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Investigating teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective: A case study of a Vietnamese upper-secondary school

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**UNIVERSITY OF
WOLLONGONG**



Faculty of Social Sciences

**Investigating teachers' implementation of the task-based
curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective: A case study
of a Vietnamese upper-secondary school**

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(BEd Huế University, Vietnam; MEd La Trobe University, Australia)

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment for the award of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in TESOL/Applied Linguistics
at the University of Wollongong, Australia**

August 2015

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Trần Giang Nam (named in Australian style as Giang Nam Tran), declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in TESOL/Applied Linguistics at the School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wollongong, Australia, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

TRẦN GIANG NAM

August 2015

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a central focus in second/foreign language education policy in Asian-Pacific countries (Adams & Newton 2009; Butler 2011; Littlewood 2007). Governments in the region have designated TBLT as the official discourse in second/foreign language curriculum innovation and teachers across different educational contexts are expected to adopt TBLT in their classes. The teachers' central role in the implementation of the curriculum has consequently led to growing research interest into English language teacher cognition (i.e., teachers' beliefs, knowledge and thinking) in relation to TBLT in the region (Canh 2011; Sakui 2004; Yook 2010) as teacher cognition is considered to be a prominent factor in the successful implementation of curricula (Borg 2006). To date, several studies have explored teachers' implementation of curricula, but they have focused primarily on only one of two major components of teacher cognition, namely their beliefs (Canh 2011; Viet 2013); no studies in the Vietnamese context have yet examined teacher cognition with the purpose exploring both their beliefs and knowledge – two major components of teacher cognition, according to the literature (Borg 2003, 2006). Furthermore, previous studies focused on teacher cognition about Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as part of the teaching methodology rather than the guiding approach that informs the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment with regards to the introduction of tasks. Given that the task-based curriculum is designed on the three-dimensional interface of curriculum content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Nunan 2004), there is a critical gap in the literature regarding this interface. In the current curriculum innovation in Vietnam, TBLT is used as an overarching discourse defining the curricular content, classroom pedagogy and learner assessment (Van et al 2006a, 2006b). Even now, what the Vietnamese teachers know, believe and practise in the classroom in relation to these dimensions of the curriculum innovation still remains unclear.

This qualitative case study fills the research gap in the literature by exploring Vietnamese teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective. Drawing on a combined framework of Shulman's (1986, 1987) categories of teacher curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, this research project examined the participating teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding the curriculum in the three dimensions (i.e., curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment) that the

curriculum innovation entailed. In particular, this study looked at three research questions:

1. *What cognitions do the participating teachers hold about the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school?*
2. *How do the participating teachers' cognitions permeate their classroom practices?*
3. *To what extent are the teachers' cognitions reflected in their classroom testing practices?*

A case study of six teachers was conducted for the current investigation. Empirical data was collected from interviews (semi-structured interviews and informal conversations), lesson plans, classroom observations, and documents (e.g., textbooks, curriculum guidelines, and test papers). The data was transcribed into the original language that the teachers used (both English and Vietnamese) and analysed using a qualitative thematic approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Guest et al. 2012).

The findings from the interview data indicated that teachers' cognitions, classroom practices and assessment all mirrored a structural approach that privileges form over meaning. Specifically, the teachers conceived the curricular content in terms of discrete linguistic items, paying minimal attention to a topic-based content that the curriculum was modelled on. For those teachers, learning English means rote memorization of linguistic items which should be prioritized over students' communicative skills. Further data from the lesson plans and classroom observations showed a similar focus-on-forms approach. In teaching, the majority of the teachers selected vocabulary-based, closed-ended and form-focused activities. In addition, these activities were organized in a form-focused sequence, reflecting the conventional Presentation – Practice – Production (PPP) teaching model (Byrne 1986), which is not aligned with that advocated by a TBLT framework of practice (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). Analysis of data from testing practices indicated that the teachers' assessment focused on discrete linguistic items and precision of language production at the word and sentence levels, aligning with the focus-on-forms approach that the teachers described and delivered in classes. In light of Bernstein's (1990, 2000) pedagogic discourse, the findings reported from the teachers' curriculum, pedagogy and assessment showed that discrete linguistic knowledge, rather than tasks, dominated their cognitions and classroom practices. It was likely that the

teachers responded to the influence of the examinations, and prioritized the importance of examinations in their classroom teaching. As a result, the teachers' classroom practices deviated from the underlying purpose behind the TBLT approach in the curriculum innovation, and instead aligned with a 'teaching-to-the-test' approach (e.g., Popham 2001) in their implementation of the task-based curriculum.

The findings reported in this study serve to enrich our academic understanding in the field of teacher cognition research from a combined framework of Shuman's (1986, 1987) concept of teachers' knowledge and Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, suggesting a rethinking of teacher cognition research which is situated in a local setting. More importantly, this thesis provides empirical evidence for language education policy makers, curriculum leaders, test designers, and teacher trainers to consider in relation to the implementation of the task-based curriculum, and suggestions for making the curriculum innovation a success in local classroom contexts.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BEd:	Bachelor of Education (degree)
CLT:	Communicative language teaching
DOET:	Provincial Department of Education and Training
EFL:	English as a foreign language
ESL:	English as a second language
L2:	Second/foreign language
MEd:	Master of Education (degree)
MOET:	Ministry of Education and Training
PCK:	Pedagogical content knowledge
PPP:	Presentation – Practice – Production
SCT:	Sociocultural theory
SLA:	Second language acquisition
TBLT:	Task-based language teaching
TEFL:	Teaching English as a foreign language
TESOL:	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
ZPD:	Zone of proximal development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Over the last ten years, the English language curriculum in Vietnamese schools has been dramatically reformed to meet the new demands of English education. The official English curriculum for upper-secondary schools, which adopted task-based language teaching (TBLT) as the principal discourse, came into use in 2006 (Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) 2006; Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). Several studies determined that although Vietnamese teachers reported having positive beliefs towards the curriculum innovation, their classroom practices were often inconsistent with their stated beliefs (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2007). Canh and Barnard (2009a) added that Vietnamese teachers merely gave ‘lip service’ (p. 29) to adhering to the TBLT discourse embedded in the curriculum. This suggests a conflict between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices which may have a detrimental impact on the English language curriculum innovation.

Teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, also referred to as teacher cognition, play a central role in the teacher’s work in the classroom (Borg 2006). Examining teachers’ cognitions is pertinent to the implementation of any curriculum innovation, because, as Borg (2003, 2006, 2009) points out, understanding teachers’ cognitions is central to understanding teaching in the classroom. This is particularly significant in the Vietnamese context, as few studies have investigated the current status of English curriculum innovation. There is wide consensus in the literature that the success of curriculum innovation largely depends on the beliefs, knowledge and understanding of the teachers who teach in the classroom (Allen 2002; Freeman 2002; Fullan 2001). According to Borg (2006), studying teachers’ cognitions helps to uncover what teachers know, believe and think about the innovation and how their knowledge, beliefs and thinking inform teaching. There is increasing research into Vietnamese teachers’ beliefs about TBLT and how this approach is adopted in the classroom (Canh 2011; Viet 2013, 2014). These studies, however, focused primarily on one of two major components of teacher cognition only, namely teachers’ beliefs. No previous studies in Vietnam have yet examined teacher cognition with the purpose exploring both their beliefs and knowledge – two major components of teacher cognition as defined in the literature (Borg 2003, 2006), leaving a critical gap in teacher cognition

research in relation to the curriculum innovation. It is thus necessary for the present study to explore teachers' cognitions regarding both teachers' beliefs and knowledge in relation to curriculum innovation in Vietnamese upper secondary schools.

The current study set out to examine teachers' implementation of the task-based English language curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school from a teacher cognition perspective. This introductory chapter sets the scene for the study. [Section 1.1](#) provides background information for this study, highlighting the changes that the current English language curriculum innovation offers and the gaps in the existing research literature on the task-based curriculum in the Vietnamese context. [Section 1.2](#) presents the research problem that the study aims to address. [Section 1.3](#) outlines the purposes of the study, and is followed by [Section 1.4](#) which articulates the significance that the research may contribute to the literature. [Section 1.5](#) introduces the main research question and subsidiary questions that the current study aims to address. The final section ([Section 1.6](#)) outlines the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

In 2006, the official English curriculum was launched in Vietnamese upper secondary schools (MOET 2006). A significant feature of the new curriculum is the introduction of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in classroom instruction. Following the TBLT approach, changes were undertaken in three major areas: curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). In terms of the curricular content, the new curriculum is designed based on topics with each unit of work structured around a topic related to students' interests and preferences. In terms of teaching pedagogy, the new curriculum adopts the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach in classroom instruction. Within the TBLT approach, the textbooks offer a variety of tasks which are provided in a three-stage sequence including the pre-task, while-task and post-task stages. The authors (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b) explain that this sequence allows a focus on meaning in the delivery of tasks in the classroom. In terms of learner assessment, the curriculum recommends testing learners' use of language with regard to four language skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). In this manner, learners are expected to be assessed in terms of four skills. All three areas of change (curricular content, teaching pedagogy, and learner assessment) are critically important in curriculum innovation (Van et al. 2006b). Therefore, teachers need to address these three

areas of change in the implementation of the curriculum innovation in the upper secondary school context.

It is also noted that the educational system in Vietnam operates as a top-down mechanism where schools and teachers are expected to enact changes in the curriculum innovation in an indisputable manner (Canh 2007; Canh & Barnard 2009a). Over the last decade, task-based language teaching has become a prevailing trend in teaching English in secondary schools throughout the country (Nunan 2003; Trang et al. 2011; Viet 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, research has pointed out that English language classrooms are facing considerable challenges due to Vietnamese traditional teaching and learning methods (Canh 2011; Oanh & Hien 2006). According to these researchers, form-focused instruction and rote memorization are still widely adopted in English language classrooms although task-based language teaching has been mandated by language policy makers in school curricula. Nunan (2003) expressed his scepticism of TBLT in Vietnam in a large scale study in the Asia-Pacific region and predicted that failure of the enactment of the task-based curriculum is ‘the order of the day’ (p. 606).

However, until now no single study has examined teachers’ implementation of the task-based curriculum across all three areas of change that the curriculum entails. Instead, studies have only looked at certain aspects of teachers’ views and/or practices in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. Minh (2007) and Canh (2007), for example, surveyed teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about the textbook content, and found that this content was difficult to teach because some of the topics were potentially irrelevant to teaching in the local context. Nevertheless, no specific topics were pointed out as being irrelevant by the researchers due to the nature of the questionnaire surveys used in these studies. According to Ellis (2003a), language topic relevancy and familiarity play an important role in TBLT, affecting the level of success that teachers can achieve with tasks in the classroom. It is thus necessary to examine teachers’ delivery of this topic-based content in the classroom in relation to their implementation of the curriculum. The dearth of research on teachers’ implementation of the topic-based content in the Vietnamese upper secondary context motivates the current study to examine this area of change in relation to the curriculum innovation.

Other studies have explored how teachers make use of tasks in Vietnamese classrooms, however, the results seem contradictory (Trang 2013; Viet 2013). While Viet found that

teachers changed most of the meaning-focused activities into form-focused activities in the classroom, Trang provided evidence demonstrating that the teachers in her study modified closed-ended tasks and made them more open, in order to maximize real-life interaction between students. While both studies relied on classroom observation data to explore teachers' use of tasks in the classroom, none of those provided insights into the teachers' views on their selection of tasks in the classroom. Borg (2006) has argued that to understand teachers' classroom practices, it is necessary to seek their views on what they teach. Therefore, the teachers' principles of task selection are one of the major foci for the current investigation. Furthermore, the teacher's sequencing of tasks also plays an important role in how TBLT is implemented in the classroom. According to TBLT advocates, tasks are sequenced from focus on meaning to focus on form in teaching (Ellis 2006; Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). This sequence represents a deep-end strategy, where learners are exposed to meaning first and form is attended to later during task completion (Johnson 2008). In the Vietnamese context, however, no studies have examined how teachers sequenced tasks in the classroom. Given the importance of task selection and sequencing in teachers' pedagogy (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004), it is necessary for the current study to examine teachers' classroom delivery of tasks in terms of what tasks they select and how these tasks are sequenced in the classroom.

Furthermore, no prior research has examined how English tests are conducted in the classrooms and what the teachers think about the new learner assessment system, leaving a critical gap in the literature regarding learner assessment in the curriculum innovation. In addition, the scarcity of research on teachers' testing practices has been exacerbated by the claim that tests and examinations are viewed as a major obstacle in the implementation of the curriculum (Canh 2011; Viet 2013). What the teachers know and how they assess students in the classroom is mostly ignored by the existing literature. It is thus important to conduct research into teachers' testing practices in the classroom in relation to the implementation of the curriculum.

In general, the launch of the new curriculum has made TBLT the prevalent discourse in the classroom regarding curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment. Nevertheless, few studies have considered teachers' implementation of the curriculum in relation to these areas. Until now, a few studies have explored the methodological aspect only (e.g., how tasks are adopted), but no studies have examined TBLT as an overarching approach that defines the curricular content, classroom pedagogy and learner assessment in

Vietnam. Furthermore, classroom teachers' views on the curriculum innovation, a critical element to the successful implementation of any curricular innovation, in relation to these areas of change have not been sufficiently examined. Therefore, it is important for the current study to explore what teachers think and how they implement the task-based curriculum in a local school context in Vietnam. The following section will examine the research problem for the current study more closely.

1.2 The research problem

Teachers' cognitions have drawn much scholarly attention over the past three decades in attempts to explore teachers' thoughts and actions in the classroom (Borg 2006). Although there is increasingly more literature available on teachers' cognitions in the field of second language (L2) education, there is a paucity of research on teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum innovation. Furthermore, while pre-service and novice teachers are the foci of research attention (Brown 2009; Cabaroglu & Roberts 2000; Diab 2006; Flores 2005; Golombek 1998; Peacock 2001; Sendan & Roberts 1998), relatively few studies have investigated in-service (experienced) teachers' cognitions in the context of curriculum innovation in non-native English speaking countries (Canh 2011; Yook 2010). In-service teachers appear to receive scant attention in the research literature regarding their cognitions about curriculum innovation in English language teaching. However, in the climate of curriculum innovation, (in-service) teachers should be recognised as the central players who are integral to the success of the innovation (Fullan 2001; Markee 1997). Woods (1996) argued that teachers often filter, digest, and implement the curriculum in accordance with their cognitions. As such, it is necessary to investigate in-service teachers' cognitions in relation to the curriculum innovation.

This study aims to examine classroom teachers' implementation of the curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective. Research on teachers' cognitions - defined as what teachers know, believe and think, and the relationship of these elements to their classroom practices - has been the focus of teacher research over the past several decades (Borg 2006). It is widely agreed that understanding teachers' cognitions is central to understanding their teaching, particularly in the context of curriculum innovation (Borg 2006; Sakui 2004; Woods 1996; Yook 2010). In the Vietnamese context, the scarcity of research on teachers' cognitions about the curriculum innovation, particularly in relation to the three major areas,

including the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment, has motivated the researcher to conduct this study.

Curriculum innovation researchers point out that teachers play a central role in the implementation of the curriculum at the classroom level (Fullan 2001; Hargreaves 1989; Markee 1997). Curriculum leaders often expect teachers to follow the content and approaches specified in the textbooks; however, teachers have their own cognitions about these changes and these cognitions influence the way they teach in the classroom (Fullan 2001; Markee 1997). In the same vein, classroom-based researchers argue that teachers often have different views from the curriculum developers, resulting in a gap between the *intended* curriculum offered by educational leaders and the *realized* curriculum which is implemented by teachers in the classroom (Sakui 2004; Wang 2008; Woods 1996). It is clear that when implementing a new curriculum, teachers have developed their cognitions of teaching as to how to best promote students' learning of the target language in the local context. Their implementation may not follow the pre-defined content and approaches provided by the curriculum leaders.

It is also widely acknowledged that second language teachers' cognitions play a crucial role in teaching (Borg 2003, 2006, 2009). Central to teachers' cognitions are their beliefs, knowledge and understanding that each teacher holds about the curriculum. These cognitive constructs and the teachers' observable behaviours help to shape the path along which the curriculum is implemented (Borg 2006). A substantial body of research has been conducted to investigate teachers' knowledge, beliefs and thinking in relation to different aspects of classroom life. Much of this research has examined teachers' beliefs in relation to the areas of grammar teaching (Andrews 2003; Ng & Farrell 2003; Phipps & Borg 2009), communicative language teaching (Sakui 2004; Wang & Cheng 2005) and the task-based language teaching approach (Andon & Eckerth 2009; Carless 2007, 2009). Though this body of research has offered insights into L2 teachers' beliefs, knowledge and thinking, teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum as a whole still remain unexplored. Given the important role of teachers' cognitions in the implementation of the curriculum innovation, further studies are required to examine the teachers' implementation of the curriculum from a cognition perspective in the Vietnamese context. What teachers know and believe about the task-based curriculum and how they implement the three areas of change still remain unexplored in the existing literature on second language curriculum innovation.

Furthermore, findings from previous studies have suggested that there is a dearth of research into teachers' cognitions about learner assessment in the classroom (Carless 2007, 2009; Fang & Garland 2013; Nishimuro & Borg 2013). For example, in an interview study of 11 teachers in Hong Kong, Carless (2007) found that the teachers cited examinations as the main factors that hindered the implementation of the tasks in the classroom. However, none of the previous studies provided empirical evidence of the teachers' testing practices in relation to the curriculum innovation. Thus, assumptions were made based on the teachers' comments on the negative impact of examinations on teachers' beliefs about the outcomes of the curriculum innovation. As a result, it is important that research into teachers' cognitions be conducted to take teachers' classroom testing practices into account. Only in this way can teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum be fully explored. Therefore, the current study sets out to examine in-service teachers' implementation of the curriculum with regards to the topic-based content, classroom teaching pedagogy and learner assessment, which are provided in the curriculum innovation as the major areas requiring change (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b).

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the current research project was to investigate Vietnamese teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from the teacher cognition perspective through the use of a qualitative case study. Theoretically, this study drew on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to depict teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. Furthermore, Bernstein's (1977, 1990) notion of pedagogic discourse, including the three message systems, the concepts of instructional/regulative discourses and recognition/realization rules, were drawn on to categorize and characterize the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in terms of the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment in response to the three major areas of change that the curriculum entails. Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative case study approach that used multiple methods of examination including interviews, classroom observations and documents (the curriculum guidelines, the teachers' written lesson plans and self-designed test papers). The participants were six in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in a local Vietnamese upper secondary school. It was hoped that the study would obtain in-depth understandings of Vietnamese EFL teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from the teacher cognition perspective, based on empirical data drawn from the classroom. These

understandings would add to the academic literature of second language teachers' cognitions in a local Vietnamese context.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study makes important empirical, theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the implementation of a task-based curriculum innovation in the Vietnamese upper secondary school context from a teacher cognition perspective.

Firstly, it adds to the understanding of language teachers' cognitions in a context that is little known in the research literature (Borg 2006, 2009, 2010). To date, there is little research on teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum with regard to the three areas of change as provided in the English curriculum in Vietnam. Only a few studies have explored English teachers' beliefs in similar areas, such as form-focused instruction (Canh 2011) or task-based instruction (Viet 2013). No studies have covered all these areas of change in a Vietnamese upper secondary school context. As the first attempt at research into teachers' implementation of these areas from a teacher cognition perspective, this study provides a detailed account of teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum, generating original academic understanding about teacher cognition research in Vietnam.

Secondly, the study is theoretically innovative in that it draws on insights from an integration of two theoretical frameworks, namely Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of a teacher knowledge base and Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, to examine teacher cognitions and classroom practices. Shulman's concepts of teachers' curricular knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge as components of teachers' knowledge base were employed to describe the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, considering the curricular content as well as the organizational and instructional features of tasks in teaching. This is significant, as Shulman's framework allowed the study to capture teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in connection with their delivery of tasks in the classroom. In addition, Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse allowed the study to characterize the relationship between the teachers' cognitions in relation to their classroom practices in the local context with regard to the three major areas of change in the curriculum: the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment in terms of the three message systems. Taken together, this combined framework allowed the study to examine teachers' implementation of the curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective,

an undertaking that no prior study has yet demonstrated in language teacher cognition research regarding the task-based curriculum in Vietnam.

Practically speaking, the findings reported in this study will have important implications for educational authorities and professional practice. Specifically, the study will inform language policy makers who are in charge of the curriculum development, of the way that the curriculum is actually enacted by classroom teachers. According to many researchers, L2 curricula in Asia Pacific countries, including Vietnam, are often developed in a top-down system (Kam & Wong 2004; Littlewood 2007; Nunan 2003). In this system, teachers' voices, regarding how they understand and implement the curriculum, are often unheard (Littlewood 2004). This study thus seeks to inform Vietnamese language policy makers by providing them with a real picture of what teachers think as well as how they implement the curriculum in a local context. Breen (1991) has argued:

By uncovering the kinds of knowledge and beliefs which teachers hold and how they express these through the meanings that they give to their work, we may come to know the most appropriate support we can provide in in-service development (p. 232).

Following the findings and suggestions made by the current study, it is hoped that adjustments may be made for either the on-going curriculum or any language programs in the future.

Finally, the present study provides teachers and other interested readers with insights into the field of language teachers' cognitions and curriculum innovation. Borg (2006) notes that teachers' cognitions are often tacit and implicit; therefore, in real life not many teachers spell out what they know about or what they believe they know about in teaching (Freeman 2002). Together with prior research in Vietnam (e.g., Canh 2011; Viet 2013), the results of the present study are likely to contribute to building a common understanding of Vietnamese EFL teachers' cognitions. This may help teachers to reflect on their own knowledge and beliefs in comparison with colleagues elsewhere (for example, see Barnard & Burns 2012). On a final note, this study provides the principal researcher with a good opportunity to understand teachers from a practical perspective. The study also allows the researcher to professionally grow in his career as a novice teacher researcher.

1.5 Research questions

The overall aim of the current study is to investigate six Vietnamese teachers' implementations of the task-based English curriculum in an upper secondary school from a teacher cognition perspective. In general, this study seeks to address the following research question:

How do Vietnamese EFL teachers implement the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective?

This overarching question is embodied in three subsidiary questions:

1. *What cognitions do the participating teachers hold about the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school?*
2. *How do the participating teachers' cognitions permeate their classroom practices?*
3. *To what extent are the teachers' cognitions reflected in their classroom testing practices?*

1.6 Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, [Chapter Two](#) reviews the literature relevant to the three major areas: Second language (L2) curriculum innovation, the task-based curriculum, and teachers' cognitions. [Section 2.1](#) highlights the changes in L2 education and the demands of the task-based curriculum in L2 education policy. [Section 2.2](#) discusses the characteristics of the task-based curriculum in three interrelated areas: curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment, and critically reviews the research literature on the implementation of the curriculum in these dimensions. [Section 2.3](#) provides a definition of teachers' cognitions and continues with an extensive review of research literature on teachers' cognitions about TBLT in selected Asian contexts and Vietnam to point out the gaps for the current study. This chapter ends with the research questions that the current study examines.

[Chapter Three](#) addresses the philosophical and methodological aspects of the current study. Philosophically, this chapter explains the adoption of the naturalistic tradition as the overarching paradigm in the current thesis. A discussion of the theoretical framework of the research is also provided in this chapter. Methodologically, the chapter describes the research settings, methods and procedures that the study used in data collection, analysis

and interpretation. Issues related to ethical considerations and enhancement of the research quality are also discussed in this chapter.

[Chapter Four](#) presents the findings of the current research on three major sections: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) three message systems from multiple sources of data including the interviews, lesson plans, classroom observations and test papers. [Section 4.1](#) presents the findings on teachers' cognitions from the interview data. This provides readers an awareness of the participants' beliefs, knowledge and understanding of the curricular content and pedagogical content issues related to teaching the topic-based content in classes. [Section 4.2](#) presents the findings generated from the lesson plan and classroom observation data to illustrate how the participants' cognitions were reflected in their classroom practices. [Section 4.3](#) continues with the findings on the participants' assessment practices that describe how the teachers' cognitions were mirrored in their testing practices. Together, Chapter Four provides an in-depth account of teachers' cognitions in terms of the three-dimensional interface of the task-based curriculum, drawing on the concept of the three message systems in Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse.

[Chapter Five](#) concludes the study by providing a discussion and conclusions based on the key findings in the current research. This chapter also discusses the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the study. Potential limitations, implications and suggestions for future research in L2 teacher cognition research are also outlined in this final chapter.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research literature in three major domains relevant to the scope of the present study: second/foreign language (hereafter, L2) curriculum innovation, the task-based curriculum, and teacher cognition. [Section 2.1](#) provides an overview of L2 curriculum innovation in two areas: syllabus design and communicative approaches, highlighting the changes in L2 education and the demands of the task-based curriculum in L2 education policy. [Section 2.2](#) discusses the characteristics of the task-based curriculum in three interrelated dimensions: curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment, and critically reviews the research literature on the implementation of the curriculum in these dimensions. This section provides an overview of research interest and gaps in the existing literature. [Section 2.3](#) focuses on teachers' cognitions by, first, establishing a working definition and the orientating framework of teacher cognition for the present study. Second, a discussion of the relationship between teachers' cognitions and pedagogical practices is presented, arguing that research into teachers' cognitions must be accompanied by observation of their classroom practices. This section continues with a critical review of recent research into teachers' cognitions and classroom practices with Task-Based Language Teaching (hereafter, TBLT) and the task-based curriculum in Asian and Vietnamese settings, highlighting the gap for the present research to explore. The chapter ends with an overview of the main issues and the proposed research questions to be addressed in the current study.

2.1 Innovation in L2 curriculum

Since Hymes (1972) coined the notion 'communicative competence' in response to Chomsky's (1965) theory of linguistic competence, some remarkable innovations have been made in the L2 curricula towards the development of learners' communicative competencies. There are two major trends in the innovation of L2 curricula. The first focuses on proposals of new L2 syllabuses (Breen 1984; Breen & Candlin 1980; Prabhu 1984, 1987) while the second draws scholarly attention to the development of communicative approaches that target learners' communicative competencies (Ellis 2003a; Littlewood 1981; Nunan 2004; Savignon 1983). In the sections that follow, a review of

these two trends is presented to provide an in-depth understanding of how L2 curriculum innovation has taken place over the last three decades.

2.1.1 Syllabus proposals

Second/foreign language (L2) syllabuses worldwide experienced remarkable changes in the early 1980s in response to the focus on learner's communicative competencies (White 1988; Yalden 1987). Markee (1997) notes that there was a shift from traditionally product-oriented syllabuses to process-oriented syllabuses, that aim to enhance the learner's use of the target language for communicative purposes. This section explores and critiques three types of syllabuses: the structural syllabus (Wilkins 1976), the process syllabus (Breen 1984; Breen & Candlin 1980) and the procedural syllabus (Prabhu 1984, 1987) as the major syllabus proposals that mark the changes. This review aims to provide an overview of L2 curriculum development prior to the introduction of the task-based curriculum, the focus of the present study.

2.1.1.1 The structural syllabus

The structural syllabus, with its focus on *what* is taught, is a product-oriented type of syllabus (White 1988; Wilkins 1976). It comprises a teaching repertoire of discrete linguistic items, usually arranged in the order in which they are to be taught (Ellis 1993). Examples of structural syllabuses include grammatical and functional-notional syllabuses, among many others (see Nunan 1988; Yalden 1987). The grammatical syllabus defined pre-determined discrete linguistic items (i.e., phonetics, grammar and vocabulary) as prerequisites for learning to use language (Wilkins 1976). The functional-notional syllabus, on the other hand, was concerned with notions and functions which were useful in communication. Similar to the grammatical syllabus, the functional-notional syllabus relied on descriptive language functions/notions, and the assumption that learners would be able to communicate after being provided with the language functions/notions needed (Breen 1987a). In general, the structural syllabus viewed language structures and/or language functions/notions as the final *products* of teaching and learning. The teaching procedure followed the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model (Byrne 1986) in which language structures and functions/notions were presented, practised and reproduced according to a pre-defined manner. In this respect, the structural syllabus focuses heavily on language form, but overlooks meaning in language teaching and learning, and was

criticised by researchers who were inspired by communicative competence (Nunan 1988, 1991a; Yalden 1987).

The structural syllabus is criticized for a number of shortcomings that it has for teaching and learning. According to Yalden (1987), the structural syllabus focused on providing students with a list of grammatical notions and/or functions which were not sufficient for students to develop communicative competence. In addition, the assumption underpinning the structural syllabus, that language consists of a set of rules which can be combined to make meaning, is not realistic in teaching practice (Nunan 1988). It was assumed that grammatical rules and/or language functions/notions were learned one by one in a linear accumulative process, claiming that each item is learned and added to the learner's existing knowledge of the target language. Rutherford (1987) noted that the structural syllabus provided students with 'accumulated entities' (p. 5) of language structures which assist them to crack the language code, rather than use the language for communicative purposes. Drawing on the literature of second language acquisition, Nunan (1991a) was critical of the structural syllabus with regard to the linear sequence of linguistic items in an accumulative fashion, arguing that language learning must be based on 'an organic process characterised by backsliding, leaps in competence, interaction between grammatical elements' (p. 148). Overall, the structural syllabus is criticized for its focus on the *what* but downplaying the *how* of teaching and learning, thus failing to take into account the link between content and pedagogy in syllabus design. Critics of this syllabus argue for the need for more process-oriented syllabuses that emphasize teaching and learning methodologies. The following sections will discuss two types of process-oriented syllabuses: the process and procedural syllabuses.

2.1.1.2 The process syllabus

The process syllabus was proposed in dissatisfaction with the structural syllabus that focused on teaching and learning language structures as end products (Johnson & Johnson 1999). In particular, the process syllabus was concerned with the learning process and how the objective could be achieved (Breen 1984). Breen (1987a, 1987b) further explained that the process syllabus is a plan for classroom work in which all teaching and learning components (i.e., content, procedure and assessment) are negotiated between the teacher and learners in the classroom; there was no pre-determined specification of what to be

taught and learned. In this manner, the syllabus was open to negotiation between the teacher and learners in class (Clarke 1991). Breen (1984) highlighted the responsibilities of the teacher and learners in the process syllabus in three aspects: participation, procedure and subject matter. Participation defines the mode of working in the classroom. It can be the teacher with the whole class or with individual learners; or it may be students working alone or with peers. Procedure focuses on the kinds of classroom activities, types of materials or resources and/or the steps that are required for learning activities to take place. Subject matter is related to the content of teaching and learning, which is negotiated between the teacher and learners in class. According to Breen (1984), the process syllabus is a dynamic type of syllabus that resides on the teacher and learners' negotiation. This type of syllabus is opposite to the traditional formal curriculum, which is in the form of a textbook that specifies what to teach and learn in the classroom. As a radical type of syllabus, the process syllabus has faced a lot of criticism in practice.

Researchers are critical of the process syllabus for its shortcomings (Long & Crookes 1992, 1993; White 1988). For example, some researchers criticized the process syllabus for lacking a formal evaluation in practice (Long & Crookes 1993; White 1988). As the syllabus challenged the traditional role of the teacher and the use of standardized curriculum texts, there was concern that the syllabus might pose challenges to the context of teaching. White (1988), for example, concedes that a strong emphasis on the process of learning may lead to an aimless journey of teaching and learning. From a practical perspective, Long and Crookes (1993, p. 36-37) further pointed out other areas of concern. Whilst there was a strong focus on classroom activities, the activities were not based on learners' needs. Nor did the syllabus pay attention to the issues of grading and sequencing in teaching and learning. Because of the overemphasis on communicative activities, language form was not identified in the syllabus design. Importantly, the syllabus was not founded on a well-articulated theory of second language acquisition. For these reasons, the process syllabus was not practical according to many L2 curriculum critics (Johnson 1989; Long & Crookes 1992, 1993; Markee 1997).

2.1.1.3 The procedural syllabus

Another type of process-oriented syllabus is the procedural syllabus (Johnson & Johnson 1999). The procedural syllabus was introduced with the work of Prabhu (1984, 1987)

which primarily focuses on *what* is performed by students in the classroom. With growing dissatisfaction with the structural approach to syllabus design, Prabhu initiated a language project in South India in the early 1980s drawing on the work of Palmer (1921) and other sociolinguists such as Wilkins (1974, 1976) and Widdowson (1978). The aim of this project was to pilot a language program, later known as the Bangalore Project, using a syllabus developed by Prabhu and his colleagues, termed the 'procedural syllabus' (Prabhu 1984, 1987). At the heart of the procedural syllabus are communicative activities that engage learners in interaction in classes. To promote learners' interaction, Prabhu outlined three types of 'gap' activities in the syllabus design. They are: information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap. *Information gap* activities involve the transmission of given information from one person to another or from one form to another (e.g., from a text to a table) which requires the encoding and/or decoding of the information into language. *Reasoning gap* activities involve the processing of given information through such practical reasoning strategies as inference or deduction. *Opinion gap* activities involve articulating personal feelings, preferences and/or attitudes in a given situation. Prabhu claimed that the three types of gap-based activities could enhance learners' communication by asking them to move 'up and down a given line of thought or logic' (1987, p. 46). In this respect, the procedural syllabus strongly focused on meaning through gap-based activities; however, it eschewed structural and semantic features of the target language (Brumfit 1984; Long & Robinson 1998).

Criticism over the procedural syllabus has been raised in some respects related to the activity content and pedagogy. For example, Brumfit (1984) pointed out that this syllabus focused too much on meaning but avoided linguistic features, leading to the learners' deficiency in response to form in language production. In addition, the procedural syllabus abstained from paying any attention to form such as drilling and error correction, which could result in 'classroom pidgin' (i.e., unofficial and rudimentary language) among the learners (Johnson 1982). Long and Crookes (1992, 1993) were also critical of the procedural syllabus for its lack of rationale for the selection of the activity content. These authors argued that it is difficult for the teacher to verify the appropriateness of an activity in the classroom without evaluating the learner needs in the procedural syllabus. In addition, the procedural syllabus failed to assess the real-world language needs of the learners in undertaking communicative activities based on a relevant second language acquisition theory. In terms of pedagogy, and despite the focus on pair work, the

procedural syllabus neglected the use of group work in the classroom (Brumfit 1984). This may deprive learners of the opportunity to use language for interaction in groups that often happens in real life. Another issue concerned how the syllabus might fit in the school assessment system, which often requires some overt display of knowledge together with language skills (Johnson & Johnson 1999). For these reasons, the procedural syllabus was experimented with in South India only; in practice, it was not used as a popular model for L2 curriculum innovation.

In general, proposals of language syllabus have illustrated a shift from product-oriented to process-oriented syllabuses with three types: the structural, process and procedural syllabuses. Each type has its particular focus on language teaching and learning. While the structural syllabus focuses on the teaching of discrete linguistic items as an end product, the process syllabus emphasizes a learning-centred approach with regard to how language is learned by negotiation between the teacher and learners in the classroom. The procedural syllabus extends the learning-centred approach by creating communicative activities in the classroom. While the process-oriented syllabuses (i.e., the process and procedural syllabuses) have provided new ideas for L2 syllabus development, they had some critical limitations. As pointed out by critics, the two process-oriented syllabuses above were not developed on well-articulated second language acquisition theories; therefore, they were piloted in some language programs on a small scale only (e.g., the Bangalore Project mentioned earlier). There was a need for well-developed approaches that could accommodate L2 curriculum innovation. The following section will look at two communicative approaches: communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which were developed in response to curriculum designers' demands for a theoretical framework for L2 curriculum innovation.

2.1.2 Development of communicative approaches

Together with the proposals of process-oriented syllabuses which were described in the preceding section, researchers also attempted to develop communicative approaches for L2 classroom instruction. The literature has been dominated by communicative approaches after Hymes' (1972) notion of 'communicative competence' came into practice in the 1970s (Richards & Rodgers 2001). The two most common versions of communicative approaches are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (e.g., Littlewood 1981;

Savignon 1983) and Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (e.g., Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004). Proponents of CLT and TBLT claimed that these two approaches have largely influenced the innovations in the L2 curriculum over the last three decades (Littlewood 2007; Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007). This section reviews and critiques CLT and TBLT, and examines the extent to which they have been driving the current curriculum innovations in the field of second language teaching.

2.1.2.1 *Communicative language teaching*

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was developed in response to the high demand for using English for communicative purposes brought about by the rapidly growing number of migrants and guest workers to Europe and North America in the 1970s (Savignon 2002). Inspired by Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence, a number of collective and individual works, for example, the teamwork of the Council of Europe on communicative language (see Richards & Rodgers 2001), Halliday's (1973, 1975) functional language and Widdowson's (1978) communicative work were initiated to seek ways of enhancing learners' use of language for communicative purposes. Based on these pioneering pieces of work, CLT was introduced by its proponents (Canale 1983; Canale & Swain 1980; Littlewood 1981; Savignon 1983). Since its introduction, CLT has been implemented in L2 curriculum design. This section discusses the implementation of CLT in the L2 curriculum in several models proposed in the literature.

Some early proponents attempted to develop a model to embed CLT in the L2 curriculum. Following Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) proposed a model in which communicative competence was embedded in the curriculum, including four major categories: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. *Grammatical competence* includes linguistic knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and phonology. To know a language, the mastery of grammatical competence must be achieved. *Sociolinguistic competence* is defined in terms of sociocultural rules of interaction and rules of discourse. Knowing these rules would enable speakers to interpret utterances appropriately in a given social context. *Strategic competence* entails verbal and non-verbal strategies used for communication, such as how to start, maintain, and terminate a conversation. *Discourse competence* concerns the ability to understand a single message in

relation to its representation by means of text and discourse. Canale and Swain suggested that in order to develop a CLT curriculum, these categories of competence should be taken into consideration by L2 curriculum developers. Alptekin (2002), however, was critical of this model, arguing that it was developed based on a native-speaker level of communicative competence; therefore, it was ‘utopian, unrealistic, and constraining’ for L2 learners (p. 57). Canale and Swain’s model was not practical for curriculum design and thus, as far as the literature is concerned, few curricula have used this model in their development (Branden et al. 2009; Long & Crookes 1992). Alptekin suggested an intercultural notion of communicative competence that allows for learners’ interpretation of the curriculum in their local context. In the Savignon’s model reviewed below, communicative competence is regarded as a dynamic notion residing in the learner, rather than the curriculum content.

Savignon (1983) suggested a five-component model of English curriculum, which aims to implement the concept of communicative competence into practice through five elements, namely language arts, language for a purpose, personal second language use, theatre arts, and ‘beyond the classroom’. In this model, students learn language through learning about language arts, which encompass different forms of English, such as vocabulary, grammar and phonology. Language is learned for a *purpose* through the use of English for a realistic and immediate communication goal and making connections to *personal language use*, which takes into account the learner’s attitude and motivation for learning. Theatre arts provide the learner with the tools he/she needs to act in the target language, practicing communicative functions such as interpreting, expressing and negotiating. ‘Beyond the classroom’ further affords opportunities to use the target language in the real world outside the classroom. However, as argued by Hiep (2005), this model requires a considerably high level of language proficiency and sophistication, and is thus challenging for both teachers and students in non-native English contexts. The model has not been taken up by curriculum developers in Asia. Other authors further elaborated on communicative competence regarding its application in L2 curriculum design with greater complexity (e.g., Bachman & Palmer 1996; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995). For example, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) provided a more complex model, including components such as linguistic competence, strategic competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence and discourse competence (p. 11). However, as pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (2006b), no

model has become dominant in L2 curriculum development due to the high level of language proficiency that CLT required.

Howatt (1984) further refined the CLT syllabus through his proposal of the ‘weak’ versus the ‘strong’ versions of CLT. The weak version focuses on ‘learning to use English’ and is based on the proposition that language can be learned through communicative classroom activities which contain lexical and/or grammatical items given in a language lesson. The strong version with its aim to ‘use English to learn’, in contrast, advocates that ‘language is acquired through communication’ (Howatt 1984, p. 279). Howatt suggested that the weak version is used when the focus is on analysing the target language, while the strong version emphasizes learners’ experiences with using the language. In a similar vein, White (1988) proposed two types of CLT syllabuses, namely Type A and Type B syllabuses, to conceptualize what is to be learned and how it should be learned. Type A is concerned with what should be learnt with language presented in small, discrete units of content knowledge. The learning outcomes are assessed in terms of mastery of content knowledge. Type B deals with how the language is learnt through making a connection to the learner’s experiences. Assessment of the learning outcomes is in terms of communicative performance rather than demonstration of content knowledge. In this respect, the Type A syllabus is similar to product-oriented syllabuses and Type B is akin to process-oriented syllabuses as described in the preceding section ([Section 2.1.1](#)). In comparison with previous models (e.g., Savignon’s model), Howatt’s and White’s works show great improvement. Specifically, the division of CLT into ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ versions, with implications for Types A and B syllabuses, are based on assumptions of how language was taught and learned, not on second language acquisition theories alone.

Critics of CLT have pointed out that CLT is much inspired by assumptions and descriptions of language teaching and learning; however, it is not built on any well-articulated grounds of second language acquisition (SLA) theories (Richards & Rodgers 2001). Swan (1985a, 1985b), for example, rejected CLT in a pair of essays which were critically targeted at early dogmatic and over-enthusiastic ideas of CLT, such as Widdowson’s (1978) work on communicative language that advocated for functions of communication but overlooked language form. According to Swan, learners should master both form and functions in order to use language for communication. Empirical research studies have also provided evidence to argue that CLT was not as successfully realized in

practice as its advocates claimed (Kam 2002; Nunan 1987, 2003). Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) viewed CLT as merely a ‘pedagogic nomenclature’ (p. 201); in practice the approach has been variously adapted across different settings. Thornbury (1998) extensively observed English classrooms in both native countries (e.g., The USA, Australia and New Zealand) and non-native countries (e.g., Western Europe) for over 20 years and concluded that CLT remained an unrealistic notion in L2 teaching. Harmer (2003) concedes that CLT ‘has always meant a multitude of different things to different people’ (p. 289). In general, inspired by Hymes’ communicative competence, together with the need to use English for communicative purposes, the early conception of CLT was introduced as a teaching approach without any relevant SLA theory. In practice, CLT has been interpreted quite loosely among classroom teachers in their teaching.

In summary, this section has reviewed the development of the CLT approach and how it has been adopted in L2 curriculum development. As discussed above, numerous scholarly efforts have been made to put CLT into practice; however, the empirical research evidence suggests these efforts have not been successful. There seems to be a gap between CLT theories and teachers’ classroom practices, due to the lack of theoretical bases of SLA theories for this approach. Nevertheless, Hymes’ idea of communicative competence and early work on CLT continued to inspire researchers to further develop a more tenable communicative approach for L2 instruction. TBLT, the latest version of CLT, came into use during the 1980s as a result of the efforts of many applied linguists (e.g., Candlin 1987; Long 1985a). The following section will look at this approach in more detail.

2.1.2.2 Task-based language teaching

TBLT was developed on the basis of CLT in response to criticism over the lack of theoretical bases (Kumaravadivelu 2006; Nunan 2004). Extensive work has been conducted in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) to provide rich theoretical bases for TBLT (Krashen 1985; Long 1985a, 1985b; Swain 1985; Swain & Lapkin 1995). Despite some differences in perspectives, researchers have come to agree that TBLT draws principally on sociocultural theory and three most noted SLA theories, namely: input, interaction and output hypotheses (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004). This section discusses these theoretical bases and suggests implications for task-based curriculum development and classroom instruction.

At a broad level, TBLT operates on sociocultural theory (SCT) which was developed by Vygotsky (1978) and his successors (e.g., Lantolf 2000a, 2000b, 2006). Vygotsky's SCT is a theory of mental development and functioning. At the heart of SCT is the argument that human learning is developed by mediation between a person's mind and the world around him/her. The person uses social interaction to form new knowledge through the use of tools, interaction and the use of signs (Ellis 2003a). Language is seen as the most powerful and symbolic means that embodies signs (Ellis 2003a; Lantolf 2000a). In this respect, language is viewed as both the means and the object of learning. Proponents have adopted SCT in the design of tasks to facilitate L2 learners' language acquisition (Ellis 2000; Lantolf 2000a, 2000b). A key tenet of the SCT is the concept of mediation. Lantolf (2000b) argued that in TBLT, L2 learners' language acquisition is enhanced through object mediation, peer mediation and self-mediation processes. Learning, conceptualized in this way, is mediated by the use of objects such as media and technologies, capable peers, and learners themselves (Ellis 2003a). While SCT focuses on learners' mediation, the role of the teacher is not lessened. Vygotsky (1978) elaborated the metaphor 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) to describe the way in which the teacher provides instruction in class. Within ZPD, learners are challenged slightly above their actual level so that they can reach the goal set for them. According to task advocates, Vygotsky's conceptualization of ZPD has informed task selection, grading and sequencing in curriculum design (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 1993).

At the classroom level, TBLT draws on Krashen's (1985; Krashen & Terrell 1983) Input Hypothesis as a theoretical underpinning (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004). According to Krashen, language is a vehicle through which messages and meaning are transferred. Acquisition only takes place when learners understand the messages and meaning in the target language. The Input Hypothesis claims that in order to understand the target language and progress to a higher level of acquisition, learners need to be exposed to 'comprehensible input' (Krashen 1985). Comprehensible input, as discussed by Krashen (1985), is the input that is slightly above the learners' current level of competence. For example, if the learners' current level of competence in the target language is '*i*', then '*i* + 1' is the next level of competence that comprehensible input aims to provide the learners (Krashen 1985). To assist language learners to progress with their tasks in the classroom, it is essential for the teacher to provide the learners with comprehensible input. Nunan (2004) notes that Krashen's Input Hypothesis has influenced TBLT in two major ways. First, this

theory highlights that understanding the message is of crucial importance in TBLT; therefore, learners should be exposed to meaning in an early stage of learning. This is contrasted with the structural approach that focuses on providing learners with decontextualized linguistic items in an early stage of the lesson (Richards & Rodgers 2001). Second, Krashen's theory has implications for task grading and sequencing in TBLT. In curriculum design, tasks are graded and sequenced in accordance to the level of difficulty as proposed by the model ' $i + 1$ ' in the Input Hypothesis. As such, Krashen's idea of ' $i + 1$ ' is aligned with Vygotsky's ZPD in L2 classroom teaching. That is, tasks are most effective when they are selected and organized in an appropriate sequence that fosters students' learning and development of communicative skills.

Given the role of Input Hypothesis in TBLT, Long (1985b) argued that comprehensible input alone is not enough to promote language acquisition for the learners. Long (1985a, 1985b) integrated 'Interaction Hypothesis' in TBLT and stated that the development of learners' language proficiency is enhanced by face-to-face interaction in the target language. Central to the Interaction Hypothesis is the "negotiation of meaning" process, by which the listener requires the speaker to adjust utterances to make the message intelligible. The speaker can also recognize a breakdown in the conversation and make adjustments by him/herself. Long (1985b) argued that the negotiation of meaning has weighty implications for the inclusion of different task types in the curriculum. For example, Long (1989) noted that two-way tasks, such as an information gap task, can generate more negotiation of meaning than one-way tasks. Nunan (1991b) also conceived two types of tasks, closed versus open tasks, in task design. The tasks are defined based on interaction between learners in the classroom. According to task advocates, closed tasks can generate more negotiation of meaning which promote language acquisition, while open tasks are useful for language production which can be used to assess the learning outcomes (Nakahama et al. 2001; Willis 2004). In general, the Interaction Hypothesis supports TBLT with regard to which types of tasks are used in curriculum design, as well as the types of interaction for classroom instruction that promote negotiation of meaning.

The last SLA theory that TBLT draws on is Swain's (1985; Swain & Lapkin 1995) 'Comprehensible Output Hypothesis', which states that language acquisition takes place when a learner encounters a gap in his/her linguistic knowledge of the target language. By 'noticing' the gap, the learner becomes aware of it and is able to modify his/her output in a

comprehensible way. Consequently, the learner acquires new knowledge about the target language. Based on the empirical data from her immersion language programs in Canada, Swain became critical of Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, as many of her students could not produce language correctly after being provided a large amount of comprehensible input. Comprehensible output, as described by Swain and her colleague, is a mechanism that enables learners to become aware of the linguistic gaps in their knowledge through noticing (Swain & Lapkin 1995). By noticing, learners will be able to: 1) enhance self-expression, and 2) move from 'semantic processing to syntactic processing' in the acquisition of the target language (Swain 1985, p. 249). Swain's Output Hypothesis has practical implications for TBLT, requiring that tasks should not only provide learners with comprehensible input but also 'push' them to produce language in a comprehensible manner. Swain's idea of noticing in comprehensible output also assists researchers in developing focus-on-form techniques in task-based instruction (Lynch 2001; Schmidt 1990).

To sum up, this section has reviewed the theoretical development and underpinnings of TBLT from CLT. Unlike early conceptions of CLT, TBLT is motivated by multiple theoretical grounds. As illustrated above, SCT and three SLA theories, namely input, interaction, and output hypotheses, have theoretically informed TBLT and the design of tasks in the curriculum. In order to understand the task-based curriculum in relation to the research topic, the following section provides an in-depth description of the task-based curriculum and its key characteristics.

2.2 The task-based curriculum

The task-based curriculum was first introduced in the mid-1980s as the realization of TBLT and soon dominated English curriculum innovation in the Asia-Pacific region (Kam 2002; Littlewood 2004; Nunan 2003). Based on previous classifications of the strong/weak versions of CLT syllabuses (Howatt 1984; White 1988) and TBLT (Skehan 1996), Ellis (2003a) outlined two versions of task-based curriculum: the strong TBLT curriculum and the weak version, which he defined as task-supported language teaching. Ellis (2003a, 2013) further explained that task-based curriculum entails the syllabus where the teaching content contains the tasks to be performed without any linguistic specifications while the task-supported curriculum is based on the linguistic syllabus where tasks serve as a means

of practising pre-defined linguistic items. Researchers have determined that the task-supported curriculum appears to be aligned with traditional language-based syllabuses where linguistic items are taught and learned and thus this type of curriculum should not be considered in second language curriculum innovation (Carless 2004, 2009; Widdowson 2003). Ellis (2003a) also highlights, ‘In the case of task-supported language teaching, tasks do not serve as the unit for designing courses but only as a means for implementing a methodological procedure’ (p.240). In this respect, task-supported language teaching is more related to classroom instruction than to curriculum design. As the focus of the present study is on the task-based curriculum, this section discusses the task-based curriculum in two relevant subsections. The first subsection discusses the characteristics of the task-based curriculum innovation. This aims to provide an overview of the task-based curriculum from the curriculum leader’s perspective. The second subsection critically reviews the research literature on the implementation of the curriculum innovation. This aims to identify the research gaps to be addressed in the current study

2.2.1 Characteristics of the task-based curriculum

The task-based curriculum innovation undertakes TBLT as the overarching approach in curriculum design and classroom instruction (Candlin 1987; Long & Crookes 1993; Nunan 1989); therefore, its characteristics are closely related to the use of tasks in different aspects of the curriculum. Nunan (2004) specifies three interrelated dimensions of the curriculum innovation in which tasks play roles in shaping curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment. The three dimensions provide a holistic view of what the curriculum innovation entails and thus it is necessary to have an overview of these areas. To obtain an understanding of the task-based curriculum innovation, this section discusses its characteristics with respect to these three dimensions as the interface of the curriculum innovation.

2.2.1.1 Curricular content

In a task-based curriculum, tasks are viewed as the central elements forming the curricular content. In particular, curriculum developers use tasks as the ‘units of analysis’ in curriculum design (Long & Crookes 1993). The view of tasks as the unit of analysis has influenced the nature of task design in terms of the language topics and different task types in the curricular content. In terms of language topics, researchers argue that a task needs to

be developed on a certain language topic (Estaire & Zanón 1994; Willis 1996). The given language topic should be familiar and relevant to the learners' needs and preferences (Ellis 2003a). As the learners' needs and preferences are varied, Estaire and Zanón (1994) suggest that there should be a range of language topics to engage different learners and their various needs and preferences. Nunan (1989) also noted that a language topic can be embedded in a number of different tasks. However, the curriculum may be overloaded with many tasks on the same language topic. This requires tasks to be well organized in the curricular content. To organize tasks in the curriculum, Estaire and Zanón (1994) propose the term 'units of work' in which one language topic may include a number of tasks in several lessons. In this way, the unit of work frames the organization of tasks in terms of the language topic in which they are embedded; however, there are issues with tasks of different types. This requires researchers to think of ways to categorize tasks according to different task types.

Nunan (1991b) proposed the categorization of tasks into open and closed tasks based on the nature of the tasks. An *open* task is a kind of communicative activity that does not have any pre-defined answer or solution; that is to say, the task is open to prediction. Examples of open tasks are interviews, conversation and discussion which do not have any pre-defined correct solution, and thus the outcome is often unpredictable (Nunan 2004; Ur 1981). In contrast, a *closed* task is a communicative activity that asks students to use a predefined solution or information for communication. Examples of closed tasks are such activities as 'spot the differences' and 'listen and draw', which require a single correct solution or a limited range of correct solutions (Nunan 1991b). Because of the limited range of responses, closed tasks are more likely to promote negotiation of meaning between learners and lead to language acquisition (Foster 1998; Long 1989) whereas open tasks are more useful for practicing language production (Nakahama, Tyler & Van Lier 2001). The inclusion of open and closed tasks in the curriculum design, therefore, can assist both acquisition and production of the target language in terms of the meaning that the task conveys.

Estaire and Zanón (1994) put forward further categorization of tasks into enabling and communication tasks based on the degree of focus on form. *Enabling* tasks have their focus on teaching linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. *Communication* tasks, on the other hand, aim to promote learners' comprehension,

production and interaction in the target language. Estaire and Zanón's (1994) specification of enabling tasks, according to Ellis (2003a), indicates a strong explicit focus on form, which is more similar to language exercises rather than tasks. In response to the non-communicative nature of enabling tasks, Ellis (2003a, 2003b) proposed two categories of task: focused and unfocused tasks. In this distinction, *focused* tasks offer opportunities for communication using some particular linguistic features while *unfocused* tasks provide learners with opportunities to broadly use language for communicative purposes without being restricted to any specific linguistic features. According to Ellis, a task can be focused or unfocused depending on the curriculum design or the way it is used in the classroom. As such, it is more important to consider how tasks are performed by students or instructed by teachers in the classroom, rather than how they are pre-designed in the teaching materials. This suggests the importance of examining teaching pedagogy in addition to the curricular content.

2.2.1.2 *Teaching pedagogy*

Pedagogy is specified in terms of two principles: *selection* (i.e., what tasks are delivered) and *sequencing* (i.e., the order in which tasks are delivered) (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 1989, 2004). In a task-based curriculum, the selection and sequence of tasks define and shape the design of pedagogy. Nunan (1989, 1993) outlined two approaches by which tasks are selected: learners' needs analysis and SLA theories. In the first approach, the teacher uses learners' needs analysis as the basis for selecting classroom tasks. By answering 'what' and 'why' questions in regard to the learners, the teacher will select relevant tasks that help the learners develop the skills needed (Nunan 1989). He argued that closed tasks are more effective with low language proficiency learners, while open tasks are more relevant to advanced learners (Nunan 1991b). Seedhouse (1999) echoed that learners with low language proficiency prefer closed tasks as this type of task requires minimal language demand. Lambert and Engler (2007) further contended that closed tasks are of limited benefit for learners with high language proficiency, as this type of task constrains the learners' creativity in task performance. However, learners' needs analysis is difficult for teachers to carry out, particularly in contexts which are often overcrowded with mixed-ability students, as can be the case in Asian classrooms (Adams & Newton 2009; Baurain & Ha 2010). These contextual factors make learners' needs analysis less practical in task selection. Edwards and

Willis (2005) argue that teachers select tasks for teaching based on their beliefs, knowledge and understanding of students and the teaching context.

The second approach to task selection is based on SLA theories. Drawing on input, interaction and output hypotheses (e.g., Krashen 1985; Long 1985b; Swain 1985), SLA researchers identified some principles of task selection (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004). First, learners should be exposed to meaning-focused tasks in an early stage in the classroom (Ellis 2003a, 2006; Nunan 2004). Johnson (2008) termed this the ‘deep-end strategy’ (p. 275) in TBLT, where learners are challenged to take risks with meaning-focused activities at the start of the lesson. This seems to be opposed to traditional teaching methods where linguistic items are presented at the beginning of a lesson and are then followed by extensive drills or practice (Richards & Rodgers 2001). Ellis (2003a) argues that the task should be selected at learners’ comprehensible input level (i.e., $i + 1$), so that they can progress to the next level of competence (Ellis 2003a). The second principle of task selection is that tasks are selected to either generate negotiation of meaning between learners, or promote language production in task completion, depending on the aim of the lesson. It has been argued that closed tasks can generate more negotiation of meaning and open tasks can promote more language production (Nakahama, Tyler & Van Lier 2001; Willis 2004); therefore, the teacher selects tasks in accordance with their purpose, whether that purpose is the negotiation of meaning or language production. The last principle is informed by the output hypothesis (Swain 1985). According to Swain, learners should be encouraged to produce language in comprehensible output. This results in the use of noticing techniques for form-focused activities in task-based instruction (Lynch 2001; Schmidt 1990). TBLT researchers (e.g., Fotos 1994; Schmidt 1990; Willis & Willis 1996) suggest selecting ‘consciousness-raising’ tasks to monitor learners’ production of language in a comprehensible manner. This aims to enhance learners’ acquisition of language in completing the task. In summary, the approach to task selection based on SLA theories suggests a selection strategy that is in concert with task sequence, the other focus of task teaching pedagogy.

Task sequence plays a crucial role in task-based instructional pedagogy (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). Willis (1996) proposes a cycle of three stages for implementing a task, comprising the pre-task, task cycle and post-task. In the pre-task, the teacher builds understanding of the language topic with the class, activating students’ background knowledge and/or personal responses in an attempt to prepare the students for the main task.

The task cycle requires the students to plan the task on their own or collaboratively with peers within a time limit. According to Lee (2000), the time limit pushes students to produce meaningful language which is similar to a real-life context. Finally, the language focus stage involves students in some consciousness-raising activities (see Willis & Willis 1996) that target the recalling of specific linguistic features occurring in the previous stages. Skehan (1996) also elaborates on a three-stage framework that includes pre-task, while-task and post-task stages. However, unlike Willis' suggestion, Skehan provides more options for the teacher to use in the post-task stage. This may involve students performing tasks and analysing their performance so as to draw students' attention to the linguistic features embedded in the task. However, despite some differences in their suggested orders, both Willis and Skehan recommend a delayed focus on linguistic features (form) until the final stage of teaching. These authors' models are in line with SLA theories of task selection as above. In brief, task selection and sequence are important dimensions in designing TBLT pedagogy and are thus a necessary part of research into teachers' classroom practices.

2.2.1.3 *Learner assessment*

Finally, in a task-based curriculum, tasks are viewed not only as the object of assessment but also as a means to assess learners' outcomes. Task proponents argue that learners should not be assessed in terms of their knowledge of discrete linguistic items. Instead there should be *qualitative* evaluation of their performance of tasks (Brown & Hudson 1998; Nunan 2004). Nunan (2004) defines qualitative evaluation in terms of learners' performance of tasks in completing simulated real-world activities outside the classroom drawing on four communicative skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing) (see also Chalhoub-Deville 2001). Ellis (2003a; Ellis & Shintani 2014) also argues for the use of non-linguistic outcomes in learners' assessment of task performance. According to Ellis, task-based assessment evaluates learners' use of language as a means to achieve the outcome rather than language as an end in itself. In this respect, tasks are used as the means to assess students' learning outcomes. Thus, tasks play a central role as the object of assessment and the means by which assessment is conducted.

In general, tasks are viewed as the central elements of the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment in the task-based curriculum innovation. According to TBLT advocates (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007), the task-based

curriculum innovation is characterized by the following features. First, the curricular content includes a variety of language topics which can cater for a range of students' interests and preferences. Second, the curriculum provides a range of tasks which are organized into an effective sequence that is ready for teaching. Third, learner assessment is based on tasks as both the object and the means of assessment. Because of its focus on developing learners' communicative competence through classroom interaction, the task-based curriculum has outweighed other types of syllabuses and become the focus of English curriculum innovation in many countries since the 1990s (Kam & Wong 2004; Littlewood 2004). Littlewood (2004) describes the task-based curriculum as 'the status of a new orthodoxy' (p. 319) in curriculum innovation:

[T]eachers in a wide range of settings are being told by curriculum leaders that this is how they should teach, and publishers almost everywhere are describing their new textbooks as task-based. Clearly, whatever task-based approach means, it is 'a good thing'. (p. 319)

In a large scale survey of seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Vietnam, Nunan (2003) noted that the task-based curriculum has underpinned all the governments' L2 policies. Adams and Newton (2009) also highlighted that TBLT has become 'the national approach to English language pedagogy, and principles associated with task-based teaching have been advocated in a range of other curriculum initiatives' (p. 1). While curriculum policy makers and educational authorities favour TBLT, there is evidence from classroom-based researchers arguing that the task-based curriculum has not always been enacted successfully across Asian settings. Worse still, some scholars even demonstrated their sceptics of the superiority of the task-based curriculum over other types of syllabi (Bruton 2005; Burrows 2008; Sato 2010; Sheen 2003). These scholars have requested more critical examinations of the implementation of the task-based curriculum in schools. Furthermore empirical research also reports that L2 curriculum policies that undertake TBLT have had limited influences on English teaching in the classroom. For a better understanding of the various contributing factors, the following section explores research of teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum across Asian schools, based on the three dimensions suggested by Nunan (2004) as the interface of the curriculum innovation.

2.2.2 *Research of the curriculum innovation in practice*

This section reviews empirical studies that explore the implementation of the task-based curriculum innovation in Asian-Pacific contexts. A substantial body of research has been conducted into teachers' implementation of the curriculum across different contexts (e.g., Carless 2003, 2007; Farrell & Kun 2007; Sato 2010; Viet 2013). In particular, most studies examined how tasks were delivered as part of the mandated TBLT approach in the curriculum innovation, and the researchers' claims were made on the basis of the comparison of tasks in the intended curriculum with those actually enacted by teachers in class. A critique of the research on teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum innovation is now discussed.

Several studies have described successful implementation of tasks in some local contexts (Carless 2003; Farrell & Kun 2007; Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011). In Hong Kong, Carless (2003) examined three qualified school teachers' implementation of a task-based curriculum and found that the teachers successfully delivered tasks in the manner intended by the curriculum designers. Carless identified six factors contributing to the success of the curriculum innovation. They include teachers' understandings of tasks; teachers' positive attitudes towards TBLT; time availability for teaching; relevant topics in the textbook; teacher preparation and resources; and learners' language proficiency. Farrell and Kun's (2007) case study of three Singaporean primary school teachers' implementation of the 'Speak Good English Movement' curriculum, initiated by their government, indicates that in general the curriculum was enacted in the way it was prescribed. The researchers suggested that the key contributing factors to the success was the participating teachers' positive beliefs in, and understanding of, the curriculum and their commitment to enact it. In Vietnam, Trang et al. (2011) explored nine EFL teachers' implementation of a task-based curriculum at a prestigious high school and found that tasks were delivered in such a way that fostered students' interaction in the classroom. Trang et al. pointed out that a key factor in successful implementation was teachers' thorough theoretical understanding of the curriculum. These examples suggest that the participating teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding of the task-based curriculum play a critical role in successful implementation of the curriculum.

Other studies, however, depicted how teachers have been torn between the structural approach and TBLT in the implementation of the task-based curriculum. For example,

Carless (2007) interviewed 11 school teachers and 10 teacher educators in Hong Kong, seeking their views on the suitability of TBLT in the secondary school. The findings showed that although these participants were interested in TBLT, their classroom practices showed a direct grammar instructional orientation. Carless identified three major factors affecting the implementation of the curriculum: the need for grammar instruction, a balance between TBLT and public examinations, and a balance between receptive and productive skills in TBLT. In Korea, Jeon's (2006) large survey of secondary school teachers' enactments of a task-based curriculum indicated that many of the participating teachers failed to implement tasks in the manner that was recommended by the textbooks. Their findings suggest that the participants reverted to the traditional structural approach due to a number of factors, among which the most frequently mentioned were the teachers' lack of TBLT theoretical knowledge (76% responses) and the teachers' target language competence (73% responses). In a similar vein, researchers (e.g., Nishino & Watanabe 2008; Sakui 2004) in Japan noted that there is a gap between the intended curriculum that adopts communicative approaches (i.e., CLT and TBLT), and teachers' actual classes that use the structural approach, due to a number of contextual constraints such as teachers' lack of confidence and limited class time. In general, most studies indicate that TBLT has not been enacted in a way that was originally advocated. There seems to be a mix of TBLT and the structural approach in the implementation of the task-based curriculum.

Studies also found teachers changed tasks in their classrooms by modifying pre-defined tasks or the sequence of tasks. In Vietnam, Trang (2013) and Viet (2013) found that teachers modified the tasks and activities provided in the textbooks. Specifically, Viet's (2013) observation of teachers' classes in two urban schools found that most teachers changed the textbook tasks and activities into language exercises, and adopted the structural approach in the implementation of the task-based curriculum. However, Trang's (2013) case study of nine teachers in a gifted school provided evidence that although tasks were modified, they maximized interaction among students, illustrating a successful case of task transformation in the classroom. Given the differences in the research contexts (i.e., standard versus gifted schools), these findings indicate that teachers modified tasks to fit their local teaching contexts. While Viet claimed that his teachers preferred to use language exercises which offered students language structures that were needed for the exams, Trang argued that classroom tasks were modified to promote the students' use of language for communication.

In terms of task sequence, studies have found that teachers changed the sequence of tasks in the implementation of the curriculum in classrooms (Carless 2009; Sato 2010). For example, Carless interviewed 12 teachers in Hong Kong, seeking their views on the implementation of tasks in the English language curriculum innovation. Most teachers reported that they changed the three-stage sequence of tasks in the classroom into the PPP teaching model as it was easy and familiar to them in the classroom. In Japan, Sato (2010) observed English classes and found that the majority of teachers were in favour of classroom activities based on the PPP model. Sato claimed that PPP was a suitable model that is compatible with skill acquisition theory, which supports the transition from the declarative knowledge (knowing what) to procedural knowledge (knowing how) in learners. In this manner, tasks have been modified regarding the criteria of selection and sequencing as suggested by task proponents (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 1989, 2004); nevertheless, the teachers' rationale underlying these criteria varied across the cases.

The aforementioned studies provide insights into the challenges the teachers are confronted with in implementing a task-based curriculum, but these studies so far have been limited to examination of one of the task dimensions as discussed by Nunan (2004). For example, while some studies claimed that learner assessment has influences on the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom (Carless 2007; Viet 2013), no empirical data on learner assessment was provided in the existing literature to support the claim. Given the importance of teachers' beliefs and understanding of the curriculum innovation that has been noted by researchers (Fullan 2001; Markee 1997), little is known about the teachers' beliefs and understanding of the curriculum innovation in Vietnam or similar Asian contexts. Freeman and Johnson (1998) argue: 'teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills'. Rather, they have their own beliefs and understanding that 'inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in the classrooms' (p. 401). Therefore, research into teachers' beliefs and understanding of the task-based curriculum innovation, based on the three-dimensional interface as discussed above, is of crucial importance in the current study.

In summary, this section has discussed the characteristics of the task-based curriculum in three interrelated dimensions as the interface of the curriculum innovation. It has also reviewed research literature on the implementation of the task-based curriculum in the Asian-Pacific region and pointed out the gaps for the current study to address. The

remainder of this chapter will explore the literature examining teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding (which are defined as 'teachers' cognitions' in the current study) in relation to their implementation of the task-based curriculum.

2.3 Teachers' cognitions

Over the past 20 years, there has been growing interest in research into L2 teachers' cognitions – what teachers know and believe – and teachers' classroom practices (Borg 2006). A substantial body of research has investigated teachers' knowledge, beliefs and thinking in relation to practice in different aspects of classroom life (Barnard & Burns 2012; Richards 2008). In general, researchers have agreed that 'teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who play a central role in shaping classroom events' (Borg 2006, p. 1). Therefore, understanding teachers' cognitions is central to understanding their teaching, particularly in the context of curriculum innovation (Borg 2006; Sakui 2004; Woods 1996; Yook 2010). This section reviews the literature on L2 teachers' cognitions that is relevant to the present study. There are four subsections that follow. [Section 2.3.1](#) reviews definitional literature on teachers' cognitions, specifying the components of teachers' cognitions that the current study investigates. Then a discussion of the relationship between teachers' cognitions and pedagogical practices is presented in [Section 2.3.2](#). [Section 2.3.3](#) reviews studies on teachers' cognitions in selected Asian countries and highlights the gaps which comprise the focus of the present study. [Section 2.3.4](#) reviews previous studies in Vietnam, which is the locus of the present thesis, in order to contextualize the current research project. The chapter ends with a summary of critical points and states the research questions for the current investigation.

2.3.1 *Defining teachers' cognitions*

The current study investigates L2 teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to the task-based curriculum innovation in a Vietnamese upper secondary school; therefore, defining the construct 'teachers' cognitions' as linked to this task-based curriculum is of crucial importance. A number of studies in L2 teachers' cognitions have characterized the perceptions, knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices in relation to implementation of the task-based curriculum; however, most research focuses on the dimension of teaching pedagogy (i.e., *how* tasks are delivered) only (Barnard & Viet 2010;

Canh 2011; Viet 2013). As the task-based curriculum innovation incorporates an alignment of the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Nunan 2004), the current study sets out to investigate teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in these three dimensions. As the first step to the investigation, this section explores the literature concerning teachers' cognitions and specifies the components of cognitions that the current study aims to examine.

Defining teachers' cognitions is a challenging task, as this construct is not universally agreed on in the literature (Borg 2006; Feryok 2010). From the domain of second language (L2) education, Borg (2003) lists some 16 overlapping notions, including teachers' knowledge, beliefs, understanding, theories, principles and attitudes which are often used to depict teachers' cognitions. Among these notions, teachers' knowledge and beliefs are those most frequently used in the literature (Barnard & Burns 2012; Calderhead 1996; Woolfolk Hoy et al. 2006). Borg (2003) defines teachers' cognitions as 'the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe and think' (p. 81). Drawing on this definition, the current study examines the participating teachers' cognitions in terms of their professional knowledge and beliefs in relation to the task-based curriculum. A discussion of teacher professional knowledge and beliefs, and how these two concepts are used in the current study, is now presented.

2.3.1.1 Knowledge-based perspective

Teacher professional knowledge – the first of the two major notions underlying teacher cognition – serves as background knowledge and understanding in teachers' cognitions about teaching (Fenstermacher 1994). Researchers have argued that teacher professional knowledge functions as the hidden side of a teacher's work (Freeman 2002; Golombek 1998), and thus understanding of the teacher's professional knowledge can provide insights into his/her teaching in the classroom. A practical issue about research into teacher professional knowledge is to identify what knowledge is essential for teaching (Fenstermacher 1994). A number of models have been proposed for researching teacher knowledge, for example, Elbaz's (1981) practical knowledge, Clandinin and Connelly's (1987) personal knowledge and Shulman's (1986, 1987) teacher knowledge bases, to name a few. These models have enabled researchers to obtain insights into teachers' cognitions about teaching from different perspectives (Borg 2006; Fenstermacher 1994). Specifically,

Shulman's (1986, 1987) model provides a comprehensive list of seven categories of teacher professional knowledge, including:

- 1) *subject matter content knowledge* – (i.e., cognitions about the target language)
- 2) *general pedagogical knowledge* – (i.e., cognitions about the broad principles and strategies of classroom organization and management that transcend the subject matter)
- 3) *curricular knowledge* – (i.e., cognitions about the curriculum or the syllabus in use)
- 4) *pedagogical content knowledge* – (i.e., cognitions about the *teaching content* and the *methodologies* in the classroom)
- 5) *knowledge of learners* – (i.e., cognitions about students' interests and motivations)
- 6) *knowledge of educational context* – (i.e., cognitions about the characteristics of the school and the educational system)
- 7) *knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values* – (i.e., general cognitions about the goal of teaching)

Shulman's (1986, 1987) model has been widely used in research into teachers' cognitions in different school disciplines such as mathematics (Marks 1990; Rowan et al. 2001), science (Justi & van Driel 2005) and other areas of education (Ball et al. 2008; Exley 2005; Johnston & Goettsch 2000). Theoretically, these studies indicate that the model serves as a reliable framework for research into teachers' cognitions. Methodologically, researchers point out that the model can be used to explore teachers' cognitions empirically (Baker 2014; Baker & Murphy 2011; Justi & van Driel 2005). To generate empirical data, the participating teachers can be asked questions through both formal and informal interviewing. In the current study, Shulman's model is used as the orientating framework of teachers' cognitions. Two categories in particular, *curricular knowledge* and *pedagogical content knowledge*, are used to explore the participating teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum. These two categories were chosen as they enabled the study to explore the teachers' cognitions as related to the implementation of the curriculum in the local school setting.

First, Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of *curricular knowledge* facilitated the categorization of the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. According to Shulman (1986), curricular knowledge can be used to describe teachers' own knowledge and understanding about the curricular content, as well as its organizational and instructional features. As the teachers play a key role in implementing the curriculum, the

success of the implementation largely depends on their curricular cognitions about the features that the curriculum entails. For example, as the task-based English curriculum in Vietnam has topic-based content in its design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b), teachers' cognitions about this content, its organizational features and instructional indications are of crucial importance to their implementation of the curriculum. Shulman (1987) argues that teachers' curricular knowledge functions as the 'tools of the trade for teachers' (p. 8) which plays a central role in their implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. In this respect, teacher curricular knowledge is pertinent to research into teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, and is thus drawn on as the first category of teachers' cognitions in the current study.

Second, Shulman's concept of *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) was used to depict the participating teachers' cognitions about how they taught the content of the curriculum, focusing to a certain extent on the classroom tasks used to teach this content. According to Shulman, teachers' knowledge and pedagogy are often examined separately in teacher cognition literature. He recommends using PCK to capture teachers' cognitions that illustrate their pedagogy. In the current study, PCK describes the teachers' cognitions about tasks as the central subject matter in the curriculum. The term PCK also depicts teachers' cognitions about the pedagogic approach used to implement the task-based curriculum. In this manner, teachers' cognitions that draw on PCK go 'beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge *for teaching*' (Shulman 1986, p. 9, emphasis in original). Unlike curriculum knowledge, PCK allows for an examination of the participating teachers' cognitions in relation to minute-by-minute decisions they make during lesson planning and the actual implementation of those lessons within the classroom. Shulman (1987) argues that PCK is the 'special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding' (p. 8). As such, PCK allows for a typical characterization of teachers' cognitions in which the curricular content is blended with pedagogy in a way that illustrates, for example, how a task is organized and presented in the classroom. In this way, PCK helps to identify teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in relation to the implementation of tasks at the classroom level. Collectively, Shulman's (1986, 1987) categories of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are used to capture the participating teachers' cognitions from a knowledge-based perspective in a local school context.

2.3.1.2 *Belief-based perspective*

Following from teacher knowledge, the notion of teachers' beliefs is the second of the two major notions used to characterize teachers' cognitions in the current study. According to teacher cognition researchers, investigating teachers' beliefs requires an emphasis on the *affective* and *evaluative* features of teachers' cognitions (Orafi 2008; Yook 2010). This assumption is in line with Pajares' (1992) claim that: '[b]elief is based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact' (p. 313). In this respect, research into teachers' cognitions from a belief-based perspective allows for the examination of the participating teachers' personal views in relation to the curriculum in their local teaching context. Nevertheless, researchers have noted that teachers' beliefs are difficult to examine empirically (Fang 1996; Kane et al. 2002; Pajares 1992). In a recent personal interview (discussed in Birello 2012), Borg highlights:

The study of beliefs presents challenges mainly because beliefs are not directly observable. We can go into a classroom, we can observe behaviour, we can see what teachers do, we can describe that; but with beliefs we can't see them. We can't look at a teacher and know what they believe. Methodologically the challenges have been for us to find ways of eliciting beliefs and the only way we can do this is by getting teachers to tell us what their beliefs are, or to produce work in which their beliefs are implied (p. 89).

Researchers have also argued that teachers' knowledge and beliefs are interwoven (Baker 2011; Borg 2006; Meijer et al. 2001; Pajares 1992). Pajares (1992) extensively reviewed the literature, concluding: '[d]istinguishing knowledge from belief is a daunting undertaking' (p. 309). Empirically, Borg (2006) argues that the distinction between teachers' knowledge and beliefs is also at best hazy. For example, Meijer et al (2001) studied language teachers in 17 secondary schools in the Netherlands and concluded that 'teachers' beliefs and knowledge [are] inseparable' (p. 172). In a recent study of teachers' cognitions about pronunciation pedagogy, Baker (2011) highlighted that the differentiation between teachers' knowledge and teachers' beliefs is a challenging task for researchers. It is likely that '[d]istinctions between knowledge and belief, complex and confusing at the theoretical level, seem to become hopelessly blurred at the empirical level' (Southerland et al. 2001, p. 348). For this reason, the current study does not view teachers' knowledge and beliefs as separate terms; rather, it combines these two constructs in a unified notion named 'teachers' cognitions' drawing on Borg's (2003) definition above.

In short, teachers' knowledge and beliefs are the two components underlying the notion 'teachers' cognitions' examined in the current study. The combination of these constructs allows the study to empirically examine the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, ranging from the types of knowledge that the teachers hold to their personal evaluations and judgments in relation to the curriculum. Such an undertaking provides an in-depth picture of the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in terms of the curricular content, classroom pedagogy and assessment which are entailed in the task-based curriculum (Nunan 2004). In order to obtain in-depth understanding of teachers' cognitions, it is advisable that cognitions should be viewed in close relation with teachers' classroom practices (Borg 2003, 2006). The following section will look at the relationship between teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices.

2.3.2 L2 teachers' cognitions and classroom practices

According to many researchers, L2 teachers' cognitions play a central role in shaping classroom teaching practices (Borg 2003, 2006, 2009; Cross 2010; Fang 1996; Feryok 2010). Particularly in the context of curriculum reform, Hargreaves (1989) claims that:

What the teacher thinks, what the teacher believes, what the teacher assumes – all these things have powerful implications for the change process, for the ways in which curriculum policy is translated into curriculum practice. (p. 54)

The relationship between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices is reciprocal, as the teachers' classroom practices to a large extent reflect what they know and believe in teaching. In a seminal review of research into teachers' cognitions, Borg (2006) is critical of studies that fail to provide an account of teachers' observed classroom practices, arguing that the main aim of research into teachers' cognitions is to obtain an in-depth understanding of teaching in the classroom. Therefore, in addition to accounts of cognitions or practices that are based mainly on self-reported interview or questionnaire data, it is necessary to examine teachers' cognitions in close relation to their classroom practices. This section discusses the relationship between L2 teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices and points out the implication for the current study.

Various researchers report the influences of teachers' cognitions on classroom practices in different contexts. Freeman and Richards' (1996) collection of studies provided insights into the relationship between L2 teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices. For

example, Burns' (1996) study of six L2 teachers in Australia indicated that teachers' classroom practices are strongly affected by their cognitions. She claimed that teachers' cognitions were 'fundamental in motivating classroom interactions. They determine what is presented for learning and how the representation of content takes place' (p.154). In addition, Smith's (1996) research into nine L2 teachers' cognitions and practices pointed out that those teachers who held a product-oriented view (i.e., the view of language teaching as a product to be mastered) taught in a way that emphasized grammar and language code; however, those who embraced a process-oriented view (i.e., the view on language teaching as a communicative process) focused on tasks and communicative activities that stimulated interaction among students. From this finding, Smith (1996) suggested a dynamic relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices, in which teachers often make decisions from a range of ideas that correlate with their beliefs and knowledge and the techniques that the teachers found relevant to the classroom. In addition, Borg (1999) presented two different examples of how teachers' cognitions influenced their practices. One of the teachers in this study, who held the belief that grammar was important in teaching, was found to base his lesson on grammatical structures and students' errors. The other teacher, who believed that language teaching should allow students to discover and experience meaningful interaction, opted for exploratory work in the classroom. To sum up, the studies above illustrate that what teachers know and believe has a strong influence on the way they teach in the classroom.

However, researchers have also found divergences between teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices (Karavas-Doukas 1995; Li 1998; Nunan 1987). In an early study of teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching (CLT), Nunan (1987) found that while the teachers reported that they used CLT in teaching, their classroom practices ostensibly illustrated non-communicative patterns of interaction. In particular, there was a great deal of traditional language work, demonstrating questions and answers on grammar between the teachers and students, and between students and students. Karavas-Doukas' (1995) case study of 14 teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes towards and practices of CLT in Greek secondary schools showed that, although the participants reported that they used CLT, their classroom practices failed to follow what they had reported. Similarly in Korea, Li's (1998) study of teachers' beliefs about CLT indicated that although the majority of the participants said that they followed CLT, their classroom practices were incongruent with CLT principles. In a large scale study of teachers' beliefs about the CLT

approach in seven Asian-Pacific countries including Vietnam, Nunan (2003) found that teachers' classroom practices were divergent from what they believed in the context of curriculum reform. In general, these studies claim that teachers' beliefs are divergent from their classroom practices with regard to the uptake of new teaching approaches such as CLT and TBLT, meaning that even though teachers believe the new teaching approaches are worth implementing, they continue to follow the traditional methods. This has drawn scholarly interest into researching the divergence that occurs between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices.

Classroom-based researchers have referred to four types of factors to explain the divergence between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices (Butler 2011; Deckert 2004; Feryok 2008; Sakui 2004). These include sociocultural factors (i.e., traditional values of teaching and learning), institutional factors (i.e., the curriculum or examination system), contextual factors (i.e., class sizes, learner motivation, or resource availability), and instructional factors (i.e., teacher professional issues). Others argue that the divergence between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices is due to the nature of teachers' cognitions and their classroom teaching work (Andrews 2006; Phipps & Borg 2009). For example, Andrews' (2006) 10-year longitudinal study of three teachers' development of subject matter cognitions about L2 teaching found that it took time for the teachers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. As a result, the divergence between teachers' cognitions and practices could be due to the fact that the teachers were in the developmental stages of their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter in teaching. In addition, Phipps and Borg's (2009) study of three teachers' beliefs and practices suggested that teachers have a complex cognitive system in which some types of beliefs are more dominant than others; consequently, teachers' classroom practices can be stable or dynamic depending on the types of beliefs that dominate. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the relationship between the two in research into teachers' cognitions, not relying on separated accounts of cognitions or practices only.

In short, the relationship between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices are reciprocal but dynamic in the literature. The studies cited above provide evidence to argue that classroom practices are an inseparable factor which must be examined closely in any research into teachers' cognitions. This feature of teachers' cognitions is central to the

current thesis as it requires the study to take both teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices into account. In order to contextualize this study, the remainder of this chapter will critically review relevant research literature concerning teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to the task-based curriculum innovation in Asia, the context in which the current study is located.

2.3.3 Studies of L2 teachers' cognitions and practices in Asia

This section reviews the research literature on teachers' cognitions and practices in relation to the task-based curriculum innovation in Asia. As illustrated below, there are relatively few studies on teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum. Nevertheless, most of this research is concerned mainly with the pedagogical dimension of the task-based curriculum only, i.e., the TBLT approach that the curriculum entails. There is no study that explores teachers' cognitions across the three dimensions of curricular content, teaching approach and assessment as suggested by Nunan (2004). Based on the nature of these particular studies, two typical lines of research have been conducted into teachers' cognitions and practices concerning TBLT. The first line of inquiry explores teachers' general cognitions in regard to beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and understanding towards TBLT and their self-reported practices of this approach as part of the curriculum using questionnaire surveys and interviews. The second line of research, by contrast, generates in-depth accounts of teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding of TBLT in some specific local contexts using multiple methods of investigation. Overall, the research literature on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices of TBLT has indicated that teachers tend to support TBLT; nevertheless, their classroom practices are divergent from what they say about TBLT. The following subsection details the two lines of research and points out the methodological implications for the current study.

2.3.3.1 General cognitions and practices of TBLT

A number of studies that explore teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards, and practices of, TBLT as part of the curriculum have typically been conducted through questionnaire surveys with relatively large numbers of respondents (Hui 2004; Jeon & Hahn 2006; Lin & Wu 2012; Tabatabaei & Hadi 2011; Xiongyong & Samuel 2011). These studies canvassed teachers' views on, and their self-reported practices of, TBLT through informants' responses. Overall, this body of research has generalized three major attitudes

describing teachers' cognitions about TBLT – supporting, rejecting, and reporting ambivalent attitudes to the uptake of TBLT. Other studies explored teachers' views on the challenges that they encountered with TBLT (Hui 2004; Lin & Wu 2012). Despite some differences in focus, this line of research has generated similar findings, claiming that teachers were in favour of TBLT. However, their self-reported classroom practices did not correspond to their beliefs due to a number of challenges in practice.

Other studies have reported that teachers generally do support TBLT theories and principles (Jeon & Hahn 2006; Tabatabaei & Hadi 2011; Xiongyong & Samuel 2011). Jeon and Hahn conducted a Likert-scale questionnaire survey to explore Korean teachers' perceptions, beliefs and understandings of TBLT in their implementation of an English curriculum in schools. There were seven key categories of TBLT that the study aimed to examine including task goal, focus on meaning, task outcome, learners' use of language, communication orientation, student-centredness and the three-stage sequence. Informants included 228 teachers from 38 different middle and high schools in Korea. The findings indicated that about two-thirds of the informants supported the TBLT approach regarding all seven characteristics of TBLT given in the survey. Using Jeon and Hahn's (2006) questionnaire survey, Xiongyong and Samuel (2011) investigated Chinese secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about TBLT in the curriculum they were teaching. Respondents included 132 teachers from different schools in Henan province. The results showed that up to 81.9 per cent of the respondents were in favour of TBLT, suggesting that TBLT may be well received by the teachers. Similar findings were also reported from a survey study in Iran that used the Jeon and Hahn's (2006) questionnaire (Tabatabaei & Hadi 2011). In this study, 51 experienced teachers were asked to give their views on TBLT. The results indicated that 46 respondents (about 90%) provided positive responses to TBLT. Overall, research into teachers' cognitions using questionnaire surveys demonstrated that most of the participants surveyed replied that they embraced TBLT theories and principles.

Ironically, the survey results of the studies above also indicated that many informants responded that they did not follow TBLT in practice, revealing inconsistencies in teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards TBLT. Specifically, Jeon and Hahn's (2006) study indicated that approximately half of the Korean respondents reported that they did not use TBLT teaching techniques in classes due to their lack of confidence in implementing the TBLT

approach. Based on this finding, the authors claimed that ‘teachers’ conceptual understandings of TBLT do not necessarily lead to the actual use of task in the classroom’ (p. 132). However, findings in Tabatabaei and Hadi’s (2011) study shed a somewhat different light. Unlike the Korea-based study, the Iranian teachers’ responses indicated that only six out of 51 respondents (slightly above 10%) rejected TBLT in practice. According to the researchers, the lower level of rejection of TBLT in this study was attributed to the participants ‘[welcoming] the new experience’ (p. 5) with TBLT. Finally, Xiongyong and Samuel’s (2011) survey found slightly higher levels of rejection among the teachers when 17% of the informants responded that they did not implement TBLT in the classroom. Xiongyong and Samuel argued that ‘attitude is related to behaviour only under specified conditions, and the correlation between them is not always biunique’ (p. 296). In short, these findings suggest that the relationship between teachers’ cognitions towards TBLT and their actual practice of TBLT is not consistent; rather, it varies under the influences of the motivations or constraints that teachers encounter in teaching. In addition, these findings were based on the teachers’ self-reported practice. Therefore, further research is required to verify their findings through analysis of what actually happens in the classroom.

These above studies also indicate that teachers have ambivalent attitudes towards the uptake of TBLT. For example, Jeon and Hahn (2006) claimed that although most of the informants responded positively to TBLT, they were not confident enough to implement the approach in their classrooms. In particular, more than 70% of those who were in favour of TBLT replied that they had little knowledge of TBLT techniques and limited proficiency in the target language. With Iranian teachers, Tabatabaei and Hadi (2011) found that about one-fourth of the participants had such constraints as unfamiliarity with TBLT instruction, learner assessment, teachers’ limited language proficiency and TBLT know-hows. As a result, they could not decide whether or not to take up TBLT. In a survey of Chinese teachers, Xiongyong and Samuel (2011) found that nearly 86% of the informants’ responses viewed class sizes as the biggest obstacle to the implementation of TBLT in practice. In another study, Hui (2004) surveyed a group of 50 teachers in Hong Kong and found that although the teachers replied that they were familiar with the approach, ‘their knowledge of TBLT is rather restricted’ (p. 59). From the participants’ responses, Hui listed some 24 factors that either motivate or hinder the implementation of TBLT in the classroom, among which teacher quality, resource availability and learner

assessment methods were the most frequently mentioned. More recently, Lin and Wu (2012) surveyed 136 EFL teachers in Taiwanese junior high schools and found that teachers have mixed perceptions of TBLT due to three major constraints on the implementation of tasks, namely teaching time, class sizes and classroom management. In general, these survey studies indicate that teachers may show interest in TBLT; however, they hesitate to use the approach due to a number of practical constraints in the classroom.

Inconsistency was also generated from studies that used self-reporting methods of investigation such as interviewing. Yim (2009) explored 10 teachers' perceptions of TBLT, and their classroom practices with TBLT, in a South Korean context. The method of investigation was solely by interviewing. Yim found that all 10 participants said that they were familiar with TBLT theories since they had studied them in their masters programs. Unanimously, these teachers commented that they would like to use the TBLT approach to motivate student participation and reproduce language based on what students had learned in the classroom. However, when asked to describe their classroom practices, the data showed that TBLT was not implemented in the classroom. According to the participants, there were four major obstacles that constrained TBLT in practice. These included: incompatibility with the examination system; teaching time pressures; teachers' language proficiency; and lack of professional support. Yim suggested that in order to successfully implement TBLT in the classroom, these obstacles must be removed. In particular, the examination system needed to be changed and teacher professional development should be taken into consideration.

Overall, studies that explore teachers' general cognitions and practices indicate that teachers have inconsistent beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards TBLT. As shown in those studies that drew on Likert items, informants' responses are divided into different streams of views, from support to rejection and even ambivalence towards the uptake of TBLT. It seems that teachers paid 'lip service' (Nunan 2003, p. 604) to the uptake of the TBLT approach which was imposed by the government in the English curriculum innovation; in fact, their classroom practices did not follow what they reported. Borg (2006), however, notes that the findings of teacher cognition research are sensitive to the methods of investigation. As studies in this strand mainly focus on questionnaire surveys and self-reported methods such as interviewing, there are methodological concerns about the findings generated. When teachers are asked to complete a Likert-scale questionnaire,

they may select the most positive item that they think of without actual knowledge and understanding of the concept being asked (Kane, Sandretto & Heath 2002). Similarly in interviews, teachers may describe their *espoused* beliefs (i.e., the beliefs about what they should do) rather than beliefs *in action* (i.e., the beliefs that reflect their actual practices) (M. Borg 2001). Apparently, inconsistencies occur in the findings on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in this line of research. Due to these methodological concerns, multiple methods of investigation have been suggested in studies of teachers' cognitions and classroom practices (e.g., Carless 2003, 2007; 2009). The following section presents a review of the research into teachers' cognitions in some specific contexts.

2.3.3.2 *Cognitions and practices in some specific contexts*

The second body of research reviewed here provides in-depth accounts of L2 teachers' cognitions about, and classroom practices of, TBLT in several local Asian contexts. Much of the research focuses on teachers' knowledge, beliefs and experiences as well as their practical constraints with TBLT. Unlike the research into general cognitive fields that gather data mostly from surveys, this line includes qualitative case studies with multiple methods of data collection such as interviewing, document analysis and classroom observation. In general, this body of research tends to focus on descriptive case studies and the findings vary and do not point to any consistent themes across different contexts. This section reviews relevant studies and points out the gap in the existing literature.

Some studies have provided good pictures of TBLT in practice (Carless 2003, 2004). For example, the qualitative account of three elementary school teachers in Hong Kong described by Carless (2003) illustrates a successful case of TBLT operating in class. Specifically, the study focused on two aspects: teachers' understanding of TBLT and factors affecting their implementation of TBLT in the classroom. Data was collected from attitude scale surveys, focused interviews and classroom observations. The findings indicated that two out of the three participants had very good theoretical understanding of TBLT principles. As a result, they expressed positive views on TBLT and their classroom practices were consistent with their views. Along with this finding, Carless identified six factors that can influence teachers' uptake of TBLT in the classroom. These include: teachers' beliefs; teachers' understanding; time availability; the textbook and the task topics; resource availability; and students' language proficiency. Carless then suggested

that successful implementation of TBLT should take those factors into consideration. Carless (2004) also reported similar findings in another study. In this study the results indicated that the participating teachers reinterpreted the curriculum in ways that were compatible with TBLT principles. The researcher identified three factors constraining the implementation of tasks in the classroom, namely students' use of the mother tongue, classroom management problems and the quality of language produced in the classroom. Overall, in the two case studies conducted in Hong Kong primary schools, Carless claimed that the participating teachers had good knowledge and understanding of TBLT; as a result, their classroom practices were compatible with TBLT principles.

Studies in other contexts, however, describe how teachers have struggled between the structural approach and the TBLT approach when applying curriculum innovation. For example, Carless (2009) explored practising teachers and teacher educators' views on TBLT in relation to the traditional presentation - practice - production (PPP) teaching model in Hong Kong. Participants included 12 secondary school teachers and 10 teacher educators in Hong Kong. Inconsistencies were found between these two groups of participants. While the teacher educators highlighted the need for TBLT, the practising teachers responded that they preferred to follow the PPP model in the implementation of tasks in the classroom. These teachers explained that PPP was easy to organize and compatible with their goals of enriching students' knowledge of grammar, while TBLT was more complicated and incompatible with their desired curriculum goals. Particularly, some teachers noted that the PPP model assisted them in preparing students for examinations. In general, in the secondary school context, the study above provides a picture of teachers' beliefs contrasting with actual practices of TBLT, as compared with the previous studies in the primary school context, even though all the studies were carried out in Hong Kong by the same researcher.

Chinese teachers also share beliefs and perceptions about TBLT which are similar to those of their international colleagues. For example, the ethnographic study of 15 teachers' views on the task-based curriculum in a central high school in Southeast China reported by Fang and Garland (2013) show that most of the participants had little understanding of TBLT and considered the curricular guidelines to be 'abstract and theoretical' (p. 57). Instead, these participants used the textbooks as their teaching syllabuses. The study pointed out a number of constraints on teachers such as examination pressures, teachers' trust in

educational change, and training opportunities for teachers. Also in the Chinese context, Hu's (2013) case study with 30 English teachers' enactment of task-based curricula at six public schools in Beijing, indicated that there were three levels of reaction to TBLT: negative denial, passive acceptance, and active application. Specifically, one sixth of the participating teachers rejected the uptake of TBLT due to examination pressure. Instead, these teachers resorted to traditional methods since they were considered effective in preparing students for the exams. In the passive acceptance category, teachers' demonstrated adherence to TBLT as it was mandated in the curriculum. Teachers in this category neither appeared to care for, nor to demonstrate understanding about, TBLT. As described by one participant: 'I teach following the manual and textbook regardless of whatever the proposed instructional methods are' (p. 10). However, in the application category, the teachers showed more initiative, helping students to explore the language in a meaningful way that is compatible with TBLT principles. Hu concluded that these different levels of reaction resulted from the different ways that TBLT was interpreted by different teachers.

Still more studies have provided further insights into teachers' beliefs in and understanding of TBLT. The narrative stories of three Chinese secondary school teachers' beliefs and understandings with TBLT reported by Zheng and Borg (2014) illustrate that all the participating teachers had little to no knowledge of TBLT regarding the use of pair and group work. Nevertheless, while the two more experienced teachers showed a strong orientation towards grammar teaching, the younger teacher was more in favour of tasks. Zheng and Borg explained that the more experienced teachers preferred grammar due to their 'deep-rooted beliefs about grammar' (p. 218) while the younger teacher persisted in TBLT as she wanted to challenge herself with teaching the new curriculum. In Japan, Nishimuro and Borg (2013) explored three Japanese high school teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar in their implementation of a task-based curriculum. Data was collected from classroom observations and interviews with the participants on site. The findings indicated that although the participants acknowledged the role of communication in teaching English, they considered grammar to be the basis of language development. As a result, these teachers felt the need to have grammar as an explicit focus in their classroom practices. Regarding the contextual constraints that hindered teachers' uptake of TBLT, the study identified such constraints as examinations, lack of time, and ambiguous targets in

language teaching as the main constraining factors. For these reasons, the participants preferred to teach grammar in their implementation of a task-based curriculum.

Similar findings have also been generated from studies in the tertiary context. For example, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) explored teachers' and students' reactions to a task-based English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course at a university in Thailand. Participants included 13 teachers and 35 university students. The methods of data collection were based on both spoken and written sources, including task evaluations, learning notebooks, classroom observations, material evaluations, interviews and field notes. Findings revealed that although both the teachers and students believed that the course offered them many benefits such as increased learner independence and real-world tasks, there were concerns about the feasibility of the course in terms of learner-centredness, teacher support and guidance, and the amount of materials used for the delivery of TBLT. Based on these findings, the authors suggested that in order to successfully implement TBLT in a Thai university, conditions such as material development, teachers' and learners' characteristics, and course evaluation should be addressed in L2 classrooms in the Thai context. In general, this study contributes to understanding the practical constraints that teachers encountered in implementing TBLT in Thai classrooms.

To sum up, qualitative research has provided various illustrations of how teachers perceived and implemented TBLT in different settings. While there are no consistent themes on the findings in this line of research, the findings in most studies indicate that despite some appraisals given to TBLT, teachers across numerous contexts fail to implement the task-based curriculum at the classroom level. Nevertheless, there are several concerns that are visible in the existing research literature. First, given learner assessment is an essential dimension of the task-based curriculum (Nunan 2004), it is problematic that none of the studies discussed above provide any empirical evidence of how teachers perceived and practised assessment in the classroom, thus leaving a critical gap in the literature of teacher cognition research on TBLT. Nevertheless, tests and examinations are claimed by some researchers as major constraints that can affect teachers' beliefs and practices in TBLT (Carless 2007, 2009; Fang & Garland 2013; Nishimuro & Borg 2013). As such, teachers' views on the task-based curriculum have not been fully canvassed in the previous studies. Second, previous studies appear to touch on the pedagogical dimension of

TBLT only. That is, very few studies have regarded TBLT as the overarching approach that aligns the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment in the curriculum innovation as argued by Nunan (2004). There seems to be a lack of an overall conceptual framework that can involve all three dimensions of TBLT in the research of teachers' cognitions about, and practices in relation to TBLT. Therefore, it is important for the current study to draw on a robust framework that allows for the exploration of all the three dimensions of the curriculum as mentioned above. The conceptual framework for the current study will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The following section reviews the research literature concerning teachers' cognitions and practices of TBLT in Vietnam, the locus of the current study, to identify the gap to be addressed in this study.

2.3.4 Studies of teachers' cognitions and practices in Vietnam

This section reviews studies on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to the task-based curriculum in Vietnam. There is a small but growing body of research that explores teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes in relation to their classroom practices of TBLT in upper secondary schools nationwide since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2006 (Canh 2007, 2012; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Minh 2007; Trang 2013; Viet 2013). Several studies have explored teachers' general beliefs and perceptions of the curriculum using questionnaire surveys (Canh 2007; Minh 2007), open-ended questions (Barnard & Viet 2010), or interviewing (Canh 2012). Others examined teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in relation to the implementation of the curriculum (Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013) and teachers' implementation of tasks in some local contexts (Trang 2013; Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011). This section reviews and critiques the previous studies in Vietnam in order to specify the gaps therein and to better locate the current study.

A few studies have explored teachers' general beliefs about the curriculum and found inconsistencies between their beliefs and classroom practices (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2007, 2012; Minh 2007). For example, Canh (2007) surveyed 249 teachers from different schools throughout the country about their beliefs and attitudes towards the curriculum. Results of the survey showed that the majority of the participants had positive beliefs and attitudes towards the curriculum as they found the topics given in the curriculum were

more interesting, informative and contemporary than the content of the old textbooks. Similar findings were reported by Minh (2007) in another survey of 250 teachers about their beliefs about the curriculum. Minh found that teachers held positive beliefs about the topic-based content and in general, the TBLT approach was in concert with their beliefs. It seems that respondents in these surveys appreciated the curriculum as they found the curricular content and the teaching approach was interesting and relevant. However, Barnard and Viet (2010) used narrative frames, a type of open-ended self-report writing survey (see Barkhuizen & Wette 2008), to explore 21 teachers' beliefs and classroom practices of the curriculum. Their findings indicate that most of the participants reported a structural approach that emphasized teaching grammatical structures (focus on forms) in their interpretation of the curriculum. Canh (2012) also interviewed eight secondary school teachers about their teaching approaches and found that teachers employed a focus-on-forms approach in their classroom teaching of the curriculum. Similar to the studies that explored teachers' general beliefs in other contexts (e.g., Jeon & Hahn 2006; Tabatabaei & Hadi 2011), the findings in Vietnam also indicate an inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their reported classroom practices. However, the extent to which teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are consistent or inconsistent has not been captured in the above studies. Further research is required to appreciate an in-depth understanding of teachers' beliefs and actual classroom practices in specific contexts.

Other qualitative case studies that explored teachers' cognitions and classroom practices have provided further insights into how teachers perceive and implement the curriculum in some local contexts (Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013). For example, Canh and Barnard (2009a) interviewed and observed three English language teachers in an underprivileged school and found that none of the participants were in favour of the TBLT approach and their classrooms practices were delivered in a non-TBLT manner. Instead, these teachers emphasised teaching grammar and vocabulary in the classroom. The authors identified six major constraints that the participating teachers had in practice: 1) a learner-centred approach and the time pressure that teachers have in classes; 2) the use of students' first language in teaching; 3) the students' lack of motivation to communicate; 4) the negative effect of examinations; 5) a lack of necessary resources; and 6) teachers' professional issues. The researchers suggested that in order to successfully implement TBLT in the classroom, those constraints must be dealt with. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the study was conducted in an underprivileged school in a remote and

mountainous region; therefore, the study results were thus not representative of other contexts in Vietnam.

In a different study, Canh (2011) also detailed how teachers perceived and implemented the curriculum in a classroom in a more privileged setting. The foci of this study were eight teachers' beliefs and practices of form-focused instruction in the implementation of a task-based curriculum in an upper secondary school for gifted students in Northern Vietnam. Multiple methods of data collection were used, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews. The findings indicated that all participants showed a strong orientation towards grammar teaching that emphasized students' memorization of grammatical rules and terminologies. In addition, their classroom practices followed the conventional PPP model, rather than following the curriculum for guidance in task sequencing (Ellis 2006; Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). From a sociocultural perspective, Canh (2011) also identified a number of contextual constraints that influenced teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, including allocated class time, students' low level of proficiency, use of the mother tongue, large class sizes, examinations, and teachers' professional development issues. Comparing the two studies conducted by the same research group (i.e., Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a), it seems that there were few differences between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in relation to the curriculum despite the different teaching and learning conditions between the two research contexts. It appears that the sociocultural perspective does not have a significant bearing on the difference between teacher's beliefs and their classroom practices in relation to the curriculum innovation.

Drawing on a combined framework of sociocultural theory and situated cognition, Viet (2013) conducted a case study to explore 11 teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in two urban upper secondary schools. The findings indicate that the participating teachers supported a structural approach where linguistic items were taught prior to the performance of tasks in the classroom. Viet claimed that participants in the study preferred a PPP teaching sequence as they believed that grammar instruction should be provided early in the lesson. In this way, the teachers adopted a focus on grammar in the pre-task stage which is in line with Estaire and Zanon's (1994) sequence of enabling and communication tasks. Viet (2013) also suggested that there were a number of factors that hinder teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, including the teachers' beliefs about language teaching

and other contextual constraints such as examinations, time available for grammar teaching, student language proficiency, and students' motivation. Due to these constraints, the participating teachers resisted the uptake of the TBLT approach embedded in the curriculum; rather, they changed most of the pre-designed tasks into forms-focused teaching activities in a non-TBLT manner at the classroom level. Overall, Viet's study indicated that the teachers failed to implement the curriculum due to their rooted beliefs about the structural approach in teaching and the contextual constraints that the teachers had in the classroom.

Unlike Viet's study, however, a report by Trang (2013) analyses the accounts of nine experienced teachers in an upper secondary school for gifted students in Central Vietnam, providing an ideal picture of how tasks can be implemented in the classroom. The study findings showed that most of the teachers had a tendency to adapt and/or replace the given tasks due to their preference for open tasks, rather than the closed tasks prescribed in the textbooks. Trang found that participants in her study selected tasks that were considered realistic for the students to practise in the classroom rather than in the real world. Typically, the teachers preferred to use tasks that engaged students in the classroom, rather than those provided in the curriculum. According to Trang, the teachers saw the students' need to make realistic use of language; therefore, they changed the activities to correspond to the students' needs to use language for communication. As such, this study provided a unique case in which tasks were modified towards communication which few other studies in Asian contexts have illustrated (e.g., Carless 2003, 2004). However, it was noted that the context of the study was in an upper secondary school for gifted students, where the majority of the participating teachers had masters' level TESOL qualifications. It seems that teachers had sound theoretical knowledge and beliefs about TBLT and thus their classroom practices were convergent with their beliefs in such an elite school context.

However, studies in the tertiary context, where teachers have high qualifications in TESOL, indicate that teachers still follow the structural approach despite their *espoused* beliefs in TBLT. Ha and Huong (2009), for example, explored university teachers' beliefs in relation to the implementation of a TBLT course in an English classroom. 19 teachers and 100 students who were involved in the course participated in the study. Data included questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The findings showed that despite the beliefs that both teachers and students held about the effectiveness of TBLT, their

classroom practices followed more traditional methods. This finding is consistent with Canh and Barnard's (2009b) survey of university teachers' beliefs about grammar, where 93% of the participants reported that they explicitly taught vocabulary and grammar in the classroom. In another study, Loi and Franken (2010) explored teachers' conceptions of input in TBLT at a university in South Vietnam. The findings suggested that all six teachers perceived input in the form of discrete linguistic elements and other types of language knowledge such as grammatical terms. This was due to the participants' concerns for students' acquisition of the target language, as well as the students' low language proficiency in the classroom. In addition, other contextual factors such as time pressure and students' use of Vietnamese were ascribed by researchers as the major obstacles that constrain teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to TBLT. Overall, the findings in the tertiary context are similar to those in the secondary school settings, highlighting the preferences among teachers for the structural approach to TBLT although the teachers may state that they support TBLT theories.

In general, Vietnamese teachers' cognitions and classroom practices are similar to those of their Asian colleagues in terms of their espoused beliefs in TBLT; however, their classroom practices follow the structural approach. Survey findings show that many teachers supported the task-based curriculum for its updated and informative content; however, they also felt constrained and so failed to implement the curriculum in practice (Canh 2007; Minh 2007). In addition, qualitative studies indicate that in many cases, teachers' beliefs and practices are inconsistent with TBLT and these inconsistencies are seen in both secondary and tertiary research settings. Researchers tend to ascribe the inconsistencies to contextual factors in the classroom. In particular, the negative impact of high-stakes examinations was attributed as a key contributing factor (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013). According to these researchers, teachers are under pressure to prepare students for the final examination that utilizes multiple choice questions (MCQ) as the singular regimen of testing. Consequently, teachers refer to the structural approach to provide students with the necessary linguistic items needed in examinations.

However, the existing research literature concerning teachers' cognitions and classroom practices of TBLT in the Vietnamese context has two major limitations. First, given TBLT is an overarching approach to curricular content, classroom pedagogy and assessment in

the curriculum innovation (Nunan 2004), none of the previous studies explores teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding all three dimensions in the implementation of the curriculum. Rather, most of the studies tend to view learner assessment (e.g., standardized examinations) as the major constraint in the implementation of the task-based curriculum. This limitation ignores the role of assessment in TBLT which is considered as a crucial aspect of the curriculum innovation (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b); therefore, the previous claims are not tenable without accompanying empirical data on assessment in the findings. Second, in terms of theoretical perspectives, most of the previous studies draw on the influences of sociocultural factors to explain the consistency or inconsistency between teachers' cognitions and practices (Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013). The theoretical framework that these researchers heavily drew on is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. While Vygotskian theory allows the researchers to explain the relationship *between* teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices with regard to possible contextual factors, it neglects the relationship *within* teachers' cognitions about different categories that the curriculum entails. For example, what teachers know about the relationship between the language topics and tasks provided in the curriculum has not yet come to light. As a result of these limitations, the current study argues that further research is needed into teachers' cognitions and classroom practices concerning the curriculum from an overarching framework that can theorize teachers' cognitions and classroom practices of the curriculum in a more systematic way. Such a theoretical framework will be developed in the following chapter.

2.4 Summary of the chapter and research questions

This review of the literature has provided a three-dimensional interface for the task-based curriculum innovation and has critiqued previous studies in the Asia-Pacific and Vietnamese contexts in relation to the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Drawing on Nunan's (2004) conception about the three interrelated dimensions: curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment in the task-based curriculum innovation, this chapter has identified a critical gap in the existing research literature on the curriculum innovation. Most prior research focuses on the dimension of teaching pedagogy only (i.e., the TBLT approach); very few studies concern the curricular content and learner assessment in the implementation of the task-based curriculum.

Empirical studies of teachers' cognitions and practices of TBLT in Vietnamese and other Asian contexts were reviewed, illustrating some general themes on teachers' cognitions and practices as well as mixed findings on teachers' beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and classroom practices towards the uptake of TBLT. In general, the existing research literature on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices with the task-based curriculum shows a strong focus on the dimension of teaching pedagogy (i.e., *how* to teach from a TBLT perspective) while neglecting the curricular content (i.e., *what* to teach) and learner assessment (i.e., *what* to assess and *how* to evaluate learners in the classroom).

To fill the gaps in the literature, the current study sets out to examine teachers' cognitions and practices in relation to the task-based curriculum in three areas. First, teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the curricular content and how this content is taught from their own perspectives require investigation. Second, decisions made by the teachers in teaching with regard to two criteria – the principles of *selection* and the principles of *sequencing* (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 1989, 2004) – need to be more carefully examined. Finally, characteristics of learner assessment with respect to *what* is being assessed and *how* assessment is conducted in the classroom warrant exploration as well. These three areas of interest are addressed through the following research questions:

1. *What cognitions do the participating teachers hold about the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school?*
2. *How do the teachers' cognitions permeate their classroom practices?*
3. *To what extent are the teachers' cognitions reflected in their classroom testing practices?*

These research questions will be systematically investigated and presented in the Findings Chapter (Chapter Four). Before discussing the research results, the theoretical perspective and methods of investigation employed in the current study are discussed in Chapter Three.

3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology that the current study adopted to address the research problem. As discussed in Chapter 2, the task-based curriculum innovation involves a three-dimensional interface including the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Nunan 2004). The current curriculum innovation in Vietnam adopts this interface as the overarching approach, introducing topic-based content, TBLT methods and task-based assessment in the new English textbook series (MOET 2006; Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). Fullan (2001) argues that teachers need to change their beliefs, knowledge and thinking in implementing the new curriculum. As the focus of the current study is to investigate teachers' implementation of the new curriculum from a cognition perspective, it is important to consider the participating teachers' cognitions about the three areas of change in the curriculum: curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment. To achieve this goal, the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in this study play a central role in conducting the research and are the foci of the current chapter.

This Methodology Chapter starts with a discussion of the research paradigm that guides the current study ([Section 3.1](#)). It is then followed by the theoretical framework that underpins the current investigation ([Section 3.2](#)). The next three sections ([Section 3.3](#) to [Section 3.6](#)) detail the research design, settings, data collection methods and data analysis procedures which were undertaken in this study. [Section 3.7](#) discusses the strategies which were used to enhance the quality of the research project. This is followed by a summary of the whole chapter ([Section 3.8](#)).

3.1 Research paradigm

The current study adopted the naturalist paradigm in conducting the research. Underlying the naturalistic paradigm is the assumption that research is an inquiry process that seeks to understand a social or human issue based on a complex and holistic picture which includes the participants' views and actions in a natural setting (Creswell 2013). As the current study focused on teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher

cognition perspective, it was conducted in a real upper secondary school context where the curriculum was implemented. The methodological approach selected for this study thereby needed to allow the researcher to ‘capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants’ (Burns 2000, p. 11). From this perspective, the guiding principles of the current research were located within the methodologies that underlie the naturalistic paradigm, including the theoretical framework, the research design and methods (Sarantakos 1998). The naturalistic paradigm was particularly relevant to the current study as it was framed from a combination of Shulman’s (1986, 1987) teacher knowledge bases and Bernstein’s (1977, 1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, and designed in a qualitative case study approach (Yin 2009). The following sections discuss how these elements are encompassed in the current study.

3.2 Theoretical framework

The present study investigated teachers’ implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective by examining the three major areas of change defining the curriculum innovation: the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). This research aim requires a theoretical framework which will enable the depiction of teachers’ implementation of the curriculum in the three areas of change in addition to the characterization of teachers’ cognitions about the task-based curriculum in the local context. The theoretical framework for the present study thus needs to allow for an in-depth description of what Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) call ‘situated cognition’, which means detailing the situated nature of teachers’ knowledge and beliefs in relation to the curriculum innovation, in a local Vietnamese upper secondary school context. This section argues that a combined framework of Shulman’s (1986, 1987) categories of teacher knowledge and Bernstein’s (1977, 1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse will provide such a theoretical lens with which to examine the research problem.

The first framework, which was employed to depict teachers’ cognitions, is represented by Shulman’s (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1986) defined curricular knowledge as the teachers’ own knowledge and understanding about the curricular content as well as its organizational and instructional features. *Curricular knowledge* was used to describe the participating

teachers' cognitions about the curricular content. As one of the major changes in the English curriculum innovation in Vietnam was the incorporation of the task-based content in its design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b), the participating teachers' curricular knowledge can thus reflect their cognitions about the curriculum in regard to its content. To further describe the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in relation to teaching methodology, the current study drew on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of teachers' *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) to describe what the teacher knows in relation to their classroom teaching practices. According to Shulman, PCK is the 'special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding' (1987, p. 8). In this sense, PCK illustrated the teachers' cognitions about how they taught the curricular content with a focus on the classroom tasks that the teachers used to deliver this content. As such, teachers' cognitions that drew on PCK went 'beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge *for teaching*' (Shulman 1986, p. 9, emphasis in original). As tasks were the central elements in the curriculum and teachers' classroom teaching, PCK allowed for a systematic characterization of teachers' cognitions about the curricular content in relation to pedagogy regarding how a task was organized and presented in the classroom. Taken together, the combination of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge allowed for an in-depth description of the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in relation to their teaching.

Once teachers' cognitions about the curriculum are canvassed, it is then important to understand cognitions in the local context. To generate an in-depth description of the teachers' cognitions, the second framework that the current study drew on was Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) sociology of education, in particular, his notion of pedagogic discourse. Bernstein (1990, 2000) defines pedagogic discourse as a set of principles that operates in a particular context. This set of principles influences a person's beliefs, knowledge and actions in a certain context. Underpinning pedagogic discourse are the concepts of the three message systems, instructional and regulative discourses, and the recognition and realization rules. According to Bernstein, the three message systems, consisting of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, regulate any type of educational practices in a context. *Curriculum* defines what is accepted as valid knowledge for teaching in that context. *Pedagogy* determines the legitimate means of transmission through two major principles – the principle of selection and the principle of sequencing – of classroom

practices; and *assessment* determines the principle of test design in terms of the assessed content and form of assessment in the context. Within these message systems, there always exist two types of discourses that make up the pedagogic discourse: instructional discourse and regulative discourse. Instructional discourse is a discourse of competence and skills defining the curricular content. Regulative discourse, on the other hand, refers to the discourse that creates the rules of social order in which the curriculum is transmitted. Any instructional discourse is embedded in the regulative discourse. These discourses are represented by a set of principles that operate in the context which illustrate teachers' beliefs, knowledge and actions in the classroom context (Christie 1995). Williams (2005) argues that pedagogic discourse demonstrates a relay of social relations – relations between regulative and instructional discourses. Examination of these two types of discourses will thus shed light on the rules of social order that regulate teachers' implementation of the curriculum in the local context.

To further describe what a teacher demonstrates in the local context and his/her abilities to recognize the special features of that context and how to act accordingly, Bernstein's (1990, 2000) conception of the recognition/realization rules helps to characterize teachers' cognitions in context. Bernstein defines one's ability to recognize the speciality of the context in terms of the recognition rule and his/her ability to act appropriately in that context in terms of the realization rule. The interplay between the recognition rules and realization rule in the context reveals special contextual characteristics and the person's abilities to act in accordance with these characteristics. Bernstein (1990) argues that the recognition rules 'create the means of distinguishing between, and so recognizing, the *speciality* that constitutes a context' while the realization rules 'regulate the creation and production of specialized relationships internal to that context' (p. 102, emphasis in original). Informed by the recognition and realization rules, details of teachers' cognitions in the local context will come to light, considering the 'speciality of the context' (2000, p. 17). Overall, drawing on Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse coupled with his notions of the three message systems, instructional and regulative discourses, and recognition and realization rules, this study offers an in-depth description of teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum in a local upper secondary school context in Vietnam.

Collectively, Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and PCK and Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse were used to inform the present investigation. Shulman's concepts of curricular knowledge and PCK helped to identify teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in relation to teaching and Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse unpack teachers' cognitions in the context. In this manner, the current study drew two different perspectives together in researching teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum. In short, this combined framework allowed the current study to conceptualize and characterize the participating teachers' situated cognitions in relation to the task-based curriculum from a sociological perspective, an undertaking that no prior study has yet demonstrated in language teacher cognition research with L2 curriculum in Vietnam and other Asian-Pacific contexts. Giving voice to teachers thus helps unpack teachers' situated cognitions of the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese local context, which is still under-researched in the literature (Borg 2010).

3.3 Research design

This section discusses the research design for the current study. As the main aim of this study is to investigate teachers' implementation of the curriculum from the teacher cognition perspective, it has an *exploratory* purpose. According to Creswell (2009), the exploratory purpose employs qualitative research as the best choice for the study design. Furthermore, this study also seeks to characterize teachers' cognitions in a systematic way; therefore, it has a *descriptive* purpose. In this sense, a case study approach is most suited for the exploratory and descriptive purposes in the research (Yin, 2009). A qualitative case study approach enables an overall description of the participants' cognitions in a bounded context, such as an individual school that the current study focused on.

3.3.1 Qualitative research

The current study adopted qualitative research in its design as it is the form of research most relevant to the scope of the project. This design allows the researcher to seek the participants' personal perspectives while acknowledging the influences of their social and physical settings (Creswell 2008; Freebody 2003). In addition, qualitative research provides an in-depth account of an existing problem in a real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the problem and the context are not clearly defined

(Maxwell 2005; Merriam 2009). Moreover, qualitative research includes the use of multiple methods of data collection such as interviews with the participants, non-participant observations, and examination of relevant documents in order to generate a rich description of the research problem (Patton 2002; Yin 2009). All of these advantages and potentials enabled the researcher to achieve the study goals in the current study.

The qualitative approach offers many exploratory and descriptive potentials which afford insights into the research problem in a specific context (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton 2002). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore the research problem in a real-life context, such as a classroom, in order to capture the meaning that the participating teachers make. In this sense, qualitative research encourages participants to reveal meaning from their own perspectives, rather than following a list of questions and answers which are provided by the researcher in quantitative questionnaire surveys (Flick 2009). Snape and Spencer (2003) note that qualitative research helps to obtain detailed and interpreted understandings of people's real worlds, by learning about their knowledge, beliefs and personal perspectives about things around them. As the current research explores teachers' cognitions, a construct that is value laden and context-specific (Borg 2006), a qualitative research is necessary for the nature of this study.

Qualitative research is an appropriate research methodology for the current study as it allows for the inclusion of multiple methods of investigation (Creswell 2007; Merriam 2009). This is of crucial importance in the study of teachers' cognitions. Pajares (1992) has suggested that inferences about teachers' cognitions require assessment of what they 'say, intend, and do' (p. 316). This can be achieved by including their verbal expressions, predispositions to action, and classroom teaching behaviours. As such, research of teachers' cognitions entails the use of multiple sources of data gathering methods, such as interviews, lesson plan analysis and classroom observations. The appropriateness of the research methodology is corroborated by Borg (2006) who notes that qualitative research is the best choice for the study of teachers' cognitions. Borg argues:

One reason teacher cognition research has been valuable is that it has highlighted the complex nature of teaching. It has used qualitative methods to portray in rich detail what teachers do and the factors behind their work. (p. 288)

In short, the selection of qualitative research in the present study is based on its potential to provide detailed understanding of teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. Qualitative research was employed as it allowed for in-depth descriptions of the research problem through the use of multiple methods of data collection. The following section discusses 'case study' as the principal approach in the current study.

3.3.2 Case study approach

A case study (e.g., Merriam 2009; Thomas 2011; Yin 2009) offers a range of methods to explore the research problem in a real-life context. A case study approach, as its name suggests, involves the use of a 'case' as the unit of analysis (Cohen et al. 2011). A case can be defined as an entity which is bounded by time, events, people, space, or context (Stake 1995). According to Berg (2009), a case study involves 'systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions' (p. 317). Case study specialists (e.g., Thomas 2011; Yin 2009) argue that case study methodology provides analytic and synthetic tools that can be used for data collection and analysis in order to make sense of the data gathered for the current research project.

As discussed earlier, the present study employed qualitative research methodology which sought to explore and describe what the participating teachers believed, thought and understood about the curriculum. As research into L2 teachers' cognitions is an emerging avenue in the literature (Barnard & Burns 2012; Borg 2006, 2009), the case study is a relevant form of inquiry as it focuses on a contemporary issue (Yin 2009). Borg (2006) has pointed out that teachers' cognitions are value-laden and context-specific. The case study approach allows the researcher to obtain in-depth understanding of teachers' cognitions derived from rich and detailed information gathered through multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews and observations, while retaining holistic and meaningful characteristics of the teaching context. A case study of teachers, such as the current one, can provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences in a real-life context, allowing for the portrayal of realities (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). Burns (2000) has noted that case study is a method of investigation that generates description rather than confirmation. As the purposes of this study were to explore and describe the participating

teachers' implementation of a new curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective, case study methods were thus relevant to the scope of the current study.

The 'case' for this study was a cohort of six experienced teachers in an upper secondary school (see [Section 3.4.3](#) for the participating teachers' profiles). A single case was chosen for the present study as it focused on the wholeness of the case being investigated (Stake 1995, 2005). The wholeness was emphasized in this study as the curriculum is an integrated system that covers Grades 10 to 12 (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). Teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, therefore, need to represent the wholeness of the system. In addition, the study employed a thematic approach in data analysis. The single case design thus allowed for the characterization of the findings in a systematic and integrated way, rather than isolated chunks of results describing individual teachers' cognitions. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a local context, and the single case study design allowed for a detailed description of teachers' cognitions, allowing for a focused view of what the teachers knew, believed and understood about the curriculum. Therefore, the wholeness of the single case study, as in the current research, presented a general picture of how the teachers perceived and implemented the curriculum in a local context.

In short, a case study was the most suitable method for the research problem in the current study. Within this approach, the researcher explores a single case over time through a detailed procedure of data collection that includes different sources of information (Creswell 2008). The researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell 2007). To better understand the research design and procedures, the following section will discuss the setting in which the research was conducted.

3.4 Research setting

This section provides information on the settings and the procedures that were undertaken to carry out the current research. [Section 3.4.1](#) provides an overview of the selected school in which the fieldwork took place. This is followed by a detailed description of how access to the field was gained ([Section 3.4.2](#)). The next section ([Section 3.4.3](#)) profiles the participating teachers. [Section 3.4.4](#) discusses the role of the researcher in the current research. The section ends with the ethical considerations related to the present study ([Section 3.4.5](#)). Descriptions of these subsections are now presented.

3.4.1 Context of the study

The school selected for the study is one of the largest upper secondary schools in a central province in Vietnam. There are 45 upper secondary schools in the province. In 2011, this school had a population 1,785 students in 40 classes with 107 teachers, among which 12 were teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). All the English teachers were experienced teachers with a range of seven to twenty years of teaching. This school was recognized as “*trường trung học phổ thông chuẩn*” (a standardized upper secondary school), which means that it was well equipped with teaching resources. According to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training’s (MOET 2010) regulations, there are a number of conditions required for schools to be recognized as ‘standardized’. First, the number of students in each class must be under 45; second, the space of each classroom must be 50 square metres or more; and lastly, the teaching facilities must meet the standards for each specific subject. For example, the English Department has a common staff room with a mini bookshelf and 10 CD players for the teachers to use. There are also three sets of portable projectors with screens available for teachers to use when needed. Teacher cognition researchers have pointed out that poor teaching facilities and resources have had negative impacts on teachers’ cognitions and classroom practices (Barnard & Burns 2012). Therefore, this standardized school was chosen for the current research on teachers’ cognitions and how their cognitions permeated their classroom practices as the teachers had access to a range of suitable resources, thus eliminating the potential concern that a lack of sufficient resources would negatively impact their cognitions and practice.

A noted feature of the school is that all the classes were held in the morning session only. There were five 45-minute classes every morning, from Monday to Saturday. School started at 7.00 am and finished at 11.15 am. Between classes, there was a five-minute break for the teachers to move between the classrooms. In the afternoon the school was closed, but was opened when there were important events, for example, teacher meetings. There was a teacher meeting every two weeks. The researcher did not join the teacher meetings as these meetings focused on the school’s internal issues. The data collection for the current study was conducted in the morning session only, in accordance with the school timetable. The schedule was planned beforehand with the participating teachers. These data collection procedures will be discussed in detail in a later section ([Section 3.5](#)).

3.4.2 *Gaining access*

In the present study, gaining access to the field setting required passage through several ‘gatekeepers’ (Maxwell 2005, p. 82). Specifically, entry needed to be negotiated (Marshall & Rossman 2011) with the Provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET) and the school principal. In Vietnam, DOET is the general gatekeeper to all upper secondary schools in a province (Education Law 2009); therefore, official permission was required from the DOET Director before contacting any school. When the proposed research was presented to the DOET Director together with The University of Wollongong Ethics Approval letter (The Application number HE11/353), the Director granted an official letter that allowed access to the intended school.

With the permission from the DOET director, the school principal was contacted and an appointment for a meeting between the Principal, the Head of the English department and the researcher was scheduled. During the meeting, the Principal and the Head of the department were informed of the aim of the study, the length of time that the study would take as well as the number of participants required. They were also informed that the study was to be carried out from the perspective of a non-participant observer and in an unobtrusive manner (e.g., Patton 2002) so that it would have minimal impact on the school timetable and the teachers’ schedules for their everyday teaching activities. Further, they were assured that the school and all the participating teachers’ identities would be protected; therefore, they would not be identified in the final research report. The Principal granted permission to access the school for collecting data. A schedule was also made with the Head of the English department for contacting potential participants in the following week.

The letter to the school principal is provided in Appendix A.

3.4.3 *Participants*

The participants were selected based on a snowball sampling technique (Patton 2002) that looked for two experienced teachers from each grade (i.e., 10, 11 and 12) respectively. Two teachers were chosen from each grade so that comparisons of their implementation of the curriculum could be made. The six teachers who participated in the current study were all experienced English language teachers with a range of eight to 15 years of teaching

experience. These teachers were chosen as this study aimed to examine in-service (experienced) teachers' cognitions and practices regarding the curriculum. Each participating teacher was given a pseudonym (see Table 3-1). As can be seen from the table, only Rob, the Head of the English Department, was male, the other five teachers being female. In terms of qualifications, all the participants held a bachelor degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (BEd in TEFL). Furthermore, each teacher taught at one grade only. In 2011 when the current study was conducted, Jane and Mary taught Grade 10 while Grace and Green taught Grade 11, and Rob and Rose taught Grade 12. The participants said that they rotated through the grades year after year. For example, if Jane and Mary taught Grade 10, they would move to Grade 11 next year and Grade 12 the year after. While rotating grades, the teachers kept the same students from Grades 10 to 12. The rotation was important for the teachers as it helped them to know the curriculum and their students quite well. This was also significant for the current study, as the rotation helped to stabilize the teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the curriculum which this study aimed to examine.

Table 3-1 Participants' backgrounds

Pseudonym	Age	Grade of teaching	Years of teaching	Qualification	In-service training courses attended
Jane	36	10	13	BEd in TEFL	Two textbook training courses
Mary	30	10	9	BEd in TEFL	One textbook training courses
Grace	37	11	14	BEd in TEFL	Two textbook training courses
Green	31	11	8	BEd in TEFL	One textbook training courses
Rob	38	12	15	BEd in TEFL	Three textbook training courses
Rose	37	12	13	BEd in TEFL	Three textbook training courses

All participating teachers received in-service teacher training in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. As shown in the table, the number of courses that the participants attended varied from one to three, with the two youngest teachers, Mary and Green, attending one training course while the older teachers Grace and Jane attended two courses. The most experienced teachers, Rob and Rose, who taught Grade 12, attended three courses. These training courses often lasted from three to five days, focusing on how to deliver a unit of work provided in the textbook. At the workshop, the participating teachers planned some model lessons and then demonstrated those lessons to their colleagues. After that the teachers gathered together and discussed whether the lessons were appropriate to their local teaching context. Since all the participants graduated from

universities before the time when the curriculum was launched in 2006, these textbook training courses were of crucial importance to them.

3.4.4 Role of the researcher

This section discusses the issues that relate to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. There are two issues to consider in the current study. These are: the power-distance relationship between the researcher and participants, and the role of the researcher in conducting the research.

My previous experiences as a teacher trainer might generate a power-distance relationship (Hofstede 1986) with the participating teachers. As such, the participants might provide information that was not relevant to their thinking in the interview. This may result in halo effects and thus influence the interview outcomes (Mackey & Gass 2005). Researchers have noted that the researcher-participant relationship may fall somewhere in a continuum from power-distance and detached to friendly and collaborative (Berg 2009; Creswell 2013). As such, it is important for me as the researcher to build a friendly and collaborative relationship with the participants in order to enhance the quality of the data. In the current study, my rapport with the participating teachers offered me several advantages in conducting the research. Specifically, the participating teachers and I have developed trust over time. This trust facilitated the data collection procedures. For example, the participants were open and straightforward to me in the interviews. However, given this trust, I was well aware of my role as a researcher and I strictly conformed to this role during the data collection period. In my previous role, I often gave feedback on teachers' lessons that I observed. But in this study, I did not give any comments or feedback. Instead, I explained clearly that no one else, not even the school principal, could see the recorded videos of the observed lessons. The teachers were happy with protection against their identities.

During the interviews, I played the role of an 'empathic listener' (Maxwell 2005, p. 85). First, great care was taken with the interview questions. My responses to the interviewee's answers were thoughtful and considerate (Kvale 1996). I had to refrain from expressing personal opinions on the answers. As such, the interviewer's considerations contributed to reducing any negative feelings in the interviewee and thus the outcomes were enhanced. Second, there was also a potential issue that may occur in the interview process if the

interviewees' ideas were different from mine (Fontana & Frey 2005). In such a case, I still included the interviewees' ideas, even if those ideas were discomfoting or contrasting with my own ideas in the research area. In short, during the interviewing processes I played the role of a colleague who shared with the participating teachers' feelings and understanding.

During classroom observations, I undertook a non-participant role (Flick 2009). While direct classroom observations provided me with detailed understanding of the participating teachers' practices, there were several concerns that might have affected the observed classroom data. First, the Hawthorne effect might have resulted from my presence in the classroom (Mackey & Gass 2005): the participating teachers might try to provide better demonstrations than usual with their teaching. I explained to the teachers that my observations were for researching purposes only; no information on the observed classes would be passed on to a third party, such as inspectors in the School system. The friendly and collaborative rapport between the researcher and the participants offered the teachers trust during the data collection process. In the observations, the teachers delivered their lessons as usual. The Hawthorne effect was minimized. Overall, it was important for me to observe whatever occurred in the classroom without judgement. Thus, in my role as the researcher, I always remained unobtrusive, neutral and harmless to the participants during the classroom observation process (Angrosino & de Perez 2000).

In brief, in this study the researcher-participant relationship and the role that the researcher took during the data collection were considered from several perspectives. In terms of the researcher-participant relationship, it was argued that a friendly and collaborative relationship between the researcher and participants could minimize the halo effects of the information collected and thus enhance the outcomes of the research. In terms of the role as an interviewer and classroom observer, the researcher acted responsibly while remaining neutral and inclusive of the participants' views. As the principal investigator in the current study, I also had to adhere to the research codes of conduct and to stay within the guidelines of the University of Wollongong human research ethics. The following section discusses ethical considerations for the current study.

3.4.5 Ethical considerations

This study was reviewed by the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee. In particular, ethical issues were considered with regard to the participating teachers' full informed consent, voluntary participation and withdrawal, and identity protection. First, the researcher obtained full informed consent in the written form from all the participants. Throughout the research, the researcher was fully aware of the potential risks that the teachers may have in their participation. For example, any information relating to the teachers' views on the curriculum must be kept confidential between the researcher and the participating teachers. The teachers were free from any concerns about their views being recognized by a third party. The teachers were encouraged to speak out about what they thought, believed and knew about the curriculum to the best of their knowledge and understanding. Second, the participating teachers' participation in the research was entirely voluntary. They were allowed to withdraw from participating in the research at any time without any negative consequences. All the teachers were satisfied with the data collection procedures and no one withdrew from the study. The final ethical consideration was the school and the teachers' identity protection. In presentation of the research findings in the thesis and publications, the school and participants were protected from being identified in the reports. The school name as well as the participants' names remained confidential in the research project through the use of pseudonyms on reporting findings.

The Participant Information Sheet is given in Appendix B and the Consent Form is in Appendix C.

3.5 Data collection methods

As discussed in [Section 3.3](#), the current study adopted a qualitative case study approach as an appropriate methodology for its design. Within this qualitative case study approach, data for the study was collected through multiple methods, including interviews, documents and non-participant classroom observations. In the sections that follow, the data collection methods are described.

3.5.1 Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are used as the primary method to explore the teacher participants' meaning-making process. Patton (2002) argues for interviews as an effective method of data collection in qualitative research:

The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions.... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (p. 341)

In theorizing teachers' cognitions, Borg (2006) argues that teachers' cognitions are often inferred from teachers' verbal comments. Interviews are most relevant to this methodological demand. In order to understand teachers' cognitions through what they say, the current study utilized two interviewing strategies: semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. The specific interviewing strategies are discussed below.

3.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participants' cognitions about the curriculum that they were teaching, which were specified in the first research sub-question. One advantage of semi-structured interviews is their flexibility which allows the interviewer to elaborate on what the interviewee says, while maintaining the focus of the interview (Borg 2006). Questions in semi-structured interviews are often open-ended, so the interviewees can speak as much as they like. As such, open-ended questions were used to foster the respondents' freedom and confidence whilst seeking their views about reasonably complex issues (Ary et al. 1990). In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted in a friendly manner, and vary in length and the language used, as well as being flexibly timed to suit the respondent (Burns 2000). Specifically, the interviewee's responses are interpreted and verified during the interview process (Kvale 1996). The interviewer listens carefully and comments thoughtfully on what the respondent says (Borg 2006). Because of these dominant features, semi-structured interviews have a well-established tradition in researching teachers' cognitions (Borg 2012).

In the current study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. Each participant agreed to be interviewed once only, on site, in their recess time between two classes. The majority of the interviews lasted for about half an hour due to the fact that the

participants had to move between classes. In the interview, open-ended questions were asked from a pre-defined list of interviewing questions (see Appendix D). Depending on the respondent's answer, additional questions were asked or clarifications sought. Although variations in the questions asked might occur depending on each participant, the interview questions were structured based on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of the three message systems and Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Specifically, the interviewer's questions aimed to seek the teachers' views on the curriculum they were teaching with regard to the curricular content, the teaching approach and learner assessment in relation to the curriculum. The teachers were asked about how they taught the curriculum so that their voices on classroom issues could be heard in the interviews. Furthermore, the interviewing questions were designed following Kvale's (1996) strategies of questioning that include introducing questions, following-up questions and probing questions. For example, an introducing question that was commonly used was 'Can you tell me about...?'. Kvale argues that such a question can produce spontaneous and informative answers to the research problem. Follow-up questions included 'You have said that..., can you explain a bit more?' and probing questions such as 'Can you make it clear that...?' With these follow-up questions, the interviews were conducted in an interactive manner, as suggested by Burns (2000). Further, the working language that was used for the interviews was Vietnamese. This language was chosen by the participating teachers because they felt more confident to answer the questions in their mother tongue. All the semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

3.5.1.2 Informal conversations

Informal conversations are considered the most open-ended interviewing strategy (Patton 2002). Fontana and Frey (2000) define informal conversations as an 'unstructured interviewing' protocol (p. 652) that allows for maximum flexibility in seeking information in any direction that may be appropriate. Compared with semi-structured interviews, informal conversations have several advantages. First, the interview is conducted in a conversational style that is open and friendly in a manner that may eliminate any anxiety that the respondent might have (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011; Maxwell 2005). Through informal conversations, the interviewee can feel more comfortable in answering questions as compared to formal interviews (Patton 2002). Second, informal conversations

can be conducted at any time that suits the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer can ask several questions that arise from the context so as to explore the interviewee's points of view (Patton 1987). This seems to be more convenient than other interviewing strategies for both the researcher and participants. Lastly, the informal conversation is often conducted without the audio recorder; therefore, participants may feel less anxious in answering the interview questions. The interviewer listens attentively and takes notes during the interview. Notes were taken in shorthand and were transcribed into full sentences on the same day that the interview took place. For these conveniences, informal conversations were utilized in the present study.

In the current study, informal conversations were used as follow-up interviews to the formal interviews and subsequent to the actual teaching of the lesson and analysis of the teachers' written lesson plans. The use of informal conversation aimed to capture the participating teachers' aims and intentions for the types of tasks/activities they used in their lesson plans. For example, a common question that might be asked was: 'You used this activity in your lesson, can you tell me more about your intentions...?' In this respect, the participating teachers were asked about their reasons for using a specific activity or how they positioned the activity in the lesson sequence. The use of informal conversations with the teachers' lesson plans was necessary to help answer the question 'why' in addition to the 'what' the teachers had prepared in their lesson plans. In this sense, informal conversations assisted the examination of how the teachers' cognitions were reflected in their principles of selection (Bernstein 1977) in the lesson plans. Further, informal conversations allowed the researcher to approach the participants at any time that suited both sides. As such, the informal conversations proved to be a convenient way of collecting information about aspects of the teachers' cognitions, in particular, about their design choices and implementation in the lessons taught.

3.5.2 Documents

Documents are rich sources of information about educational programs (Creswell 2009; Merriam 1998) that can provide specific details needed to corroborate information from other sources (Yin 2009). In the present study, two types of documents, lesson plans and test papers made by the participating teachers, were examined to see how the teacher participants' cognitions were reflected in their teaching and testing practices. First, the

lesson plans were used to capture how the participating teachers' cognitions were reflected in their principles of selection (Bernstein 1977). Researchers have argued that teachers' lesson plans serve as a good source of data that provides a trace of their cognitions (Richards 1998; Shulman 1986). For example, Richards (1998) notes that the lesson plan is a 'map' for the teacher to follow in the classroom. Lesson plans can also be seen as a record of what has been taught (Shulman 1986). Therefore, examination of the lesson plans can offer insights into the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. The results from the lesson plan data were further corroborated with other sources of data such as interviews and classroom observations for triangulation (Creswell 2007).

Test papers were another type of document that the current study used for data collection. Participants' test papers were used to examine the teachers' testing practices with regard to the assessed content and forms of assessment (Bernstein 1977, 1990) so as to uncover the teachers' principles of test design in the classroom. In the school, teachers had two types of written tests in the classroom. They were: the 45-minute test and the 15-minute test. The 45-minute test was used to assess students' general competence of English use including both linguistic competence (i.e., lexical and grammatical knowledge) and language use (i.e., reading, listening and writing), although there was no speaking component in these tests. The 15-minute test, however, focused on four language skills, including reading, speaking, listening and writing (MOET 2007). These test papers were collected from the participating teachers soon after the tests were administered to students.

A teacher's written lesson plan is given in Appendix E and a 45-minute test paper is in Appendix F.

3.5.3 *Classroom observations*

In the present study, the participating teachers' classrooms were observed and video recorded for evidence of the teachers' implementation of the curriculum. Patton (2002) has noted that observations enable the researcher to see things that may not be evident in interviews or documentation. In addition, observations provide more direct information than other self-reported protocols (Dornyei 2007). In the literature reporting research on teachers' cognitions, observations are often utilized to capture teachers' classroom practices (Borg 2012). Furthermore, observations provide a rich account of teachers' teaching in their actual classrooms (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). In language

education research, observations are often recommended as this method of data collection can provide a detailed description of what happens in a specific context at a certain time (Nunan & Bailey 2009). Borg (2006) has argued that observation ‘clearly has a central role to play in the study of language teacher cognition by providing a concrete descriptive basis in relation to what teachers know, think and believe’ (p. 231). In short, observations allow the researcher to capture what the participating teachers actually do in the classroom.

Theoretically, classroom observations in the current study were used to capture how teachers’ cognitions were reflected in their principles of sequencing, the second criteria in Bernstein’s (1977, 1990) concept of pedagogy that constitutes his notion of pedagogic discourse. Specifically, classroom observations provided detailed evidence that precisely described the participating teachers’ pedagogy (Borg 2006). Duff (2008) has suggested that observation should be conducted with interviews in order to appreciate the participants’ actions or behaviours in the classroom.

In the present study, classroom observations were carried out in the following ways. First, after the semi-structured interviews, a detailed schedule for classroom observation was prepared with each of the teacher participants. An individual participating teacher was observed for two consecutive lessons that focused on language skills. Each lesson lasted for 45 minutes. Teachers elected which lessons would be observed, consistent with their teaching schedules. Each observed lesson was video recorded with full consent of the teachers. Second, unstructured field notes during observations documented as much detail as possible (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 1990). These notes were recorded in a diary that detailed classroom activities, including the sequence of the activities and the nature of each activity (i.e., form-focused or meaning-focused). These diary notes were later cross-referenced in relation to documents such as lesson plans and curriculum guidelines. In this way, records of what the teachers did in the classroom in relation to the interviews as well as documents for the study were captured (Borg 2006). The records provided a concrete description of what the teachers thought and did in relation to the curriculum at the classroom level.

In summary, this section has discussed the methods of data collection that were utilized in the current study. As suggested by teacher cognition researchers (e.g., Barnard & Burns 2012; Borg 2006), multiple methods of data collection were utilized. These methods included: interviews (semi-structured and informal interviews), documents analysis (lesson

plans and test papers) and classroom observations. The main purpose of using multiple methods of data collection was to obtain rich information about categories of beliefs/knowledge that made up the teachers' cognitions and how cognitions were reflected in their teaching and testing practices, as posited in the research questions in the current research. The following section discusses data management and protection procedures for the current study.

3.5.4 Data management and protection

This study involved a large amount of data which was not ready for analysis until it was transcribed and systematically organized. As soon as the first data was collected, transcription began and data management procedures were systematized. Transcribing qualitative data was a challenging task for a novice researcher such as myself. Gillham (2005) roughly estimates that a one-hour interview will take about ten hours to transcribe into written text. Furthermore, this one-hour interview can produce up to 15 single-spaced pages of written text (Patton 2002). In the current study, six 30-minute semi-structured interviews and twelve 45-minute observed lessons took the researcher roughly 150 hours of transcribing and yielded approximately 300 pages of written transcripts. In addition, the data set has included research diaries and notes from informal conversations and classroom observations, as well as the English textbook series, teachers' manuals, curriculum guidelines, teacher participants' lesson plans and test papers. This large amount of data required systematic organization and arrangement of the data which had a two-step procedure as follows.

The first step was the transcription of audio and video recorded data into the written form. All interview (semi-structured interviews and informal conversations) and classroom observation data was transcribed into the original language/ languages that were used. Specifically, the interview data was transcribed into Vietnamese which was used to conduct the interviews. The classroom observation data was transcribed into both Vietnamese and English in exactly the same way as the teachers had used in the classroom. Using the original language/languages that the participating teachers used allowed the researcher to analyse the data in the 'real' sense that was illustrated, rather than having the transcripts translated into English, a process through which a loss of meaning may occur (Merriam 2009; van Nes et al. 2010). Furthermore, using the original language saved a significant amount of time spent on data translation (Gillham 2005). Gillham estimates that

the time spent on translation can be as much as the time spent on transcription. For these reasons, the analysis of data in the current study was conducted with the original language and/or languages.

The second step was the rearrangement of the data into a manageable form. Based on the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study, a four-column data matrix was developed (Table 3-2). The first column includes the research question that the study aimed to address. As shown in the table, all the three research questions were categorized in this column. The second column includes the theoretical frame that each research question entails. For example, the first research question was about the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, which were specified in terms of curricular cognitions and pedagogical content cognitions, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The third column includes the primary source of data analysed by the study for each research question. For instance, the first research question relies on the semi-structured interview data that includes the teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding about the curriculum. The fourth column includes the secondary source of data that the research question relies on in collaboration with the primary data source. For example, to investigate how the teachers' cognitions were reflected in their principles of selection with the lesson plans, the informal conversations were used to obtain the teachers' opinions on the tasks/activities they selected. In general, the matrix provides a useful way of organizing data prior to the analysis procedure. In this respect, this matrix enabled the researcher to organize the collected data in a systematic way.

Table 3-2 The data organization matrix

Research question	Theoretical focus	Primary data source	Secondary data source
<i>What cognitions do the participating teachers hold about the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers' curricular cognitions - Teachers' pedagogical content cognitions 	Semi-structured interviews	
<i>How do the participating teachers' cognitions permeate their classroom practices?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Principles of selection - Principles of sequencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lesson plans - Classroom observations; 	Informal conversations
<i>To what extent are the teachers' cognitions reflected in their classroom testing practices?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The assessed content - Form of assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-structured interviews - Test papers 	

Once the data was organized, keeping the data safe and secure was an important issue in data management (Patton 2002). During the process of data collection, duplicated copies of data were made to ensure that the data could not get lost under any circumstances. As the data is treated as the most precious material in a research project, it was crucial to keep the data in a safe place. The data was safely stored in a password protected computer and on a portable hard drive during the collection and analysis processes. The following sections and subsections describe the procedures of data analysis in the present study.

3.6 Data analysis

The data analysis procedure used in the current study followed a thematic approach based on the work of qualitative researchers such as Boyatzis (1998), Ryan and Bernard (2003) and Braun and Clarke (2006). There were two major phases: coding the data; and developing themes and reporting the results. These stages represent an iterative process in which the researcher repeatedly went forwards and backwards in reading, coding and developing themes that emerged from the data analysis. A detailed description of these stages follows.

3.6.1 Coding

Coding is an important step in the analysis of qualitative data (Creswell 2013). This stage reduced the amount of raw data collected to a manageable size that was used for interpretation and to generate different themes (Miles & Huberman 1994). This phase involved the coding of four types of data: interview transcripts; teachers' written lesson plans; classroom observation transcripts; and written test papers. The coding process for each of these data sources is described in turn.

3.6.1.1 Coding the interview data

Considering all the participating teachers as a single case in this study, the coding process began with the semi-structured interview data. The coding of the interview data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) two major analytic steps: becoming familiar with the data and generating initial codes. First, the researcher read and re-read the data carefully in order to become familiar with the set of transcripts. According to Braun and Clarke it is crucial for the researcher to be immersed in the data and familiarized with the depth and

breadth of the information. By repeatedly reading the data, the researcher gained a sense of the whole prior to coding (Hatch 2002). The second step was the process of generating initial codes. At first, the researcher conducted a pilot coding of one entire interview transcript. The researcher coded the transcript and revised the codes to get general ideas about what the interview was about. This trial coding step was part of a check-coding process and the researcher's role was as an intra-coder (Miles & Huberman 1994). The researcher then coded the same piece of transcript again and compared the two versions to note any differences that arose. These differences were reviewed and the researcher continued to assign codes until the two copies of the transcript were almost the same. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the self-check stage ends when approximately 90 per cent agreement between different times of coding is achieved. Table 3-3 provides an example of the initial codes of the semi-structured interview data in the present study.

Table 3-3 Initial codes of the interview data

Teacher	Extracts	Lines	Code
Mary	I like the topic-based content. This content provides teachers and students with lots of information about life around.	51-52	Cognitions about the curricular content
Mary	Of course, I would like to develop communicative skills for students in teaching	72	Pedagogical content cognitions
Mary	I think the topics are mandated in the curriculum design.	125	Cognitions about instructional indications of the curriculum
Mary	The sequence of tasks includes pre-task, while-task, and post-task stages.	138	Cognitions about task sequence
Mary	Vocabulary and grammar play a central role in teaching and learning English.	290	Content cognitions
Mary	I think that in any test, it's necessary to assess students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. This is very important as it can ensure how good at the language the students are.	305-308	Cognitions about the assessed content

After the coding of the first transcript was finalized, a Vietnamese research student in the faculty was enlisted to code the same interview transcript. After this trial, inter-coder agreement was about 60%, which is acceptable for an early stage of coding (Geisler 2004). Miles and Huberman (1994), however, recommend a minimum inter-coder agreement of 80% for qualitative data analysis. The differences were thus discussed and clarified to

achieve a higher degree of consistency. During these discussions, the main issue contributing to the differences was the coders' perceptions of teacher knowledge and teachers' beliefs, a daunting distinction which is widely recognized as problematic in teacher cognition research (Borg 2006; Pajares 1992). In addition, teacher knowledge was often mistaken with a more general notion of 'knowledge' such as scientific knowledge specified in the curriculum. For these reasons, moving to an inclusive concept that could include 'teachers' beliefs' and 'teacher knowledge' was necessary. The term 'teachers' cognitions' was then chosen to be an overarching term that includes teachers' knowledge, beliefs and understanding about the curriculum. After that, the coding process was repeated and the two coders reached an inter-coder agreement of approximately 85%. This is an acceptable percentage of inter-coder reliability in qualitative data analysis (Geisler 2004; Miles & Huberman 1994). The researcher then coded the remainder of the data. When the initial coding of the interview transcripts was finalized, the next step was to categorize the codes in accordance with the theoretical framework in order to develop themes. These completed coding processes are described in [Section 3.6.2](#).

3.6.1.2 *Coding the lesson plan data*

The aim of the lesson plan analysis was to observe the ways the participating teachers made changes to the tasks provided in the textbook via their lesson plans. Coding the lesson plan data was based on the juxtaposition technique (Miles & Huberman 1994). Each activity in the lesson plans was juxtaposed with the activity specified in the textbook (Van et al. 2006a). From the juxtaposition of the two activities, one of the following codes was assigned to the activity that the teachers specified in the lesson plans: retaining, modifying, adding and omitting, which was adopted from previous studies on teachers' implementation of tasks in Vietnam by Trang et al. (2011) and Viet (2013). *Retaining* an activity means that the participating teacher made use of the pre-designed activity in exactly the same way as it was provided in the textbooks. *Modifying* an activity means that the activity was somewhat changed by the teacher in his/her lesson plan. For example, a true/false statement activity could be modified into multiple-choice questions, or a display-question activity could be changed into referential questions, or vice versa. *Adding* means that the activity was not specified in the textbook but was inserted into the lesson by the teacher. Finally, *omitting* means that an activity specified in the textbook was not utilized by the teacher. Table 3-4 provides an example of the coding of an activity by juxtaposing

the activity provided in the lesson plan with the activity and its location specified in the textbook.

Table 3-4 An example of the lesson plan coding

Teacher	Textbook activity	Activity in the lesson plan	Location	Code
Grace (Reading lesson)	<i>Task 3: Answer the following questions:</i> 1. When is Tet holiday in Vietnam? 2. How long did Tet preparations and celebrations last in the past? 3. What did streets look like before Tet? 4. What do people often prepare for Tet? 5. What is <i>banh chung</i> made from? 6. What is <i>mut</i> ? 7. What are some popular activities at Tet?	<i>Questions and Answers:</i> 1. When is Tet holiday in Vietnam? 2. How long did Tet preparations and celebrations last in the past? 3. What did streets look like before Tet? 4. What do people often prepare for Tet? 5. What is <i>banh chung</i> made from? 6. What is <i>mut</i> ? 7. What are some popular activities at Tet?	While-task	Retaining

3.6.1.3 Coding the classroom observation data

The aim of classroom observation data analysis was to see how the teachers sequenced tasks in the classroom. Therefore, the coding of the classroom observation transcripts needed to show how the activities were sequenced in the classroom and why the sequence mattered. This author acknowledged that the lesson plan data could exhibit the teachers' principles of sequencing; however, the classroom observations provided a more detailed account of how the teachers sequenced the tasks in their classroom practices. To illustrate the teachers' principles of sequencing of tasks, the current study used episodes (Gibbons 2006) that the observed lessons contained. Gibbons describes an episode as a short observation transcript that illustrates a task or an activity that teachers use in teaching. Unlike activities that can stand alone, episodes were chosen for analysis in the current study as they were related to other parts of the lesson and could depict the teachers' principles of sequencing (Lemke 1990). Similar to the interview data, the coding of classroom observation data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) two major steps, including repeatedly reading the data and assigning codes. The codes were short descriptions of what the teacher did in relation to the task sequence in the classroom and could be assigned in the following ways. First, the researcher read and re-read the

transcripts to become immersed in the data and get the sense of the whole. Second, the researcher began to code the data transcripts. An entire lesson transcript was first coded by the researcher and self-checked to have an intra-coding agreement between the two copies of the coded transcripts. The coding process continued until he reached an agreement of 90% between the two versions of the same coded transcript. Then another Vietnamese research student in TESOL in the faculty was enlisted to code the lesson transcript until they reached an agreement of about 80%, which is acceptable (Geisler 2004; Miles & Huberman 1994). The researcher continued to code the remainder of the transcripts on his own. Table 3-5 provides an example of coding of an episode using the transcript from the classroom observation data.

Table 3-5 An example of the classroom observation coding

Episode		Source	Code
<p>T: (Write on BB) HCOSOL, ONIEDUCTA, STEMYS, Now, look at the blackboard, these are some words whose letters are not in order. Please put them in order to make the correct words. Do you understand? That means you have to reorder the letters to make meaningful words. We have three words, one, two, three... three words. ///// OK? The first. Can you (T pointed at one student)</p> <p>S1: School</p> <p>T: School. Good (T wrote on BB). The whole class, do you agree?</p> <p>Ss: Yeah</p> <p>T: Very good. /// The second word? Ngoc (pointed at one student)</p> <p>S2: Education</p> <p>T: Education, education. Good. Do you agree, class?</p> <p>Ss: xxxx</p> <p>T: Yes or No?</p> <p>Ss: Yesss.</p> <p>T: The last one? (Pointed at one student)</p> <p>S3: System</p> <p>T: Yes, system. Right?</p> <p>Ss: Yes.</p> <p>T: Yes, school education system. In Vietnamese? (pointed at one student)</p> <p>S4: hệ thống giao dục</p> <p>T: Yes, hệ thống giao dục phổ thông. Hệ thống giáo dục hoặc hệ thống giáo dục phổ thông. Yes, OK.</p>		Rob's Reading lesson, Grade 12	Starting the lesson with vocabulary-based activities

An example of a whole lesson transcript is provided in Appendix G.

3.6.1.4 Coding the test paper data

In the current study, the analysis of the test papers aimed to depict the participating teachers' testing practices in the classroom in relation to the task-based curriculum,

drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) third message system, assessment, using a content analysis approach (Krippendorff 2004). There were several steps in the analysis procedure. First, the researcher read the test paper data carefully to have a general sense of the teachers' assessment in terms of both the assessed content and form of assessment (Bernstein 1977, 1990). Then codes were labelled on the written test papers. Codes were short descriptions that the researcher assigned to the data so as to discern the way that the teachers tested their students in the classroom. Similarly to coding other kinds of data, the coding of the test paper data also included the intra-coding and inter-coding processes until an agreement of more than 80% was achieved. An example of the coding of the test papers is given in Table 3-6 below.

Table 3-6 An example of the test paper coding

Test Question	Source	Code
<p><i>I. Choose the word whose underlined part is pronounced differently from the rest:</i></p> <p>1. A. parach<u>u</u>te B. <u>ch</u>ampagne C. <u>ch</u>ivalry D. church<u>g</u>oer</p> <p>2. A. solv<u>e</u>d B. practis<u>e</u>d C. rais<u>e</u>d D. explain<u>e</u>d</p> <p>3. A. <u>th</u>ese B. <u>th</u>eory C. wort<u>h</u> D. <u>th</u>reaten</p> <p>4. A. behav<u>e</u>s B. hous<u>e</u>s C. heritag<u>e</u>s D. diseas<u>e</u>s</p> <p>5. A. fri<u>e</u>nd B. <u>s</u>ec<u>o</u>ndary C. sp<u>e</u>cial D. secr<u>e</u>t</p>	Grace	MCQ was used to test students' discrete knowledge of phonetics
<p><i>IV. Use the correct tense:</i></p> <p>26. When I (arrive) _____, the teacher (write) _____ on the blackboard.</p> <p>27. When we (come) _____, the dinner (already begin) _____.</p> <p>28 He made us (do) _____ it carefully.</p> <p>29 I want (see) _____ the house where Shakespeare was born.</p> <p>30. She enjoys (go) _____ out with her friends at weekend.</p>	Grace	A focus on verb tenses
<p><i>IV. Finish the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first one, beginning with the given words or phrases:</i></p> <p>16. No one has opened that box for the past hundred years. → The box</p> <p>17. He has never behaved so violently before. → He is behaving</p> <p>18. The last time it snowed here was six years ago. → It</p> <p>19. I only bought the dog because my children wanted a pet. → If</p> <p>20. "I have an English lesson this morning but I haven't done my homework yet," said a pupil. → A pupil said that</p>	Green	Controlled writing used to test students' precise reconstruction of language at the sentence level

These previous sections have presented the process of coding the empirical data in the current study using a thematic approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). As most

processes showed, the coding involved two major steps that included repeatedly reading the data and assigning initial codes to the transcripts. Once the coding was completed, the researcher moved onto developing themes in the data. The following section will discuss the third phase of data analysis in the present study: developing themes.

3.6.2 *Developing themes*

This stage involved the process of developing themes from the coded data. There were three steps in developing themes: organizing the coded data; identifying themes; and refining themes in relation to the empirical data based on the work of qualitative research (e.g., Braun & Clarke 2006; Ryan & Bernard 2003). First, as soon as all the data was coded, the organization of the coded data began. In this step, the coded data was organized based on the ‘theoretical categories’ (Maxwell 2005, p. 97) on which the study was structured. Conastas (1992) argues that the use of theoretical categories as *a priori* frames can assist the researcher to organize data in a systematic way. As the current study involved a range of empirical data from different sources such as interviews, lesson plans, classroom observations and test papers, the theoretical categories functioned as the orientating frameworks in data organization. In particular, the coded data was organized based on Bernstein’s (1977, 1990) three message systems and Shulman’s (1986, 1987) concepts of teacher curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The organization of the coded data was performed manually using the traditional cut-and-paste techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Ryan and Bernard (2003). These techniques included cutting original quotes in the interviews and transcripts of observation and document data, then pasting them into categories of the theoretical framework such as Bernstein’s (1977, 1990) three message systems (i.e., curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) and Shulman’s (1986, 1987) curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. When the cutting and pasting was completed, the sorting of the data began. The sorted data was read carefully in order to identify potential themes that emerged from the empirical data.

The second step began when the researcher began to seek themes from the sorted data. A qualitative theme, as defined by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), is ‘[a] unit of meaning that is observed (noticed) in the data by a reader of the text’ (p. 50). The sorted data was read and re-read carefully by the researcher in order to discover any emergent themes. While themes can emerge from the data (Dornyei 2007), they can be ‘influenced

by questions or issues that the researcher brought to the research' (Holliday 2007, p. 97). For the interview transcripts, the process of identifying potential themes was based on the messages of repetition of words and/or similar words and phrases sharing a similar topic that they represent (Bogdan & Biklen 1998). For example, three potential themes were discovered from the participants' comments about the curriculum regarding the topic-based language content: 'diverse', 'irrelevant' and 'mandatory'. These potential themes were further examined so as to possibly form an overarching theme (Braun & Clarke 2006). For instance, from the potential themes above, the overarching theme that includes the three potential themes was categorized as 'teachers' cognitions about the curriculum'. This overarching theme also relates to the theoretical framework of teachers' cognitions based on Shulman's (1986, 1987) category of teacher curricular knowledge. In this sense, the overarching theme illustrates an interrelationship between the themes and the theoretical perspective that demonstrates a solid representation of the data based on the theoretical framework of the study (Dey 1993).

The last step involves the refinement of the themes in order to develop the general meaning that each theme represented (Braun & Clarke 2006). Specifically, the data extracts for each theme were further scrutinized so as to provide the best representation of the findings. When the refinement of the themes was completed, each theme was given a name which was 'concise, punchy, and immediately gives the reader a sense of what the theme is about' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.93). The data was double checked to ensure the coherence and consistency of the themes. The writing up for the report commenced afterwards. The findings were structured according to the theoretical framework. As shown in the findings chapter (Chapter Four), Bernstein's three message systems and Shulman's concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge were used as the orientating framework of the results presentation.

3.7 Quality of the research

Given the potential strengths in teacher cognition research, qualitative research has several weaknesses. The most common concern is the rigour of the data collection and interpretation procedures undertaken in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Maxwell 2005; Merriam 2009). Research rigour, to a large extent, equates to the validity and reliability of the study during data gathering and analysis procedures (Creswell & Miller 2000). While validity refers to the process of making accurate representations of

what the research set out to investigate, credibility indicates that the same results will be obtained by another researcher using the same methods of investigation (Creswell 2007). Drawing on suggestions from qualitative researchers (e.g., Berg 2009; Creswell 2007; Freebody 2003; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Maxwell 2005; Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 2002), this study adopted a number of strategies to enhance the rigour of the research. These strategies include the researcher's prolonged engagement in the fieldwork; the use of the participating teachers' first language in data collection; and analysis involving inter-coder rating, member-checking, triangulation and peer review of the results. These strategies are described in the remainder of this section.

Qualitative researchers suggest that prolonged and intensive engagement in the field, including building rapport with participants and learning their culture, might contribute to the validity of the research findings (Creswell 2007; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 2009). It took five months to complete data collection. During this time, the researcher was at the school almost every school day. As discussed earlier, building a good rapport with the teacher participants as well as other members in the school was important in the current study. This rapport made the researcher more an insider colleague rather than a guest in the school. On the one hand, the rapport helped the participating teachers to ease any anxiety that they had with the interviews. They also had feelings of friendship and trust with the researcher; consequently, they were more open in the interviews. Even so, teachers' cognitions are tacit and personal (Borg 2006) and having a good relationship with the participants thus enabled the researcher to elicit the participants' internal beliefs and thinking through intensive engagement with them.

Furthermore, the participating teachers' first language was used in the data collection and throughout the analysis. This language is also the researcher's first language. Using the first language for analysis offered several advantages. First, the use of the first language in everyday communication helped the researcher to gain trust and confidence during the interviews with the participants. It also reduced the possibility that the participants misunderstood the research questions or misinterpretation on the part of the researcher in examining how expressions were stated in their responses. In the analysis procedures, using the first language allowed the coding of the transcripts with their original meanings which can avoid the risk of losing the real meaning through translating into English before analysis (van Nes, Abma & Jonsson 2010). In this way, using the teachers' first language

allowed the researcher to work with the original meaning in data collection and analysis procedures. English translation was only referred to when the final report on the findings was completed. All the theme names and related data transcripts were translated into English using verbatim translation (Corden & Sainsbury 2006).

Other validation strategies included inter-coder rating (Miles & Huberman 1994), triangulation (Merriam 2009; Patton 2002), and peer reviewing of results (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 1998). In an early stage of data analysis, the help of two research students was enlisted in checking the codes. The refinement was finalized when the inter-coding procedures achieved an agreement of more than 80 per cent between different coders on the minimum amount of 10 per cent of the data set (Geisler 2004; Miles & Huberman 1994). Finally, to enhance validity and reliability, critical review was continually sought from three research supervisors. In supervision meetings that took place every two weeks, the supervisors provided the student researcher with insightful comments on his work. In this way, the supervisors helped to validate both the process and the product of the research and helped to foster its reliability (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Miles & Huberman 1994). Table 3-7 summarizes the strategies that the current study used to improve the quality of the research procedures.

Table 3-7 Overview of the strategies used to enhance the research rigour

Strategies	Procedures	Purposes
Multiple methods of data collection	Interviews (semi-structured and informal conversations), lesson plans, classroom observations, and test papers.	Multiple data sources enable exploration of different aspects of the teachers' cognitions. Further, the multiple methods enable triangulation of data sources and findings.
Researcher's prolonged engagement with the setting and data	Engaged with the setting as well as the participants	To see and interpret the data as an insider so as to eliminate misinformation. Also, to reduce Hawthorne effect in observation.
Using first language in data collection and analysis	Interviews, transcription and analysis were done in the first language. Final themes and evidence translated into English.	To reduce the loss of meaning in data collection, analysis and presentation of the findings.
Code-checking (intra- and inter-coder)	Self-check coding procedure and the help of two inter-coders in coding at least 10% of the data with satisfactory results	To validate the start lists of codes as well as to enhance credibility through multiple coders.
Peer review	Regular fortnightly supervision meeting with three supervisors	To discuss the data collection and interpretations in detail so as to enhance validity and credibility.
Thick description	Deep and dense descriptions through narrative strategies in writing up the results.	To make the findings generalizable and transferable so as to enhance credibility.

3.8 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the theoretical framework, research approach and the methods used in the present study to investigate teachers' cognitions and practices in an upper secondary school in Vietnam. Guided by Bernstein's (1977, 1990) educational code theory and Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as underlying frameworks, the research adopted a qualitative case study approach as the research methodology. Specifically, multiple methods of data collection including different interviewing strategies, non-participant observations and document analysis were employed, which enabled an in-depth description of the research problem and the case. Following the justification of the theoretical framework and research methodologies, a detailed description of the research setting, data collection and analysis procedures was presented. Lastly, this chapter has summarized a number of strategies that were undertaken to enhance the rigour of the research in the current study.

The next chapter will present the findings on teachers' cognitions and how they were reflected in the teachers' classroom teaching and testing practices. These findings are the results of the data collection and analysis procedures described in the current chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings in three sections following Bernstein's (1977, 1990) three message systems: *curriculum*, *pedagogy* and *assessment*. [Section 4.1](#) presents data on the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum based on the semi-structured interviews. As the focus of Bernstein is not on teachers' cognitions, two categories of Shulman's (1986, 1987) teacher knowledge model, namely *curricular knowledge* and *pedagogical content knowledge* are used to frame the presentation of teachers' cognitions in this section. These two categories of teacher knowledge provide insight into teachers' cognitions in relation to curriculum innovation. [Section 4.2](#) presents data on the teachers' practices based on the lesson plans and classroom observations. Drawing on Bernstein's principles of selection and sequencing in the concept of pedagogy, this section describes how the teachers' cognitions permeated their classroom practices. [Section 4.3](#) presents data on the teachers' assessment practices based on the interviews and test papers. Drawing on Bernstein's concept of assessment, this section describes the teachers' cognitions of assessment and their classroom testing practices to uncover their principles of test design in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings based on Bernstein's concept of the three message systems that informs the current study ([Section 4.4](#)).

4.1 Curriculum

This section presents the findings on teachers' cognitions interpreted from the interview data. The data was analysed and organized into two major categories corresponding to Shulman's (1986, 1987) *curricular knowledge* and *pedagogical content knowledge*, the orientating framework for teachers' cognitions in the current study. Curricular knowledge depicts the teachers' cognitions regarding the topics, organization of tasks and instructional indications of the official curriculum as outlined by the government (MOET 2006). Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), on the other hand, focuses on how the teachers understand or choose to implement the curriculum in the classroom. In the present study, PCK is used to seek the teachers' cognitions about the design and sequence of tasks they use to teach English, which may differ from the tasks provided in the textbooks. This offers a practical means for examining how teachers perceive and implement the task-

based curriculum in the classroom. As cognitions are inferred from a teacher's verbal comments (Borg 2006), results discussed in this section are based on interpretations from the semi-structured interviews. Each teacher attended one semi-structured interview which lasted for about half an hour. The data was gathered, analysed and synthesized using a thematic approach as described in Chapter Three ([Section 3.6](#)). In the subsections that follow, results are presented based on the themes that were identified in the interview data analyses.

In this chapter, the source of the interview data is provided with the quote given. The information includes the pseudonym of the participant (e.g., Jane) and the lines from which the extract is taken from the interview transcript (e.g., [Lines 10-11]) or the date when the informal conversation took place (e.g., Informal conversation 20/11/2011). Since each participant attended only one semi-structured interview, but had a number of short informal conversations, only the dates for the informal conversations were provided when reporting data.

4.1.1 Curricular cognitions

Drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) teacher curricular knowledge, this section presents the findings on the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. According to Shulman, the curriculum includes the teaching materials as well as the set of organizational and instructional features that the materials entail. Teachers' curricular cognitions, therefore, characterize what teachers know, believe and understand about the curriculum in terms of the categories of curricular content, organization and instructional indications.

4.1.1.1 The curricular content

One of the major changes in the current English curriculum in Vietnamese upper secondary schools has been the incorporation of the topic-based content (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). As the first step in exploring teachers' curricular cognitions, the interview questions focused on eliciting teachers' views about the topics embedded in the curriculum. Although some studies in Vietnam have surveyed teachers' general beliefs about the topics in the curriculum (Canh 2007; Minh 2007), none of these studies dealt with details of the teachers' cognitions about the topics. This section presents the analysis

of the participating teachers' comments on the topics as part of the curricular content, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) conception of curricular knowledge.

A consistent theme that emerged from the interview data was that the curriculum contained a wide range of language topics that were regarded as "diverse" by these participants. In response to the interview question "*What do you think about the curriculum in terms of its topic-based content?*" all the teachers gave similar comments regarding their views about the given language topics. For example:

Grace: Throughout the upper secondary level, the textbook is designed under 16 major language topics stretched over 16 units of work. These topics are quite informative. I like most of them. [Lines 54-55]

Mary: I like the topic-based content. This content provides teachers and students with lots of information about life around. [Lines 51-52]

Jane: The curricular content is quite diverse. For instance, in the Textbook 10, Unit 4 is about education for disability. Students know more about disabled people,... Unit 3 is about a world famous scientist such as Marie Curie, ... and Unit 2 is about world Olympiad athletes. These topics are not related to each other. [Lines 90-94]

Green: The topics that the textbooks contain are about many aspects of life. [Lines 55-56]

Rob: The curriculum is designed based on topics. Some topics offer a wide range of information related to many aspects of life which is difficult to teach. [Lines 40-41]

Rose: Most of the topics given in the textbooks are about different aspects of life. I can say some of the topics are inappropriate to students. [Lines 43-44]

The teachers' comments indicate that in general they held positive attitudes towards the range of topics embedded in the 16 units of work embedded in the curriculum. The teachers were particularly in favour of various topics that address learners' varied interests and preferences. This appears to be aligned with the position of the literature about the diversity and relevance of the topics (Willis & Willis 2007).

Other data from the interviews indicated that the range of topics seemed to raise concerns among the teachers, especially in relation to the unfamiliarity and/or irrelevance of the topics being taught. For example, the three most experienced teachers, Grace, Rob and Rose, noted that there were several topics that were not relevant to the students or the local teaching context.

Grace: There are some topics that have technical language such as the topic on economic reforms. With this topic, we have difficulties in teaching as the topic is unfamiliar and irrelevant to students. [Lines 128-130]

Rob: For example, the topic on life in the future is difficult for students. Students need to have good understanding about life, er, and society. [Lines 41-42]

Rose: For example, the topic on deserts is an unfamiliar to Vietnamese students. It's because there are no deserts in Vietnam. Therefore, students have difficulties with the vocabulary of deserts. [Lines 45-47]

The comments above suggest that the teachers held the importance of the familiarity and the relevance of the topics in high regard. According to the teachers, topics such as 'economic reforms', 'life in the future' and 'deserts' (English 12) were unfamiliar and irrelevant to students in English classes in Vietnam. They presented difficulties to both teaching and learning in the classroom because students had little background knowledge on the topics, according to the participating teachers. In previous surveys of teachers' beliefs about the topic-based content in the curriculum, Canh (2007) and Minh (2007) claimed that there were some language topics that might be irrelevant to teaching; however, neither of these studies provided any examples to illustrate the findings. Comments from participants in the current study thus provided evidence to demonstrate that the curriculum contains some irrelevant language topics according to the teachers.

The teachers were also reticent about the reasons why they believed the topics were irrelevant. For example, Grace remarked: "The [irrelevant] topic hinders students' communication. My students do not understand the topic" [Line 131]. In this respect, Grace acknowledged the importance of content in supporting students' use of language for communicative purposes. Green was, however, concerned that: "The topic contains too many new words which can cause difficulties in teaching" [Line 67]. From Green's perspective, an unfamiliar topic may often contain a large proportion of technical vocabulary. This may pose challenges for teaching. Rob echoed similar concerns: "The amount of vocabulary is too much for us in teaching the topics" [Line 54]. These two teachers' concerns about the amount and technicality of vocabulary included in the topics suggest that they viewed the task topics in terms of lexical items (i.e., what the tasks contain) rather than task topics (i.e., what the tasks are about). In a study of teachers' beliefs about task topics in Hong Kong, Carless (2003) found that those teachers who viewed the familiarity and relevance of the topics in terms of lexical technicality tended to adopt a structural approach in teaching, while those who viewed the topics in terms of their

meaning were more likely to adopt the TBLT approach. The teachers' beliefs about the amount of vocabulary and concerns about its technicality in the present study appeared to support Carless' findings, suggesting a structural approach in their cognitions about the curricular topic-based content.

Overall, the comments expressed by the participating teachers about the curricular content indicate that, in general, the teachers felt positive about the curriculum for its informative and contemporary topics, although they considered some of the topics irrelevant to them in their teaching. While some teachers viewed the irrelevance of the topics with regard to their meaning, others viewed the topics in terms of lexical technicality of the topics. This finding suggests that the teachers may have different ways of interpreting the curricular topic-based content in teaching. As this content is built on the topics and tasks, it may then be worthwhile to seek the participating teachers' views on the organization of the content. The next section looks particularly at the curricular organization drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) conception of teacher curricular knowledge.

4.1.1.2 The curricular organization

Tasks are considered central elements in the organization of the English curriculum in Vietnam (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). Therefore, this section explores the participating teachers' views on how tasks are organized in the curriculum. During the interviews, the participants were asked to provide their views on task sequence, which is interpreted as part of their curricular cognitions. This section presents the data that describe the teachers' views on the sequence of tasks.

A consistent theme that emerged from the interview data was the participating teachers' recognition of the three-stage sequence of tasks. In most of the teachers' descriptions of a task sequence, they commented that:

Mary: The sequence of tasks includes pre-task, while-task, and post-task stages.
[Line 138]

Jane: Yeah, it's pre-task, while-task and post-task as designed in the textbooks.
[Line 199]

Grace: I follow the model of three stages as provided in the textbook. Er, I think the pre-task and the while-task are all right for me. However, activities in the post-task are challenging for my students. They often find it hard to do well in the post-task activities. [Lines 140-143]

Rob: The textbook has a clear organization of three stages: pre-, while- and post-; we just follow this organization in teaching. [Line 162-163]

Rose: The model I use to teach a skills lesson is pre-, while- and post-. [Line 144-145]

A task based curriculum is sequenced in three stages: pre-task, while-task and post-task (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996) and the English language curriculum innovation in Vietnam took this model as the overarching framework in task design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). It is clear from the above comments that teachers' cognitions about task sequence seemed to correspond with the intended design of the curriculum (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). However, while the teachers seemed to have recognized the broad stages of a task sequence, other data from the interviews showed that the participating teachers had a range of views regarding the purposes of, and the activities they used to implement, each stage. Teachers' descriptions of the teachers' views of the three stages are discussed below.

In TBLT, the purpose of the pre-task stage is to activate students' background knowledge and/or responses in a way that piques their interest in doing the tasks (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). In contrast to the pre-task stage description as defined in the literature, most teachers contended that the main purpose of this stage was to provide students with new linguistic items that are embedded in the tasks. In particular, these teachers emphasized vocabulary and grammar at the start of the lesson:

Grace: I have a section which focuses on introducing a new language item in every lesson. Usually, this section is at the beginning of the lesson. Vocabulary can be provided in examples. Sometimes I present in the context of the lesson so that students may use the item to develop sentences. [Lines 72-75]

Green: I often use vocabulary techniques to start. After that I may present a context in which vocabulary and grammar are introduced. [Lines 220-221]

Mary: I usually present grammar in a situation first. For example, to teach the present perfect tense, er, I use two people, A and B. Then I ask what they have done, er, or anything else. Er, I use a situation to present grammar. I lead students in the situation, then I introduce new language item. [Lines 159-162]

These comments indicate that the participating teachers emphasized form-focused activities that introduce vocabulary and grammar in the pre-task stage. According to the teachers, activities in the pre-task stage should focus on providing students with language structures on which the lesson is based. In this respect, the participants' views are divergent from the TBLT literature that argues for meaning-focused activities at the start of

lesson, so as to motivate and familiarize them with the main task in the lesson (Ellis 2006). As such, the teachers' comments suggest a resemblance to the *Presentation* stage in Byrne's (1986) Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model, which focuses on introducing linguistic items early in the lesson.

Rose, however, was an exception. She indicated that the main purpose of this stage was to motivate students to take up the topic in the lesson. She commented:

In my understanding, the pre-task stage aims to motivate students and lead them into the topic and prepare for undertaking tasks in the lesson. [Lines 130-131]

According to Rose, to motivate students, activities in the pre-task stage should provide "fun" in the classroom. She commented that, "I often use activities with fun like games in the pre-task stage. I think games motivate students to communicate in the topic" [Lines 84-85]. Rose's views on the use of the pre-task for a motivational purpose are thus different from all of the other participating teachers.

Regarding activities in the while-task stage, Ellis (2006) argues that students should be given opportunities to perform tasks in this stage. Inconsistent with the literature of TBLT, the interview data indicated that most participating teachers proposed a variety of language activities for this stage. The following are examples of the teachers' comments:

Rose: The while-task stage allows students to practise new language in order to develop communicative skills. [Line 131-132]

Grace: In the while-task stage, I need to instruct my students to practise the language.... I often have such activities as grids, table, true/false statements and answer the questions in this stage. [Lines 165-167]

Mary: In the while-task stage, I often use prediction, true/false (statements), or ask and answer the questions. I think these activities are suitable for students to practise using the language. [Lines 128-129]

The teachers' comments emphasise a focus on having students practise new language in the while-task stage. In particular, the teachers described a range of activities that they used for practising. In TBLT, researchers suggest that activities in the while-task stage should set a time limit, but extend the number of student participants who perform the task (Ellis 2006; Lee 2000). Lee, for example, argued that providing students with limited time resulted in more meaningful language than the performance of the same tasks without time pressures. Furthermore, Ellis suggested that increasing the number of while-task stage activities to involve more student participants provides more interaction in the classroom.

The participating teachers' descriptions of the range of activities they used indicated their beliefs that this stage should provide students with additional language practice that requires more time. Canh (2011) found that Vietnamese teachers spent a great amount of time on practice during while-task activities, suggesting a resemblance to the extensive drilling typical of the *Practice* stage in Byrne's (1986) PPP model.

Finally, TBLT researchers seem to agree that the post-task stage has two major purposes: to repeat the task performance and/or to draw students' attention to the form which occurs in the tasks using noticing strategies through consciousness-raising activities (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004; Willis 1996). In the current study, the participants tended to share a similar view concerning this stage. The quotes below are examples of the teachers' descriptions:

Mary: The post-task stage emphasizes language production. There are such activities as role play, retelling the story, and/or discussion in this stage. [Lines 146-147]

Grace: In the post-task stage, I'd like to focus on students' interaction.... I think the most preferred activities are role play and interviews. [Line 167-170]

Rose: The post-task is the stage after the practice stage. Students need to present their product in this stage. Therefore, this stage focuses on speaking and/or writing skills. [Lines 132-133]

These teachers seemed to stress that the goal of a post-task lesson was to enable students to use newly learned language (whether using new grammatical structures or vocabulary); therefore, activities in this stage promote spoken and written language as the goal. As can be seen from the above comments, most activities in the post-task stage are open tasks such as discussion and interview, which are useful for language production (Nakahama, Tyler & Van Lier 2001). This indicates that in the teachers' views, students should produce language using the form or structure that has been provided. As such, the teachers' descriptions of the post-task suggest a focus on production of language which is in line with the *Production* stage in Byrne's (1986) model.

From the comments expressed by the participating teachers in this section, it appears that in their beliefs and knowledge, the three-stage sequence of tasks, which resemble the PPP teaching model where linguistic items (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) are presented, practised and produced (Byrne 1986), was prevalent. This sequence is not aligned with any TBLT framework in the literature (e.g., Ellis 2006; Skehan 1996; Willis 1996) nor with the task sequence in the curriculum (Van et al. 2006a). These teachers' cognitions may thus have considerable influence on their classroom instruction in implementing the curriculum.

To further understand the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, the next section presents data on the teachers' descriptions of instructional indications of the curriculum as part of their curricular cognitions, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of teachers' curricular knowledge.

4.1.1.3 Instructional indications

One area of Shulman's (1986, 1987) teacher curricular knowledge is how teachers perceive the instructional indications/contra-indications of the curriculum (i.e., what should/should not be done in implementing the curriculum). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the instructional implementation of the curriculum as part of the current research into teachers' cognitions. During the interviews, the participating teachers were asked to express their views on the instructional indications of the curriculum regarding the topics and the tasks provided in the textbooks. This section presents data on the teachers' cognitions about these categories drawing on Shulman's concept of curricular knowledge.

A recurrent theme that emerged from the teachers' comments was the perceived inflexibility of the language topics provided in the textbooks. In response to the interview question: "*What do you think about the implementation of the topics in teaching?*" the teachers explained:

Mary: I think the topics are mandated in the curriculum design. [Line 125]

Jane: I think the teacher should follow the topics. I cannot change them. [Lines 114-115]

Grace: I can't change the topics specified in the curriculum. These topics are mandated. [Lines 99-100]

Rob: We are not allowed to change the topics. [Line 58]

Rose: We cannot change the topics provided in the textbooks. [Line 116]

The above comments indicate that the participants viewed the topics specified in the textbooks as mandatory since they could not change these topics in their teaching. Rob, who was Head of the Department, noted that in the current curriculum: "changes are not allowed to the topic-based content" [Line 61]. Similarly, Mary said that if there were any changes to the topics, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) would "inform teachers what changes were to be enacted" [Line 98] in the implementation of the curriculum. In this respect, though the teachers might find some topics irrelevant, they felt they still needed to follow these topics in their teaching. In Canh and Barnard's (2009a)

case study, the researchers found that teachers tended to adhere to the textbooks in their teaching; however, their study neither clarified what the teachers adhered to, nor outlined the topics or tasks that the teachers actually implemented from the curriculum within their classrooms. In the present study, however, the teachers' comments clearly indicate that they adhered to the topics as specified in the textbooks.

However, the teachers expressed that they could change the tasks/activities specified in the textbooks to suit their classrooms. Jane said: "I retain the language topic but change the activities to fit the classroom nature" [Lines 36-37]. In a similar vein, Grace commented:

I can't change the topics. Er, I mean, what a single language topic covers is mandated in terms of its lexical and grammatical features. However, I may change the teaching tasks or activities associated with that topic. [Lines 100-102]

According to these participants, teachers could design the teaching tasks and activities based on the topics provided in the textbooks. Jane explained:

I believe that we can change the tasks specified in the textbooks. Difficult tasks can be made easier for teaching. However, we need to keep the task topic. We keep what the topic is about; but we can change the tasks to make them easier. [Lines 467-470].

This comment indicates that the participating teachers felt they could make changes to the pre-defined textbook activities/tasks in implementing the curriculum for the local teaching context. This is consistent with Minh's (2007) suggestion in a previous evaluation of the curriculum. Minh examined the curricular content and found that teachers changed the activities specified in the textbooks so as to make the activities more appropriate for local contexts. More recently, Trang et al. (2011) observed English classrooms in a high school and made a similar finding, namely that most participants in their study changed their teaching activities according to student characteristics. In line with the previous study findings, the teachers' cognitions about the tasks provided in the textbooks suggested that they felt the need to change the given tasks/activities to make them more relevant to the context of teaching.

In summary, this section presented data that described the participating teachers' curricular cognitions in terms of the curricular content, curricular organization and instructional indications/contra-indications drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of curricular knowledge. In terms of the curricular content, most participating teachers felt positive about the curriculum for its informative and up-to-date topic-based content, although some

of them noted that several topics were irrelevant for teaching. In addition, most teachers viewed the content to be taught as linguistic knowledge rather than through the meaning embedded in the topics, suggesting an orientation to form in the teachers' cognitions about the curricular content. Regarding the curricular organization, the teachers described a three-stage sequence that resembles the traditional structure-based teaching model (Byrne 1986). Having examined the teachers' cognitions, it seems that the way they approached the curriculum was not in concert with TBLT but more aligned with a focus-on-forms approach, which claims that communicative skill develops through the mastery of discrete linguistic items (Richards & Rodgers 2001). In terms of the curricular indications/contraindications, the teachers' comments indicate that they might change the prescribed tasks/activities in the classroom. Overall, from the comments expressed by the participating teachers in this section, it appears that in practice, as noted in similar research (Littlewood 2007), teachers adapted, rather than adopted, the curriculum. To further understand how the teachers adapted the curriculum, we now examine the data describing the teachers' pedagogical content cognitions, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of PCK in teacher knowledge bases.

4.1.2 Pedagogical content cognitions

This section presents data on the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). According to Shulman, PCK is the combination of content and pedagogy that uniquely illustrates teachers' cognitions about how to teach particular subject matter content. In this study, PCK is used to identify teachers' cognitions about tasks that are the central elements of the curricular content and pedagogy in the classroom. Analysis of the interview data indicates that participating teachers' cognitions relate to the following three categories illustrating implementation of tasks in the classroom: provision of linguistic items; development of language skills; and memorization of linguistic items. Descriptions of these categories are now presented in detail.

4.1.2.1 Provision of linguistic items

This section presents the data that describes the participating teachers' pedagogical content cognitions about teaching the curriculum. Although the curriculum content primarily focuses on meaning, Ellis (2001; Ellis et al. 2002) argues that linguistic items play an

important role in classroom instruction. Furthermore, task advocates suggest that research on TBLT should consider how teachers integrate attention to linguistic form in task-based instruction in the classroom (Basturkmen et al. 2004; Long & Robinson 1998). During the interviews for the current study, the participating teachers were asked to offer their views on linguistic form (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) in relation to the implementation of tasks.

A dominant theme that emerged from the participating teachers' comments on the role of linguistic items was the need to teach grammar and vocabulary in the classroom. In response to the interview question "*What do you think about vocabulary and grammar in the implementation of tasks?*" the teachers replied:

Mary: Vocabulary and grammar play a central role in teaching and learning English. [Line 290]

Jane: Grammar is very important. Only students who know grammar well, er, they can correctly use, er, correctly use the language. [Lines 150-151]

Grace: I think that, in any way, grammar and vocabulary are, er, and language functions (like giving directions) are very important. I think students must memorize these things. [Lines 322-324]

Green: I think vocabulary and grammar are very important. In order to be able to speak, students must have some kind of "input", they are vocabulary and grammar. [Lines 213-214]

Rob: I think students must have vocabulary to communicate, they use vocabulary to convey their ideas. Grammar may be a bit different, in communication, it is not necessary to be correct with grammar. [Lines 273-276]

Rose: Students are only able to speak, to listen and to write when they have mastered linguistic items. [Lines 86-87].

It is clear from these comments that vocabulary and grammar played a central role in the participating teachers' cognitions about teaching English as the subject matter. This is in accordance with the results in Canh and Barnard's (2009b) survey, which showed that up to 93% of respondents focused on vocabulary and grammar in teaching English in the classroom. Participating teachers' comments in the current study similarly suggest that they explicitly dealt with vocabulary and grammar in classes.

Some teachers explicitly focused on vocabulary and grammar when implementing tasks in a skills-based lesson (i.e., reading, speaking, listening and writing). For example, the two

Grade 12 teachers, Rob and Rose, noted that they explained lexical and grammatical items during the pre-task stage:

Rob: About vocabulary and grammar, we use explanation to teach... Teachers tell students about grammar when necessary. We need to teach grammar to our students. [Lines 191-192]

Rose: In each lesson, we must provide a grammatical structure so that our students can use it for speaking and/or writing. [Lines 85-86]

Both teachers said they taught grammar whenever they felt it was necessary to do so. Rose's belief that 'we must provide a grammatical structure' suggests a strong orientation to form in teaching skills lessons. This approach was underpinned by principles of form-focused instruction (Ellis 2001). Later in the interviews, when asked about how to teach vocabulary and grammar, Rose said:

I may use the PPP model to present grammar. In the first stage, presentation, I teach new linguistic items to students. This aims to provide the new linguistic items that will be used in the lesson... In the practice stage, I can use such activities as drill, questions and answers ... In the final production stage, I may use discussion or summary activities. [Lines 136-141]

Rose mentioned the PPP model in presenting grammar in the classroom. According to her, linguistic items should be presented in the first stage so that students can use these items for subsequent activities. This is in accordance with other teachers' comments on the pre-task stage in the sequence of tasks in [Section 4.1.1.2](#) which emphasize teaching linguistic items at the start of the lesson. As such, there appears to be a general similarity of opinion among the participating teachers that presentation of linguistic items is necessary in the classroom and that the pre-task stage serves this purpose. As noted by Rose, this is the PPP model (Byrne 1986) and this represents an alignment with a structural approach in implementing the curriculum. In this approach, linguistic items are first explained and presented by the teacher; students are then asked to drill the items until they are proceduralized in their classroom practices (see, Richards & Rodgers 2001).

In short, the participating teachers' comments indicate that linguistic items were viewed as an essential part of teaching in the classroom. According to most teachers, the focus is on teaching vocabulary and grammar at the start of the lesson, which suggests an alignment with a structural approach to teaching English that emphasizes language structures (forms) (Richards & Rodgers 2001). This finding, however, indicates that teachers' cognitions

about teaching pedagogy are not aligned with the curriculum intention that advocates a focus on interaction in the classroom (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). As the curriculum aims to develop students' communicative skills through interaction, the next section further investigates participating teachers' views on communicative skills in their implementation of tasks in the classroom.

4.1.2.2 Development of communicative skills

Teachers' views on the development of communicative skills are an integral part of investigating their pedagogical content cognitions in the current study. During the interviews, the teachers were asked to describe their views on how they developed students' communicative skills.

The interview data shows that most teachers believed that the development of students' communicative skills was the ultimate goal of teaching. The data was replete with comments that highlighted the importance of developing communicative skills:

Mary: Of course, I would like to develop communicative skills for students in teaching. [Line 72]

Jane: I think communicative skills are the most important to students. [Line 145]

Grace: Apparently, learning a language, English or any, is to communicate. Therefore, I think, developing communicative skills for students is a goal in teaching. [Lines 47-48]

Green: Yes, students must learn how to communicate. Therefore I need to develop communicative skills for my students. [Lines 126-127]

Rose: The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to enable students to speak, to hear, er, to use all communicative skills in using English. The curriculum aims to develop communicative skills for students. [Lines 107-109]

Participating teachers made similar comments on the goal of developing communicative skills in implementing the curriculum. According to them, communicative skills were perceived as the end target of the curriculum innovation, suggesting an alignment between the teachers' cognitions and the curriculum authors, who claimed that learners' communicative skills were the final outcomes of the curriculum innovation (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). However, close examination of the data revealed that participating teachers used different teaching strategies to develop communicative skills.

As discussed earlier, a key tenet of TBLT is developing students' communicative skills through social interaction (Ellis 2003a). From some teachers' descriptions, it appeared that in their beliefs and knowledge, communicative skills can be developed through mastery of linguistic items and extensive drills. For example, Mary expressed the view that by constantly drilling linguistic items, students would eventually develop their communicative skills:

Through constant practice with linguistic items, students will be able to develop their communicative skills. I mean practice makes it perfect: students first learn grammar, then extend the use of grammar and finally develop their communicative skills. [Lines 83-86]

Other teachers expressed similar views:

Green: I provide vocabulary and grammar first and then instruct students to practise and develop their communicative skills. [Lines 221-222]

Grace: Communication must be built on the basis of vocabulary and grammar. [Lines 186-187]

Rob: I think students must have linguistic knowledge in order to develop the four language skills. [Lines 285-286]

These teachers seem to consider the provision of linguistic items as prerequisite to developing communicative skills. In a classroom-based study in Vietnam, Viet (2013) found that teachers often taught linguistic items before drilling them to develop students' communicative skills, suggesting a structural approach to the development of learners' communicative skills on the basis of mastery of linguistic items. The interview data in the current study supports Viet's findings, demonstrating the prevalence of a structural approach in the teachers' cognitions in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. Overall, in line with [Section 4.1.2.1](#), the prevalence of a structural approach indicates that teachers believe that communicative competence can be developed on the basis of mastery of linguistic items and drilling (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

In addition to the development of communicative skills, the participants expressed the view that the mastery of linguistic items could also help students to prepare for tests and examinations. For example, Grace commented:

Usually every two or three units of work there is a Test Yourself section. When a test comes, I teach vocabulary and grammar to prepare students for the test. We need to orientate to the test rather than communication. [Lines 194-196]

Clearly, teachers believe that providing instruction on linguistic items serves to prepare students to pass tests and examinations. The teachers noted that tests and examinations were based on assessing students' memorization and/or precise language production. Rob highlighted: "Regarding grammar in examinations. I can say that grammar must be precise, absolutely precise in order to get the marks". In this respect, provision of linguistic items can assist students to pass tests and examinations. Relating examinations to development of communicative skills, Mary stated: "Actually, we do not need communicative skills in examinations". Mary's comment reflects the reality that communicative skills are not included in examinations; therefore, these skills can legitimately be neglected in the classroom. In contrast, linguistic items are needed to pass the examinations, thus justifying their emphasis by teachers. This is consistent with Linh's (2009) study in the lower secondary school context that found teachers emphasized discrete linguistic items in teaching due to the pressure of public examinations. The participating teachers' comments in the current study also illustrate an orientation to non-communication activities in teaching due to the pressure of tests and examinations.

Overall, although the participating teachers acknowledged communicative skills as an important goal in teaching English, they gave greater emphasis to the role of linguistic items in the development of communicative skills, suggesting a structural approach in their teaching. Some teachers also noted that they provided linguistic items to prepare students for tests and examinations, indicating the important influence of testing on the teachers' pedagogical content cognitions in teaching. It appears that the implementation of the curriculum was constrained by tests and examinations. As such, the teachers' views on tests and examinations are worth considering in their implementation of the curriculum.

4.1.2.3 Memorization of linguistic items for exams

The question of how the teachers prepared students for examinations in their implementation of the curriculum was part of the interviews with the participants. One of the major themes that emerged from the interview data was the participating teachers' emphasis on students' rote memorization of linguistic items for examinations. Examples of their comments include:

Mary: I think we need to teach what the exams require. Our students must memorize linguistic items in order to pass tests and examinations. [Lines 270-271]

Jane: Students need to remember what they have learned to do the test well. [Line 151]

Grace: Tests and examinations that undertake the MCQ format have resulted in the focus on memorization of linguistic items for exams; communication is often neglected. [Lines 408-409]

Rose: The MCQ format can test very small items; therefore, students need to have good memory. [Lines 205-206]

Rob: Er, the final examination undertakes the MCQ format as the single testing regimen. Therefore I need to provide students with the tested content and ask them to memorize this content for the exam. There is no communication test, it's not feasible. [Lines 248-250]

According to these participating teachers, memorizing linguistic items assists students to pass high-stakes examinations; therefore, students' rote memorization of linguistic items was a focus in teaching. During the interviews, the teachers described the classroom strategies that they used to help students memorize materials. For example, Grace explained:

We assign more language exercises so that students can memorize vocabulary and grammar in each lesson as part of the topic that has been learned. [Lines 193-194]

According to Grace, it is important for teachers to consolidate linguistic items used in tests and examinations in classroom teaching. In this sense, tests and examinations had a negative impact on the teacher's implementation of the task-based curriculum in the classroom. Rob expressed his concerns for his students regarding the final examination:

The final examination is in the written form; there are no oral tests. This examination system prohibits communicative teaching. In fact, students only study for exams. What exams require will be studied and memorized; otherwise, no attention is paid. It's the students' nature. They study for exams. [Lines 114-118]

The teachers seemed to believe that they should teach to prepare students for the final examination. The participants' comments are aligned with Linh's (2009) findings in the lower secondary school context. Linh found that under the pressure of examinations, teachers extracted discrete linguistic items to teach explicitly so that students could memorize the items and pass high-stakes examinations. Similarly in the current study, the final examination was interpreted as part of classroom teaching, demonstrating a negative impact of the final examination on the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. In contrast with TBLT principles that target using language for communication, the teachers described the need to provide students with discrete linguistic items and foster rote

memorization in order to prepare students for the final examination. Teachers' cognitions in this study seem to be aligned with Popham's (2001) description of teachers' 'teaching to the test' (p. 16), which is contrary to TBLT principles of practice.

Overall, data from the interviews showed that all six teacher participants emphasized explicit linguistic items (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) in the delivery of tasks in the classroom. Although the participants stated that they viewed the development of communicative skills as the goal of teaching, their descriptions of classroom teaching methods indicate a structural approach in the implementation of the curriculum. According to all participants, communicative skills can be developed on the basis of the mastery of linguistic items and drilling. Therefore, they appeared to believe that teaching should begin with linguistic items and then include extensive drill to develop communicative skills. The participants also considered rote memorization of linguistic items as part of their teaching strategies in implementing the curriculum, as most teachers believed that memorization of linguistic items could enable students to pass the final examination. In this way, the participating teachers' pedagogical content cognitions about the curriculum potentially illustrate a gap between what the teachers know and believe, and the intended curriculum innovation which aims to focus on communicative tasks in the classroom.

4.1.3 Summary

This section presented data that describe the participating teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum in terms of two major categories drawing on two concepts of teacher professional knowledge: *curricular knowledge* and *pedagogical content knowledge* (Shulman 1986, 1987). In terms of teachers' curricular cognitions, most teachers felt positive about the curriculum for its informative and contemporary topic-based content, although they considered some of the topics as potentially irrelevant to students. While some teachers saw the irrelevance of the topics in terms of the meaning, others viewed the topics in terms of the excessive amount of vocabulary to be learnt for each topic. This view indicated a structure-based view towards the curricular content which was divergent from its topic-based content (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). In addition, the teachers' comments on task sequence suggested they followed a PPP teaching model in which linguistic items (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) are presented, practised and produced (Byrne 1986). In this manner, the teachers' cognitions about the organization of tasks illustrated a non-task

sequence which may contradict common TBLT frameworks that emphasize communicative interaction (e.g., Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). Furthermore, the findings on the teachers' cognitions about the instructional indications/contra-indications of the topics and tasks demonstrated that in general, the topics were considered mandated while tasks were subject to change, according to the teachers' interpretations of student interests and the teaching context. The contrasting views on the topics and tasks suggest a dilemma in the teachers' implementation of the curricular content in the classroom.

In terms of pedagogical content cognitions, the empirical data showed that, in most teachers' views, linguistic items (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) are the main foci of teaching in the classroom. The teachers explained that they focused on linguistic items at the start of the lesson. Then extensive drills were provided to develop students' communicative skills on the basis of these linguistic items, demonstrating the prevalence of a structural approach in the teachers' PCK in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the findings on teachers' PCK also indicated that the teachers tended to foster students' rote memorization of linguistic items for examination purposes, suggesting a 'teaching to the test' perspective (Popham 2001) in the teachers' cognitions in relation to the implementation of the curriculum.

Overall, the findings on teachers' cognitions have illustrated explicit linguistic items as the central elements in the curriculum, which is inconsistent with the curriculum innovation that aims to focus on communicative tasks in the classroom. In line with previous studies on Vietnamese teachers' beliefs about the curriculum innovation (Canh 2007; Minh 2007), the findings on teachers' cognitions in the current study indicated an orientation to form in the participating teachers' views. However, unlike those previous studies that used questionnaire surveys to seek teachers' beliefs, the current research used interviews to determine teachers' cognitions about the language topics and tasks concerning their everyday classroom practices, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and PCK. Therefore, a detailed account of the teachers' cognitions concerning the curricular content and tasks has been provided. To understand the teachers' actual pedagogical practices, we now turn to data demonstrating the participating teachers' pedagogy, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) second concept 'pedagogy' in the three message systems.

4.2 Pedagogy

This section presents the data on the participants' planned and actual classroom practices, drawing on the concept of pedagogy in Bernstein's (1977, 1990) three message systems. According to Bernstein, teachers' pedagogy can be specified in terms of two principles: selection and sequencing in the classroom. As Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of PCK focuses on teachers' reported descriptions of their teaching practices, PCK was not used as the underlying framework of the teachers' classroom practices in this study. Bernstein's concept of pedagogy, however, allows capture of the teachers' actual classroom practices in terms of what tasks/activities were selected and how these tasks/activities were sequenced by the teachers, and thus examines the teachers' pedagogic discourse that reflects their cognitions about the curriculum. Therefore, this concept was used as the underlying framework for examining teachers' classroom practices in the current study. Empirical data for this section was from three sources including lesson plans, classroom observations and informal conversations with the participating teachers. The lesson plans were used to depict the teachers' principles of task selection and classroom observations were used to describe the teachers' principles of sequencing using tasks in their classrooms. It should be noted that both the lesson plans and classroom observations can be used to describe the teachers' principles of selection and sequencing with tasks. However, the use of the lesson plans allows for a detailed characterization of teachers' pedagogy by comparing tasks/activities provided in the textbook with those designed by participating teachers in their written lesson plans. Classroom observations, on the other hand, provided a live account of how tasks were sequenced in classes. In this sense, these two sources allowed for triangulation of data from different sources, which is advisable in teacher cognition research (Borg 2006, 2012). In addition, informal conversations were used to identify the teachers' rationale for their selection of tasks in the written lesson plans. This aimed to obtain in-depth understanding of the teachers' pedagogy from a teacher cognition perspective. The qualitative data was analysed and synthesized using a thematic approach which was described in Chapter Three ([Section 3.6](#)). The results are presented in the subsections that follow, based on the themes that were identified from the data analyses.

In this chapter, the following conventions are used in the samples of the transcript from classroom observations:

T	Teacher
Ss	More than one student speaking
S1, S2	Individual students
(...)	Explanation
F[i]nal	Actual speech or pronunciation by the speaker
/, //, ///	Pauses (in seconds)
<...>	Overlapped speech
xxxxx	Inaudible
Bold	Emphasis made by the speaker
(trans: <i>italics</i>)	<i>English translation</i> of Vietnamese speech
Question mark (?)	Raising intonation, not necessarily a question
.....	Unfinished speech
Bum-per-crops	Teacher speaks and writes at the same time

4.2.1 Principles of selection

This section presents the data from the participating teachers' lesson plans so as to uncover their principles of selection (Bernstein 1977). Borg (2006) has argued that teachers' principles guide their teaching practices and can thus be used to describe teachers' cognitions. In total, 24 lessons plans with 111 teaching activities were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach that employed juxtaposition (see, Miles & Huberman 1994). Specifically, the lesson plans were analysed in terms of the teaching tasks/activities that the teachers used as compared to the tasks/activities specified in the textbook series. Previous studies in Vietnam have identified general patterns in task implementation. These are retaining, modifying, adding and omitting (Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011; Viet 2013). The current study used these patterns as the points from which to analyse the curriculum and as a means to compare lesson plan information with actual classroom tasks/activities. The next sub-section details descriptions of the participating teachers' principles of selection with their written plans based on these patterns.

4.2.1.1 Retaining activities from the textbooks

Retaining an activity means that the participating teacher used that activity in the same way as it was specified in the textbooks (Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011). In previous studies in the Vietnamese context, Trang et al. (2011) and Viet (2013) observed tasks in classes and came to contrasting conclusions. While Trang et al. claimed that teachers tended to retain meaning-focused tasks, Viet argued that it was form-focused activities that the teachers retained. It is apparent that teachers' views on task retention need further examination.

Shulman (1986) argues that teacher's lesson plans can serve as an important data source of their transformation of the curriculum into practice. The current study examines the lesson plans as part of the participating teachers' classroom practices to identify to what extent the teachers' cognitions permeated their retention of the textbook tasks/activities.

Data from the 24 lesson plans showed that among the 111 activities and/or tasks provided in the lesson plans, 54 (49%) were retained from the textbooks. Table 4-1 summarizes the number of activities provided in the lesson plans and those that were retained.

Table 4-1 Overview of the retained activities (*)

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Activities in the lesson plans	29	26	30	26	111
Retained activities	20	11	16	7	54
Rate of retention	69%	42%	53%	27%	49%

(*) The numbers and the percentages used in the table assist the qualitative interpretations in the current study.

As shown in the table, the rate of retention varied from the highest in reading (69%) and listening (53%) to the lowest in writing (27%) and speaking (42%). As the purpose of the current section is to explore teachers' cognitions through their selection of tasks/activities, further examination of the data was needed with regard to two aspects: individual teachers' principles of selection with retained activities, and the types of tasks/activities that were retained by most teachers.

Regarding individual teachers' principles of selection, Table 4-2 details the number of retained activities for each teacher in their lesson plans. As shown, there was little variation among individual teachers across the four skills lessons. Similarity in retaining activities in each skills lesson planned for teaching suggests similar principles of selection with the retention of textbook activities.

Table 4-2 Individual teachers' retained activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing
Mary	3	2	3	2
Jane	3	2	2	1
Grace	4	2	3	1
Green	3	2	3	1
Rob	4	2	3	1
Rose	3	1	2	1

Regarding the type of tasks/activities that were retained, closer examination of the lesson plan data revealed two major characteristics of the retained tasks/activities.

First, the majority of the retained activities were closed-ended (i.e., activities with single correct answers). Table 4-3 summarizes all types of retained activities in the lesson plan data. As can be seen, the most-often retained tasks were: matching (9), T/F statements (5), display pre-questions (4) and listen and repeat (4). These tasks are typically closed-ended in nature; for example, the matching activity only requires students to match two parts of a split sentence. Further data from informal conversations uncovered the rationale behind the retaining of certain tasks/activities by the teachers as well as some reasons for retaining such closed-ended items. For example, Jane said: “I found these tasks easy to use so I keep most of them” (Informal conversation 8/10/2011). In the same vein, Mary confided: “These tasks do not require much language use; therefore, I keep them in teaching” (Informal conversation 3/10/2011). Rose also added: “To complete these tasks, students just need minimal language demand” (Informal conversation 4/11/2011). Consistent with the research literature about the use of closed tasks in the classroom (Nunan 1991b; Seedhouse 1999), the retention of closed tasks indicated that the participating teachers intended to retain activities with minimal language demand, so as to make their teaching easier in the classroom. In this sense, the teachers’ principles of task selection illustrate a strong orientation towards closed tasks/activities in their planned classroom practices.

Table 4-3 Details of the retained activities

Retained activities (*)	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Recognition	1	1	0	1	3
Pre-questions (display)	3	0	1	0	4
Matching	5	1	2	1	9
Repetition drill	0	2	0	0	2
Listen and repeat	0	1	3	0	4
Comprehension questions	6	0	2	0	8
Information gap	1	0	1	0	2
Multiple choice questions	1	0	1	0	2
T/F statements	2	0	3	0	5
Listen and recognize	0	0	2	0	2
Gap fill	1	1	1	0	3
Questions and answers (referential)	0	3	0	0	3
Cued practice	0	1	0	0	1
Information transfer	0	1	0	0	1
Guided letter writing	0	0	0	2	2
Guided paragraph writing	0	0	0	3	3
Total	20	11	16	7	54

* As the tasks/activities provided in the textbooks were sometimes not given names, the terms used in this study are consistent with terms used in TBLT (Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007) and TESOL (Brown 2007).

Second, a sizeable number of the retained activities were comprehension-based tasks, which meant that they were related to the information provided in the reading/listening texts. As detailed in Table 4-3 above, activities that were most commonly retained in reading and listening lessons were: comprehension questions (8), T/F statements (5), referential questions (3), and gap fill (3). Besides being closed-ended in nature, a common characteristic of these activities is that they are dependent on the information provided in the reading texts or listening scripts. In the informal interviews, Jane explained: “I have to use these activities since they are related to the texts in reading lessons” (Informal conversation 10/10/2011). Similarly, Grace said “Once my students have listened to the script, they should do the activities given in the textbook” (Informal conversation 8/10/2011). In this respect, the participants’ retention of these activities was influenced by the information embedded in the reading/listening texts after they had used the texts for teaching. This finding seems to support Viet’s (2013) research that found teachers retained most activities associated with reading and listening lessons, suggesting that the teachers depend on the textbook for comprehension-based tasks/activities that are related to receptive skills.

In general, approximately half of the provided activities in the textbooks were retained in the participating teachers’ lesson plans. While the retention of closed tasks illustrated the teachers’ intention to minimise language demand in the classroom, the use of comprehension-based tasks was due to their tight linkage to the texts specified in the textbooks. These findings suggest that the teachers’ principles of task selection were influenced both by their desire to retain close-ended tasks that required students’ minimal language demand, and their dependency on the textbook in teaching receptive skills lessons. For other types of activities in written lesson plans, the lesson plans did show modifications to textbook tasks and activities.

4.2.1.2 Modifying activities from the textbooks

Modifying an activity means that the activity was kept in the lesson plan but changed by the teacher to some extent (Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011). For example, true/false statements can be changed to multiple choice questions or display questions can be converted to referential questions, or vice versa. Table 4-4 shows that in general some 17% of the activities in the lesson plans were modified by the participants as compared to the original

specifications in the textbooks. Furthermore, the number of modified activities remained more or less the same across the four types of language skills lessons. To uncover the teachers' principles of selection for task modification, this section looks at individual teachers' modified tasks/activities and the types of tasks/activities that were modified.

Table 4-4 Overview of modified activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Activities in the lesson plans	29	26	30	26	111
Modified number	5	5	6	3	19
Rate of modification	17%	19%	20%	12%	17%

At the individual level, Table 4-5 lists the number of activities modified by each teacher included in their lesson plans.

Table 4-5 Individual teachers' modified activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing
Mary	1	1	1	0
Jane	1	1	1	1
Grace	1	1	1	1
Green	1	1	1	0
Rob	0	0	1	0
Rose	1	1	1	1

As shown in the above table, all teachers modified activities in their lessons. Rob was perhaps exceptional as he modified only one activity in the listening lesson, while Mary and Green did not modify any activities in the written lesson plans. All of the other teachers modified one activity in every lesson plan. These figures indicate that most teachers modify textbook activities to some extent. However, relative to the number of tasks/activities specified in the textbooks, the number of modifications is quite small. Therefore, to uncover the teachers' principles of modification, further examination of the nature of the activities that were modified is necessary.

Table 4-6 lists the activities that were modified. As shown, the most commonly modified activities were: pre-questions (4), referential questions (3) and discussion (3); and the most common activities resulting from modification were: grammar explanation (5), display questions (4) and vocabulary teaching (3). In the interview, Mary explained: "I changed the pre-question task into a grammar explanation activity so that the linguistic items were made explicit" (Informal conversation 20/10/2011). In a similar vein, Jane expressed: "I feel more confident with the activities after the change. I need to emphasize grammar and vocabulary

in teaching” (Informal conversation 2/11/2011). These changes suggest that modifications were made to convert meaning-focused activities into form-focused activities. This is consistent with findings in a recent study that found teachers changed the pre-designed tasks in order to make forms explicit (Viet 2013). In summary, about one-fifth of the activities specified in the textbook were changed from meaning-focused to form-focused by the teachers in the current study. Though this number was small, it suggests that the teachers shared an orientation towards form-focused activities in their principles of selection of teaching tasks/activities.

Table 4-6 Details of activities before and after modification

Pre-designed in the textbooks	Teacher modification in the lesson plans
Gap fill	Explanation
Pre-questions (4)*	T/F statements; matching; vocabulary teaching (2)
Listen & Repeat	Vocabulary teaching
Matching	Explanation
Word meaning in context (2)	Warm-up; recognition game
Referential questions (3)	Display questions (2); gap fill
Information transfer (2)	Display questions; explanation
Guided paragraph writing	Explanation
Discussion (3)	Explanation; referential questions; cued practice
Story-telling	Display questions

* Each category of activity appeared once, unless otherwise specified in parentheses.

4.2.1.3 Adding activities to the lesson plans

Participating teachers also added a number of activities to their lesson plans. *Adding* an activity means that the activity was not previously provided in the textbook, but rather inserted into the lesson plan by the teacher (Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011). To uncover the teachers’ principles of selection for added activities, this section looks at individual teachers’ added tasks/activities and the nature of the activities that were added to the lesson plans.

Table 4-7 Individual teachers’ added activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Mary	1	1	1	2	5
Jane	1	2	2	3	8
Grace	0	2	1	2	5
Green	0	1	1	3	5
Rob	1	1	1	3	6
Rose	1	3	2	3	9
Total	4	10	8	16	38

Table 4-7 above lists the activities that each teacher added to their lesson plans. As shown in the table, all teachers added similar numbers of activities in each skills lesson. However, Grace and Green added no activities to the reading lesson and Rose added three activities to the speaking lesson. It is interesting to note that the numbers of added activities in speaking and writing were considerably higher than those of reading and writing activities. Perhaps the teachers added more activities in the productive skills lessons so as to motivate students to use English in the classroom. The nature of the added activities and the teachers' reasons for their addition of tasks/activities are examined below.

Table 4-8 shows that the 38 added activities included: vocabulary games (11); vocabulary pre-teach (10); writing correction (6); explanation (4); matching (3); and others (4). Vocabulary-based activities (21) outnumbered other types of added activities. Some participating teachers spoke about their reasons for adding vocabulary-based activities in the informal interviews. For example, Rose noted that: "I added vocabulary before the main task so that my students would be able to do what the task requires" (Informal conversation 4/11/2011). Expressing a similar view, Jane explained: "vocabulary is necessary as it enables students to use the language in the completion of tasks" (Informal conversation 17/10/2011). Thus these participating teachers added vocabulary-based activities to facilitate students' uptake of tasks in the classroom. In line with their pedagogical content cognitions about providing linguistic items in teaching ([Section 4.1.2.1](#)), the teachers' principles of selection regarding added activities indicates a similar orientation towards linguistic items in lesson plan design.

Table 4-8 Number of added activities in the lesson plans

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Vocabulary game	2	4	3	2	11
Vocabulary pre-teach	2	4	2	2	10
Matching	0	1	0	2	3
Cued practice	0	1	0	0	1
Listen & repeat	0	0	1	0	1
Recognition	0	0	2	0	2
Grammar explanation	0	0	0	4	4
Written correction	0	0	0	6	6
Total	4	10	8	16	38

Table 4-8 also shows other activities that were added to the lesson plans such as grammar explanation (4) and matching (3). Some teachers provided reasons for their choice in the

informal interviews. For example, regarding grammar explanation activities, Mary said: “I added grammar explanation as I wanted to make sure that students know the grammatical item in the lesson” (Informal conversation 21/10/2011). As such, Mary made grammar explicit by adding activities that explain grammar to students. This is consistent with Canh’s (2011) findings about form-focused instruction that suggest teachers often made forms explicit in their classroom teaching by providing detailed explanation of grammar. Furthermore, the addition of matching activities (3) and recognition activities (2) suggests that closed tasks may be preferred by teachers in the current study. Green expressed that “I added matching as I find this type of activity quick and easy in teaching” (Informal conversation 6/10/2011). In a similar vein, Rob noted that “recognition tasks require minimal use of language in the classroom” (Informal conversation 1/11/2011). These participants’ comments accord with Seedhouse’s (1999) argument, suggesting that the addition of closed tasks helped minimize language demand in the classroom. Overall, the addition of grammar explanation and closed tasks indicates the teachers’ intention to make forms explicit and to keep language production at a minimal demand, which may reflect a preference for form-focused activities in their principles of selection of classroom tasks/activities.

Finally, the six added “correction” activities also suggest an orientation to forms among the participants. This type of activity was named “correction” by the participants as they intentionally had the students exhibit their written work on posters for direct corrective feedback at the end of a lesson. Some participating teachers also provided reasons for adding these activities. According to Rose, correction activities were prepared to “anticipate students’ errors and ways to correct” (Informal conversation 14/11/2011). Similarly, Green noted that “correction helps students to avoid making errors” (Informal conversation 17/10/2011). Canh (2011) showed that teachers in his study used a focus-on-forms approach when they provided explicit corrective feedback on students’ work in the classroom. Teachers in the current study also added explicit correction activities in writing lessons, confirming Canh’s findings and suggesting an explicit focus-on-forms approach influenced their principles of selection for adding activities in lesson plans.

In general, the added category illustrates an orientation to forms in the participants’ lesson plans. The majority of added activities were vocabulary-based, closed-ended or explicit

correction, which are in line with research findings about the types of activities that teachers often use in form-focused instruction (Canh 2011).

4.2.1.4 *Omitting activities from the textbooks*

Omitting an activity means that the activity, which was specified in the textbook, was not used by the teacher in his/her lesson plan (Viet 2013). Table 4-9 shows that in total 15 activities were omitted by teachers participating in the current study, including: reading (5); speaking (2); listening (7); and writing (1), accounting for approximately 14% of all the activities specified in the lesson plan data. To explore the teachers' principles of selection regarding the omitted tasks/activities, this section looks at individual teachers' omitted tasks/activities and the nature of the activities that were omitted.

Table 4-9 Number of omitted activities in lesson plans

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Activities in the lesson plans	29	26	30	26	111
Omitted number	5	2	7	1	15
Rate of omission	17%	8%	23%	4%	14%

Table 4-10 lists the activities that were omitted from the textbook by each participating teacher. As shown in the table, only one or two tasks/activities were omitted in the writing and speaking lessons, while a much higher number of reading and listening tasks/activities were omitted. In general, each teacher omitted approximately one task/activity per reading or listening lesson. This figure seems to be contradictory to an earlier finding in this study that tasks/activities in the receptive skills lessons (i.e., reading and listening) were mostly retained, due to the teachers' dependency on the reading texts and listening scripts provided in the textbook ([Section 4.2.1.1](#)). Thus, further scrutiny into the nature of the omitted tasks/activities is warranted to examine the teachers' principles of selection regarding the omitted tasks/activities.

Table 4-10 Individual teachers' omitted activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Mary	1	0	1	0	2
Jane	1	1	1	0	3
Grace	1	0	1	1	3
Green	0	0	1	0	1
Rob	1	1	1	0	3
Rose	1	0	2	0	3
Total	5	2	7	1	15

Table 4-11 shows that nine out of the 15 omitted activities were pre-discussions designed to take place at the beginning of the lesson. This finding is consistent with the earlier finding about receptive skills lessons. In the informal interviews, the participating teachers explained why they omitted these activities. Green contended: “I think discussion should take place in the end of the lesson. At the beginning, however, we need to provide students with vocabulary” (Informal conversation 19/10/2011). In a similar vein, Rob suggested: “I like to provide some vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson to familiarize students with the topical language” (Informal conversation 10/11/2011). In this respect, meaning-focused activities such as pre-discussions were considered unnecessary by the teachers to start the lesson; rather, the teachers aimed to provide lexical items to familiarise students with the language topic. Loi and Franken’s (2010) study of language input in a Vietnamese context suggested that teachers might facilitate students’ learning by providing them with lexical items. In the current study, in line with the addition of vocabulary-based activities in the preceding section, the teachers’ principles of selection in omitting the pre-discussions are consistent with their cognitions on the value of vocabulary-based activities, which were used to replace pre-discussions that were omitted. Further, this also replaces meaning-focused activities with ones that are more form-focused.

Table 4-11 Details of the omitted activities

	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Overall
Pre-discussion	4	2	3	0	9
Dialogue completion	0	0	1	1	2
Summary	0	0	2	0	2
Referential questions	1	0	1	0	2
Total	5	2	7	1	15

In summary, this section has examined patterns in task implementation to illustrate the participating teachers’ principles of selection of tasks in their lesson plans. By retaining tasks/activities, the participating teachers intended to minimise language demand in their classrooms; modifications changed meaning-focused activities into form-focused ones; by adding tasks/activities, vocabulary was emphasized as the key form of language input; and by omitting selected tasks/activities, meaning-focused activities were excluded in classrooms. Overall, the teachers’ principles of selection indicate that they used closed-ended, form-focused and vocabulary-based activities that downplayed meaning-focused activities in their lesson plans, suggesting a focus-on-forms approach in the implementation of the task-based curriculum. In this respect, the findings on the teachers’

lesson plans are aligned with their cognitions, demonstrating consistency between teachers' cognitions and practices in implementing the curriculum.

Although written lesson plans can serve as a rich source of empirical data for research into teachers' cognitions (Pajares 1992; Shulman 1986), researchers have argued that teachers may diverge from their lesson plans in teaching due to various classroom constraints (Nunan 1992; Ulichny 1996). Borg (2006) highlights the need to consider teachers' actual classroom practices as an important source of empirical data in research on teachers' cognitions. The following section examines participating teachers' actual teaching practices in order to examine their principles of sequencing with tasks/activities in the classroom, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of pedagogy.

4.2.2 Principles of sequencing

This section presents the data from the participating teachers' actual classroom practices in order to depict their principles of sequencing with tasks in the classroom, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of pedagogy. Data for this section is based on the transcripts of video records from 12 classroom observations, two from each of the six participating teachers. The classroom observation data was analysed in terms of episodes (Gibbons 2006). An episode is a short observation transcript that illustrates a task or an activity used by teachers in the classroom. Episodes were chosen as the unit of analysis since they are interrelated with other parts of the lesson and can thus reveal the teachers' principles of sequencing (Lemke 1990). The following sub-section, details descriptions of the teachers' principles of sequencing with tasks/activities in their classroom teaching practices.

4.2.2.1 Introducing vocabulary in the pre-task

As discussed earlier, in TBLT, the early stage of pre-task aims to prepare students for the main task or tasks that they will complete in the lesson (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). As included in the textbook series, pre-task activities are mostly in the form of pre-discussions that aim to activate students' initial use of language on the given topic (Van et al. 2006a), suggesting a focus on meaning at the start of the lesson. Observation data from the current study, however, showed that the participating teachers explicitly introduced lexical items when they began their lessons. The two most commonly used types of vocabulary-based

activities were warm-up and vocabulary pre-teach activities. For example, Rob carried out a jumbled-letter word game as the warm-up activity to elicit the main words relating to the language topic of the lesson that he was going to teach, as shown in Episode #1:

Episode #1

- 01 T: Would you like to play a game?
 02 Ss: <Yes, yes>
 03 T: **(T wrote on BB)** HCOSOL, ONIEDUCTA, STEMYS,
 04 Now, look at the blackboard, these are some words whose letters are not in
 05 order. Please put them in order to make the correct words. Do you understand?
 06 /// That means you have to reorder the letters to make meaningful words.
 07 We have three words, one, two, three... three words. ////
 08 OK? The first. Can you **(T pointed at one student)**
 09 S1: School
 10 T: School. Good **(T wrote on BB)** School. The whole class, do you agree?
 11 Ss: <Yeah>
 12 T: Very good. ///
 13 The second word? Ngoc **(T pointed at one student)**
 14 S2: Education
 15 T: Education. Good. **(T wrote on BB)** education
 16 Do you agree, class?
 17 Ss: (xxxxx)
 18 T: Yes or No?
 19 Ss: Yes.
 20 T: The last one? **(T pointed at one student)**
 21 S3: System
 22 T: Yes, system. Right?
 23 Ss: <Yes>
 24 T: Yes, school education system **(T wrote on BB)** system
 25 In Vietnamese? **(T pointed at one student)**
 26 S4: Hệ thống giáo dục **(trans: school education system)**
 27 T: Yes, hệ thống giáo dục. Hệ thống giáo dục, hoặc hệ thống giáo dục phổ thông.
 28 Yes, OK.

(Rob, Grade 12, Reading)

In this episode, Rob introduced the lesson by providing the students with three jumbled-letter words and asked the students to reorder them into meaningful ones (Line 03). He then nominated individual students to stand up and speak out the words that they thought the jumbled letters represented (Lines 09, 14, 21). After each response from the nominated students, Rob checked the word meaning with the whole class and then wrote the words on the blackboard (Lines 10, 15, 24). In this way, Rob and the students worked together to rearrange the jumbled letters into meaningful words that represented the topic of the lesson (i.e., school education system) and illustrates an explicit focus on vocabulary at the start of

the lesson. Canh's (2011) study of teachers' form-focused instruction found that teaching new vocabulary early in a lesson might enable students to take up tasks later in the lesson. Rob's lesson extract above seems consistent with Canh's study findings, demonstrating a pattern to start with vocabulary in the pre-task stage. However, this is divergent from the common TBLT framework that emphasizes starting with meaningful interaction (focus on meaning) at the beginning of the lesson (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). It is interesting to note that there were no similar activities specified in the textbook; the activity that Rob demonstrated above was added as a "warm-up game" (although it was not necessarily a 'game') that he used to present lexical items. Rob's classroom practice in the pre-task stage indicates a principle of sequencing that starts the lesson with vocabulary.

Similar to Rob, Jane also included warm-up activities with an aim to elicit students' vocabulary on the topic of "school":

Episode #2

- 01 T: Would you like to play a game?
- 02 Ss: <Yes, yes>
- 03 T: Yes, today we are studying Speaking. We are going to speak about school, right?
- 04 Yes, school. What is related to school. (**T drew four circles on BB, in which**
- 05 **"school" is in the middle**) What is related to school? School?
- 06 S1: Examinations,
- 07 T: Yes, examinations. You (**T pointed at another student**) what else?
- 08 S2: Homework
- 09 T: Yes, homework. Anything else?
- 10 S3: Friends.
- 11 T: Yes, friends. Good.
- 12 S4: Teacher
- 13 T: Teacher, good.
- 14 S5: Class
- 15 T: Good, class. And what is this? (**T pointed at the textbook she held**)
- 16 S6: Subjects
- 17 T: Yes, subjects, right. Anything else?
- 18 S7: Activities
- 19 T: Yes, activities. OK. Very good.
- 20 T: Now, let's look at your textbook.

(Jane, Grade 10, Reading)

In this activity, Jane elicited the vocabulary that was related to the topic of "school" (Lines 04-05). She nominated individual students to speak out the words, one word per student (Lines 06, 08, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18). However, unlike Rob who wrote each word mentioned by students on the blackboard, Jane quickly ran through the vocabulary words

provided by the students. Her aim seemed to include the vocabulary as key language input, demonstrating an early attention to lexical items in her lesson. In this way, both Rob and Jane started with lexical items through the use of warm-up activities. However, the teachers' explicit focus on vocabulary, as shown by Rob and Jane, did not serve the purpose of activating students' initial use of language for communication on the given topic as intended by the textbook authors (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b); therefore, what the teachers demonstrated is not part of the TBLT approach used for classroom instruction in implementing the curriculum.

The participating teachers also used vocabulary-based activities to explicitly teach new words in the pre-task stage. The classroom observation data showed that almost all of the observed lessons had a vocabulary pre-teach activity at the beginning of the lesson. The following episode illustrates the way that Mary taught vocabulary in a listening lesson.

Episode #3

- 01 T: Pay attention to some new words (**T wrote on BB**)
- 02 Coast
- 03 Atmosphere
- 04 Replaced
- 05 Changes
- 06 Resort
- 07 Instead
- 08 Suburb
- 09 Resurfaced
- 10 Narrow
- 11 T: OK. Here are the words you are going to hear, to listen in the passage. Before
- 12 listening I would like you to pay attention to these words. Are these words new to
- 13 you? Yes or No? //// No, I think they are not.
- 14 T: Coast? Do you know the word 'coast?'
- 15 Ss: <Yes, yes> <No, no >
- 16 T: Yes? Atmosphere?
- 17 Ss: <Không khí> (**translation:** atmosphere)
- 18 T: Yes. Replaced?
- 19 Ss: <Thay thế> (**trans:** replaced)
- 20 T: Yes. Thay thế. Changes?
- 21 Ss: <Thay đổi> (**trans:** changes)
- 22 T: Resort?
- 23 Ss: <Khu nghỉ dưỡng> (**trans:** resort)
- 24 T: Instead?
- 25 Ss: <Thay thế> (**trans:** instead)
- 26 T: OK. Suburb?
- 27 Ss: <Ngoại ô> (**trans:** suburb)
- 28 T: Resurfaced?

- 29 Ss: <Đánh bóng bề mặt> (**trans**: resurfaced)
 30 T: Yes. Narrow?
 31 Ss: <Nhỏ hẹp> (**trans**: narrow)
 32 T: All right. So you pay attention to these words. OK? Now, before listening, we
 33 read about these words first. (**T pointed and knocked on BB to rhyme for**
 34 **students to read aloud word by word**)

(Mary, Grade 10, Listening)

Mary provided the nine-word list of vocabulary terms needed for the lesson on the blackboard (Lines 02-10). After this she ran through the words by reading each word aloud in English and the students responded with the Vietnamese meaning (Lines 14-31). Mary appeared to focus on the literal meaning of the vocabulary, suggesting a focus on form in teaching vocabulary. Nation (2001) argues that teaching vocabulary needs to include form, meaning and use. The way that Mary reviewed vocabulary in her classroom focused on form but overlooked meaning and use of vocabulary in context. This is divergent from meaning-focused interaction of task delivery in the classroom as recommended by the textbook authors (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b).

Another example of explicit focus on form in the pre-task stage is that the participating teachers elicited new vocabulary through pre-teach techniques. For example, the following episode illustrates how Grace taught the word “agrarian” as part of a vocabulary teaching activity:

Episode #4

- 01 T: (**T showed a picture**) Look at the picture. Is he a farmer?
 02 Ss: <Yes>
 03 T: Another word for a farmer? You please (**T pointed at a student**)
 04 S1: Agrarian
 05 T: Again class!
 06 Ss: <Agrarian, agrarian>
 07 T: Agrarian, agrarian people. Ok, now, the whole class. Agrarian, agrarian!
 08 Ss: <Agrarian, agrarian> (3 times)
 09 T: (**T wrote on BB**) Agrarian (a) thuộc về nông dân
 10 T: Now, look at this (**T pointed on BB and read aloud**) agrarian, agrarian
 11 Ss: <Agrarian , agrarian>
 12 T: Where’s the word stress? First or second?
 13 S2: Second
 14 T: No. it’s on the first (**T drew the stress mark on the word**).
 15 OK. Good. Now, the next...

(Grace, Grade 11, Reading)

In this teaching activity, Grace followed a pattern of: eliciting the word using a synonym (Lines 01, 03), pronouncing it several times (Line 07), writing the word on the blackboard (Line 09), providing literal meaning in the first language (Line 09), having several students repeat the pronunciation (Line 11) and checking the word stress (Line 12, 14). This is consistent with Canh's (2011) teachers' practice of form-focused instruction when teaching vocabulary in the classroom. Canh argued that delivering vocabulary in such a way removed the contextual meaning of the new word; however, this teaching method emphasized the students' first language-related meaning, demonstrating an explicit focus on form in vocabulary teaching. The teacher's explicit focus on form in the pre-task stage reflects a principle of starting with vocabulary in the lesson. In the textbooks, it is recommended that pre-task activities should generate students' initial use of language and activate their background knowledge in the topic (Hoang et al 2006). However, the teachers' classroom practices in this stage indicate the principle of teaching vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson, thus deviating from the original intention of the curriculum authors (Hoang et al. 2006a, 2006b) as well as TBLT theories of practice that focus on meaning in the pre-task (e.g., Skehan 1996; Willis 1996).

In short, data from classroom observations illustrated a principle among the participating teachers of sequencing that starts the lesson with teaching vocabulary. Whilst vocabulary teaching to some extent prepares students for the task ahead, the exclusive focus on form indicates a minimal level of attention to the meaning of vocabulary. In particular, the explicit focus on vocabulary does not serve the purpose of activating students' initial use of language on the topic as suggested by task advocates. Therefore, it is only partially aligned with the meaning-focused approach in TBLT (Ellis 2003a; Willis 1996) and the original intention of the textbook authors in the curriculum design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). In the textbook, pre-task activities were meaning-focused tasks that aimed to generate learners' use of language and activate their interest in the topic; however, the data provided in the current study illustrated that most teachers focused on teaching vocabulary only, indicating a strong focus on form at the start of the lesson. Task advocates outline a three-stage sequence, including pre-task, while-task and post-task in classroom instruction (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996) and this sequence is adopted in the curriculum design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). Therefore, in order to understand the teachers' principles of sequencing in this study, it is necessary to examine teachers' classroom practices in the other stages as well.

The following section presents data that illustrate the participating teachers' principles of sequencing in the while-task stage.

4.2.2.2 *Explaining language and grammar in the while-task*

While-task is the second stage in the lesson where students complete the main task or tasks. This stage is also named 'during task' by some TBLT advocates (Ellis 2003a; Skehan 1996). As outlined in the textbook, while-task activities mostly take the form of comprehension-based tasks through reading and listening lessons and production-based tasks in speaking and writing lessons, which ask students to complete the task(s) by collaboratively working with peers in pairs or groups (Van et al. 2006a). However, a recurrent theme identified from the classroom observation data was that the teachers focused on structural explanation (i.e., lexical and grammatical structures) in the while-task stage. The episode below from Mary illustrates a lexical explanation in a while-task activity:

Episode #5

- 01 T: OK, now you pay attention (**T read from the textbook**) Decide if the following
 02 statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the task.
 03 After listening two times, you'll decide if they are true or false.
 04 For example, sentence number 1.
 05 "Popffero is on the west coast of England".
 06 Can you translate into Vietnamese?
 07 S1: Thừa cô, là... (**trans: dear teacher**) Popffero..., it's, it's /// Popffero... (silent)
 08 Ss: < Popffero ở bờ biển.... (xxxxx) >
 09 T: Popffero ở bờ biển phía Tây nước Anh (**trans: Popffero is on the west coast of**
 10 *England*)
 11 T: Number 2: "Popffero used to be a tourist resort" (?)
 12 Ss: Popffero từng là địa điểm du lịch (**trans: Popffero used to be a tourist resort**)
 13 T: [Number 3]: "The town no longer had its old atmosphere" (?)
 14 Ss: (xxxx)
 15 T: Không còn không khí cũ nữa, đúng không? (**trans: no longer has its old**
 16 *atmosphere, right?*)
 17 T: [Number 4]: "There are more green trees in the town now than there used to be"
 18 (?)
 19 Ss: Có rất nhiều cây xanh hơn trong thành phố.... (xxx) (**trans: there are more**
 20 *trees now...*)
 21 T: Bây giờ thì có nhiều cây trong thị xã hơn trước đây, đúng không? (**trans: There**
 22 *are more green trees in the town now than there used to be, right?*)
 23 "...than used to be" có nghĩa là có hơn trước đây (**trans: "than used to be"**
 24 *implies that now there are more than it had before*)
 25 T: [Number 5]: Everybody in the town likes its changes (?)

- 26 Ss: Mọi người trong thị xã thích sự thay đổi này (**trans:** *Everybody in the town likes*
 27 *its changes*)
 28 T: Uh-huh, so now listen to number 1. OK?

(Mary, Grade 10, Listening)

As shown in the episode above, Mary explained the given statements in the students' first language as she read through the text. Specifically, she read aloud the text and asked students to translate (Lines 5, 11, 17 and 25), correcting them along the way. She sometimes translated the text for the students when they got stuck with the literal meaning (Lines 09, 15 and 21). It seemed that Mary wanted to ensure her students' understanding of all statements in their first language before doing the listening task that followed. The way that Mary moved back and forth between the target language and the students' mother tongue indicates a principle of sequencing that emphasizes understanding through first language before doing the task/activity that underpins a traditional grammar-translation method in teaching. This demonstrates a type of structural explanation in her delivery of tasks in the while-task stage. In TBLT, the while-task stage is where students complete tasks with peers in pairs or groups, fostering students' use of language on the given topic. Mary's emphasis on students' first language as above, however, illustrates a principle of sequencing that explains language items before tasks in the while-task stage.

Explanation of the target language items was also prevalent in other teachers' classroom practices. The episode below demonstrates the way that Rose taught grammatical structures in a writing lesson.

Episode #6

- 01 T: (**T wrote on BB**) Useful structures:
 02 S + should (not) + Verb (bare [infinitive])
 03 must (not)
 04 had better (not)
 05 T: Very good. We may use this structure to make sentences. OK.
 06 So to link or to connect these sentences in the first paragraph, what should we
 07 do?
 08 What should we use? What kind of words will we use to link 2 sentences in a
 09 paragraph?
 10 We use the linking words.
 11 Maybe the first, the second, the third, next, maybe finally. OK.
 12 Linking word. (**T both spoke and wrote on BB**)
 13 First, second. What else?
 14 Next, What else?
 15 Then. What else?
 16 Moreover. What else?

- 17 In addition. What else?
 18 Finally. OK, very good.
 19 We may use these linking words to connect or to link these sentences in a
 20 paragraph.

(Rose, Grade 12, Writing)

It was noted that there were no such explicit structures required in the task given in the textbook. The original activity was a discussion that asked students to work in pairs and suggest some possible measures to protect endangered animals (English 12, page 113). It seemed that Rose modified the task by adding the structures above to help her students develop their own sentences based on the structures as a model. As shown in the episode, there were two language structures provided by Rose: the first gave advice in the form “Subject + should (not) + verb” (Lines 01-04); and the second used the sentence connectors “first”, “second”, “third”, and so on (Lines 12-17). In this respect, Rose made the grammatical structure explicit in her instruction. In particular, Rose used the blackboard to explain the grammatical structures. Rose’s delivery of the task indicates a focus on grammar teaching through explanation activities in the while-task. It seems that in her principle of sequencing, grammar should be taught before students undertake the task. In this way, her principle of sequencing leads to a focus on form before meaning, which is consistent with a structure-based approach in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

Furthermore, practice of form was shown in the teachers’ use of closed-ended activities. The classroom observation data showed that a majority of while-task activities were in the form of display questions (i.e., questions that have the answer provided in the textbook). The following example depicts how Rob used display questions in a while-task reading activity:

Episode #7

- 01 T: Question 1, who can ask and who can answer? Yes, you and you please...
 02 (**T pointed at two students**) You ask and you answer. You read this question
 03 and you answer.
 04 S1: When do children in England start their compulsory education at school?
 05 S2: From the age of five.
 06 T: From the age of five. Right. (**T wrote on BB**) From-the-age-of-five. Or when
 07 they are five years old. OK. Question 2? You and you please.
 08 S3: How many terms are there in a school year in England?
 09 S4: There are three terms.
 10 T: Yes, there are three terms. Yes, right. (**T wrote on BB**) There-are-three-terms.

- 11 What are they? Can you tell me the name of these terms?
- 12 Ss: <Autumn, Spring and Summer>
- 13 T: Yes, Autumn, Spring and Summer. Yes, (**T wrote on BB**) Autumn, Spring and
- 14 Summer. Good. Number 3? Who can ask and who can answer? Luong and Hoa?
- 15 S5: What are the two school systems in England?
- 16 S6: The first system is state school and the second is independent school.
- 17 T: Yes, they are state school and independent school systems. Right? (**T wrote on**
- 18 **BB**) They-are-state-school-and-independent-school-systems. Number 4?
- 19 Question 4. Who can? Son and Ngoc, Ngoc asks and Son answers. Louder.
- 20 S7: Do children have to pay fees if they go to independent or public schools?
- 21 S8: Yes, they do.
- 22 T: Yes, they do. (**T wrote on BB**) Yes, they do. Good. OK, number 5? How many
- 23 core subjects are there in the national curriculum? Who can ask and who can
- 24 answer? Raise your hand please. Yes, Hieu you ask and Linh you answer.
- 25 S9: How many subjects are there in the national curriculum?
- 26 S10: There are three.
- 27 T: There are three. Yes. What are they?
- 28 S10: Yes, they are English, Maths and Science.
- 29 T: Yes, they are English, Maths and Science (**T wrote on BB**) English, Maths and
- 30 Science. Good. The last question. Yen, can you ask and Hoai, can you answer?
- 31 S11: When can students take the GCSE examination?
- 32 S12: When they finish secondary school.
- 33 T: When they finish secondary school. Good. Thank you, sit down. (**T wrote on**
- 34 **BB**) When they finish secondary school. Right.

(**Rob, Grade 12, Reading**)

Rob had his students do an open pair work activity (i.e., an activity that requires two students sitting apart to demonstrate a task publicly in class) – asking and answering using display questions. As shown in the extract, Rob nominated six pairs of students to stand up and publicly present the activity in the classroom (Lines 04-05, 08-09, 15-16, 20-21, 25-26, and 31-32). Immediately after the students’ presentation, Rob confirmed whether their answers were right or wrong (Lines 06, 10, 17, 22, 27 and 33). Finally, he provided the answers to the questions on the blackboard (Lines 06, 10, 13-14, 18, 22, 29-30 and 34) so that all students could see. It seems that Rob wanted his students to master the target language by extensively drilling the form. The activity used by Rob demonstrates a traditional chalk-and-talk explanation that illustrates a structure-based approach modelled on extensive practice of language form. It is likely that in Rob’s principle of sequencing, language form is thoroughly practised before use so that students can master the language. This principle is in line with the structural approach where language is drilled before use in classes (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

Similarly to Rob, Green conducted a matching activity where she asked, and students answered questions, about the structure of a letter:

Episode #8

- 01 T: Bây giờ ta nối và sắp xếp lại thành một bức thư hoàn chỉnh (**trans**: Now we
02 match and reorder the items on this poster into a complete letter) (**T used a**
03 **ruler to point at the poster**) ////
- 04 T: Nào, các em làm việc nào (**trans**: Come on, work it out) (silent for 30 seconds)
- 05 T: Nào, phần đầu tiên nào? Hằng nào (**trans**: Come on, the first part of a letter,
06 Hang please).
- 07 S1: Thưa cô, opening ạ (**trans**: Dear teacher, it's opening).
- 08 T: Yes (**and T asked**) right or wrong, the whole class?
- 09 Ss: <Right>
- 10 T: Opening a letter, [the section] D "Dear Lan".
- 11 T: Now, number 2? Number 2? Việt nào (**trans**: Viet please).
- 12 S2: Thưa cô, B ạ (**trans**: Dear teacher, it's B).
- 13 T: B or C?
- 14 S2: B.
- 15 T: Yes, B. B, (**T read from the poster**) "Confirming the letter you have
16 received". Yes, it's number 2.
- 17 T: And number 3? Mời Mai nào (**trans**: Mai please).
- 18 S3: Đó là A (**trans**: It's A).
- 19 T: Yes, that's right. "Providing necessary information". Yes, it's number 3.
- 20 T: Number 4, and number 4?
- 21 Ss: <C>
- 22 T: Right, C "Closing and ending [the] letter". Yes. Phần closing thường có gì?
23 (**trans**: What does the closing include?) (**T read aloud from the poster**) "I
24 look forward to meeting you soon"
- 25 T: Bây giờ mời một em đọc lại toàn bộ cho cô cái nào (**trans**: Now I would like
26 one student to read through the format of writing a letter for me).

(Green, Grade 11, Writing Lesson)

In this episode, Green asked students to match the parts of a letter with the given letter-writing format (Lines 7, 12, 18 and 21). Unlike other teachers who explained the structure to students, Green nominated the students to give answers and then she provided feedback and confirmed whether the students' responses were right or wrong (Lines 08, 13, 15, 19 and 22). The way that Green conducted this classroom activity demonstrated a strong focus on the format of the letter. Furthermore, Green took a hierarchical role as the authority who provided the final 'correct' answer on students' performance in a mutually exclusive manner between 'right' or 'wrong', consistent with teacher-centred pedagogy in the classroom. It appears that Green sought to confirm that her students had memorized the form through doing the activity. In TBLT, the sequencing of activities in the while-task stage illustrates a transition from processing to familiarization, which means that teachers

should allow students to actively process the task in order to familiarize themselves with doing it (Skehan 1996). Green's teaching episode, however, indicates a principle of sequencing representing a focus-on-forms approach and teacher-centred pedagogy that targets learners' memorization of grammatical structures in the classroom, demonstrating a divergence from TBLT principles of sequencing. In a study of form-focused classroom instruction in Vietnam, Canh (2011) found that teachers tended to sequence their teaching activities in accordance with Byrne's (1986) structural PPP teaching model. This finding is also reflected in Green's principle of sequencing, echoing the *Practice* stage in that structural PPP teaching model.

Overall, data from the classroom observations indicated that the participating teachers explained the target language items (e.g., grammar, forms and structures) in the while-task stage. While grammar/language explanation was to some extent important to the completion of tasks in the Vietnamese context (Canh 2011), extensive emphasis on grammar/language explication indicated that the teachers focused on form rather than meaning in the completion of tasks. Following the focus on vocabulary in the pre-task stage, the focus on grammar/language in the while-task stage indicates a principle of sequencing vocabulary-based activities before grammar-based activities in the teachers' organization of tasks in the classroom. It seems that the teachers' principles of sequencing in this study are in many ways similar to Canh's (2011) findings that echoed a PPP sequence in Vietnamese teachers' classroom practices. We turn now to explore the teachers' principles of sequencing in the third stage of the three-stage lessons, the post-task.

4.2.2.3 *Language practice in the post-task*

In TBLT, the post-task is the final stage where students are engaged with some consciousness-raising activities that aim to recall significant linguistic features embedded in the task (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). As specified in the textbook, post-task activities are mostly in the form of interviews and discussions that extend students' use of language for real-life communication (Van et al. 2006a). Similar to the pre-task and while-task stages, the teachers' principles of sequencing in the post-task have important implications for the current study, helping to unpack the participating teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum in their classroom practices.

Data from classroom observations indicates that teachers gave further language practice in the post-task stage. For example, Jane nominated two students to practise a conversation in the post-task stage of a speaking lesson:

Episode #9

- 01 T: Yeah. Now, who can? You and you please (**pointed at two students**)
 02 Louder, please.
 03 S1: Which lower secondary school did you go to?
 04 S2: I went to Nguyen Du Lower-secondary School.
 05 S1: Where was the school?
 06 S2: My school was in Ha Tinh city.
 07 S1: What about homework?
 08 S2: I didn't like it very much.
 09 S1: What were your subjects then?
 10 S2: My subjects were maths, biology, literature, English, chemistry, physical
 11 education, information technology and geography.
 12 S1: What was your favourite subject?
 13 S2: My favourite subject was physical education because I can run and do activities.
 14 It was good for my health.
 15 S1: Can you tell me about tests and examinations?
 16 S2: My exams are amazing. I have 15-minute tests and 45-minute tests.
 17 S1: What time did you go to school?
 18 S2: I usually go to school at 6.30
 19 S1: What did you like in the school?
 20 S2: In my school, I liked (xxxxx) because it was pretty and interesting.
 21 T: Yeah, very good, good. Anything else?
 22 S2: And I liked my teachers. They are very good, and, er, er, friendly.

(Jane, Grade 10, Speaking)

Jane started the activity by nominating two students to practise a conversation based on an example provided in the textbook. The first student used the questions provided in the textbook with some modification in terms of the subject, school, place and the timetable they study, making these items relevant to them (Lines 03, 05, 07, 09, 12, 15, 17 and 19) and the second student answered the questions in his own way (Lines 04, 06, 08, 10-11, 13-14, 16, 18 and 20). The students demonstrated a substitution conversation using the language provided in the textbook. It seems that Jane wanted her students to further practise the conversation using the information relevant to their contexts. In this way, Jane's principle of sequencing indicates a focus on language production at the end of the lesson which resembles the final stage in Byrne's (1986) PPP teaching model, where the language produced is based on the form provided in earlier stages of the lesson.

Similarly to Jane, Green instructed her students to practise in a pair-work activity:

Episode #10

- 01 T: Now, work in pairs. Ask and answer using the models on the blackboard.
02 Nào, bây giờ hai người cùng làm việc theo nhóm nào (**trans: Come on, now**
03 *two of you work in each pair*). Anh và Hằng làm trước nào (**trans: Anh**
04 *and Hang, do a demonstration first*).
05 S1: Do you like the arts competition?
06 S2: It's very exciting.
07 T: Do that again with another structure. Be louder for the whole class.
08 S1: What do you think of the arts competition?
09 S2: Oh, it's very exciting. It's an opportunity for my creative activity.
10 T: OK. Good. Now come on with another pair.

(Green, Grade 11, Speaking Lesson)

As can be seen, Green asked her students to practise language using the structures of asking and giving personal opinions which were provided earlier in the while-task stage. At first, the pair of students referred to a more simplistic structure such as "Do you like..." for asking for one's opinion and "It's..." for answering (Lines 05-06). Green then asked them to continue with another structure that contained more complex language items (Line 07). The students then generated language using a more complex structure (Lines 08-09). Green asked the students to demonstrate a higher level of language production, given that these structures were provided as pre-defined models for the lesson. In this respect, Green's principle of sequencing illustrates an explicit focus on language practice using pre-defined structures or models, suggesting consistency with Byrne's (1986) PPP teaching model.

Besides language practice, classroom observation data showed that direct correction was common in the post-task stage. The example below illustrates the way that Rose provided direct correction in a post-writing lesson. In this writing task, the students were asked to write about measures to protect endangered animals based on the language structures that were provided in previous tasks. Students wrote on posters that were exhibited on the blackboard so that students could see their peers' work.

Episode #11

- 01 T: Now, look at your friend's writing on the blackboard and correct it. /////
02 T: Now, look at this [poster] (**T used a ruler to point at the poster**) /////
03 T: Look at this (**T read aloud from the poster**) "There are a number of measures
04 that should be taken to protect endangered animals".
05 T: Good, but this [sentence] missed a stop [mark]. (**T used the pen to put a stop**
06 **mark onto the poster**).
07 T: (**continued**) "First, we should have different activities to raise people's awareness
08 of the need to protect these animals".
09 T: "Second", (**T looked at the poster and read silently to herself**) ///// OK.

- 10 T: "Then, humans must keep [water, air,] land clean to preserve natural habitats for
11 wild animals".
- 12 T: "The next", (**T paused to ask**) Next or the next?
- 13 Ss: <Next>, <the next>
- 14 T: No, next. (**T used a pen to cross out the article "the" on the poster**)
- 15 T: "Next, government should have a good policy" ////
- 16 T: (**T paused to explain**) maybe "governments" (**T used the pen to add "s" after
17 the word "government"**), OK?
- 18 T: (**continued reading aloud**) "to improve life of people who live in or near
19 endangered animal's habitats. In addition (**T inserted a comma ","**), laws should
20 be enacted to protect endangered animals. Moreover (**T inserted a comma ","**),
21 governments must stop the illegal trade of endangered animals and encourage
22 people not to use wild life products".
- 23 T: (**continued reading aloud**) "Finally (**T changed a stop "." into a comma ","**),
24 humans must provide endangered animals with suitable habitats to live and breed
25 successfully".
- 26 T: Very good. Good writing.

(**Rose, Grade 12, Writing Lesson**)

After the students' work was exhibited, Rose corrected every grammatical and punctuation error that appeared in the writings, such as the full stop "." (Line 05), the comma "," (Lines 19, 21, and 23), the article "the" (Line 14), or the ending "s" (Line 16). The way Rose corrected her students' errors demonstrates an emphasis on direct correction in the post-task stage. In TBLT, Ellis and Shintani (2014) argued that direct correction should not be used; rather, noticing techniques and/or consciousness-raising activities are advocated for the post-task stage so that students learn to attend to the form and also develop linguistic competence (Schmidt 1990; Willis & Willis 1996). Rose's focus on direct correction in the post-task stage as above indicated an emphasis on accurate language production at the end of the lesson, demonstrating a principle of sequencing that provides direct correction together with language practice, illustrating a strong focus on forms. In this manner, Rose's principle of sequencing, in many ways, represents a focus-on-forms approach which is based on accurate language practice.

In general, the teachers' principles of sequencing show an explicit focus on accurate language practice in the post-task stage. Data from the post-task activities illustrated that the participating teachers strongly emphasized the reproduction of language-based structures in the tasks. The teachers also used a great deal of direct correction of students' work in the classroom. While language production and correction are important options for the teacher to use in the post-task stage (Ellis 2003a, 2006), the strong focus on accurate

language production can prevent students from taking risks in communication. In TBLT, it is argued that fluency rather than accuracy should be emphasized in task performance (Willis & Willis 2007). The teachers' principles of sequencing, as evidenced in the data, are largely inconsistent with a primary focus on meaning as outlined by TBLT advocates (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004) and the textbook authors' intention in the curriculum design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). A typical textbook lesson primarily focuses on meaning in a three-stage sequence. The pre-task introduces students to the task, the while-task focuses on students' performance of the task, and the post-task allows students to rehearse the task and raise their consciousness of form (Ellis 2003a). The findings here, however, demonstrate an explicit focus on forms through teaching the three-stage sequence, including introduction of linguistic items in the pre-task, extensive drills in the while-task and accurate language production in the post-task. In this respect, the teachers' principles of task sequencing seemed consistent with Byrne's (1986) structural PPP teaching model and further echo their cognitions about the curriculum ([Section 4.1](#)).

4.2.3 Summary

This section has presented the data on the participating teachers' principles of selection and sequencing with tasks in the classroom, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of pedagogy. With regard to the principles of selection, the lesson plan data indicated that, to a large extent, the participating teachers had a similar principle for vocabulary-based, closed-ended and form-focused activities. In particular, meaning-focused activities that were provided in the textbooks were modified or omitted, and/or replaced by form-focused activities in the participating teachers' lesson plans. In line with previous studies in Vietnam (Canh 2011; Viet 2013), the teachers' lesson plans in the current study illustrated that the teachers selected form-focused activities in their delivery of tasks at the classroom level.

With regard to sequencing, the order of tasks in the observed lessons showed that the participating teachers followed a principle of vocabulary - grammar - practice sequence. In the pre-task stage, the teachers taught vocabulary through the use of such tasks as warm-up and vocabulary-based activities. The while-task stage emphasized structural explanations in terms of grammar activities. The post-task stage offered students language practice that focused on using the linguistic items that were provided in earlier stages. As such, the

teachers' principles of sequencing indicated a form - form - meaning order which contrasts with the meaning - meaning - form sequence proposed in the framework of TBLT for the official curriculum (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). In this manner, the participating teachers' principles of sequencing suggested a structural approach in which communicative skills are developed on the basis of linguistic items (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

Overall, classroom observation data illustrated a strong focus on forms orientation in the teachers' delivery of tasks in the classroom. Consistent with previous studies in Vietnam (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013), the participating teachers' pedagogy indicated a focus-on-forms approach in the implementation of the curriculum at the classroom level. However, unlike other studies that claimed inconsistencies between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices, the findings in the current study indicated that teachers' cognitions were largely aligned with their classroom practices. Thus, we have found consistencies in two of the three message systems: curriculum and pedagogy. To complete our examination of teachers' implementation of the curriculum, the following section will present the data on the participating teachers' testing practices, drawing on Bernstein's concept of assessment as the third of the three message systems (Bernstein 1977, 1990).

4.3 Assessment

This section presents the data from the participating teachers' testing practices drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of assessment. According to Bernstein, assessment is defined in terms of two criteria: *what to assess* (or assessed content) and *how to assess* (form of assessment). The explicitness of these criteria depicts the principles of test design that the participating teachers used in learner assessment. When the assessed content and form of assessment are explicit, the emphasis is on students' rote memorization and/or retention of discrete linguistic items. In Bernstein's terms, this principle of test design includes a performance-focused curriculum that is aligned to a traditional structure-based curriculum in language teaching. In contrast, when the assessed content and form of assessment are implicit, assessment targets students' abilities to use language for communicative purposes through their communicative skills and the demands of language use. In this respect, the teacher's principle of test design is in concert with a competence-focused curriculum which echoes the task-based curriculum. Informed by Bernstein's

conception, we can interpret the view of curriculum that the teachers reflect through their principles of test design. This helps to provide further insights into how the teachers' cognitions were reflected in their classroom testing practices, which was the aim of the third subsidiary research question in the present study.

Data for this section was collected from the semi-structured interviews and test papers designed by the participating teachers. The interviews focused on the teachers' perceptions of assessment and the test papers offered empirical evidence of how assessment was conducted in the classroom. As the research question was qualitative in nature, the combination of the interview and test paper data enabled the study to explore the participating teachers' principles of test design through their reported and actual classroom testing practices. As governed by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), assessment in the classroom involves two types of tests: the *45-minute* and *15-minute* tests (MOET 2007). The 45-minute test aims to assess students' general competence in English use including both linguistic competence (i.e., lexical and grammatical knowledge) and language use (i.e., reading, listening and writing), although there is no speaking component in these tests. The 15-minute test, however, involves some skills-based assessment. The curriculum guidelines outline that the 15-minute tests be used to assess the four language skills of reading, speaking, listening and writing. This section examined test papers from a total of six 45-minute and six 15-minute tests, one of each from each teacher. The papers were collected and analysed using a content analysis approach (Krippendorff 2004). In the sections that follow, the findings of the participating teachers' assessment are presented in two categories: *teachers' cognitions of assessment* and *teachers' practices of assessment*.

4.3.1 Teachers' cognitions of assessment

This section presents the results of qualitative analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews, using a thematic analysis approach (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012), on the participating teachers' cognitions of assessment at the classroom level. Key ideas from the teachers' comments were first identified and grouped into categories from which themes were developed. In total, two major categories were developed from the teachers' cognitions of assessment: *assessment of linguistic items* and *assessment of reading and writing*. Descriptions of these categories are now presented.

4.3.1.1 *Assessment of linguistic items*

A major theme that emerged from the participating teachers' comments on testing in the classroom was their explicit focus on vocabulary and grammar in making tests. In response to the interview question: *"In your point of view, what are the important elements that a test should have?"* all teachers explained that assessment should test students' language knowledge in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Examples of their responses to this question include:

Mary: I think that in any test, it's necessary to assess students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. This is very important as it can ensure how good at the language the students are. [Lines 290-293]

Jane: I think assessment should focus on linguistic knowledge such as grammar, part of speech, use of language and so on. Students must master the language before using it. In particular, students must know grammar before speaking and writing. [Lines 285-287]

Grace: I focus on assessing students' memorization of vocabulary and grammar. These aspects are important as they are included in the final examination. [Lines 344-345]

Green: I think the vocabulary and grammar play a central role in learning English. Therefore, students must be assessed in terms of their understanding of vocabulary and grammar. [Lines 324-325]

Rob: Usually in a test, I have from 30 to 35 items. The proportion of vocabulary and grammar accounts for more than half of the items. Yes, vocabulary and grammar is more than half of the test items. [Lines 280-283]

Rose: I think that assessment of students' understanding of vocabulary and grammar is very important. [Line 240]

According to the teachers, vocabulary and grammar are the central foci of teaching and learning English in class; therefore, vocabulary and grammar should be included in assessment tasks. The teachers' common emphasis on vocabulary and grammar seemed to contrast with the curriculum innovation that demands learner assessment in terms of their abilities in four language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking and writing) (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). During the interviews, some of the participating teachers provided reasons for their focus on discrete linguistic items in assessment. For example, Grace noted:

I think that, no matter how 'communicative' a curriculum is, students need to memorize grammar and vocabulary of the target language... Er, and what can help students memorize vocabulary and grammar is testing, yes, through tests. You know,

what is tested is learned. Students only memorize what is included in the tests. [Lines 327-329]

Grace's comment illustrated two important points in her view on assessment. First, she explicitly focused on grammar and vocabulary as she believed that students needed to memorize linguistic items in learning English. Such a belief reflects a structural approach to learner assessment when linguistic items were made explicit in testing. Second, Grace's comment that what was tested was what was learned by students, suggested a teaching-to-the-test belief among the teachers. Other data from the teachers' comments showed that a teaching-to-the-test belief was prevalent in the teachers' cognitions about testing. For example, Rob highlighted:

I need to focus on linguistic items to familiarize my students with the final examination so that they can do well in the exam... This is why vocabulary and grammar were so prevalent in learner assessment in the classroom. [Lines 314-316]

According to Rob, teachers focused on linguistic items in classroom tests to prepare students for the final examination. He further explained: "The focus on vocabulary and grammar helps me to check how well my students can respond to lexical and grammatical items in the final examination" [Lines 366-367]. In the same vein, Rose expressed "By doing tests on grammar and vocabulary repeatedly, students will be more likely to have high scores in the final exam" [Lines 227-228]. These teachers' comments provided evidence to illustrate the testing effect of the final examination on the teachers' assessment in the classroom (McDaniel et al. 2007). According to McDaniel et al., one of the serious consequences of the testing effect is that it pushes teachers to provide students with material to be studied so as to promote subsequent learning and memorization or retention of that material for the final test/examination. The teachers' comments as above indicate the testing effect in their principles of test design, showing an explicit focus on linguistic items in the assessed content to ensure that students learn the discrete content knowledge in preparation for the final examination.

In short, the comments expressed by the teachers about testing indicated that in general, teachers focused on vocabulary and grammar in designing tests for two major reasons. First, the teachers believed that linguistic items were crucial to language teaching and learning; therefore, linguistic items should be included in the test content. Second, the focus on linguistic items could enable students to pass the final examinations that are mainly based on discrete linguistic items. The teachers' cognitions about testing were

consistent with their emphasis on teaching the tested content, but to a large extent contradictory to the goal of task-based assessment that targets communicative skills in using language (Ellis 2003a). This finding demonstrates a strong testing effect in the teachers' principles of test design. As the curriculum guidelines outline assessment in terms of linguistic competence and communicative skills (MOET 2007), it is necessary for the current study to seek teachers' views on how these are assessed. The following section presents data on the teachers' cognitions about skill-based assessment in terms of reading and writing.

4.3.1.2 Assessment of reading and writing

The second theme that emerged from the teachers' cognitions about testing was the inclusion of skill-based assessment in testing at the classroom level. In particular, the teachers stated that in addition to grammar and vocabulary, writing was a frequently tested skill in classroom tests. Some of the teachers' comments were:

Jane: In a test, I have the last question focus on writing. I want to provide students five items on writing. [Lines 367-368]

Green: I have one or two writing sections in a test paper. For example, students are asked to transform the part of speech in a sentence and keep the meaning similar to the original. [Lines 363-364]

Mary: On assessment, I prefer to have a combination of both multiple choice questions and writing. Yes, both multiple choice questions and writing. I think it should be both. Students' writing work should be included in tests. [Lines 275-277]

Grace: I think that there should not be multiple choice questions testing format only; there should be both multiple choice question items and writing in a test. Students need to practise writing and using language for a purpose. We should allow them to do so in assessment. [Lines 299-302]

According to the teachers, writing was an important focus of assessment in addition to grammar and vocabulary. Most teachers noted that they included one or two sections in their test papers that focused on controlled writing. For example, Grace explained: "40% of the test items were controlled writing in the form of sentence transformation" [Lines 376-377]. In the same vein, Green suggested that "the proportion of writing and multiple choice question items should be 50 - 50 in the test content" [Lines 319-320]. The teachers' comments indicated that in their views, writing accounted for about half of the tested content, suggesting a balance between language knowledge and skills in assessment.

However, further data from the interviews with the teachers indicated a different focus with the assessed content of a writing test. For example, Mary described:

Usually my writing section focuses on the linguistic items that students have learnt. I may ask students to rewrite a sentence, transforming from the past simple to the present perfect tense; I may ask them to connect two split sentences into one using the relative pronouns; or I may ask students to transfer sentences from the active voice into passive one, and vice versa. These are the foci of a writing test that I use in the classroom. [Lines 405-408]

In a similar vein, Green expressed:

My writing section is often very short. I usually have about five items for students to write. This can be five transformation writing sentences that ask students to rewrite the given sentences in a different way that keep the meaning similar to the original ones. Or I may ask students to rewrite and make changes to the part of speech used in the sentences, for example, from nouns to verbs or from nouns to adjectives. [Lines 362-364]

According to the literature on task-based assessment, writing assessment should include some real-life written tasks such as writing a letter to a friend or notes to a family member (Brown & Abeywickrama 2010). The teachers' descriptions of their writing assessment above, however, indicate a strong focus on regurgitation of discrete linguistic knowledge and being accurate in doing so (e.g., sentences rewritten with correct grammar), demonstrating a deviation from the literature of writing assessment in TBLT. As such, the teachers' descriptions of writing assessment indicate a structural approach that privileges form over meaning in their cognitions about testing in the classroom.

In addition to writing, reading was also included in the teachers' descriptions of assessment at the classroom level:

Jane: I often have a reading question that contains five to 10 test items. [Lines 377]

Mary: About reading, we can test students by reading and answering the questions or filling the gaps such as cloze tests. [Lines 382-383]

Grace: I usually have one or two sections on reading in a test. It can be a cloze or a reading comprehension. Students read and then fill in the gap or answer the question using the provided options. [Lines 380-382]

Green: I have a reading section in the test. Students are asked to read a short passage and then select the best answers by circling the best answer A, B, C or D. [Lines 360-361]

Rob: Yes, reading is also covered in the test. I often have ten items for reading. This is similar to the specifications of the final examination. [Lines 282-283]

Rose: Usually I have ten items in for a reading question which is similar to the final examination. I need to prepare my students for the exam. [Lines 264-265]

According to the participating teachers, reading elements were included in their classroom tests. Collectively, the teachers described that they included from 5 to 10 test items on reading, illustrating explicit specifications of the tested content. It seemed that the teachers felt a strong testing effect of the final examination on their principles of test design. In particular, the two Grade 12 teachers (i.e., Rob and Rose) contended that they included the same type of reading test items which were used in the final examination, so as to familiarize students with the exam. It was clear that the testing effect of the final examination directs the teachers' test design in a way which is consistent with the final examination format.

Regarding the assessment of speaking and listening skills, the participating teachers expressed their difficulties with the assessment of speaking and listening:

Jane: I cannot conduct speaking and listening tests. You know, it is impossible to test students' speaking and listening skills in the classroom. There are many students in one class and the time allotted for a test is only 45 minutes. [Lines 321-323]

Green: I think it's impossible to have speaking and listening tests. With only 45 minutes, we cannot assess all four skills. Therefore, speaking and listening are excluded. [Lines 341-343]

Rose: The listening test cannot be conducted in the classroom as it's too difficult to prepare the equipment, and the classroom is too crowded. Similarly, speaking is not practical as there are many students in a class. In my opinion, these two skills are impossible to assess. In fact, we don't need to assess speaking and listening as they are not in the final exam. [Lines 228-231]

Rob: I am concerned about speaking and listening assessment as these two skills are impossible to carry out. There are too many students who take the test at the same time, so it's not easy at all to have tests on speaking and listening. Further, the preparation for a listening test is too difficult. There are no resources available, and the lack of equipment... In my opinion, assessment should be similar to the final examination. [Lines 383-387]

Teachers excluded speaking and listening from classroom-level assessment. There were two main reasons for the exclusion. First, the teachers felt that it was impossible to organize listening and speaking tests due to the large size classes and the lack of equipment and resources. Second, assessment of these two skills was not conducted in the final

examination. As a result, teachers felt justified in neglecting communicative skills such as speaking and listening in classroom tests. The teachers' exclusion of speaking and listening skills from classroom level tests indicates that in their cognitions, speaking and listening play a less important role than writing and reading, as the former skills are not part of the final examination. In this sense, the data from the teachers' comments indicates a strong testing effect of the final examination on their principles of test design.

In short, from the comments expressed by the participating teachers, it is clear that teachers attend to skill-based assessment in their classroom tests. However, only reading and writing skills were tested; speaking and listening were disregarded by most teachers. As indicated by the data, speaking and listening were not assessed by the teachers because they were not included in the final examination. The teachers' common focus on writing and reading indicated the testing effect of the final examination on these teachers' principles of test design. Specifically, the teachers' principles of test design illustrated an explicit focus on forms in the assessed content and form of assessment, suggesting an orientation to the performance-focused curriculum in Bernstein's (1990) terms. To fully understand the teachers' cognitions about assessment, it is necessary to examine the classroom testing data in connection with their cognitions (Borg 2006). Data on the teachers' classroom testing practices is presented in the next sub-section.

4.3.2 Teachers' practices of assessment

To further examine the teachers' testing practices, this section presents analysis from the test papers. A total of 12 test papers, including one 45-minute and one 15-minute test from each participating teacher, were examined using a content analysis approach (Krippendorff 2004). The test content was analysed and grouped into categories of items that shared similar characteristics. Overall, two major categories were formed as a result of the analysis procedure: *multiple choice questions (MCQ) assessment* and *writing exercises* (Table 4-12). Descriptions of these categories are now presented. The numbers and percentages included in the table assist qualitative interpretations of the data for this section.

Table 4-12 Overview of assessment practices

	Category	Number of test questions
Forms of assessment	Multiple choice questions (MCQ)	25/36 (69%)
	Writing exercises	11/36 (31%)

4.3.2.1 Multiple choice questions format

As shown in Table 4-12, approximately 69% of the test questions from all papers collected as data was in the form of MCQ. Categorization of the test paper data indicated that the MCQ format was used in three types of test questions: *phonetic features*; *general vocabulary and grammar*; and *reading comprehension*.

Test papers showed that all teachers used the MCQ format in assessing students' recognition of phonetic features. Sample #1 from Grace illustrates an MCQ-based test question on phonetic features.

Sample #1

Question 1.			
Choose the word whose underlined part is pronounced differently from the rest:			
1. A. parach <u>u</u> te	B. ch <u>a</u> mpagne	C. ch <u>i</u> valry	D. chur <u>ch</u> goer
2. A. solv <u>e</u> d	B. practis <u>e</u> d	C. rais <u>e</u> d	D. explain <u>e</u> d
3. A. <u>t</u> hese	B. <u>t</u> heory	C. wort <u>h</u>	D. <u>t</u> hreaten
4. A. behav <u>e</u> s	B. hous <u>e</u> s	C. heritag <u>e</u> s	D. diseas <u>e</u> s
5. A. fri <u>e</u> nd	B. sec <u>o</u> ndary	C. spec <u>i</u> al	D. secr <u>e</u> t
(Grace, Grade 11)			

The test question in Sample #1 tested phonetic features of both consonant and vowel clusters. As shown, the first item focused on identifying the “ch” consonant cluster while the second item included the ending sound which modelled on the cluster “ed”, indicating that different linguistic items were tested in parts of the test question. In line with the teachers' perceptions of assessment of linguistic items ([Section 4.3.1.1](#)), the use of the MCQ format allowed the teacher to test a range of phonetic features. It seemed that phonetic features were defined as essential objects of assessment in Grace's testing practices. In TBLT, however, Ellis (2003a) argues that assessment should evaluate learners' use of tasks for communicative purposes. In this respect, Grace's testing practices appear to deviate from TBLT; however, the emphasis on phonetic features is consistent with a focus-on-forms approach in learner assessment.

In addition to phonetic features, the MCQ format was also used to assess a wide range of linguistic items in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Sample #2 from Jane illustrates a test question that used the MCQ format.

Sample #2

Question 2.

Choose the word or phrase among A, B, C or D which best completes each sentence:

1. Shethe piano since she was 10.
A. played B. has played C. had played D. was playing
2. We went to sing after we a wonderful party.
A. had B. were having C. have had D. had had
3. She arranged her friends in the evening.
A. to meet B. to be meeting C. meeting D. to have met
4. Mary is interested in Vietnamese.
A. to learn B. learn C. learning D. learnt
5. I don't like people tell lies.
A. whose B. who C. they D. which
6. People who are afraid heights are called acrophobes.
A. of B. on C. in D. to
7. The work on the new bridge a few weeks ago.
A. has completed B. completed C. has been completed D. was completed
8. We'll be late we hurry.
A. if B. despite C. unless D. when
9. My brother is interested in doing research.
A. science B. scientific C. scientist D. scientifically
10. He was sitting on the beach when he a noise.
A. heard B. had heard C. was hearing D. hears

(Jane, Grade 10)

This sample has 10 test items on linguistic features, such as verb tenses (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 10); relative pronouns (Item 5); prepositions (Item 6); connectors (Item 8); and vocabulary (Item 9). Thus, the test question aimed to test a wide range of linguistic items. Similar to the test item in Sample #1, this example displayed an explicit focus on discrete linguistic items in assessment. Similarly to Grace's sample #1, Jane's testing question demonstrates a focus-on-forms approach that used multiple choice questions of discrete linguistic items as the central objects in test design.

The MCQ format was also used in assessment of reading. Sample #3 from Mary offers a typical example of how reading assessment was conducted by the participating teachers in the classroom.

Sample #3

Question 4. Read the passage and choose the most suitable option for each question:

All human beings should study. It is widely agreed that we study to widen our knowledge and develop our life skills. Education plays a crucial role in our life. First of all, we have to learn how to observe accurately, to think truthfully, to speak correctly and to write clearly. Education provides us with knowledge of things around the world and it preserves the national noble traditions and customs from generation to generation. Education makes a person more perfect. An educated person is both talented and virtuous. In every country, the government always considers education as the most important policy. Some of us sometimes think that we ‘have finished’ our education when we leave school or graduate from a university. In fact, real education should never finish.

(Adapted from the students’ workbook)

1. An educated person is.....
 - a. virtuous.
 - b. talented.
 - c. both talented and virtuous.
 - d. perfect.
2. We study in order to.....
 - a. develop our life skills.
 - b. make things easier.
 - c. widen our knowledge.
 - d. both a and c.
3. Education.....
 - a. can play role important.
 - b. plays an important role in our life.
 - c. has an important role in a play.
 - d. helps us play important role.
4. We learn how.....
 - a. to be talented.
 - b. to widen our knowledge.
 - c. to play a role in life.
 - d. to observe accurately, to think truthfully, to speak correctly and to write clearly.
5. When will education finish?
 - a. At the end of the school-year.
 - b. When one gets old.
 - c. Whenever one leaves school.
 - d. Education will never finish.

(Mary, Grade 10)

As shown in the example, this test question tested the students’ ability to search for the right answer, since the phrase was provided in exactly the same way in the reading text. For example, Item 1 asked students to recall the statement ‘*An educated person is ...*’ which was exactly the same as the given sentence ‘*An educated person is both talented and virtuous*’. In this way, the test question did not test the students’ reading comprehension but their ability to identify information or facts provided in a text. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) have noted that in reading comprehension assessment, test questions should require learners to show their reasoning ability with both skimming (i.e.,

ability to read for general ideas) and scanning skills (i.e., ability to look for specific information). In the above example provided by Mary, all the test items focused on recognition of information that was provided in exactly the same way as it was in the reading text, and thus little reasoning ability was needed in completing the test question. Mary's principles of test design, as shown in the example, were of little relevance to reading comprehension assessment, demonstrating a deviation from the assessment approach that the curriculum required for classroom testing.

In general, the three types of test questions used by the teachers illustrate an explicit orientation to forms and/or regurgitation of knowledge when designing test items in the MCQ format. A wide range of phonetic, lexical and grammatical features were assessed in the MCQ format, highlighting an explicit focus on the assessed content in the participating teachers' assessment practices. In this respect, the teachers' principles of test design emphasise the students' display of discrete linguistic items, which is consistent with the focus-on-forms approach that is reported in the findings of teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices. Furthermore, the MCQ format used in reading elements to check students' recognition of knowledge confirms the form-focused approach that the teachers typically used in assessment. Taken together, the teachers' testing practices in their use of the MCQ format contrast with task-based assessment that emphasizes evaluation of task outcomes (Ellis 2003a). We now turn to the second category of the teachers' assessment practice, writing exercises, in the data analysis of the teachers' test papers.

4.3.2.2 Writing exercises

The second category identified in the analysis of the test paper data shows that approximately 31% of the test questions used the form of writing exercises (Table 4-12). Examination of the data indicates that there were two types of writing exercises frequently used by participating teachers as test questions. These include sentence formation and sentence transformation exercises.

A majority of participating teachers used language formation exercises as test questions in assessment of writing. There were two common types of language formation exercises: word-level and sentence-level formation. Sample #4 illustrates a writing test question used by Mary that took the word-level language formation exercise.

Sample #4

III. Complete the sentences with the appropriate form of the words in brackets:

1. We postponed our picnic because it was raining (**heavy**)
2. I live alone and I don't have many (**visit**)
3. It is of you to expect us to work overtime every night this week. (**reason**)
4. My father has been For 6 months. He's trying to find a new job now. (**employ**)
5. They entered the area without (**permit**)
6. Will it be for you to meet me at 8 tomorrow morning? (**convenience**)
7. He wants to his knowledge of the subject. (**wide**)
8. Here's the of the bicycle which was stolen. (**describe**)
9. Didn't you think it was an play. (**amuse**)
10. It wasn't very of you to slam the door on his face. (**friend**)

(Mary, Grade 10)

As can be seen in the sample, the test question asked students to provide the appropriate form (e.g., noun, verb, adjective and so on) of the specified word to agree with the sentence structure. For example, Item 1 asks students to provide the adverbial form of the word 'heavy' in relation to the verb phrase 'was raining'. Student response to the test questions should be 'heavily' to agree with the sentence structure. In this manner, the test question reflects a language exercise that explicitly focused on discrete linguistic knowledge. In task-based assessment, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) argue that a writing test question should focus on students' own written work with a clear purpose, for example, writing a letter to a friend. The test question provided above by Mary was not in line with the recommended forms of task-based assessment in the curriculum, consistent with a focus on forms in her principles of test design.

The participating teachers also included test questions requiring students to form a complete sentence from words provided, as shown in Sample #5 from Jane.

Sample #5

V. Complete each sentence with the words given:

1. You / not keep / promise / write / me / more frequently.
2. I / not dare / stay / home / myself / night.
3. How long / it / take her / cook / meal / yesterday?
4. After / visit / dentist / Phuong's teeth hurt/ more / they / have / before.
5. Despite / age / he / join / social activities / neighbourhood.

(Jane, Grade 10)

This sample focuses on assembling the words to form grammatically correct sentences (i.e., sentence formation). For example, Item 1 asked students to build a correct sentence using the list of separated words given. In order to complete this test item, students need to have mastered a wide range of grammatical rules such as agreement between verb and subject, verb tenses and prepositions, and so on. All these features illustrate a strong focus on the accuracy of grammar in completing the test. By emphasizing the accuracy of grammar in such test items, this language exercise demonstrated a focus on form but avoided the meaning embedded in the writing. As argued by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), task based assessment should not be explicitly assessed in terms of language knowledge but the meaning behind the words is to be made explicit for a clear purpose. Thus, the type of language exercise in such test items as Sample #5 is inconsistent with literature on assessment of writing in TBLT.

Besides sentence completion, sentence transformation writing exercises were also used for written assessment by participating teachers. Sample #6 below illustrates a writing test question in the test paper written by Green that asked students to transform the unfinished sentence in a way that preserves the meaning in each sentence compared to the original sentence provided.

Sample # 6

IV. Finish the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first one, beginning with the given words or phrases:

16. No one has opened that box for the past hundred years.

→ The box

17. He has never behaved so violently before.

→ He is behaving

18. The last time it snowed here was six years ago.

→ It

19. I only bought the dog because my children wanted a pet.

→ If

20. "I have an English lesson this morning but I haven't done my homework yet," said a pupil.

→ A pupil said that

(Green, Grade 11)

This test question focused on sentence transformation. For example, in Item 1, students were asked to complete a sentence starting with the phrase ‘*The box.....*’ in such a way that the transformation retains the meaning of the original sentence: ‘*No one has opened that box for the past hundred years*’. To complete the second sentence in such a way that it has a similar meaning to the original sentence provided in the test, students needed to use the passive voice as the underlying structure. In this respect, the students’ responses were deliberately controlled by the test designer (e.g., the teacher) with regard to the structure needed for completing the sentences. As such, this type of test question focused on accurate reproduction of language at the sentence level. In TBLT, students are encouraged to write about the topic of interest rather than to complete pre-designed sentences in a controlled manner (Brown & Abeywickrama 2010; Ellis 2003a). Green’s test question as above indicated a principle of test design which is consistent with a structure-based assessment approach; therefore, it was not consistent with the task-based assessment approach in the curriculum innovation.

In brief, the three examples of test questions above indicate that writing assessment focused on accurate reproduction of language at both the word and sentence levels using discrete linguistic items. While the construction of language at these levels may be useful to some extent for learners in Vietnam to develop language (Canh 2011), the strong focus on language reproduction indicates that the teachers’ assessment practices show an explicit focus on the form of assessment. In TBLT, it is argued that language assessment should focus on the work that students composed for clear communicative purposes (Brown & Abeywickrama 2010). The findings in this section are largely different from the literature advocated in task-based assessment (Ellis 2003a); however, they are consistent with a focus-on-forms approach that highlights the role of precise language reproduction in written assessment at the classroom level. In summary, the findings reported in the third message system ‘assessment’ show a common principle of test design the participating teachers held, that privileged form over meaning in their classroom testing practices in the local school context.

4.3.3 Summary

This section has presented the data on the participating teachers’ principles of test design in terms of the *assessed content* and *form of assessment* drawing on Bernstein’s (1977, 1990)

concept of assessment. In terms of the assessed content, data from the semi-structured interviews showed that the teachers used linguistic items and skill-based assessment as the major elements for classroom testing practices. In particular, the teachers emphasised the assessment of discrete linguistic items, reading and writing in their comments. According to the teachers, the focus on linguistic items for the skills of reading and writing enhanced students' rote memorization of the target language knowledge and thus contributed to their examination scores, illustrating the impact of testing (see, McDaniel et al. 2007) on the teachers' cognitions about assessment. In this way, the teachers' principles of test design were not aligned with the task-based curriculum that they were teaching; however, their testing practices were consistent with preparing students for the final examination that students were ultimately required to pass.

In terms of the form of assessment, the teacher-generated test papers showed a preference for the MCQ format. As shown in the empirical data, 69% of the test questions were in the MCQ format, indicating a strong emphasis on explicit discrete linguistic items. In addition, the remaining 31% of the test questions were in the form of controlled writing that focused on the reconstruction of language at the sentence and word levels, illustrating a form-focused approach in the teachers' testing practices. In this respect, the participating teachers' assessment practices diverged from task-based assessment that focuses on learners' competence in using language for communicative purposes (Ellis 2003a). Furthermore, there was no assessment of speaking and listening elements, indicating that these skills were downplayed in the teachers' principles of test design. As such, the test paper data illustrated that the teachers' principles of test design were based on students' rote memorization of discrete linguistic items and accurate language construction, which is consistent with a focus on forms structure, but contrasts with the principles of task-based assessment, which targets the evaluation of learners' use of language in terms of non-linguistic outcomes (Ellis 2003a). This contrast highlights a strong focus-on-forms approach in relation to the implementation of the curriculum.

Overall, the empirical data in the current study illustrated a strong focus on forms in the teachers' cognitions and classroom practices of assessment, demonstrating the testing effect that the final examination had on teachers' principles of test design. Unlike previous studies that claimed tests and examinations were obstacles in classroom teaching (Canh 2011; Viet 2013), the findings in the current study provide evidence that teachers'

principles of test design were aligned with their cognitions and classroom practices in all the three areas of change in the curriculum innovation, reflecting a focus-on-forms approach in the teachers' implementation of the curriculum in the local school context.

4.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has presented the findings based on data collected and analysed with regard to the participating teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to the curriculum. Drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of the three message systems, this final section now summarizes the key points of the findings in terms of the three message systems that informed the current study.

In terms of the first message system *curriculum*, data from the interviews indicated that teachers believed that discrete linguistic items were the central focus of the curricular content. Specifically, informed by Shulman's (1986, 1987) curricular knowledge, interpretation of the teachers' descriptions of the curricular content indicated their emphasis on linguistic items through language topics and tasks in their classroom teaching. The teachers' emphasis on linguistic items was evidenced in their reported teaching strategies, interpreted further through Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of teacher pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). In particular, the teachers described their reported teaching strategies in a manner which was similar to the traditional PPP teaching framework (Byrne 1986). It was clear that the teachers' cognitions reflect a structural approach in the way that they attempted to develop learners' communicative skills on the mastery of linguistic items (Richards & Rodgers 2001). As such, findings from the interview data indicated that a focus-on-forms approach, rather than TBLT, was prevalent in the teachers' cognitions about the task-based curricular content in the local teaching context.

The second message system *pedagogy* depicted how the participating teachers' cognitions permeated their classroom practices concerning their principles of task selection and sequencing, two major criteria in Bernstein's terms. Analysis of the lesson plan data indicated that the teachers selected vocabulary-based, form-focused and closed-ended activities; however, they tended to neglect meaning-focused activities for their classroom teaching. In line with the teachers' cognitions, their lesson plans illustrated a structural approach in their principles of selection for what to teach. Further data from the observed

classrooms illustrated a principle of sequencing which was based on the belief in teaching linguistic knowledge first and developing communicative skills later using the provided linguistic items, which is consistent with the structural approach (e.g., Richards & Rodgers 2001). This finding appeared to support previous studies that claimed a prevalence of the PPP teaching framework in Vietnamese classroom practices of English teaching (Canh 2011; Viet 2013). In summary, findings reported on the teachers' principles of selection and sequencing with classroom tasks/activities show that their cognitions and practices were consistent, demonstrating a structural approach in the implementation of the task-based curriculum in the local teaching context.

The third message system *assessment* illustrated the teachers' principles of test design concerning the assessed content and form of assessment in classroom testing practices. Data from the interviews showed that all teachers described discrete linguistic items, reading and writing as the central foci of testing, suggesting various types of tests that the teachers used to assess students' language knowledge and skills as proposed in the curriculum guidelines (MOET 2007). However, further data from the test papers showed that two forms of assessment, namely the MCQ format and controlled writing (although it is not writing assessment in the real sense), were used in the teachers' testing practices. This demonstrated a strong focus on forms in the teachers' principles of test design. In line with the teachers' comments, the use of MCQ-based items and controlled writing illustrated a strong orientation towards the final examination, indicating the testing effect of the final examination on the teachers' principles of test design. In this manner, the teachers' principles of test design show an explicit focus on discrete linguistic items and accurate language production, demonstrating the enactment of a performance-focused curriculum in Bernstein's terms which is aligned with the traditional focus-on-forms curriculum in language teaching (Nunan 2004).

In conclusion, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) conception of the three message systems and Shulman's (1986, 1987) categories of teacher curricular knowledge and PCK as the underlying framework, this chapter has presented findings on the participating teachers' implementation of the curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective. Across all the three message systems, emphasis on discrete linguistic items was predominant, highlighting a structural approach in the teachers' implementation of the curriculum. The findings in the current study have provided empirical evidence to show that the task-based

curriculum was not implemented in accordance with the intended curriculum; however, it was enacted in a manner which was aligned with the teachers' knowledge and beliefs in the local teaching context. Consistent with the research literature of TBLT in the Asian context (Adams & Newton 2009; Butler 2011; Littlewood 2007), the data in the current study indicated that the participating teachers had their own perspectives on implementing the curriculum in the local school context, although these perspectives were sometimes different from TBLT principles of practice. Furthermore, unlike previous studies in Vietnam which blamed teachers for not implementing the curriculum in the pre-designed approaches (Canh 2011; Viet 2013), the present study has offered a detailed account of teachers' cognitions and how these cognitions permeated their classroom practices concerning the three major areas of change outlined in the curriculum innovation (Van el at. 2006a, 2006b).

The next chapter, Discussion and Conclusions, will shed further light on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in this chapter, by providing an in-depth discussion of the findings and the research procedures in light of the theoretical framework and related literature. It also outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the present study, as well as elaborates on the implications and suggested directions for future research on second language teachers' cognitions in relation to the task-based curriculum in Vietnam or similar contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the empirical data has provided a detailed account of how teachers perceived and implemented the curriculum in the classroom. This chapter discusses the findings and brings the study to a close. [Sections 5.1](#) to [Section 5.3](#) revisit the research questions and discuss the findings in relation to the previous studies in Vietnam and similar contexts. Each section that follows is related to one of the research questions that the current study examined and was presented in the same order as in the previous chapters. [Section 5.4](#) discusses the findings to provide further insights regarding the theoretical framework that the study drew on. [Section 5.5](#) concludes the study based on the findings reported. [Section 5.6](#) addresses implications and recommendations regarding theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of the current study. [Section 5.7](#) identifies limitations and delimitations of the current research. Following this section, suggestions for future research in L2 teacher cognitions and language curriculum innovation avenues are outlined ([Section 5.8](#)). The final section ([Section 5.9](#)) closes the thesis with a summary of the study.

5.1 Teachers' cognitions

This section discusses findings on teachers' cognitions which were reported from the data in response to the first subsidiary research question:

What cognitions do the participating teachers hold about the task-based curriculum in a Vietnamese upper secondary school?

The current study answered this question by providing a detailed account of teachers' cognition in the previous chapter ([Section 4.1](#)). Informed by Borg's (2006) definition of teachers' cognition in terms of teachers' knowledge and beliefs ([Section 2.3.1](#)), the following sections will discuss the major themes generated from the findings in terms of participating teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the task-based curriculum.

5.1.1 Teachers' knowledge

Intertwined in the definition of teachers' cognitions in this study was the participating teachers' knowledge of the curriculum, in particular their curricular and pedagogical content knowledge, drawing on Shulman's (1986, 1987) teacher knowledge bases. In terms of *curricular knowledge*, data in the current study indicated that what the participating teachers knew about the curricular content appeared to be superficial in terms of the given language topics. Specifically, the teachers described the language topics specified in the textbook in terms of lexical items but overlooked the meaning that the topics entailed. In this manner, teachers' curricular knowledge suggested that they viewed the curriculum mostly in terms of linguistic items. Furthermore, findings on teachers' curricular knowledge indicated that the teachers considered the curriculum as a repertoire of grammatical and lexical items. As such, what the teachers knew about the curriculum in terms of its content seemed to illustrate a set of 'accumulated structural entities' (Rutherford 1987, p. 5) which contrast with the meaning focus that the curriculum entailed. In summary, teachers' curricular knowledge in this study suggested a structural approach that was modelled on discrete linguistic items as essential components of the curriculum.

The structural approach was prevalent in the data on the teachers' *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK). In contrast with TBLT theorists who claim that language teaching should focus on interaction between students in the classroom (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004), the data in the current study suggested that the participating teachers viewed teaching as a process of transmitting content knowledge. As shown in the findings, most teachers expressed the view that teaching should have a language content to focus on. Specifically, the teachers viewed teaching as a process that includes presentation of linguistic items, followed by extensive drills before developing communicative skills. The procedure of teaching that the teachers described seemed to follow Byrnes' (1986) teaching model, in which teachers presented specified language content, instructed students to practise it and then produce language using a pre-defined language form. In this respect, the teachers' PCK contrasted with the TBLT approach, which emphasizes online decision-making with language meaning rather than form (Ellis 2006). It was noted that in most teachers' descriptions, they proposed a pre-teach vocabulary section that focused on teaching new vocabulary. According to the teachers, relevant linguistic items (in terms of vocabulary and grammar) should be provided as prerequisites for students in the classroom, suggesting a

bottom-up teaching process in which linguistic items were the first items to be provided for students to accumulate. The teachers' PCK was thus not aligned with the TBLT principles that include the concepts of the input, interaction and output in the delivery of tasks in the classroom ([Section 2.1.2.2](#)).

Informed by the combination of Shulman's categories of teacher curricular knowledge and PCK, the current study has provided a detailed description of the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum in relation to their teaching. *Curricular knowledge* offered a systematic categorization of teachers' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum in terms of the curricular content as well as its organizational and instructional features. As shown in the findings, teachers' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum illustrated a strong focus on discrete linguistic items, demonstrating a focus-on-forms approach in the teachers' views of the curriculum. Further, the teachers' knowledge and understanding suggest that they viewed discrete linguistic items as the 'units of analysis' that constitute the curriculum. This view is opposed to the curriculum innovation that is modelled on tasks as the central units of analysis in its design and classroom instruction (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b). It should be noted that curricular knowledge is insufficient to depict the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum, as this type of knowledge focuses on teachers' knowledge of the curriculum as a subject matter only; therefore, it is exclusive of teachers' pedagogy (Shulman 1986). *Pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK), therefore, was used in connection with teachers' curricular knowledge to uncover their cognitions in relation to teaching the curricular content with a focus on classroom tasks used for teaching this content. As shown in the findings, the teachers' descriptions of their delivery of tasks in the classroom illustrated a structural, rather than a TBLT approach, in implementing the curriculum. Shulman has argued that PCK allows for an understanding of teacher knowledge that goes 'beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge *for teaching*' (Shulman 1986, p. 9, emphasis in original). Overall, findings reported on the teachers' cognitions indicated that the combination of Shulman's curricular knowledge and PCK allowed for the systematic characterization of teachers' cognitions in which curricular content was blended with pedagogy in such a way that depicted how tasks were perceived, organized and presented in the classroom. As such, curricular knowledge and PCK were complementary to each other in characterizing the teachers' cognitions in the current study.

Findings reported in the current study indicate that participating teachers' curricular knowledge and PCK were integral components of teachers' cognition about the curriculum innovation that they were teaching. Borg (2006), however, has argued that although teacher knowledge is a crucial part of teachers' cognitions, their beliefs play a no less important role in shaping the cognitions. As teachers' cognitions in the present study are defined inclusively both of teachers' knowledge and beliefs drawing on Borg's (2003, 2006) argument, it is necessary to examine teachers' beliefs in connection with their knowledge. The following section will look at the teachers' beliefs in the current study.

5.1.2 Teachers' beliefs

This section discusses findings on the participating teachers' beliefs and how their beliefs contribute to understanding teachers' cognitions in the present study. In general, data in the current study indicated that the participating teachers held strong beliefs about the role of linguistic items in teaching. Specifically, vocabulary and grammar as well as rote memorization were the central focus of their descriptions of classroom teaching.

Findings reported in the current study indicated that the participating teachers believed that they needed to provide students with lexical and grammatical exercises to practise language in the classroom. This belief was evidenced in the interview data where many teachers described their teaching procedures. For example, Grace said that she offered students 'more language exercises' so that the students could have more practice with the linguistic items. This practice suggests a focus-on-forms approach where discrete linguistic items were accumulatively taught to students in class. In TBLT, it is advocated that language teaching should focus on the use of language through introduction and completion of meaningful tasks. Attention to form (if necessary) was directed later in the lesson (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). The findings in the current study suggested that the teachers have not changed their beliefs towards the task-based curriculum. Fullan (2001) has noted that teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in the success of a curriculum innovation. To successfully implement change, teachers need to change their beliefs in accordance with the curriculum innovation. Teachers' strong beliefs about the role of vocabulary and grammar as demonstrated in the current study probably hindered the enactment of the task-based curriculum innovation in practice.

The participating teachers' beliefs about rote memorization in language teaching and learning have also influenced the way they taught in the classroom. This belief was evident in the teachers' descriptions of the teaching strategies they used in the classroom. According to the teachers, there were two reasons for emphasizing rote memorization. Firstly, the teachers believed that they needed to provide discrete linguistic items as the basis for English teaching. Extensive practice with linguistic items might help students to internalize the target language so as to develop communicative skills in language learning. The teachers indicated that they provided linguistic items and then conducted extensive drills to help students proceduralize the language (i.e., putting it into practice). In this manner, the teachers' reported teaching strategies illustrated a traditional approach in which communicative skills were developed on the basis of the mastery of linguistic items (Richards & Rodgers 2001). The teachers' beliefs in the current study, to a large extent, are consistent with Viet's (2013) observations, which found the teacher followed a traditional structural approach similar to the PPP teaching model (Byrne 1986) – presentation, practice and presentation of linguistic items.

Another reason that underpinned the teachers' focus on rote memorization of discrete linguistic items was their belief that memorization was beneficial in preparing students for the final examinations. According to the teachers, memorization of discrete linguistic items could enable students to achieve high scores in the final examination. The teachers' comments indicated that students' memorization of linguistic items is necessary and thus justified their emphasis in classroom teaching. In this sense, the teachers' beliefs in the current study lend support to Canh's (2011) study of form-focused instruction, which argued for the importance of lexical and grammatical forms in language teaching and the need to memorize the language forms to be successful in the examinations. Findings reported here suggested that the participating teachers believe learning a language involves memorizing as many linguistic items as possible. This can be explained in light of a structural approach where language is coded in terms of lexical and grammatical forms for students to learn (Richards & Rodgers 2001). The teachers' beliefs about the roles of linguistic items and rote memorization in the current study had little resemblance to the TBLT approach in which language is learnt through the processes of input, interaction and output (see [Section 2.1.2.2](#)). Through these meaning-focused processes, the teacher scaffolds learners' learning enabling them to use the target language in their own way (Ellis 2003a, 2006). Researchers have argued that students should be given opportunities

by the teacher to use language through meaningful communicative activities in the classroom (Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007). The participating teachers in the current study, however, emphasized an approach that highlights rote memorization manifested in traditional teaching methods, which viewed language learning as a process of discrete knowledge accumulation (Rutherford 1987).

In summary, findings reported in the current study indicated that in the participating teachers' knowledge and beliefs, vocabulary and grammar were the central elements constituting the curriculum. Teaching was viewed by the teachers as a process of transmission of linguistic items and involved extensive drills to help students memorize the target language. The teachers' knowledge and beliefs illustrate this traditional teaching approach that focuses on form rather than meaning. The approach is divergent from the TBLT embedded in the curriculum; therefore, this approach may influence teachers' classroom practices. As the focus of the current study was on teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices, the following section will discuss how the teachers' cognitions were reflected in their teaching via lesson plans and classroom observation data.

5.2 Teaching practices

This section discusses how the participating teachers' cognitions were reflected in their classroom teaching practices via the second subsidiary research question:

How do the participating teachers' cognitions permeate their classroom practices?

In general, findings reported from the lesson plans and classroom observations showed that the teachers' teaching practices were consistent with their cognitions about the curriculum. Specifically, their cognitions about the focus-on-forms approach were reflected in which activities the teachers selected to teach and how they sequenced the classroom activities. First, the lesson plan data indicated that the participating teachers selected vocabulary-based, closed-ended and form-focused activities. Canh (2011) and Viet (2013) have found that those teachers who used vocabulary-based and form-focused activities tend to adopt a focus-on-forms approach in teaching. Reflecting a similar view, Trang (2013) claimed that teachers who used more open-ended tasks were more in favour of TBLT than those who used closed-ended tasks in the classroom. The teachers' selection of tasks in the current

study showed an orientation to the focus-on-forms approach which was consistent with their cognitions.

Second, the order of tasks in the classroom observation data indicated that the participating teachers organized tasks in a single sequence, proceeding from vocabulary to grammar and ending in language reproduction. According to the teachers, they provided students with linguistic items first, then extensive language practice activities were conducted to enable the students to memorize the linguistic items and develop communicative skills by asking students to reproduce language using a predefined form. The teachers' sequence of tasks in the current study seemed to be aligned with Byrne's (1986) PPP teaching model, in which teachers develop communicative skills on the basis of learners' mastery of linguistic items (Richards & Rodgers 2001). In this sense, the teachers' order of tasks seemed to run counter to the TBLT frameworks of sequencing (e.g., Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). The teachers' sequence of tasks was thus consistent with their cognitions, aligning with the focus-on-forms approach that they had described.

Teachers' common orientation towards the focus-on-forms approach in implementing a task-based curriculum has been noted by some researchers in Vietnam (e.g., Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013) and other Asian contexts (e.g., Fang & Garland 2013; Zheng & Borg 2014). These researchers found a number of factors contributing to teachers' use of the traditional focus-on-forms approach in the classroom. Canh (2011) and Canh and Barnard (2009a), for example, claimed that the major factor that hindered the uptake of TBLT was teachers' inadequate knowledge and understanding of TBLT theories, resulting in teacher resistance to TBLT. Elsewhere, Fang and Garland (2013) found that Chinese teachers adopted the focus-on-forms approach because of their rooted beliefs about the traditional approach. These studies also claimed public testing systems as the major obstacles to the implementation of the task-based curriculum in classes. Nevertheless, little empirical data on teachers' testing practices was provided to support their claims. Given the task-based curriculum models on the three-dimensional interface of curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment (Nunan 2004), the current study explored teachers' cognitions and practices in relation to these dimensions and the findings were presented in the preceding chapter. To obtain further insights into the teachers' cognitions and practices of assessment, the following section discusses their testing practices drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) third message system, 'assessment'.

5.3 Testing practices

The teachers' testing practices were examined in the third subsidiary research question:

To what extent are the teachers' cognitions reflected in their classroom testing practices?

The findings generated from data in response to this research question indicated that all the teachers were explicit about the assessed content in their descriptions of classroom testing practices. Specifically, the teachers emphasized linguistic items (e.g., vocabulary and grammar) as the subject of assessment in classes. According to the teachers, their tests in the classroom needed to imitate the final examination so that students could be familiar with the examination format. In addition, most teachers reported that skill-based assessment should be used in testing; however, only reading and writing were tested. Speaking and listening were excluded from classroom tests. The teachers explained that the focus areas included linguistic items and reading and writing, which were modelled on the specifications of the tested content in the final examination. The teachers' descriptions illustrate a testing effect (e.g., McDaniel et al. 2007) in their principles of test design in the classroom. Roediger and Butler (2011) have found that the testing effect has serious consequences on classroom testing in that teachers ask students to take tests to enhance later performance by cramming similar materials for students' retention of content knowledge in their minds. Aligned with their beliefs in rote memorization of linguistic items, the teachers' descriptions of the assessed content indicated that they made the related content explicit in order to support students' rote memorization, and thus enhance retention of tested content so that students could achieve high scores on the final examination. In summary, the final examination had a strong testing effect on the teachers' classroom testing practices.

The testing effect was also evidenced in the analysis of the teachers' designed test papers. Data indicated that up to 69% of test questions used discrete linguistic items in the MCQ format and the other 31% used the form of controlled writing; no speaking and listening tests were conducted in the classroom. In line with the teachers' reports of testing practices in the interview data, their test papers illustrated an alignment with the format of the final examination, where recognition of discrete linguistic items and precise reconstruction of language were the objects of testing. This indicated a strong influence of the testing effect of the final examination on the teachers' testing practices in the classroom. Unlike task-

based assessment that focuses on the non-linguistic outcomes of language learners (Ellis 2003a; Ellis & Shintani 2014), teacher designed tests were used to assess their students' memorization and regurgitation of the target language in terms of linguistic items. In this sense, the teachers' testing practices were contrary to the principles of task-based assessment that the curriculum entailed (MOET 2007; Van et al. 2006b); however, the testing practices were aligned with their expectations of the final examination. Overall, both the teachers' cognitions and classroom testing practices were driven by the final examinations, which predominantly included discrete linguistic items via the MCQ format and regurgitation of knowledge in controlled writing and reading.

The findings in the current study suggested a mismatch between the task-based curriculum innovation and the final examination in the upper secondary school context examined in the current study. While the curriculum innovation was modelled on the TBLT approach that targets the development of students' communicative skills in four skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – the final examination focused on testing students' rote memorization of discrete linguistic items and regurgitation of given knowledge. It was likely that in order to enable students to pass the final examination, teachers in the current study embraced a traditional focus-on-forms approach that emphasized students' rote memorization of linguistic items, and students' retention of linguistic items in the final examination. This indicates a testing effect of the final examination on the teachers' classroom assessment practices (Roediger & Butler 2011). The findings reported from learner assessments were of great importance in the current study, as this is the first study in the Vietnamese context to examine teachers' classroom testing practices. These findings support the previous studies in Vietnam that have claimed there is a negative impact of the final examination on teachers' implementation of the curriculum innovation (Canh 2011; Viet 2013, 2014). In summary, the data in the current study provided empirical evidence of teachers' testing practices, offering further insights into the implementation of the task-based curriculum innovation in the Vietnamese context.

Overall, findings reported from this study demonstrate that the teachers' cognitions, classroom practices and assessment are all consistent, mirroring a structural approach that privileges form over meaning in the implementation of the task-based curriculum. It appears that the teachers' cognitions and classroom practices were divergent from the curriculum innovation. To further understand the teachers' cognitions and classroom

practices in the current study, the following section will discuss the findings in light of Bernstein's (1990, 2000) pedagogic discourse, the underpinning framework for this study.

5.4 Discussion

This section discusses findings on participating teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices in light of Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse. The section is structured into three subsections. The first section ([Section 5.4.1](#)) highlights the situated nature of teacher cognition, arguing for the use of an overarching framework that allows for characterizing teachers' cognitions in relation to the three major dimensions defining the curriculum innovation, including the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment. The second section ([Section 5.4.2](#)) provides an in-depth discussion of teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices in terms of the three message systems and instructional/regulative discourses – the structuring components of the pedagogic discourse – offering further insights into the connection between teachers' cognitions and pedagogic discourse in the local context. The final section ([Section 5.4.3](#)) suggests rethinking language teacher cognition research on curriculum innovation in terms of the three message systems in Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse in the local context.

5.4.1 *Situated nature of teachers' cognitions*

This section discusses two major characteristics of teachers' cognitions in the current study. First, findings reported from this study indicated that teachers' cognitions were situated within the local teaching context. Second, it seemed that the teachers' professional knowledge was downplayed by their experiential knowledge in teaching. These characteristics suggest a rethinking of teacher cognition research is required.

Findings in the current study indicated that all teachers articulated their beliefs about the task-based curriculum and these beliefs were similar to some extent. The teachers' beliefs in the current study appeared to support Breen et al's (2001) description of a 'collective pedagogy' (p. 497) when detailing teachers' beliefs about teaching in a context, meaning that teachers in the same context often share similar beliefs and thinking about their work. Phelan et al (2006) also took notice of the 'culture of sameness' (p. 176) when examining teachers' beliefs about teaching. It seems that the participating teachers in the present study expressed their cognitions in a manner similar to their colleagues in the teaching

community to which they belong. It was noted that one of the teachers, Rose, provided somewhat different views when talking about tasks at first; however, her teaching practices demonstrated similar patterns to those of other participants. It seems that Rose may have put aside her personal beliefs about teaching and chained herself to the teaching community. Lave and Wenger (1991) coined the term ‘community of practice’ to depict teachers’ beliefs and practices in the same context, and argued that teachers’ cognitions were situated in their community of practice. The empirical data in the current study supports this argument.

Furthermore, teachers’ knowledge (Shulman 1986, 1987) about teaching was downplayed by their experiential knowledge (i.e., knowledge developed through teaching practices that may be opposed to professional knowledge) in the local context. Findings reported in the current study suggest that the participating teachers tended to rely merely on their experiential knowledge in teaching. In a study of Vietnamese teachers’ form-focused instruction, Canh (2011) found that teachers’ experiential knowledge diverged from theories of TBLT as most teachers taught what their context demanded, rather than what the curriculum dictated. As a result, what the teachers demonstrated in the classroom ran counter to the curriculum innovation. Data in the current study indicated that teachers’ knowledge, drawing on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and PCK, was affected by contextual constraints (e.g., high-stakes examinations) in the local setting. Consequently, teachers managed to implement the curriculum in a way that was in concert with teaching to the test.

Overall, the findings of the current study suggest that teachers did not implement the curriculum in the way that was mandated by the official curriculum. Rather, the teachers drew on their own knowledge and beliefs to enact the curriculum in a way that they felt was relevant to their local school context. In Bernstein’s terms, the teachers had their own discourse about teaching in the local context and this discourse was different from the discourse that the curriculum entailed. In order to understand the pedagogic discourse that the teachers held in the classroom, Christie (1995) suggests examining the set of principles that operated in the context. The following sub-section provides a discussion in light of Bernstein’s (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse.

5.4.2 Teachers' cognitions and pedagogic discourse

This section discusses the findings on teachers' cognitions in terms of pedagogic discourse that the teachers held in their local context. Bernstein (1990) defines pedagogic discourse as a set of principles that teachers experience in a local context. This section examines the set of principles that seemed to dominate the teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices in the school context, in order to obtain further understanding of the teachers' implementation of the curriculum from the teacher cognition perspective.

Findings on the teachers' cognitions indicated that the participating teachers perceived discrete linguistic items as valid knowledge for teaching. It seemed that, in the teachers' cognitions, discrete linguistic items were viewed as central units of analysis in the official curriculum. According to Long and Crookes (1993), when teachers view linguistic items as the units of analysis in the curriculum, they are more likely to follow a traditional structural approach. The teachers' common use of a structural approach when implementing the task-based curriculum illustrated a principle of selection that focused on discrete linguistic items. Viewing the curriculum in this way may result in a focus-on-forms approach in the teachers' teaching practices, as teacher cognition researchers have argued that teachers' principles have considerable influence on the way they teach in the classroom (Breen et al. 2001; Burns 1996). Informed by Bernstein's concept of pedagogy in examining teachers' classroom practices, we now turn to examine two major principles that characterize the teachers' classroom practices – principles of selection and of sequencing – to further understand the teachers' classroom practices from a Bernsteinian perspective.

Regarding the principle of selection, data from the teachers' written lesson plans indicated that they commonly selected vocabulary-based, form-focused and closed-ended activities for teaching. In previous studies in Vietnamese contexts, Viet (2013) found that those teachers who selected form-focused and closed-ended activities were more likely to enact a structural approach in the classroom. Trang (2013) also argued that teachers who embraced TBLT tend to challenge their students with more meaning-focused activities. The findings reported from the teachers' lesson plans seemed to support the previous studies, suggesting a structural approach in the teachers' principles of selection of tasks for teaching. According to TBLT advocates, the types of classroom activities that the teachers selected illustrate an orientation to form (Nunan 2004; Willis & Willis 2007); therefore, they are not recommended for the practice of tasks in the classroom. The teachers' principle of task

selection thus ran contrary to TBLT principles; however, this principle was consistent with a focus-on-forms approach in teaching.

Regarding the principles of sequencing, the teachers' organization of tasks/activities in the classroom indicated that form-focused activities were prioritised over the meaning-focused activities in the classroom. It seemed that the teachers' sequencing of tasks followed a structural principle in which meaning is developed based on the mastery of form (Richards & Rodgers 2001). This sequence appeared to be opposed to the meaning-form sequence in TBLT where students are exposed to meaning first; form is only attended to later through noticing techniques in the post-task section (Ellis 2003a, 2006). In a study of form-focused instruction in Vietnam, Canh (2011) found that his teachers tended to teach in a way that was similar to Byrne's (1986) PPP teaching model. The teachers' sequence of tasks in the current study seemed to echo Canh's study findings, indicating a focus on forms in their principles of sequencing. As such, in both principles of selection and sequencing, the teachers in the current study had total control over what and how the curriculum should be delivered. However, what the teachers demonstrated in the classroom diverged from the TBLT principles for classroom practices (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004).

The last principle, the principle of test design, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of the three message systems, indicated that the teachers were explicit about both the assessed content and the form of assessment in their classroom testing practices. In terms of the assessed content, all teachers described discrete linguistic items as the main foci of assessment. In this sense, the teachers' assessed content in classroom tests indicated a strong focus on forms in testing. This focus was also prevalent in the teachers' forms of assessment. Specifically, data from test papers showed that the MCQ format and controlled writing (although it was not writing assessment from the TBLT perspective), which focused on recognition of linguistic items and/or regurgitation of given knowledge, were predominant in classes. The teachers' principles of test design in the current study reflect a strong testing effect that emphasizes retaining discrete linguistic items by rote memorization (Roediger & Butler 2011). This principle is contrary to task-based assessment which focuses on learners' skills and competence in using language for communication (Ellis 2003a).

Overall, having determined the set of principles interpreted from teachers' cognitions and classroom practices, it was clear that the participating teachers perceived and practised the

curriculum in a way that was opposed to its official goals. In light of Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, this thesis now turns to instructional/regulative discourses and recognition/realization rules to gain further insight into teachers' cognitions in the local school context.

According to Bernstein (1990), pedagogic discourse is made up of two types of discourse: instructional and regulative discourses. Instructional discourse is a discourse of specialized competences and skills which are intended in the curriculum; regulative discourse, on the other hand, is the discourse that creates the rules of social order in which the curriculum is enacted. As such, regulative discourse is context specific. Morais (2002) argues that in the classroom context, these two discourses are incorporated in such a way that regulative discourse always dominates instructional discourse. Considering the current study, instructional discourse refers to the set of principles of TBLT that the curriculum entails, and regulative discourse is the set of principles that describe the participating teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding the curriculum. Furthermore, the final examination provided a strong form of regulative discourse that governed the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Findings reported in this study indicate that the regulative discourse dominated the instructional discourse in such a manner that the intended curriculum was implemented in accordance with a traditional focus-on-forms approach. This contrasts with the goal of the curriculum innovation (Van et al 2006a, 2006b). This was surprising as all the teachers had attended textbook workshops prior to the implementation of the curriculum (see [Section 3.4.3](#)). To further understand this paradox in the teachers' implementation of curriculum, we turn to Bernstein's concepts of the recognition/realization rules in his theory.

Bernstein (1990) argues that 'recognition rules create the means of distinguishing between and so *recognizing* the speciality that constitutes a context' (p. 15, emphasis in original). In other words, the recognition rules define which meanings can legitimately be combined and which referential relations are prioritized. Realization rules, on the other hand, 'regulate the creation and production of specialized relationships internal to that context' (Bernstein 1990, p. 15). Specifically, realization rules regulate how the meanings are assembled to create a legitimate transmission of the curriculum. In this manner, the recognition rules and the realization rules are intertwined, demonstrating which competencies and skills are legitimate in a teaching context and how these competencies

and skills are transmitted. As shown in the findings from the present study, the teachers recognized discrete linguistic items as the central components of the curricular content; subsequently, their planned and actual classroom practices followed a focus-on-forms approach. Taken together, these two sets of rules allowed for a detailed characterization of how the curriculum was perceived, reproduced and eventually enacted in the local teaching context.

Overall, Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse offered a means for interpreting teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding the curriculum in the local school context. The three message systems located teachers' cognitions and classroom practices in relation to the three-dimensional interface that the task-based curriculum is modeled on (Nunan 2004). Pedagogic discourse, in particular, the instructional and regulative discourses, allowed the study to interpret teachers' beliefs and knowledge, and a set of principles (e.g., principles of selection, principles of sequencing and principles of test design) that regulated the teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices concerning the curriculum, offering further insights into the discrepancy between the curriculum intended by the authorities and the curriculum realized by teachers in the classroom. This is significant as previous studies have pointed out this discrepancy (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013). However, these previous studies tended to blame teachers for not implementing the curriculum in the way it was intended. Finally, the recognition and realization rules enabled an understanding of the teachers' cognitions and classroom practices based on the internal logic of the relationship between what and how the curriculum is implemented in the local context. In light of Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse, the current study argues that, while teacher cognition may be defined as a cognitive construct constituting teachers' knowledge and beliefs (e.g., Borg 2006), it should be seen as a social construct, regulated by social relations, power and control in the local context. The following section suggests rethinking teacher cognition research based on the findings in the current study.

5.4.3 Rethinking teacher cognition research

Based on the findings generated by this study, research into teachers' cognitions about language curriculum innovation should be rethought in terms of what to teach (i.e., the teaching content), how to teach (i.e., teaching methodology), and how to assess students in

the classroom (i.e., learner assessment) in the local teaching context. Each of these categories will be considered in light of the instructional and regulative discourses, and the recognition and realization rules (Bernstein 1977, 1990).

First, curricular content is one of the three important dimensions of the task-based curriculum (Nunan 2004); therefore, teachers' cognitions about this content area are important for the current research on curriculum innovation. Findings reported in this study have offered empirical evidence into teachers' cognitions about the curricular content. Based on the data collected from the participating teachers' comments about the curricular content, we come to know participating teachers' beliefs and knowledge about the *what* of teaching in relation to the task-based curriculum. Informed by Bernstein's concept of the first message system *curriculum*, the findings indicate that in the teachers' cognitions, discrete linguistic items were considered 'valid knowledge' for teaching. As such, Bernstein's concept of curriculum offers a typical perspective on teachers' cognitions about the curricular content. In comparison with previous studies that relied on questionnaire surveys (Canh 2007; Minh 2007), the data in the current study provided in-depth descriptions of teachers' cognitions about the curricular content using verbal reports from the teachers' interpretations of the content in close relation with their teaching.

Second, regarding how to teach, the current study explored the teachers' practices regarding the curriculum in terms of two major principles that are critical in the literature of TBLT: the principle of selection (i.e., what tasks are selected by classroom teachers) and the principle of sequencing (i.e., what order are tasks organized) (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004). According to Ellis (2003a) and Nunan (2004), these principles are of great importance in the delivery of tasks in the classroom as they reveal how teaching is related to TBLT principles of practice. Until now, however, few studies have depicted teachers' classroom practices in relation to these principles. Informed by Bernstein's concept of pedagogy, this study examined teachers' delivery of tasks with regards to how tasks were selected and sequenced. Data illustrating teachers' pedagogical practices was gathered from two sources, including written lesson plans and classroom observations. With these sources of data, we come to realize that the teachers employed a structural approach that privileges form over meaning in the classroom concerning the implementation of the task-based curriculum. In concert with their cognitions, the teachers' classroom practices showed a focus-on-forms approach that is based on discrete linguistic items in

implementing the curriculum. As such, Bernstein's concept of pedagogy allows us to capture *how* the curriculum is implemented in a way that is aligned (or not) with task advocates' recommendations for research into classroom practice of tasks (Ellis 2003a; Nunan 2004).

The third aspect of the curriculum innovation that the current study explored is teachers' testing practices, drawing on Bernstein's (1977, 1990) concept of assessment in the three message systems. According to Nunan (2004), testing is one of the key dimensions of the task-based curriculum that regulates curricular content and teaching pedagogy. Research in Vietnam and other Asian contexts has also claimed that there exists a negative impact of tests and examinations on the uptake of TBLT; however, very little empirical data was provided in those studies (Canh 2011; Carless 2007, 2009; Fang & Garland 2013; Nishimuro & Borg 2013; Viet 2013). Informed by Bernstein's concept of assessment, this study examined teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of testing with regard to the assessed content and form of assessment. The empirical data collected from interviews with participating teachers and their self-designed test papers revealed that the teachers' cognitions and practices of testing were aligned, and further, demonstrated a focus-on-forms approach that prioritized form over meaning in implementing the curriculum innovation.

Once teachers' cognitions and classroom practices are canvassed, it is important to understand the rationale behind the teachers' implementation of the curriculum and factors contributing to their cognitions. Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse allows for a comparison between the curricular discourse and participating teachers' discourse in terms of the set of principles articulated by curriculum leaders and those held by the teachers. In light of instructional and regulative discourses, the dominant discourse provides insights into teachers' cognitions in the local context. Furthermore, coupled with the sets of recognition and realization rules, 'the speciality of the context' (Bernstein 2000, p. 17) comes to light, offering insights into what content is accepted by the teachers and how this content is taught in the local classroom context. Bernstein (2000) concluded 'recognition rules regulate *what* meanings are relevant and realization rules regulate *how* the meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text' (p. 18, emphasis added). Overall, Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) concepts of the three message systems, pedagogic discourse, and the recognition and realization rules allowed for an in-depth examination

and characterization of teachers' knowledge, beliefs and their classroom practices in implementing the task-based curriculum, and hence, to grasp an overall and detailed understanding of teachers' cognitions in relation to the curriculum innovation in the local school context.

5.5 Conclusions

The findings presented in the current study indicate that in general, the participating teachers did not implement the curriculum in accordance with the TBLT approach intended in the official curriculum. From a teacher cognition perspective, teachers' knowledge and beliefs and their classroom practices regarding the task-based curriculum diverged from the theories and practices of the intended curriculum. The first conclusion in the current study was that the task-based curriculum innovation was not implemented in concert with TBLT theories by the participating teachers in the local school context. According to curriculum reform advocates (e.g., Fullan 2001; Markee 1997), the English curriculum innovation tended to fall short of its intended goal, which was the introduction of TBLT as the teaching approach in the classroom in the local context.

The second conclusion supported by the evidence presented in this study was that the teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices were strongly driven by the final examination that took discrete linguistic items in the MCQ format as the predominant testing focus. Findings reported in the current study illustrated the link between the final examination and the implementation of the curriculum. It should be noted that in the Vietnamese education system, the curriculum is governed by the Ministry of Education and Training (*Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo* - MOET) while the final examination is conducted by the Bureau of Education Assessment and Quality Assurance (*Cục Khảo thí và Kiểm định Chất lượng Giáo dục*), an organization independent of the MOET. The findings in this study suggest that these two organizations need to have the same points of view and approaches toward the curriculum innovation and the final examination in upper secondary schools.

The final conclusion generated from the findings of the current study was that the teachers had their own cognitions about the curriculum innovation, and that their cognitions may be different from the TBLT discourse that the curriculum entailed. This conclusion supports findings from other research on teacher cognition that, in enacting curriculum innovation,

teachers do not always follow the intended curriculum set by the authorities (e.g., Sakui 2004; Woods 1996); rather, teachers have their own beliefs and knowledge which must be recognized, and that they apply a curriculum in a manner which is in concert with their local context. The findings reported in the current study suggest that in any curriculum innovation, leaders and authorities should consider teachers' cognitions in connection with the curriculum discourse, making them aligned to ensure the success of the curriculum innovation.

From the teacher cognition perspective, the findings reported in this study have provided an in-depth picture of how the teachers perceived and implemented the task-based curriculum in a local Vietnamese upper secondary school. Based on the findings, important suggestions can be made for curriculum leaders, teachers and teacher trainers to take into consideration. The following sections will look at the implications of the current research in more details.

5.6 Implications of the study

This section suggests implications and recommendations for research into teachers' cognitions in terms of theoretical and methodological contributions of the current study. It also draws out implications and recommendations for language policy makers, teachers and teacher trainers in relation to L2 curriculum innovation in Vietnam or similar contexts. While most of the implications and recommendations are elaborated on the basis of the findings in the current thesis in relation to other studies, some are speculative from the findings and/or research procedures undertaken.

5.6.1 Implications for theory and research methodology

Teacher cognition is a complex construct which is personal, practical, systemic and implicit (Borg 2006). Therefore, one of the challenges for the current research was to examine and describe teacher cognition regarding the theoretical framework and the presentation of findings. To do so, combined theoretical perspectives with multiple methods of data collection were used in the current investigation. This section outlines the theoretical and methodological implications for research of teachers' cognitions based on the procedures and the findings from the current investigation.

In terms of theory, the current study offers several theoretical implications for research on teachers' cognitions. The first theoretical implication is the definition of teachers' cognitions in terms of teachers' beliefs and knowledge. Unlike previous studies of teachers' cognitions that mainly focused on teachers' beliefs (Barnard & Burns 2012; Borg 2006), this study combined teachers' beliefs and knowledge in an overarching construct named 'teachers' cognitions'. In the literature, the distinction between teachers' beliefs and knowledge is at best blurry (Borg 2006; Calderhead 1996; Pajares 1992); therefore, this combination allows the study to include the disputably more objective cognitions of different knowledge types (e.g., Shulman 1986, 1987) and the more subjective cognitions of teachers' beliefs. As shown in the process of inter-coding, the agreement between different coders was higher when teachers' beliefs and knowledge were combined into the overarching construct teachers' cognitions, suggesting that the overall concept can include teacher knowledge and beliefs, the two disputable constructs in teacher cognition research (Borg 2006). This combination is also in line with suggestions from teacher cognition research worldwide (Andrews 2006; Baker 2011, 2014; Borg 1998). In this respect, the definition of teachers' cognitions in the current study suggests a more practical way of combining teachers' beliefs and knowledge in teacher cognition research rather than viewing these concepts as separated constructs.

The second implication of this study is the use of Shulman's categories of teacher knowledge in research on teachers' cognitions. In particular, Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of teacher curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) grounded the current investigation of teachers' cognitions about the curriculum. Curricular cognitions represent the teachers' understanding of the curricular content and its organizational and instructional characteristics. As the English curriculum in Vietnam has topic-based content in its design (Van et al. 2006a, 2006b), teachers' cognitions about this content, its organizational features and instructional indications were of key importance in the study. In this respect, teacher curricular knowledge served to be a relevant concept for researching teachers' cognitions about the curricular content. Furthermore, Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) was also used in the current study to depict the teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in relation to their implementation of tasks in the classroom. As pointed out in the literature, teachers' cognitions might be different from their classroom practices (Barnard & Burns 2012; Borg 2006); therefore, a concept that allows the description of teachers' cognitions in relation to

their classroom practices was critically needed for the current investigation. Shulman's PCK served to be the most relevant concept that could bridge the differences between teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices. As shown in the data, what the teachers described about the curriculum was related to their teaching. In this respect, PCK enabled the study to depict the participating teachers' cognitions about the curriculum in the combination of content and pedagogy. As a result, most of the teachers' classroom practices were consistent with their cognitions, as interpreted from the interview data. Unlike previous studies in Vietnam which claimed inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Canh 2011; Viet 2013), Shulman's categories of teacher knowledge in the current study showed the alignment between beliefs and classroom practices of the curriculum. In this sense, Shulman's categories of teacher knowledge prove to be a useful concept in teacher cognition research.

The third theoretical implication is the use of a Bernsteinian perspective in the current research into teachers' cognitions, an undertaking that no previous studies in L2 teachers' cognitions have demonstrated. In response to Nunan's (2004) claim for an alignment of tasks in three dimensions of the curriculum innovation, this study drew on Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) notions of pedagogic discourse as the overarching framework to examine teachers' cognitions and classroom practices concerning the curricular content, pedagogy and learner assessment. The findings of the study showed that teachers' cognitions and practices were consistent across these three dimensions. This implies that Bernstein's (1977, 1990, 2000) concept of the three message systems interact with Nunan's (2004) three-dimensional interface of the task-based curriculum, illustrating an alignment between the two models in shaping the current research. Furthermore, the findings in the current study are significant as compared to previous studies, which found inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2007; Canh & Barnard 2009a). The three message systems have thus enabled the description of teachers' cognitions and practices based on Bernstein's concept of the three message systems. This contributes to the expansion of Bernstein's theory to the field of teacher cognition research, an undertaking that no prior research has yet demonstrated in the literature (see, Barnard & Burns 2012; Borg 2006). Furthermore, the present study highlights the importance of learner assessment in research into second language teacher cognition about curriculum innovation. This is significant as no previous studies in Vietnam or other Asian contexts have examined the teachers' testing practices in relation

to the English language curriculum innovation. In addition, the notions of instructional and regulative discourses, and recognition and realization rules in Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse, have helped to explain the relationship between the teachers' cognitions and their classroom practices in the local context. Overall, in terms of research theoretical framework, Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse and recognition and realization rules, coupled with Shulman's (1986, 1987) concepts of curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), serve to be a useful framework for studying teachers' cognitions and classroom practices, as demonstrated in the current study.

In terms of research methodology, the current study involved multiple methods of data collection to research teachers' cognitions, consistent with suggestions by Barnard and Burns (2012) and Borg (2006). In particular, this study included the data collection methods of teachers' written lesson plans, informal conversations and teachers' self-designed test papers. First, the participating teachers' written lesson plans served as an important source of data to examine how tasks were transformed from the curriculum into their L2 classes. According to Pajares (1992) and Borg (2006), written lesson plans can be used to capture teachers' cognitions through their dispositions toward classroom actions. The current study utilized teachers' written lesson plans as an integral source of data for exploring teachers' cognitions in the implementation of the curriculum. As illustrated in the findings chapter, the results generated from the lesson plans were consistent with other sources of data, such as the participants' verbal commentaries and their observed classroom practices. Informed by Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse, the written lesson plans serve as an important source of written text produced by participating teachers in implementing the curriculum innovation. In summary, the written lesson plans provided insights into teachers' practices regarding the curriculum that few studies in Vietnam or similar Asian contexts have demonstrated.

Second, informal conversations were also used to seek the participating teachers' views on their selection of tasks in the classroom. In the Vietnamese context, none of the previous studies has used interviewing strategies such as informal conversations in teacher cognition research. The most common verbal protocols that have been used are formal interviews (Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Loi 2011; Viet 2013) or surveys (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2007; Minh 2007). Due to the nature of recorded data in these methods (i.e.,

recordings of either spoken or written responses), participants may have felt constrained in answering the researcher's questions. Informal conversations thus proved to be a flexible method that can be used in research into teachers' cognitions, in particular in the context where teachers are constrained by a power-distance relationship between the participants and researcher. Ebsworth and Schweers' (1997) study of teachers' cognitions about grammar instruction in the USA and Puerto Rico also suggested using informal conversations in seeking the teachers' views. The findings in the current study indicated that together with other methods of investigation, informal conversations served as an important source of data. It should be noted that the use of informal conversations should be combined with other methods as well, so that the issues of credibility and trustworthiness are overcome in research methodology (see [Section 3.7](#)).

Third, the teachers' self-designed test papers were used as a source of data that illustrated how their cognitions were reflected in their testing practices. As indicated in the data, most teachers focused on testing discrete linguistic items and precise language production, suggesting consistency between the teachers' cognitions and their testing practices. In comparison with previous studies in Vietnam (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2011; Trang 2013; Viet 2013), this is the first study that conducted analyses of teacher-designed test papers in research into teachers' cognitions and practices. The results of these analyses provided an in-depth view of teachers' cognitions and practices in relation to their class testing, an important aspect of teachers' work in the classroom. Thus, the inclusion of teachers' self-designed test papers suggests that in studying teachers' cognitions, any type of teachers' work in the classroom should be included so that more empirical evidence is obtained.

Overall, this section has outlined the theoretical and methodological implications of the current study. In terms of theory, this study has combined Bernstein's (1990, 2000) concept of pedagogic discourse and Shulman's (1986, 1987) categories of teacher professional knowledge to examine teacher cognition, expanding the research literature by mingling Bernstein's idea of sociology of education with Shulman's teacher knowledge-based perspective, an undertaking that previous studies in the area of L2 teachers' cognitions have not yet demonstrated. In terms of empirical research, the current thesis has utilized a case study approach with multiple methods of data collection. In particular, these included teachers' written lesson plans and informal interviews as data sources. Overall,

this research has provided a new perspective, theoretically and methodologically, in research into teachers' implementation of the language curriculum innovation from a teacher cognition perspective in the Vietnamese context.

5.6.2 Implications for language policy makers, teachers and teacher trainers

This section discusses implications for language policy makers, teachers and teacher trainers. First, for language policy makers, the findings reported in the current study have provided evidence about the implementation of a task-based curriculum which was initiated by the government in a top-down system. With this system, Littlewood (2004) noted that: 'teachers in a wide range of settings are being told by curriculum leaders that this is how they should teach' (p. 319). Researchers from different contexts in Asia have pointed out that teachers' voices are rarely heard by curriculum leaders in these settings (Kam & Wong 2004; Nunan 2003; Yook 2010). The empirical findings in the current research, together with other studies in Vietnam (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013), argue that in general, the task-based curriculum failed to achieve the goal set out for the innovation. As a result, the findings in the current study have implications for the language policy makers with regard to the discrepancy between the goal set for the curriculum innovation and the final examination. As stated in the English curriculum innovation in Vietnam, the goal of the curriculum was to develop learners' communicative skills in using the target language for communicative purposes (MOET 2006). However, the final examination only assessed students in terms of discrete linguistic items (MOET 2007). This serves as a rule of social order, as in Bernstein's term of pedagogic discourse, regulating the transmission and acquisition of the curriculum. As illustrated by the findings on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices, the testing effect of the final examination influenced the teachers' selection of what to teach and how to teach it. Although the curriculum innovation had a stated goal of developing learners' communicative competence, all the teachers emphasized a focus-on-forms approach in the implementation of the curriculum. In this respect, the teachers' teaching practices diverged from the task-based curriculum, but this happened in a way that was consistent with the final examination – the rule of social order. Thus, a new rule of social order is required so that the curriculum innovation may be implemented successfully. This may mean that the Vietnamese Bureau of Education Assessment and Quality Assurance (*Cục Khảo thí và Kiểm định Chất lượng Giáo dục*), the organization that governs the final examination,

needs to align the testing items with the curriculum innovation. Only in this way can the teaching and testing approaches of the two organizations be made compatible, which could then foster implementation of the task-based curriculum in the classroom according to the intentions of the curriculum designers.

Second, the participating teachers in the current study, like their colleagues in other contexts in Vietnam (Barnard & Viet 2010; Canh 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard 2009a; Viet 2013), seem to lack theoretical knowledge of TBLT for the implementation of the task-based curriculum. As evidenced in the data, technical language related to contemporary literature regarding TBLT was absent from the teachers' comments describing their cognitions and practices in implementing the curriculum. In these circumstances, as pointed out by Canh (2011), teachers often refer to their experiential knowledge which is defined as 'taken-for-granted instructional behaviours and personal theories for practice' (Canh 2011, p. 227) in teaching the curriculum. Clearly, in these circumstances, the curriculum was not successfully implemented on the basis of TBLT theories and principles. Thus, an implication for classroom teachers is that in order to successfully implement the task-based curriculum, teachers need to develop their understanding of TBLT theories and principles. In order to do so, one of the possibilities is that opportunities for teacher professional development should be offered so that teachers can have better theoretical knowledge of TBLT and the curriculum that they are teaching.

The last implication is for me as the principal investigator in the current research. In doing this research, I have developed my understanding about the roles of teachers' cognitions in teaching. By examining the findings in this study, I have become well aware that teachers play a key role in the successful implementation of the curriculum innovation. Teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, as well as contextual factors, have remarkable influences on the way they teach. I started to understand that teaching is hard work, as teachers have to fulfil their role in relation to many influences both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers' cognitions play a central role in assisting the teacher to recognize and realize the curriculum in the context. As a teacher trainer, I have developed a better understanding of the teachers and their work in school. Through data collection in the school, I had close contact with the teachers, listened to their voices, looked at their lesson plans and test papers and observed their classroom practices. All these valuable experiences assisted my professional growth and enriched my knowledge of the teachers in

their local context. In addition, the current study helped me develop my research skills and expertise which I would not have otherwise mastered. Specifically, I have learned about methods of conducting research, analysing empirical data, the conventions of academic writing and expression in a second language such as English. Overall, through the study I have grown academically and become more confident with my profession as a teacher trainer in Vietnam in the context of curriculum innovation.

In summary, the current study has generated some practical implications for language policy makers, teachers and teacher trainers in Vietnam or similar contexts. For policy makers, this study suggests a readjustment of the examination system to better align with the task-based curriculum. This study also recommends more in-service training programs for teachers in local contexts who have little access to contemporary theories and principles in TBLT. For teacher trainers, this study suggests considering the teachers' actual classrooms in teacher training. In short, this study recommends that in order to be successful with the task-based curriculum innovation, not only school teachers but also educational authorities at different levels should take action to achieve the goals of the innovation in practice.

5.7 Limitations and delimitations

Despite contributions made to academic understanding of teacher cognition research as discussed above, the current study had several potential limitations. First, due to the nature of qualitative case study methodology, criticism may be on a single case which is incapable of producing a generalizing conclusion for a wider population. In the current case, the participants included six participating teachers in a standardized upper secondary school in a small city of Central Vietnam. These participating teachers are not likely to be representative of other colleagues, even those who share similar characteristics because a case is bounded by time, place and people (Yin 2009). Furthermore, teacher cognition can be affected by the school settings (Borg 2006). The location chosen for the current study was a standardized school that was different from other contexts that previous studies in Vietnam have explored, for example, schools for gifted students (Canh 2011; Trang 2013; Trang, Newton & Crabbe 2011), underprivileged schools in rural areas (Canh & Barnard 2009a) or schools in urban areas (Barnard & Viet 2010; Viet 2013). The current standardized school context was chosen because as a well-resourced school, the physical

setting was not then a negative influence on teacher cognitions which, as Borg (2006) has pointed out, is sometimes the case. Due to these features, the current study makes no claims beyond the data collected and the context in which it was situated.

The second limitation was with the researcher's experiences. As discussed in Chapter Three ([Section 3.3.4](#)), the researcher's past experiences as a teacher trainer might offer him both advantages and disadvantages, which may cause bias. Advantages included the close rapport with some teachers and this helped the researcher to gain the participants' trust and collaboration in conducting the research. However, being known to the participating teachers might also have some limitations. In particular, the teachers saw the researcher as an expert who had greater expertise, and this might have resulted in a Hawthorne effect (Mackey & Gass 2005), where the teachers try to tell their ideal perspectives, rather than what they actually thought and did in the classroom. In addition, the participating teachers agreed to have only one recorded interview, so that some information might be missing from the formal interviews that were audio recorded. To overcome this limitation, informal conversations were used as a handy method of data collection to ask for the teachers' views on any issues or problems that arose. In brief, this study had limitations in its nature as a small-scale qualitative case study design, including context specificity and low transferability in the results, as well as the position of the researcher in the teaching community where the research was conducted. To overcome these limitations, the following section will discuss the suggestions for future research in relation to the teachers' implementation of the curriculum innovation in Vietnam or a similar context.

5.8 Suggestions for future research

Based on the procedures undertaken and the findings of the current study, possible directions for future research are suggested. First, the present research is a small scale case study that involved six participants in the same school. As described in the findings chapter, the data provided by these participants was quite similar; there were few exceptions in the descriptions of the findings. A noted characteristic is that all the participants were experienced teachers in their thirties (see Chapter Three). The findings of the current study appear to be in concert with Canh's (2011) and Cham's (2013) study findings, that Vietnamese teachers' cognitions and practices can be affected by their community of practice. Therefore, future research should involve participants from

different age groups, wider teaching experiences and in different schools. Second, the results in the current study seemed to support Canh and Barnard's (2009a) and Viet's (2013) research findings about the focus-on-forms approach in the implementation of the curriculum; however, the findings contrasted with Trang's (2013) study that found TBLT was actually implemented. Given that the different results were generated by different teachers, in different contexts and with different textbook series (i.e., the advanced textbooks and the standardized versions), no insights have been obtained from a case study that enable comparisons among teachers in different contexts. Therefore, future research should look at a comparative case study (e.g., Druckman 2005) between different schools, so that further understanding of Vietnamese L2 teachers' cognitions in different school contexts would be gained. Furthermore, as most studies in the Vietnamese context were small scale case studies, it is suggested that a large scale study of how the curriculum is implemented should be considered by future researchers.

5.9 In summary

By exploring cognitions and classroom practices of six in-service teachers who were implementing the task-based curriculum in an upper secondary school, this study has made several contributions to academic understanding of teacher cognition. First, the study has found that in teaching, the teachers had their own discourse informing their classroom practices. This discourse may be different from the curricular discourse set by curriculum leaders and authorities. Therefore, it is important for language policy makers, curriculum leaders and teacher trainers to consider teachers' discourse in curriculum development. Second, the study has extended research into teachers' cognitions by combining two different frameworks, Shulman's (1986, 1987) categories of teacher knowledge and Bernstein's (1990, 2000) notion of pedagogic discourse. Shulman's categories of teacher knowledge allowed the study to look at teachers' cognitions about the task-based curriculum and Bernstein's pedagogic discourse enabled the characterization of the relationship between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices concerning the curricular content, teaching pedagogy and learner assessment. The findings have provided a detailed account of the teachers' cognitions and classroom practices and the relationship between them in a local school context. Finally, the study has demonstrated the value of utilizing multiple methods of data collection in teacher cognition research with regard to the methodology. In particular, this study employed a range of methods including teachers'

written lesson plans, informal conversations and test papers to research teachers' cognitions and practices with the task-based curriculum. The complementarity of these methods offers a range of insights into teacher cognition research. Overall, the study has achieved its goal of exploring Vietnamese teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective, generating greater academic understanding of Vietnamese EFL teachers and their approach to the curriculum innovation in a local upper-secondary school context.

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APPENDIX A: A LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal,

Six teachers at your school will be invited to participate in a doctoral research project conducted by Mr Tran Giang Nam, a doctoral candidate at the University of Wollongong. The project is entitled: *Investigating teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective: A case study in a Vietnamese upper-secondary school*. We write to seek your approval and assistance to conduct research.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the participating teachers' cognitions and practices of the current English language curriculum in the Vietnamese upper-secondary school.

Approval is sought to visit the school for a period of 4 months, from September 2011 to January 2012. During that period of time, the researcher would like to interview each teacher for approximately half an hour on what their opinions about the curriculum, followed by classroom observation for two or three lessons (45 minutes), and a number of informal conversation interviews in relation to the lessons. All the interviews and observations will be recorded with the consent of the participants. In addition, the research will need to have access to some documents such as the curriculum guidelines, teachers' lesson plans, and the teachers' self-designed test papers.

The research is being funded by a joint scholarship between the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the University of Wollongong, and ethics has been reviewed by the University of Wollongong's Human Research Ethics Committee. In addition, a letter of permission to conduct research in public school is granted by Ha Tinh Provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET). Please find attached to this letter the Participant Information Sheets for the teachers.

The findings of this research will provide a better understanding of teachers' cognitions and classroom practices concerning the current English language curriculum innovation in Vietnam. If there are any ethical concerns you can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong on (+612) 42214457.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact members of the research team whose names and contact details are provided below.

Yours sincerely,

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APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

TITLE: *Investigating teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective: A case study in a Vietnamese upper-secondary school.*

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by a doctoral candidate at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate Vietnamese upper-secondary school teachers' cognitions and classroom practices of the current English language curriculum innovation in Vietnam.

INVESTIGATORS

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METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in interviews and classroom observations over a period of four months. Each teacher will be interviewed (semi-structured) before the classroom observation and attended about five informal short conversations (two or three minutes each). Each semi-structured interview will last about half one hour. Furthermore, each participant teacher will have and two or three 45-minute lesson observations. We wish all the interviews to be audio-recorded, and observed lessons will be video-recorded with the consent of the teaching participants. The tapes and transcripts will be securely stored in a locked cupboard in the researchers' office, and no one other than the researchers will have access to these materials. The data will be seen only by the researcher and his supervisors, the names of all the teachers and the school will be assigned pseudonyms and care will be taken to ensure that no individual can be identified from the eventual thesis, or from any resulting publication.

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Apart from your time for the interview (approximately half an hour for each) and observing your teaching (two or three 45-minute lessons), we foresee no risks for you. Your

involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Wollongong.

FUNDING AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This study is funded by a joint scholarship between the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the University of Wollongong. This research will provide insights into the teachers' implementation of the current English curriculum innovation in Vietnam. Findings from the study will contribute to English language education policy in Vietnam. Confidentiality is assured: the school, you and the students will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the University of Wollongong Ethics Officer on (+612) 4221 4457 or by email: rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

TITLE: *Investigating teachers' implementation of the task-based curriculum from a teacher cognition perspective: A case study in a Vietnamese upper-secondary school.*

RESEARCHER'S NAME: TRAN GIANG NAM

I have been given information about the research on teachers' cognitions and classroom practices and discussed the research project with Mr Tran Giang Nam who is conducting this research as part of his doctoral degree supervised by Dr Honglin Chen and Dr Wendy Nielsen in the Faculty of Education, the University of Wollongong, Australia.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research, which include no significant risks, and have had an opportunity to ask Mr Tran Giang Nam any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdraw consent will not affect my professional identity or any performance at my workplace, or my relationship with the University of Wollongong.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Mr Tran Giang Nam (email: gnt950@uowmail.edu.au) or his supervisors: Dr Honglin Chen (email: honglin@uow.edu.au) and Dr Wendy Nielsen (email: wnielsen@uow.edu.au) or if I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on (+612) 4221 4457 or by email: rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to (tick the appropriate boxes):

- ☐ participate in recorded interviews conducted by Mr Tran Giang Nam for the research purposes,
- ☐ allow for observing my classroom teaching and video-recording the lessons, and
- ☐ provide related documents (such as lesson plans, curriculum documents, and test papers).

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for a doctoral research study and possible scholarly publications and conference presentations, and I consent for it to be used in this manner.

☐ I have read and understood all the information given in this form.

Signed

Date

.....

...../...../ 2011

Name (please print)

.....

APPENDIX D: PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW

I. General questions:

1. Could you tell me when you started teaching English?
2. Do you like teaching English? Why/why not?
3. Can you tell me a nice experience you have in your teaching career?
4. Have you ever attended any teacher training workshop? If yes, when did you attend? Do you think that the workshops are useful or not? Can you tell me more about that?
5. How about in curriculum innovation? Do you think that the current curriculum is relevant? Can you tell me more about your points of view?

II. More specific questions:

6. In terms of the curriculum content, what do you think about the curriculum in terms of its topic-based content? Can you provide more details?
7. Do you think the topic-based content can be taught with tasks? Why/ why not? Do you think that the sequence of tasks provided in the textbook is suitable for the delivery of tasks in the classroom?
8. What do you think about the role of vocabulary and grammar in the implementation of tasks?
9. Do you think that this content can enable or hinder the delivery of tasks in the classroom? Why do you think so?
10. If you could change the curriculum content, what would you like to do? Why?
11. Do you believe that you can perform well with the curriculum content? Why/ why not?
12. In terms of the teaching methods, what do you think about the TBLT approach which is imbedded in the curriculum? Do you think that you can deliver tasks in the classroom?
13. Do you think that the TBLT approach can improve your students' communicative skills? Why/why not?
14. Do you think it is good to teach communicatively? Why/ why not?
15. With regard to learner assessment, can you tell me what you wish to test? Why? What techniques you often use to assess you students' learning? Can you describe in more detail?
16. What do you think about task-based assessment (e.g. regarding speaking, listening, reading, and writing)? How do you carry out in your classrooms?

17. What do you think about the multiple choice test format (MCQ) that is used in the final examination? How does this exam affect your teaching? Can you say in more detail?
18. Do you think the assessment is getting on well with the proposed teaching content and methods in the curriculum innovation? Why/ why not?
19. If you could make change to the assessment, what would you like to do? Can you explain in more detail?
20. In general, what do you think about the curriculum innovation? Do you believe that the goals of the curriculum will be achieved? Why/why not?
21. Is there anything you would like to add to our interview today?

Thank you for answering my questions. Wish you success in your teaching!

APPENDIX E: A WRITTEN LESSON PLAN SAMPLE

Unit 8: CELEBRATIONS

LESSON A: READING

A. Aims: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- + Develop reading strategies such as scanning for specific information and guessing the meaning in the context of use.
- + Use the information they have read to develop discussions on the topic.

Lexical items: Help students know something about the Tet holidays

Teaching aids: Textbook, lesson plan, pictures, chalks, posters.....

B. Teaching Procedures:

1	<p><u>I. Pre-reading:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ask sts to tell your partner which of these activities you enjoy doing most at Tet .Are they any other things you like doing? -Go round and help -Call on sts to present their answers and elicit comment from other sts <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. making banh chung c. eating special Tet foods e. going to the pagoda g. receiving 'lucky money' </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. decorating the house d. going to the flower market f. watching fireworks h. visiting relatives and friends </div> </div> <p>• <i>Vocabulary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lunar New Year: (translation) Tết âm lịch - kumquat tree: Cây quất - lucky money: tiền mừng tuổi - fall between ...and...: rơi vào khoảng thời gian - candied fruit: mứt - positive comments: những lời chúc mừng tốt đẹp 	
2	<p><u>II. While reading:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ask sts to read the text about 4 minutes <p>* Task 1: Find what the following words mean in the text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Give instructions -Ask sts to discuss the meaning of the words based on the contexts of the sentences - Go round and offer help 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check sts understanding by asking them to provide the Vietnamese <p>Keys:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. grand: to, lớn, hoành tráng 2. agrarian: thuộc về nhà nông 3. banner: băng rôn, khẩu hiệu 4. pray: cầu nguyện 5. sugared apples: mút táo 6. excitement: sôi nổi, hào hứng 	
3	<p><i>Task 2: Decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give instructions - Run through the statements - Ask sts to read the statement carefully and discuss with their friends - Call on sts to report their answers and ask them to explain their choices - Give correct answers <p>Keys:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.F (it falls between 19th January and 20th February) 2.F (it's just for agrarian people) 3.T 4.F (Lucky money tends to be given to children) 5.T 6.T 	
4	<p><i>Task 3: Answer the following questions.</i></p> <p><i>LUCKY NUMBER</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give instructions (ask sts to look at the textbook-) - Divide sts into pairs - Run through the sentences or phrases - Ask students to read the questions carefully then answer the questions given in the textbooks. - Ask students to read the reading again then do task 3 in pairs orally. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask sts to ask and answer the questions - Go round and help - Call on sts to ask and answer - Correct the students' answers and give suggested answers. - Ask students to rewrite the sentences basing on the information given. <p>(2 & 5 are lucky number, right answers and lucky numbers are 10 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Keys:1.It's sometime between 19 January and February 2. For months 3. They are decorated with colored lights and red banners. 4. They buy gifts, clean and decorate their houses and cook traditional foods 5. It's made from sticky rice, green beans and fatty pork. 6. It is candied fruit such as sugar apples, plums or tomatoes 7.Visiting friends and other family members, exchanging wishes, going to the pagoda, playing games etc 	
5	<p><u>III. Post-reading:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ask sts to work in groups to tell each other about their last Tet holiday -Go round and help -Call on sts to report their ideas to the class -Elicit corrective feedback from other sts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how you prepared for Tet • how you decorated your houses • who you visited • what special foods you are • what activities you enjoyed doing most during Tet 	
	<p><i>C.HOMEWORK:</i> Ask students to learn by heart new words</p>	

APPENDIX F: A 45-MINUTE TEST PAPER SAMPLE

I. Choose the word whose underlined part is pronounced differently from the rest:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. A. parachute | B. <u>ch</u> ampagne | C. <u>ch</u> ivalry | D. church <u>g</u> oer |
| 2. A. sol <u>ve</u> d | B. practis <u>e</u> d | C. rais <u>e</u> d | D. explain <u>e</u> d |
| 3. A. <u>th</u> ese | B. <u>th</u> eory | C. wor <u>th</u> | D. <u>th</u> reaten |
| 4. A. behav <u>e</u> s | B. hous <u>e</u> s | C. heritag <u>e</u> s | D. diseas <u>e</u> s |
| 5. A. fri <u>e</u> nd | B. s <u>e</u> condary | C. spec <u>i</u> al | D. secret |

II. Choose the best answer:

6. I saw an accident.
A. Before we have walked to school B. When we walked to school
C. After we had walked to school D. While we were walking to school
7. She was of hearing about their trip to India.
A. keen B. bored C. tired D. interested
8. When I came to visit Mike,
A. he is listening to music B. he will listen to music
C. he was listening to music D. he has listening to music
9. You can't always insist on your own way - There has to be some give and
A. to B. make C. take D. do
10. When I first him, he in a restaurant.
A. was working / was meeting B. met / worked
C. met / was working D. was meeting / worked
11. They let their children up late at weekends.
A. to stay B. staying C. stayed D. stay
12. We all said, " " ! before Nam blew out the candles on the birthday cake.
A. Happy birthday to you B. Happy New Year
C. Happy anniversary D. Congratulations
13. Their lasted a lifetime.
A. friendly B. friendship C. friendliness D. friend
14. David is so He only cares about himself, not about other people.
A. generous B. modest C. selfish D. embarrassing
15. He enjoys the crossword puzzle in the newspaper today.
A. doing B. making C. filling D. A or C

III. Put the suitable preposition(s) in each of the following blanks:

16. Many people seem to be incapable having a good friendship.
17. He's quite careless danger.
18. She's very nervous the new boss.
19. Two friends should be loyal each other.
20. I've been so anxious you.
21. This service is free charge.
22. They went ahead contrary my advice.
23. He was married Sue for a day.
24.the devil and the deep blue sea.
25. With the money I bought the pretty hat my dreams.

IV. Use the correct tense:

26. When I (*arrive*), the teacher (*write*) on the blackboard.
27. When we (*come*), the dinner (*already begin*)
- 28 He made us (*do*) it carefully.
- 29 I want (*see*) the house where Shakespeare was born.
30. She enjoys (*go*) out with her friends at weekend.

V. Finish the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first one, beginning with the given words or phrases:

31. "Don't forget to take the holiday," John said.
→ John reminded
32. "You should take a holiday," John said.
→ John
33. "Why don't you organize an English competition for our student?" said Ms Lien.
→ Ms Lien suggested
34. "I'm sorry I'm late," said Mr Thanh.
→ Mr Thanh apologized
35. "Me? No, I didn't take Sue's calculator" Said Bob.
→ Bob

APPENDIX G: A LESSON OBSERVATION TRANSCRIPT SAMPLE

A Reading lesson, Grade 12, UNIT 4: SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

1	Ss:	Good morning teacher.
2	T:	Good morning. Thank you, Sit down.
3	Ss:	Keep silent please. //// Don't talk. Keep silent.
4	T:	Would you like to play a game?
5	Ss:	Yessss
6	T:	(Write on BB) HCOSOL, ONIEDUCTA, STEMYS,
7		Now, look at the blackboard, these are some words whose letters are not in
8		order. Please put them in order to make the correct words. Do you understand?
9		That means you have to reorder the letters to make meaningful words. We have
10		three words, one, two, three... three words. //// OK? The first. Can you (T
11		pointed at one student)
12	S1:	School
13	T:	School. Good (T wrote on BB). The whole class, do you agree?
14	Ss:	Yeah
15	T:	Very good. /// The second word? Ngoc (pointed at one student)
16	S2:	Education
17	T:	Education, education. Good. Do you agree, class?
18	Ss:	xxxx
19	T:	Yes or No?
20	Ss:	Yesss.
21	T:	The last one? (Pointed at one student)
22	S3:	System
23	T:	Yes, system. Right?
24	Ss:	Yes.
25	T:	Yes, school education system. In Vietnamese? (pointed at one student)
26	S4:	hệ thống giao duc
27	T:	Yes, hệ thống giao duc phổ thông. Hệ thống giáo dục hoặc hệ thống giáo dục
28		phổ thông. Yes, OK.
29		Today we are going to read a passage about the school education system in
30		England. Yes, we have some new words.
31	T:	(wrote on BB) Thursday October 20 th , 2011.
32		UNIT 4: SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM
33		Lesson 1: Reading
34		I) Vocabulary
35	T:	First word. How do you say “bắt buộc” or “có tính bắt buộc” in English? Hoai
36		(name of a student)
37	S5:	Thưa thầy (trans: dear teacher), “compulsory”
38	T:	Yes, compulsory. The whole class, repeat after me: “compulsory, compulsory”.
39	Ss:	Compulsory, compulsory.
40	T:	(both spoke and wrote on BB) Com-pul-so-ry (adj)
41	T:	What does it mean, class?
42	Ss:	Bắt buộc, có tính bắt buộc.
43	T:	Right, that's right.
44	T:	(wrote on BB) ... School year. What it means?

45	Ss:	Nam hoc
46	T:	Yes. What is another phrase for school year? Ngoc
47	S6:	Academic year
48	T:	Academic year. Academic year. The whole class, repeat, Academic year.
49	Ss:	Academic year
50	T:	Academic year
51	Ss:	Academic year
52	T:	(wrote on BB) Academic year: năm học
53	T:	OK (drew 2 straight lines on BB)
54		Now look. I have two straight lines. Two straight lines, one and two. How are
55		these two straight lines? How are these two straight lines?
56	Ss:	Song song
57	T:	Yes, in English
58	Ss:	(pointed at one student) do you know?
59	S7:	Parallel
60	T:	Yes, parallel, parallel. The whole class, repeat, parallel, parallel.
61	Ss:	Parallel, parallel
62	T:	(wrote on BB) Parallel (adj): song song.
63	T:	Good, whole class, listen to me. In Ha Tinh city, there are two school systems,
64		Phan Dinh Phung and Thanh Sen are... are... what? //// Hoang Xuan Han is ...
65		high school?
66	Ss:	xxxxx
67	T:	In Ha Tinh city, there are two school systems, (T wrote on BB) Phan Dinh
68		Phung and Thanh Sen are... are... schools. But Hoang Xuan Han is ... school.
69		What can you fill here? (point to the dots). Can you? (pointed at one student)
70	S8:	State.
71	T:	State school? Yes, that's right. Vietnamese?
72	Ss:	Truong cong lap.
73	T:	Yes, truong cong or truong cong lap. Right. The whole class, repeat after me,
74		state school, state school.
75	Ss:	State school, state school.
76	T:	(wrote on BB) State school: truong cong lap
77		Now, look at Hoang Xuan Han school here. What is different?
78	Ss:	Dan lap.
79	T:	In English?
80	Ss:	Independent school.
81	T:	Yes, independent school. Vietnamese?
82	Ss:	Truong dan lap
83	T:	The whole class, repeat after me. Independent school
84	Ss:	Independent school, Independent school
85	T:	(wrote on BB) Independent school: truong dan lap (tu thuc)
86		Ok, now. How do you say "chuong trinh hoc" in English? "chuong trinh hoc"?
87	Ss:	Curriculum
88	T:	Yes, curriculum, curriculum, curriculum. Now, the whole class, repeat,
89		curriculum.
90	Ss:	curriculum
91	T:	curriculum
92	Ss:	curriculum
93	T:	(wrote on BB) Curriculum (n) chuong trinh hoc
94	T:	The last word, how do you say "mon hoc chinh" in English? Yes, you please

95	S:	Core subjects
96	T:	Yes, core subjects, core subjects. Whole class, repeat, core subjects, core
97		subjects
98	SS:	Core subjects, core subjects
99	T:	(wrote on BB) Core subjects: mon hoc chinh /////
100		Have you finished? Have you finished writing?
101	Ss:	Yeah, yeah.
102	T:	Whole class, repeat after me. Compulsory
103	Ss:	Compulsory
104	T:	Academic year
105	Ss:	Academic year
106	T:	parallel
107	Ss:	parallel, parallel
108	T:	State school
109	Ss:	State school
110	T:	Independent school
111	Ss:	Independent school
112	T:	Curriculum
113	Ss:	Curriculum
114	T:	Core subject
115	Ss:	Core subject
116	T:	Core subject
117	Ss:	Core subject
118	T:	Core subject
119	Ss:	Core subject
120	T:	Curriculum
121	Ss:	Curriculum
122	T:	Independent school
123	Ss:	Independent school
124	T:	State school
125	Ss:	State school
126	T:	parallel
127	Ss:	parallel
128	T:	Academic year
129	Ss:	Academic year
130	T:	Compulsory
131	Ss:	Compulsory
132	T:	(Pointed at one student). Can you read again?
133	S:	Compulsory, academic year, parallel, state school, independent school,
134		curriculum, core subject.
135	T:	Yes, curriculum, curriculum. Hoai (pointed at one student), read again.
136	S:	Compulsory, academic year, parallel, state school, independent school,
137		curriculum, core subject.
138	T:	Good, thank you. Another student.
139	S:	Compulsory, academic year, parallel, state school, independent school,
140		curriculum, core subject.
141	T:	Ok, the whole class, repeat after me one more time.
142	T:	(Read and knocked the ruler on BB) Compulsory, academic year, parallel, state
143		school, independent school, curriculum, core subject.
144	S:	(Repeated) Compulsory, academic year, parallel, state school, independent

145	school, curriculum, core subject.
146	T: OK, learn new words by heart at home.
147	
148	II) Reading:
149	Task 1: T/F statements
150	T: (hang a poster on BB) the poster said: read the passage and decide whether the
151	statements are true or false:
152	1. Students in England finish their compulsory education at the age of 18.
153	2. The school year in England starts in September and finishes in May.
154	3. Most of children in England go to state schools.
155	4. The National Curriculum which is taught in the state school has 12 subjects.
156	5. The compulsory education consists of two levels.
157	T: OK, the whole class. Close your books, close your books.
158	Ss: (closed their books)
159	T: Look at the board. Look at these statements. Look at these statements and guess
160	if these statements are true or false. Guess, only guess. You know? OK, read and
161	guess.
162	<i>(Three minutes later)</i>
163	T: How many statements are there?
164	Ss: There are five
165	T: Do you have any new words? Do you have any new words? /// Consist? (pointed
166	at the word on BB)
167	Ss: bao gom
168	T: Yes, bao gom. //// Have you finished? Number 1, true or false? Can you guess?
169	S: False
170	T: (wrote F on BB) OK, just guess. Number 2? Yes, you.
171	S: True.
172	T: (wrote T on BB) Thank you. Number 3? You.
173	S: False.
174	T: (wrote F on BB) Number 3?.
175	S: False.
176	T: (wrote T on BB) Number 5?.
177	S: True.
178	T: (wrote T on BB) OK. These are (pointed on BB) are your guesses. Now, please
179	open your book. And read the passage in your book to decide whether the
180	statements are true or false. Open your book at page 45, page 45. Read the
181	passage and check. Quickly.
182	<i>(Five minutes later)</i>
183	T: have you finished?
184	Ss: Yes
185	T: Good/// Now, number 1, true or false? And explain why you think it's true or
186	false? Hieu, please.
187	S: One is false.
188	T: Why? Can you tell me the information about it?
189	S: students in England complete compulsory at the age of five to sixteen.
190	T: Yes, at the age of 16, not 18. Right? So, number one is False. Good. OK. Number
191	2? Luong?
192	S: It's false.
193	T: False? Why?
194	S: School in England starts in September and finishes in July.

195	T:	July, yes. The school year in England starts in September and finishes in July.
196		Not in May. So, number 2 is false. Good. Number 3? Number 3, Hieu?
197	S:	False.
198	T:	False, Maybe. Who has another idea? Who has another idea? Có ý kiến khác
199		không? Hoai, do you have another idea?
200	S:	It's true.
201	T:	True? Why do you think it's true?
202	S:	Because ... (xxxxxxx)
203	T:	Whole class, please look at line 4 in paragraph 2. Look at the line 4 in the
204		paragraph 2. Can you see it? Line 4 paragraph 2. Dòng 4 đoạn văn thứ 2. (T
205		read) The state school system educate 93% of pupils in England, that means
206		number 3 is true. Yes, true. OK. Number 4? Hoa Nghi
207	S:	False.
208	T:	False. Why do you think is false?
209	S:	There are eleven subjects
210	T:	Yes, there are eleven subjects, not twelve subjects. Right? /// Eleven subjects, so
211		number 4 is false. Good. ..(T read from the textbook...) Yes, only eleven, not
212		twelve. Number 5, Ngoc.
213	S:	True.
214	T:	Can you tell me the levels of compulsory education?
215	S:	Primary and secondary education.
216	T:	Yes, primary and secondary education. So number 5 is true. Good, very good.
217		Thank you.
218		
219	Task 2:	Answer the questions
220	T:	Whole class, please open your book at page 46. Open your book at page 46.
221		Look at the task 1, sorry, look at the task 2 "Answer the questions", How many
222		questions are there?
223	Ss:	There are six.
224	T:	Yes, there are six. (Then T read aloud):
225		1) When do children in England start their compulsory education at school?
226		2) How many terms are there in a school year in England?
227		(Paused to ask) " terms "?... Do you know this word?
228	S:	Học kì (<i>trans: terms</i>).
229	T:	"Học kì", yes.
230		3) What are the two school systems in England?
231		(Paused to ask) " school systems "?...
232	S3:	Hệ thống giáo dục (<i>trans: school systems</i>)
233	T:	"Hệ thống giáo dục", right. (T continued reading aloud)
234		4) Do children have to pay fees if they go to "independent" or "public"
235		schools?
236		(Paused to ask) Do you know " fees "?
237	S4:	Học phí (<i>trans: fees</i>).
238	T:	How many core subjects are there in the national curriculum?
239		Core subjects? Core subjects?
240	Ss:	Mon học chính.
241	T:	When do students have to take the GCSE examination? GCSE examination?
242		GCSE? General Certificate of Secondary Education. Kỳ thi tốt nghiệp phổ
243		thông. Right? Please read the passage again and answer the question.
244		Quickly. Read the passage and answer the question.

245		If you have any new words, please ask me. ...
246		Don't forget to read the information in the table...
247		(5 minutes later)
248		Have you finished?
249	Ss:	Yes
250	T:	OK. Very good.
251	T:	Question 1, who can ask and who can answer? Yes, you and you please
252		(pointed at two students) You ask and you answer. You read this question and
253		you answer.
254	S1:	When do children in England start their compulsory education at school?
255	S2:	From the age of five.
256	T:	From the age of five. Right. (T wrote on BB) From the age of five. Or when
257		they are five years old. OK. Question 2? You and you please.
258	S3:	How many terms are there in a school year in England?
259	S4:	There are three terms.
260	T:	Yes, there are three terms. Yes, right. (T wrote on BB) There are three terms.
261		What are they? Can you tell me the name of these terms?
262	Ss:	Autumn, Spring and Summer.
263	T:	Yes, Autumn, Spring and Summer. Yes, Autumn, Spring and Summer. Good.
264		Number 3? Who can ask and who can answer? Luong and Hoa?
265	S5:	What are the two school systems in England?
266	S6:	The first system is state school and the second is independent school.
267	T:	Yes, they are state school and independent school systems. Right? (T wrote on
268		BB) They are state school and independent school systems. Number 4?
269		Question 4. Who can? Son and Ngoc, Ngoc asks and Son answers. Louder.
270	S7:	Do children have to pay fees if they go to independent or public schools?
271	S8:	Yes, they do.
272	T:	Yes, they do. (T wrote on BB) Yes, they do. Good. OK, number 5? How many
273		core subjects are there in the national curriculum? Who can ask and who can
274		answer? Raise your hand please. Yes, Hieu you ask and Linh you answer.
275	S9:	How many subjects are there in the national curriculum?
276	S10:	There are three.
277	T:	There are three. What are they?
278	S:	Yes, they are English, Maths and Science.
279	T:	Yes, they are English, Maths and Science. Good. The last question, Yen can
280		you ask and Hoai, can you answer?
281	S11:	When can students take the GCSE examination?
282	S12:	When they finish secondary school.
283	T:	When they finish secondary school. Good. Thank you, sit down. (T wrote on
284		BB) When they finish secondary school. Right.
285		We move to another task.
286	Task 3:	(T wrote on BB) Ask your partner about the current curriculum they are
287		studying, using the following cues:
288		1. Who/ your/ current curriculum/ set/ by?
289		2. How many/ subjects? What/ are/ they?
290		3. What/ core subjects?
291		4. What/ you/ think/ about/ curriculum?
292	T:	Whole class, do the task three. (T read from the BB) ask your partner about the
293		current curriculum, (paused to ask) current curriculum? In Vietnamese?
294	Ss:	chuong trinh hoc hien tai.

295	T:	Yes, chương trình học hiện tại. ... Cues? Vietnamese? Su gọi ý. (T read from
296		the BB)
297		1. Who/ your/ current curriculum/ set/ by?
298		2. How many/ subjects? What/ are/ they?
299		3. What/ core subjects?
300		Please use these as keys and make questions to ask your partner about the
301		curriculum they are studying. Quickly.
302		The first question, can you make question in passive or active voice?
303	Ss:	Passive voice.
304	T:	Yes, passive voice. Right. Quickly. For example, the first question “Who is
305		your current curriculum set by?” Who is your current curriculum set by? Who
306		can answer?
307	Ss:
308	T:	It is set by the Ministry of Education and Training. Ministry of Education and
309		Training.
310		Are you ready?
311	Ss:	Yes
312	T:	Who can ask and who can answer? Thinh, can you ask and you answer (pointed
313		at a student)
314	S1:	Who is your current curriculum set by?
315	S2:
316	T:	It is set by
317	S2:	It is set by .. Ministry of Education and Training (T hinted). Number 2.
318	S1:	How many subjects?
319	T:	How many subjects are there?
320	S2:	There are eleven... xxxxxx
321	S1:	What are they?
322	S2:	There are English, Maths, Geography... Biology.. History.. Literature...
323		Physical education.. Chemistry .. Civic education... National defence education
324		.. (T hinted the student to speak)
325	T:	Yes, OK. Next.
326	S1:	What is, er, what are.. the core subjects?
327	T:	Is or are?
328	S1:	What are core subjects?
329	
330		<i>(The school bell rang, class time is over)</i>