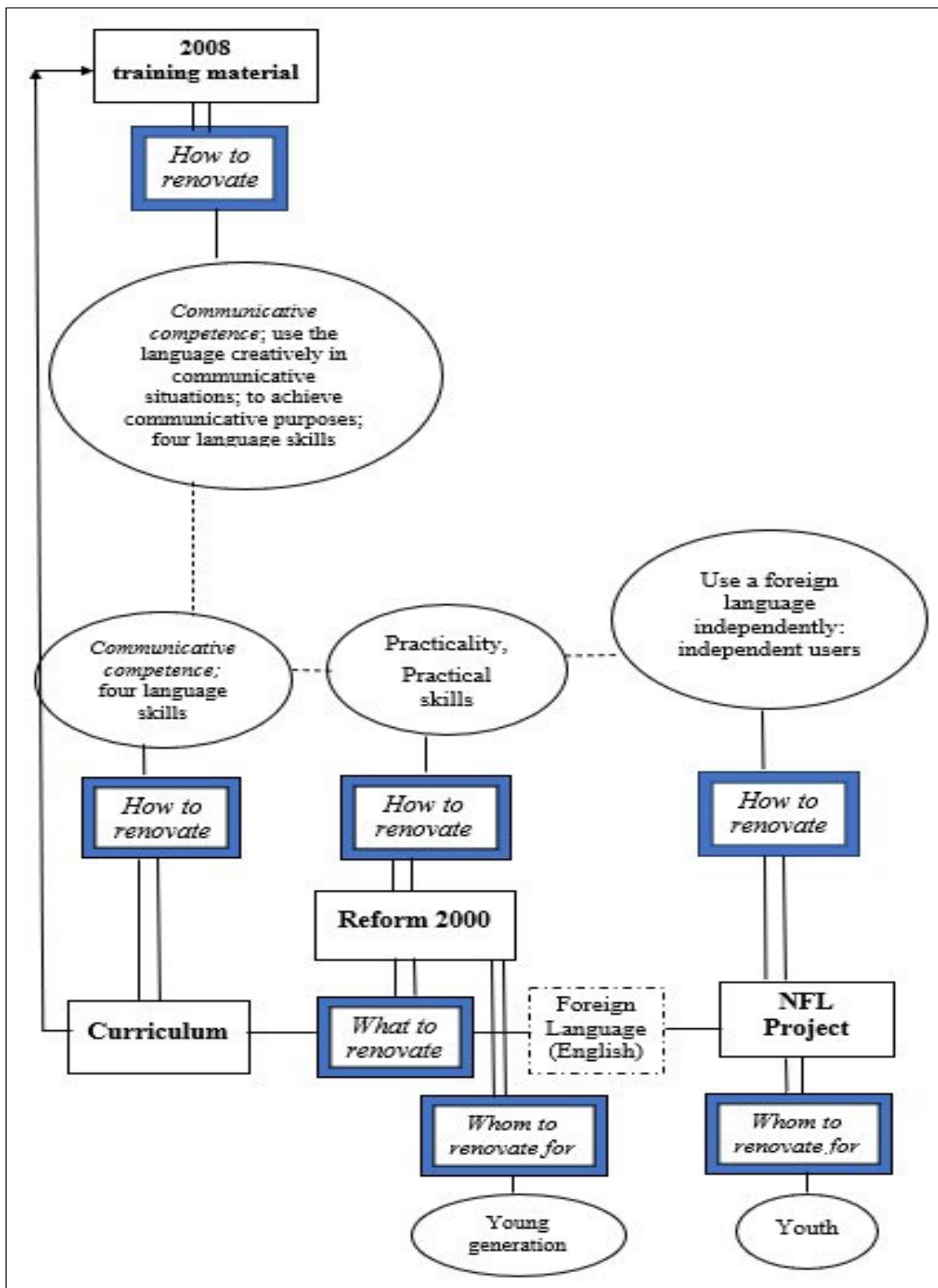
5.2.3 Exploratory Analysis

In applying an exploratory analysis to the texts detailed above, it is important to consider the social cultural context, the ideology, and the power dimensions that might explain the interaction between the social-cultural context and the production and consumption of these texts. After national reunification in 1975 and until 1986, Vietnam suffered from severe economic hardship and was one of the poorest countries in the world. Vietnam faced hyperinflation, major food shortages and low living standards (Edwards & Phan, 2008; Shultz et al., 2016). Poverty urged the Vietnamese government to industrialise and modernise the country to improve the living standards of its people. This resulted in a significant period of renovation in Vietnam, starting with the economic renovation policy of 1986 called Doi Moi (Doi Moi means *renovation*). Under this policy, the Vietnamese government committed to integration in the global economy by moving from a centralised economy towards a socialist-oriented market economy and opening its doors beyond the socialist bloc (Doan et al., 2018).

As a consequence of Doi Moi, English was no longer seen as the language of the opposite political system (Doan et al., 2018), but rather as a tool to integrate into the international community for national development as articulated in the *General Education Reform 2000* and *NFL Project* documents. Accordingly, Russian gradually lost its privileged status as the dominant foreign language. The economic renovation policy of 1986 can be seen as a turning point that marked a new ideology of English as the most important foreign language in Vietnam.

Following this economic renovation policy, the Vietnamese government implemented *General Education Reform 2000* as it considered education and human resource development a key to the industrialisation and modernisation of the country. According to Vietnamese scholars, for example Hoang (2004) and Vu et al. (2007), Vietnamese education at the beginning of the renovation period neither kept up with international and regional progress nor met the requirements of Vietnamese society. The reasons for this low quality of Vietnamese education included disconnection between education and social requirements, overloaded curricula, outdated teaching methods, low-quality teachers, and limited teaching facilities, to name a few (Hoang, 2004; Tran, 2016; Vu et al., 2007). Hoang (2004), one of the most influential professors in Vietnam, offered the critique that Vietnamese education produced a workforce who were obedient and self-disciplined, rather than

able to think creatively, work cooperatively and solve problems. The major reasons for this were the overloaded and impractical curriculum, a one-way transmission teaching approach, and an outdated way of testing which focused on knowledge cramming and rote memorization (Doan 2014; Hoang, 2004; Ngo, 2018). Hoang (2004) further indicated that much of the academic content was impractical and far from real life, with lectures on theoretical issues far outweighing interactive hands-on sessions.

It can be assumed that it was for these underlying reasons that General Education Reform 2000 suggested overcoming the limitations of existing curriculum and textbooks by increasing *practicality* and *practical skills*. In order for this to happen, the implication from General Education Reform 2000 is that new curriculum and textbooks need to bring in real-life issues and offer learners opportunities to practise and apply what they learned to real life. This utilitarian approach to teaching and learning became the target of the educational renovation, with the purpose of developing human resources in service of the industrialisation and modernisation of the country.

In the context that Vietnamese education lacked practicality, English teaching was not exceptional. English teaching focused on developing lexicogrammar, reading, and translation skills using the Grammar-Translation method (Bui, 2015; Hoang, 2009; Le, 2011). Learners were drilled in target grammatical structures and how to use them to translate made-up English sentences (without context) into Vietnamese, or vice versa (Hoang, 2009). As a result, students were very good at grammar and could do grammar exercises well, but they could not apply grammatical rules when writing or speaking (Nguyen, 2002). This implies that students could not apply what they learned for real communication, which is the real purpose of language learning. Le (2011) characterised English pedagogy used in Vietnamese classroom as "first listening to the teacher, then repetition, then copying the linguistic models provided by the teacher on the chalkboard" (p. 21). This approach to learning English by memorising linguistic rules and imitation through drilling exercises did not enable learners to use the target language for communication (Albright, 2018; Nguyen, 2002).

It can be assumed that this has led to the shift in focus from mastering linguistic rules to developing communicative competence through the four language skills to meet the goals of educational

renovation, namely, increasing practicality and integrating into the global community for national development. Communicative competence to use English *creatively* or *independently* through the four language skills was emphasised in both the *curriculum* and *NFL project* documents. This implies a significant turning away from the traditional ways of teaching and learning foreign languages using memorisation and imitation.

After the governmental commitment to global integration, as expressed in Doi Moi (renovation) policy in 1986, Vietnam participated in several international and regional organisations, for example, the World Trade Organization (in 2006), the ASEAN Economic Community (in 2015) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (in 2016). International integration for nation development unquestionably requires that Vietnamese human resources can use English competently for communication. Therefore, developing communicative competence instead of linguistic knowledge alone is more pressing than ever before. Re-lowering the official age for English education from grade 10 to grade 6, then to grade 3 with the launch of the costly NFL Project, shows the strong governmental determination to renovate English education for nation development. The NFL project was budgeted at VND 9,378 billion (Government of Vietnam, 2008), which is a considerable investment given the low capital GDP of Vietnam. The social context at the international and national levels has produced a new ideology surrounding English in Vietnam; English is no longer seen as the language of the opposite political system, but as a high-value commodity that offers profits such as economic success, global membership, industrialisation, and modernisation. This led to the renovation in teaching English and English writing that I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

5.3 Top-Down Discourses on Teaching English and English Writing

This section focuses on how 'renovation' in teaching English and particularly writing is realised in the textbooks and in-service teacher training materials. The analysis of the first group of texts, namely, the English curriculum, English textbooks, and the 2008 teacher training material, is presented in Section 5.3.1. The analysis of the second group of texts, namely, the NFL Project and the 2017 and 2018 training materials, is presented in Section 5.3.2.

5.3.1 English Curriculum, English Textbooks and 2008 Training Material

5.3.1.1 Descriptive and Interpretive Analysis

5.3.1.1.1 Communicative Competence

As seen in excerpts 6 and 9 above, it was stated in the *curriculum* document that the goal of English teaching is developing communicative competence through the four language skills. Linguistic knowledge is seen as a vehicle to achieve communicative competence. An analysis of the grade 8 and grade 9 textbooks reveals that this goal was reproduced in them, as evidenced in the following excerpts from each table of contents (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5). Each table of contents (grade 8 and grade 9) is divided into three columns named as *units, competencies,* and *language focus*.

Figure 5.4

Excerpt of Table of Contents (Grade 9 Textbook)

The first column, units, introduces topics to be learned. Each unit is concerned with a topic. These topics cover a range of domains in social practice such as home, work, education, health, recreation, environment, and media. Corresponding to each unit (topic) are competences and grammatical items presented in the second and third columns respectively. Accordingly, competences listed in column 2 involve the ability to use language for different purposes and functions in a range of domains of life, which is a manifestation of communicative competence. For example, students are expected to master competencies including *seek information, express opinions,* and *write a letter of inquiry* (unit 4, grade 9) or *describing places and situations*, *asking for and giving reasons,* and *writing a description of a room* (unit 3, grade 8). The third column, language focus, introduces grammatical items to be learned and aims to develop grammatical competence, a part of communicative competence.

A careful examination of the tables of contents shows that these competences and language items were copied from section 6 of the *curriculum* document. The goal of developing communicative competence through the four language skills is also manifested in the distribution of grade 8 and 9 textbooks, where sections are named *Listen, Read, Speak* and *Write,* and the section intended for grammatical competence is named *Language focus*. Overall, traces of the skills required for communicative competence are found in both textbooks.

On closer examination, I found that linguistic knowledge contained in *Language focus,* which is seen as a means to achieve communicative competence as articulated in the *curriculum* document (excerpt 6), seems not to support the development of writing. Many of the grammatical items presented in *Language focus* seem irrelevant to the writing section. For example, in unit 3 (grade 8), *modal verbs* (must, have to, ought to), the structures *why-because* and *reflective pronouns* (myself, herself) seem unhelpful for the writing task of *describing a room in a house*. Likewise, the structure of *reported speech,* the grammar focus of unit 4 (grade 9), seems not to be a typical grammatical feature required to write *letters of inquiry.*

Figure 5.5

Excerpt of Table of Contents (Grade 8 Textbook)

Units	Competencies	Language Focus
1 My friends *page 10*	• Introduce people • Respond to introductions • Describe people • Write about oneself and about other people	• Simple tenses • Present simple to talk about general truths • (not) adjective + enough + to-infinitive
2 Making arrangements *page 18*	• Talk about intentions • Use the telephone to make and confirm arrangements • Take a telephone message	• Talk about intentions with *be going to* • Adverbs of place
3 At home *page 27*	• Describe places • Describe situations • Ask for and give reasons • Write a description of a room	• Reflexive pronouns • Modals: *must, have to, ought to* • *Why - Because*
4 Our past *page 38*	• Talk about past events • Express feelings • Distinguish between facts and opinions • Write a short imaginary story	• Past simple • Prepositions of time: *in, on, at, after, before, between* • *used to*
5 Study habits *page 46*	• Give instructions and advice • Express obligation • Write a letter to a friend	• Adverbs of manner • Modal: *should* • Commands, requests and advice in reported speech
6 The young pioneers club *page 54*	• Talk about the future • Ask for favors and offer assistance • Write a letter telling about a future plan	• Present simple with future meaning • Gerunds • Modals: *may, can, could*

Units	Competencies	Language Focus
7 My neighborhood *page 63*	• Make comparisons • Ask for information and assistance • Write a community notice	• Present perfect with *for* and *since* • Comparison with *like, (not) as ... as, (not) the same as, different from*

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Noticeably, *most* of the practice exercises in *Language focus* are practised in non-communicative, decontextualised contexts, as illustrated in Figures 5.6 and 5.7. It may be seen from these figures that these exercises focus on accuracy of language form rather than the communicative aspect of language. When doing these exercises, learners can provide correct answers without necessarily reading the whole sentence and understanding its meaning. For example, for the gap-filling exercise (see Figure 5.6), memorising the rule that the preposition *on* goes with days of a week, students can put *on* before *Wednesday* without having to understand the meaning of the sentence (see sentence a, Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6

Language Focus (Grade 8, Unit 4)


```
3. Complete the sentences. Use the prepositions in the table.

   in        November 1997     between    7 am and 8 am

   on        Monday, July 2    after
                                          3 pm
   at        6 pm              before

a) I'll see you on Wednesday.
b) I'm going to Laos _____ January.
c) We must be there _____ 8.30 and 9.15.
d) The bank closes _____ 3 pm. If you arrive _____ 3 pm,
   the bank will be closed.
e) I'll be home _____ seven because I want to see the seven o'clock news
```

Likewise, for the sentence completion exercise (see Figure 5.7), students can apply a transformation formula provided by the teacher to change from active voice into passive voice mechanically without much consideration of the meaning. (The formula is that the subject and object of the active voice sentence become the object and subject of the passive voice sentence respectively. The verb of the active voice sentence is changed into 'be + past participle' in the passive voice sentence). It is obvious that the grammatical items – prepositions and passive voice – are not practised via communicative situations, which reveals a focus on grammar rules for their own sake. Learners themselves are not required to create sentences out of communicative situations. The *Language focus* section seems to imply a return to the traditional way of learning

grammar in decontextualised contexts. As a result of this traditional way of teaching, students were able to do grammar exercises well, but were not able apply these rules when speaking and writing (Nguyen, 2002). It is noted here that while the policy directed teachers to communicative competence, the textbooks seemed to promote traditional approaches and direct instruction almost exclusively in grammatical competence. This created a dilemma for teachers.

Figure 5.7

Language Focus (Grade 9, Unit 2)

1. Read the first sentence and then complete the second sentence with the same meaning. Use the passive form.

Example: They sell jeans all over the world.
            Jeans are sold all over the world.

a) They made jean cloth completely from cotton in the 18th century.
    Jean cloth ....

b) They grow rice in tropical countries.
    Rice ....

c) They will produce five million bottles of champagne in France next year.
    Five million bottles of champagne ....

d) They have just introduced a new style of jeans in the USA.
    A new style of jeans ....

e) They have built two department stores this year.
    Two department stores ....

A careful examination of the *Write* section of the textbooks also reveals a focus on language forms rather than on the communicative function of writing. The writing section is mainly composed of controlled and guided practice; that is, gap-filling, labelling, sentence completion or writing based on available outlines and/or words/ideas cues, as shown in Figures 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10. Only four out of 15 units of grade 8 and one out of 10 units of grade 9 offer independent practice. (In the first semester when the study was conducted, three out of seven units of grade 8 and no units of grade 9 offer independent practice.) For guided practice with words/ideas cues, as seen in Figure 5.9, learners do not need to brainstorm ideas or think creatively. These writing activities do not give learners opportunities to negotiate meaning for real communication. Controlled practice, for example the activities of gap-filling and completing sentences as seen in Figure 5.10, encourage teachers and students to focus on practising language forms, rather than actually using the language

to communicate ideas. Little independent practice, as mentioned above, is also synonymous with fewer opportunities for learners to develop creative or independent language use. This analysis suggests that writing seems to be seen an extension of grammar; the writing sections are inclined to develop grammatical competence, which is just one part of communicative competence.

Figure 5.8

Guided Practice (Unit 1, Grade 9)

> ### 6. WRITE
>
> *Imagine you are visiting your relatives or friends in another part of Viet Nam or in a different country. Write a letter to your family. Follow the outline.*
>
> | Outline | |
> |---|---|
> | **First paragraph:** | • say when you arrived and who met you at the bus / train station / airport |
> | **Second paragraph:** | Talk about:
• what you've done
• places you've visited
• people you've met
• food you've tried
• things you've bought |
> | **Third paragraph:** | • tell how you feel (happy / disappointed...)
• say what interests you most (people / places / activities...)
• mention when you return home |

Figure 5.9

Guided Practice (Unit 2, Grade 9)

> *b) Now write a paragraph of 100-150 words. But this time you support the argument that secondary school students should wear casual clothes. Outline B may help you.*
>
> **Secondary school students should wear casual clothes**
>
> **Outline B**
>
> Wearing casual clothes:
> • makes students feel comfortable.
> • gives students freedom of choice (sizes, colors, and fashions, etc.).
> • makes students feel self-confident when they are in their favorite clothes.
> • makes school more colorful and lively.

Figure 5.10

Gap-Filling Exercise and Controlled Practice (Unit 4, Grade 8)

WRITE.

1. Complete the story. Use the verbs in the box.

burned	escaped	went	was	appeared
left	lit	tied	was grazing	said

How the Tiger Got His Stripes

One day, as a farmer was in his field and his buffalo (0) *was grazing* nearby, a tiger (1)_____. The tiger wanted to know why the strong buffalo was the servant and the small man (2)_____ the master. The farmer (3)_____ he had something called wisdom, but he (4)_____ it at home that day. He (5)_____ to get the wisdom, but before that he (6)_____ the tiger to a tree with a rope because he didn't want it to eat the buffalo. When he returned, the farmer brought some straw with him. He said it was his wisdom. He (7)_____ the straw and the fire (8)_____ the tiger. The tiger (9)_____, but it still has black stripes from the burns today.

2. Now imagine you are the man. Use the words to write the story. Start like this:

One day as I was in the field and ....

One day / I / field

buffalo / graze / tiger / come

It / ask / why / strong buffalo / my servant / and I / its master

I / tell / tiger / I / have / wisdom

tiger / want / see / it

I / tell / it / I / leave / wisdom / home

then I / tie / tiger / tree / rope / I / didn't / want / eat / buffalo

The analysis of the *2008 training material* in terms of *how to renovate* also reveals an emphasis on teaching the four language skills to develop communicative competence. The teacher training material has four separate sections named as *Teaching Listening, Teaching Speaking, Teaching Reading* and *Teaching Writing*. Accordingly, instructions on how to teach each language skill are provided in the training materials. Explanations of vocabulary items or grammatical structures are presented with techniques to introduce new lessons (e.g. brainstorming). The training material

aimed to explicitly instruct teachers to teach the four language skills, supporting them to shift from teaching grammar, reading and translation to teaching *listening, speaking, reading* and *writing*.

My analysis of instructions on teaching writing provided in the *2008 training material* also reveals a focus on linguistic aspect of writing. Below is the description of sequences to teach writing presented in the training material:

> (Excerpt 11 - The 2008 training material)
>
>   Pre-writing
> - Teachers introduce a model text.
> - Teachers guide students to explore its overall structure.
> - Teachers explain new vocabulary and grammatical structures.
>
>   While-writing
> - Teachers explain the requirements of the writing task.
> - Students discuss in pairs or groups and then write individually.
> - Students need to follow the model text and cues to write as required.
> - Teachers ask some students to show their writing in front of the whole class (e.g. on the overhead projector)
> - Teachers correct their writing and make suggestions.
>
>   Post-writing
> - Students can share their writing with the whole class in an oral manner.
> - Teachers can ask students to do another task in a similar but new situation.
>
> (MOET, 2008, p. 16)

A careful analysis of excerpt 11 shows that the approach to teaching writing shares important characteristics with the product-based approach, which is characterised as paying undue attention to linguistic features (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland, 2016). The two sentences *Teachers guide students to explore its overall structure* and *Teachers explain new vocabulary and grammatical structures* reveal that the use of a model text seems to introduce linguistic features, namely, the overall structure of the text, its vocabulary and grammar. The 2008 training material does not mention the analysis of the context of writing (purpose and audience); that is, the impact of the

communicative purpose and audience on the language choices. This suggests that the sociocultural rules of language use are dismissed.

Further analysis of excerpt 11 shows that another aspect of writing – revision for improved drafts – is completely absent from the training material. Students are not asked to exchange their papers and revise their writing. After controlled/guided practice and then free practice, the class proceeds to teacher correction; that is, the teacher corrects some student writing displayed in front of the class. It can be inferred from this analysis that writing is seen as a textual product rather than as social act or a composing process.

While communicative competence requires more than grammatical competence and refers to the ability to use language to achieve different communicative purposes, this approach does not equip learners with the knowledge of sociocultural rules of language use or sociocultural competence that is an integral part of communicative competence. In addition, opportunities for learners to generate or develop ideas which encourage creative language use are disregarded.

5.3.1.1.2 Shift from Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Approach

A close examination of the *curriculum* document reveals a shift in the methods of teaching and learning and the roles of teachers and students. The *curriculum* document defines learners as "**active**, and **creative participants** and teachers as **organizers or facilitators**" (MOET, 2006, p. 7). These roles are further explicated:

(Excerpt 12- Curriculum)

To develop skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing by means of linguistic knowledge, i.e. phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, following teaching method is **required**:

Teachers organize and facilitate classroom activities so that **students participate actively** in the learning process through **pair and group work** …. Learners need to participate in communicative activities **actively, creatively and cooperatively**" (MOET 2006, p. 24, bold emphasis added).

As may be seen in excerpt 12, *what to renovate* are the methods of teaching and learning and the roles of teachers and students. *How to renovate* is described by nouns (e.g. organisers, facilitators,

participants), verbs (e.g. organise, facilitate, participate) and adjectives or adverbs (e.g. active/actively, creative/creatively). Excerpt 12 implies that to develop the four language skills, the teacher needs to be a facilitator, and learners need to cooperate with the teacher and peers in pairs or groups. Learners need to play an active and creative role in their learning. This has much resonance with the construct of 'social interaction' inherent in sociocultural theory of learning, which maintains that learning happens when individuals interact with each other (Vygotsky, 1978). The verb *required* is used in the first sentence of excerpt 12 to imply an obligation that the teacher needs to follow this teaching principle to facilitate the goal of developing the four language skills for communication. The words *active, creative, organise* and *facilitate* are repeated on pages 7 and 24 of the document to emphasise the new roles of teachers and students, which reflects a learner-centred approach.

The new *learner-centred* teaching approach was reproduced in section 1 of *the 2008 training material* document, which presents views on innovative teaching methodology:

(Excerpt 13 - The 2008 training material)

Innovations in **teaching methods** refers to a shift from **teachers lecturing and students taking notes to teachers organizing and facilitating learning activities, and students actively participating** in the process of learning" (MOET, 2008, p. 2, bold emphasis added).

As may be seen in excerpt 13, *what to renovate* is teaching methods. *How to renovate* is described by the phrase in bold (*teachers lecturing and students taking notes to teachers organizing and facilitating learning activities, and students actively participating*). Lexical recurrence (*teachers organise and facilitate, students actively participate*) is used to emphasise the new roles of teachers and students as facilitators and active learners. Excerpt 13 highlights that renovated teaching methods means turning away from the teacher-centred, one-way transmission teaching and moving toward learner-centered teaching. This reveals an intention for learners to be placed at the centre of the learning process and be given more autonomy.

5.3.1.1.3 An Emphasis on Authentic Learning

A close examination of the *curriculum* document shows that the dominant theme of *General Education Reform 2000* document, namely, practicality, was recontextualised in the *curriculum* document. The curriculum states:

> (Excerpt 14 - Curriculum)
>
> **Guidelines for compiling textbooks**
>
> The selection and sequencing of topics, communicative competences, linguistic knowledge, instructional units, exercises and communicative tasks draw on the following principles:
>
> - Contextualize language by means of communicative situations **close to reality**
> - Ensure the material is **authentic** and **highly practical** in terms of communication.
> - …Ensure the material is **appropriate for psychophysical characteristics, level of understanding, needs and interests of learner**. (MOET, 2006, p. 23, bold emphasis added)

A close look at the words in bold reveals *what to renovate* is *textbook* (i.e. topics, competences, tasks, etc.) and *how to renovate* is *close to reality, authentic, highly practical and appropriate for psychophysical characteristics, level of understanding, needs and interests of learner*. The phrases *close to reality, authentic* and *highly practical* have connotations of 'practicality', which was highlighted in the *General Education Reform 2000* document. In addition, the phrase *appropriate for … needs and interests of learner* implies relevance to learners. This seems to be associated with authentic learning, which aims to engage students in learning through the use of contextualised tasks that tap into learners' lived experience, or are connected to their interests and needs, or replicate real-life tasks (Duke et al., 2006; Kalantzis et al., 2016). In other words, excerpt 14 implies that language learning needs to be connected to real life and be personally relevant or meaningful to students, which helps to motivate them to use the target language (Kalantzis et al., 2016). Valuing learners' needs and interests reveals once again a belief that learners need to be placed at the centre of the learning process.

When analysing the textbooks, I found that 'practical relevance' was clearly manifested by introducing topics covering different domains of life and a variety of real-life genres provided in the *Write* sections. Table 5.2 shows that real-life issues include not only personal ones, for example,

my friends, at home (grade 8)*, a visit from pen pal, clothing* (grade 9); but also issues related to community and global concerns, for example, *the Young Pioneers Club, recycling, computers* (grade 8), *saving energy, natural disasters, media* (grade 9) or knowledge about the world, for example, *festivals*, *wonders of the world* (grade 8), *celebrations*, *life on other planets* (grade 9). It appears that via the English language, the textbooks aim to raise the younger generation's awareness of practical global issues and prepare them for international participation. This is in line with the goal of integrating into the world as articulated in the *curriculum* document.

Table 5.2

Summary of Topics and Genres Structured According to Units

Grade 8		
Semester	**Units**	**Genres** (the *Write* section)
First semester	**1** My friends	Description of a friend
	2 Making arrangements	Telephone messages
	3 At home	Description of a house room
	4 Our past	Short imaginary stories
	5 Study habits	Personal letters about upcoming events
	6 The Young Pioneers Club	Personal letters about future plans
	7 My neighborhood	Community notices
Second semester	**8** Country life and city life	Personal letters describing neighborhood
	9 A first aid course	Thank-you notes
	10 Recycling	A set of instructions
	11 Travelling around Vietnam	Personal recount
	12 A vacation abroad	Postcards
	13 Festivals	Reports of a festival
	14 Wonders of the world	Personal letters recounting a trip
	15 Computers	A set of instruction
Grade 9		
Semester	**Units**	**Genres** (the *Write* section)
First semester	**1** A visit from pen pal	Personal letters recounting a trip
	2 Clothing	Arguments
	3 A trip to the countryside	Personal recounts
	4 Learning a foreign language	Letters of inquiry
	5 The media	Expositions
Second semester	**6** The environment	Letters of complaint
	7 Saving energy	Speeches
	8 Celebrations	Personal letters expressing opinion
	9 Natural disasters	Personal recounts
	10 Life on other planets	Expositions

Table 5.2 shows that students are expected to acquire a wide range of genres encountered in real life. These genres, based on the classification by Derewianka and Jones (2012) and Wing Jan (2015), include informal letters, personal recounts (grades 8 and 9), narrative stories (e.g. folk tales), description, phone messages, postcards, thank-you notes, community notices, instructions, reports (grade 8), formal letters, speeches, arguments and expositions (grade 9). This shows a connection between the textbook topics and real life, as required in the *curriculum* document.

A deeper analysis of writing tasks of the *textbooks*, however, shows that several tasks appear unfamiliar or irrelevant to lower secondary students. As may be seen from Figure 5.11, students are required to take a *business telephone message* (unit 2, grade 8), a skill that perhaps is preparing them for future work. It is true that taking business messages is an important skill at work but the question is whether 14-year-old students are interested in learning this business skill. The answer to this question is most likely that taking business telephone messages is not psychologically appropriate for 14-year-old students, who tend not to think much about their future careers. It is also hard for them to imagine a business setting where they have no experience.

Figure 5.11

Write Section (Unit 2, Grade 8)

2. Now read the passage below. Write the telephone message in your exercise book.

A customer telephoned the Thanh Cong Delivery Service on June 16 just after midday. The customer's name was Mr. Nam, and he wanted to speak to Mrs. Van. Mrs. Van was in a meeting and could not come to the phone. So Mr. Toan took a message. Mr. Nam called about his stationery order. He said Mrs. Van could reach him at 8 634 082.

Thanh Cong Delivery Service

Date: ....
Time: ....
For: ....
Message: ....
....
Taken by: ....

Furthermore, Figure 5.12 shows that students are required to write a *letter* to a language school to find out about an English course they are interested in (unit 4, grade 9). This seems unrealistic or impractical in Vietnamese society. Few, if any, people would write *letter*s to language schools to ask for course information which is available by phone, on the school website, on the school noticeboard, or at the information desk.

Figure 5.12

Write Section (Unit 4, Grade 9)

The intertextual analysis reveals that the beliefs or ideologies about English teaching embedded in the *curriculum* document, including communicative competence, learner-centred approaches and authentic learning, were reproduced or recontextualised in the textbooks and the 2008 training material. However, some of these were not as well developed in the textbooks and the training material as might be expected. The discourse topic *learner-centred approach* from the *curriculum* document was directly transferred to the teacher training material by using repeated phrases such as *teachers as facilitators and students as active, creative participants*. The discourse topic *authentic learning*, which was influenced by 'practicality' from *General Education Reform 2002*, was recontextualised in the *Write* sections of the textbooks. While the textbooks introduce a variety of real-life genres, they seem not to satisfactorily meet the curriculum requirement of 'relevance to learners' in the lower secondary setting.

In addition, the *Write* sections of the textbooks and instructions on teaching writing provided in the 2008 training material seem not to support the development of expected competence in writing. Textbook tasks and the product-based approaches introduced in the training material focus only on the linguistic aspect of writing, which is not sufficient to develop communicative competence.

Figures 5.13 and 5.14 show intertextual links among the English curriculum, English textbooks, and the 2008 training material. In addition to the symbols explained in earlier figures, in Figure 5.13 the dotted rectangles with rounded corners are used to contain discourse topics. The two-headed, dotted arrows symbolise 'mismatch' between discourse topics (Figure 5.13) or between words taken from the texts (Figure 5.14).

Figure 5.13

Intertextual Links 1 (the Curriculum and Textbooks)
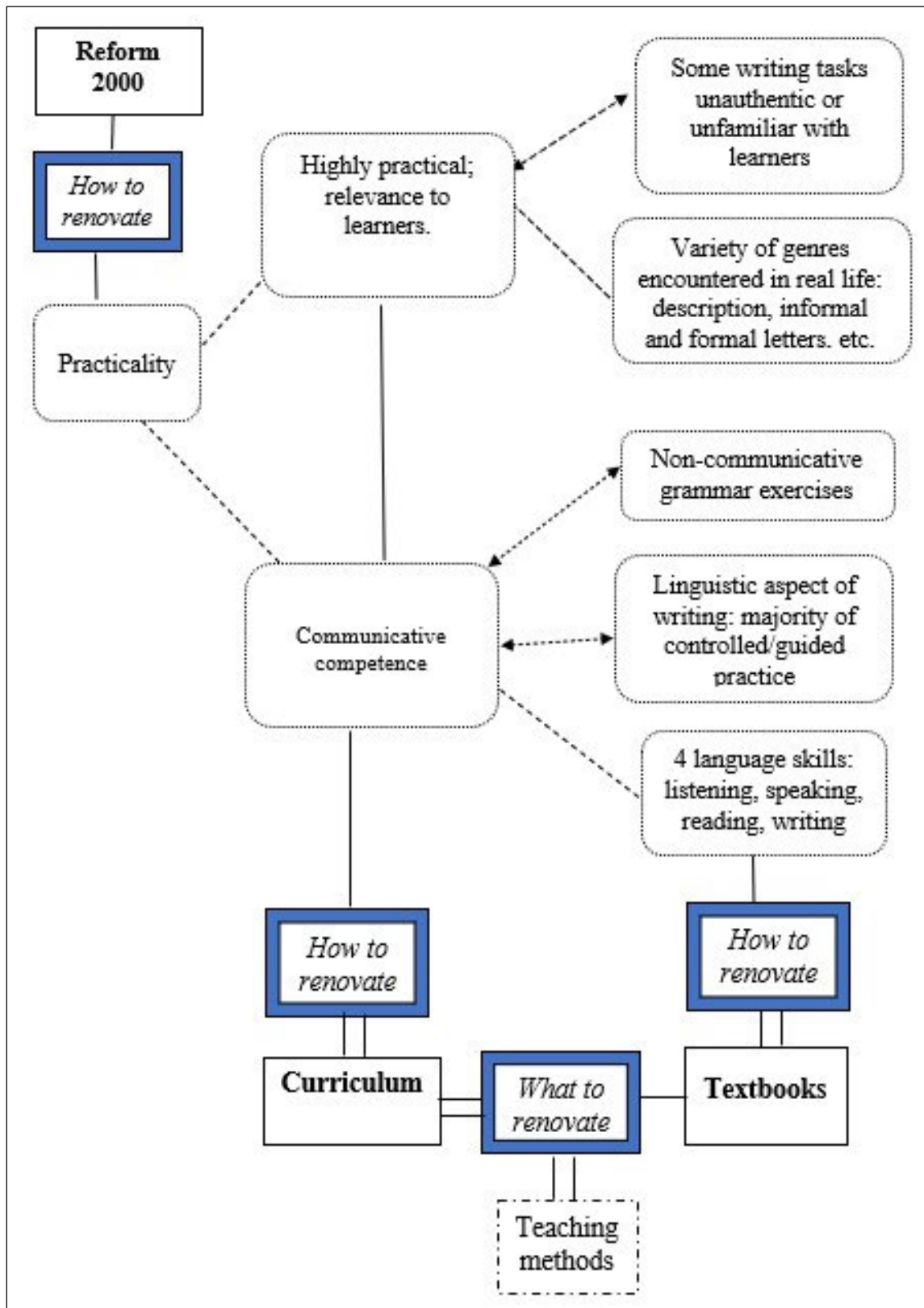
Figure 5.14

Intertextual Links 2 (the Curriculum and 2008 Training Material)
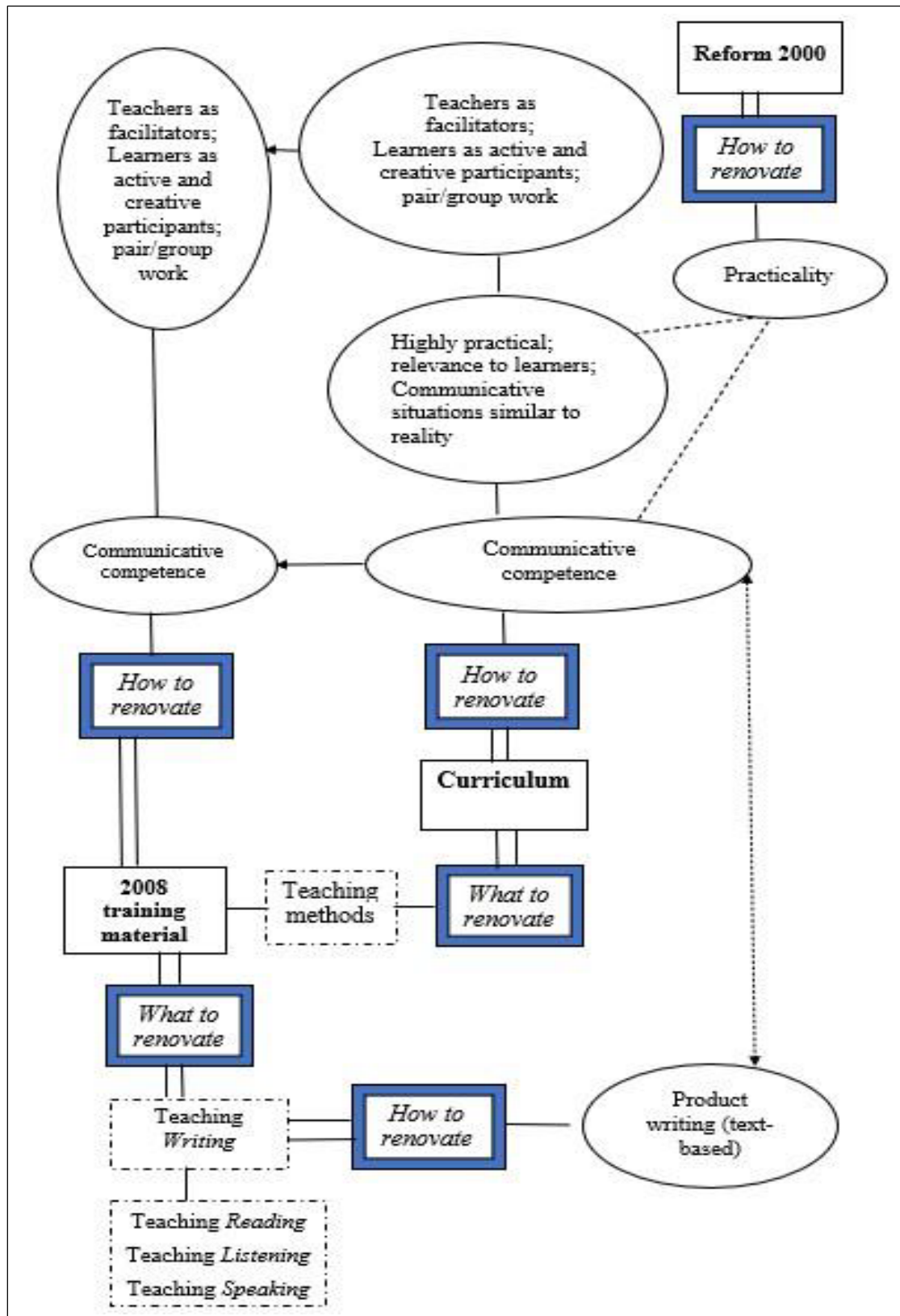
5.3.1.2 Exploratory Analysis

When applying an exploratory analysis to the texts discussed above, I found that the renovation period initiated by the economic policy of 1986 and then *General Education Reform 2000* led to significant changes in ideologies that underpin teaching English in Vietnam. Specifically, the learner-centred approach was adopted to replace the teacher-centred approach, which was influenced by the ideology of *hierarchy* from Confucianism. To gain communicative competence as the goal, the learner-centred approach, which has much resonance with the construct *social interaction* of sociocultural theory of learning, was emphasised in the curriculum document and teacher training material. Accordingly, teachers were required to change their traditional ways of teaching by using more pair and group work and encouraging more student autonomy.

In addition, authentic learning was advocated; however, this was not well developed in the textbooks, as analysed above. In terms of writing, the product-based approach was prescribed as a method to teach writing. However, this approach to teaching writing has been criticised for its focus on linguistic features and for ignoring the composing processes and the social aspect of writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland, 2016; Silva, 1990), both of which can support the development of competence in writing. In consideration of the social context, when the new English curriculum was enacted in 2002, it was found that the product-based approach was well-established in L2 contexts, while other approaches to writing were not (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). This may be the reason that the product-based approach alone was introduced in the 2008 training material.

5.3.2. The NFL Project and the 2017 and 2018 Training Materials

5.3.2.1 Descriptive and Interpretive Analysis

5.3.2.1.1 Introduction of Heterogeneity of Views on Writing

As presented in Section 5.2, with its goal of using language independently for global integration, the NFL Project continues to highlight the development of competence in the four language skills by using the international standard based on CEFR to measure learners' English competence in the four skills. This goal of the NFL Project was recontextualised in the teacher training materials in 2017 and 2018; these two materials provide instructions on teaching the four language skills. A careful examination of the 2017 training material, particularly the instructions on teaching writing, reveals a change in belief about writing and teaching writing. In addition to the product-based

approach, the 2017 training material introduces process-based and genre-based approaches, as illustrated in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15

Three Approaches to Writing (2017 PowerPoint slide)

Product Writing (Text-based)

- Traditional approach
- Model text is provided for analysis and imitation.
- Key features of the text are highlighted.
- Organization of ideas is important.
- Emphasis is on the product.

Process Approach (Task-based)

- Focus is on a variety of classroom activities. (Writing as a process)
- Brainstorming ideas by students as a starting point of the lesson
- Students analyze the quality and usefulness of ideas before writing.
- Draft in pairs or small groups
- Students exchange drafts and write their feedback.
- Drafts are returned and improvements are made based on peer feedback.
- A final draft is written.
- Students once again exchange and read each other's work and perhaps even write a response or reply.

What is a genre based approach?

This approach identifies that writing is a social activity with particular power relations and social conventions. The approach explicitly identifies the social and linguistic conventions of different types of texts.

The approach usually includes the following:

Familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing and then free writing

Steps to follow

1. Learners are given a model text.
2. Text is read and analysed with the teacher.
3. Patterns and linguistic features are identified.
4. Teachers and learners collaboratively construct the genre.
5. Learners in groups use writing frames.
6. Learners write individual genres.

Figure 5.15 shows that writing processes, for example, *brainstorming ideas, draft in pairs or in small groups,* and *improvement based on peer feedback*, were introduced to trainees on the PowerPoint slides. Likewise, the social aspect of writing was introduced to trainees on the PowerPoint slides through the description of the genre-based approach: *this approach identifies that writing is a social activity with particular power relations and social conventions*. This definition implies that writing is social in nature; it is influenced by power relations and social conventions. This suggests that the genre-based approach attends to sociocultural competence, which forms part of communicative competence.

In addition, collaborative writing, which is defined as *projects where written work is created by multiple people collaboratively* was also introduced in the 2017 training material. This definition suggests that writing can be seen as a collaborative, social activity, which implies an advocacy for a sociocultural perspective on writing. The three approaches shown in Figure 5.15 in combination with collaborative writing reveal that writing processes and social aspect of writing are being acknowledged in the teaching of secondary writing in the context of Ba Ria-Vung Tau. It can be seen from the 2017 training material that a heterogeneity of views on writing was introduced to teachers, which reveals that writing is no longer seen as a textual product.

5.3.2.1.2 Focus on a Variety of Genres

An analysis of the 2018 training material, particularly instructions on teaching writing, reveals an advocacy for both academic and non-academic genres, as illustrated in Figures 5.16 and 5.17. Figure 5.16 shows that the instructions on teaching academic genres focused on rhetoric patterns; that is, how to write topic sentences, supporting details and closing statements, and how to make a paragraph cohesive by using transitional words, for example, in 'the same way', 'as a result', 'in conclusion'. This type of writing aims to prepare learners for academic life.

Figure 5.16

Academic Writing (2018 PowerPoint slide)

In addition, other types of genres that are encountered in daily life such as reports, posters, stories, diaries, and biographies were also introduced in the 2018 training material. Figure 5.17 is an excerpt from the handout that introduces some writing activities. In these writing activities, students are asked write a commercial script, give directions on making a video and a travel report, or design a travel poster.

Figure 5.17

Writing Activities (2018 Training Material - Handout)

Watch —— Write

1. Commercials.
Students watch a TV Commercial. Then, they write their own script based on that commercial but focused on a different product. Afterwards, they can perform. F

2. Short videos.
Just like a story but this time students watch. Then, they can rewrite / respond / reflect. Students can choose to reflect on one standard Reading Response question or as part of a daily journal. Ex. The best part was ...... / If I had made the video, I would have ......

Short videos are powerful and if well chosen can really get students writing in a reflective manner. CP / F

How to Videos
Students can watch a short "How to" video that describes a process. There are some excellent sites with User Generated Content. Expert Village and eHow are recommended. After the students watch the video several times, they can write out the steps using transitions which the teacher lists on the board. [First, first off, To begin, then, after that, next, most importantly, finally, last but not least, to finish] CP / F

3. Newscasts / Weather reports
Watch the daily news or weather report. Students write in groups or individually, their own version of the news for that week/day. Then perform for the class like a real news report! F

4. Travel Videos
Watch a few travel videos (there are many nice, short travel "postcard" videos online). Groups of students select a place and write up a report or a poster outlining why others should visit their city/country. Alternately, give students a postcard and have them write to another student in the classroom as if they were in that city/country. For lower leveled students, provide them with a template and they just fill in the details.

As seen in Figure 5.17, television commercials, daily news or travel videos are materials taken from real life, and they are seen as teaching materials. These authentic teaching materials are multimodal texts. Multimodal texts are composed of written-linguistic forms with other modes of meaning making such as visual, audio, gestural or spatial patterns of meaning (Kalantzis et al., 2016). The writing activities presented in Figure 5.17 require learners to consider audience and communicative purposes when producing texts. For example, to write a good television commercial script for a product, students must be aware of potential customers (audience) and the purpose of a television commercial; that is, persuading customers to buy their product. These

writing activities also include composing multimodal texts, for example a travel poster which is composed of written and visual modes. This shows the idea of incorporating multimodal texts into teaching writing is beginning to be introduced to Vietnamese teachers of English in the Ba Ria-Vung Tau context.

On closer examination, I found that the writing activities suggested in the 2018 training material, for example, writing a diary or whatever might be interesting to learners, or designing a poster, serve to *connect school learning with students' interests and daily life*. These give learners a reason for writing and offer 'traces' of authentic learning. They also place learners at the centre of learning process because they attend to learners' interests and needs. The analysis of the 2018 training material reveals the implication that real life genres (academic and non-academic) need to be brought into the classroom to familiarise learners with them. This is in line with '*practicality'*, as expressed in the *General Education Reform 2000* document.

5.3.2.1.3 Promoting Language Learning and Use via the Use of IT

One noticeable point mentioned in the *NFL Project* document issued in 2008 is promoting language learning by means of IT. The phrase "enhance the integration of IT into foreign language education" (Government of Vietnam, 2008, pp. 4-5) was mentioned twice. How to integrate IT into foreign language education was not described in this document; however, in the revised policy document issued in 2017, the use of IT continues to be highlighted with more elaboration:

> (Excerpt 15 - The NFL Project)
>
> Enhance the **integration of advanced IT into foreign language education** with **electronic learning system** appropriate for all types of learners so that learners can be exposed to the target language **wherever and whenever they are**. (Government of Vietnam, 2017, p. 2, bold emphasis added)

It may be seen from Excerpt 15 that *what to renovate* is *integration of advanced IT into foreign language education*, and *how to renovate* is through developing *electronic learning system* that learners can access wherever and whenever they like. The phrase *wherever and whenever* implies an embrace of different types of environments. Excerpt 15 implies that advanced IT needs to be adopted to boost the teaching and learning of English in ways that expose learners to English

beyond the classroom. This view can be seen more clearly in Excerpt 16, which immediately follows excerpt 15 in the policy document:

> (Excerpt 16 - the NFL Project)
>
> **Create foreign language learning environments at school, at home and in society** so that teachers, lecturers, family members and learners (school, college and university students…) use the target language together. (Government of Vietnam, 2017, p. 2, bold emphasis added)

Excerpts 15 and 16 highlight the creation of *foreign language learning environments* at home and in society and reveal that foreign language learning is no longer seen as limited to the classroom alone.

It is interesting to see that the teacher training in 2017 and in 2018 included one module called *the integration of IT into teaching* in response to the NFL Project. This module instructed the trainees to edit pictures or video clips (which may be downloaded from the internet) and then insert them in PowerPoint presentations. The trainees also learned how to create games and crossword puzzles using PowerPoint tools and to use the software *hot potatoes*, which enables teachers to create web-based exercises of several basic types. These types of exercises included multiple choice or true/false questions, gap-filling, matching, crossword puzzles, and jumbled sentences. The 2018 module of IT instructed the trainees to use ActivInspire, which is a collaborative lesson delivery software for interactive touchboards that provides the trainees with tools to create interactive and engaging lessons in class by designing interactive games or inserting pictures and videos.

A close examination of the 2017 and 2018 IT module materials shows that the use of IT is intended for supplementing traditional mediating tools in class such as boards, chalk, and paper, and bringing more diversity to the classroom through the use of electronic pictures, video clips and games to make lessons more attractive. The exercises created by the *hot potatoes* software (e.g. multiple choice or true/false questions, gap-filling) can be useful for listening or reading comprehension and for learning vocabulary and grammar. These exercises focus on receptive skills and linguistic development; they do not encourage the use of English for communicating one's ideas. To sum up, the analysis of the 2017 and 2018 training material reveals that the application

of IT knowledge can enhance language learning in class, but it does not promote the use of English *for communication* outside the classroom.

Intertextual analysis reveals that the discourse topics from the NFL project, namely, developing competence in the four language skills and promoting language use via the use of IT, were recontextualised in the 2017 and 2018 training material. Figure 5.18 illustrates the intertextual links between the NFL project documents and the 2017 and 2018 training materials. Dotted rectangles with rounded corners are used to contain discourse topics. Dotted lines represent 'matching' between discourse topics while elbow arrows symbolise 'not fully matching' between discourse topics.

Figure 5.18

Intertextual Links (the NFL Project Documents and the 2017 and 2018 Training Materials)
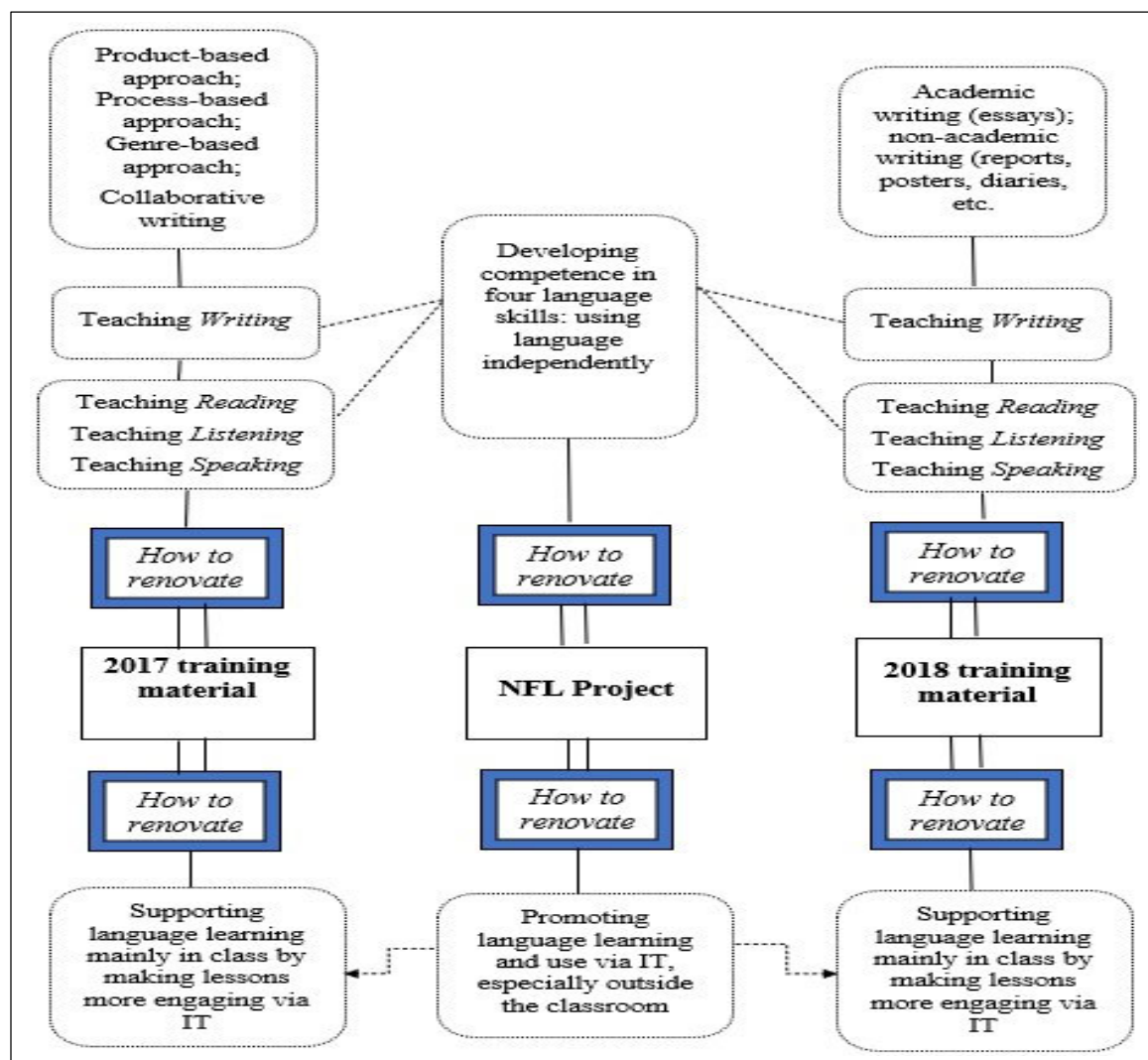
5.3.2.2 Exploratory Analysis

When applying an exploratory analysis to the texts discussed above, I found that international trends in language teaching have influenced English teaching in Vietnam at the macro level. Specifically, in terms of writing, process-based and genre-based approaches, collaborative writing and composing multimodal texts have been introduced to teachers of English. In addition, IT is believed to support the learning of English in EFL contexts like Vietnam, where students have little exposure to the target language. This is further evidenced by the introduction of web-based technologies on the NFL Project website that can promote language learning, especially outside the classroom, for example, Moodle, Wiki, blog, social webs (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) and virtual worlds (see http://ngoainguquocgia.moet.gov.vn/Chương-trình-học-liệu/nhung-ung-dung-cong-nghe-trong-giang-day-ngoai-ngu-83). However, in considering the sociocultural context, the integration of IT into language teaching may be challenging for two reasons: (1) the limited IT infrastructure in suburban and rural areas, and (2) English teachers' limited knowledge of IT (Ngo, 2016).

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the discourses that were intended to shape the practices of teaching English and English writing in the Vietnamese context. The analysis of the documents uncovered the four dominant ideologies underpinning these discourses. The first is the hegemony of English; that is, English is a high-value commodity that offers benefits such as access to the global economy and to scientific and technological world knowledge for national economic development and for the industrialisation and modernisation of the country. English is also an important (if not vital) tool for global membership; it provides a means to connect Vietnam to the rest of the world and enhancing its status on the global stage. Hence, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has been promoted vigorously in the national education system, with the purpose of training the young generation of Vietnam to be bilingual/multilingual, which is part of a human resource development scheme for state building. This has led to a significant change in English education, namely, developing communicative competence instead of focusing on linguistic knowledge alone.

Second, language learning needs to be connected to real life and thus multimodality should be incorporated due to the advancement of IT. Learners are expected to produce a wide range of real-life genres, which can be written language texts or multimodal texts. Third, students are seen as agents of the learning process. They are expected to be active learners who can use language independently and creatively, thereby further developing human resources and national development. Teachers are therefore required to give learners more autonomy by providing them with opportunities, with the support of the teacher as a facilitator, to participate actively and creatively in the learning process instead of being passive listeners. Furthermore, learners' needs and interests should be taken into consideration when designing learning content to promote their engagement in the lesson; teaching thus becomes learner-centred.

Fourth, paradoxically, while learners are seen as the agents of the learning process, teachers are not seen as the agents of the teaching process. The traditional Vietnamese hierarchy ideology still applies to teachers; they are required to comply with top-down discourses by following the prescribed curriculum and textbooks and having no autonomy in what to teach. Most often the textbooks discount the new modes of instruction and the sociocultural view of language and learning. The goal of developing competence in writing seems not to be fully addressed by the textbooks.

The next chapter analyses the participants' instructional practices of English writing, as observed in writing classes, and unveils how teachers acted in the context of great change in English education in Vietnam.

Chapter 6

Instructional Practices of English Writing

6.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 reports on the analysis of the instructional practices of six lower secondary teachers from one urban, one suburban and one rural school (two teachers per school) in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, Vietnam. It addresses the sub-question 'How do Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers institute their instructional practices of English writing?' As mentioned in Chapter 3, Literature Review (Section 3.4), I draw on Fairclough's (2003) notion of social practice to define instructional practice as consisting of five constituents: (1) actions and interactions between teachers and students and between students and students as part of classroom activities; (2) teachers' backgrounds and beliefs that can impact their instructional choices; (3) the roles of teachers and students that reflect their social relations; (4) classroom discourse or talk, and (5) teaching materials and aids used in the classroom.

In this chapter, the analysis of teachers' pre- and post-observation interview data was integrated with the analysis of classroom observational data to explore how the participants' instructional practices were mediated. The analysis of observational data focused on classroom activities, with attention given to the roles of teachers and students and the mediating tools observed such as the classroom talk and teaching materials or aids. This analysis was further supported by the interview data which provided insights into the teachers' instructional choices. The formulation of post-observation interview questions was guided by the observational data. For example, question 2 which investigates the teachers' views on the textbooks (see Appendix 4.7) stemmed from the observational data that the teachers relied heavily on textbooks. The follow-up question reserved for T13-suburban-grade 8 was driven by the observational data that revealed T13-suburban-grade 8 asked students to draw their favourite room at home before they described it in class (see Appendix 4.7).

The next section provides a brief presentation of contextual information about the research sites and participants in this study, followed by a detailed analysis of the teachers' instructional practices.

6.1 Background Information

In all three investigated schools, each class had a fixed room; that is, the students used the same room throughout the school year. In the classroom, seating was arranged in a traditional way: desks were arranged in columns and rows, with aisles in between columns, and two-student desks in each row were teacher-fronted, facing a large blackboard on the wall. None of the classrooms was equipped with computers and projectors. When the teachers needed to use computers and projectors, they had to book a 'computer room'; that is, a classroom equipped with a computer and a projector. The rural and suburban schools had two computer rooms each, and the urban school had seven. All teachers in a school shared these computer rooms. The urban school had about 80 teachers while the rural school and suburban school had about 50 teachers and 30 teachers respectively. In the post-observation interviews, the teachers stated that the shared use of computer rooms discouraged them from integrating information technology (IT) into their teaching because of the high possibility of room unavailability. They also felt inhibited by technical problems and the time required to prepare PowerPoint presentations for their lessons.

> The computer room was not often available when I booked it. Besides, I often had technical problems with the connection between the computer and the projector. Consequently, I could not finish my lesson since quite a lot of time was spent on fixing technical problems. These discourage me from using IT. (T3-urban-grade 9)

> In order to use the computer room, I have to book it and it is not always available. This is annoying. In addition, preparing PowerPoint lessons is time consuming. Therefore, I do not integrate IT in my teaching. (T9-rural-grade 8)

Regarding the number of English classes, the 8th graders had three 45-minute periods per week and the 9th graders had two 45-minute periods per week. A lesson unit, which had seven sections as introduced in Section 5.1, took five or six periods at both grade levels. The *Write* section of one unit was dealt with in one class period of 45 minutes (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5 and Table 5.2 for detailed information on the learning contents delivered in the first semester when this study was conducted). As mandated by the textbook, in the first semester, the 8th graders were required to learn six text types or genres: description of friends, telephone messages, description of rooms, narrative (imaginative) stories, personal letters, and community notices (Nguyen et al., 2008a). (The word *genre* is used by

the researcher, not by the textbook). The 9th graders were required to learn four genres: personal letters, arguments, personal recounts, formal letters of inquiry and exposition (Nguyen et al., 2008b). (Personal letters and personal recounts were learned at 8th grade). It can be seen that the students were expected to master a wide range of genres encountered in both informal and formal contexts.

6.2. Instructional Practices

As discussed in Chapter 2, sociocultural theory argues that human activity, including learning, is mediated by technical (physical) tools and semiotic tools (language, concepts, signs and symbols) of which language is viewed as the most important and prominent tool; it is a vehicle for thoughts and mental development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through social interaction with others via speech or talk, we think, learn and develop mentally. In this study, a sociocultural lens has allowed me to view the classroom settings and examine how the teaching of English writing was mediated by tools such as classroom talk, teaching materials and other aids.

Sociocultural theory also indicates that learning may be enhanced during social interaction. With support or scaffolding from more knowledgeable others, children can do what they may not be able to do on their own (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983). Researchers and scholars of sociocultural theory have continued to develop the concept of scaffolding, positioning it as an integral part of learning in classroom contexts. As this study was concerned with writing instruction, I drew on the teaching and learning cycle (TLC), a scaffolding approach to teaching writing that has been described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3). This helped to guide my analysis of the teachers' scaffolding strategies throughout the stages of teaching writing. I adopted the TLC because of two reasons. First, this cycle is used to extensively instruct learners on mastering genres and aims to provide students with confidence to handle real-world writing (Ahn, 2012; Hyland, 2007). This is the goal of the renovated seven-year English curriculum: learners are expected to be able to produce texts in different real-life genres. Second, this cycle is underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) social view of learning and informed by Bruner's (1983) notion of scaffolding.

As described in Chapter 4 (Methodology), I analysed pre- and post- observation interview data and observational data collected from 30 lessons, each of which lasted 45 minutes. My analysis of 30 lessons delivered by the six teachers suggested a common pattern of teaching sequences across the

three schools. Each of the six teachers' 45-minute lessons consisted of three broad stages of teaching which I label *preparation, creating texts,* and *teachers' giving feedback*. This three-stage classification was informed by Brown's (1984) classification, which includes pre-writing, writing, and revising. The observational data showed that although not intentionally adopted by the teachers in this study, traces of the TLC were seen at the teachers' first stage of teaching, *preparation*, which was generally divided into three sub-stages – *lead-in, building topic knowledge,* and *text deconstruction.* The three broad stages of teaching provide a framework through which to view the five constituents of the instructional practice as detailed above, namely, students' and teachers' actions and interactions; teachers' backgrounds and beliefs that shape their instructional practices and their roles as well as their students'; classroom talk; and teaching materials or aids.

Table 6.1 summarises the teaching sequences of a 45-minute lesson that all the teachers shared. Significant variations were not found across the urban, suburban and rural cases during the timeframe of the data collection phase. Detailed analysis of each teaching stage is provided in the following sections.

Table 6.1

Instructional Practices of English Writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools

Instructional practices of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools					
Teaching sequence of a 45-minute lesson					
1.Preparation				2. Creating texts	3.Teachers' giving feedback
a. Lead-in	b. Building topic knowledge	c. Text deconstruction		- Students produced texts mainly by doing controlled/ guided tasks from the textbooks. - Mainly individual work	- Teachers asked one or two students to go to the board and wrote their texts. -Teachers gave their feedback on what was written on the board, focusing on word and sentence level.
- Teachers introduced the purpose of the lesson through short dialogues.	- Teachers activated students' prior knowledge about vocabulary and/or grammar.	- Teachers guided learners to deconstruct the model texts in the textbooks in terms of organisation, vocabulary and/or grammar.			

6.2.1 Stage 1: Preparation

6.2.1.1 Lead-in

At the first sub-stage of preparation, all six teachers introduced the purpose of the lesson through short dialogues. In these conversations at the beginning of the class, the teachers introduced the lesson by either relating the broad theme of a unit with the writing topic to be learned, or establishing a link between learners and the writing topic as shown in excerpt 6.1 (grade 8) and excerpt 6.2 (grade 9) below. All the teachers started the dialogue with "Today we learn how to…" in Vietnamese (first language) to introduce the purpose of lesson. This stage generally ranged from three to five minutes.

What the teachers did at this sub-stage was similar to what Scrivener (2012) called *lead-in*. Lead-in is used to describe an activity at the beginning of a lesson that aims to set a good atmosphere, or establish contact with students and then get onto the lesson focus. Jingxia and Jing's (2013) review on lead-in shows a similar definition. Lead-in, as Jingxia and Jing indicated, is usually brief at the beginning of a new lesson and aims to attract students' attention, arouse their interest, help to clarify the purpose of the lesson, and establish a communicative link between the learners and the information about to be presented. Strategies used for lead-in vary and may include dialogues, discussions, storytelling, and multi-media (pictures, videos, etc.). The term *lead-in* has been chosen because the six teachers' introductory activities were usually brief and served similar purposes, as detailed in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 6.1 (Observational data, T9-rural-grade 8, unit 1)

T: Chủ đề bài 1 là gì nào? What's unit 1? (What is the theme of unit 1? What's unit 1?)

SS [chorally]: My friends [*My friends* is the title of unit 1]

T: Yes, **hôm nay chúng ta học mô tả bạn.** Now open your books, page 15. (Yes, **today we learn how to describe our friends**. Now open your books, page 15).

In excerpt 6.1, the dialogue introducing the purpose of the lesson ended with "Today we learn how to…" in Vietnamese. Here, T9-rural-grade 8 led her class to the writing topic to be learned simply by relating it with the theme of unit 1. This interaction serves no purpose other than to lead students to the lesson about to be presented. This opening interaction differs from the interaction presented in excerpt 6.2 below.

Excerpt 6.2 (Observational data, T3-urban-grade 9, unit 3)

T: Have you been on a picnic, S1?

S1: No, I haven't

T: What about you? Have you been on a picnic, S2?

S2: Yes

T: Where did you go?

S2: I went to Dat Do

T: Who did you go with?

S2: With my friends

T: [T turned to the class] Một số bạn chắc cũng có đi dã ngoại giống S2. **Hôm nay mình học cách kể lại chuyến dã ngoại**. (Some of you might have had a picnic like S1. **Today we learn how to retell a picnic.**)

In excerpt 6.2, T3-urban-grade 9 introduced the lesson by establishing a link between the learner and the writing topic by posing questions such as *Have you been on a picnic? Where did you go? Who did you go with?* Getting learners to talk about their personal experience is seen as a good way to promote their use of language (Kalantzis et al., 2016). However, after receiving short answers from the student, T3-urban-grade 9 did not expand the student's story to create more opportunity for his language use. Instead, she introduced the purpose of the lesson and ended the conversation with "Today we learn how to …" in Vietnamese.

To sum up, lead-in in this context focused on introducing the purpose of lessons. Both excerpts 6.1 and 6.2 above reveal that the teachers completely stayed in control of the dialogues and did not invite much interaction from students at this sub-stage. The next sub-stage is building topic knowledge, which included activating students' prior knowledge that mostly focused on building knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

6.2.1.2 Building Topic Knowledge

At the second sub-stage of preparation, after introducing the lesson, the teachers provided their students with vocabulary and/or grammatical items relevant to the writing topic by activating their prior knowledge via teacher-designed activities that were not included in the textbook. Prior

knowledge refers to experience, information and skills previously acquired (Hertzberg, 2015). Specifically, in this study, prior knowledge was concerned mainly with the knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar the students had learned.

After reviewing models of teaching writing (e.g. Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Gibbons, 2015; Hammond, 2001; Hedgcock, 2012; Hyland, 2016), I borrowed the term *building topic knowledge* from literature on the TLC to name the second sub-stage of the *preparation* stage, since what the teachers did had some relevance to this notion. *Building topic knowledge* or *building the field* was described by Gibbons (2015) as focusing on building content knowledge about the topic. The aim of this stage is to make sure that learners have enough *background knowledge of the topic* to be able to write about it and to *develop its associated language*. My notion of building topic knowledge involves building the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar relevant to the topic, which is part of building the field in this EFL context. It is similar to the notion of *building topic knowledge* or *building the field* from the TLC in the sense that it aims to develop learners' *language associated with the topic*. However, it does not emphasise building background knowledge about the topic; that is, ideas to write about the topic by collecting relevant information through listening, reading, and researching, because the teachers did not focus on this.

The stage of building topic knowledge normally ranged from 10 to 15 minutes. When providing learners with relevant vocabulary and grammar items through elicitation techniques, two teachers, T4-urban-grade 8 and T12-suburban-grade 9, sometimes used translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014; Jones & Lewis, 2014) as a tool to mediate this activity. Illustrative examples are presented in the following sections.

6.2.1.2.1. Provision of Relevant Vocabulary and Grammar Items

At the stage of building topic knowledge, the teachers elicited relevant vocabulary and/or grammar items from their students mainly through initiation-response-feedback (IRF) interaction (Mehan, 1979) between the teacher and the whole class or between the teacher and nominated students. In this research study, nominated students were usually those who volunteered to give answers by putting up their hands. (Students stood to answer their teacher's questions.)

Excerpt 6.3 demonstrates the way the teachers activated their learners' prior learning related to vocabulary through an IRF interaction between the teacher and nominated students. This excerpt occurred in T9-rural-grade 8's class, unit 1, in which the students learned how to describe a friend. The teacher elicited adjectives used to describe a person's appearance and characters. (Students had learned some *appearance* and *character* adjectives in previous lessons.)

Excerpt 6.3 (Observational data, T9-rural-grade 8, unit 1)

1 T: Tell me adjectives for appearance, S1

2 S1: Tall, slim, thin, fat, short [T wrote these words on the board while S1 was saying them. After five words, she said 'OK' to interrupt S1 and signaled S1 to sit down.]

3 T: What are adjectives for characters, S2?

4 S2: Kind and generous [T wrote these words on the board while S2 were saying them]

5 T: What else? […] S3

6 S3: outgoing and reserved [T wrote *outgoing, reserved* on the board].

7 T: Now, let's talk about hair.

In excerpt 6.3, T9-rural-grade 8 initiated the exchange by eliciting *appearance* adjectives (line 1). The nominated student, S1, responded by listing some English adjectives (line 2). The teacher offered implicit feedback by writing the student's answer on the board, which showed her approval for the answer. Noticeably, while S1 was contributing ideas, the teacher interrupted him by saying 'OK' and started a new initiation to elicit *character* adjectives from another student (line 3). This was possibly partly due to time constraints. In the post-observation interview, when responding to the question related to obstacles to teaching writing, T9-rural-grade 8, together with the other teachers, complained about limited teaching time and the content overload of the textbook:

> I have about 20-25 minutes for instruction, 10-15 minutes for student writing and 5-10 minutes for giving feedback, only 45 minutes to teach a text type. I have to try to finish everything within one 45-minute writing session [one observed lesson]. Next writing session deals with a completely new text type. The class time is limited but the textbook requires learners to master too many text types. (Phase 3 interview, T9-rural-grade 8)

The activity presented in excerpt 6.3 above aimed to teach vocabulary to describe a friend, which was part of the content or topic knowledge of unit 1. It could be seen as a scaffolding activity in the sense that it reminded the students of vocabulary items necessary for their subsequent writing; that is, describing their friend. It was particularly useful for those who forgot what they had learned in previous lessons. However, T9-rural-grade 8 did not draw on her students' experience to elicit how to describe a person, for example, by asking 'how would you describe a person?' Instead, she imposed on her students a way of describing a person by eliciting adjectives used to describe a person's appearance, characteristics, and hair, which were suggested by the textbook. The practice of not drawing on learners' prior experience was also seen in the other teachers' classes.

In addition to vocabulary, the teachers sometimes provided scaffolding in terms of grammar. For example, when instructing their students to write a narrative story; that is, a folk tale (unit 4, grade 8) or a personal recount (unit 3, grade 9), all the teachers asked some learners to go to the board and write the simple past form of the verbs that occurred in the controlled practice. (The students learned the simple past tense at lower grades, but the simple past form of some verbs might have been new to them.) When a student could not write the simple past form of a verb, the teacher elicited the answer from the whole class as illustrated in excerpt 6.4.

Excerpt 6.4 took place in T3-urban-grade 9's class when the teacher instructed the students to write a personal recount. She asked five students to go to the board; each wrote simple past forms of two verbs (take, walk, go, lay, catch, play, enjoy, gather, arrive, run). She then checked the students' answers with the whole class.

Excerpt 6.4 (Observational data, T3-urban-grade 9, unit 3)
1   T: Look at the board, *go – went*, right or wrong, class?
2   SS: Right [some said *right*] wrong [some others said *wrong*]
3   T: Right, *lay – layed*, right or wrong?
4   SS: [silence]
5   T: Wrong, *laid* [T wrote *laid* on the board] *catch*, now help your friend.
      What is the simple past form of *catch*?

6   SS: caught

7   T: Yes [T wrote *caught* on the board]

Excerpt 6.4 is an example of the IRF interaction between the teacher and the whole class: teacher initiation (e.g. line 1), student response (e.g. line 2) and teacher feedback (e.g. line 3). Through this activity, the teacher helped the learners to recall the simple past form of the verbs they had learned and provided the simple past form of the verbs that might be new to the students (e.g. lay-laid, line 3). This was important content of unit 3. This scaffolding activity supported the learners to use the simple past tense of verbs when doing the controlled practice in the textbook.

Apart from the dominant IRF interactions that reveal a teacher's authority over the learning process, peer interaction, particularly group work, was sometimes used for vocabulary elicitation by one participant, T13-suburban-grade 8. For example, in unit 3 of room description, she used pictures to elicit words from learners. She divided the class into four groups of seven or eight students and showed four pictures, each of a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. (Desks were rearranged to make it convenient for group work. After the English class, the students had to return desks to the original arrangement, since they had to learn another subject with a different teacher in the same room.) She gave each group a picture and asked them to work in groups, naming household items (e.g. chairs) and parts of the room (e.g. windows). After that, one member of each group stuck the paper with their answers on the board.

In this activity, T13-suburban-grade 8 drew on individual students' prior knowledge to build one another's knowledge of the topic-specific content. By putting students in groups, she created an opportunity for the learners to contribute their ideas to the lesson through group work, thus promoting their learner autonomy (Ur, 2012). As I observed them, most of the students seemed engaged in contributing their words to the group list, which helped the vocabulary lists grow. Group discussion, together with pictures and seating rearrangement, were used as tools to mediate this teacher's activity of providing vocabulary relevant to the writing topic. In this case, group work, a scaffolding tool for promoting talk and learning from a sociocultural perspective, supported vocabulary development.

Unlike in excerpt 6.3, which shows T9-rural-grade 8 choosing three students, possibly those she knew would have sufficient vocabulary to share, T13-suburban-grade 8 elicited vocabulary from the whole class, and the students as a group supported each other to finish the task assigned by their teacher. However, this collaborative activity occurred only occasionally in her class due to the inconvenience caused by the teacher-fronted classroom organisation.

> In my opinion, groupwork is very suitable for brainstorming activity, but I just sometimes use it because seat rearrangement takes times (Phase 3 interview, T13-suburban-grade 8).

At this stage of building topic knowledge, traces of translanguaging were also found in the classes of T4-urban-grade 8 and T12-suburban-grade 9 when these teachers elicited vocabulary from their students. I will now elaborate on this.

6.2.1.2.2 The Use of Translanguaging

Tranlanguaging, as presented in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework), initially refers to a pedagogical practice where two languages were used purposefully concurrently in a bilingual classroom (García & Wei, 2014). It is "a process of establishing meaning, shaping experiences and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Jones & Lewis, 2014, p. 141). It advocates for the use of learners' entire linguistic repertoire in L2 learning (García & Wei, 2014). In this study, translanguaging referred to the process of establishing meaning through the use of two languages, most often simultaneously (Jones & Lewis, 2014). It was primarily concerned with building topic-specific vocabulary. An example is presented in excerpt 6.5, which occurred in T4-urban-grade 8's unit 1 class when the students learned how to describe their friend. T4-urban-grade 8 used an activity called the *guessing game* (which she designed herself) to activate her students' prior knowledge about adjectives denoting appearance. She explained an English adjective in Vietnamese and provided one or two first letters of the adjective in English. The students tried to work out what the adjective was. (None of the five adjectives she introduced were provided in the grade 8 textbook.)

Excerpt 6.5 (Observational data, T4-urban-grade 8, unit 1)

1 T: Bây giờ mình chơi đoán từ. Cô giải thích nghĩa từ tiếng Anh bằng tiếng Việt và cho một hoặc hai chữ cái đầu của từ tiếng Anh. Các em đoán đó là từ gì nhe. Do you understand? (Now we play a guessing game. I explain an adjective in Vietnamese and

give one or two first letters of the adjective in English. You try to guess what word it is. Do you understand?)

2 SS: Yes

3 T: Từ này nghĩa là 'hơi mập', 'thân hình tròn trịa'. It starts with P-L… What word is it? (The word means 'slightly fast', 'round body'. It starts with P-L… What word is it?)

4 SS: …[silence]

5 T: Plump. [T wrote *plump* on the board] Từ thứ hai nghĩa là 'rất gầy'. It starts with S…

6 What word is it? (The second word means 'very thin'. It starts with S… What word is it?)

7 SS: …Skinny

8 T: Good

In excerpt 6.5, T4-urban-grade 8 used translanguaging as a tool to mediate her students' knowledge of vocabulary and content. When processing the teacher's prompts in both Vietnamese and English simultaneously, her students successfully retrieved the related word in English, *skinny* (line 7). They did not know the English word *plump*, so the teacher's explanation in Vietnamese helped them retrieve the meaning of this word (lines 3-5).

It is worth mentioning here that L1 was used at the beginning of this excerpt to provide instructions for the game. The use of L1 for instruction was practised as a routine in this study. According to the teachers, the 8th or 9th graders had low levels of proficiency in English because they had officially started to learn English just two or three years previously. Therefore, the teachers strongly believed that L1 use was necessary to mediate learners' understanding and reduce their anxiety.

> My students have officially learned English for only two years, so they do not know much English. As an EFL learner, I used to be nervous when I did not understand my teacher. I often use Vietnamese for complex instructions or explanations to help them understand what I say and make them feel comfortable. However, I also try to use English as much as possible because I know this is an English class, not a Vietnamese class. (Phase 3 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

Excerpt 6.6 is another example of translanguaging that occurred in T12-suburban-grade 9's class when she instructed her students how to write an argumentative paragraph about secondary students wearing

uniforms. In this excerpt, she elicited from the whole class some English words related to this writing topic.

Excerpt 6.6 (Observational data, T12-suburban-grade 9, unit 2)

1 T: Do you like uniform, S1?

2 S1: Yes

3 T: Why?

4 S1: because it's comfortable.

5 T: Ok, comfortable [T wrote on the board: comfortable] Còn lý do gì nữa nè? [the class
6 was silent] Do you know *rich* or *poo*r? *Rich* là mình có nhiều tiền. *Poor* là mình có ít
7 tiền. Cho dù em giàu hay nghèo, khi là học sinh, em phải mặc đồng phục. Việc mặc đồng
8 phục làm cho học sinh cảm thấy **equal**. What does 'equal' mean? (Any other reasons? [the
   class was silent] Do you know *rich* or *poo*r? *Rich* means you have a lot of money. *Poor*
   means you have a little money. Whether you are rich or poor, as a student, you have to
   wear uniform. Therefore, wearing uniform helps students feel **equal**. What does 'equal'
   mean?)

9 SS: bình đẳng (equal)

10 T: Yes [T wrote on the board: *rich/poor→equal*]

In excerpt 6.6, T12-suburban-grade 9 provided a long explanation for the word *equal* and ended it with a sentence using both Vietnamese and English *việc mặc đồng phục làm cho học sinh cảm thấy* **equal** (wearing uniform helps students feel **equal).** Drawing on their teacher's explanation in Vietnamese, the students successfully retrieved the meaning of the English word *equal*.

In this context, translanguaging seemed to play an important role in building topic-specific vocabulary which is necessary for building topic knowledge. Being aware that their students had a low level of proficiency, the teachers used translanguaging to mediate the students' understanding that supported the teaching of vocabulary. Data presented above show that building topic knowledge in this context focused on providing linguistic resources alone, not on developing background knowledge of the topic (Derewianka & Jones, 2016), which is essential for independent writing. Students need to have enough background knowledge of the topic to be able to write about it (Gibbon, 2015; Zammit & Tan, 2016). In this research context, the process of gathering information on the topic through different channels

such as listening, reading or researching was not observed. In other words, scaffolding for ideas to write about was not considered.

6.2.1.3 Text Deconstruction

Deconstruction is described by Derewianka and Jones (2016) as breaking up a text in terms of context (purpose, audience) and genre features, which are organisational patterns, vocabulary, and grammatical features. In the third and final sub-stage of preparation, the teachers focused on breaking up model texts provided by the textbook. For this study, the notion of text deconstruction refers to deconstructing a text which focuses on organisational patterns and vocabulary, particularly formulaic chunks. Formulaic chunks, according to Ziafar (2016), are fixed or semi-fixed expressions such as 'Yours faithfully', 'In conclusion'. The notion of text deconstruction in this study does not include analysing a text in terms of the purpose and audience of the text, as the teachers' analysis of model texts did not focus on this. This stage generally lasted 10 to 15 minutes, during which traditional IRF interaction continued to be dominant. The teacher was the knowledge provider and students were passive knowledge receivers, thus offering evidence of the roles the teachers and students played in this study. At this stage, all the teachers relied on the textbooks for their teaching content and instructions. The analysis of this stage revealed two emergent themes: text-oriented analysis and reliance on the textbook as a mediating tool.

6.2.1.3.1 Text-oriented Analysis

At the stage of text deconstruction, the teachers guided their students to analyse the model text provided by the textbook. The analysis of model texts aimed to help the learners identify textual aspects of a text without mentioning its context. From a functional perspective, there are two kinds of context: context of culture, and context of situation (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). The context of culture refers to the broad cultural context within which we use language for purposes such as explaining and recounting. The context of situation is concerned with who is involved, what is happening and what channel of communication is used, for example, spoken or written. Our language choices are made in response to the cultural context and the particular context of a situation within that culture (Derewianka & Jones, 2016).

Excerpt 6.7 occurred in T4-urban-grade 8's unit 5 writing session, in which students were instructed to write a *personal* letter. In this unit, the textbook provided a model letter with a labelling exercise and guided practice using given phrases to write to a pen pal, as shown in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1

Labelling Exercise, Model text and Guided Practice (Unit 5, Grade 8)

1. Look at Hoa's letter to Tim. She wrote it at the end of term. Identify the sections. Label them with correct letter.

   A   Body of the letter
   B   Heading – writer's address and the date
   C   Closing – Your friend/ Regards/ Love
   D   Opening – Dear ... ,

   12 Tran Hung Dao St.
   Ha Noi
   February 10, 200...

   Dear Tim,

   Thanks for your letter. I'm pleased to hear you had an enjoyable Christmas vacation.

   We received our first semester report a few days ago. I got good grades for Science, English and History, but my math result was poor. My math teacher asked me to spend more time on it. I must study harder next semester.

   It is almost Tet. That's the Lunar New Year Festival in Viet Nam. I think I told you about it in my last letter. We're going to Hue tonight to celebrate the festival with my grandmother. I'll send you a postcard from there.

   Write soon and tell me all your news.

   Regards,
   Hoa

2. Now help Lan write a letter to her pen pal Donna in San Francisco. Use the information in the box.

   • Mother's Day
   • second semester report / last month
   • good grades / Geography / Physics / Math
   • teacher / tell / improve English / History
   • in a few weeks / Mid-Autumn Festival / moon festival
   • Ha Long Bay / aunt and uncle / bus / this afternoon
   • send you / postcard

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Excerpt 6.7 (Observational data, T4-urban-grade 8, unit 5)

1   T: Let's do task 1 on page 50. Look at the letter. [see Figure 6.1. T showed a wall chart

2   where the model letter was written] As you see, the letter is divided into four sections [T

3   pointed to markers on the wall chart]. Label these sections with A, B, C or D. Can you

4   read task 1, S1?

5   S1 [reading from the textbook]: A. body of the letter, B. heading-writer's address and the

6   date, C. closing-your friend/regards/love, D. opening-dear

7   T: Now label the sections of the letter with A, B, C or D. Do you understand?

8   SS: Yes

[The teacher asked one student to label the sections of the letter on the wall chart, then checked the

answer with the whole class.]

9   T: Right or wrong, class?

10   SS: Right

11   T: Yes, *heading*, what does it mean, S2?

12   S2: dạ phần đầu thư (heading)

13   T: Yes, phần đầu thư phải viết địa chỉ người viết và ngày tháng. Em dùng *Dear* để mở

14   đầu lá thư. Em dùng dear trước tên ai đó, ví dụ *Dear Mary, Dear Thu*, hay là em có thể

15   nói *Dear Dad, Dear Mom*. Kế tiếp là phần nội dung thư, *body of the letter*. *Closing* là

16   phần kết thư. Em có thể dùng *your friend, regards or love* (Yes, *heading* includes the

writer's address and the date. To begin a letter, you use *Dear*. You use *Dear* before

someone's name, e.g. *Dear Mary, Dear Thu*, or you can say *Dear Dad, Dear Mom*. Next

is the content of your letter, *body of a letter*. *Closing* is to close a letter. You can use

your friend, regards or *love*). Do you understand?

17   SS [chorally]: Yes

18   T: Now look at task 2

Excerpt 6.7 begins as an exchange between the teacher and the whole class, and then becomes one

between the teacher and individual students nominated. It was structured according to the IRF

pattern. T4-urban-grade 8 initiated the conversation by posing questions (e.g. lines 9 and 11). The

students responded as requested. Their responses did not go beyond answering their teacher's

questions or further exploring the issue being discussed (e.g. lines 10 and 12), and the teacher

offered feedback by saying 'yes' (e.g. lines 11 and 13). In this excerpt, T4-urban-grade 8 used English to guide her students to do a labelling exercise from the textbook that helped them identify the overall structure of an informal letter. She then switched to Vietnamese to again explain the organisation of the letter and introduce language features, specifically salutation expressions (e.g. *Dear Mum, Dear Thu*) and closing expressions (e.g. *your friend, regards* or *love*). In this case, it seems that she used L1 to focus her students' attention on the overall structure and key language features of informal letters.

It may be seen from excerpt 6.7 that when mentioning informal opening and closing expressions (e.g. *Dear Mum, regards*), T4-urban-grade 8 did not emphasise these characteristics of informal letters or when to use informal style for letters, or that each type of letter has its own features. Rather, she emphasised that a letter has four parts – heading, opening, body, and closing. She did not explain that a letter written to your relatives, friends or a person you are close to is an informal letter that is usually characterised by contraction (e.g. *I'm*), incomplete sentences or informal language such as *Dear* plus *first name, thanks for, your friend/regards/love* etc. This suggests she focused on showing the learners how the text was structured but not on explaining why it was written this way. She did not guide the learners to think about for whom and for what purpose the letter was created. While the context for each text was implicitly included in the textbook, for example writing to a pen pal in San Francisco, the teachers did not draw the students' attention to the purpose and audience that shape a writer's language choices.

Socio-cultural rules underlying how a text is structured were not explained to the learners. It can be argued that T4-urban-grade 8 was not aware of the importance of equipping her students with socio-linguistic competence and discourse competence, which help to form communicative competence. Socio-linguistic competence is gained once learners possess knowledge of socio-cultural rules of using language appropriately in context (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Discourse competence is interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of socio-cultural rules of language use, which helps to produce unified texts in different genres (Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 2008). Therefore, providing learners with knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language use is important for helping them gain communicative competence, which is identified as the goal of English teaching as articulated in the curriculum and policy documents.

It is interesting to note that a similar procedure happened at the higher grade. Excerpt 6.8 occurred in T10-rural-grade 9's unit 4 writing session. In this unit, the textbook provided a formal letter of inquiry and guided practice based on an outline as shown in Figure 6.2. The outline shows the overall structure of the body of inquiry letters, which consists of four parts: introduction, request, further information, and conclusion.

Figure 6.2

Model Text and Guided Practice (Unit 4, Grade 9)

Unit 4: Learning a foreign language

6. WRITE

A letter of inquiry is a request for information or action. In all formal letters, you must include the addresses of the writer and the recipient.

25 Le Duan St., District 1
Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam
April 17th, 2003

Dear Sir,
I saw your school's advertisement in today's edition of the Viet Nam News.
I am interested in learning Vietnamese and I would like some information about your school.
I speak a little Vietnamese, but I want to learn to read and write it. Could you please send details of courses and fees? I can complete a spoken Vietnamese test if necessary.
I look forward to hearing from you.
Yours faithfully,

J. Robinson

John Robinson

a) Read this letter.

b) Read the advertisements in 5. READ again. Choose one of the schools you want to attend to improve your English. Write a letter of inquiry to the institution requesting for more information about the courses and fees. Follow the outline below.

	Outline
Introduction:	Say how you come to know about the Institution (advertisement on newspaper / watch on TV); express your interest (want to know more information).
Request:	State how good your English is; exactly what kind of information you want.
Further information:	Say you are ready to supply more information about your English / study (record of study) if necessary.
Conclusion:	End with a polite closing.

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T10-rural-grade 9 first introduced the overall structure of formal letters by asking her class to do a matching activity taken from the textbook (see Figure 6.3). She then asked one student to write the answer on the board. After checking the answer with the whole class, she explained how to organise the body of an inquiry letter using the outline provided in the textbook, as illustrated in excerpt 6.8.

Figure 6.3

T10-rural-grade 9's PowerPoint Slide 1 (Unit 4)

Excerpt 6.8 (Observational data, T10-rural-grade 9, unit 4)

1 T: Look at the screen [Figure 6.3] and match phrases on the left with phrases
2 on the right. Lớp nhìn màn hình, tìm cụm từ bên trái tương thích với cụm từ bên phải
   (Look at the screen and match phrases on the left with phrases on the right)

[After T10-rural-grade 9 asked one student to write the answer on the board, she corrected it with the whole class.]

3 T: Look at the board. 1-C, 2-D, 3-B, 4-D. Is it right, class?
4 SS: Yes
5 T: Right. Look at page 37. [T read the guidelines as shown in Figure 6.2 above]
6 *Introduction: Say how you come to know about the institution (e.g. advertisement*
7 *on newspaper/watch on TV); express your interest (want to know more information).*
8 How did the writer of the letter know the school's advertisement, S1?
9 S1: He saw the school's advertisement in today's edition of Viet Nam News.
10 T: Yes, how did he express his interest, S2? What sentence?
11 S2 [reading from the letter]: I am interested in learning Vietnamese and I would like
12 some information about your school.

13   T: Right, so, this is **introduction**, do you understand? **Request** [T read the guidelines in

14   the textbook] *state how good your English is and exactly what kind of information you*

15   *want.* What part of the letter tells you this information, S3?

16   S3 [reading from the letter]: I speak a little Vietnamese but I want to learn to read and

17   write it. Could you please send details of courses and fees?

18   T: Yes.

(…)

19   T: [reading the guidelines in the textbook] *Conclusion ends with a polite closing*. What

20   part of the letter is **conclusion,** S4?

21   S4 [reading from the letter]: I look forward to hearing from you. Yours faithfully

22   T: Right, now look at the screen, please [Figure 6.4]. Đây là những cụm từ

23   các em cần dùng khi làm bài tập viết trong sách. Lớp nhớ là lá thư này có bốn phần, đó

24   là phần giới thiệu, phần đề nghị, phần cung cấp thêm thông tin và phần kết. Khi

25   viết mỗi phần của lá thư, các em có thể dùng các cấu trúc này. Để viết một câu yêu cầu,

26   các em dùng 'Could you please…'. Để kết thư, các em dùng 'I look forward to hearing

27   from you' và 'Yours faithfully' (These are expressions you need to use when doing the

writing task in your textbook. Remember that the body of the letter has four parts, i.e.

introduction, request, further information and conclusion. When writing each part of the

letter, you can use these structures. To make a request, you use 'Could you please..'. To

close the letter, you use 'I look forward to hearing from you' and 'Yours faithfully'.)

Figure 6.4

T10-rural-grade 9's PowerPoint Slide 2 (Unit 4)

1-Introduction,
*I saw/heard/watched …. in
  newspapers/ on TV ,…
*I am interested in learning….
2-Request
I speak a little ……. But I want to
  learn to read/write…….
Could you please….. …..fees.
3-Further information,
I can complete a test/supply my
  school report/….if necessary
4-Conclusion,
I look forward to hearing from you
Yours faithfully

Excerpt 6.8 is also an IRF interaction between the teacher and the whole class and then between the teacher and the nominated students. T10-rural-grade 9 asked questions to initiate the dialogue (e.g. lines 3 and 8); the nominated students answered her questions (e.g. lines 4 and 9) and she said 'right' or 'yes' as feedback (e.g. lines 5 and 10). At the beginning of the excerpt, she used English and then translated what she had said into Vietnamese to instruct her students to do the matching activity (lines 1-2). The use of translation in this case seems unnecessary because the instruction *match phrases on the left with phrases on the right* had been used several times in the previous lessons. Therefore, the use of translation in this case did not aid meaning making. This was usually seen in the rural and suburban cases where the teachers tended to translate their English instructions for writing tasks (e.g. filling in the gaps, using these given words to write), even though they had been used previously.

After introducing the overall structure of the formal letter through a matching activity, T10-rural-grade 9 used English questions to guide her students to identify the components of inquiry letters. Next, she focused her students' attention on language features by presenting a writing frame (Figure 6.4) that included some sentences from the text (e.g. I saw/heard…in newspapers, I am interested in learning….) or formulaic chunks (e.g. Could you please…..?, I look forward to….,Yours faithfully). Like T4-urban-grade 8 (excerpt 6.7 above), T10-rural-grade 9 switched to Vietnamese at the end of the excerpt to re-mention the organisation and to highlight key language features of the model letter (lines 22-27). She seemed to use Vietnamese as a tool to make her initial instructions in English more comprehensible to the students.

It may be seen from excerpt 6.8 that T10-rural-grade 9's questions did not explicitly take the context of the text into consideration. Questions like *What is the purpose of the text? Where have you seen a text like this before?* and *Who is the intended reader or audience?* were not discussed. She did not compare this letter of inquiry with the personal letter that her students had learned at grade 8 to help them see the various language choices required for different purposes and audiences. For example, while letters of inquiry use formal language such as *Dear Sir*, *Could you please.., I look forward to.., Yours faithfully,* personal letters use informal language such as *Dear* plus *first name* or *Love*. This suggests that T10-rural-grade 9 was not aware of the importance of

guiding the students to identify the connection between language choices and the context of the text.

It is important to mention that because genres are specific to particular cultures (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Hyland, 2007), L1 and L2 texts of the same genre may vary. In this case, the salutations of English and Vietnamese formal letters are completely different. In English formal letters, the salutation can be *Dear Sir/Madam*, or *Dear* plus the addressee's **surname** and title, depending on the context of situation. However, the salutation of Vietnamese formal letters includes *Dear* plus the addressee's **full name** and title. In Vietnamese culture, a surname alone is never used to address someone. Excerpt 6.8 shows that when adopting a text-oriented approach, T10-rural-grade 9 missed the teaching of appropriate language use based on the context. She could have strengthened the students' sociolinguistic competence by highlighting the differences in L1 and L2 salutation. Learners' unawareness of how such differences in language choices are influenced by the context of the text would result in their failure in written communication. The evidence presented above confirms that T10-rural-grade 9 did not equip her students with the socio-cultural rules of language use that form sociolinguistic and discourse competence, integral parts of communicative competence.

In this activity, T10-rural-grade 9 used IT to present a matching activity and provide important expressions she took from the model letter. IT was used to replace traditional tools such as chalk and board, rather than to create an interactive and engaging learning environment. This is also how T3-urban-grade 9 and T13-suburban-grade 8 used IT. (In this study, IT was used occasionally by one teacher per school.)

Like T10-rural-grade 9 and T4-urban-grade 8, the other teachers analysed model texts but focused on textual features without considering the purposes and audiences of the texts. Accordingly, the relationship between language choices and the context of each text or the socio-cultural context of the language use were not discussed. The analysis of observational data at the preparation stage shows that the teachers saw writing as a 'textual product' (Hyland, 2016) that focuses on the linguistic aspects of writing. This is quite consistent with all the teachers' beliefs in teaching writing, as expressed in the phase 1 interview, that in order to have a successful writing class,

teachers should carefully prepare learners for writing by showing them how to organise a text and providing relevant vocabulary and grammatical items.

> Writing is demanding, so teaching writing is difficult. To be able to write, students must have good command of grammar and vocabulary and know how to organise ideas. When preparing learners to write, the teacher needs to instruct them how to organise ideas and provide them with linguistic resources to write. (Phase 1 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

The teaching of organisational patterns and key language features is helpful to Vietnamese learners because they have little exposure to English texts outside the classrooms and because L2 learning results from conscious noticing (Ellis, 2005). Schmidt (2001) claimed that L2 acquisition is mainly driven by what L2 learners notice or consciously pay attention to in the target language input. At this stage, the teachers scaffolded their learners' writing in terms of linguistic aspects through the use of a model text provided by the textbook. However, this was insufficient because writing is not just a technical skill (Street, 2006) or a textual product (Hyland, 2016), it is also social in nature – to achieve their communicative purposes, writers must use appropriate language to meet their readers' expectations (Bracewell & Witte, 2008; Hyland 2007).

What is important to note here is that T10-rural-grade 9 and T4-urban-grade 8 participated in the 2017 teacher training course (provided by the NFL Project) before classroom observations occurred. In this course, the genre-based approach was introduced to the trainees (see Section 5.3.2). However, these two teachers' views of writing remained the same as those of the other teachers, who had not taken part in the 2017 course. In the phase 3 interview, T10-rural-grade 9 and T4-urban-grade 8 said that they did not understand what had been taught because the course was too theoretical and overloaded with knowledge. Consequently, they did not apply what they had learned to their teaching:

> We were overwhelmed with a 'sea of knowledge'. Trainees should be given enough time to 'chew' and 'digest' the knowledge provided. We were not given learning materials to read at home before the lessons. In class, the instructor went through the slides very fast. I was not clear about what he said. Therefore, I did not apply what was taught to my teaching. (Phase 3 interview, T10-rural-grade 9)

Honestly, I did not apply what was taught to my teaching. The lesson was too theoretical. The instructor went through slide by slide. We just sat there and listened to him. After the course, nothing was left in my mind. I think the instruction should have been more specific, for example, the instructor should demonstrate how to teach writing by taking one lesson from the textbook we are using to illustrate the theories he provided. (Phase 3 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

6.2.1.3.2 Reliance on the Textbook as a Mediating Tool

At the stage of text deconstruction, all the teachers relied on the textbook for their teaching content. They introduced to their students only one model text provided by the textbook. This meant that their students were not exposed to a wide range of texts, from which they could have learned different ways of expressing communicative purposes. The use of only one model text limited the learners' linguistic resources and did not help them to see how a text can vary in relation to its purpose and audience. Noticeably, when the textbook did not provide model texts, the stage of text deconstruction was skipped. This happened in unit 3, grade 9. When the textbook only provided outlines, for example, in unit 1, grade 9, the teachers used these to explain organisational patterns. None of the six teachers brought other model texts into their classroom.

While five teachers stuck to the content available in the textbook, T3-urban-grade 9 sometimes offered her students information outside the textbook by introducing additional formulaic chunks. For example, in unit 4, which asked the students to write a letter of inquiry, she did not bring in a new model text but provided a list of formal requests for her students (e.g. *Could you please send…/ I would be grateful if you could../ I wonder if you could../Do you mind…)*. This gave her students more choices to vary their ways of expressing formal requests.

The data presented above show that in the preparation stage the teachers transmitted knowledge and the students played a limited role in constructing knowledge. The teachers' instructions clearly showed traces of the text-oriented approach: focused on teaching of the generic text structure, key vocabulary and other language features as content in preparation for students' writing. They treated these aspects as drilling, and thus IRF was dominant in the classroom interactions**.** Through the dominant use of traditional IRF interactions, the teachers controlled their classroom discourses.

The teachers' questions generally checked learners' existing knowledge, for instance, the question "Right or wrong?" as seen in excerpts 6.4 and 6.7, and elicited known answers to questions, for example, "What part of the letter is conclusion?" in excerpt 6.8. Open-ended questions to create space for the students to clarify their understanding, explore the lesson, or contribute their new ideas were not found at this stage. It seems that the teachers saw their students as receivers of knowledge rather than as co-constructors of knowledge. Besides, little interaction among learners was seen at this stage.

6.2.2 Stage 2: Creating Texts

Most of the instructional activities took place in the preparation phase, as detailed above. In the second stage, creating texts, the focus was on students creating short texts using the textbook tasks. The time spent on this stage generally ranged from 10 to 15 minutes. This section discusses the way the teachers organised their students' writing and relied on the textbook tasks.

6.2.2.1 The Use of Individual, Pair and Group Work

At the stage of creating texts, T12-suburban-grade 9, T4-urban-grade 8, and T3-urban-grade 9 made some changes to the ways they controlled their classes by offering their students more autonomy through the use of pair and group work. While T12-suburban-grade 9 asked her students to write in groups in all her classes, T4-urban-grade 8 and T3-urban-grade 9 used pair work for the controlled practice, and individual work for guided practice or independent practice. The other three teachers always asked their students to write individually. However, the use of peer interaction does not always enhance interaction and learning (Ur, 2012). This was seen in T12-suburban-grade 9's classes, where two common scenarios happened. One scenario was a student in a group focusing on writing and not talking to other students while those sitting close by copied down and those farther away chatted or looked around. The other scenario was two or three students sitting together discussing and writing while those distant from them chatted or looked around.

T12-suburban-grade 9 favoured group work because she believed that less competent students could not write on their own, and the more capable students would support them to write. She said:

> I suppose that weak students cannot write on their own. I put at least one good student in a group so that she or he can help slow students. However, there are few students who can

write well. Therefore, I divided the class into four groups of 8-9 students. (Phase 3 interview, T12-suburban-grade 9)

From a sociocultural perspective, group work is generally believed to scaffold and support students (Hanjani and Li, 2014; Yong, 2010). However, the observational data showed that contrary to T12-suburban-grade 9's expectations, most of her students did not work together in their groups and the more competent students did not support the less able ones. In this case, there are three possible reasons for ineffective groupwork. First, the teacher-fronted seat arrangement and the big size of the group made it hard for students to talk to each other. T12-suburban-grade 9 did not rearrange the seats. Her students tried to gather around but some remained seated and others stood to form a circle. Second, the students might not have been used to working in groups; therefore, they might not have known what to do and how to work in groups. Third, they might not have been interested in the writing task.

Five teachers reported ineffectiveness as one of the four reasons they sometimes or never used pair or group work in their classes. The other reasons were the need to focus on individual assessment, the time required for group work, and the noise generated by group work.

> I suppose that group work is time-consuming. Different students may have different ideas. It takes time for students to discuss and reach agreement in groups. In addition, it also takes time to rearrange seats while my teaching time is limited. (Phase 3 interview, T3-urban-grade 9)

> The class time is limited. Students need to work on tests individually. Therefore, with limited time, I chose to use individual work because I want to see learners create texts on their own. If I had more time, I would use pair/group work before individual work. (Phase 3 interview, T13-suburban-grade 8)

> When the textbook provides both controlled and guided or independent practice, I first ask my students to do controlled practice in pairs. Pair work helps them to do the task more quickly, so I can have more time for guided practice or independent practice. Then I ask them to do guided or independent practice individually. I think they need practice in

creating texts by themselves because they have to write individually for assessment. (Phase 3 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

In my experience, pair or group work is not effective. When working in pairs/groups, few students work collaboratively; most of them chat or turn to individual work after the first few minutes of working together. This makes big noise and may influence the next-door class because the classrooms are not soundproof. (Phase 3 interview, T9-rural-grade 8)

It is interesting that the teachers' experiences and beliefs influenced their choice of peer interaction at the stage of creating texts. While T13-suburban-grade 8 used group discussion for brainstorming at the stage of building topic knowledge, she preferred to use individual work at the stage of creating text because she supposed that students had to write individually on tests. Two teachers from the rural school did not use pair and group work because of their negative experience of peer interaction caused by noise and students' resistance to collaborative activity. However, unlike their rural counterparts, two teachers from the urban school found pair work useful in that it helped learners do the controlled practice faster, and thus have more time for guided or independent practice. Like T13-suburban-grade 8, these urban teachers preferred to use individual work for guided or independent practice because learners need to write individually in examinations, and because group work is time-consuming (partly caused by teacher-fronted seating arrangement). Despite the challenges of using group work, T12-suburban-grade 9 favoured group work because she strongly believed that less competent students could not write in English on their own. It can be argued that the teachers interpreted and responded to the innovation, promoting learner-centred approach through pair and group work, in their individual ways; and these ways related to their existing beliefs and personal experience about students and their group work practices. In other words, the teachers' cognition shaped their instructional choices, and this signals the potential for further research on teacher cognition, an area of study that remains scarce as indicated by Borg (2015).

To sum up, although collaborative activities such as pair and group work are generally considered as a useful tool to mediate learning because learning happens through interaction with other people (Vygotsky, 1978), in this research context, collaborative activities did not often enhance learning.

Possible reasons for this include unfamiliarity with collaborative activities, particularly group work, disengaging tasks and the traditional design of classrooms unconducive to group work.

6.2.2.2 Reliance on the Textbook as a Mediating Tool

All six teachers asked students to do only the writing tasks provided in the textbook, which were predominantly decontextualised. This provides more evidence that writing in this study was isolated from the context. Most of the writing tasks of grade 8 and grade 9 textbooks, as mentioned in Section 5.3.1.1, were controlled and guided practice, such as completing sentences or writing using words/ideas cues, or outlines. According to the teachers, most of the writing tasks asked students to write for reasons that were irrelevant or meaningless to them. In the post-observation interviews, the teachers reported:

> I think the task of unit 4 is not realistic. Nobody writes a letter to a school to ask about the information of a language course and tuition fee. Another example is that in unit 6, students are asked to write to the head of the local authorities to report on the wrong way of catching fish in the lake behind their houses because this is harmful to the environment. My students live in the city. They have no ideas of using electricity to catch fish. (Phase 3 interview, T3-urban-grade 9)

> I do not understand why we have to instruct the 8th graders to take a business phone message. It is hard for them to understand a business message clearly, so I do not think they are interested in it. (Phase 3 interview, T9-rural-grade 8)

Although discontent with the textbook tasks, none of the teachers changed these tasks because of reasons related to *time* and *the prescribed textbook*:

> I can bring new activities or tasks into the classroom, but I first have to finish what is included in the textbook. However, 45 minutes is sometimes not enough to finish the writing tasks of a unit, let alone outside tasks. (Phase 3 interview, T10-rural-grade 9)

The excerpts immediately above reveal that the teachers had no autonomy in terms of what to teach, and that the limited class time and the prescribed textbook allowed for little or no textbook

adaptation. Besides, the teachers admitted that adapting the textbook or designing new tasks or activities was time consuming when they already did not have much time for lesson planning.

> It takes time to think about how to adapt the textbook or design new tasks. We have a lot to do, administrative paperwork, marking test papers, etc. If I bring in a new activity or task, I must make sure it does not take much time so that I can finish the content covered in the textbook. Therefore, it is much more convenient for me to use the available tasks in the textbook and finish the lesson as required. (Phase 3 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

> I have 15 teaching periods per week. Apart from reporting on weekly teaching schedules, as a form teacher, I have to write plans for class management, write students' report cards, entered the final results of all subjects in each students' academic record and so on. Sometimes I have to help my class with the activities to celebrate special events such as camping for the foundation of Youth Union or music performance for Vietnamese New Year. Besides, I have a second job at a private English teaching center after school hours. Therefore, I do not have much time for lesson planning. (Phase 3 interview, T13-suburban-grade 8)

A noteworthy point from T13-suburban-grade 8's response is that she had a second job. It was revealed through informal talks with the teachers that due to low teacher pay, each of the six teachers had a second (casual) job to support their family. It can be seen from the teachers' responses that although they were allowed to adapt the textbook, limited time inside and outside the class discouraged them from adapting the textbook. However, one teacher, T13-suburban-grade 8 *occasionally* tried to make the writing activity more meaningful to her students. For instance, in preparation for independent practice, the second task of unit 3; that is, describing a room, she asked each of the students to draw their favourite room at home because she knew that learners had drawn a room in their arts class. In the writing session of unit 3, after the students did the first task of completing sentences individually, she asked her students to share their pictures in groups, then to describe their favourite room individually, using their pictures. This activity, as observed, looked engaging; students looked interested to share their pictures. In the post-observation interview, T13-suburban-grade 8 explained why she asked her students to draw their favourite rooms.

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I know my students learned to draw a room in their arts class. I want to bring something new into classroom, hoping that this makes the class more interesting and motivate my students to write. (Phase 3 interview, T13-suburban-grade 8)

This activity drew on learners' experience and thus made learning more authentic (Kalantzis et al., 2016) by providing learners with a concrete picture to describe, which meant they were not describing without context. More importantly, the students described a picture they drew themselves, which was of their favourite room. Therefore, this activity was personally meaningful to the students, which might have motivated them to write and engaged them in learning. In addition, this task could support their language learning in a way that when describing their drawings, the students had to find the correct vocabulary to describe the room they had drawn. For example, if a student had painted their room yellow, she had to choose the correct English *colour* adjective to describe the colour of the room. This would consolidate what she had already learned or stimulate her to learn a new adjective by asking the teacher or peers, or by consulting a dictionary if she did not know the word *yellow*. Without the drawing, she might have chosen any colour adjective that came to mind. (It is noted here that when the students had just started to write, the school bell rang and T13-suburban-grade 8 had to ask them to stop and continue to write at home. However, she did not follow up by collecting the students' homework. This is explicated in Section 6.2.3.)

T13-suburban-grade 8 seemed to be concerned with authentic learning that taps into learners' lived experiences, is connected to their interests and needs, or replicates real-life tasks (Duke et al., 2006; Kalantzis et al., 2016). In the phase 4 interview, she stated that the 2018 training course introduced several exciting writing activities. However, she thought it was challenging to apply these activities to her teaching. This view was also shared by the three teachers who attended the 2018 training course.

I found many writing activities suggested by the 2018 training course exciting, for example, watching a video and then writing about what is shown in the video, writing diaries or designing a poster, etc. However, I think it is hard to apply these activities because the examination generally tests students on what is included in the textbook. I need to help my students to do well in the examination. Class time is limited. If I use these activities, I will

not be able to finish the content included in the textbook. (Phase 4 interview, T13-suburban-grade 8)

T13-suburban-grade 8's response reveals that examinations had a considerable influence on her following the textbook. It can be inferred that the teachers' reliance on the textbook may be caused partly by the examination, which focused on testing how much knowledge had been learned from the textbook.

In this research context, using mostly controlled and guided practice suggests that independent writing seemed unimportant. In the first semester when this study was conducted, independent practice, where learners apply what they have learned to the new situation without any types of support such as words/ideas cues or outlines (Lopez, 2012), was seen only in unit 2 and unit 3 of grade 8. This means that students were given little opportunity to practise using language independently. While controlled and guided practice are helpful in supporting learners to write, these activities alone do not give learners opportunities to negotiate meaning for real communication. In other words, it is hard for students to be competent at writing when they are exposed mainly to controlled and guided practice, which do not serve to develop creative, independent language use.

In summary, in this context the textbook was a dominant mediating tool. The teachers used only the writing tasks provided by the textbook although they found most of these tasks irrelevant or meaningless to their students. Since the textbook focused on controlled and guided practice, the teachers' reliance on the textbook offered the students little opportunity to practise using language independently and develop as creative writers. The teachers' dependence on the textbook resulted mainly from their lack of autonomy and busy life after school, and traditional examinations.

6.2.3 Stage 3: Teachers' Giving Feedback

In the final observed stage of instruction, all six teachers' writing sessions were similar in that the teachers nominated one or two students to write their responses to the textbook tasks onto the board, which took approximately three to five minutes, while other students wrote at their desks. The teachers then corrected these pieces of writing on the board. Although all students were asked to

participate in correcting mistakes in the writing pieces on the board, very few did, perhaps partly because this activity was done hastily within five to seven minutes, and/or because the students knew that their teachers would correct them and waited for their model answers. Therefore, this stage was dominated almost entirely by a teacher's monologue, with students listening and watching the teacher's correcting their peers' writing passively.

The teachers' feedback focused on correcting errors at the word and sentence level. None of the teachers commented on idea development. All six used direct correction; that is the teachers crossed out wrong choice of words or erroneous parts of sentences and provided the correct forms. Based on the writing sample(s) on the board, they then asked the students to correct their papers themselves if they had made similar mistakes. The whole class listened and made changes on their papers (if any). This suggests that corrected writing samples were used as models for the students to follow. In other words, imitation was seen as 'scaffolding strategy' (Mascolo, 2005) in this context.

L1 was used to mediate the activity of the teachers' giving feedback. The teachers used Vietnamese exclusively to explain and correct mistakes. The teachers could have used L1 for two possible reasons. First, it would take time to explain grammar in English, while the time available for teacher feedback was short. Second, it might be hard for students to understand these explanations in English because they had officially learned English only for two or three years at school and it was not used by most of them outside the classroom.

Figures 6.5 and 6.6 below are examples of what was written on the board for teacher correction. The observational data suggest that mimicking model texts in students' writing was a common practice; students followed model texts, outlines or words/ideas cues provided in the textbook. Figure 6.5 presents one student sample in the writing session of unit 5, grade 8. In this unit, students were asked to do only one guided practice, namely, writing to a pen pal in San Francisco. They were provided with *word cues*, for example, Mother's Day, second semester report, and last month, as shown earlier in Figure 6.1.

When comparing the student sample (Figure 6.5) with the model text (Figure 6.1), it was found that the student sample resembled the model text. The student replaced some phrases in the model text (underlined in the following excerpt) with word cues provided by the textbook (italicised) or by the student's own words (in bold). For example, the first two sentences of the model text, Thanks for your letter. I'm <u>pleased</u> to hear you had an <u>enjoyable</u> <u>Christmas</u> vacation, were reworded as Thank for your letter. I pleased to hear you had a **happy** *Mother's Day*. Likewise, the third sentence of the model text, We received <u>our first semester report</u> <u>a few days ago,</u> was written as I received my *second report last month*. This suggests that the student's writing was similar to a substitution exercise.

Figure 6.5

Student Sample 1 on The Board (Grade 8, Unit 5)
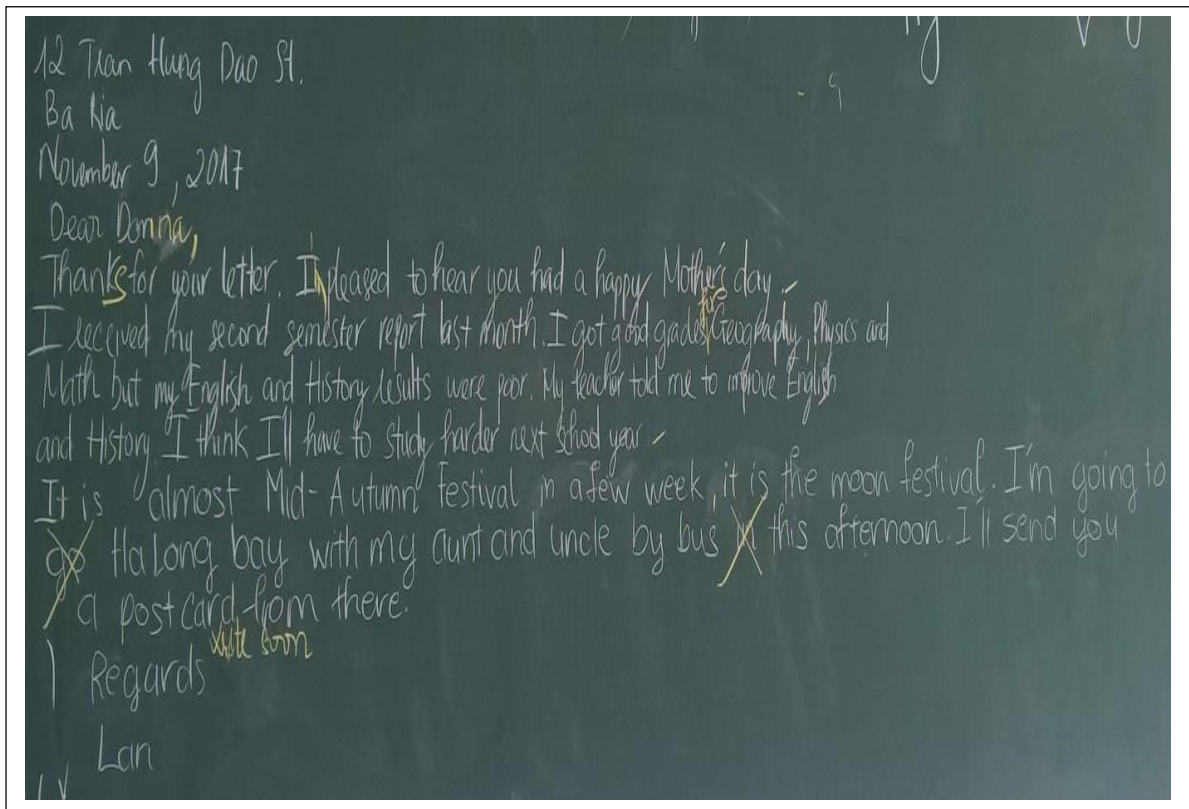
The same technique; that is, substitution, was seen in one student sample from grade 9, unit 4, as shown in Figure 6.6. In unit 4, the students were also asked to do only one guided practice. They were not provided with words cues, but were given *an outline* containing the general instructions

for what needed writing in each part of an inquiry letter (see Figure 6.2). In this unit, the students were asked to write to a language school to ask for information on the courses and tuition fees.

Figure 6.6

Student Sample 2 on The Board (Grade 9, Unit 4)
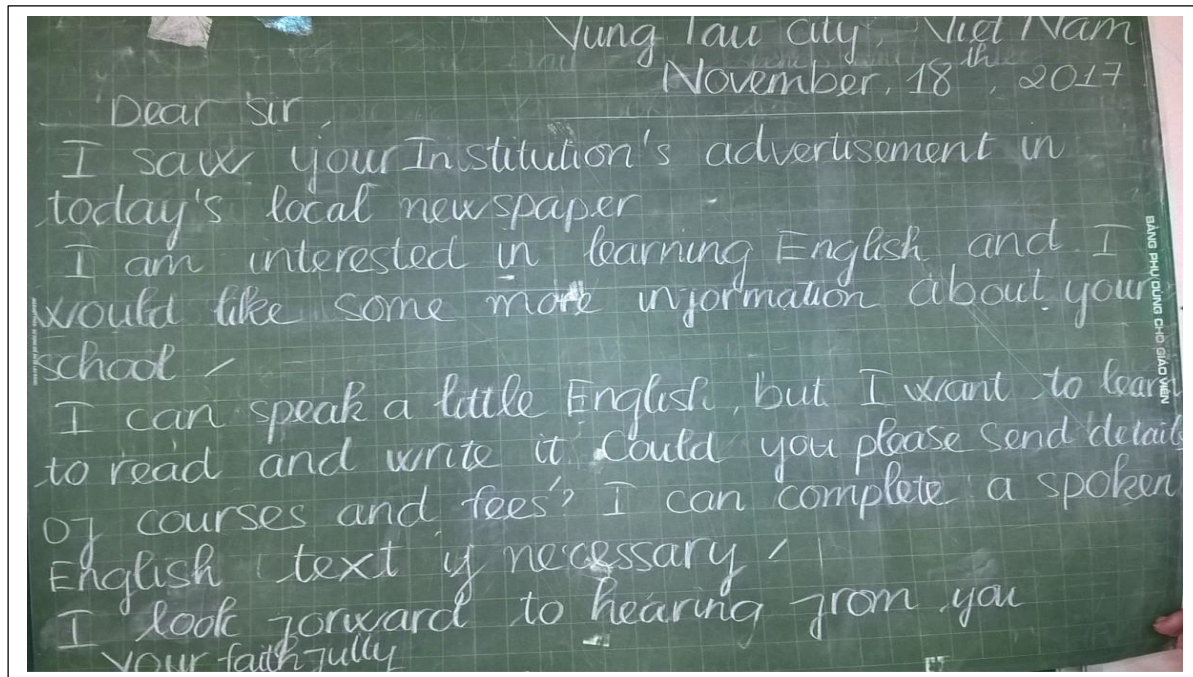
A close examination of the student sample (Figure 6.6) and the associated model text (Figure 6.2) reveals that the student copied the model text and changed only three words/phrases in it. Specifically, *school, edition of the Viet Nam News* and *Vietnamese* from the model text were replaced by *institution, local newspaper* and *English* respectively. For example, the first three sentences of the model text, I saw your school's advertisement in today's edition of the Viet Nam News. I am interested in learning Vietnamese … I speak a little Vietnamese, were rewritten as I saw your *institution*'s advertisement in today's *local newspaper*. I am interested in learning *English* … I speak a little *English*. The remaining sentences of her letter and of the model text were exactly the same.

It can be seen from the student samples presented above that the students followed the same flow of idea development and used grammatical structures similar to the model texts, and even exact sentences from the model texts. This practice was seen in all six teachers' classes. That the teachers asked their students to look at what was corrected on the board to correct their papers implies that

these student samples, which were similar to model texts, were seen as 'good enough' to follow. This suggests that the learners in this study were positioned as mimics rather than independent or creative writers.

It is important to emphasise here that in this research context, students produced a single and final copy at one sitting in class. The only type of feedback the students received was their teacher's (written) corrective feedback on their peer writing on the board, which was carried out for a very short time (approximately 5 minutes). Individual students did not receive feedback on their own writing (except for those copying their writing on the board). Feedback is widely seen as crucial for the development of L2 writing, both for its potential for learning and for student motivation (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Several studies suggest written corrective feedback from teachers is useful in improving L2 students' writing (e.g. Bitchener, 2008; Fan & Ma, 2018; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Sheen, 2007). However, at the end of the class, none of the teachers collected their students' papers to assess the quality of their writing in order to give the students further feedback, although all six teachers shared the view that teachers' feedback could help to improve students' writing and motivate learners to write, and that it should include giving explanations to less competent students.

> Teacher correction is very important. It helps learners realise their mistakes. They learn from these mistakes, which help improve their writing. Therefore, despite limited teaching time, I tried to reserve some class time to correct one or two writing pieces on the board. (Phase 1 interview, T10-rural-grade 9)

> I think correcting some writing pieces on the board is not very helpful. Teachers should give feedback to each student and especially explanation to slow students. If teachers just show learners their mistakes and/or corrections without explanation, able students may benefit from teacher correction, but slow students cannot figure out teacher correction; thus, teacher feedback becomes useless. (Phase 1 interview, T4-urban-grade 8)

> Teacher feedback supports learners to write better. Students will also feel more motivated to write when the teacher gives detailed feedback to individual students. (Phase 1 interview, T3-urban-grade 9)

Despite acknowledging the importance of teacher feedback as a scaffolding tool, the teachers were not able to give their students enough feedback because of limited time, both in class and outside the class. They explained in the post-observation interviews that they could not take their students' papers home for correction because they were too busy with their administrative (paper) work and second jobs.

> Besides teaching and marking test papers, I have to do duties of a form teacher and you know, I am also busy with my casual job. I do not have enough time to correct student papers outside the class. (Phase 3 interview, T12-suburban-grade 9)

That the teachers did not look at their students' papers suggests that they were unable to identify what their students knew and did not know. In other words, the teachers were not aware of each learner's current level of development. According to SCT, identifying learners' current levels of development helps teachers design tasks or activities beyond these levels to promote their cognitive development and extend their ZPD. However, in this study, observational data show that the teachers did not take any actions to explore their students' current levels of development, and as a result, there were no changes in the teachers' teaching procedures and scaffolding activities throughout the semester.

6.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 6 provides a picture of the instructional practices employed by the six participating Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary teachers. It reveals five major characteristics that appear typical in this context. First, the teachers' instructional practices focused on textual aspects of writing and regarded writing as simply imitation of input. Their students were positioned as mimics rather than independent and creative writers as expected in the seven-year English curriculum and NFL Project documents. Second, the dominant mediating tool in this study was the textbook. All six teachers relied on the textbook as the only teaching material. They did not change the textbook tasks or bring in other teaching materials because of lack of teacher autonomy, pressure of finishing what was covered in the textbook, and their busy lives after working hours.

Third, learners' needs or interests were not taken into consideration, with most of the writing tasks irrelevant or meaningless to them. This was caused by the teachers' dependence on the prescribed

textbook, which resulted partly from the traditional way of testing. Fourth, L1 was observed to be a mediating tool for instructions, although it was sometimes overused by the rural and suburban participating teachers. It was also used to mediate the teaching of vocabulary when translanguaging occurred. Finally, the roles of the teachers and students remained traditional: the teachers were knowledge providers through the use of dominant IRF interactions and they positioned their students as passive learners with little knowledge or skills who should wait to be nominated by their teachers. In addition, there was little collaborative interaction among students in this study. The teachers provided few opportunities for students to learn from others through talking and working together. These instructional decisions were influenced by their cognition – their existing beliefs about teaching and learning.

Chapter 7

Discussion

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter I respond to the overarching research question '*What are the practices that influence the teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau (Vietnam) lower secondary schools?'*. This discussion is informed by findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 5, I examined the top-down discourses that provide directions for classroom practice, as analysed in policy and curriculum documents. English is now the international language of world trade, science, and technology, and the discourses underpinning the policy and curriculum indicate that the Vietnamese government has come to recognise English as a vital tool for national development (Government of Vietnam, 2008; MOET, 2006). This has led to a renovation of Vietnam's English education policy and the English curriculum. Specifically, this analysis reveals that a communicative, learner-centred approach to teaching English was advocated in the English curriculum to achieve the new goal of promoting English education which develops communicative competence, an approach that focuses beyond linguistic knowledge. Vietnamese learners are now expected to use English independently and creatively to function well in various communicative situations, and to integrate into the international community (Government of Vietnam, 2008; MOET, 2006). These goals require changes in practice.

In Chapter 6, I reported on the instructional practices of English writing employed by six lower secondary teachers in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province. A detailed analysis of the observation and interview data reveals that developing students' communicative competence presented several hindering factors that challenged the teachers, including lack of teacher autonomy, traditional examinations and teachers' busy life after school. Chapter 7 discusses the relationship between policy directives and English writing classroom practice. I applied a sociocultural perspective to identify the influences on teaching of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools, since learning (and teaching) cannot be separated from the social and cultural context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and how social agents such as teachers and students in school practices act is influenced by sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 2010). Four themes emerged from my

analysis: prescriptive teacher professional development, textbook-bound teaching practices, teaching as a paradoxical practice and traditional teaching and learning practices. I will now discuss each of these in detail.

7.1 Prescriptive Teacher Professional Development

The interview data show that in this research context teacher professional development took two main forms, namely mandated in-service training courses and peer observations. The teachers reported that they were provided with in-service training courses by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) or the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training (DOET) only when there were changes in the English education policy and/or the English curriculum. In terms of peer observations, the teachers were required to observe their school colleagues' classes three to four times a semester (depending on the school) and attend occasional workshops organised by the Office of Education where chosen teachers would share their teaching experiences with teachers from different schools. The teachers reported, however, that none of these chosen teachers talked about the teaching of writing. This is possibly because, according to the teachers, teaching writing was difficult and teachers were often unsure about how to do it effectively. In the phase 1 interviews, the teachers reported that the teacher education programs of their colleges did not prepare them for teaching writing, because writing was not given importance at the lower secondary level when they were pre-service teachers.

It is important to mention here that according to the teachers, their schools did not provide financial funds or other types of incentives for teachers to attend professional development programs. This means that besides the obligatory in-service teacher trainings organised by MOET or DOET, teachers were not given support to attend other professional development activities they thought might be necessary. In other words, they did not have the authority to choose their own professional development. Mandatory in-service training courses played a crucial role in the teachers' professional development. However, these courses did not consider the teachers' specific needs or involve them in any negotiations about what professional development they felt they needed or wanted to undertake.

The teachers reported that their knowledge of writing instruction was gained from their peer observation and teaching experience and/or from a 2008 in-service training course organised by MOET to meet requirements of the seven-year English curriculum and its new textbooks. This course was intended to support teachers to change from teaching mainly reading, grammar, and translation to using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach now officially promoted at the lower secondary setting. The observational data also reveal that the teachers' approach to teaching writing was influenced by the 2008 in-service training course.

As analysed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.1.1), the approach to teaching writing introduced in the 2008 in-service training course was the product-based approach. This approach sees writing as a textual product rather than as a social act or a composing process and thus focuses on the linguistic aspects of writing alone (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland, 2016). A careful comparison of the teachers' instructional practices and the 2008 training material reveals that what the teachers did in their writing classes was similar to the writing instructions documented in this training material (see Table 7.1). The teachers focused on analysing a model text in terms of the organisational pattern, vocabulary and grammatical features; they did not analyse the purpose and audience of the text. After the students had produced a single and final text at one sitting, the teachers asked them to show their writing in front of the whole class (on the board) and then corrected these pieces of writing.

However, there were two differences between the teachers' instructional practices and the 2008 training material. First, the teachers activated their students' prior knowledge about vocabulary and/or grammar after the lesson introduction, which was not seen in the training material. Second, the teachers did not ask some students to share their writing with the class orally or to do another task in a similar but new situation, as suggested in the training material (post-writing). This is possibly because the teachers did not have time to do these activities. It was observed that each lesson ended with the teachers correcting students' writing on the board for five to seven minutes. It is also possible that the teachers considered these post-writing activities less important than other activities. Table 7.1 below illustrates the difference between the teachers' instructional practices and the 2008 training material.

Table 7.1

Teachers' Instructional Practices of Writing and Writing Instructions of the 2008 Training Material.

Teachers' instructional practices of writing		Writing instructions of the 2008 training material	
Lead-in	Introduce new lessons	**Warm-up**	Introduce new lessons
Build topic knowledge	Activate students' prior knowledge about vocabulary and/or grammar.		
Text deconstruction	Introduce a model text and explain new words from the text. Guide learners to deconstruct the model texts in terms of organization, formulaic chunks (if any) and/or grammatical features.	**Pre-writing**	Introduce a model text. Guide students to explore its overall structure, and explain new vocabulary and grammatical structures.
Creating texts	Explain the requirements of the writing task Ask students to produce texts by doing mainly controlled/ guided practice from the textbook Ask students to work individually (most commonly), in pairs or groups, depending on the teacher.	**While-writing**	Explain the requirements of the writing task Ask students to work in pairs or groups, then individually.
Teachers' giving feedback	Ask one or two students to show their writing on the board Correct their writing and make suggestions		Ask some students to show their writing in front of the whole class (e.g. on the overhead projector) Correct their writing and make suggestions
		Post-writing	Ask some students to share their writing with the class in an oral manner. Ask students to do another task in a similar but new situation.

It has been discussed in Chapter 6 that what the teachers did in their writing classes was quite consistent with their belief about teaching writing; that is, focusing on the linguistic aspects of writing. The above analysis shows that this belief may have been influenced by the 2008 teacher training course. It can be argued here that there were traces of the impact of the teachers' cognition on their instructional practices. While there was some relationship between the teachers' cognition and their instructional choices, this was not the focus of this study and did not drive the analysis of instructional practice. Further exploration of this dimension could be considered in future research.

As presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2), the seven-year English curriculum underscored using English as a means of communication. With the goal of developing communicative competence, it aimed to enable learners to use the target language to achieve *communicative purposes in different social contexts* (MOET, 2006 & 2008). Accordingly, students were expected to produce authentic texts of different genres. Therefore, the textbooks for grades 8 and 9 introduced a variety of genres, including description, narratives, phone messages, informal and formal letters, and arguments, among others. From a sociocultural lens and a social view of language, the language features of each genre are shaped by the contexts of a culture and of particular situations within that culture (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). This means knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language use, discourse rules and consideration of the context are crucial when writing.

In reference to the notion of communicative competence as presented in Chapter 2, Literature Review, evidence suggests that the teachers supported their students in developing grammatical competence by providing knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical items relevant to the writing topic, and discourse competence in a sense that students were instructed to write a short *text* in a target genre instead of translating English sentences into Vietnamese or vice versa, as they would have done previously. While this can be seen as a change, more explicit attention is needed to work towards the goal of developing communicative competence in writing, namely, that to function well in written communication, writers need to consider the purpose and audience (context) of writing. In contrast, the product-based approach, which the 2008 in-service training course introduced to the participants and was applied in their classes, does not explicitly foreground the social and situational context of writing. Influenced by this view, the teachers were not giving explicit attention to the socio-cultural and discourse rules of using language appropriately in

context. This meant that the students were not equipped with sociolinguistic and discourse competences which are constituents of communicative competence. The observational data also show that there was no evidence of the teachers supporting the learners in developing strategic competence; that is, the use of strategies to avoid breakdowns in communication.

Rather than creating opportunities for their students to explore a range of texts and how these texts might vary according to their contexts, the teachers focused their students' attention on the structural and language features of a model text. It can be argued that as a result, the observed students tended to produce formulaic texts. In other words, they seemed unable to use the target language creatively or independently. As suggested in the literature, this is a typical feature of the product-based approach, which focuses on analysing textual aspects of the model text and sees writing as simply imitation of input (Anastasiadou, 2013). Evidence suggests that the teachers' adoption of the product-based approach suggested by the 2008 training material made it hard for them to meet the goal of developing learners' communicative competence in writing. There is a clear mismatch between the aims of the seven-year English curriculum and the instructions of the 2008 teacher professional development program. While the curriculum promoted the communicative approach, the 2008 teacher professional development program introduced the product-based approach to teaching writing, which is inclined to a grammatical focus.

In this study, the teachers did not receive further in-service training in English teaching methodology until 2017, despite the NFL Project's (period 2008-2020) calls for innovations in teaching methodology to make English proficiency a strength of the Vietnamese youth in the service of nation building. In both 2017 and 2018, an in-service training course was organised in response to the pressing need for innovations in teaching methodology from the NFL Project, which has been extended to 2025. These two courses were organised by Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training. Two teachers, T4-urban-grade 8 and T10-rural-grade 9, attended the 2017 course and the other four teachers participated in the 2018 course. It seems that budget and/or management issues prevented these teachers from attending a training course together, hindering their opportunities to continue to develop knowledge and skill aligned to the new policy frameworks.

As described in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.2), the 2017 course introduced teachers to three major approaches to teaching writing: product-based, process-based, and genre-based approaches. However, it was observed that the genre-based approach, which matches the goal of the curriculum; that is, learners are expected to be able to produce texts in different real-life genres, was not applied by T4-urban-grade 8 and T10-rural-grade 9 in their classes. As presented in Chapter 6, these two teachers reported that the course was too theoretical and content-overloaded; they could not understand the instructor's lecture and thus they could not apply what was taught to their teaching. They reported that writing instruction took only one session of three to four hours, during which the instructor introduced several issues, for example, principles of teaching writing, contrastive rhetoric, qualities of good writing, types of writing, approaches to teaching writing, and writing activities. There was no time spent on discussion, teaching demonstration, or teaching practice. T4-urban-grade 8 made a suggestion that is worth considering: the instructor should illustrate how a theory is applied by teaching a specific lesson shown in the current textbook, using the theory he introduced. It can be argued that the problem with the 2017 course lay in the delivery of instruction. Paradoxically, at the same time as calls for the learner-centred approach to English teaching were being made, this training session was organised in a traditional way. The instructor used the 'one-way knowledge transmission approach' to teach the 'new' teaching methodology.

The 2018 course, as presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.2), provided instructions on teaching academic paragraphs and introduced authentic writing activities such as designing posters or writing reports, stories, diaries, and biographies. It is important to note that the teaching content of the 2017 course was different from the 2018 course. This difference in training highlights how sharing information among the teachers in this context would have been crucial. At the time of this study, when asked about the 2017 training course, the four teachers who had not attended this course stated that they had not had an opportunity to look at its training materials. However, even if the teachers had exchanged their training materials, it might still have been difficult for them to understand the information presented in PowerPoint slides because they were not provided with the reading materials needed to supplement the content in the slides. For example, Figure 5.15 illustrates that the information on the genre-based approach shown on two PowerPoint slides does not explain why writing is seen as a social activity. Therefore, it would have been challenging for

the four teachers who had not attended the 2017 course to understand the genre-based approach if they had drawn on these PowerPoint slides alone.

It is apparent that even after the two training courses in response to the NFL Project, the genre-based approach, which is in line with communicative approaches to language teaching (Hyland, 2007), seemed 'vague' or 'unknown' to all six teachers. In regard to the 2018 training course, although having positive attitudes toward authentic writing activities introduced by this course, the four teachers (who attended it) said that it would be challenging to apply these activities to their teaching because their priority was to finish the textbook, as mentioned in Chapter 6.

The information presented so far reveals two noteworthy points about the teachers' professional development. First, from 2008 to 2017, the teachers did not receive any support from teacher professional development programs to improve their teaching methods. In 2017, only two of the six teachers had an opportunity to attend a training course that provided updated knowledge on teaching writing. However, according to these two teachers, this course was not effective; it did not support their learning due to low-quality delivery of instruction and thus it had no impact on their writing instructions. As a result, at the time of this study (in 2017), all six teachers were using a product-based approach that was introduced to them approximately 10 years before, but unfortunately does not meet the new policy and curriculum directives.

Analysis of the data suggests that the teachers' limited access to pedagogical training and the poor quality of that training did not support them in applying a model of communicative language teaching to their teaching of writing. This finding supports previous Vietnamese studies (e.g. Khuong, 2017; Le & Barnard, 2009; Nguyen, 2011) which indicated that due to inadequate, low-quality teacher training and professional development, teachers made few changes in their teaching methods, despite policy makers' appeals for innovations in teaching methodology.

Second, the 2018 training course encouraged the use of multimodal texts (e.g. videos) as teaching materials and the creation of multimodal texts (e.g. designing a poster) in the English classroom. The teachers themselves thought the presence of multimodal texts would make the classroom more authentic and exciting; however, this application would be challenging because of several

constraints, one of them being textbook-bound teaching practices, which I discuss in the following section.

7.2 Textbook-bound Teaching Practices

The teachers in this study had no say in the choice of the textbook or in selecting what to teach from it, because MOET prescribed its use at the secondary level. In other words, the teachers had no autonomy in the teaching content. The findings presented in Chapter 6 show that the teachers used writing activities and tasks dictated by the textbook, most of which asked the students to fill in gaps, do labelling or matching activities, complete sentences, and write using words/ideas cues or given outlines. Insufficient attention was paid to independent writing. This means that the students were given little opportunity to practise using language independently or to negotiate meaning for authentic communicative purposes. The observational data reveal that scaffolding for ideas was absent from the participants' instructional practices. This is possibly because their students were mostly asked to complete sentences (without contexts) or write using words/ideas cues; scaffolding for ideas was not considered. Consequently, the target language was predominantly learned in decontextualised ways, with the teaching of writing focusing on the reproduction of formulaic texts rather than the development of creative or independent language use. In other words, learners were trained to become mimics rather than independent users of English. This is in sharp contrast to the aim articulated in the English curriculum and the NFL Project; that is, learners are expected to use the target language creatively and independently and to be able to achieve communicative purposes in different situations.

In addition, the teachers found many writing tasks provided by the textbook unrealistic, irrelevant or meaningless to students, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.1.3). For example, learners were asked to write a letter to a language school to ask for details about a language course and its tuition fee or to take a business telephone message. Another example is asking students to write to local authorities to report on the wrong way of catching fish by some local people. According to T3-urban-grade 9, this task was unfamiliar to her city-based students. Such tasks also seem to contradict the curriculum's advocacy of placing learners at the centre of the learning process by considering their interests and needs through the use of tasks that are relevant or meaningful to them (MOET, 2006). The teachers' use of these irrelevant textbook tasks might have demotivated

their students to write because the learners found no reasons to write (Kalantzis et al., 2016). A noteworthy point here is that while the textbook writers attempted to abide by 'practicality', a requirement of *General Education Reform 2000,* by introducing genres such as *business phone message* to 8th graders, they seemed to neglect another requirement from the curriculum; that is, considering learners' interests, needs and level of understanding (MOET, 2006).

It is noted here that although being discontent with the textbook, the teachers strictly followed it partly due to the traditional way of testing. As revealed in the phase 3 interview, the teachers covered the knowledge required in the textbook because it would be tested in examinations that focused on measuring how much textbook content had been learned. The writing questions in the examination were generally based on the writing questions introduced in the textbook. In this research context, examination scores were seen as the most important indicator of the teachers' teaching capability. Teachers would risk possibly getting into trouble, for example, being criticised in a meeting and not being rewarded financially, if their students' examination scores were poor. Because of this, teachers were under pressure to finish the textbook and prepare their students well for the examinations. This had a significant influence on the teachers' instructional practices. This finding is consistent with Le and Barnard's (2009) study, which showed that the teaching of English in a Vietnamese secondary school remained textbook-bound, which was caused partly by traditional examinations.

A noticeable critique from the teachers was that the textbook was content-overloaded. In the first semester, when this study was conducted, the 8th graders and 9th graders were required to learn six genres and four genres, respectively. The teachers had to deal with one genre within a period of 45 minutes. A few genres were repeated in the second semester or at the higher grade, but most of them were learned on a one-time basis. To teach or master a genre within 45 minutes would be a tough challenge for both teachers and students. This result confirms Le's (2009) claim that Vietnamese secondary textbooks were content-overloaded. It is important to mention that overloaded curriculum and textbooks were criticised by the prominent Vietnamese Professor Hoang (2004) as causes of knowledge cramming and one-way knowledge transmission. It can be argued that the current textbook includes the limitations of previous textbooks.

Content overload and lack of teacher autonomy altogether hindered the teachers from introducing new tasks or activities to supplement the textbook. Although the teachers were allowed to use other teaching materials, they were required to finish what was in the textbook. Based on the teachers' interviews and my observations, there are three possible reasons it would have been hard for the teachers to bring in new tasks or activities when they had to combine teachers' instructions, students' writing, and teachers' giving feedback within one session of 45 minutes. First, the teachers generally had to move to a new genre in the next writing session. Second, they were directed by the 2008 training material to give feedback publicly on some students' writing pieces, which were displayed in front of the whole class in this context. Third, they were unable to correct students' papers after class because they most often had busy lives and additional jobs after school, as will be discussed in the following section.

7.3 Teaching as a Paradoxical Practice

In Vietnam, there is a clear conflict between instructional and institutional conditions. While teaching is considered as a reputable profession (McAleavy et al., 2018), teachers are not paid well (Le, 2015; McAleavy et al, 2018), which results in teachers taking a second job (Le, 2015; McAleavy et al, 2018; T.H. Nguyen, 2015). As revealed in the phase 3 interview and informal conversations, the teachers were unable to take students' papers home for correction and had limited time for lesson planning after school hours. This was due to time availability, as all of them were busy with second jobs and additional demands on their time, including paperwork related to their duties as a form teacher or a leader of a group of English teachers. Their salaries were low and they found it difficult to manage a reasonable standard of living on their teaching wage; as a result, each of the six teachers had a second job. This finding concurs with Le's (2015) claim that "teachers' low salaries have forced many to tutor extra classes or moonlight a second job to earn enough money for themselves and their families" (p. 186). It also supports T. H. Nguyen's (2015) research, which indicated that due to their second jobs, the teachers were "too busy and too tired to prepare the lessons" and thus they relied on the available textbook (p. 232).

The interview data suggest that the teachers' busy after-school lives were obstacles to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Failing to look at student papers inhibited their ability to assess their students' current levels of development. The observational data reveal that throughout the

semester, the teachers offered few opportunities to enhance learning and cognitive development by considering their students' ZPD or creating scaffolding activities that considered this learning construct. In addition, the teachers' modest investment in lesson planning was evidential when none of the ninth-grade teachers brought model texts into their classrooms in the absence of a model text in unit 3. It can be argued that this might have disadvantaged the grade nine students as the explicit teaching of the genres often included deconstruction of model texts.

Limited financial support, which led to a reduction in the time, hindered the teachers' ability to invest in lesson planning and devote themselves more fully to teaching. This was admitted by the teachers in the post-observation interview, as presented in Chapter 6. The teachers occasionally brought their own ideas or activities into their classrooms (but most often strictly followed the textbook tasks). For example, T4-urban-grade 8 brought a guessing game to her class at the stage of building topic knowledge, and T13-suburban-grade 8 asked her students to describe the rooms they drew themselves. These activities, as observed, seemed to make their students more engaged. In addition, T3-urban-grade 9 spent time looking for additional formulaic chunks for formal requests to introduce to her students when instructing them to write a letter of inquiry. The observational data reveal that this activity offered learners more language choices for making formal requests. It can be argued that if teachers had more time, autonomy and flexibility, they would be able to find ways to enliven their instruction and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Data analysis also reveals that teachers' instructional practices were influenced by traditional teaching and learning practices, which I discuss below.

7.4 Traditional Teaching and Learning Practices

Evidence from this study suggests that traditional teaching and learning practices, which include teacher-centred approach and the traditional design of classrooms, had a considerable influence on the teachers' instructional practices. As presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.1.2), to achieve the goal of developing communicative competence, the curriculum emphasised learner-centred teaching. Teachers were expected to organise activities that would support learners to participate actively in learning process. They were encouraged to use pair and group work to promote learner autonomy (MOET, 2006). In other words, the teaching and learning process would no longer be seen as one-way knowledge transmission from the teacher to learners; teachers and students were

expected to change their traditional roles into facilitators/organisers and active participants, respectively. However, the observational data show that roles of the teachers and students seemed to remain traditional. The teachers strictly controlled classroom discourse, and through the dominant use of initiation-response-feedback interaction, they transmitted knowledge and their students received the knowledge passively.

Although the teachers elicited their students' contributions during the lesson, this was conducted in controllable ways by nominating students to answer and/or using questions that directed the learners to the answers that the teachers were aiming at. For example, in unit 1, grade 8, in which the students learned how to describe a person, instead of asking 'How would you describe a person?', T9-rural-grade 8 used the questions 'Tell me adjectives for appearance' and 'What are adjectives for characters?' or the statement 'Let's talk about hair' (see excerpt 6.3). The teacher's questions and statement directed the students to describe a person by appearance, characteristics and hair, as suggested by the textbook. If the teacher had asked 'How would you describe a person?', the students' answers might have included more than appearance, characteristics and hair; the learners might have suggested ideas outside the textbook, for example, nose, eyes or the like. It was observed that dialogic exchanges seemed to be absent, the teachers rarely used open-ended questions to expand learners' participation, and the students limited their answers, responding only to the teacher's questions without raising new questions or further exploring the issue being discussed.

It appears that the Confucian value of hierarchy still influenced the teacher-student relationship in this context. As presented in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2.3), due to the Confucian influence on Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese students are taught to respect and obey teachers (Bui, 2015; Le, 2011; Truong, 2013). Traditionally, teachers have been viewed as the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom (Le, 2011; Truong, 2013). This view might have waned in contemporary Vietnam, but the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students was clearly seen in this study. The teachers decided who might talk, when, what and how they might talk, and when they should stop talking. The students waited for the teacher's questions and responded either individually or together, as requested. This suggests that both the participating teachers and their students seemed to regard the teacher as the sole authority to provide knowledge in the classroom. This finding is

consistent with Nguyen's (2011) and Le and Barnard's (2009) studies, which were conducted at a Vietnamese public primary and upper secondary school, respectively. These researchers also found that the teacher was the authority to provide knowledge in class and most of the students were passive in participating in class activities.

Researchers (e.g. Bui, 2015; Maloch et al., 2004) have identified teacher-centred approaches in the traditional classroom culture as one of the hindrances to students' collaborative activities, which are seen as tools that help develop communicative competence by increasing the quantity and quality of language use (Brown, 2007; Gibbons, 2015; Long & Porter, 1985). When students are actively participating in pair and group work, it is students, not their teacher, who are doing the language-learning work. When working together to solve a problem or a task assigned by the teacher, learners have opportunities to use the target language or learn from hearing how their peers use the target language. Bui's (2015) and Maloch et al.'s (2004) studies indicated that having been socialised into traditional teacher-centred learning, students may resist or have difficulty in participating in collaborative activities when their teachers attempt them. This finding was also evidenced in this study. For example, when T12-suburban-grade 9 asked her students to write in groups, most of the students did not work collaboratively. Instead they turned to individual work, chatted or looking around.

According to Le et al.'s (2018) research conducted at a Vietnamese university, the most commonly reported obstacle to effective student collaboration was lack of collaborative skills. Their student participants reported that they did not know how to collaborate in groups because they were not used to group work. Le et al' s (2018) research found that some students refused to work in groups because they had to do most of the group work, while others did not feel confident enough to contribute to the group work.

Other obstacles to group participation can include inauthentic or disengaging tasks, lack of clear instructions, and insufficient discussion time (Gibbons, 2015). The success or failure of collaborative activities were dependent on several factors in this context. It is argued here that teachers need support in organising collaborative activities (e.g. theoretical support from professional development programs and support in terms of class time), and in the teacher-centred

teaching practice like Vietnam, special attention needs to be paid to training leaners in the skills necessary to work with others.

In this study, T13-suburban-grade 8 occasionally used group discussion to elicit vocabulary, and the data suggest this collaborative activity worked. It is possible that her students had some experience in group work and the task of vocabulary brainstorming did not demand as many collaborative skills as the group writing used by T12-suburban-grade 9. It is also possible that vocabulary brainstorming engaged her students and her seating rearrangement made discussion more convenient for them. This suggests that the question is not whether teachers should use pair and group work in Vietnamese classrooms, but how they should organise collaborative activities to make the best use of them, since talk is a key tool for learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this research context, collaborative activities were also hindered by the traditional design of classrooms. Teacher-fronted seating was a real challenge to the teachers when using groupwork, as required in the curriculum. As seen in T13-suburban-grade 8's case, after the English class her students had to return the desks to the original position for the next class. This could be the reason that T12-suburban-grade 9 did not ask her students to rearrange the desks in her classes, which then made it difficult for her students to write in groups. In addition, noise was some teachers' concern when organising pair and group work because the classrooms were not soundproofed and thus noise might affect the next-door classroom. This finding echoes Khuong's (2017) study which indicated that teacher-fronted class organisation and noise were two of the obstacles to implementing the communicative approach to teaching English in Vietnam.

In addition, traditional classrooms, which were not equipped with computers and projectors contributed to discouraging the teachers from integrating information technology (IT) into teaching English. The interview data suggest that the teachers found the shared use of computer rooms inconvenient because this often resulted in the high possibility of room unavailability. Therefore, only three of the six teachers occasionally used IT in their classrooms. Noticeably, these three teachers used IT to present the information provided in the textbook, rather than to introduce authentic learning materials such as videos, songs, and movies or to engage learners in interactive

activities. This teaching practice is in sharp contrast to the policy intent, which emphasised the use of IT to improve the quality of English teaching and learning (MOET, 2008 & 2017).

The practices presented above are *closely related*, with each playing a role in shaping the teachers' instructional practices. Having received little support from professional development activities and/or ineffective teacher training, the teachers' viewpoints on writing remained unchanged: they saw writing as a textual product rather than a social act. Consequently, they were unable to address limitations in the textbook, which did not provide information about the communicative function of writing, and focused mostly on linguistic aspect of writing such as the organisational pattern of a genre. Arguably, when teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of English teaching methodology, they tend to rely on a textbook, whether it is prescribed or not.

In this study, the teachers' reliance on the textbook was further triggered by their lack of autonomy due to government policy that had prescribed the textbook and the examinations based on it. As well, due to low teacher salaries, they had to work part-time outside school hours, which prevented them from investing sufficient time in designing scaffolding activities appropriate for their students or in personal reflection to improve their teaching practices. In addition, even though the textbook provided mainly controlled and guided practice, content overload from it and the textbook-based examinations gave teachers a reason for not adapting the textbook. As a result, the students were given little practice in independent writing. The teachers did not give their students writing homework for further practice outside the class, perhaps because they thought it unreasonable to ask the students to write when they themselves would not be giving feedback on their students' writing.

Facing all these challenges, the teachers chose 'imitation' as a 'scaffolding strategy' (Mascolo, 2005) in their writing classes. Their students were trained to be mimics rather than creative or independent writers. The traditional way of teaching and learning with the teacher as a knowledge provider and learners as passive knowledge receivers contributed to stifling the learners' creative thinking. The students were given little opportunity to discuss the lesson, express their own opinions, or engage in dialogues with the teacher and their peers. Other possible reasons for this were the arrangement of desks in rows and the textbook content overload that meant the teachers

had to cover the textbook content in the scheduled class time. Such classroom practices are not conducive to 'thinking out of the box', a critical skill that 21st century citizens need to possess.

7.5 Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between the intent of government policy and what happened in actual classrooms in this context. The influences on the teachers' instructional practices, namely, prescriptive teacher professional development, textbook-bound teaching practices, teaching as a paradoxical practice and traditional teaching and learning practices, have similarly been indicated by many Vietnamese researchers as hindering the success of the country's English education policy (e.g. Le, 2015; Le & Barnard, 2009; Nguyen, 2011; T. H. Nguyen, 2015; Khuong, 2017).

While some of the key findings in this study have also been found in previous studies, in this study they are considered in response to the most recent English education policy (NFL Project) in Vietnam. This study provides new substantial grounded data to inform Vietnamese policy makers about the revised NFL Project (period 2017-2025) and the work that is required for successful implementation going forward. Improving only one or two of these influences would not be sufficient to bring about real change in classroom practice. It is undeniable that the English curriculum and textbooks, despite their limitations, are useful in providing guidelines for classroom practice, since not all teachers have the skills to design a curriculum and teaching content. However, one-size-fits-all practices with a lack of support and resources will continue to contribute to the poor translation of education policy into classroom practices. My recommendations for improving the quality of teaching English in general and English writing in particular will be presented in the following and final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin with a brief summary of key findings of this study. I then present the contributions of the study in terms of theory and practice. I offer implications for stakeholders such as the MOET, relevant authorities, and teachers, which aim to contribute to the success of implementing the NFL Project by improving teachers' instructional practices of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province and possibly other similar contexts in Vietnam. I end this chapter with a critique of my own work and put forward suggestions for future research.

8.1 Summary of the Key Findings

The objective of this study was to investigate instructional practices of English writing at lower secondary level and the influences on these instructional practices at three schools in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, Vietnam. A qualitative, multi-case study approach was adopted and multiple sources of data were collected, including documents, pre- and post- observation interviews with teachers and classroom observations. The analysis of policy documents reveals that under the influence of globalisation and the hegemonic forces of English, the Vietnamese government has acknowledged English as a tool for national development, and English competence is realised as an indispensable skill the Vietnamese workforce needs if it is to facilitate of the goal of nation building.

Vietnam's people are now expected to use English creatively and independently. The Vietnamese government has promoted the teaching and learning of English at all educational levels, including the secondary school level. This has led to renovations in the English curriculum and the launch of the NFL Project. In response, the Ba Ria-Vung Tau province added the writing of short texts to semester-end examinations to improve the teaching of English writing and learners' writing ability. This study was promoted by my interest in what happened in actual English writing classrooms and how classroom practices were related to the renovation of the seven-year English curriculum and the NFL Project. My findings show that rather than writing creatively and independently to

achieve communicative purposes, learners were most often producing formulaic texts. Student writing samples displayed on the board were seen as 'good models', and they were simple imitations of the model texts provided in the textbook. The findings also reveal that inadequate in-service teacher training programs failed to support teachers in developing a communicative or social approach to teaching writing although this was explicit in the curriculum. Most often teachers introduced organisational patterns and provided vocabulary and grammatical features and viewed writing as a textual product without paying explicit attention to the social and situational contexts for writing.

This study also reveals the challenges the teacher participants had to face in their teaching contexts: content overload from the prescribed textbook and lack of teacher autonomy, busy after-school lives caused by their needing a second job due to low teacher salaries, and preparing students for examinations. These challenges were conducive to the teachers relying on the textbook, which I have shown, did not often support the development of creative, independent writing. In addition, the teachers and students in this study were considerably influenced by traditional classroom culture where teacher-centred teaching practices dominated. This resulted in teachers being regarded as authorities in class and the students playing a passive role in their learning process. The traditional design of the classroom was also an obstacle to creating opportunities for learners to extend their learning through pair and group work. All these influences had a significant impact on what I identify as the teaching practice of positioning students as mimics or uncreative writers.

8.2 Theoretical Research Contributions

While EFL writing for undergraduates has attracted the attention of several Vietnamese researchers (e.g. Bui, 2015; Huynh, 2008; Luu, 2011; Ngo & Trinh, 2011; Nguyen, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2012; Nguyen & Hudson, 2010; Nguyen & Ramnath, 2016; Pham, 2010; Tran, 2007; Trinh & Nguyen, 2014), there is a dearth of studies in the area of EFL writing at the secondary level, especially at the lower secondary level. This study contributes to the Vietnamese research literature on EFL writing for the lower secondary level and provides a fuller picture of EFL writing in Vietnam generally, and most specifically the nexus between practice and policy. It also enriches the modest body of Vietnamese empirical research using sociocultural theory (SCT) to examine instructional practices (e.g. Khuong, 2017, Nguyen, 2018) and illustrates the merits of using sociocultural

perspectives for L2 research. My research concurs with other SCT studies in L2 contexts (e.g. Bui, 2015; Khuong, 2017; Maloch, 2004), indicating that it is important to consider sociocultural contexts when making pedagogical decisions. For example, while collaborative activities seem to fit well in Western cultural contexts, students in Confucianism-influenced contexts have difficulty with these activities. Evidence suggests more work is required in supporting teachers and their students in developing collaborative skills for pair or group work.

L2 researchers have used sociocultural theory to examine teacher scaffolding (e.g. Bassiri, 2012; Khuong, 2017; Lee, 2014; Nguyen, 2018), peer scaffolding through collaborative activities (e.g. Bui, 2015; Hanjani & Li, 2014; Yong, 2010), and mediation strategies in supporting L2 learners to write (e.g. Kang & Pyun, 2013; Lei, 2008). L2 researchers have also used Fairclough's discourse theory to analyse student writing samples and/or policy and curriculum documents (e.g. Mohamed, 2006; Tseng, 2006). A unique contribution of my research is that it incorporates three theories related to social context: Sociocultural theory (Vygostsky, 1978, 1986 & 1994) Discourse theory (Fairclough, 2003 & 2010) and Genre theory (Halliday, 1978) to examine English education in the field of L2 writing in the Vietnamese context. These three theories come together in the following ways.

According to SCT, learning happens not only at the individual level; that is, in one's mind, but also at the social level, in interaction with others in particular social and cultural contexts via mediating tools. In this study, the sociocultural theory of learning has helped me reveal how the teachers used tools such as the textbook, scaffolding, and teacher-student interactions encompassing talk to mediate the teaching and learning of English writing. Fairclough's discourse theory examines the dialectical relationship between texts, social agents and sociocultural practices. Texts shape and are shaped by sociocultural practices, this relationship is mediated or regulated by social agents. Fairclough's three-layer model of critical discourse analysis was used to analyse not only educational policy and curriculum documents, as commonly seen in other studies, but also textbooks and teacher training materials. The analysis of different sources of documents helped me unpack how a range of discourses influenced the teachers' instructional practices.

In addition, Fairclough's conception of discourse complements SCT and allows for further understanding of the roles of mediating tools such as textbooks and classroom interactions. The findings reveal that under the influence of Vietnamese sociocultural practices; that is, textbook-bound practices which resulted from the one-size-fits-all approach, the textbook in this context became almost the only tool to provide teaching content. Likewise, influenced by the traditional teacher-centered teaching practices which resulted from the Confucian values of hierarchy, classroom interactions in this study were dominated by the teachers. I used genre theory and the teaching and learning cycle lens to foreground the social context of writing, to examine the teaching of writing and reveal contradictions between the desired outcomes of the curriculum and actual classroom practices. These three theories complemented each other to provide in-depth understanding of instructional practices of English writing at lower secondary level and the influences on these instructional practices.

Last but not least, this study makes a terminological contribution to the body of literature on instructional practices. Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) notion of social practice, which is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, I introduce a definition of instructional practices that includes five components: actions and interactions between teachers and students and between students and students; teachers' backgrounds and beliefs; roles of teachers and students; classroom talks and teaching materials/aids. This scrutiny helps to understand the tools teachers employed to mediate writing instruction and scaffold student learning.

8.3 Implications for Practice

8.3.1 Implications for MOET and Relevant Authorities

This study reveals that the teachers faced several challenges to improving their instructional practices of English writing. It can be argued if MOET and other relevant authorities are to facilitate the successful implementation of the NFL Project, they need to provide teachers with advantageous working conditions and other forms of support. This requires changes to be made in five major areas: (1) teacher professional development, (2) curriculum, textbooks and teacher autonomy, (3) testing, (4) teacher salaries, and (5) resourcing.

8.3.1.1 Teacher Professional Development

Mandatory in-service training is a dominant form of professional development for L2 teachers, especially in developing countries such as Vietnam (Le, 2019). It is therefore essential that MOET or local educational authorities such as the Department of Education and Training (DOET) and the Office of Education provide adequate in-service training courses for teachers. The findings of this study show that when an in-service training course was inadequate, insignificant changes in teaching methods were made. The findings also suggest that four important issues should be taken into consideration when MOET or local educational authorities organise in-service training courses. First, the training course should not overwhelm in-service trainees with knowledge. It is important to consider the amount of knowledge provided in relation to the amount of time allocated so that more attention can be paid to explaining and processing the knowledge to be presented.

Second, the training courses should provide more than just theoretical concepts. They should offer trainees opportunities to discuss how to apply theories of language teaching to their teaching practices. Time should also be allocated to teaching demonstrations that help trainees to see how a theory of language teaching can be applied. In addition, teaching practice should be included as a crucial part of training so that trainees can practise what they have learned. Third, trainees should be given reading materials related to the instructors' PowerPoint slides so that they can find more information about the topics they do not understand and have resources for future reference. Fourth, the training courses should incorporate knowledge about using pair and group work effectively. This knowledge should not be seen as 'trivial' in the Vietnamese context, where students are not used to collaborative activities. (Information on using pair and group work was not included in any of the in-service teacher training materials.)

The provision of quality in-service training is crucial because it is only when teachers understand and internalise what is taught that they can apply this knowledge to their teaching, or share and support colleagues who do not have the same access to in-service training. The six teachers in this study were divided into two groups; each group participated in a training course of the NFL Project that taught different content. Two teachers, T9-rural-grade 8 and T12-suburban-grade 9, missed the 2008 in-service training because this course had been organised before they entered their schools as teachers. I therefore recommend that professional learning communities (PLCs) should

be created so that teachers can exchange information, and support each other to develop professionally. PLCs are informal professional exchanges among teachers and between teachers and other people in their communities. These contrast with mandatory, formal in-service training that is conducted by outsiders and teachers who have little responsibility to determine content (Phan, 2017). Through PLCs, teachers use mediational tools such as talk and collaboration to negotiate meaning and assist each other to internalise new knowledge. PLCs offer teachers opportunities for ongoing talk which enables teachers to share their understandings about effective teaching and learning, and discuss how theory and practice come together to obtain the best outcome. Teachers can learn from each other through discussing their own practices and reflections on teaching and learning. As Ngo (2018) pointed out, teachers' cognition can be developed through their active participation in their professional communities. This means that well-designed PLCs can play a powerful role in shaping teacher cognition which may have a significant impact on teachers' instructional practices.

Once teachers are equipped with adequate knowledge of English teaching methodology through formal and informal professional development activities, they will feel confident and agentive and improve their classroom practice by, for example, adapting the textbook according to their students' level of understanding, interests and needs.

8.3.1.2 The Curriculum, Textbooks and Teacher Autonomy

The findings of this study reveal that the English curriculum required lower secondary students to learn many genres within a limited time. This resulted in content-overloaded textbooks. It is essential that the English curriculum should take this issue into consideration to avoid knowledge cramming and provide enough time for teachers to give detailed instructions and for students to have more practice and opportunities for discussion.

The textbook also needs to be modified in a way that supports the development of competence in writing. Specifically, it should provide at least one model text along with controlled, guided and independent practice for the writing section. To support teachers, especially inexperienced ones, the textbook should also provide questions to accompany the model text and guide learners to identify how texts are structured to achieve communicative purposes in particular contexts of use.

In addition, the writing tasks should be more personally relevant to learners, which would motivate them to write. However, it is important to remember that no textbook can cater for all learning contexts or all learners' needs and interests (Allwright, 1981; Littlejohn,1992). Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in tailoring the textbook to their teaching context. This suggests that textbooks should not be prescribed, but instead teachers should be given autonomy to decide on textbooks, since they are the only ones who can best understand their students' backgrounds, their levels of English understanding and their interests, strengths and weaknesses.

The National Assembly of Vietnam recently passed the Education Law 2019 (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). One of the revised items of Education Law 2019 is the 'one curriculum and several textbooks' policy, which states that there is to be more than one textbook for each subject at the general education level and that from July 2020 each Provincial Committee of People, a head organisation of a province, is responsible for deciding on textbooks for schools located in the province. Textbooks are to be chosen from among those approved by MOET's national committee on textbook accreditation.

Based on this study, I would strongly recommend that Provincial Committees of People give classroom teachers autonomy to choose textbooks. However, there may be some concern that leaving classroom teachers to choose the textbook may be a risk because they may not be able to make informed choices about what to teach. Hence my first recommendation (as presented above) is to improve teacher professional development. Instead of asking whether teachers should be given the right to choose the textbook, we must ask how to improve professional development for teachers. It is argued here that it is essential for teachers to have a say in choosing the textbook because it is classroom teachers, not DOET or any educational organisations that know what learning content is most suitable for their teaching contexts. To help to 'liberate' teachers from relying on the textbook alone, testing needs to be innovated, as will be discussed in the next section.

8.3.1.3 Testing

One way of changing classroom practice is to change the format and content of examinations. In Vietnam, teaching and learning are driven by testing (Bui, 2015; Le & Banard, 2009; T. H. Nguyen, 2015). The teachers revealed that their teaching was considerably influenced by examinations. In

this research context, writing a short text accounted for only one out of 10 marks, while other grammar questions (including multiple-choice questions, completing sentences, and rewriting sentences) were given much more weighting. Therefore, to stimulate teachers and students to pay more attention to writing, I suggest that grammar questions be reduced or even removed, so more weighting and more writing time can be given to writing tasks. Grammar questions serve to test learners' linguistic knowledge rather than their competence in writing. The reduction or removal of grammar questions would change teachers and learners' views on learning grammar. In other words, grammar should be learned as *a means* to understand and produce English texts, not for the sake of examinations. In addition, it is essential that examinations focus on testing whether students can apply what they have learned to similar but new tasks, rather than how much knowledge they remember. This suggests that examination questions should not be the same as the writing tasks in the textbooks. To achieve the goal of developing communicative competence, as required by Vietnam's English education policies, testing needs to stimulate learners to write independently and creatively.

When testing no longer focuses on memorisation, it is highly likely that teachers will have the flexibility to examine their teaching, especially if they have sufficient time to reflect on improving their teaching. This relates to teacher salaries and is therefore an important issue that needs tackling.

8.3.1.4 Teacher Salaries

As a proverb goes, hungry bellies have no ears. When teachers are struggling financially or are busy with their extra job to support themselves or their families, it is hard for them to respond to calls for innovations in teaching methods. Working a second job means that they may not have time to produce creative and engaging lessons, to correct students' papers after class, to attend to students' needs, or to provide them with timely support. Nor may they have time to reflect on their teaching to make improvements in classroom practice or look back at the in-service training materials to improve their teaching methods.

Teachers are gatekeepers of a language policy and play a key role in the success or failure of its implementation (Kheng & Baldauf, 2011). To facilitate the national goal of producing human resources possessing English communicative competence, as articulated in the NFL Project, it is

essential to offer teachers a sufficient income so that they can devote their full attention to their teaching job. Once teachers invest their time in professional development and teaching, the quality of English teaching and learning will improve, especially when they are provided with adequate resources for their teaching activities, as will be discussed next.

8.3.1.5 Resourcing

The promotion of the communicative approach to teaching English and the integration of information technology into teaching, as documented in the English curriculum and NFL Project documents, requires improvements in school facilities. This would be a great challenge for local governments at the moment. However, when economic conditions allow, it would be worth considering equipping each classroom with Internet access, a computer and a projector. Accordingly, attention needs to be paid to maintenance work to prevent technical problems from taking place when teachers are delivering lessons. The availability of information technology can lead to teachers' consideration of incorporating multimodal texts into English teaching, which helps to make learning more authentic. In addition, when a local government plans to build a new school or upgrade an existing school, the design of classroom needs to include soundproofing and ways of arranging student desks and chairs that are conducive to collaboration and group work.

Top-down support in the five areas presented above would give teachers the incentive to improve their classroom practices. The following section offers some implications for teachers in terms of English teaching in general and writing instructions in particular.

8.3.2 Implications for Teachers

The findings of this study suggest that teachers should have a more comprehensive view of the nature of writing, and incorporate elements of a social view of language. In addition to providing learners with discrete linguistic knowledge, teachers should guide students to identify how language features are shaped by cultural and situational contexts and offer them opportunities to revise their writing based on teacher (and peer) feedback. Furthermore, it is important for teachers to train learners in the skills of working with others. They should raise students' awareness that every member in a group is equal and thus every member's ideas should be heard carefully and respectfully, that disagreement should not be seen as criticism (Le et al., 2018), and that voting can

be used when members cannot agree with each other. Teachers should also model for students how to collaborate effectively to support pair and group work (Gibbons, 2015). Since Vietnamese students are not accustomed to taking an active and collaborative role in study, teachers need to spend time at the beginning of a course introducing them to new ways of learning and providing them with both opportunities and time to practise and become comfortable with their new responsibilities and roles.

Talk is a vehicle for thought (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, in addition to peer talk, teachers should enhance teacher–student exchanges by using open-ended questions to allow for more dialogic exchanges (in addition to IRF interactions), which offer learners opportunities to express their own ideas and arguments. Furthermore, teachers should consider students' zones of proximal development in order to design appropriate scaffolding activities. It is essential that teachers should provide opportunities for students to share their ideas before writing, and offer more practice in independent writing and feedback to individual students, all of which will help to develop their writing ability.

8.4 Limitations of the Study

This is a small-scale study with six teacher participants from three schools located in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, Vietnam. The findings of this study may not represent instructional practices of lower secondary English writing elsewhere in Vietnam. Although Ba Ria-Vung Tau province and other parts of Vietnam share top-down discourses in the teaching of lower secondary English, the influences on teachers' instructional practices may not be the same in different local contexts. While the findings cannot be generalized, there may be some elements that are relatable to similar contexts in Vietnam. For example, this study coheres with McAleavy et al.'s (2018) investigation into key components of the Vietnamese public (primary, lower and upper secondary) school system in terms of the organisation systems and challenges teachers face, such as traditional pedagogy and low teacher salaries.

A second limitation is related to data collection. Since the participants did not allow video-recording, I only audio-recorded their classes. Consequently, I was not able to capture students' facial expressions and behaviours, which could have shown more about their engagement and participation. Moreover, my recording equipment was unable to capture all the students' voices

when they worked in pairs or groups, which could have revealed more about the learning taking place. In short, capturing learners' behaviours and voices may have added extra depth and complexity to this study.

8.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Scholars of L2 acquisition have recently turned their attention to the notion of translanguaging as a pedagogy to be encouraged and applied in L2 learning contexts (García & Wei, 2014; Sembiante, 2016). In this study, the participating teachers often used both English and Vietnamese to give instructions and explain vocabulary, sometimes employing what the literature classifies as translanguaging practices. However, due to the scope of this study, translanguaging was not fully addressed. Evidence from this study shows that some translanguaging practices were used as a useful mediating tool to introduce students to vocabulary relevant to the writing topic. However, in the Vietnamese lower secondary context, the giving of instructions in Vietnamese and its application to translanguaging requires further investigation. The literature reveals that translanguaging can also be used in pedagogical strategies to support emergent bilinguals to write. Such strategies include, for example, using bilingual model texts and/or reading texts to stimulate ideas to write about, and allowing learners to switch to L1 to help make meaning of words or ideas when speaking or writing in L2 (García & Wei, 2014). Research indicates that learners have found bilingual texts useful for understanding the content of texts and providing them with ideas to write about (Kano, 2012), and that allowing learners to switch to L1 when speaking or writing in L2 has motivated them to produce longer texts that were richer in content (García, 2012). Many of these pedagogical strategies were absent in this study. Examining the impact of these pedagogical strategies on Vietnamese students' writing is an opportunity for future research.

In this study, the teachers did not use peer feedback, which has both forceful proponents and detractors (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). A number of Vietnamese studies (e.g. Huynh, 2008; Pham, 2010) have investigated the effectiveness of online peer feedback activities at the tertiary level but not at the lower secondary level; they showed that peer feedback using technology such as blogs and DOKEOS (a learning management system) could enhance university students' motivation for writing and also improve their writing performance. In the Vietnamese context, where a lower secondary teacher is usually in charge of five to six classes, each containing 30 to 45 students, it

would be a challenge for teachers to give feedback to individual students on a regular basis, and thus using peer feedback (together with teacher feedback) might be a solution that needs to be considered. This prompts a need for further research on peer-to-peer feedback in both face-to-face and online modes at the lower secondary setting. In addition, in the previous section, I suggested building PLCs. Despite their benefits, introducing PLCs in this research context might increase teachers' workloads and offer further challenges to those they already face. Therefore, the creation of effective PLCs deserves further research.

This study revealed some link between teacher cognition and instructional practices. The teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing and the use of pair and group work seemed to be influenced by the 2008 teacher training course and their personal experiences of pair and group work respectively. Teacher cognition is an area that has scant representation in the literature (Borg, 2015), and investigating teacher cognition was not the focus of this study; however, a better understanding of teacher cognition and its impact on teaching practices is a significant area for future research. In the Vietnamese context, the understandings of teachers' cognition may offer some useful suggestions for teacher professional development, and as a result, this might make an impact on teaching practices.

8.6 Final Thoughts: My Reflexivity

Reflexivity is broadly defined as a turning back on oneself, a process of self-examination (Davies, 2008). At its most obvious level, reflexivity refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the researcher and process of doing research. These effects can be found in all phases of the research process (Davies, 2008). Through reflexivity, "researchers acknowledge the changes brought about in themselves as a result of the research process and how these changes have affected the research process." (Palaganas, et al., 2017, p.426). In other words, reflexivity involves the journeys of learning that researchers underwent (Palaganas, et al., 2017).

The journey of completing this study was a challenging but rewarding experience. It helped me develop intellectually both as a researcher and as a teacher. As a researcher, my bias sometimes influenced the way I reviewed the literature or interpreted the data. Specifically, when reviewing the literature, I needed to be mindful of examining the merits and limitations of an issue, but

initially, I could only see, for example, the merits of Vygotsky's ZPD. I became aware of the need to review both sides of an issue, which offered complexity to my thinking. In addition, I had to examine my use of biased language at times when interpreting data by questioning myself. For instance, when looking back on a sentence I wrote: "The teacher asked *good* students to copy their writing pieces on the board," I asked myself if I had any evidence to prove these students were good. Such critical questioning helped me to realise the influence of my assumptions. During my PhD candidature, I have developed the habit of approaching an issue from different perspectives, and not making claims without supporting evidence.

This journey of learning has also widened my viewpoints on teaching and learning and thus helped me to develop professionally. When I started this research, I understood that language is a means of communication that cannot be detached from the context of use. However, at that time, I had no idea of an approach to teaching writing that considers the context of writing, namely, genre-based approach. Extensive reading gave me insights into the differences between L1 and L2 writing and into the writing instructions that I will further explore in my teaching and research in Vietnam. Furthermore, sociocultural perspectives have raised my awareness of learning theory and practice, most particularly, sociocultural theory enhanced my understanding of building on students' knowledge, experiences and skills and further recognising how this contributes to scaffolded lessons design and instruction.

8.7 Conclusion

Although this study makes important contributions to understanding of instructional practices of English writing in Ba Ria-Vung Tau lower secondary schools, to some extent, some of its findings may be transferable to other contexts in Vietnam. It has revealed that the participating teachers attempted to instruct their students to produce short texts in target genres. However, due to several challenges they faced, such as inadequate in-service training, the dominance of the content-overloaded textbook, poor salaries and the traditional teaching and learning practices, these teachers used imitation as a 'scaffolding strategy'. As a result, student writing samples displayed on the board for the whole class to follow were structured and mechanistic, showing a mastery of linguistic features rather than demonstrating the effective communication of meaning in a particular

context of use. In other words, the learners seemed to be unable to write creatively and independently.

This study also makes unique contributions to Vietnamese literature on English education and possibly the field of L2 writing in terms of theoretical frames and terminology. In addition, its findings have implications for MOET, relevant authorities and teachers, which aim to contribute to the successful implementation of the NFL Project. This study also provides suggestions for potential research into translanguaging, peer feedback, professional learning communities and teacher cognition at the lower secondary setting. Last but not least, this study has greatly benefited me both as a researcher and a teacher.

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Appendix 4.1

Participant Information Sheet – Teachers

Project Title: An Investigation into Writing Practices in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools.

Project summary

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by the chief researcher Chi Thi Kim Nguyen, a PhD candidate of the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr Jacqueline D'Warte and Dr Lynde Tan, in the School of Education, Western Sydney University. Research data which comprise teacher interviews, classroom observations (including teaching artefacts) will be collected in the following ways:

Interviews consist of two phases. Pre-observation interviews start in June, 2017. These interviews aim to investigate teachers' perception of teaching English writing within the current policy context and of their pre-service and in-service training in teaching English writing. Post-observation interviews will be carried out after the first semester ends. These interview questions will focus on what influenced or shaped teachers' instructional practices as observed in the field.

Classroom observations start in mid-August and end in December. Writing classes throughout the first semester will be observed and audio-recorded with participants' consent. Teaching artefacts will also be collected.

Benefits of the research

This research purports to investigate and offer recommendations that will enhance teaching practices of English writing at the lower secondary level in Ba Ria – Vung Tau province in particular and in Vietnam in general. It will also contribute to the modest research literature on EFL writing for the lower secondary level in Vietnam.

What teacher participants will be asked to do

Teachers will be asked to

      a. participate in pre- and post-observation interviews
      b. be observed teaching writing classes during the first semester
          (Two teachers in a school, one from grade 8 and one from grade 9)

Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate, you can withdraw at any time without giving reason. If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied will not be used.

Confidentiality and data management

The data will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer. To ensure confidentiality, participants' names and their school names will be coded during the process of analyzing and reporting the research data. The data will be stored in UWS's Research Shared Drive/Cloudstor+ (de-identifying data) for five years after the completion of the project. Only the chief researcher has access to the raw data participants provide.

Research dissemination

The results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified, except with your permission. Numbers or pseudonyms will be assigned to participants.

Further information

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on +61 2 4736 0229 or humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you very much for considering your participation. Please feel free to contact Ms Chi Thi Kim Nguyen (kimchisp@gmail.com, 0974996263), should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H12118.

Appendix 4.2

Consent Form -Teachers

Project Title: An Investigation into Writing Practices in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools.

I, (teacher's name), hereby consent to participate in the above named research project.

I acknowledge that:

• I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

• The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

Tick all the appropriate box(es)

☐ **Participating in interviews.**

☐ **Having my information audio recorded.**

☐ **Being observed.**

☐ **Using unidentified work samples, interview responses and excerpts of classroom talk collected from me in publications.**

I consent for my data and information provided to be used in this project.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published and stored for five years but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher and any organisations involved, now or in the future**.**

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix 4.3

Consent Form - Students

Project Title: An Investigation into Writing Practices in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools.

I hereby consent to participate in the above named research project.

I acknowledge that:

• I have been given the opportunity to discuss the research information and my participation in the project with the researcher.

• I understand fully what I will be asked to do in this study.

I consent to participate in the research and consent to be observed in my English teacher's writing classes ☐

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher, the teacher and any organisations involved, now or in the future.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix 4.4

Participant Information Sheet – Parents/Carers

Project Title: An Investigation into Writing Practices in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools.

Project summary

Your child's teacher is participating in a research study being conducted by the chief research Chi Thi Kim Nguyen, a PhD candidate of the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr Jacqueline D'Warte and Dr Lynde Tan, in the School of Education, Western Sydney University. Research data comprise teacher interviews and classroom observations.

The researcher will observe the writing classes of your child's teacher from August to December. There will be no intervention in teaching and learning. Your child will learn and interact with his/her teacher and friends as usual.

Benefits of the research

This research purports to investigate and offer recommendations that will enhance teaching practices of English writing at the lower secondary level in Ba Ria – Vung Tau province in particular and in Vietnam in general. This will contribute to making young people's learning of English writing more effective.

Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. If your child does participate, he/she can withdraw at any time without giving reason, and any information about him/her will not be used.

Confidentiality and data management

The data will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer. To protect privacy, your child's name, teachers' and school's names will be coded during the process of analyzing and reporting the research data. The data will be stored in UWS's Research Shared Drive/Cloudstor+ (de-identifying data) for five years after the completion of the project.

Research dissemination

The results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified, except with your permission. Numbers or pseudonyms will be assigned to participants.

Further information

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on +61 2 4736 0229 or humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you very much for considering your child's participation. Please feel free to contact Ms Nguyen Thi Kim Chi (kimchisp@gmail.com, 0974996263), should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. If you allow your child to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H12118.

Appendix 4.5

Consent Form - Parents/Carers

Project Title: An Investigation into Writing Practices in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Lower Secondary Schools.

I, *[Parent/Carer to print name]***, hereby consent for my child** *[Parent/Carer to print name of child]***, to participate in the above named research project.**

I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child agrees to participation in the project.

I acknowledge that:

• I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child's involvement in the project with the researcher.

• The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent for my child to participate in the research

I understand that my child's involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals his/her identity.

I understand that I can withdraw my child, or my child can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting our relationship with the researcher, the teacher and any organisations involved, now or in the future.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix 4.6

Phase 1 Interview

1. What is your name?

2. What is your age group?

a. 20-30 years old   b. 31- 40 years old   c. 41-50 years old   d. Over 50 years old

3. How long ago did you graduate from a college/university?

4. How long have you been working as a teacher of English at the lower secondary level?

5. What are your specific duties as a teacher?

6. How do you feel about **teaching writing**? (Can you please explain your response?)

      Follow-up question: What should a teacher do to have a successful writing class?

7. Did you graduate from a teacher training institution?

If the answer to question 7 is *yes*:

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education program prepared you for **teaching writing**?

Do you think your teacher education program needed improving? If yes, what do you think needed improving?

8. Did you get any in-service training in **teaching writing**, *i.e. training teachers in instructing lower secondary students to write,* especially from Project 2020?

If the answer to question 8 is *yes*:

What did you learn about **teaching writing** from the course(s)?

What was helpful or unhelpful for your **teaching writing**? Why (not)?

If the answer to question 8 is *no*:

Would you like to have had any training in teaching **writing**? Why (not)?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4.7

Phase 3 Interview

Phase 3 interview occurred after observation and document analysis. The formulation of phase 3 interview questions was guided by the observational data. Follow-up questions were tailored to individual teacher participants.

I. Common questions used to ask six teachers

1. Were there any factors that prevented you from doing what you really wanted to do in your writing classes? If yes, what were they? (Can you please explain your response in detail?)

2. What do you think about the writing tasks in the textbook?

    Follow-up questions:

    In unit 3, you asked your students to draw their favourite room at home, then you asked them to describe it in class. What drove you to make this choice? What did you want to achieve? (reserved for **T13-suburban-grade 8)**

3. At the moment, Minister of Education and Training (MOET) is supporting an idea of having more than one textbook for each subject, and encouraging individuals and agencies to produce books that meet MOET's criteria. Suppose MOET or Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training give teachers freedom to choose the books among those accredited by MOET or to choose teaching materials themselves *provided that what they teach meet the learning outcomes MOET set*. Which do you prefer: freedom to choose what content to teach *with or without* the assistance of books accredited by MOET or follow a prescribed textbook as ever?

4. What do you think about the use of pair or group work?

    Follow-up questions:

    You *always* asked your students to write in groups. What drove you to make this choice? (reserved for **T12-suburban-grade 9)**

    You *often* asked your students to work on vocabulary activity in groups and *always* asked them to write individually. Can you explain your choice? (reserved for **T13-suburban-grade 8)**

5. What do you think about the use of technology and first language in the teaching of English writing?

6. The National Foreign Language Project has been extended until 2025. In your opinion, what needs to be done to support teachers to teach English effectively in general and English writing in particular?

II. Questions used to ask T10-rural-grade 9 and T4-urban-grade 8

(T10-rural-grade 9 and T4-urban-grade 8 attended a training course held on August, 2017 by Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training)

7. What do you think about the training course held on August, 2017 by Ba Ria-Vung Tau Department of Education and Training? Did you apply what you had learned in your own teaching last semester? Why (not)? If yes, what did you apply?

Appendix 4.8

Observation Sheet

School……………   Classroom ………… …….   Date: ……………

Length of observation: ………… Teacher's name: …………… Number of students: ……………

General physical setting: ……………………………………………………………………

Abbreviation: Students: SS; Teacher: T

Descriptive notes				Reflective notes
Time	Setting	Steps of teaching	What is written on the board	
		1. Activities used to prepare SS for writing 2. Activities used while SS are writing 3. Activities used after SS writing		

Teaching aids (artefacts) collected……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………