Teacher agency in times of educational policy change: 
A Vietnamese case study

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the manifestation and characteristics of teacher agency in response to educational policy change in a Southeast Asian setting. It is a qualitative case study based on fieldwork with tertiary-level language teachers in Vietnam. The teachers who participated in the study were required to transition from teaching French, Russian and Chinese to English due to changes that occurred in foreign language education. The study is located in the scholarly field of teacher agency, working from the perspective that teachers are the key agents in the enactment of educational policy change. The central argument of this study is that in response to educational policy enactment, teacher agency is deeply influenced by the political, social and cultural contexts in which educational changes take place.

The thesis focuses on the dramatic changes brought about in tertiary-sector language teaching in Vietnam as a consequence of educational reforms and the emerging role of English as the most important foreign language. The participants in my study were 20 Vietnamese teachers of modern foreign languages, referred to in this thesis as ‘transitioned teachers’, at one of the leading universities in Vietnam. These transitioned teachers were given little option but to rapidly switch from teaching other foreign languages to English and were required to meet a proficiency benchmark introduced under the stipulations of the National Foreign Language 2020 Project. These changes had enormous implications for the transitioned teachers in their professional and personal lives. My study explores their responses to policy change and reveals the features of their agency.

The notions of Figured Worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) and the subject-centred sociocultural approach (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013) served as twin interpretive lenses for this study, which sought to understand the ways in which the transitioned teachers exercised agency in a hierarchical, top-down management system. A Figured World is a realm of interpretation that is socially and culturally constructed, and in
which “particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 52). Working with its concepts of space and improvisations, my study explored the transitioned teachers’ agency as they moved from their previous world of their first foreign language teaching to a new world of English teaching. A modified subject-centred sociocultural approach provided another useful lens to examine how sociocultural factors and the transitioned teachers’ identities shaped their responses in the enactment of educational change.

Data were collected from a variety of sources: a preliminary survey, two documents, multiple-stage interviews with both transitioned teachers and faculty and university leaders, and observations of online communication, faculty meetings, and distance-teaching sessions. Qualitative thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data, which were collected in Vietnamese and translated to English. Cultural Discourse Studies (Shi-xu, 2012) was also employed to provide insights into the cultural layers of meaning and sociocultural values in the participants’ interview data.

The findings show that the agency of the transitioned teachers and the ways they improvised their pathways through the transition were complex, dynamic, and culturally nuanced, circumventing rather than challenging or resisting policy over which they had little control. In a highly centralised political system, manœuvrevability and critical evaluations become important elements of agency. These features have hitherto received scant attention in the literature on teacher agency. While these findings confirm the complexities of teacher agency, they also present fresh insights into the influences of sociocultural factors and teacher identities on the exercise of agency in times of educational change. In addition to the transitioned teachers’ work history and experience, motivation and interest, goals and ideals, professional knowledge and competence, professional commitment, and professional ego, the findings show that solidarity and collectivity can be powerful elements of agency. On the
personal front, cultural perceptions of family roles and responsibilities were also found to play an important role in the exercise of agency.

Overall, in examining the transitioned teachers’ responses to change and the ways in which they enacted the new policy, my study contributes rich cultural perspectives on teacher agency and its manifestations. It also provides suggestions for stakeholders involved in change enactment processes, such as keeping the lines of communication open between policymakers and enactors in order to better deal with tensions and miscommunications that may arise. The findings and recommendations in my study offer lessons for those aspiring to contribute to the process of educational policy enactment in other educational contexts undergoing similar changes.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made within the thesis itself.

HAO THI TRAN
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This thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance and encouragement I was very fortunate to receive from many people throughout my PhD studies.

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My heartfelt thanks are to my husband and my coming son. I am grateful to my husband for his love and understanding with my moodiness and stress especially at the last stage of my PhD. The morning coffee he made when I went to university and his cooked meals for dinner after my long day were some of the so much support and love he had for me. Knowing that my son joining me in the last stage of my PhD was amazingly special on this memorable journey. His hard kicks when I am quietly working on the thesis gave me more strength and motivation to stay focused and complete my PhD.

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THESIS-RELATED PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS


Tran, T. H. (Manuscript under review). Language teachers’ professional identity negotiation in the process of educational change: Stories from transitioned teachers.

BOOK REVIEWS


Tran, T. H. (Manuscript under review). Un(intended) language planning in a globalising world: Multiple levels of players at work.

PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


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<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>ASEAN Economic Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>The Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDS</td>
<td>Cultural Discourse Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEFR</td>
<td>Common European Framework of Reference</td>
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<td>ELT</td>
<td>English language teaching</td>
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<td>HERA</td>
<td>Higher Education Reform Agenda</td>
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<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Master of Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOET</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Training</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>The World Trade Organisation</td>
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The operational definitions used in the thesis are provided below.

*English major students* - Students who study English as their main major, including teacher training education, linguistics or translation.

*Non-English major students* - Students whose main majors are not English, but other majors such as Engineering, Business, or Law. They study English as a required foreign language.

*The transition process* - The transition of teachers from teaching foreign languages (i.e. French, Russian, Chinese) to teaching English.

*The transitioned teachers* - The foreign language teachers who underwent the transition process.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Southeast Asia is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017) and language education in this region has been the subject of much research. With the advent of globalisation and the exponential growth of English (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992), foreign language policies in many Southeast Asian countries have changed greatly (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Tupas, 2018). In Vietnam, driven by globalisation, rapid social and economic change, educational trends and market forces, foreign language education has witnessed the increasing ascendancy of English over the last two decades (Do, 1999; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). In the wake of educational reform and the emerging role of English as the most important foreign language in Vietnam alongside the appearance of other foreign languages such as Spanish or Germans, a range of educational policy changes have been introduced. One of these changes is the retraining of teachers who have taught French, Russian or Chinese to become English teachers. The shift from teaching these languages to English, henceforth referred to as the transition, has been one of the most dramatic changes in recent foreign language education policy (Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen & Mai, 2015). Accompanying this change, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) mandated an English proficiency benchmark in 2008 for new English teachers across all educational levels with the aim of enhancing the quality of English teaching and learning.

Many language teachers have been swept up in this major change of policy direction, yet little attention has been paid to its impacts on their personal and professional lives. Prompted by the dramatic policy shifts that have changed the face of foreign language teaching in Vietnam, this study aims to explore the ways in which the teachers perceive, respond to,
engage with the process of change and enact new policies. The thesis is concerned with the relationship between teacher agency and policy enactment. It focuses on a group of 20 teachers as they moved from teaching French, Russian and Chinese to English, and on the ways in which they perceived, responded to, and engaged with the process of policy enactment. In this thesis, they are referred to as the transitioned teachers. The experiences of the transitioned teachers offer a rich and informative opportunity to study teachers’ engagement with educational change and how they exercise agency in response to policy enactment.

1.2. Background

In order to situate my study and to give an indication of the scale of educational change in Vietnam and the rise of English since the launch of Doi Moi1, it is necessary to go back in time. I first discuss the changes in higher education and English language teaching (ELT) at tertiary level in Vietnam since the late 1980s. I then discuss the shift of English from a minor to the major foreign language, which led to the transition of the teachers who took part in this study. Following this, I describe the introduction and promulgation of the English proficiency benchmark for English teachers in Vietnam.

1.2.1. Higher education in Vietnam

Higher education in Vietnam has experienced various rapid changes since Doi Moi both in terms of size and diversity. Between the 1980s and 1990s, higher education followed the Soviet model with mono-disciplinary specialised institutions (Dang, 2009; Quach, 2013) and all institutions were publicly run. Following the establishment of the first non-public higher education institutions in 1988 (Oliver, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2006), diverse types of institutions

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1 Doi Moi is known as Vietnam’s Renovation or Open-door policy, by which Vietnam implemented a dynamic diplomacy, and the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the U.S. In line with this, Vietnam introduced nationwide open and market economy policies following liberalisation in economic sectors, instead of its previously centrally planned and closed economy.
were established in 1993, namely public, semi-public, private and foreign-owned institutions (Quach, 2013). This was an “important first step in the expansion and its growth and development of higher education in Vietnam” (Gropello, Nesmith, Yilmaz, & Mai, 2008, p. 6). Higher education reform processes were also supported by the World Bank in assisting the country’s steady transition to a market economy and forming two national universities. The number of higher education institutions rose sharply from 83 in 1983 to 376 by 2009 to 450-470 universities and colleges in 2011 (Hayden & Thiep, 2010). Enrolment of students into higher institutions also increased by 172.4% from 1999 to 2006-2007 (Nguyen, 2009).

The Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) was established in 2006 with the aim of modernising the higher education system by 2020. The HERA (2006-2020) eliminated control of the MOET over higher education institutions and increased tertiary institutional autonomy (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Pham, 2012), which allows universities and colleges to have independence in their administrative and academic management. These institutions can decide their own educational strategies, including their human resources, in accordance with their teaching foci, majors, training programmes and educational targets, provided they meet the general requirements of the MOET (Hayden & Thiep, 2007).

The role of English in higher education in Vietnam was emphasised in conjunction with the rapid change in higher education, especially with the establishment of the HERA. With the focus on the internationalisation of higher education, English has emerged as the most popular language chosen by the majority of tertiary students (94%) (Le, 2007; Hoang, 2008). English plays a principal role as the foreign language specified in most programmes at tertiary level (Nguyen, 2012), and is currently the only foreign language taught in many universities in Vietnam.

At tertiary level, English is divided into two sets of programmes comprising a non-English major programme and an English major programme. The former is for students whose
majors are in disciplines such as Business or Engineering. The latter is for those students whose area of study focuses on English teacher education or English language and literature mainly to become English teachers or interpreters. Within the group of non-majors, English is a compulsory subject with both entry and exit standard requirements. Following the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), graduates from the non-English major branch or students who study other majors must achieve a CEFR level of English (B1) as a condition of graduation, a challenging requirement for most students.

1.2.2. English in Vietnam

The history of learning foreign languages in Vietnam has fluctuated in accordance with different periods of colonialism through various historical periods (Denham, 1992; Nguyen, 2003; Wright, 2002). The position of English in Vietnam is an illustration of this shifting process; Since the 1980s, English has changed from being a minor subject at school to the most preferred foreign language and a current compulsory subject at all levels.

Before Doi Moi (1986), the position of English in foreign language curricula was minor, standing after Russian and French among foreign languages (Le, 2007; Nguyen, 2012; Pham, 2006; Vu & Burns, 2014; Wright, 2002). To give an indication, in the 1970s, English constituted only a small percentage of the foreign languages offered to students in Hanoi (25%) compared with Russian (60%) (Wright, 2002). However, in response to social demands following Doi Moi, English re-emerged as the main foreign language taught and used in Vietnam for wider communication and international cooperation (Alter & Moreau, 1995; Shapiro, 1995; Wilson, 1993a, 1993b).

In the context of Doi Moi, Vietnam adopted a market-oriented economy (Nguyen, 2011). It expanded its relations with all foreign countries by integrating into different associations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1997), Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation (APEC) (1998) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (2007). Since its formation in 1967, ASEAN has been an increasingly powerful regional organisation; English is identified as its working language according to Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN, 2008). In response, each member nation has taken action to develop its English capacity for communication purposes within ASEAN. In many countries of ASEAN today, English plays a dominant role in both intra and international communication (e.g. Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Low & Ao, 2018).

Being a member of ASEAN since 1995, Vietnam acknowledges the importance of developing and fostering the quality of English teaching and learning (Hoang, 1999; Pham, 2006; Nguyen & Phung, 2015). Following its national integration into ASEAN, English has become as an “unquestionable asset” for Vietnam (Shapiro, 1995, p. 4). English a major foreign language to be taught and learnt in Vietnam (Do, 2006). Regarded as an attribute for the development of “a better standard of living” (Denham, 1992, p. 64), English gradually became the most preferred foreign language in education with 98% of students at all school levels choosing to study English over other languages (Nguyen, 2003; Ton & Pham, 2010). The current status of English in foreign language teaching in Vietnam is shown through the policy of MOET by employing English as the medium of instruction in approximately 20% of national and provincial universities in certain subjects and sectors (Le, 2012). English is currently the most popular foreign language in schools, colleges and universities and has come to play a central role in foreign language teaching in Vietnam (Ngo, 2015).

The crucial role of English has been emphasised more strongly following the participation of Vietnam in the ASEAN Economic Community 2015 (AEC). This community established a single competitive market within ASEAN countries with five major components: the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labour. This dynamic market, directly and indirectly, influences the nations within the region in different ways. The
promotion of English as an international business language is one objective of the plan for the regional integration of the AEC (Jindapitak, 2019). ELT is seen as an important indicator of promoting effective and successful communication in this context (Stroupe & Kimura, 2015).

The pivotal role of English in ASEAN was highlighted by its General Secretary, who described it as “the language of our competitive global job market, the lingua franca of ASEAN” (Le, 2013, p. 3). An ASEAN conference, “Educating the Next Generation of Workforce: ASEAN Perspectives on Innovation, Integration and English” in Thailand, noted the position of English thus:

[English is an] indispensable tool to bring our Community closer together... [enabling] us to interact with other ASEAN colleagues in our formal meetings as well as day-to-day communications... Through English, we are raising awareness of the ASEAN region.

(Le, 2013, p. 2)

Among a multitude of issues in many ASEAN countries’ modernisation and integration with the regional and global economy, language capacity is a major concern. To bolster relationships and seek mutual benefits among regional countries with the different free market flows that the AEC membership brings about, each nation takes English language capacity to be a “key factor” in the accomplishment of regional integration (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015, p. 43). Rooth and Saarela (2007) also identify English proficiency as one of the most important components of workers’ human capital. In line with the development of Vietnam as a “dynamic Asia-Pacific economic tiger” (Fry, 2009, p. 257), since Vietnam became an ASEAN member, “English language fever” has taken hold throughout the country (Le, 2007, p. 172).

Following the regional and global trend to keep pace with social and technological change and respond to economic pressures, a number of English language policies have been adopted nationwide in Vietnam. These policies aim to enhance the quality of English teaching and learning and equip students with a good command of English to satisfy various communicative needs in their future work and meet national and regional market demands.
One of the earliest actions that took effect in 2003 was to introduce English as a compulsory subject at lower secondary school level (Years 6-9 for children aged 11-15) instead of upper secondary level (Years 10-12 for children aged 15-18) (Nunan, 2003). In addition, communicative language teaching methods were introduced with a focus on communicative skills rather than teaching reading or grammar (Le, 2000; Pham, 2005).

However, numerous problems have been identified following the implementation of these policies. The shift to the communicative approach does not seem to have been successful in many contexts in Vietnam (Le, 2006; Le, 2013; Pham, 2006). English is treated as a subject for study rather than as a living language to be spoken in daily conversation. Students’ high achievement in exams does not ensure their excellence in real-life performance. Indeed, studies have pointed out that students cannot communicate in daily life “at survival level” (Le, 2006, p. 175) and in some most common communication situations (Le, 2013). Tien (2013) also pinpointed that the rapid growth of English in Vietnam has resulted in serious shortages of quality ELT teachers at lower education levels and major problems concerning teachers’ English language proficiency.

1.2.3. National Project 2020 and the English proficiency benchmark

With the aim of enhancing the quality of foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam, the MOET introduced “Đề án Dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2008-2020” (The Project of Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008-2020). This project, hereafter referred to as National Project 2020, has been described as the most significant language reform in Vietnam’s history (Bui, 2013). With an estimated budget of five billion USD, this project aims to open a new chapter in English teaching and learning in Vietnam and enhance the quality of English teaching by 2020:
“... By 2020 most Vietnamese students graduating from vocational schools, colleges and universities will be able to use a foreign language confidently in their daily communication, their study and work in an integrated, multicultural and multilingual environment, making foreign languages a comparative advantage of development for Vietnamese people in the cause of industrialisation and modernisation for the country”. (Decision 1400, p. 1. Translation mine).

National Project 2020 was issued through “Quyết định 1400” (Decision 1400) on 30 September 2008. Decision 1400 presented an overview of national foreign language education and the overall mandate of National Project for all educational levels in the country. Two main objectives noted in the document of Decision 1400 are as follows,

Item 1. Foreign languages taught and learned in all educational systems are English and other foreign languages.
Item 2. Construct and issue a foreign language framework, including six levels, equivalent to the international testing system, to be used as criteria for curriculum design, lesson plans and for constructing assessment criteria for each level.

(Decision 1400, p. 2. Translation mine)

As stated in these objectives, National Project 2020 highlighted the need to construct and issue a framework to be used for the national education system in Vietnam. This framework was then used to establish required benchmarks for foreign language teachers’ proficiency at different levels across the country. It is notable that the focus of National Project 2020 and the employment of the framework were not only on English but also on other foreign languages. Additionally, general strategies were proposed in Decision 1400 for achieving the targets of National Project 2020. This project necessitates reviewing and evaluating foreign language teachers at all educational levels in order to ensure they met these prescribed proficiency levels.

Following the prescribed objectives and strategies noted in Decision 1400, the MOET continued to issue “Công văn số 7274” (Document 7274) entitled “Kế hoạch triển khai Đề án ngoại ngữ 2020 trong các cơ sở giáo dục đại học giai đoạn 2008-2020” (Implementation Plans for National Project 2020 at Tertiary Levels Period 2008-2020). While Decision 1400 noted English and other foreign languages as the foci of National Project 2020, Document 7274 put specific focus on solutions and actions for English. The strategies of the Project, particularly
the necessity to assess the proficiency of English language teachers nationwide, were described in the document as follows:

Item 2. From November 2012, the MOET will start to organise the review of foreign language teachers’ proficiency at the tertiary level (first, English teachers at this level) ... Based on the results, institutions construct and operate plans, recruitment and training for English lecturers to ensure the prescribed proficiency standard. (Document 7274, p.1. Translation mine).

English teachers at the tertiary level were the first to be reviewed for their proficiency in response to the introduction of the Document 7274. The transitioned teachers in this study belonged to this group. It was stipulated that the CEFR or equivalent international testing systems were to be used as the benchmarks to assess foreign language teachers’ proficiency. However, during this period, the benchmark was based on the IELTS and TOEFL international testing systems. With the aim of constructing a framework that was said to be suitable for the practical conditions of foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam, the MOET then issued the Vietnamese version of the CEFR framework on January 2014 through “Thông tư số 01/2014/TT – BGDDT” (Circular No. 01/2014).

This framework includes six levels ranking from lowest to highest levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2; Teachers at tertiary institutions like the transitioned teachers at TriThuc University were required to achieve C1 level or Level 5 – the second highest level in the ranking. English teachers nationwide were then to be assessed for their proficiency and required to meet the required proficiency standard according to this Vietnamese version of the CEFR framework. At the same time, other equivalent international testing systems were also accepted such as IELTS or TOEFL.

In short, with the introduction of National Project 2020, the MOET of Vietnam set a clear target for national foreign language education up to 2020, especially with a proficiency requirement for foreign language teaching staff, starting with English teachers. As shown from the above documents, there was a long and complex implementation process of the required
benchmark: from its introduction in 2008, to the decision of following the international testing system in 2012, and then the introduction and implementation of the Vietnamese CEFR version in 2014. How this proficiency benchmark was implemented in one tertiary institution following the MOET’s prescribed benchmark, and the teachers’ responses, especially the transitioned teachers’, to this requirement was the focus of my study.

1.3. The aims of the study and its significance

It has been claimed that in response to a myriad of changes accompanied by global trends, teachers need to adapt their new professional roles, cultivate new professional identities and incorporate new insights into their teaching (Day & Kington, 2008; Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Korthagen, 2009). Therefore, it is important to explore how teachers experience different educational change processes. Following the exponential development of English in Vietnam, the shortage of teachers in English and the redundancy of teachers of other languages, many of these teachers were given little choice but to transition to first learning and then teaching English in order to keep their jobs. Although this influential shift brought about profound changes in the personal and professional lives of these transitioned teachers, their experiences through the transition have been under-researched.

Furthermore, teachers have been described as the “central agents in language policy development” (Baldauf, 2006, p. 154). They have been also widely identified as having important roles in language policy enactment (Baldauf, 2012; Campbell, 2012; Datnow, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Li, 2010; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Priestley, Edwards, Miller, & Priestley, 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015). However, studies exploring teachers’ experiences in response to educational policy enactment, or teacher agency, in Vietnam have been limited (Mai, 2015; Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Nguyen, Hamid, & Renshaw, 2015; Phyak & Bui, 2014). None has explored the case of the transitioned teachers and their
experiences in enacting the required English proficiency benchmark. In view of their distinctive backgrounds, my study aims to focus on this group of transitioned teachers and their responses to the requirement. I will examine how these transitioned teachers individually and collectively exercised and manifested agency in response to the transition process and the required proficiency benchmark for English teachers in the field of ELT.

In addition, this study also aims to reflect on the effectiveness of policy enactment as well as teaching and teacher education in Vietnam, especially in view of the questionable effectiveness of the implemented policies discussed earlier. Implementing innovation is not a matter of directly executing policies but, rather, it involves a process of sense-making through which teachers make meaning from their work environments, a process which, in turn, orients their decisions and actions (Marz & Kelchterm, 2013). In the context of Vietnam, it is important to understand the process of educational change and reform as well as policy enactment. By examining policy promulgation as complex policy enactment (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), this study aims to contribute to the field of language policy scholarship in Vietnam.

Moreover, in order to understand the complexity and the success of educational change, we must examine how teachers are engaged in this process because they are often most directly involved in implementing educational reforms (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). By exploring the experiences of teachers and their responses to educational policy enactment, through their agency, my study focuses on the ways in which policies are enacted at grass-roots level and sheds light on the processes and effectiveness of these policies. An increasing number of studies have emphasised the important roles of teacher agency in teaching, teacher education and policy enactment (e.g., Lasky, 2005; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Priestley et al., 2012; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007; Rogers & Wetzel, 2013; Sannino, 2010; Sloan, 2006). The exploration of the transitioned teachers’ responses to educational change in my
study thus aims to produce insights and recommendations for further research of this field in the context of Vietnam. Acknowledging that teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds might experience change and enact policies in varied ways, my study also aims to contribute to the field by shedding light on the enactment process of different policies and on the forms teachers’ agency may take in a Southeast Asian, and specifically Vietnamese cultural context.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter One, the introduction, has specified the background, the context of the study, outlined the focus of the investigation, research aims, the significance of the study and the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two presents the literature review, including a discussion on agency, previous studies on teacher agency, and the identified research gaps, followed by a description of the dual heuristic used to explore the data. Chapter Three, delineates the research questions and the rationale for a qualitative case study design along with the description of the case. The research design, data collection and analytical approach are also presented in Chapter Three. The three subsequent chapters present the findings of the thesis. Chapter Four delineates the findings from my analysis of the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition process. Chapter Five goes on to present the findings from my analysis of these teachers’ responses to the required English proficiency benchmark. Chapter Six scrutinises the factors influencing the transitioned teachers’ responses as presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. Chapter Seven, discusses what these findings reveal about the nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency in the light of the research literature. The conclusions, limitations and the recommendations of the study, are presented in this final chapter.
2.1. Introduction

In order to explore teacher agency in response to educational policy change, several bodies of literature relevant to the research problem were reviewed. I first surveyed the research on agency from different perspectives in order to build a foundational understanding of the term. As my study aims to investigate teacher agency in an educational setting, I reviewed studies of agency in the field of educational policy change and enactment and searched for studies which have focused on policy actors and teachers’ roles within this field of scholarship. Next, in the search for suitable research methods, I reviewed empirical studies which have explored teacher agency in various educational contexts. My search then focused on the literature on teacher agency in policy enactment processes in Vietnam to provide background knowledge of the research previously done in this context. This helped identify research gaps and establish a clear need for my study. Finally, in the search for analytical tools to explore the nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency, I identified Figured Worlds and the Subject-centred sociocultural framework. The following sections discuss these bodies of literature and how they informed the research.

2.2. Agency from different perspectives

The process which required the teacher participants in this study to transition from teaching other foreign languages to teaching English was a seismic ground shift, professionally and personally, for the teachers who had to undergo it. To understand their perceptions of the change and analyse how and why they responded as they did, the literature review began by
searching for studies that would shed light on how teachers interpret and respond to policy change. This search took me first to the concept of agency.

2.2.1. Early discussion on agency

The idea of agency has been central to educational thinking and practice since the Enlightenment. Scholars have debated whether instrumental rationality or norm-based action is the truest expression of human freedom. Agency has been theorised and examined widely from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Discussions in critical philosophy made a valuable contribution to the early understanding of agency. Kant’s studies (1951, 1956, 1965) raised the notion of free thinking, which he saw as the basis for autonomous action. Kant saw autonomous action as the ultimate destination of education. In this perspective, education is the process through which human beings develop their rational capability to construct independent judgment and then form autonomous action or become more agentic. Agency is seen as an educational aim, an educational ideal and as the desired outcome of educational processes. The idea suggested by Kant of revealing individuals’ autonomous characters through their free thinking has had a profound impact on the understandings of agency in modern educational theory and practice.

Following Kant’s view of autonomous action in agency through free thinking, other scholars added further perspectives on agency. In anthropology, agency has been examined through two distinctive modalities: (i) ideas of power, and (ii) ideas of intention (Ortner, 1984). The former explored the domination and resistance of agents, whereas the latter explored people’s plans in the world and their ability to formulate and enact them. In other words, agency is demonstrated not only through the agents’ resistance to change, but also through their plans in response to change and their ability to improvise them.
Social psychology shed a different light on agency by defining it as decision-making, and/or the ability to enact and take responsibility for ones’ actions (Carson, 2012). In this view, agency is not only shown through free thinking but through how people self-determine, make decisions and enact their own plans. This view is intertwined with the activity approach to agency, which emphasises the actions of the individuals as the ways they exercise their agency. Agency is considered to be human beings’ ability to act in a goal-directed manner and use mediation to perform an action (Wertsch, 1993). In the view of action-theorised perspectives, agency is defined as the individual’s capacity to act (Gao, 2010) “purposefully and reflectively” (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63).

In the field of sociology, agency is seen as the ability of individuals or agents to influence their contexts rather than merely react to them. Giddens (1984) defined agency as “the capacity of the individual to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events” (p. 14). Individual agency or the ability to make a difference was seen as the capability to intervene in the world and make changes to current situations to exercise power to varying extents. Giddens’s agency approach implies the possibility of resistance, as power exercised through action. This view of agency encompasses teachers’ ability to intervene in the world and make change or influence the pre-existing state of affairs, especially in line with educational change.

In addition to these features of agency, Archer (1995) added reflexive deliberation. Archer, a social realist theorist, conceptualised reflexivity as an internal conversation in which individuals reflect on the world around them (e.g. “what’s going on?”), which shapes action (e.g. “what am I going to do?”). In particular, individual agency, shown through the ways people influence their contexts, is not only achieved through perceptions or the ways the policy or change is interpreted, but also through a person’s reflections on the contexts in which the change emerged and where individuals are involved to form consequent
actions. It is thus notable that this kind of agency may also be conditioned by the world around the person, or the contexts and structure to which they belong.

Overall, agency has been seen as the intention or the capability of an individual to act, to initiate or self-regulate, or to make differences or changes to their situation. It has also been seen as a form of resistance (Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 1984) or exercise of choice (Pickering, 1995). However, these definitions do not fully explain the complexity of agency in all contexts, especially in settings where power is exercised in a strongly top-down fashion and those obliged to put it into practice have little room to manoeuvre. In addition, these definitions do not allow for the interplay between structural factors and agency. The influences of external factors on the ways in which individuals or groups manifest their agency have been discussed through a sociocultural perspective.

2.2.2. Agency from a sociocultural perspective

The rise of the sociocultural perspective was based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), a developmental psychologist in the 1920s and 1930s. In this perspective, agency is not simply an individual character trait; but rather its features are shown through “a contextually enacted way of being in the world” (van Lier, 2008, p. 163). In the sociocultural perspective, two notable contributions were the chordal triad of agency by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and ecological understanding of agency by Biesta and Tedder (2007). Emirbayer and Mische argued that agency is a situated notion, reflecting “the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations” (p. 971). Notably, they situated agency within a specifically temporal framework, claiming that “agentic processes can only be understood if they are linked intrinsically to the changing temporal orientations of situated actors” (p. 967). They emphasised the temporal nature of human experience and introduced the chordal triad of agency, which is defined as,
[Human agency is] the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970).

The definition of chordal triad of agency encompasses different constitutive elements of human agency including iteration, projectivity and practical-evaluation. The iterational element draws on habits of the past, indicating that agency is structured by experiences and/or habitualised routines. The projective element gives attention to imagination and future planning. The practical-evaluative element allows for judgment of immediate situational variables. In this dimension, agency is reflexive, as actors have the capacity to make evaluative judgments about the available possibilities open to them.

Based on Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) theorisation of the temporal nature of agency, Biesta and Tedder (2007) introduced an approach called an ecological understanding of agency. Taking this approach, rather than being possessed, agency is achieved through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action. Structural changes such as changes in power-relations or reconfigurations of social relations mean that individuals must navigate different constraints and possibilities and thus change their agency. As Biesta and Tedder (2007) assert, the ecological concept of agency highlights that people act by means of an environment rather than in an environment. This view claims that the achievement of agency results from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors. In other words, agency is not exclusively an individual achievement but is connected to contextual and structural factors.

The perspective on agency by Biesta and Tedder (2007) resonates with the notion of mediated agency introduced by Wertsch, Tulviste, and Hagstrom (1993). Wertsch and Tulviste (1992) referred to agency as an attribute of “the individuals-operating-with-mediational-means” (p. 555). The concept of mediated agency highlights the relationship between agent(s)
and the mediational means provided by the sociocultural context. According to Wertsch et al. (1993), these mediational tools (i.e., literature, art, media, language, technology or numeracy systems) influence the ways individuals believe, think and act.

Understanding agency through the interplay between individuals’ efforts and contextual factors is supported by other scholars. It is asserted that what individuals believe and how they think and act are shaped by historical and sociocultural trajectories and practices (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lasky, 2005). According to Lasky (2005), human beings retain the ability to influence their lives and environment, even while they are also shaped by social and individual factors. This view of agency is what Ahearn (2001) defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). Likewise, agency is asserted to be “constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). Agency is a person’s way of being, seeing and responding in the world and as being embedded in contexts of activity and interpretive practices (Edwards, 2000). Social contexts and cultural tools make substantial contributions to the development of human beliefs, values and the ways of acting (Wertsch, 1993).

Overall, in the light of the sociocultural perspective, agency both shapes and is shaped by the structural and cultural features of society and educational contexts. These views and findings offer valuable tools for the exploration and understanding of agency in times of educational change.

2.2.3. Towards a definition of agency and collective agency

In this section, I will first explain why the term agency holds greater explanatory power for this study than autonomy, which conveys a similar meaning. Then, the main working definitions of agency in the research literature which have helped me construct an understanding of agency are discussed and the features of agency are outlined.
It could be argued that the view of agency as the capacity to act to an extent resonates with other researchers’ concepts of autonomy. Indeed, autonomy has been seen both as *liberty to act* and *freedom from constraints* (Carter, 2012; Erss, 2016). However, the view of autonomy and teacher autonomy in educational contexts is mainly related to teaching or professionalism (Aoki, 2002; Erss & Kalmus, 2018; McGrath, 2000; Prichard & Moore, 2016; Smith, 2000) or curriculum implementation (Benson, 2010).

As discussed, agency has also been defined as a transformative potential to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs, or the capacity to initiate purposeful actions. In addition, agency is seen to be interactive because it does not just reside in the individual, it is a socially constructed experience. Agency is not only about intentions of the actors but also the responsibility or the evaluations of their intentions and actions. Table 2.1 summarises the main definitions of agency and interpretations of the concept.

Table 2.1.
*Main Definitions of Agency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definitions of agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giddens (1984)</td>
<td>The capability of the individuals to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wertsch and Tulviste (1992)</td>
<td>Agency is as an attribute of the individuals-operating-with-mediational-means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickering (1995)</td>
<td>The ability of individuals to exercise choice and discretion in their everyday practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandura (1997)</td>
<td>The power to originate actions for given purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahearn (2001)</td>
<td>The socioculturally mediated capacity to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biesta and Tedder (2007)</td>
<td>Agency is achieved through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van Lier (2010)</td>
<td>The ways in which, and the extents to which, a person is compelled to, motivated to, allowed to, and coerced to, act”, and</td>
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</table>
Agency should be seen as doing or acting instead of having or possessing. In other words, agency should not be seen as a quality of an individual or a teacher themselves but as part of their engagement with “temporal-relational contexts of action” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). Exploring agency in such a view helps understand not only how humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints, but also how individuals are enabled and constrained by their social and material environments (Priestley et al., 2012).

Notably, agency is not just exercised by individuals but also by groups or communities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), which is seen as collective agency (Bandura, 2000). This view is supported by Wertsch et al. (1993), who argue in a sociocultural perspective, that agency is “intermental” as well as “intramental” (p. 337). In Bandura’s view (2000, 2006), collective agency refers to a group of people organising their knowledge, skills and resources together to achieve a communal goal in concert to shape their future. In other words, this kind of agency is exercised by a group of people or actors. Collective agency has been seen as a mediating bridge negotiating the discrepancies between reform mandates and the local needs of the school and teachers’ issues (Fu & Nashon, 2015; Spicer, 2011).

In educational settings, teacher collective agency can be observed through their participation in groups or teamwork, their willingness to collaborate, and to share their knowledge, resources and skills to achieve communal goals in relation to their teaching, learning and reform (Fu & Nashon, 2015). Furthermore, collective agency can be explored not only in formal settings but also from interactions among professional communities in various social-collective settings or social networks (Datnow, 2012). In supporting this, Spicer (2011), for example, investigated the enactment of instructional reform in the light of the sociocultural perspective, by examining the emergence of collective agency through professional
collaboration. The study emphasised the importance of the collective as a setting in which reforms are enacted when exploring teacher agency. The study contributes a novel approach to illuminating the institutional dynamics of educational change in the everyday interactions that constitute professional work in schools.

Overall, for the research purposes of this study, agency is more dynamic than autonomy because it covers not only teachers’ capacity to act in their teaching or classroom contexts, but also in their professional and social lives. Among the diverse approaches to agency, the sociocultural perspective held the most promise to be used in exploring agency in this study. The discussion of collective agency in the reviewed literature also assisted me in forming an analysis of the nature of transitioned teachers’ agency in this study.

I drew on three core features from the literature on agency to assist my enquiry:

(i) Agency is not possessed but enacted by individuals (i.e. individual agency) or by groups (i.e. collective agency);

(ii) Agency is not only intentions or initiatives but also responsibility, evaluations and awareness of the responsibility for one’s own actions;

(iii) Agency mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context.

The next step was to review studies on agency and teacher agency in the field of educational policy enactment.

2.3. Teacher agency in educational policy enactment

The goal of understanding the nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency at a time of dramatic policy change and their responses to the introduction of a compulsory benchmark for language teacher proficiency led me to survey studies of agency in educational policy processes. I searched for studies that acknowledged the interrelationships between educational processes (e.g. Ball et al., 2012) and language-in-education planning (Baldauf, 2006).
2.3.1. From policy implementation to policy enactment

The term implementation is used to describe the process of putting a policy initiative into effect (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015). In the model of policy materialisation, policy is mechanistically transferred through a hierarchical structure from the upper levels of decision making to the lower levels of implementation. Authoritative actors are the ones who define the policy and also design how the policy is implemented. However, a number of shortcomings in the model of policy implementation have been noted in the literature. First, the view of policy adoption as a hierarchical and top-down transfer of text into action does not capture the complexities of the ways in which policy is materialised. Specifically, a number of scholars point out that insufficient attention has been paid to the contextual dimensions of policy adoption, especially in local contexts (Ozga, 2000; Ozga, Seddon, & Popkewitz, 2006; Simons, Olssen, & Peters, 2009). Furthermore, this linear model of policy implementation does not address the actors’ role in translating policy into practice. In particular, the model does not fully consider how policy actors recontextualise policy messages or interact and engage with policy, as well as their possible active and creative efforts to make sense of policy or adapt it to their own particular contexts of practice (Ball et al., 2012). In other words, policy actors are seen as passive implementers of policy. Therefore, there is a need for more robust and complex conceptualisations of policy processes that capture their complexities and consider the different roles of diverse policy actors in these processes.

Ball et al. (2012) thus used the notion of enactment to better illustrate how school actors recast policy texts into concrete practices. According to these scholars, policy enactment involves “creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices” (p. 3). Interpretation signals an initial reading and decoding and making sense or meaning of policy
texts. Translation suggests re-reading, recoding and enacting policy, in and through talk, school plans, meetings, classroom lessons, data walls, and school websites. The language of policy texts is translated into the language of practice, words into action, and abstractions into processes. These dual processes are interwoven and overlapping, yet enacted policy is not always clearly defined in the literature. A number of scholars of language policy introduce the terms covert or de facto policy to highlight the status of unwritten or implicit policy (Baldauf, 2006; Schiffman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). Therefore, the enactment of these policies can also be discerned from talks, meetings or circumstances where the policy is officially disseminated.

To sum up, the review of these fields shows that policy processes are complex, confounded by varied forces and interests and shaped through negotiation, interpretations and compromise (e.g. Ball, 1994; Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; Gornitzka, Kogan, & Amaral, 2005; Ozga 2000; Reynolds & Saunders, 1987; Sin, 2014; Trowler, 2002; Trowler, Saunders, & Knight, 2004). They are best examined in ways that highlight their complexity and multidirectionality in the light of policy enactment rather than merely their implementation. Importantly, while policy implementation tends to take all actors in the policy process as passive implementers or receivers and agents who work on and with policy in the same ways, the notion of enactment emphasises the active role of policy actors. These perspectives present a way of understanding how actors take on different roles across a wide variety of situations in the process of recontextualising and translating policy into practice.

2.3.2. Policy actors in policy enactment

Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) have described policy actors as those people who work with policy. According to Ball (2015), policies are contested, mediated and differentially represented by different policy actors in different contexts. In particular, the goals and intentions of policymakers are reshaped at various levels of policy enactment processes
Supporting this view, Sin (2014) has claimed that policy actors are important in negotiating, constructing and enacting policy. Every policy actor plays a role or performs a set of activities that add to the understanding of how policy is enacted. Ball et al. (2012) have identified various positions that policy actors adopt. Table 2.2 summarises these actors and their roles.

Table 2.2.
Policy Actors and Policy Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy actors</th>
<th>Policy work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrators</td>
<td>Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by educational leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Advocacy, creativity and integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsiders</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactors</td>
<td>Accounting, reporting, monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasts</td>
<td>Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translators</td>
<td>Production of texts, artifacts and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics</td>
<td>Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receivers</td>
<td>Coping, defending and dependency, mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As delineated in Table 2.2, policy actors are not necessarily specific individuals and their positions are not fixed; rather, they may move between these roles. Among these actors, while receivers indicate a passive position, other actors such as entrepreneurs, enthusiasts or critics play more active roles. As Ball et al. (2012) point out, receivers mainly look for guidance and direction and are policy dependent, with high levels of compliance rather than creativity, whereas entrepreneurs are personally invested in and identify with policy ideas and their enactment by reworking and recombining aspects of different policies. Enthusiasts embody
policy in their practice, planning and production of events and processes and institutional policy texts. Policy critics are people like union representatives and activists when policies or policy translations threaten teachers’ interests in relation to conditions of work and service and wellbeing. These critics challenge or critique new policy. In order to clarify how policies are put into practice, it is potential to attend to the experiences of policy actors (in my study, the transitioned teachers) and the roles they play in enactment processes. Being policy actors, teachers can enact different roles in response to policy implementation. Teachers are receivers of the policy but also narrators, critics of the change or reform mediators who adapt the change according to their working contexts.

2.3.3. Teachers’ roles and their agency in policy enactment

As one of the aims of this study was to gain insight into the responses of the transitioned teachers to educational policy change, I narrowed the literature review further to focus on teachers’ roles in policy enactment. The crucial roles of teachers in realising the goals set by language policymakers, and in policy enactment processes in general, have been emphasised in numerous studies (e.g., Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). These studies note that teachers’ positive influences on instructional conditions are “only achieved when they are positioned as agents” (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 96).

Teachers have also been considered as obvious core decision-making agents (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). According to Ricento and Hornberger (1996), teachers have been seen as the catalysts for policy making and should be viewed as primary language policy makers. Other researchers have supported this view by explaining that teachers have the expertise and ability to operationalise policy (Freeman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). Menken and Garcia (2010) emphasised the vital roles of teachers as the “final arbiters” of language policy
implementation (p. 1). They claimed that educators are at the epicentre of the dynamic process of translating language education policies into practice. Although government bodies have the power to impose their ideas, teachers have the power to operationalise the policies (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008).

The significant role of teachers as policy enactors has also been seen in their capability to handle changes in their working conditions in a creative manner and to actively react to the demands and expectations being imposed upon them (Luttenberg, van Veen, & Imants, 2013). Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2000) point out that teachers have the potential to occupy and exercise transformative roles, even within a highly constraining policy environment. Such significant roles in implementing and responding to changes in policy have also been noted in various empirical studies such as those conducted by Hamid (2010), Li (2010), and Wang (2008).

Concerning the important roles of teachers in policy enactment noted above, teacher agency is considered to be an indispensable element of good and meaningful education, especially in relation to the complexities of different educational practices (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Ball (2015) has emphasised that the creative agency of teachers is considered to be “a necessary basis for enactment” (p. 307). Other scholars emphasise that actors’ agentive role is a critical factor in implementing and responding to changes in policy (e.g. Hamid, 2010; Hamid, Zhu, & Baldauf, 2014; Li, 2010; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Shohamy, 2006; Wang, 2008). Baldauf (2012) argues that teachers’ individual agency may be so significant as to “compromise the impact of a national language policy” (p. 240). A number of studies have also highlighted teacher agency in mediating and negotiating between policies, pedagogical practice and institutional constraints (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007); empowering teachers as critical policy makers (Menken & Garcia, 2009; Shohamy, 2006); or opening new ideological and implementational
possibilities for micro, meso and macro level change (Hornberger, 2006). These studies show that the multidimensional nature of teacher agency in policy enactment processes should be carefully explored.

2.4. Review of empirical research on teacher agency in policy enactment

Acknowledging the significant roles and position of teachers in educational policy enactment, it was necessary to review empirical studies on teacher roles and their agency in this process. I discerned five main strands of this body of literature: (1) teacher agency in response to policy enactment, (2) sociocultural factors in teacher agency, (3) agency and teacher identities, (4) teacher agency at tertiary level; and (5) teacher agency in policy enactment in Vietnam.

2.4.1. Teacher agency in response to policy enactment

In investigating teacher agency in policy enactment processes, studies have explored their responses to policy, reform or educational change. These studies have produced different categorisations of teachers’ responses to reform. Coburn (2004) conducted a study exploring how teachers made sense of innovation messages about reading instruction and their classroom practices in two urban elementary schools in California. She found that the teachers reacted to the innovation in five ways, namely rejection, symbolic response, parallel structures, assimilation and accommodation. Rejection happens when teachers perceive the innovation is not congruent with their own beliefs about education and dismiss the instruction. The symbolic response is the way teachers symbolically or notionally respond to an innovation without truly implementing it. In other words, this can be seen as superficial adoption of reform, which does not result in substantial changes in practice. In contrast, assimilation indicates teachers’ elaboration and/or preservation of their frame of reference to fit the policy into former practices. Accommodation means teachers reframe the previous practices to implement new
approaches, or reject the initial frame and replace it with a new one. Parallel structures refer to the balance or the combination of multiple and conflicting priorities with regard to employing two parallel, old and new, policy approaches. Coburn’s study highlights the complexities in the ways teachers in her study made sense of the innovation. While rejection and symbolic response indicated that the innovation was not implemented, the other three ways show the teachers’ attempted to negotiate with the change, to fit the change into their previous teaching context, to adapt the previous context or replace it with the innovation or try to balance both in their teaching.

Conducted in a different context, a medium-sized high school in the Netherlands, Luttenberg, van Veen and Imants’s (2013) study presented findings which, to a large extent, concurred with Coburn’s. Investigating the interaction between teachers and reforms, these authors translated how the teachers made sense of reform into two dimensions which they named congruence and dominance. The first dimension relates to the degree of congruence between the teachers’ frame of reference and the situational demands of the innovation. The second dimension relates to the dominance of either the teachers’ frame of reference or the situational demands of the innovation in the sense-making process. Luttenberg and colleagues further classified teachers’ sense-making through change into four types: assimilation, accommodation, toleration and distantiation. These categories largely echo those in Coburn’s study. While assimilation and accommodation match Coburn’s categorisation, distantiation used by Luttenberg et al. actually means rejection in Coburn’s. Notably, toleration highlights a different aspect which indicates that teachers accept the reform without transformation of their existing practices.

Recent work by Petrovic and Kuntz (2013) and Ali and Hamid (2018) grouped teachers’ responses to change into broader categories. Petrovic and Kuntz (2013) identified three potential responses of the teachers in dealing with educational change: responding to the
existing frame, interpreting the existing frame and reframing it. While the first category inferred that language teachers implemented the policy without questioning it, the second meant that teachers examined the policies, and interpreted and implemented what they were expected to do. In contrast, the last category essentially indicated that teachers interpreted what they were expected to do but implemented the policy in their own way.

Working through Petrovic and Kuntz’s categorisation and exploring the agency of content-area lecturers in the process of implementing English as medium of instruction (EMI) at a university in Malaysia, Ali and Hamid (2018) proposed a classification of three slightly different categories. Ali and Hamid (2018) found that teachers’ responses to policy were an act of: (1) resistance when teachers refused or opposed the change, (2) accommodation when teachers adjusted changes to reconcile differences, and (3) dedication when teachers were wholeheartedly devoted to change. Compared with Petrovic and Kuntz’s (2013) categorisation, resistance means reframing; accommodation can be likened to interpreting the existing frame but emphasises identifying the differences and reconciling them. Notably, dedication is a new concept through which Ali and Hamid highlighted the teachers’ wholehearted devotion to the cause of students and went beyond the policy requirements. Although dedication was not directly related to the responses mentioned by Petrovic and Kuntz (2013), to an extent it recalled toleration in Luttenberg et al.’s study (2013). Both categories, teachers’ dedication and teachers’ toleration, support the view of teachers as agents of change (Lin, 1999), and highlight their roles as “transformative intellectuals” (see Kumaravadivelu, 2003) or “socio-political actors” (see Alhamdan et al., 2014).

Overall, the above studies focus on whether the teachers accept, resist or reframe change. Table 2.3 summarises the various terms used in previous studies and their relations to each other by delineating three main directions of teacher agency in response to change,
acceptance, resistance or reframing. The diverse responses of teachers indicate the complexities in the ways they respond to educational change and policy enactment.

Table 2.3.

*Summary of Previous Studies’ Findings on Teacher Agency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main directions</th>
<th>Used terms</th>
<th>Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teachers’</td>
<td>Responding to the</td>
<td>Petrovic and Kuntz (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main intention</td>
<td>existing frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is to</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>Ali and Hamid (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implement change</td>
<td>Toleration</td>
<td>Luttenberg, van Veen and Imants (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers’</td>
<td>Symbolic responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main intention</td>
<td>Distantiation</td>
<td>Luttenberg, van Veen and Imants’s (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is to</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Ali and Hamid (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reject change</td>
<td>Reframing</td>
<td>Petrovic and Kuntz (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main intention</td>
<td>Interpreting the</td>
<td>Luttenberg, van Veen and Imants’s (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is to</td>
<td>existing frame</td>
<td>Petrovic and Kuntz (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negotiate with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implement it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2.4.2. Sociocultural factors in teacher agency**

Ahearn (2001) wrote that teachers’ capacity to act involves the capacity to take actions according to their own intentions, but still within operative social and contextual constraints. Therefore, I focused on reviewing sociocultural factors influencing teacher agency. The sociocultural approach suggests that what individuals believe and how they think and act, or respond to policy change, are shaped by historical and sociocultural practices and individual factors (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lasky, 2005; Wertsch et al., 1993).
The sociocultural approach conceptualises teacher agency as relationally embedded across social circumstances, tools, and people (e.g. Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011), and sociocultural factors and teacher identities have a powerful impact on teacher agency.

Following the new forms of curricular policy in Scotland, Priestley et al. (2012) addressed how teacher agency was achieved in the context of curriculum making in schools through an ecological view of agency. The study showed that in a well-organised school context, attainment was highly valued, with rigorous focus on quality assurance and its procedures in assessing the performance of teachers and departments. Such structures and systems influenced the subsequent behaviour of teachers in curriculum making. The ecology of the school shaped the teachers’ projections of risk in developing their classroom teaching because of how they might impact on students’ examination results. The study suggests that the extent to which teachers exercise agency varies according to contexts, and is shaped by environmental conditions of possibility and constraint.

Investigating challenges and constraints affecting novice teachers’ sense of professional agency and the resources that these teachers needed in their first years at work, Eteläpelto, Vähäsanaten and Hökkä (2015) found out that the principal played a crucial role in the novice teachers’ work in schools. The principal was seen as a resource but also as a constraint on the teacher’s sense of professional agency both at individual and school levels. This conclusion resonates with other studies about the paramount role of structural aspects, or power-relations or social relations on the actors’, including teachers’ roles, in transforming practices (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2013; Priestley et al., 2012). Eteläpelto et al. suggested that close collaboration and support from other teachers in difficult everyday situations, or features of collective agency, were significant in school contexts. Other sociocultural factors have also been found to be influential in the exercise of teacher agency; for example, the demands,
opportunities, and constraints of his or her work or workplace conditions and organisational climate (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Pietarinen, Pyhältö, & Soini, 2016; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). However, there is a lack of empirical studies which explore these factors to demonstrate their influence. This represents a clear gap in the literature.

2.4.3. Agency and teacher identities

Agency does not stem from an internal state of mind, but rather a way of positioning oneself to allow for new ways of being and new formations of identities. A number of notable studies have suggested there is a link between identity and agency (e.g. Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; Leander & Osborne, 2008; Sloan, 2006). Lasky (2005) supported the view that agency is always mediated by the interaction between the individual’s attributes and inclinations and the structures of a social setting. This study investigated how secondary Canadian teachers understood and experienced a school reform through the lens of their professional identity and how their experiences of reform influenced their vulnerability throughout this process. The findings showed that the teachers’ agency was mediated by their professional identity, particularly their belief of being a teacher to teach not only academic content but also attend to social and emotional elements of their students’ development. In addition, early influences on teacher identity and the reform context were two mediational systems that shaped teacher agency and their professional vulnerability. Resulting from their ineffectual vulnerability when experiencing the change, the teachers felt impotent to affect the reform context. Their agency was thus compromised, and they became reform mediators rather than policy generators. By exploring teacher vulnerability, the study highlights the value of exploring teachers’ emotions in reform implementation. Overall, even though the interplay was not clearly shown in the study, Lasky (2005) highlighted the necessity of analysing the interplay
between teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability or teacher emotions in school reform.

Focusing on the influences of teacher identity on teachers’ responses to curriculum policies, Sloan (2006) examined teacher identity and identity formation as a base to explore the ways in which three elementary school teachers in Texas read and responded to test-based systems of accountability. The study showed that these teachers had different ways of self-authoring themselves within the school, such as a good teacher with diligence and hard work, a teacher as an entertainer, or someone sharply attuned to learners’ strengths and weaknesses. In turn, these teachers had their unique ways of responding to the policies according to their identities. The study highlighted that when examining agency in educational reform, the influences of identity are worth exploring.

In agreeing on the importance of teacher identities in line with the negotiation of identity and agency, Kayi-Aydar (2015) explored how teachers positioned themselves in relation to their social context and how this kind of narrative positioning, or their identity, influenced their agency. The findings showed that the teachers positioned themselves differently in relation to the mentor teachers. The teachers saw themselves as organised, structured, effective and sensitive in relation to the learners’ needs. The teachers’ relational and reflexive positionings with the students and the mentor teachers influenced their agency to act with regard to understanding the learners’ needs and feelings. The study also highlighted that teachers’ identities and agency were affected by the micro-politics settings, especially the power relations with the school principal. The teachers’ assigned non-powerful position in their internship settings questioned their capacity to act and teach the students in the ways they wanted. Kayi-Aydar (2015) thus indicates that teacher identity and agency are context-dependent and intertwined in complex ways.
Overall, these studies highlight the value of exploring teacher identities in teacher agency in different contexts. From a sociocultural perspective, identity is viewed as a fluid, socially, and linguistically mediated construct (Gee, 2000; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Kang, 2015). Copper and Olson (1996) state that “teacher identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed as individuals develop over time and through interactions with others” (p. 80). Teachers continually construct, reconstruct, revise, and renew their visions and perspectives of self within the shifting backdrop of their surroundings and contexts. The influences of teacher identities include teachers’ past experiences such as their work history and experiences, their current perceptions and commitment to their professional work and their projective plans and goals.

To sum up, previous studies have highlighted the impact of sociocultural factors and teacher identities on teacher agency. Views and findings from these studies substantially contributed to my understandings of the influences of sociocultural factors and teacher identities on teacher agency in times of educational change.

2.4.4. Teacher agency at tertiary level

Having reviewed studies on teacher agency and factors that influence teacher agency at different educational levels, I went on to explore the literature on teacher agency at a tertiary level, which is the sector in which the transitioned teachers were based. A number of studies have been conducted to explore vocational teacher agency (e.g., Ketelaar, Beijaard, Boshuizen, & Den Brok, 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto (2009), for example, examined how 16 Finnish vocational teachers responded to curriculum reform. By analysing narrative interviews, these authors grouped teachers’ responses into resistance, inconsistency and approval. To a large extent, this categorisation resonates with Petrovic and Kuntz’s (2013). While resistance means that teachers were against
the reform, approval confirms teachers’ positive and enthusiastic inclination toward it. Inconsistency delineates teachers’ ambiguous responses and not taking a constant position during the reform process. Inconsistency is one of the vital aspects which show potential complexities in teachers’ response. Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto (2009) highlighted that teachers’ orientations were shaped by their individual backgrounds, including their actual sense of their professional selves, their prior working experiences and their expectations of their professional future, as well as by their social affordances, the practices and traditions of the vocational study programmes. They recommended that these aspects be further explored in other contexts.

Also investigating vocational teacher agency, also in Finland, Vähäsantanen (2015) distinguished three complementary perspectives of teacher agency, including influencing one’s own work, making decisions and choices about one’s own involvement in an educational reform, and negotiating and influencing ones’ own professional identity. The study showed that professional agency is closely related to a wide range of phenomena at the individual level, including productive working and professional identity negotiation. Particularly, when teachers were unable to do what seemed meaningful to them, they became dissatisfied and lost commitment to the work organisation. Similarly, in other situations such as when social demands imposed by the reform conflicted with the teachers’ professional identities and when teachers did not have resources to negotiate their identities, they did not perform effectively in response to the reform. This study thus highlighted that professional agency is related to both individual and social resources. However, although professional agency at organisational and community level was discussed, it is still at a limited level compared with studies of teacher’s individual agency among the studies. Vähäsantanen (2015) thus recommended further examination of teacher collective agency.
Among the limited studies conducted at tertiary level, Tao and Gao (2017) explored how eight Chinese teachers enacted agency to facilitate their professional development during curricular reform at a Chinese university. Based on teachers’ retrospective narratives, complemented with field notes, this study examined the enactment of teacher agency in connection with professional development, as manifested in their learning investment, teaching engagement and relevant research endeavours. The teachers showed strong agency in their continued investment in learning to prepare for teaching the new curriculum and fulfilling and improving their teaching tasks. Meanwhile, they also displayed varied agency in research activities. Under the contextual constraints on their research participation, only the teachers who held a strong identity commitment, that is professional interests and aspirations, sustained their research endeavours. Tao and Gao (2017) thus highlighted the importance of identity commitment and implicit power relations in teacher agency, especially in relation to research activities. Regarding the teachers’ collective agency, they concluded that teachers at the tertiary level are more likely to work individually and learn, teach and research within their own professional trajectories. Overall, despite limited research, studies exploring teacher agency at tertiary levels highlight both social influences and teachers’ identities play a role in agency. Collegiality among teachers in response to educational changes or teachers’ collective agency deserves more exploration (Vähäsantanen, 2015).

So far, I have shown teachers’ responses, which delineate their agency, in response to policy enactment, the influences of both sociocultural factors and teacher identities on teacher agency as well as reviewing studies on teacher agency at tertiary level. How teacher agency has been explored in the Vietnamese context will be reviewed in the next section.

2.4.5. Teacher agency in policy enactment in Vietnam
The previous sections have discussed studies on teacher agency in the general scholarship of educational policy enactment and at a tertiary level as well as factors influencing teacher agency. In the last body of reviewed literature, the focus narrowed to studies of teacher agency in Vietnam. In the context of Vietnam, several studies have discussed policy implementation such as educational policy borrowing in a globalised world, particularly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015), or local challenges to global needs in English language education (Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2018).

Among a limited number of studies focusing on teachers’ perspectives in relation to policy implementation, Mai (2014) explored the perceptions of Vietnamese primary English teachers regarding their own English language proficiency and their attitudes towards MOET’s training courses and standardised levels of English language proficiency required by the MOET. The teachers self-rated their English language proficiency and compared it with the required level of English proficiency for their job. They expressed dissatisfaction with their low proficiency despite their confidence that it was enough for their job, as well as their disagreement with the standard set by the MOET. The author pointed out several factors that influenced the teachers’ responses, such as the economic situation of Vietnam, pre-service primary teacher education curriculum, textbook design, and the objectives of English teaching at primary level. Mai (2014) argued that the difficulties and needs of teachers, who are the main protagonists in response to macro-change, should be considered during the change process.

Also focusing on the primary school level, Nguyen and Bui (2016) investigated teacher agency in low socio-economic and remote areas where they believed to have difficulties in implementing educational change. Their research uncovered the ways in which a group of teachers in a mountainous area in Vietnam interpreted, interrogated and appropriated English language policy. The study addressed the teachers’ attitudes to the English policies and the
extent to which they possessed the capacity for change using Fullan’s (1993) theory of change agency. The study highlighted teachers’ capacity to become change agents in their local context. The authors called for providing teachers with opportunities to design their own teaching practices and to reconceptualise and transform these practices to develop their agency. Recommendations were also made for policy makers as well as teacher educators to recognise the roles of teachers as leaders in curriculum reform, and stressed the need for adequate preparation for policy change. Although Nguyen and Bui (2016) concluded that the teachers displayed capacity as change agents, they did not explore how this agency, was influenced by their identity and sociocultural backgrounds. In addition, like Mai (2014), Nguyen and Bui (2016) focused on teacher agency at primary educational level.

2.5. Research gaps

The review of research on teacher agency in response to educational change and policy enactment has revealed a range of issues that deserve greater research attention. The review of the different frameworks for classifying types of agency, such as resistance, dedication, accommodation, have provided useful insights and ways of characterising agency, however they do not show any interconnectedness among these categories.

Datnow (2018) has argued that teachers’ initial emotional responses to reform are an important consideration in the reform process due to the potential influence emotions can have on long-term professional engagement individually and with colleagues. Supporting this view, van Veen and Sleegers (2009) highlighted that emotions help individuals make sense of what is going on in their workplace; they are, therefore, part of individuals’ meaning-making processes. However, the emotional dimension is considered “one of the most neglected dimensions of educational change” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 278). Several scholars have noted that teachers’ emotional responses in educational change have been under-examined
Moreover, few studies have discussed collective teacher agency in response to educational change and policy enactment. Indeed, the review of literature has shown that studies examining teachers’ collective agency are scarce (Bandura, 2000; Fu & Nashon, 2014; Spicer, 2011). Insight into collective agency holds great promise for building an understanding of agency in a Southeast Asian setting. In the light of the studies by Datnow (2012) and Spicer (2011), there is scope to explore the collaborations of transitioned teachers not only in formal meetings, but also in interactions among professional communities in various social-collective settings and networks.

Although previous studies have highlighted that sociocultural factors and teacher identity influence the ways teachers respond to change, studies exploring both factors have been limited (Lasky, 2005; Vähäsantanen, 2015). Even fewer studies concerning the influence of sociocultural factors on teacher agency in the process of educational change have been conducted in Southeast Asian contexts. There is scope for studies investigating the influences of sociocultural factors and teacher identity on teacher agency in Vietnam, at a time when dramatic educational policy changes have been taking place in foreign language teaching. The sociocultural approach to teacher agency, which interrogates influences of social and power issues on teachers’ responses, holds rich potential for understanding the contextual factors that influence transitioned teachers’ decision-making. Finally, placing the limited literature investigating teacher agency in response to educational change in the Vietnamese context, the number of studies which explore teacher agency, especially at tertiary level, as well as the factors influencing the exercise of teacher agency, have been few. This study aspires to contribute to this limited
scholarship in educational research in Vietnam. In exploring the transitioned teachers’ agency, the next section introduces two analytical tools, Figured Worlds and the subject-centred sociocultural framework.

2.6. Figured Worlds and the sociocultural framework: A dual heuristic for this study

This study explores transitioned teachers’ agency in response to the enactment of the policy shift to English and policy on the proficiency benchmark. Following my review of the literature, I adopted sociocultural approach as a broad framework of the study. In the light of this approach, the two concepts, Figured Worlds and subject-centred sociocultural framework, are dually used to understand and analyse the range of influences on the way transitioned teachers exercised agency. I propose that Figured Worlds and a subject-centred sociocultural framework offer a rich dual heuristic to explore transitioned teachers’ interactions with the people and contexts surrounding them. Figured Worlds provides a lens for understanding the whole picture of the transition of the teachers, and their responses to and engagement in this educational change when moving from their previous worlds of teaching other foreign languages to their new worlds of teaching English. In addition, acknowledging the complexities of teachers’ responses to policy, the subject-centred sociocultural approach adopted by Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä and Paloniemi (2013) provides a multilayered framework for understanding the potential factors and conditions influencing teacher agency in relation to educational reform. This framework covers sociocultural factors and subject-centred aspects, particularly teachers’ identities. Figure 2.1 visualises how I propose to use these two concepts as twin organisers for exploring the transitioned teachers’ agency in the light of Figured Worlds, and the factors influencing their agency in the light of the subject-centred sociocultural approach.
Figure 2.1. A dual heuristic for the study.

2.6.1. Figured Worlds and educational change process

Drawn from the sociocultural theoretical work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), a Figured World is defined as a realm of interpretation that is socially and culturally constructed, in which “particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). The notion of Figured Worlds has been used to explore teachers’ engagement in various contexts (e.g. Bragg, 2013; Urrieta, 2007; Varghese & Snyder, 2018), and in relation to language policy implementation (e.g. Pennington, 2007; Plaisance, 2014). Figured Worlds builds in an understanding of change and agency (Varghese & Snyder, 2018), and hence can also highlight the dynamic nature of the ongoing and transitioning process of change and agency for teachers. Using a sociocultural approach, Figured Worlds allows me to consider transitioned teachers as actors who mindfully engage with and continually construct their worlds in response to implemented policies and change. In addition, Figured Worlds are dependent on interactions and people’s intersubjectivity for perpetuation (Urrieta, 2007), and exploring the intersubjectivity of the transitioned teachers could assist in understanding their collective agency. In particular, the notion of Figured Worlds also highlights its actors’ social interactions
with other actors (i.e., colleagues, leaders). This view thus assists in exploring the complexities in transitioned teachers’ responses.

The concept of Figured Worlds has been used in various educational research contexts, especially to explore the worlds and spaces of teachers in their professional contexts. For example, Tomczyk (2009) explored how a group of prospective teachers from a teacher preparation programme conceptualised their experiences in leading parent-teacher conferences. Plaisance (2014) examined the ways in which a group of teachers perceived and improvised their teaching in and outside their classrooms when enacting a prescribed literacy curriculum. Similarly, the notion of Figured Worlds was employed by Min (2015) to explore how teachers incorporated and improvised contemplative practices including mindfulness, concentration, and yoga in their classrooms. In relation to policy and teaching, Pennington (2007) employed the notion to demonstrate the worlds of policymakers and teachers in exploring their opposing views when implementing the policy of the “No child left behind Act” of 2002 in the U.S. Overall, Figured Worlds have been shown to be a suitable and valuable lens for studies investigating teachers’ experiences when they interact with their environment, and their improvisations in different contexts to construct their own worlds and respond to the change.

The concept of space in Figured Worlds can be used to visualise the transition of teachers from their previous to their new work spaces. These are spaces where characters (contributors / participants) act, importance or relevance is placed on these acts, and value judgments are made about the outcomes produced from these acts (Iannone, 2014). Using the concept of space or the realm of interpretation, allows the exploration of their perceptions, feelings and interpretations of the change from teachers’ previous worlds or first foreign language teaching spaces to a new space or ELT.
From the perspective of Figured Worlds, agency is born through acts of *improvisation* (Holland et al., 1998; Holquist, 2001, cited in Sisson, 2018). Improvisation is necessary when an individual faces a situation that cannot be adequately accommodated through his or her existing representational world. Figured Worlds emphasises the ways in which individuals improvise by crafting new responses to circumstances or events, and by creating their own spaces for change, especially when they face situations, or a combination of circumstances and conditions, unfamiliar to their existing representational Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998). The theory of improvisation has great potential for understanding how transitioned teachers improvise their ways through transition. In the light of the concepts underpinning Figured Worlds, my study is based on the following assumption: *Teachers’ agency can be potentially examined through the ways they individually or collectively feel, perceive, interpret, improvise, and judge change.*

### 2.6.2. Subject-centred sociocultural approach

As discussed earlier in this chapter, this study is underpinned by the sociocultural approach towards understanding agency (see Section 2.2.2). Teacher agency is conceived as an emergent phenomenon connected to influences stemming from specific social, political and economic contexts and/or institutional pressures, such as social structures, policies and norms, and resourced by a range of personal factors, such as pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, experience and established practices (Biesta et al., 2015; Coburn, 2004; Lasky, 2005). In addition to Figured Worlds, I use a modified subject-centred sociocultural approach (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) as interpretive lens to examine the factors influencing teachers’ exercise of their agency. Figure 2.2 visualises the original model of the subject-centred sociocultural approach suggested by Eteläpelto et al. (2013).
The subject-centred sociocultural approach highlights the interplay between individual factors and sociocultural factors in teacher agency. The ways teachers think, act and learn, through and during their work is imbued and resourced or constrained by the sociocultural context in which they work. Eteläpelto et al.’s framework captures two factors influencing teachers’ professional agency: the sociocultural conditions of the workplace and professional subjects.

Before presenting the modified framework employed in this study, I will point out significant differences in terms of terminology and definition used in Eteläpelto et al. (2013)’s framework and the ones used in this study. First, regarding terminology, this study distinguishes between teachers’ professional agency and teacher agency. This study uses the term teacher agency in order to cover a broader view of teachers’ responses and their agency not only in their profession but also through other activities such as social interactions. Likewise, instead of using the term professional identity, I use the term teacher identity to explore other potential aspects of teacher identities (such as their family roles) rather than just their professional identities. Second, as shown in Figure 2.2, Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) definition of teachers’ professional agency is that it is “practised when professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities.”

Figure 2.2. Subject-centred sociocultural approach by Eteläpelto et al. (2013).
work and/or their professional identities” (p. 61). Although this understanding of teachers’ professional agency covers the sense of both the individual (subjects) and collective (communities) agency, it does not pay adequate attention to the emotional (i.e. how they feel or perceive) and judgmental (i.e. how they judge the change) aspects of teachers through the policy enactment processes. Teacher agency is thus used in this thesis, instead of teachers’ professional agency, to cover the ways in which teachers individually and collectively feel, interpret, improvise, influence, make choices, take stances and judge educational change.

Concerning the above differences, I propose a modified version of the subject-centred sociocultural framework by Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013). Figured 2.3 illustrates this framework.

![Figure 2.3. A modified subject-centred sociocultural approach.](image)

Although the original framework allows for the exploration of the potential influences of different sociocultural and material constraints and resources on teacher agency in the course of educational policy enactment, several differences are noted in the modified version. Teacher agency has been highlighted to shape and also to be shaped by sociocultural factors and teacher identity. However, due to the limited scope of this study on teacher agency, I focus on how sociocultural factors and teacher identities influence teacher agency, which is illustrated
through the bold arrows in Figure 2.3. While Eteläpelto and her colleagues (2013) used the term *Conditions of the workplace*, this context needs to be expanded for this study so that the sociocultural factors explored are not limited to the workplace. For example, Ball (2015) introduced different interconnected contextual factors which have influence on policy enactment, such as situated contexts (e.g. location of the school, school histories and intakes) and external contexts (e.g. pressures and expectations from the broader policy context such as MOET). In this study, the broader view of sociocultural factors, including not only conditions of workplace but also other contexts, is employed.

In this study, the broader view of sociocultural factors, including not only conditions of workplace but also other contexts, is employed. In Figure 2.3, Eteläpelto and her colleagues (2013) describe six sociocultural workplace conditions that influence teachers’ professional agency. These are material circumstances, physical artifacts, power relations, work cultures, discourses and subject positions. As these scholars note, these factors are intertwined; for example, physical artifacts can belong to material circumstances. Taking teachers as subjects of the sociocultural framework, this study investigates how transitioned teachers take stances in relation to educational change. Therefore, as shown in Figure 2.3, *subject positions* is not required in terms of the conditions of the workplace; rather, it is investigated as one feature of the teacher agency. Subject positions can also be seen through power relations. These relations are elucidated through the professional relationships of the context, particularly, the relationships among transitioned teachers, and transitioned teachers and other teachers within an educational setting, as well as the relationships between these teachers and the leader. In addition, while Eteläpelto et al. (2013) identified *discourse* as one of the sociocultural conditions of a workplace in this study not only is the discourse or talk and other forms of language used by the transitioned teachers explored, but the cultural values hidden in these forms of communication are also examined. That is, discourse is not presented as an influential sociocultural factor. Instead, when analysing the
transitioned teachers’ accounts of their experiences to investigate their agency, the focus is on analysing and acquiring a deep understanding of the meanings behind.

In terms of work culture, this study also investigates the professional working culture of transitioned teachers such as collaboration and work styles. In exploring the support or constraints of social networks among teachers in relation to instructional practice, professional development and educational reform, Datnow (2012) highlights that social networks or professional communities can be both enhanced to work toward positive change or to thwart it. The social networks in which transitioned teachers individually and collectively communicate and enact their tasks is explored. The material circumstances cover the professional physical support from the context in relation to professional developments as well as language environment context. Although sociocultural factors, namely power relations, work cultures and material circumstances, were not clearly delineated in Eteläpelto et al.’s framework, these factors are worth further exploring to clarify how they are shown in particular contexts. Therefore, they are used as themes in the data analysis for this study considering the change contexts of Vietnam.

Professional subjects are also noted in Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) subject-centred sociocultural approach. In this approach, teacher professional knowledge and competence, together with work history and experience were categorised separately from professional identity. Arguably, these aspects can be seen as part of teacher identity. Menter (2008) divided the contextual dimension of professional identities into different levels, which were the micro level (teacher’s biography and his/her interaction with colleagues, students and parents in the immediate workplace context), the meso level (the teacher in his/her school), and the macro level (the teacher as a member of the teaching force in the wider sociocultural context). Following Menter, the view of the teacher in terms of the dimension of teacher identity, their previous teaching experience, work history, their knowledge and competence as being a
teacher, are employed in this study to examine the influences of teacher identity on their agency in response to educational change. In addition, both identity and its plural form, identities, are used interchangeably in the literature (Lasky, 2005; Sloan, 2006, Kayi-Aydar, 2015). In this study, the plural form of identities is preferred when mentioning the identities of the transitioned teachers (Castañeda, 2011; Gormally, 2016; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Overton, 2006).

2.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature that has informed my thinking and helped frame my study. Figure 2.4 provides an overview of this chapter.

![Figure 2.4. Overview of Chapter 2.](image)

From the review of the different perspectives on agency, I took sociocultural perspective on agency and teacher agency in policy enactment. Two concepts were then identified and presented as a dual heuristic to structure the exploration of teacher agency: Figured Worlds,
and a modified version of the subject-centred sociocultural framework. In the next chapter, the research questions, the research design and methodology are presented.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction
The previous chapter set out the literature concerning teacher agency in response to educational policy enactment. This chapter presents the methodology employed to address the research questions in this thesis. Before presenting the research design, I briefly revisit the research context and state the research questions. This is followed by the rationale for adopting a constructivist epistemology to underpin the study and the reasons for employing a qualitative case study approach. Next, I define the whole case of this study, the cohort of 20 transitioned teachers, and introduce these teachers together with one university and one faculty leader as research participants. I then move on to present three-stage research design in this study, before describing the methods of data collection and analysis. I collected the data over a six-month period. The data was obtained from a preliminary survey, two documents, semi-structured interviews with both transitioned teachers and the leaders, and observations of the transitioned teachers’ online communication, their distance-teaching sessions and faculty meetings. Thematic content analysis, together with Cultural Discourse Studies (Shi-xu, 2012) were used to analyse the data. Finally, I reflect on my researcher role in this study and discuss the limitations of the research.

3.2. Research context and research questions
As noted in Chapter One, this study was conducted in the Foreign Languages Faculty of a public university in Vietnam. The university is one of leading partners in National Project 2020 and is actively involved in its implementation. I shall refer to it as TriThuc (Knowledge) University. The experiences of the teachers who have undergone the transition from teaching other foreign languages to teaching English at TriThuc University provided a rich and
informative picture of the teachers’ engagement with educational change and how they exercised agency in response to policy enactment.

The thesis pursues three overarching research questions and associated sub-questions:

1. How did the teachers in the transitioned group respond to the transition?
   1.1. What were their attitudes towards the transition?
   1.2. What adaptations did they make in response to the transition?

2. How did the teachers in the transitioned group respond to National Project 2020, particularly the required benchmark for English teachers’ proficiency?
   2.1. How did they position themselves in relation to the requirement?
   2.2. How did they interpret the requirement?
   2.3. How did they engage with the requirement individually and collectively?

3. What factors influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the required benchmark?
   3.1. How did sociocultural factors influence the teachers’ responses?
   3.2. How did teacher identities influence their responses?

3.3. Research epistemology and approach
This study employed a constructivist view as the general theoretical approach to explore and understand the transitioned teachers’ responses within a qualitative case study design. The following sections explain and justify these choices in detail.

3.3.1. Rationale for a constructivist epistemology
The decisions about which research methods can be used to achieve the most reliable and valid findings are guided by the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of knowledge or how realities are constructed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This thesis takes a constructivist view, which is underpinned by the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, and that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds.
(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; McGregor & Murane, 2010; Merriam, 1998). It takes the view that knowledge is not only subjective but also intersubjective and incorporates contradictory perspectives.

Taking a constructivist view enables the researcher to “capture authentically the lived experience of people” (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010, p. 720). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), people attach different meanings to their perceptions and experiences based on their past experiences. The social and cultural contexts and the settings in which the participants live and work need to be examined to understand their experiences. Constructivist researchers build understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by collecting qualitative data, such as observations and interviews, and then interpreting these findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). As Merriam (1998) notes, research produces knowledge about the world and thus, researchers are interpreters and gatherers of information on participants’ lived experiences. In this thesis, I worked as an interpreter and a gatherer of the ways in which the transitioned teachers exercised their agency in educational contexts, through my roles as an insider-researcher, a Vietnamese tertiary lecturer, and an outsider-researcher, not a transitioned teacher (see Section 3.8.1 for more details of these two roles).

3.3.2. Rationale for a qualitative case study approach

Case study research is defined as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context… in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984, p. 23). In this approach, case study researchers attempt to describe and analyse the case under investigation both intensively and holistically within a bounded context. In the field of education, case study research began to gain importance in the late 1960s and since then has been widely used (Duff, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011) to examine contemporary situations in education and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods (Qi,
Case studies allow researchers to probe the reality of educational settings (van Lier, 2005) and to examine the pragmatic implications of this reality for both teaching practice and policy formation (Merriam, 1998). As an influential method in education research, case study seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors (Qi, 2009). It can portray, analyre and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts of their lived reality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, cited in Qi, 2009).

As stated, this thesis employs a qualitative case study research design to mine the in-depth knowledge and understandings of the transitioned teachers through a period of major educational change and policy enactment in TriThuc University. It is a descriptive and exploratory case study (Yin, 1984, 2003). As Yin (2009) asserts, the appropriateness of case study research is emphasised when the research addresses either a descriptive and/or an explanatory question. A case study approach aligns well with this study’s research questions, which aim to explore the participants’ perceptions of the changes (i.e. the what), and the ways in which they responded to the changes and policy enactments (i.e. the how and why). This approach enabled me to deeply explore their attitudes and adaptations towards the transition and the ways they engaged with the proficiency benchmark (descriptive questions) and how their responses and engagement were influenced by other conditions, including contextual factors and their own identities (explanatory questions).

3.4. Defining the case and introducing the participants

The qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009) employed in this study involved the cohort of the transitioned teachers as the whole case of the study. The individual transitioned teachers were embedded cases within the research setting. These cases added significant opportunities for extensive analysis and to enhance the insights into the single overall case of the transitioned
teachers. In addition, faculty and university leaders took part in the study, whose views potentially provided insights into the transitioned teachers’ responses.

Purposive sampling was implemented to identify relevant participants for the study, who had transitioned from teaching other foreign languages to teaching English. Maxwell (1996) defines purposive sampling as a “strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are deliberately selected in order to provide important information that cannot be [obtained] from other choices” (p. 69). All the transitioned teachers (n=20) in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, TriThuc University, were contacted via email to ask for their participation in the study. The email included an information sheet explaining the aims of the study and what would be involved (see Appendix A), and a consent form to be signed (see Appendix B) if they agreed to take part in the study. This email asked them to take part in both a survey (see Appendix C) and an interview, which explored their attitudes and adaptations to the transition. All the transitioned teachers (n=20) contacted agreed to take part in the first stage of the study (see more details of this stage at Section 3.5). Among these 20 teachers, the transitioned teachers from Transition Two (n=17) (see Section 4.2.2. for more details about Transition Two) agreed to continue to participate in the second stage of the study, which investigated their responses to the benchmark of teacher proficiency (see more details of this stage at Section 3.5). Based mainly on these transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the proficiency benchmark in the first two stages of the study and their availability to participate in further interviews, a total of eight participants, two former teachers of Chinese, two former teachers of Russian and four former teachers of French, took part in Stage Three of the study (see more details of this stage at Section 3.5). This stage was designed to obtain more in-depth insights from the responses in the first two stages. The transitioned teachers who took part in this stage (n=8) also signed another consent form (see Appendix I) before the data were collected.
Faculty and university leaders were also invited to participate in the interviews at Stage One and Stage Two of the study. These interviews aimed to elicit insights into the transition and the proficiency benchmark from the leaders’ perspectives and to identify any mismatches between the transitioned teachers’ perceptions and the leaders’ in the change enactment. A consent form was sent to the selected leaders to ask for their participation (see Appendix D). At the time of the research, there were three leaders in the faculty, one Dean and two Vice-Deans. As one of them was a transitioned teacher, and another had only recently been nominated as a faculty leader and was not involved in leadership during the transition, I decided not to invite these two leaders to participate. Hence, I only asked for the consent of the third faculty leader who was willing to take part in the study. As for university leaders, the one that I asked to participate in this research had overseen foreign language education at the university and was directly involved in the transition. Therefore, the interviews with him also made contributions to understanding the context of TriThuc University and its development plans.

3.5. Research design

A research design is the logic that links the research questions of a study to the data to be collected and the methods of analysis to be adopted. In the light of the constructivist worldview underpinning this study, the research design focused on qualitative data. The survey, which was used to construct a profile of the participants, also contained mainly qualitative questions. Figure 3.1 illustrates the three stages of the research.
Figure 3.1. Three stages of the research design.

Stage One of the research design investigated the whole single case, that is, all the transitioned teachers’ perceptions of the transition process and their perceptions of how they adapted to this change. A faculty historical development document was analysed, and a preliminary survey was used to mainly address the transitioned teachers’ demographic data and provide preliminary findings on their perceptions about the transition and proficiency benchmark. Semi-structured interviews with the transitioned teachers were conducted to ask about their transition. A semi-structured interview with the faculty leader, who was the faculty leader at the time of transitioning and also at the time of data collection, were also conducted to explore the leader’s perceptions of the transition.
Stage Two explored the transitioned teachers’ perceptions of how they engaged with ELT, and their responses to the benchmark for English proficiency. As mentioned earlier, only the transitioned teachers from Transition Two (n=17) (see Section 4.2.2. for more details about Transition Two) took part in this stage. A document delineating the following-up actions by TriThuc University after the university received the requirement from the MOET was collected and analysed to set the context of the benchmark at the university. Semi-structured interviews were used with the transitioned teachers participating at this stage. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the faculty and university leaders to explore their perceptions about the benchmark. In the first two stages of the research design, some data collection overlapped. The survey which was used in Stage One provided preliminary data in the first and second stage. Likewise, observations of meetings, distance teaching sessions and online communication (see more details at Section 3.6.2.4) were also done throughout both first two stages.

Based on the findings from the interviews and observation field notes from Stage One and Stage Two, further in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight participants were conducted in Stage Three to yield further insights into the previous findings (see Section 3.4 for the selection of these participants). Details of how the data were collected are presented in the next section.

3.6. Data collection
This section commences by clarifying the ethical considerations of the study before outlining the data collection process. The stages in the six-month data collection process are then described, followed by the description of all instruments employed in this research. This section ends by presenting how I managed the large quantity of data collected.
3.6.1. Ethical considerations

I took a range of ethical measures in order to protect participants’ wellbeing, obtain their informed consent and guarantee their confidentiality and privacy. I followed the ethical clearance process of Griffith University to achieve approval to conduct the research (GU Ref No: 2016/769). The following principles were applied to protect the participants’ rights throughout the research process: obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing confidentiality, and ensuring anonymity and non-traceability. Before the data collection process started, I requested and obtained permission from one of the leaders in-charge to gain access to TriThuc University and the Faculty of Foreign Languages in order to conduct the research. I then sent a letter to the leaders in the Foreign Languages Faculty and to all relevant faculty teachers inviting their participation. As mentioned, attached to the invitation letter were an information sheet and a consent form which explained the purpose of the research and what the participants would be asked to do (see Appendices A and B). Signed consent forms were also obtained from the participants in the study before any data collection commenced. All participants’ names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and they were assured that they would not be identified in any way in future reporting or publication. Participants were guaranteed there would be no risk to them, that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study.

3.6.2. Data collection instruments

The employment of a variety of data collection methods ensures that a research study can achieve a detailed and complex data set and thus build the trustworthiness of the data and findings (Glesne, 2006; Yin, 2009). The instruments in this study consisted of a survey, documents, interviews, and observations, all detailed in the following sections.
3.6.2.1. Documents

The employment of documents in case study research has been confirmed as worthwhile by many scholars. As Patton (2002) asserts, documents can provide background information and historical insights into a research context in a cost-effective and non-intrusive manner, thus adding valuable supplementary data to an investigation or constituting a particularly rich source of information. Glesne (2006) affirms that documents give testimony to verify the truth and facts drawn from interviews and observations and confirm findings from these sources. Indeed, this qualitative research data collection method, which includes both printed and electronic materials, allows for review and evaluation of written texts and images without researcher intervention in the research setting (Bowen, 2009).

In this study, I collected and analysed two documents. To avoid the risk of disclosing the name of the university research setting, the titles of the faculty and university documents are not provided. Instead, these documents are referred as Document #1 and Document #2. Document #1 was collected first at the faculty in Stage One of data collection. It provides background data about the twenty-year development history and different development stages of the Foreign Languages Faculty since its formation in tandem with the development of TriThuc University. All the faculty had access to this document, and I asked permission from the Faculty Dean to borrow a hard copy and I was allowed to keep it for my research. Document #2, which was issued by TriThuc University, was collected in Stage Two of data collection to situate the English language proficiency benchmark at the institutional level. This document delineated how the required benchmark for English language proficiency was introduced at TriThuc University and follow-up actions of the university. This document was kept in the faculty in a hard-copy folder in the faculty which contained all documents sent to the faculty from the university and the MOET.
3.6.2.2. Survey

The administration of an online survey, which can be undertaken in a short amount of time and in a readily accessible form, is a highly effective way to save the researcher’s time, effort and money. Furthermore, a well-designed survey can help reduce interviewer bias and increase the reliability of the data gathered (Bryman, 2012). A survey can also elicit attitudinal information that even respondents themselves may not be aware of. The distribution of a preliminary online survey in Stage One of data collection enabled me to gather overall information and construct demographic profiles of the participants. The survey (see Appendix C) consisted of five main parts containing mainly open questions: (i) demographic information about the participants’ ages, number of years in foreign language teaching, their current division and main roles; (ii) questions about the education of their first foreign languages (i.e. Chinese, Russian and French), such as number of years in their teaching of first foreign language, their highest qualification in this language, their educational background and whether or not they were still teaching this language; (iii) the same questions that were asked about their first foreign language were asked for their experiences in learning and teaching English; (iv) questions about the transition, such as the year they started their transition to learning and teaching English, and their reasons for transition; and (v) their views of foreign language educational policy change in Vietnam in general.

The open items in the survey (see Appendix C) were designed to elicit more information from the participants’ own emic perspectives, particularly their working experience in their first foreign languages or the reasons for their transition. The use of this survey provided preliminary themes and supporting information to be further explored in Stage Two and Stage Three of the research, namely semi-structured interviews or observation field notes. From the analysis of the survey (see Section 3.7.2 for data analysis), the follow-up semi-structured interviews were then designed for these participants.
3.6.2.3. Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews in all three stages of my study. While the preliminary survey enabled me to build an overall profile of demographic data of the participants as well as their opinions of the transition and general policy changes, there was a risk that the teachers’ responses could be superficial (Dörnyei, 2003). Therefore, interviews helped me to elicit insights into the participants’ experiences and perceptions (Richards, 2009) of both the transition and the proficiency benchmark. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with different sets of questions (see Appendices E and Appendix F) were conducted for two reasons. First, semi-structured interviews have been used extensively in educational research by virtue of their loose structure (Borg, 2006). They allowed me to develop a rapport with the participants and thus obtain rich data (Anderson & Burns, 1989; Fontana & Frey, 1994). Second, although the structure of semi-structured interviews was relatively loose, a list of core probing questions guided the interview process (Cohen et al., 2000). All the semi-structured interviews were scheduled between one and two weeks after the participants had completed the survey and the analysis of the responses had been completed.

In order to enhance the interview quality, I designed probe questions to encourage both elaboration and clarification (Creswell, 2012). However, excessive probing was avoided because it may have led to participant defensiveness (Seidman, 2006). In addition, as recommended in Seidman (2006), I focused more on active listening than speaking and showed constant interest via backchanneling signals. Therefore, during the interviews, I let the interviewees control the overall pace. I also attempted to exclude all leading questions, ambiguous or loaded words (Dörnyei, 2007).

All the interviews were audiorecorded (with consent) by a digital recorder and a recording application on a mobile phone. Recording the interviews allowed me to concentrate fully on the interview because I could observe their non-verbal behaviour and engage better
with their responses. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese but code switching between English and Vietnamese was not discouraged, as it assisted the participants’ thinking process (Faerch & Kasper, 1987).

3.6.2.4. Observation field notes

In addition to interviews, long-term, naturalistic and direct observations were used. As Chmiliar (2010) claims, interview data may reflect “only what individuals think, or think they should report, at that particular point in time” (p. 126) and, as Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2002) argue, studies that examine teachers’ stated beliefs without actual observations run the risk of only “telling half the story” (p. 177). Therefore, the use of observations helped me to verify data acquired from the interviews and identify the consistencies and inconsistencies between what was said in the interviews and the participants’ “espoused beliefs” and “beliefs-in-action” (Borg, 2001, p. 187).

My observations were conducted in multiple settings through Stage One and Stage Two of the research to explore the engagement of the transitioned teachers in the field of ELT, their actual responses to the transition and required benchmark and communications with one another, with English teachers and the leaders in their teaching contexts (see Appendix K for the observation protocol). These observations included four faculty meetings, eight distance teaching sessions2 with several transitioned teachers, and four Viber online communication groups. These observations were described in field notes that contained detailed descriptions of the meetings, teaching sessions or online communication group chats. Observations allowed me to understand in-depth and up-close how the transitioned teachers responded to the change.

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2 During my data collection at TriThuc University, I was asked to help the hectic workload at the Foreign Languages Faculty by teaching several distance-teaching courses
The mutual online communication platform Viber\(^3\) was widely used as a communication tool in the Foreign Languages Faculty. I was an active participant in two Viber groups: Faculty Viber One and Faculty Viber Two. Faculty Viber One was the first discussion group created by the faculty and included most faculty members. In this group chat, members were able to freely share their opinions, raise questions and discuss all aspects of their work and social lives. Faculty Viber Two was another group that included all members of the faculty. Unlike Faculty Viber One where the content was diverse, all information shared and posted in Faculty Viber Two was work-related. It was used as a platform only to receive notices about work or work-related events.

In addition to these faculty groups, I was also an observer of two other Viber division group chats. The faculty consisted of two divisions: English 1 Division\(^4\) and English 2 Division\(^5\). In addition to these two faculty group chats, I was also an observer of two other English 2 Division group chats: Division Viber One and Division Viber Two. Functionally, these two groups were the same as the two faculty groups. However, none of the members of these two groups belonged to English 1 Division. Participation and/or observation of these groups provided additional information on how the transitioned teachers individually and collectively discussed, collaborated and engaged with their transition and the proficiency benchmark.

I also attended the four faculty meetings which were held during the data collection process. I asked permission to record the meetings for research purposes. I used a recorder to ensure that I could cover all the content of the meetings and at the same time observe and note down the behaviour and actions of the participants during the meetings. Several sets of previous

\(^3\) This name is replaced for the real name of the platform for anonymous purposes.

\(^4\) English 1 Division: teaching English for students who specialise in English such as English language teaching, interpreting and translation

\(^5\) English 2 Division: teaching English as a required foreign language for students who specialise in other majors (i.e. Economics, Business, Mathematics or Literature)
faculty meeting minutes were also collected to explore what had been mentioned in previous meetings and capture the long process of the transition and the benchmark implementation in the faculty.

In addition, I joined eight weekend distance teaching trips with seven transitioned teachers. These trips are part of the faculty’s activities to deliver courses to distance learners from different provinces in Vietnam under National Project 2020. I was asked to participate in these teaching sessions by the Vice Dean of the Foreign Languages Faculty to assist with the heavy teaching workload. By joining the distance teaching sessions, I was able to enhance my relationships with the participants as well as understand the hectic work atmosphere in ELT. During some of these trips, I also managed to arrange time to interview some transitioned teachers.

Glesne (2006) suggests that researchers can choose among four positions, namely full observer, observer as a participant, participant as observer and full participant, depending on the research questions, the context of the research, and the theoretical framework of the research. In this study, depending on the suitability of my position in each situation, I located myself along various points on the participant-observer continuum (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Sometimes I was an observer (i.e. faculty meetings) but mostly I was a participant (i.e. a member of the online communication groups). Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) classify three types of observational processes: descriptive observation or observation of everything, focused observation and selective observation. I considered my observational process to be selective. I looked for specific attributes or characteristics that best described the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition such as their participation in online group chats, the faculty’s group and their first foreign language groups, or what they said in the faculty meetings about the required benchmark.
Overall, I collected different forms of data to strengthen and deepen the study. The survey helped to construct preliminary demographic profiles of the participants and the documents set out the context and background of the study as well as being useful to identify potential gaps between the actions outlined in documents and those that were implemented by the university and faculty. In-depth semi-structured interviews provided insights into the participants’ perceptions of the transition, their improvisations, and their experiences through the transition process. Interview data were combined and triangulated with my observations which were undertaken in diverse contexts such as faculty meetings and the online group chat. Observation complemented with follow-up semi-structured interviews potentially avoids bias and increases reliability in interpreting data and drawing conclusions from the research.

3.6.3. Data collection process

The data collection process lasted approximately six months, from November 2016 to May 2017. Table 3.1 outlines three sub-stages which were conducted in the data collection process. Stage One ran from 1st November to 20th January, the second stage from 12th January to 21st April, and the last stage from 16th March to the end of April. Due to their different time schedules, I did not wait for all participants to complete one stage before commencing the next. Rather, while waiting for the last few participants to complete the first stage survey and interviews, I began conducting the second stage interviews with the participants who had already completed Stage One. Likewise, participants who were ready to participate in the third stage were asked to start this stage, even though other participants had not yet finished Stage Two. This overlap of the timing in the data collection process assisted me in making the best use of time for the participants’ schedules as well as reducing the time for the whole data collection process. All data collection was conducted in Vietnamese, the participants’ and my native language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>01/11/2016</td>
<td>06/11/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enter the field and contact gatekeepers and participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Join Viber groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7/11/2016</td>
<td>18/11/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email surveys to the teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receipt and analysis of surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24/11/2016</td>
<td>15/01/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20/01/2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 1 with faculty leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>12/01/2017</td>
<td>22/03/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15/03/2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with university leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>16/03/2017</td>
<td>16/04/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07/04/2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2 with faculty leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Stage One, data were collected on the participants’ perceptions of the transition. First, 20 surveys were collected from the participating transitioned teachers (see more details in Section 3.4.3.2). After that, 20 follow-up interviews were conducted with these teachers (see Appendix E). Their perceptions, including their feelings and interpretations, experiences, improvisations and judgments of the transition were explored in these interviews. In addition, one interview with a faculty leader was also undertaken at this stage to explore his perceptions of the transition in general and the teachers’ transition in particular (see Appendix G).
Stage Two focused on the participants’ perceptions of the requirements of the university regarding both the teachers’ proficiency in English and students’ outcome standards. In this stage, interviews (see Appendix F for guided questions) with 17 teachers from Transition Two took place (see Section 4.2.2). These transitioned teachers were directly involved with the English proficiency benchmark. Insights into their perceptions of the transition as well as the requirements were also gained through the observation field notes including online communication, meetings, and distance teaching. One semi-structured interview with a university leader was also carried out in this stage to explore his views towards the proficiency benchmark implementation (see Appendix H for guided questions).

Following observations and preliminary analysis of the first two stages of data collection, the last stage concentrated on the eight participants (see Section 3.4 for the selection of these participants) with interviews conducted to obtain further insights (see Appendix J for guided interviews questions). The second interview with the faculty leader was also collected in this stage after observations and interviews with the transitioned teachers. The questions with the faculty leader about the proficiency benchmark implementation in the interview at this stage were similarly guided as the one above with the university leader (see Appendix H for guided questions).

3.6.4. Data management

Data management is an organisational process which involves “a designed structure for systematising, categorising, and filing materials to make them efficiently retrievable and duplicable” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 61). It is a challenging, integral, and vital part of qualitative research. In order to manage the large amount of data collected, I first allocated different folders on my computer: Documents, Survey, Interviews with the transitioned teachers, Interviews with the leaders, and Observations. In these folders, sub-folders were then created. For
example, in the Observations folder, I added three sub-folders: (1) Viber, (2) Distance teaching, and (3) Faculty meetings. Given that documents were preliminarily analysed in hard copy, they were scanned and kept in the Documents folder for further analysis and cross-checking. All the collected data were kept in three locations: on my personal laptop at home, on my personal laptop at the Griffith University office, and on Research Drive which is the online space supported by Griffith University to store research data. All these sources need passwords to be accessed to ensure their security. A similar process was also conducted for the data analysis with different folders created for different data which were saved after each analysis session. Table 3.2 presents the summary of collected data in the research.

Table 3.2.
Summary of Collected Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Two documents at institutional level: Document #1 and Document #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>20 surveys with 20 transitioned teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>45 interviews with teachers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Stage 1: 20 interviews with 20 transitioned teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Stage 2: 17 interviews with 17 transitioned teachers from Transition Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Stage 3: 8 interviews with 8 transitioned teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Three interviews with leaders:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 1 interview with university leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2 interviews with faculty leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Faculty meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viber groups</td>
<td>Four Viber groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Faculty Viber One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Faculty Viber Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Division Viber One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Division Viber Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Distance teaching sessions       | Eight sessions with seven transitioned teachers |

### 3.7. Data analysis

According to Merriam (1998), data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data” or “making meaning” (p. 178). It involves classifying, comparing, weighing and combining material from the collected data to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This complex process requires moving back and forth between concrete pieces of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. These meanings, understandings or insights constitute the findings of a study.

As there were only a small number of closed questions in the preliminary survey and the collected surveys only numbered 20, I analysed these quantitative questions manually and used Excel to store the data. The answers were manually counted and then presented numerically (e.g. 6 out of 20), rather than being converted to a percentage. For example, to classify the age range of the participants, I counted the number of identical responses in the surveys, wrote the total number down in the Excel file and presented this number in my findings. All the closed questions were analysed using a similar process.

#### 3.7.1. Analytical techniques

Content analysis was my main method used to analyse the data collected from the documents, multi-stage semi-structured interviews and field notes from observations and online
Communication. I used Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS) as an additional analytical lens to examine in-depth cultural features and meanings in the participants’ responses, for the analysis of the interview data.

3.7.1.1. Content analysis

Content analysis is a research technique that extracts a set of characteristics from a text (Franzosi, 2004) in order to make valid inferences from it (Weber, 1990). Content analysis can be used for many purposes, including analysing data from documents, interviews, and open-ended survey questions. By employing content analysis, recurrent instances of data such as words or phrases are inspected and labeled as items, themes or discourses. The instances are subsequently grouped into larger units and variously labelled (categories, organising themes or interpretive repertoire) (Wilkinson, 2004). For example, while analysing the transitioned teachers’ interviews, I noticed the following words appearing many times across the transitioned teachers’ accounts: worried, angry, shocked, and surprised. These words were then put into label: “Feelings”, which was then added to the theme: “Perceptions of the transition”.

In this study, qualitative content analysis was carried out in the form of thematic analysis, which is a method for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). This thematic approach not only involves organising and describing a data set, but also interpreting many aspects of the research issue (Boyatzis, 1998), thus discovering the “underlying deeper meaning of the data” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). In fact, the research questions and conceptual framework played an important part in delineating key ideas and constructing preliminary themes of the study. The qualitative data was analysed according to themes and concepts suggested by the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. For instance, with regard to Research Question 3 concerning factors influencing teachers’ responses, I modified the framework introduced in Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) study, which
constructed two main themes: sociocultural factors and teacher identities. Under these themes, there were sub-themes discovered during the analysis process, which were assigned different codes. The key ideas expressed by each participant were then formed into common themes. In the process of analysis, if new themes appeared and contributed valuable insights in the study, these were then referred to the research questions and the frameworks to construct new theories for the study.

3.7.1.2. Cultural Discourse Studies

All data for this study were collected in the participants’ first language, which was Vietnamese. Therefore, in order to strengthen understanding of their responses, in addition to content analysis, the study took an intercultural approach to analysing the data. A CDS approach was used as a lens to analyse how sociocultural factors influenced interviewees’ choice of words, sentence patterns, and the way they transferred it. CDS is a form of discourse research that is locally grounded (i.e. exhibiting cultural identity and usefulness) and globally minded (i.e. capable of engaging in international dialogue and showing global, human concerns) (Shi-xu, 2012). In this approach, it is premised that different cultural communities communicate and interact differently, in terms of their general worldviews, concepts, values, rules, strategies, means, channels, purposes, consequences, historical circumstances, and intra/interrelations (Shi-xu, 2009). These factors involve power-differential positions and relations (Shi-xu, 2009). As all the participants in the study were Vietnamese and most of them had had overseas training, understanding the underlying meanings in their discourse was crucial to the analysis. Being a native Vietnamese, I selected Vietnamese words and phrases which potentially contain cultural values and applied three principles for the construction and practice of CDS as suggested by Shi-xu (2012, p. 439):

1. Attend to culture-specific needs and perspectives;
2. Be aware of culturally diverse perspectives and human concerns (especially coexistence, common prosperity, knowledge innovation);

3. Take account of relevant international scholarly traditions in terms of concepts, theory, methods and terminology.

For example, in the interview discussing the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition, one said that because there were many others who had to transition, she felt it was “less scary” to make the decision to transition. On the surface, it seems to be a straightforward statement. However, in the light of CDS, I analysed what she meant in in terms of Vietnamese culture. Belonging to a shared community has been regarded as a strength by Vietnamese who nurture collectivism in their working style. Therefore, when she knew that it was not only her but other teachers who had to transition, she had more confidence in making the decision. Viewing the transitioned teachers’ accounts in terms of CDS helped me to understand the cultural influences on why this transitioned teacher decided to transition. Overall, a CDS approach assisted me to understand the deeper meanings behind the transitioned teachers’ word choices, how they responded in their interviews or the ways they acted.

3.7.2. Data analysis procedure

It is often advised that researchers should not wait until the data collection process has finished to start analysing data but rather, they should start as soon as the data collection process begins (Glesne, 2006; Miller, 2005; Richards, 2005; Slavin, 2007). In this study, data were analysed alongside the data collection process within each stage. The process of analysis involved coding textual data, searching for relationships in the data, cross-checking findings and synthesis. Data were analysed: (i) manually while listening to the recordings and (ii) using the software package NVivo (QSR). Coded themes were then translated from Vietnamese to English to be reported.
3.7.2.1. Manual data analysis

In the early stage of data collection, I analysed interview data manually while listening to the audios after the interviews. First, I identified broad codes inductively, using open and axial coding and I subsequently refined them through an iterative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). I constructed the first codes and segments relating to the three main research issues that appeared in the recordings (i.e. teachers’ transition, teachers’ perceptions of the proficiency benchmark and factors influencing their perceptions and their responses). These codes were then grouped into different themes and compared with the other recordings to identify any other new ideas that arose. Second, listening to the recordings immediately after they were collected enabled me to note several main points that needed to be better stated or further explored, and to draw out new interesting points, emerging themes and codes that had not previously considered. This process allowed me to modify questions to be asked of the next participants (both transitioned teachers and leaders) in the follow-up interviews or through observations. Third, because there were long interviews that lasted more than an hour and contained pauses with information irrelevant to the focused topic of the interviews, I did not transcribe the entire recordings. Rather, I selected the sections in the recordings which answered the interview questions to be transcribed. These transcriptions were then used in NVivo (QSR) in the second stage of data analysis.

3.7.2.2. Data analysis with NVivo (QSR)

With the large number of the interviews collected, analysing the data manually could have hindered the comparison and cross-checking among these interviews for broader themes. Hence, NVivo 11 (QSR) was used for further analysis. First, all the interviews were listened to and preliminarily coded. The relevant sections were coded based on the two frameworks of the study, which delineate the transitioned teachers’ agency and factors influencing their agency. After that, I listened to these codes again and started transcribing the relevant sections. These
transcriptions were then uploaded into a NVivo project which allowed data entry in Vietnamese. NVivo allowed me to generate, analyse and store a large number of interview recordings and transcriptions. This software enabled codes and themes to be saved online systematically and at the same time these codes and themes could be presented visually and comparatively among the interview transcriptions across 20 participants.

Based on the previous manual codes, I again coded the transcriptions in NVivo with important words or expressions and sentences and named these codes. Among the recordings with the participants, there were different segments under the same codes. I read these codes again and put these codes into themes. Next, I renamed these codes under bigger themes for more coherent coding, such as Name of theme 1 - Code 1, and Name of theme 1 - Code 2 (see Appendix L for an example of my coding process). After I finished coding and theming, in NVivo, clear and systematic themes with supporting sub-codes emerged, and under these codes there were supporting segments and data from different participants. Following Merriam’s (2009) constant-comparative method, these codes and themes were compared across different data sets to identify common themes. These themes were then reviewed and further refined. This thematic analysis procedure was conducted with the interviews, open-ended questions in the survey, and observational data, and documents.

3.7.2.3. Translation

Since translation is a difficult and time-consuming process, data were analysed and transcribed in Vietnamese. Coding was also conducted in this language. Translation was only used for the coded themes for collected data including the survey documents, observation field notes, and interviews. In order to sustain the validity of the translation, I used the back-translation procedure suggested by Weber (1990). When the themes from the interviews were constructed, they were then translated into English. The translated texts in English were translated back into Vietnamese and then compared with the original to check their equivalence.
Additionally, sending the translations back to the participants was also done for several complicated words. I asked what the participants really wanted to convey by using certain Vietnamese words, and received their explanation of that word. After receiving a participant’s confirmation, I translated their Vietnamese words to English by selecting the most suitable English words/expressions. These were then sent back to the participants. For example, when being asked about their feelings about the transition, one transitioned teacher mentioned that he had “tự ái nghề nghiệp lớn” about his French, and therefore he felt sad at having to transition to English. I contacted the participant to ask him to explain what he wanted to convey when he used this phrase. With his agreement, I decided to translate the phrase into “high professional self-esteem” which seemed to be the most appropriate. When there was no English equivalent for a quote, I presented the original Vietnamese words/phrases and provided their closest equivalent translation in English in brackets {..}.

3.8. Researcher role and limitations of the study

In this last section of the chapter, I will discuss the research roles I played in this study. The limitations of the study are also presented.

3.8.1. Researcher role

The case researcher plays an important role in case study research. The nature of the role that a researcher decides to take on has an immense impact on how the research is designed, as well as how the results are approached and analysed. In my thesis, I played two researcher roles: I was an insider-researcher as a Vietnamese tertiary lecturer who is familiar with teaching contexts in Vietnam; and I was an outsider-researcher who does not belong to the transitioned teacher group. These roles had advantages and disadvantages for my investigation. As noted by Bonner and Tolhurst (2002), the role of an insider researcher provides advantages in terms
of (i) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied; (ii) not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and (iii) having an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth (cited in Unluer, 2012). Having been a lecturer in Vietnam, I had an insider view of how the educational system is structured in Vietnam. However, I also acknowledged that such close contact could compromise the objectivity of research analysis, for example, the issues that I experienced in my teaching. To avoid this bias, all ideas and themes were carefully elicited from the transitioned teachers’ accounts to validate the trustworthiness of the conclusion. In addition, the role of an outsider-researcher who did not belong to the transitioned group allowed me to retain objectivity in the process of collecting and interpreting the data. I was not a transitioned teacher and therefore, I did not assume the transitioned teachers’ responses, but rather I set out to explore their real experiences. Overall, by taking both roles in conducting this research, I was able to develop an in-depth understanding of the case in its research context and at the same time enhance the reliability of the collected data and analysis.

3.8.2. Limitations of the study

At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge that there were several limitations to this study. First, my involvement as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis might have impacted on the study’s validity and reliability. As noted earlier, being an English teacher, my personal experiences in relation to educational changes might have led to bias in the process of interviewing and interpreting the data. This subjectivity might have resulted in narrowing down the discussion of the interview questions, as well as the ways I evaluated the situations and the participants’ engagement. Therefore, various sources of evidence were collected to enhance the construct validity of the study. Meticulous documentation of all procedures as well as well-organised fieldwork and data files maintained the chain of evidence and increased the reliability
of my research. Furthermore, subjectivity is not seen to be a major issue in qualitative research. Rather, it is “an inevitable engagement with the world in which meanings and realities are constructed, not just discovered, and in which the researcher is very much present” (Duff, 2008, p. 56).

Another limitation of case study research is its lack of generalisability. This research was conducted with the focus on a specific group of teachers at a specific university. Therefore, the findings of the study may not necessarily be generalisable to all universities in Vietnam or to all transitioned teachers. However, as Stake (1988) argues, there may or may not be “an ultimate interest in the generalisable” (p. 256). van Lier (2005) also supports the view that particularisation means that “insights from a case study can inform, be adapted to, and provide comparative information to a wide variety of other cases” (p. 198). In addition, it is claimed that the purpose of the case study is not empirical generalisation but analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003). With the shortage of the previous studies on the case, my study aims to suggest ways to research and analyse teacher agency in relation to policy enactment and educational change in Vietnam. The study also hopes to provide a basis for further studies of teacher agency in other disciplinary fields.

3.9. Summary

This chapter has presented details of the research methodology for the study. It has described the research design, data collection and data analysis. It has also considered the researcher’s roles and limitations of the study. Table 3.3 presents a summary of the research methodology, which includes the research questions and how these questions were to be answered with data collection and the data analysis process. The following chapters will delineate the findings of these questions based on the research methods.
**Table 3.3.**

*Summary of Research Methodology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How did the teachers in the transitioned group respond to the transition?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>A preliminary survey</td>
<td>Content analysis CDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. What were the attitudes of these teachers towards the transition?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>CDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. What adaptations did they make in response to the transition?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How did the teachers in the transitioned group respond to the National Project 2020, particularly the required benchmark for English teachers’ proficiency?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>A preliminary survey</td>
<td>Content analysis CDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. How did they position themselves in relation to the requirement?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>CDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. How did they interpret the requirement?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. How did they engage with the requirement individually and collectively?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What factors influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the required benchmark?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Content analysis CDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. How did teacher identities influence their responses?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRANSITIONED TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO THE TRANSITION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter, and Chapters 5 and 6, present the findings regarding the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition from teaching Chinese, Russian and French to teaching English and to the benchmark for English teachers’ proficiency, as well as the factors that influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses. These three chapters use different data sources to address Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Relevant documents were analysed to explore and set the context for the transition at TriThu University (Chapter 4) and the dissemination of the proficiency benchmark for English teachers (Chapter 5). In these three finding chapters, I used semi-structured interviews to gather the transitioned teachers’ responses, complemented by my observations of the transitioned teachers’ distance-teaching sessions, their participation in faculty meetings and their Viber online communication groups (See Section 3.4.3.4). By examining the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the proficiency benchmark, the findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 reveal the nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency in these processes. Where relevant, the features of the transitioned teachers’ agency are noted in these three chapters and are then further synthesised and discussed in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, I used Figured Worlds and the subject-centred sociocultural approach to explore, organise and analyse the collected data. The concepts of spaces and improvisations in Figured Worlds, (See Section 2.6.1), guided my analysis of the teachers’ responses in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Teacher agency in response to the transition and the proficiency benchmark was analysed through the ideas of a new space or realm of interpretation following the change and improvisation through this change. In particular, teacher agency was explored through the ways in which teachers perceived, interpreted,
improvised and judged the change. The modified subject-centred sociocultural approach (See Section 2.6.2) provided essential themes to explore the influences of sociocultural factors and teacher identities on teachers’ responses. These themes are presented in Chapter 6.

This chapter addresses Research Question 1 which asked how the transitioned teachers responded to the transition to English teaching. It presents a synthesis of the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition process which were drawn from a preliminary survey, Document #2, observation field notes and, most importantly, multi-stage interviews (see Section 3.6.2). The transition process at the university is outlined in two stages: Transition One (Section 4.2.1) and Transition Two (Section 4.2.2). Drawing on the faculty development documents, these two transitions are described in accordance with the foreign language development at TriThuc University and the wider language context in Vietnam. The demographic data of the transitioned teachers participating in this study were collated from preliminary surveys and are delineated in Section 4.2.3. The transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition (Section 4.3) are presented using the notion of Figured Worlds as an interpretive lens. Three themes were elicited, which provided insights into the transitioned teachers’ responses and the forms of agency which the transitioned teachers were able to adopt: (i) their perceptions (Section 4.3.1), (ii) their improvisations (Section 4.3.2), and (iii) their evaluations (Section 4.3.3). These themes were drawn from the interviews and, as noted, from my observations. Table 4.1 outlines primary sections of this chapter together with the type of data collected and the findings.
Table 4.1.
Main Sections of Chapter 4 in Response to Research Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Main data collected</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Transitions at TriThuc University</td>
<td>Document #1 1 Interview with a faculty leader</td>
<td>Two transitions at the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preliminary surveys</td>
<td>Demographic profile of the transitioned teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition</td>
<td>Interviews with the transitioned teachers</td>
<td>The transitioned teachers’ responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Improvisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with university and faculty leaders</td>
<td>Potential gap and disparities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>between the leaders’ interpretations and the transitioned teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations: Distance teaching sessions</td>
<td>Benefits of learning and teaching English through the transition process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online communication: Viber group chats</td>
<td>Transitioned teachers’ improvisations through the transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transitioned teachers’ interpretations of the transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. The transitions at TriThuc University

In order to better understand how the transitioned teachers responded to the transition and the English proficiency benchmark, this section firstly describes the transition process at TriThuc University in parallel with policy shifts in Vietnam generally. Table 4.2 describes two transitions in the university in line with the changes in national language policy, based on Document #1 (See Section 3.6.2.1). The first transition involved a group of Vietnamese
teachers who transitioned from teaching Russian to English in the 1990s. The second transition involved a group of Vietnamese teachers who had taught Chinese, French and Russian and then moved to teaching English in the 2000s. All these teachers had a limited level of English before their transition to learning and then teaching English.

Table 4.2. Transitions at TriThuc University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The development history at TriThuc University</th>
<th>The consequent transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1990</td>
<td>The formation of TriThuc University</td>
<td>The first transition: A group of teachers in the university transitioned from teaching Russian to teaching English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One Russian teacher to teach Russian to all students at the university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The formation of the Russian Literature division consisting of six Russian teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The establishment of the Foreign Languages Branch of the university offering three languages: Russian, French and English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only Russian and French taught to students of the university. English lecturers work in the Science Research Laboratory to translate documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1990</td>
<td>Expansion of the Foreign Languages Branch of the university to four divisions: French, Russian, Chinese and English</td>
<td>The second transition: All teachers of Chinese, Russian and French in the Foreign Languages Faculty began the transition to teaching English only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The establishment of the Foreign Languages Faculty with the aim of training pre-service English language teachers and teaching other languages including French, Russian and Chinese to students of other majors in the university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The opening of a new major: Pre-service French language teachers alongside English language teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2000</td>
<td>English as the only foreign language for non-English major students in the university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closure of French language teachers major. French teachers only teach French as a second foreign language to students majoring in English.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English as the only foreign language taught at the university for other majors;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1. Transition one

The first transition at TriThuc University saw the transition of Russian teachers to teaching English during the 1990s. Document #1 delineated that at the time of the university’s establishment, there was only one Russian teacher for two major groups of students, Mathematics and Literature. In fact, following the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 and the growing political support from the former Soviet Union, Russian was the most important foreign language in Vietnam for several decades after Independence (1945) and Reunification (1975). Notably, although English was taught in the South of Vietnam where the U.S was directly involved in the Vietnam War (1954-1975), English was still marginalised, particularly in the North where TriThuc University was located. During this time, Russian was also the only foreign language offered at the university. Conversely, before the 1990s, English was not on offer and English lecturers, as noted in this document, “only worked in the Science Research Laboratory to translate documents” (p. 7).

However, during the 1990s, TriThuc University began to offer English and Chinese. The Foreign Languages Branch of the university included four divisions: French, Russian, Chinese and English. The Foreign Languages Faculty at TriThuc University was then established from this branch with the aim of training pre-service English major language teachers as well as offering other languages to students of other majors in the university. During this time, due to the shortage of English teachers following its exponential development in Vietnam, together with signs of the downgrading of Russian in the country, a group of Russian teachers were forced to study and teach English. This development formed the first transition in the university.
4.2.2. Transition two

While the first transition witnessed the shift of Russian transitioned teachers to English teaching, the second transition involved not only teachers of Russian but also teachers of Chinese and French. Despite the continuing expansion of English, Chinese, Russian and French were still taught to students of non-English majors at TriThuc University. For example, students whose majors were Literature, History or Geography would study Chinese as the required foreign language, whereas students majoring in Mathematics-Physics-Chemistry would study Russian, and English major students would study French. Notably, following the national educational trend, TriThuc University changed from a yearly-based system to a credit-based system\(^6\). Following this change, the university chose English as the only required foreign language to be taught at the university for all majors, with French as the second required foreign language but only for English major students. Consequently, Russian and Chinese transitioned teachers no longer had formal classes at TriThuc University. Additionally, not long after this change in the educational system at the university, the Foreign Languages Faculty closed the French-teacher-training major and only maintained English majors. French transitioned teachers thus only had a limited number of classes for English major students in the Foreign Languages Faculty. As a result of these changes, the teachers of Russian, Chinese and French in the faculty transitioned to teaching English which constituted the second transition of language teaching in the faculty.

Noticeably, in both transitions, no official documentation required the teachers to become English teachers. Instead, the idea of transitioning was pitched and formed through faculty meetings with faculty academics and university leaders. In other words, the transitions could be seen as a covert decision without being officially mandated. For their part, the teachers

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\(^6\) In the yearly-based education system, programme completion is based on the number of years; In the credit-based system, programmes’ completion is based on the number of credits the students achieved.
considered this decision to be their only choice if they wanted to continue working at the university. Their responses to the transition process are analysed in Section 4.3 of this chapter. To give a more rounded picture, the next section presents demographic details of these transitioned teachers.

**4.2.3. Introducing the Transitioned Teachers**

This section describes the general profiles of the 20 transitioned teachers who took part in this study. They are grouped into two transitions in accordance with Transition One and Transition Two, as presented in previous sections. The data were collected from a preliminary survey. Four main themes are covered, the transitioned teachers’ first foreign languages, their number of years in teaching English and their first foreign languages, their qualifications in these languages and in English, and the languages they taught at the university at the time of the study.

There were two groups among the participants in line with the two transitions. The first group included three Russian transitioned teachers who transitioned to English in the 1990s. None of them teach Russian any longer. One is currently one of the Vice-Presidents of TriThuc University and, from time to time lectures for the faculty, the other two have retained senior positions in the faculty. The second transition involved 17 teachers, two Russian, four Chinese and eleven French. When the announcements of the transition were disseminated at TriThuc University, two transitioned teachers in this group decided to study their Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English full-time at a national university. The rest took a BA in English through an in-service training course offered by the university. When they completed their study and received a BA in English, they were considered officially eligible to teach English. Some transitioned teachers took two years to complete this degree while others took up to four. Among the transitioned teachers, nine out of the 20 changed to teaching English only after they had completed their
English degree. The others were already teaching English before they completed the degree and, from time to time, they also taught their first foreign languages (i.e. Russian, Chinese and French), or maintained other activities using these languages.

Table 4.3 presents the demographic information of the transitioned teachers. The names of TTs 1-20 (Transitioned Teachers) are all coded as pseudonyms and arranged according to their first foreign language. TTs 1 to TT 4 are Chinese transitioned teachers, TTs 5 to TT 9 are Russian transitioned teachers, and TTs 10 to TT 20 are French transitioned teachers. As noted earlier, one participant currently works as one of the Vice-Rectors of the university and only delivers classes from time to time. The other 19 transitioned teachers all belong to the faculty and are directly involved in all faculty activities. According to the faculty leader, the number of transitioned teachers in the faculty used to constitute up to 60% to 65% of working staff in the faculty (Faculty leader, Interview 1). At the time of the research, the transitioned teachers comprised 43% of the human resources of the faculty. Regarding the transitioned teachers’ ages, 16 out of 20 were in the age range of 30-45 years old, which essentially meant they could potentially be employed in the faculty for 15 to 25 years. This evidence confirms the important position of the transitioned teachers as a human resource at the university. It also highlights the necessity of understanding their responses to educational change in the university, and in Vietnam.

Table 4.3.
Demographic Profile of the Transitioned Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First foreign language</th>
<th>Teaching experience (years)</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Language(s) currently being taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First foreign language</td>
<td>English (since the transition)</td>
<td>First foreign language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 In Vietnam, teachers can be employed till the age of 65 for men and 60 for women
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TT</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English/Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English/Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 presents three main points drawn from the surveys: the participants’ number of years in teaching experience, their qualifications in their first foreign language and English and their current teaching language(s). The transitioned teachers were all experienced teachers, but most had more experience in teaching their first foreign languages than in English. Their experience ranged from less than five years, from five to ten years and more than ten years. All the transitioned teachers taking part in this study had more than 10 years’ experience of teaching, or even more than 20 years, as four of them noted in their interviews. While 10 of the transitioned teachers had more than 10 years’ experience in teaching first foreign languages, only three had more than 10 years of teaching English.

In regard to the transitioned teachers’ qualifications, the majority of them (12) had higher qualifications in their first foreign languages than they have since acquired in English. All of the participating transitioned teachers had at least a Master of Arts (MA) in either English or their first foreign language. While most of them (15 out of 20) only had their two-year in-service English learning to achieve the BA in English, all of them had BA in their first foreign language undertaken from four to five years at prestigious universities in Vietnam. Nearly all of them also had taken extra six-month training courses in learning and/or teaching their first foreign language. Many of them had also obtained their MA from the countries in which their languages were spoken, namely France, Taiwan, China, and Russia.

With regard to the languages the transitioned teachers had taught, since the transition,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TT 18</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>&gt;10</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>English/French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TT 19</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TT 20</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English/French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all the transitioned teachers had been working as English lecturers at TriThuc University. Their primary duty was to teach English as a required foreign language to non-English major students at this university, usually called “English 2”. This division is distinct from “English 1” and “English 1 Division” in the faculty, which trains English major students in the faculty. All the transitioned teachers belonged to the English 2 Division, except two from Transition One, TT 7 and TT 8, who belonged to the English 1 Division. More than half of them (12) still taught their first foreign languages, whereas the others no longer taught their first foreign languages. While Chinese and French were still taught by transitioned teachers, Russian was no longer taught by any of them. The participants’ points of view on their teaching of English and first foreign languages are discussed, together with their improvisations, in Section 4.3.2.

4.3. The transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition

In the transition process from their first foreign languages to English teaching, the transitioned teachers moved into and created a new professional Figured World, which was ELT. Their responses to the transitions to a new Figured World of English teaching, are presented in this section under three themes: (i) their perceptions, (ii) their improvisations in accordance with the transition, and (iii) their evaluations of the transition and the policy relating to this change. These themes were mainly elicited from the semi-structured interviews with the transitioned teachers, complemented by my observations. These themes are presented in three separate sections: their first emotional reactions and interpretations of the transition (Section 4.3.1); their improvisations to the transition (Section 4.3.2); and their evaluations of related issues about the change (Section 4.3.3).

4.3.1. The transitioned teachers’ perceptions of the transition

The transitioned teachers’ feelings and interpretations were explored in terms of their first
sense-making of the transition, which led them to the Figured World of English teaching. These explorations indicate their agency in response to the change. Despite not receiving any official documents about the transition, the transitioned teachers had diverse feelings upon hearing about the transition in the faculty meetings (Section 4.3.1.1), and different interpretations, including a range of unresolved concerns (Section 4.3.1.2).

4.3.1.1. The transitioned teachers’ feelings at the time of hearing about the transition

The transitioned teachers experienced emotions which ranged from worry, shock, sadness, disappointment and even anger, when they received the information about the transition to English from the faculty leaders at faculty meetings. Although a small group of the transitioned teachers had predicted the transition to English teaching, the majority were shocked by the university’s decision to offer English only to non-English major students at the university. Several of the Transition Two teachers (TTs 2, 14, 15, 16) reported that the transition was to an extent “predictable”. These transitioned teachers explained that they had known about and/or witnessed the transition of several Russian transitioned teachers to English in Transition One. Therefore, they could envisage a similar outcome for other foreign languages. However, many of the other transitioned teachers expressed shock and anger at the university’s decision. TT 1, for example, said:

We were astonished and had mixed feelings... Hearing they [the leaders] say that only English [would be taught], [I was] very angry, I tell the truth, very angry. The atmosphere was really suffocating. Seeing they eliminate a language, a working tool that I had been working with from the past, I felt really surprised.

As well as shock, at the time of hearing about the transition, many transitioned teachers experienced a range of other different emotions. TT 13, for instance, described experiencing mixed feelings about whether to accept or to refuse to follow the change.

At first [what I felt] was stuck. A number of people and I intended to refuse to follow this major [English]. However, [I was] then concerned. Considering the future, life, income, daily work, I had to study [English]. The mood was generally sad and occupational pride [in French] was high.
As shown in this account, TT 13 expressed many concerns related to materialistic conditions such as work and income. Clearly, for TT 13, the news of the transition was not well-received and the decision to transition was not easy.

TT 13 and other transitioned teachers (TTs 1, 15, 16) also highlighted feelings of loss and sadness. These transitioned teachers thought that changing to English was “cảm thấy tiếc” {a pity or regret}. TT 15 added that she had to take time to “stabilise psychologically”. TT 13 further explained his loss of professional pride, “it is like when you are teaching but pulled out to become a vehicle keeper [parking security guard]” (TT 13). In Vietnam, teaching is a prestigious job, while a vehicle keeper [parking security guard], who just has responsibility of checking in and out tickets, is far less noble. TT 13’s choice of words indicated that he was not happy with the transition. Indeed, in his view, “the transition was compelled or coerced”.

Other transitioned teachers also expressed strong feelings about being asked to decide whether to transition or not. TT 2, for example, explained that her emotions resulted from the fact that her intense passion for Chinese, her first foreign language, had been “absorbed into her blood”. She also worried that her English would fall far short of her Chinese language competence in which she had received meticulous training.

[I was] definitely worried, because I was totally passionate about Chinese. Chinese is [what I am] extremely passionate about. Furthermore, my Chinese training was meticulous. Previously, [I had] studied [Chinese] in Hue (pseudonym)\(^8\) for four years, and then went to China for two years, ... My Chinese was certainly strong.

Taken together, these findings show that the feelings that many transitioned teachers experienced at the beginning of the transition were mixed. These feelings, ranging from worry, surprise to outrage, showed the emotional tensions that the transitioned teachers experienced in the early stage of the transition. They also questioned the hidden powers that had brought about the change and shaped their decisions. These influential forms of power are elaborated

\(^8\) Pseudonyms will also be used for other universities in Vietnam mentioned by participants through this thesis.
on in Section 6.2.1. How the transitioned teachers managed to overcome these feelings and make their transition is worth exploring and the transitioned teachers’ improvisations are analysed in Section 4.3.2. The next section continues to present the transitioned teachers’ interpretations of the transition.

4.3.1.2. The transitioned teachers’ interpretations of the transition

In addition to their feelings, the transitioned teachers also interpreted the transition in different ways. Some transitioned teachers (TTs 7, 8, 9) considered it an opportunity. Others regarded it as an unavoidable fact of change following the educational shift at TriThuc University. Several transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 5, 6, 10) regarded the transition to teaching English as inevitable, particularly as the status of English was increasing exponentially in Vietnam. Following the expansion of English and the decrease in the number of students studying languages including Russian, French and Chinese at the university, the transition to English teaching was seen as a matter of course. As TT 6 said, “sooner or later, they would have to change to teach English”.

In a different vein, the transition was interpreted by a large number of transitioned teachers as a compulsory requirement. They mentioned this as “general regulations” from the university (TT 15), or a “mandatory requirement” (TT 14), which they “had to follow” (TT 1). TT 9 confided that had he not decided to study English, “there was a risk of not being able to be a teacher”. The reason for the change to English teaching was that “the higher-ups [the leaders of the university] wanted it”, so “we [the participants] had to follow” (TT 1). This shows that while the transitioned teachers followed the transition, for the majority, it was not an option for them but rather an undertaking they were forced to do. In this circumstance, they could not exert their own choice concerning the change, although transitioning was their decision. In other words, in the early stage of the transition, the agency of these transitioned teachers was shut down.
Nonetheless, despite their perceived powerlessness regarding the decision of transitioning, the transitioned teachers still critically interpreted the reasons that triggered it. According to them, the university leaders of the Department of Training of TriThuc University claimed that students were not choosing to study other foreign languages. Therefore, the university offered only English to non-English major students in its educational system, which led to the transition. However, many transitioned teachers questioned this claim. These transitioned teachers (TTs 1, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19) believed that students chose English because it was the only foreign language offered to non-English major students in the university education system. Likewise, while the university leaders said that the number of students who chose to study other foreign languages was insufficient to open a class, several transitioned teachers pointed out that this was false reasoning. TT 14, for example, argued that there were even fewer students in several Physics classes, yet these were not shut down. Therefore, the decision to only offer English to non-English major students at the university was not made on the basis of the students’ choices, but on the university’s or “what they [the university leaders] want”. The arguments and criticisms of the transitioned teachers about the reason for the transition show that they disagree with the university’s decision on offering only English and making teachers of other foreign languages change to teach English. The transitioned teachers had their own understanding and critical interpretations of the change and the policy.

More importantly, several transitioned teachers (TTs 11, 12 13, 16, 17) gave more examples to clarify and support their opinions and concerns about the reasons for the transition. First, they revealed that they had heard about various challenges that a group of students who used to study French in neighbouring provinces faced when changing to studying English. According to these transitioned teachers, these students had studied French in high school and thus preferred to continue studying French at university, rather than starting over to study English as a new foreign language. Furthermore, the transitioned teachers questioned the
university’s decision to offer only English to non-English majors by pointing out that no surveys or consultations were conducted to seek their opinions. TT 1 said that the change to teach only English at the university for him was “a mandate, rather than a choice”. He elaborated,

Seemingly, I find it [English as the only foreign language taught at university policy] more imposing than being a choice. I did not see the university conduct any surveys, to decide that we should teach what foreign languages in the university.

The above evidence confirms that the transitioned teachers had their own perceptions and arguments about the change leading to the transition. According to the transitioned teachers, the change dissemination was not a linear and straightforward process, but a complex one. Even though the transitioned teachers could not exert their own choice relating to the transition, they still expressed critical concerns and uncertainty about the transition. The conflicts between the transitioned teachers’ decisions to transition and their emotions and interpretations of the process indicate the influences of other factors than just the transitioned teachers’ perceptions through the change process. These factors are delineated in Chapter 6. The transitioned teachers’ improvisations throughout the transition are presented in the next section.

4.3.2. The transitioned teachers’ improvisations

Despite their uneasy feelings about the transition, the transitioned teachers had to study and then teach English as a new major as well as contend with difficulties associated with working in a new field. At the same time, the majority of them also managed to retain their teaching and involvement in activities in their first foreign languages, regardless of insufficient support.

4.3.2.1. Studying English as a new major

To work as an English teacher in the TriThuc University Foreign Languages Faculty, all the transitioned teachers had to study English, and simultaneously overcome differences between
the teaching of English and their first foreign languages. Some transitioned teachers studied English to achieve a new BA degree, while others studied both a BA and an MA or even a Ph.D. in English.

The majority of transitioned teachers of the first transition generation in the 1990s, namely TTs 7, 8, 9, had to obtain a Diploma level C⁹ English as a pre-requisite to study their BA English. They studied for both their BA and an MA in English at another prestigious university in Vietnam. Similarly, TT 5 and TT 10 in the Transition Two studied English at a different university, at the same time with their MAs in their first foreign languages. These two transitioned teachers also decided to pursue MAs in English to enhance their proficiency. When they finished their English study, they were assigned by the faculty to teach English. In a different vein, the other members of the group decided to study a two-year in-service training course offered by TriThuc University in order to transition. These transitioned teachers were studying this English course while teaching at the same time. Several of them took about three to four years to finish. One group of the transitioned teachers (TTs 3, 6, 11), who received their BA in their first foreign language, opted to study a further MA in English to fulfill the minimum required degree for teachers at the university level.

Furthermore, the majority of transitioned teachers attempted to overcome difficulties in learning English such as negative transfer of language features, resulting from similarities and differences between English and the first foreign languages and/or their first language Vietnamese. Russian transitioned teachers, for example, agreed that Russian and English were different in terms of grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Although French was considered by the transitioned teachers to be similar to English, the French transitioned teachers also had to deal with challenges in learning English. These included the strong influence of French on their

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⁹ Level A, B and C were traditionally required as benchmark to assess English learners’ level in Vietnam during the 1990s. Level C is the highest level, equivalent to advanced level.
English pronunciation, phonetics and vocabulary. The French transitioned teachers pointed out that some English words were pronounced differently from those in English, despite having the same spelling. TT 10, for instance, highlighted the difficulty when learning English, “when presenting thesis of my BA in English, I tried to forget French in order to speak English precisely. However, English pronunciation was still influenced by French.”

Lack of enthusiasm for English was also a challenge for the transitioned teachers’ English learning. TT 13 said, “I had a big love for my previous foreign language [French], so the enthusiasm with a new foreign language [English] declined”. Many transitioned teachers also expressed similar opinions that they did not have as much interest in English as in their first foreign language. In other words, the required changes could not trigger a passion for the new language and the transitioned teachers’ interest in learning it. Nevertheless, although English was not their “passionate” language, the transitioned teachers had to study and then teach it. These examples confirm potential tensions in the transitioned teachers’ working environment as well as the strong influences of the imposition of the university’s policy on the transitioned teachers’ professional lives.

4.3.2.2. Teaching English as a new profession

The transitioned teachers not only had to struggle to learn English, but they also had to improvise at work to engage with the new field. The process of practising teaching English involved different stages: teaching distance learners, demonstrating lessons to on-campus non-English students with the observation by the faculty’s leaders, before finally officially teaching these students. The transitioned teachers’ new process of teaching English also caused pressures and challenges to be overcome in their professional lives.

The transitioned teachers had to undergo a multi-level process as novice teachers of this new foreign language. This process involved different stages in their English teaching. First, after completing their BA study in English, most taught English to “sinh viên tại chức”
The learners in this programme were part-time, specialising in other majors and English was a compulsory but minor component in their programmes. The English requirements for these students were not as high as those for on-campus students. After teaching several courses for this group of students, the transitioned teachers moved on to teaching demonstration classes to non-English major students on campus, which were observed and assessed by the faculty leaders. According to several transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 12, 16), on the one hand, these observed classes provided valuable comments and enabled them to learn from other transitioned teachers’ strengths and weaknesses; but, on the other hand, this activity caused them a lot of pressure in their preparation and teaching. Only after having observations and assessment in demonstration classes, were the transitioned teachers allowed to start teaching on-campus students.

Being a teacher of another foreign language before teaching English, the transitioned teachers also had to overcome difficulties resulting from language transfer. Most of them admitted that they kept speaking in their first foreign languages, especially with quick responses, in English classes. TT 4, for example, said that when teaching English, she often said “好” (hao, or good) when complimenting students. She added that it took her a long time to manage this habit of code-switching between Chinese and English.

Other transitioned teachers also said that they had to prepare meticulously for their English lessons. Some transitioned teachers (TTs 1, 15) asked the experienced English major teachers and colleagues for their advice about the test preparation, whereas others searched the internet and looked up words in a dictionary (TTs 13 and 16). TT 2 even sought assistance from one English teacher who did not belong to the faculty but was believed by TT 2 to be a good English teacher. This teacher demonstrated the lesson that TT 2 was about to teach. TT 2 then practised and copied this English teacher’s lesson procedures.

Having already been a teacher in the faculty before the transition and then having to
undergo an assessment process caused the transitioned teachers more stress. To be more specific, having been teachers in the faculty, many transitioned teachers had constructed the self-image of being a good teacher of their first foreign languages. When they had to demonstrate a lesson in English, a language that they were not familiar with, they experienced feelings of unease. In the retrospective comments about the classes he had taught, TT 1, for example, said that despite his experience in teaching a foreign language, he experienced “feelings of embarrassment and low self-esteem” when his English teaching was assessed by the leaders and colleagues in the faculty. Such feelings were rooted in the fear of being wrong or teaching incorrect English in the first few lessons.

Overall, from learning and then teaching a new foreign language, the transitioned teachers had to start from scratch and overcome various changes and challenges in their professional lives. These included working with new learners, the different working environment of distance-teaching compared with on-campus, as well as pressures from being assessed through their teaching classes. Such a long-drawn out process of transition to English teaching involved a lot of effort and improvisations on the part of the transitioned teachers to be able to learn and teach English. In addition, while trying to teach English, the majority also attempted to retain their first foreign languages. The next section presents how the transitioned teachers improvised their retention of their first foreign language teaching.

4.3.2.3. Retaining first foreign languages

In addition to their efforts in studying and teaching English, some transitioned teachers adopted different ways to retain their first foreign languages in academic work, social activities and online communication. Despite having no support or requirement from the university to undertake these activities, the transitioned teachers attempted to promote and maintain their engagement with their first foreign languages.
4.3.2.3.1. Academic work

Due to the change in foreign language education at the university (See Section 4.2.2), French was merely offered to English major students as their second foreign language at Foreign Languages Faculty. However, because of the limited number of French classes delivered per semester in the faculty, not all the French transitioned teachers taught French classes each semester. Additionally, the number of students in these French classes was much smaller than in the English classes, thus the credits\(^{10}\) they had for teaching French were lower than for teaching English. Furthermore, the French transitioned teachers revealed that the students’ level of French in these classes was very low. Therefore, they could not communicate with students much in French but used mostly Vietnamese in their French classes. Consequently, they could not apply the advanced knowledge of French that they had studied to their teaching.

Despite these challenges, the majority (eight out of 11) French transitioned teachers (TTs 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20) attempted to retain their French teaching at the university. According to these French transitioned teachers, French classes were regarded as their “precious treasure” which they wanted to keep in order to retain their French language. TT 14, for example, admitted “teaching means accepting disadvantages” to keep “a language that we are dedicated to and are passionate about”.

In an even harder situation, Chinese and Russian classes were no longer officially offered at TriThuc University. Although some Russian transitioned teachers still tried to teach Russian, these classes were very limited. The Chinese transitioned teachers who still wanted to keep teaching Chinese also had to deliver Chinese courses in their spare time, at night classes, in language centres or tutoring at home. Apart from teaching, Chinese transitioned teachers also tried to maintain their involvement in other activities connected with Chinese by undertaking translation and interpreting work between Chinese and Vietnamese. Noticeably,

\(^{10}\) In the credit-based system, each class/subject is assigned with a number of credits.
like Russian transitioned teachers, Chinese transitioned teachers sourced most of this work through their own connections rather than with the university’s support.

The above evidence shows that the transitioned teachers had to make decisions and efforts regarding teaching English and retaining their first foreign languages. While English was the official foreign language offered at TriThuc University, the university did not have any professional activities to maintain other foreign languages or support the transitioned teachers who wanted to retain these languages after the transition. The transitioned teachers therefore had three options. They could keep teaching their first foreign languages despite the disadvantages. They could commit to only teaching English with its new requirements and differences, or they could maintain both languages with all these challenges plus a potentially heavy workload. If they chose to maintain the teaching of their first foreign languages, the transitioned teachers then had to find their own ways to retain the language.

Overall, this section has shown the professional challenges, such as differences in teaching credits or student proficiency levels, for this group of transitioned teachers. The majority made significant individual efforts to maintain activities in their first foreign languages. Their efforts to retain their first foreign language indicated their intention and purposeful actions through the transition. These efforts also further demonstrated the transitioned teachers’ strong sense of agency in responding to the transition.

4.3.2.3.2. Other activities

The transitioned teachers’ agency was also shown through their wider professional lives such as their daily activities besides teaching as well as their works outside university. In addition to teaching and academic work, other activities such as working as a tour guide, listening to the news or participating in social events were also used by the transitioned teachers to retain their first foreign languages. Many transitioned teachers managed to become involved with their first foreign languages through different activities. Five out of the 11 French transitioned
teachers (TTs 10, 13, 14, 15, 20) said that after the transition, listening to the radio, news or reading newspapers in French were still a regular and favourite activity. TT 1, a Chinese transitioned teacher, revealed that as well as listening to the news, he had a wide variety of Chinese books to read at home. He noted “although English books that I have are mainly course books to teach, I have a big bookshelf with a wide range of Chinese books including both old and new ones”.

Interestingly, a group of transitioned teachers also tried to take up new activities to be able to retain their first foreign language proficiency. For example, TT 15 decided to work as a French tour guide in a famous French-tourist attraction region in the north of Vietnam during semester break. He reported “doing tour guiding and meeting French, “sướng lắm” {very happy}, I could come back with the old time, could speak [French]. Everything “được xả hơi hết” {can be relaxing}. Working in French-related field was TT 15’s true interest and he did not feel forced but enjoyed himself. Importantly, he admitted that by doing this extra work, he could compensate for the lack of a French-language supporting environment at the university and to reduce his nostalgia for French. Therefore, although he had to travel to a distant province to do this tourism work, he made this effort to keep this job and retain his French.

Furthermore, many of the transitioned teachers also participated in social events related to their first foreign languages and with the community speaking these languages. All the Chinese transitioned teachers joined the celebration day of the Friendship Association of Vietnam and China. Likewise, seven out of the 11 French transitioned teachers (TTs 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20) attended the annual celebration of the Francophone Community Day. Their participation in these activities helped them maintain the connection with their friends and colleagues who spoke and taught the first foreign languages. TT 12 described

Every year, on March 20 [Francophone Community Day], I go to meet other teachers... Participation to this [event] is really meaningful, [a chance] to be close with other French teachers... [This is also a chance] to share and talk about the difficulties of the transition, as well as recalling the memories of the French golden time [before the
Overall, the transitioned teachers’ participation in social activities confirmed their efforts and individual intentions to actively engage with and to retain their connection with their first foreign languages.

4.3.2.3.3. Online communication and Viber group chat

Online communication tools were also used by many transitioned teachers in order to retain their connection with their first foreign languages. These included social public networks such as Facebook, emails, as well as the online group chat, called Viber (see Section 3.6.2.4), that they created. Facebook and emails helped over half (12 out 20) transitioned teachers communicate with friends and colleagues who also spoke their first foreign languages and enabled them to retain their ability and connection with these languages. TT 1, for example, maintained communication with Chinese friends and former Chinese students through emails and phone calls. He commented “I still keep contacting my friends and my former Chinese students in China. We emailed each other from time to time.” Similarly, TT 2 also kept in touch with Chinese friends and teachers so she would not forget her Chinese. She stated “I am usually on Facebook and chat with Chinese teachers, I often comment [in Chinese] on their posts [on Facebook] … If they post anything [in Chinese], I always try to read them.” These examples showed that these Chinese transitioned teachers deliberately made attempts to keep the connections they had with their Chinese friends and hoped to an extent to retain their Chinese capability through these activities.

The French transitioned teachers created a French group chat on Viber, which was named “Vous parlez Francais?” (Do you speak French?). According to the French transitioned teachers, this online group chat was used as a platform to connect all the French transitioned teachers in the faculty. TT 13 explained that the group chat name was a question to ask whether the French transitioned teachers still spoke French given the transition to English teaching. He
added that this name was also used to remind the French transitioned teachers about their first foreign language, its value and the need to keep the language. In addition, through this Viber online space, the French transitioned teachers could collaborate to discuss the issues, especially the difficulties, they had in French teaching. As the French transitioned teachers pointed out, problems in their teaching, such as teaching materials or designing French assessment tools, could be resolved in the online group chat.

Importantly, according to many French transitioned teachers, this online space was also created to alleviate the disadvantages that had resulted from the administrative and academic management of the French language teaching in the faculty. For example, French was still taught to English major students in the Foreign Languages Faculty. However, there was no separate division or leader taking charge of this major. Instead, all French transitioned teachers belonged to the “Non-English major Division” or the so-called “English 2” Division which included all transitioned teachers and some English teachers. The leader of this division did not teach or have knowledge of French so there was no one to lead or monitor the quality of French language teaching. Consequently, the French transitioned teachers had to discuss among themselves if there were any emerging issues in their French teaching.

Overall, the transitioned teachers showed their efforts and struggles individually and collectively to transition to English teaching as well as retaining their first foreign languages. Specifically, despite the lack of support in the retention of their first foreign language and the challenges in their new English language learning and teaching, the transitioned teachers attempted to overcome these difficulties. The transitioned teachers undertook the transition but still actively found ways to retain their work and passion for their first foreign language languages.
4.3.3. Evaluations of the transition and related policy

In addition to the transitioned teachers’ perceptions and improvisations in response to the transition, they also expressed their evaluations of this process and related policies. The transitioned teachers expressed diverse concerns about their English proficiency, their first foreign language retention and the university’s foreign language policy.

4.3.3.1. The benefits: Career opportunities and the high status of English

The transition to English teaching was perceived by the transitioned teachers to be beneficial in various ways such as creating job opportunities for all the transitioned teachers. The majority said that studying and teaching English provided them with economic advantages and created more work and stable teaching hours compared to their first foreign languages. TT 16 gave an example that in one semester, she taught from at least three to nine English groups, compared to merely one or two French ones. In agreeing on this, TT 6 stated “having [knowledge of] English brings more work opportunities in teaching English compared to those in teaching Russian. This is an advantage, a motivation.” TT 8 also highlighted that he considered the change to study English to be “good luck” because he was able to flourish in this field.

Quite importantly, several French transitioned teachers (TTs 13, 14, 15, 18) who had maintained their French teaching admitted that studying and teaching English supported their French teaching. According to these transitioned teachers, the knowledge of English after the transition partly supported them to become better French teachers. Their understanding in learning and teaching both languages assisted them to avoid negative transfer between these languages and at the same time understand the difficulties that their English major students encountered when studying French. TT 14 gave an example that the use of “rendezvous” in French was clearly illustrated when he taught French to his English major students thanks to his understanding of the use of the equivalent word, “appointment”, in English.

The benefits of the transition, as acknowledged by the transitioned teachers in the
interviews, were also proven through my observations. National Project 2020 set out the requirement for different kinds of English certificates for English learners in Vietnam. Following this requirement, TriThuc University became one of the ten leading universities to be authorised to issue certificates to English learners as part of the 2020 Project. As a result of being English teachers, the transitioned teachers took part in most of the hectic English teaching activities under this project, not only at TriThuc University but also as at other partner universities nationwide. During the time of the data collection, I joined several transitioned teachers in their distance teaching courses. From November 2016 to April 2017, most transitioned teachers taught additional courses nearly every weekend, which brought them more work in addition to their English teaching at the university. This busy English working schedule confirms that the transition to English gave the transitioned teachers better working opportunities and economic benefits.

4.3.3.2. The drawbacks: Dilemmas between first foreign language retention and English language improvement

Following the transition, the transitioned teachers expressed concerns about the retention of their first foreign language proficiency, their English proficiency and the challenge of working with both languages. They also presented their judgments about the transition enactment that they underwent. First, according to the transitioned teachers, their sophisticated understanding and high proficiency in their first foreign language had gradually weakened since the transition. Given that most of them tried to retain their first foreign language activities as discussed above (See Section 4.3.2.3), they were concerned about their proficiency of their first foreign languages. Because of the heavy workload in English, the low requirements for their first foreign language work and lack of frequent use, the transitioned teachers’ first foreign language

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11 These courses mainly deliver English certificates to English learners, according to the requirement of the MOET
capacity was not being developed. TT 3 asserted,

I “ma một” {forgot} my first foreign language a lot. When I studied [Chinese], I was really devoted, very passionate... but now... no use [of Chinese]... A foreign language without use is easy to be forgotten, especially Chinese. Speaking [Chinese] is still okay, but I almost forget Chinese writing capability…

TT 3 mentioned that although many people offered her translating or interpreting work in Chinese, she “felt no confidence to be a translator because for a long time I have not used Chinese, so I nearly forgot [my Chinese]”. This fact was also shared by TT 2. She reported, “many companies were asking for interpreting, but I did not dare to join. The reason was that, for ages, I have not used much [Chinese]..., I forgot everything [Chinese]... Interpreting is challenging, so I did not accept the offer.” Other transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 6, 10, 12) also commented on the same situation where they were no longer confident in teaching their first foreign languages. As evidenced here, the majority of the transitioned teachers were concerned that after the transition, their first foreign language capability was weakened. The transition undoubtedly led to deteriorations in the transitioned teachers’ proficiency of the language they used to teach before the transition. Their meticulous training and expertise in these languages were seen to be wasted without frequent use.

Despite the downgrading of their first foreign languages, the transitioned teachers did not feel as though their English language proficiency was improving. This dilemma was shared by TT 2, “... Now, Chinese is dying, English is not getting better... I am not satisfied with myself...” As most of the transitioned teachers (15 out of 20) mentioned, they only had a two-year in-service course training in English. They said that this training was not as effective as the one they had in their first foreign languages and they thus did not value it highly. Furthermore, most of the transitioned teachers (18 out of 20) only taught English to non-English major students at a basic level. Many transitioned teachers admitted that they mainly spoke Vietnamese in class and rarely spoke English. The knowledge of English required in these classes was also simple compared with the English major and did not require them to
develop their English capability. In a different respect, there was also a lack of effective frequent professional development for the transitioned teachers. Many of them commented that the activities for their professional development were rare and not effective.

It is evident that the transition caused a dilemma and a complex situation concerning the transitioned teachers’ professional development for both their first foreign language and English. The dilemma of whether to maintain their first foreign language ability and at the same time develop their English proficiency created great concerns among the transitioned teachers. They said that gradually they would lose their capability in their first foreign language, while at the same time their English was not seen to be adequate. Overall, the transitioned teachers presented various critical thoughts and concerns about their work after the transition. Specifically, although they acknowledged the benefits that the transition brought out to be able to learn and teach a new language, the transitioned teachers raised the issues and dilemmas in maintaining capability in their first foreign language as well as developing their proficiency in English. In addition, the transitioned teachers also showed their judgments on the transition against the broader picture of foreign language education in Vietnam.

4.3.3.3. Foreign language education change and foreign language provision

In addition to the teachers’ interpretations and improvisations, the transitioned teachers judged the policies related to the transition and their actions responding to this. In particular, the transitioned teachers questioned the decision of choosing English as the only foreign language to be taught across the whole university. They also challenged TriThuc University’s preference for English, which led to the marginalisation of other languages at the university.

4.3.3.3.1. The transition and issues of foreign language provision

Several of the transitioned teachers (TTs 13, 14, 15, 17, 20) found the university’s decision to offer English “too extreme” and presented their concerns about the loss of diverse foreign language provision resulting from the transition. TT 20, for example, presented a strong point
of view, saying the English-only policy of the university was “a wrong decision”. He argued, “I think a big university should offer many foreign language majors, not only English... Multilateral relations, multiple languages, multiple cultures are essential.” He asserted that maintaining different foreign languages rather than only English at university “ensures the diverse provision of foreign languages and cultures and confirms the position of a university”. He also expressed his opinions by writing articles to discuss this issue. Although other transitioned teachers did not take such explicit action as writing articles like TT 20, they presented convincing reasons to keep other foreign languages at the university. TT 17 argued for keeping the French-major in the faculty by explaining that the previous French-teaching major was closed because French was not widely offered at high school. However, students who majored in French might not necessarily become French teachers, but they could still work in tourism or the interpreting field. Indeed, TT 15 still worked successfully as a tour guide in his spare time during the process of transitioning.

The Chinese transitioned teachers also provided examples on the benefits of studying Chinese, rather than English. TT 1 and TT 2 highlighted the cases of students who majored in Literature-History-Geography. These transitioned teachers clarified that this specific major, Vietnamese literature, history and geography, was closely linked with Chinese due to the strong bonds in language and shared culture between Vietnam and China throughout the history of the two countries. TT 1 and TT 2 also pointed out that in this major there was a course called “Han Viet” which focused on characters and meanings of Chinese words. Therefore, studying Chinese as a foreign language could support and reinforce students’ knowledge in this major. Likewise, their knowledge in Chinese and Vietnamese could also assist their Chinese learning.

The above examples have shown that although the transitioned teachers complied with the university’s policy, they had their own ideas and expressed various concerns about the policy. The above accounts also highlighted the tensions at the grass-roots level through the
change implementation and confirm the transitioned teachers’ intention to influence or make a
difference to the change.

4.3.3.3.2. The transition and educational change implementation

In addition to the transitioned teachers’ evaluations of the transition and diverse foreign
language provision, the transitioned teachers linked the implemented policy at the university
to an overall picture of language policies in Vietnam and presented their evaluations of these.
TT 14 said, “the way of introducing policy or its implementation... almost was pre-decided...
nothing to be referenced but [teachers] have to accept [the decision]”. From the fact that the
transitioned teachers had to transition from other languages to English, the transitioned teachers
claimed that foreign language policy was “fragile” (TT 14) or “bốc đồng” {impulsive} (TT
10). TT 14 clarified his opinion by mentioning his personal experiences with the language
education changes in Vietnam. He studied Russian as his major for seven years at high school,
and then changed to French after the collapse of Russian in 1990, and recently to English. TT
14 also provided an example of a Vietnamese teaching colleague who had Russian language
training in Russia but then became a ticket seller at the foreign language centre of the university
as a result of the decline and loss of Russian compared to other languages in the 1990s. These
comments call into question the effectiveness of the foreign language education and policy in
Vietnam. They also highlight significant consequences for the working conditions of the
transitioned teachers.

More importantly, even though the transitioned teachers acted as followers of the
change, they also had their own critical views and judgments of the transition in line with a
broader context rather than passively accepting the change. The implementation process of the
transition was also questioned by several transitioned teachers. For them, the enactment of the
transition process partly caused constraints in their professional development and the
achievement of real knowledge to become English teachers. TT 1, for example, expressed his
thoughts,

If at that time [the early period of the transition process] the university had had a clearer path and had plans to re-educate [teachers from other languages to English] more “khoa học hơn” {effectively or logically}, we [the transitioned teachers] would have learned more.

As shown here, TT 1 was not content with his experiences in the transition process. His concerns attended to the quality of his learning and then teaching English resulting from the ways the transition was monitored by the university. Although he equipped himself with adequate English degrees and certificates to officially transition to become an English teacher, he was still concerned with his English learning. To an extent, in his view, the certificates he achieved were fabricated so that he could transition. The unclear plan from the university led to his low English proficiency as well as lack of confidence in his English, although he was equipped with the required degrees and certificates. Further analyses on the ways in which the transitioned teachers prepared for and sat the tests to obtain the required certificates have been presented in Chapter 5.

As perceived by the transitioned teachers, there were also unhelpful activities and policies from the university in response to their transition. As a result of the transition, several transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 16, 18) did not have enough classes to teach and hence could not meet the required standard number of teaching periods\(^\text{12}\) from the university. Consequently, they had to pay out of their own pockets for this shortfall in their teaching hours. Arguably, the lack of the required number of teaching hours was out of their control. That the transitioned teachers had to pay for the shortfall in their required teaching periods showed that the university’s policy did not cover all aspects of transitioned teachers’ professional life and neglected the difficulties that they faced in the transition. Overall, the transitioned teachers’ judgments of the transition were not only limited to their own teaching perspectives, but also

\(^{12}\text{Teachers are required to teach at least 270 periods (50 minutes each period) per year.}\)
attended to the issues of general educational changes and other related problems such as diverse foreign language provision and the university’s position.

4.4. Closing remarks

This chapter has discussed the transitioned teachers’ diverse responses to the transition, including their emotions and the improvisations in their English learning and teaching, their attempts to retain their first foreign languages despite difficulties, and their critical evaluations of related issues. The transitioned teachers’ responses contribute to understanding the influences of the transition on the teachers’ professional lives at the grass-roots level.

At the beginning of the chapter, I contextualised the policy transition at TriThuc University in line with the general picture of foreign language education in Vietnam. Given that there was no written documentation of the transition, the transition could be regarded as a covert action of the university in response to the educational change nationwide. However, as presented above, faculty leaders acknowledged the large number of transitioned teachers in the province where the university is located. Therefore, the phenomenon of the transition process at TriThuc University as a covert and undocumented policy could reflect how other institutions were undergoing similar change.

The findings presented have shown the complex and even contradictory responses of the transitioned teachers to the transition. The transitioned teachers decided to transition, yet reported worries, concerns and even outrage about the transition and how the university policy led to this change. The transitioned teachers did not resist the change but questioned its value as well as its contributions to their careers. Several of them followed the transition as suggested by the leaders but still hoped to return to their first foreign language teaching. Various uneasy feelings, as well as critical interpretations of the transitioned teachers about the transition, confirmed the complexity of their responses. The transitioned teachers took various forms of
action and improvisations throughout the transition process. These included deliberate actions to be eligible to teach English and retain their first foreign languages. It was clear that the transitioned teachers followed their leaders recommended and tried their best to be involved with the transition to English teaching. However, despite lack of support from the university and the faculty, they also attempted to retain their first foreign languages.

Ball et al. (2012) classified different positions and relevant policy work that policy actors adopt in response to policy enactment (See Section 2.3.2). In the light of this classification, the ways in which the transitioned teachers responded to the transition can be summarised as follows:

- Most of the transitioned teachers perceived themselves as powerless to oppose the transition;
- The transitioned teachers deliberately improvised their situations to meet the required changes;
- The transitioned teachers showed their critical mindset in response to the change by critically interpreting the change and related issues;
- Several transitioned teachers aimed to make differences to the situation or the transition (such as writing a journal article to raise awareness about diverse foreign language provision). These actions showed their roles as entrepreneurs in educational change;
- Most of the transitioned teachers collaborated closely, which indicates their collective agency, especially in retaining their first foreign languages.

Overall, this chapter has shown the transitioned teachers’ complex and dynamic responses to the transition to English teaching. These are discussed further in Chapter 7 in terms of their agency. With the diverse reactions to the transition, how the transitioned teachers responded to the policy implemented in the field of ELT is intriguing to explore. The next
chapter presents the transitioned teachers’ responses to the proficiency benchmark for English teachers.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE TRANSITIONED TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO THE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK

5.1. Introduction
In the effort to explore the transitioned teachers’ responses to and their engagement with the educational and policy enactment processes, this chapter continues to examine how the transitioned teachers responded to policies introduced in their new working field. As has been noted in Chapter 2, teachers are considered active actors who are often most directly involved in implementing educational reforms. Therefore, in addition to the ways the transitioned teachers responded to the transition process as presented in Chapter 4, it was pertinent to explore how they enacted their roles to accomplish the requirements and responsibilities of English teachers at TriThuc University since the transition and how the transitioned teachers responded to the proficiency benchmark, which was set for all English teachers, including the transitioned teachers.

This chapter presents the findings that address Research Question 2 of the study, which reads: “How did the transitioned teachers respond to National Project 2020, particularly the proficiency benchmark for English teachers?” In particular, the following sub-questions were posed,

2.1. How did they interpret the benchmark?
2.2. How did they engage with the benchmark individually and collectively?
2.3. How did they judge and position themselves with the benchmark?

To address these questions, the data were mainly drawn from the 20 interviews with the teacher participants and a further eight follow-up interviews for more in-depth exploration. Data from interviews with the faculty and university leaders also contributed to the findings discussed in this chapter. To recap, Figured Worlds provided a useful lens to guide the analysis of the
teachers’ responses to the benchmark through the ways in which the teachers made sense of, engaged with and evaluated this change.

To examine the transitioned teachers’ responses to the requirement, it is worthwhile to first revisit and explore the process and the context of the introduction of the requirement at TriThuc University. I thus begin the chapter by contextualising the requirement by analysing Document #2 issued by the university. In the light of Figured Worlds, I then explore the transitioned teachers’ responses to the required benchmark by presenting four main themes: (i) their sense-making of, (ii) their engagement with, (iii) their evaluations of and (iv) their position with the proficiency benchmark. The transitioned teachers’ sense-making in relation to this proficiency requirement is interpreted through their feelings, their views and their perceived roles towards it. These facets, together with the ways in which they enacted and engaged with this change in their new working field of ELT, can highlight their agency in response to this requirement. While the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition presented in Chapter 4 show their agency in relation to their change to previous Figured Worlds of their first foreign languages to a new one of ELT, their responses to the new required benchmark indicate their agency in this new Figured World. Table 5.1 presents the main sections in the chapter, including the data collected and an overview of the main findings.

Table 5.1.
Main Sections of Chapter 5 in Response to Research Question 2

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<td>Interviews with the transitioned teachers (20 interviews with 20)</td>
<td>5.3.1. Transitioned teachers’ sense-making of the proficiency benchmark</td>
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5.2. TriThuc University and the proficiency benchmark

In response to the MOET’s request for a national review of English teachers’ proficiency (See Section 1.2.3), TriThuc University issued Document #2 in 2014. This document set forth the university’s planned actions for this proficiency benchmark. The general objectives of the university’s foreign language education project and its primary duties were also outlined in the document. Three of the objectives delineated objectives for English teachers, which read:

Item 3.2.3. By 2015, 100% of English lecturers will be trained and supported to meet the required benchmark (Level 5 or C1)

Item 3.2.4. By 2020, 100% of English lecturers will be trained and will undertake professional development in English-speaking countries.

Item 3.2.8. Meeting the English standard is a compulsory requirement in performance assessment.

(Document #2, p. 9. Translation mine.)

In accordance with the benchmark of the MOET, TriThuc University distributed these objectives to all English teachers, including the transitioned teachers, with the aim of achieving the required benchmark by 2015. As it was required by the MOET, like other institutions, the achievement of the benchmark was important for the university. Indeed, as noted in item 3.2.8, TriThuc University included the achievement of the required benchmark as one of the criteria for assessing the teachers’, including the transitioned teachers’, professional performance.

Alongside the prescribed objectives, TriThuc University suggested different tasks to be
accomplished by the university and the Foreign Languages Faculty. Three of the tasks were related to foreign language training:

Item 4.1. Identify that foreign languages learned and taught at TriThuc University are English and other languages.

Item 4.2. Apply the Vietnamese version of the CEFR Framework including all six levels as the foundation to compile curriculum and teaching plans, and to build assessment criteria.

Item 4.5. Regularly employ new lecturers of English and retrain current ones.

(Document #2, p. 10. Translation mine.)

As shown from these duties, several aspects of foreign language education at the university and in the Foreign Languages Faculty can be pointed out. As noted, in addition to English, other languages were to be offered at the university. This offer was seen to be in accordance with MOET’s National Project 2020. However, it was not clearly stated in the university’s document what these other languages were. In fact, at TriThuc University, apart from English, only French was offered for English major students with a minimal number of classes compared to English per semester. It appeared that even though other languages were mentioned in the university document, the university’s real position was that the development of and the investment in these languages in practice were minor considerations.

Overall, the process of introducing, disseminating and implementing the proficiency benchmark, particularly for English teachers, involved many activities directed by the MOET and the university. However, the perceptions and responses of the tertiary teachers to the requirement have been under-examined by the university particularly and in the Vietnamese contexts generally. The transitioned teachers’ perceptions and responses to the proficiency benchmark and related issues are discussed in the next section to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation process as well as the transitioned teachers’ agency in
response to educational and policy changes.

5.3. The transitioned teachers’ responses to the proficiency benchmark

This section presents the transitioned teachers’ responses to the benchmark according to three themes: the transitioned teachers’ sense-making of (Section 5.3.1), their engagement with (Section 5.3.2), their evaluations of (Section 5.3.4) and their position with the benchmark (Section 5.3.4). The transitioned teachers’ sense-making in relation to this proficiency requirement is delineated through their feelings and their interpretations of this benchmark as well as their views and their roles towards it. Together with the ways in which they enacted and engaged with this change in their new working field of ELT, these facets can highlight their agency in response to this requirement.

5.3.1. The transitioned teachers’ sense-making of the benchmark

Before examining how the transitioned teachers prepared for and adapted to the required benchmark, I explored their reactions upon receiving the introduction of this benchmark, as well as their early interpretations of it.

5.3.1.1. Powerless recipients of the requirement

As seen in Chapter 4, the transitioned teachers experienced a range of complex feelings when they had to transition to English teaching. Likewise, they expressed uneasy feelings about the required English proficiency benchmark, as powerless recipients. First, the transitioned teachers said that having to meet the requirement came as a shock. There was no discussion of the benchmark between the university and the faculty with the transitioned teachers prior to its implementation. For TT 19, this proficiency benchmark was “sudden”. TT 17 added that she had had “no exposure to proficiency testing in English before”. According to TT 14, at the time of the transition, his English level was also “low”. The introduction of the proficiency C1 level
benchmark so soon after the transitioned teachers had transitioned to ELT, was a sudden jump for most of the transitioned teachers.

In addition, being worried or “bỏ ngỡ” {agitated} were common feelings expressed by the transitioned teachers about the benchmark. As TT 3 reported, the process of transitioning from teaching Chinese to English, let alone meeting the proficiency standard, was abrupt and made everyone “really worried”. Recalling the time when she heard about the requirement, she said,

At first [I was] really worried. I was teaching Chinese, and then had to study and transition to English teaching]. Suddenly, the university sent out a document and required us to take tests to assess our [the transitioned teachers’] English language proficiency to verify if we meet the required benchmark.

According to TT 3’s accounts, seemingly she has gone through change after change and from one shock to the other in the process of transition to ELT. Some of the transitioned teachers mentioned that they first chose teaching as their profession by virtue of its stable and noble status as perceived in Vietnamese society. The changes appeared to negatively influence the transitioned teachers’ emotional and professional lives. TT 14 expressed that “when the document arrived, we were “mất ăn mất ngủ” {no eating, no sleeping} for several months”. These examples show the strong influence the change had on the transitioned teachers.

Nevertheless, the transitioned teachers had to manage their emotions to prepare for and take part in the tests for the English teachers’ proficiency benchmark. TT 14 said that he had to control his worries, and calm down, to face the fact that “there are no other ways but get prepared, review and sit the test.” TT 1 expressed the view that, although he felt unhappy about the transition, he had to accept the compulsory nature of the proficiency standard.

[It was] very challenging... At first, I was anxious. When changing from teaching Chinese to English, I was unsatisfied and unhappy. And then, [I] was required to meet assigned teaching responsibilities [the required proficiency benchmark] from the university. I had to try my best to study [to prepare for the tests].
Despite these uncomfortable feelings, like TT 14 and others, TT 1 ended up sitting the tests. He said, “like other colleagues, I had to “buộc lòng” {grudgingly} take part in all the courses offered by the faculty and the university to prepare for the test”.

As evidenced by the above comments, the transitioned teachers felt cynical about this unexpected benchmark. Furthermore, they felt passive and powerless upon receiving the notice of the required proficiency level. The uncomfortable feelings together with mandatory fulfillment to achieve the benchmark created difficulties and tensions in the transitioned teachers’ professional lives.

5.3.1.2. The proficiency standard as an indicator of professional expertise

In line with their emotions, the transitioned teachers presented how they made sense of the benchmark not only in view of their profession but also for the faculty’s benefits. First, most of the transitioned teachers understood the necessity of a required level of proficiency for English language teachers. They used words like “reasonable” (TTs 6, 10, 14, 20), “proper” or “appropriate” (TTs 2, 11, 17, 18) to talk about setting a standard for English teachers. The transitioned teachers also used student proficiency levels as an indicator to set a benchmark for teachers. TT 18, for example, mentioned that in order to have successful students, it was important to have effective teachers. TT 14 noted, “teachers always have to be better than students”, and officially, “C1 [level] is to teach non-English major students [for whom B1 level is required]”. As expressed in TT 14’s account, the suitability of the transitioned teachers’ required level C1 was merely to match the students’ required B1 level as delineated by the MOET. How this level is necessary for or compatible with the transitioned teachers’ actual teaching practices was not shown.

In addition, several transitioned teachers (TTs 1, 3, 14 and 17) acknowledged the contribution of the benchmark to raising their awareness of the need for professional development. According to the transitioned teachers, through the process of learning and
preparing for the requirement, they were able to enhance their proficiency and learn more English. TT 1 said:

The benchmark influenced the quality of teaching and learning, teachers’ self-learning and teachers’ professional development. Teachers’ awareness [towards improving their professional development] has also progressed. [As a result of the required benchmark], teachers pay more attention to their self-study to enhance their language proficiency.

For these transitioned teachers, the proficiency standard encouraged them to try and develop their ability to support their English teaching.

Furthermore, the transitioned teachers perceived the proficiency benchmark as contributing to the faculty’s development. Several of the transitioned teachers (TTs 10, 11, 12, 13 and 17) highlighted the benefit of achieving the benchmark for the status of the university and the faculty in national foreign language education. According to TT 13, the proficiency benchmark was “significant to the faculty”. Explaining this, TT 17 said,

When the English teachers achieve the required standard, [the university] can prove the quality of its human resources. This achievement can justify the image and position of the faculty and the university in the national foreign language education. Therefore, the faculty and the university want everyone [the teachers] to participate in the test.

As shown in this account, the proficiency benchmark could upgrade the position and influence of the faculty on English education in Vietnam, as well as gaining recognition for the university from society. In fact, if English teachers could obtain the required benchmark, the faculty and university could confirm and prove the quality or the proficiency of their staff. As evidenced here, the transitioned teachers not only saw the importance of the requirement for their own profession but also its contributions to the faculty’s and the university’s status.

Overall, the transitioned teachers acknowledged their lack of power, or lack of agency, in relation to the required proficiency benchmark, but they also understood the necessity of a standard for teaching quality and the achievement of required benchmark for the faculty and university development. Their responses show that they did not just perceive their roles and interpret the achievement’s contributions and consequences at an individual level. Rather, they
placed the benchmark in a wider educational context regarding the consideration and concerns for the development of the university and the faculty. This deeper and broader layer in the transitioned teachers’ interpretations of the benchmark confirms the critical and reflective views of the transitioned teachers on their teaching and in the transitional process.

5.3.2. The transitioned teachers’ engagement with the benchmark

In line with the benchmark for English teachers’ proficiency, the transitioned teachers had to prepare for the test by participating in different activities individually and collectively. Individual engagement is explored through the initiatives of each transitioned teacher regarding this proficiency requirement. The transitioned teachers’ collective engagement is presented through the participation of all transitioned teachers or groups of several transitioned teachers to respond to this change.

5.3.2.1. Collective actions

In response to the benchmark set for English teachers, the transitioned teachers engaged in different collective activities including attending meetings and revision classes to prepare for the tests, as well as taking part in the tests run by the MOET and the university. A group of the transitioned teachers (TTs 4, 11, 15) revealed that after the requirement was issued, the faculty had “frequent meetings” to disseminate information and “quán triệt” {ensure} that the transitioned teachers (together with other English teachers in the faculty) knew about the requirement and took implementation actions. As the transitioned teachers reported, the university leaders also attended many of these faculty meetings about the requirement. However, the fact that the required benchmark was so frequently mentioned caused the transitioned teachers much stress. At the time of my data collection at the university, all the transitioned teachers had by then achieved the required benchmark based on CEFR framework. Nevertheless, as shown in the faculty meetings, the leaders kept mentioning it and notified the
transitioned teachers that a requirement for an equivalent IELTS score would soon be issued. Even though, the required score of IELTS (6.5-7) is supposed to be equivalent with C1 level in the Vietnamese CEFR framework, according to the transitioned teachers, achieving the IELTS score is considered to be “more difficult” than the C1 level.

Alongside these pressures, the transitioned teachers took part in different review classes and sat many actual tests conducted by the university and the faculty before they could finally obtain the required level. After the university received the notification from the MOET, the transitioned teachers were sent to the capital city to take part in first exam review classes conducted by the MOET. These classes were held with the aim of preparing the teachers for the test and familiarising them with the test format. The first test took place in the capital city, only two weeks after the transitioned teachers received notification of the requirement from the MOET. At this first test, none of the teachers achieved the required C1. The transitioned teachers then continued preparing for the next test by participating in other revision classes conducted at TriThuc University and delivered by several English 1 teachers (See Section 3.3.1) at the faculty. The revision classes and test preparation were considered “serious preparation” (TT 18). As TT 14 revealed, “during the daytime, we were teaching and learning… At night time, we attended revision classes run by the faculty for the requirement”. However, while most of the transitioned teachers sat the second test and passed, some (TTs 3, 14, 17, 18) still had to take a third test before finally obtaining the required benchmark. As evidenced from these examples, the transitioned teachers made substantial efforts to enhance their knowledge of English, to achieve the required level of proficiency and be eligible for English teaching.

In order to prepare for the tests, in addition to the exam review classes conducted by the MOET and the university, the transitioned teachers also constructed their own small groups and worked collectively. For example, TTs 2, 3, 11, 17 worked together. TT 2 said,
We had a group of several teachers studying together. We timed the test to see how many points each person had for each trial test. If the others had higher scores, we asked them how they did it and their techniques. When we studied together, we could “thi dua” (compete) among us and could improve a lot.

It is clear that working together in a group assisted these transitioned teachers to prepare for the test.

In summary, the transitioned teachers took part in different collective activities to prepare for and achieve the proficiency benchmark. These collective engagements, despite not being on the transitioned teachers’ own initiative, prove their efforts to achieve the required proficiency standard and be recognised as qualified English teachers. While collective actions contributed to their achievement of the requirement, the transitioned teachers’ individual actions were equally significant.

5.3.2.2. Individual actions

Apart from the activities organised by the faculty and the university in response to the requirement, each transitioned teacher made different efforts to overcome difficulties related to achieving the benchmark. In order to achieve the required standard, they also managed to prepare for it including teaching themselves through books, online sources, online materials (TTs 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20); asking colleagues, or contacting foreign teachers. According to the transitioned teachers, in the process of trying to meet the requirement, they had to overcome a range of difficulties. First, the time allocated to prepare for the test was noted as a major disadvantage. As pointed out, the transitioned teachers had to take the first test with only two-week notice from the MOET. Such short-allocated time was an impediment to their preparation for the test and their achievement of the benchmark. Compared to other English teachers who were not involved in the transition, according to the transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 18, 20), having only just transitioned to teaching English made it even more difficult to achieve the requirement. As they said, their knowledge of English was insufficient, and they were unconfident about their proficiency so soon after the transition.
Despite the challenges, the transitioned teachers attempted to obtain the benchmark to be eligible for English teaching. While several transitioned teachers (TTs 13, 14, 17) asked their colleagues, or English teachers from English Division 1 in the faculty for help, other transitioned teachers (TTs 10, 14) tried to communicate with foreigners to improve their communication skills and prepare for the test. TT 10 asserted, “I am a confident person who likes to communicate with foreigners and to find the chance to talk...”. Likewise, TT 14 commented that he frequently contacted foreign teachers who came to the faculty to teach, to learn and practise English with them. The ways the transitioned teachers engaged with English learning through enlisting the help of foreigners or native speakers can be traced back to several causes. First, as the transitioned teachers commented, they did not have a chance to go overseas, or to other English-speaking countries to study or improve their English, although this was noted by the university as a way to achieve the required standard. Unsurprisingly, the transitioned teachers saw contact with foreigners as a chance to enhance their ability. Second, the preference for practising with foreigners was also linked to the fact that most of the transitioned teachers had their first foreign language training overseas. Likewise, with English learning, they also regarded communication with native speakers or engagement with native language environment as a way to enhance their proficiency.

In summary, in the process of engaging with English teaching, particularly to achieve the required proficiency benchmark, the transitioned teachers undertook both collective and, more importantly, individual actions to prepare for and then achieve the required standard. While the collective activities were conducted as actions required by the leadership to support the transitioned teachers in their preparation and revision for the requirement, the transitioned teachers’ individual activities needed to also utilise more of their own self-exerted actions to engage with and to achieve the standard.
5.3.3. The transitioned teachers’ evaluations of the benchmark

The transitioned teachers had different critical evaluations of the proficiency benchmark, with regard to their teaching practices, the connection between this benchmark and their English teaching as well as the way it was implemented. These interpretations are presented in terms of four themes: (1) the irrelevance of the benchmark to everyday pedagogy, (2) its contributions to teachers’ professional development, (3) the questions of the required benchmark and necessary effective training, and (4) concerns about the implementation process.

5.3.3.1. The irrelevance of the benchmark to everyday pedagogy

Despite recognising the benefit of the proficiency standard for the faculty and university, rather than passively accept the standard, the transitioned teachers showed their agency in response to the benchmark implementation by questioning its relevance to their teaching. According to several of them, although setting a standard in their teaching was necessary, the C1 level was not closely related to their teaching. Nor did it support their classroom teaching practices. Several of the transitioned teachers (TTs 6, 15, 17, 19) mentioned that the C1 level that they needed was solely to meet the requirement of the MOET rather than a perceived need on the part of the transitioned teachers themselves. As TT 6 highlighted, “achieving this requirement and my teaching are not related, not much influence…” According to TT 19, his attempts to obtain the certificate were to fulfil the duty required by the MOET and to be eligible to work in the field of ELT, but not to meet his teaching needs. He confirmed that the achievement of the benchmark would not guarantee better teaching or make him feel confident in teaching.

This certificate satisfies the requirement of the university to be “được dạy” {able to teach}. Having the certificate does not mean that teaching is good. Teaching is a process to be accumulated.

TT 15 also added that the requirement was one more “working license”, “to be eligible to teach non-English majors” at the university.
Many transitioned teachers argued that the requirement for a C1-level was much higher than necessary for teaching the non-English major students at the university. TT 17, for example, said that obtaining the certificate was to fulfil the MOET’s requirement, yet his teaching did not need to be that “cao siêu” {advanced}. TT 14 also emphasised that there was “no point” in achieving a C1 level because their students’ actual proficiency level was low. In other words, the requirement for C1 was not seen to be driven by the transitioned teachers’ actual teaching needs. The irrelevance and unnecessity for the requirement were also shown through the divergence from the sociocultural context in the area where the university is located. The differences between students at TriThuc University and those at others were clarified. TT 4 revealed her students’ backgrounds, saying they were from neighboring provinces and mainly from the countryside. Their scores in the entrance exam\textsuperscript{13} were not as high as the other students from other universities or cities, and their English level was much lower.

Concerning the students’ backgrounds, the transitioned teachers expressed doubts about the benefits of the benchmark by describing the students in their classes. TT 2 also added that she had only used elementary English in her teaching, but her students still could not understand. TT 2 elaborated on this by mentioning the reality of her students’ level in class: “during the whole teaching session, students cannot speak a sentence... To apply difficult things [higher knowledge] for these students is not effective”. Supporting this point, TT 17 clarified,

> The levels of students are important in teachers’ professional development. If the students are good, the teachers have to learn more and teach more for them. However, if the students are not good, given that the teachers have more advanced knowledge [as the required benchmark], they do not have opportunities to use it.

As shown in this account, TT 17 acknowledged the importance of the students’ needs and their levels in relation to teachers’ professional development. The need to enhance their professional

\textsuperscript{13} The students will use the results from this national exam to choose the universities/colleges in which they want to enroll.
development depended on the students, not the benchmark. As for her, the current teaching context did not require C1 level as set by the MOET and the university.

Overall, the transitioned teachers perceived a great distance between the proficiency benchmark and their everyday teaching. While the benchmark was issued with the aim of enhancing the quality of English teaching and learning (See Section 5.2.), the transitioned teachers did not see its relevance to and its support for their teaching practices, especially regarding their students’ actual levels in class. In other words, the suggested solution for teaching practices, that is the required proficiency standard, were imposed from the university and from the MOET, rather than stemming from the opinions, decisions or intentions of the teachers who were indeed directly involved in teaching the classes. Importantly, the above examples show that even though the transitioned teachers took part in the test as required, they had their own critical evaluations of what was effective and pertinent to their practices and their students. The transitioned teachers’ evaluations of the correlation between the requirement and their professional development are presented in the next section.

5.3.3.2. A question of effective teachers’ professional development

In addition to their concerns about the high level of the proficiency standard, the transitioned teachers felt it did not effectively support their professional development. In regard to this point, it is worth first discussing the discrepancies between the university’s plans for the teachers’ professional development noted in Document #2 and those conducted in reality. In this document, the university put forward various ways to enhance the teachers’ professional development in its foreign language education project. Key strategies were,

Item 5.7. Construct plans to send English lecturers overseas to study, train, and develop their profession, especially to participate in postgraduate programmes and training sessions to be granted with international certificates.

Item 5.9. Enhance infrastructure, standard equipment and financial sources for teaching
and learning English.

(Document #2, pp. 13-14. Translation mine.)

However, even though Document #2 was introduced in 2014, up to the time of the research in 2016, the two solutions were neither widely introduced nor effectively implemented by the university. Noticeably, the university’s objective, which read “by 2020, 100% of English teachers will be trained and will undertake professional development in English-speaking countries” (Document #2, p. 9. Translation mine), was not achieved. In fact, as revealed in the interviews with the transitioned teachers, from 2008 to 2018, only a small number of teachers were sent to overseas or English-speaking countries to take part in short training courses. All the teachers selected to undertake these activities were from English Division 1. None of the transitioned teachers at TriThuc University were given opportunities to train overseas. Putting aside the questionable correlation between overseas training and teacher proficiency, this evidence confirms the gap between the university’s plans as stated in documents and their actual practices concerning teachers’ professional development.

One group of transitioned teachers questioned the lack of university activities for teacher professional development. They argued that support for the teachers’ professional development was preferable to simply setting a required standard for the transitioned teachers to achieve. They highlighted the fact that professional development did not receive adequate attention from either the faculty or the university. TT 15, for example, pointed out that there had not been any courses or training to support their professional development since the transition. Although there were a few seminars discussing teaching activities in their division, these were “rare and not effective” (TT 20). More noticeably, TT 12 confronted the fact that the training courses that the transitioned teachers participated in to upgrade their proficiency and prepare for the tests were “bốc dộng” {overhasty}. In response to the requirement from the MOET, the faculty and university held many language-based activities such as organising
revision classes with the aim of helping the transitioned teachers achieve the requirement. However, TT 12 claimed, “the professional development activities of the faculty were still overhasty, not frequent. They were just short-term, conducted only in the period that we were standing under pressure from National Project [to achieve the requirement]”.

In these comments, several issues can be identified. The arbitrary actions of the faculty and the university as well as their actual impacts on teachers’ practical professional activities were questioned. The university’s responses were at least in part due to pressure from the MOET and their motive to be recognised for having qualified teachers, rather than their own acknowledgment of the necessity for regular professional training. This situation thus raised the issue of short-term and long-term professional development, especially the effectiveness of the latter at the university. The transitioned teachers’ views of “effective training” are discussed in the next section.

5.3.3.3. Effective training versus a required benchmark

Arguing that the benchmark was irrelevant to their teaching practices and professional development activities, the transitioned teachers raised issues of how to make the activities supporting their teaching more effective. TT 12 questioned, “How to make it [professional development] effective? Do not think to do something big. Teach teachers specific real things, close to their actual teaching first, not things too far away…”. It is shown from this account that more attention was hoped to be paid to practical activities that were more relevant to their actual teaching and more suitable and practical for their professional development. In other words, the transitioned teachers’ view was that there was a gap between the activities held by the MOET and the university that they participated in and their real application for the transitioned teachers’ teaching. In the transitioned teachers’ view, there were differences between the necessary knowledge for their teaching and the revision classes to prepare for the proficiency test.
While the benchmark was used as a tool by the MOET to enhance the quality of teachers, several transitioned teachers (TTs 6, 11, 12, 18) suggested other activities that they thought would have been more useful for their teaching, rather than achieving a certificate or a benchmark through passing tests. They showed their interest in professional development activities such as pedagogical workshops and training which focused directly on specific skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, or teaching methodology. TT 11 said,

Sometimes we should have training, in respect of teaching methodology for teachers, especially the teachers like us [the transitioned teachers]. This kind of training is better. When we attend more training, we will be more familiar with English teaching and know more new things. That is good.

Supporting the necessity for professional development, TT 18 provided a detailed comment on possible ways that the training and re-training for the group of transitioned teachers could have been conducted,

Probably we should organise extra training. The good ones or English teachers in the faculty can train and help the not good ones. Alternatively, if conditions permit, we can invite experts in teaching, foreign teachers, to help us communicate better. This can also help to avoid English communication just between Vietnamese and Vietnamese.

In short, the professional development activities which the transitioned teachers favoured, involved more than just a certificate. Rather, they were related to teaching methodology, communications in English and teaching collaborations among faculty members to support their daily teaching practice and professional needs.

Nearly half of the transitioned teachers (8 out of 17) highlighted the reasons why such re-training and workshops were necessary for the transitioned teachers. TT 12, for example, elaborated on this, explaining that the difficulties they faced in their teaching and learning were not like the other English teachers who did not undergo the transition. TT 18 also said that even though they had knowledge of teaching methodology for foreign languages, they were still transitioning teachers and needed more time to improve. From these concerns pertinent to their specific group, the transitioned teachers raised the ideas of having training and even specific
policies for themselves, rather than grouping them with all English teachers. TT 12 complained that although the National Project 2020 organised many workshops, for example for English teachers in general, none were conducted for the distinct group of English teachers who had transitioned from other foreign languages. She added that “the number of the transitioned teachers is large” and they had specific needs compared to other English teachers.

In summary, the previous sections have shown that the transitioned teachers acknowledged the importance of a standard in teaching. However, at the same time, they questioned its relevance and raised concerns about the relative value of a certificate (regarding teachers’ professional development and) compared to the real knowledge obtained. The certificate for them was just to meet the requirement for the MOET, but it did not show their legitimate knowledge or what they wanted to achieve in their new field. The critical and reflective comments, interpretations and evaluations of the transitioned teachers indicate that they were critics rather than just recipients of the policy. These controversies are revisited in further discussion in Chapter 7.

5.3.3.4. The implementation process: How is more important than what

Apart from the transitioned teachers’ evaluations of the benchmark in relation to its contributions to their English teaching and professional development, the transitioned teachers also critically interpreted the implementation process. The transitioned teachers argued that “how” to achieve the benchmark was more important than the test itself. The transitioned teachers expressed concerns about the standardisation and the test forms in the implementation process. TT 12, for example, argued that teachers’ ages and the length of their employment should be considered with respect to the required benchmark. She asserted,

Whether we should have standardisation, for example, how many years they [the teachers] will be employed [to be required the benchmark]. In addition, the teachers can only learn well foreign languages up to an age... They [the policy makers] should consider the zone of age [in respect of requiring the benchmark].
As shown in this account, TT 12 pointed out the influence of age in foreign language learning and on the long-term effectiveness for foreign language education. In particular, she claimed that it could be easier and more valuable for a young teacher to take the test, achieve the required standard and then contribute to their work later, than an older teacher who had a short time left in their working life. Paying attention to the teachers’ potential contribution after achieving the required standard and their capability concerning their ages and employment devotion indicates the view of transitioned teachers as critics through the change implementation and the influences of these factors on the teachers’ agency.

The inconsistencies of the test formats, which were applied to check the teachers’ proficiency, were also questioned by several transitioned teachers. TT 4 complained about the complexities of different sections in a test, which caused confusion and uncertainty for the transitioned teachers,

The way [the form of test] was not appropriate, not “nò đức nò cái” {homogeneous}… and “lung tung” {messy}. In Hanoi, [the form of test] followed TOEFL, reading test was under TOEFL [format] but listening was IELTS [format]… It was not uniform.

Supporting this, TT 14 also mentioned the test format changed from the first test to the later ones. To recall, it was the change from IELTS, an international language testing system to the Vietnamese CEFR, a national language testing system. She commented,

At first, it [the test] was IELTS, and then it was changed to C1. We were first trained with IELTS, and then C1. Maybe the faculty firstly required IELTS, and then university followed the documents from the MOET to follow C1.

As shown in this account, TT 14 was not certain why there were changes in the test formats. In other words, although the transitioned teachers were the test-takers, they were not informed of the reasons for these changes, which were decided by the leaders. The adjustment of test formats, particularly from the time when the benchmark was first introduced in 2012 to when the Vietnamese version was developed in 2014, caused confusion and uncertainty for the
transitioned teachers. This influenced their perceptions and actions and hence led to difficulties for them in preparing for the test.

In a more notable respect, the way of preparing for tests also influenced the ways the transitioned teachers acted throughout the process of obtaining the benchmark. TT 13 described the ways he prepared for the benchmark, which was heavily test-oriented. He said,

Prepared for and achieving the standard was just like practising for a driving license. The more you practise, the better you get familiar with the test formats and then better results. It is just like when you take a driving license test. You pass because you get familiar with the driving route. However, this achievement cannot assure that you are already good at driving.

To better understand TT 13’s account, it is necessary to explain that the driving license test in Vietnam is different from that in other countries, for example, Australia. The driving tests in Australia involve a lot of practice and learners undergo different stages of probationary driving. This requires a theory test, practical driving under supervision up to a compulsory number of hours to achieve a Green P, and then completing a required number of hours of driving to obtain a Red P, before the test-takers can finally achieve an open license. The test process in Vietnam requires much shorter time and less practice. The test-takers in Vietnam mainly practise on a pre-designed route, which is a similar design to the one in the real driving test. The test-takers can directly obtain an open license if they can pass a theory test, complete driving practice on the pre-designed route and a short driving practice with instructors on outside routes. TT 13’s accounts, which compared the English test preparation for a driving license test in Vietnam, revealed the test-oriented way he prepared for the English tests.

The above account also partly explained why although most of the teachers achieved the required standard, they were not satisfied with their proficiency. The transitioned teachers reported that they were not confident in their own proficiency even though at the time of the research, they had achieved the C1 level required by the MOET. TT 6, for example, added that she had already obtained the certificate at C1 level as required; however, she believed that her
real capacity was not at that level. In other words, there was inconsistency between the transitioned teachers’ belief and satisfaction with their professional development and their achievement of the benchmark. Most transitioned teachers noted that they did not need a certificate as required by the benchmark, but instead needed long-term support for their professional development. TT 20, for example, confirmed “we need knowledge, not a certificate or degree.” This raised questions about the correlation or equivalence between the quality of the test or the certificate that the transitioned teachers gained from the test, and the actual knowledge of English that the transitioned teachers obtained. Consequently, although the benchmark was issued in order to enhance the teachers’ proficiency, regarding the test-oriented ways of how it was implemented, the transitioned teachers still questioned the knowledge they had gained through achieving this benchmark.

Taken together, the requirement for the transitioned teachers to achieve a prescribed standard created a range of complex dissatisfactions, confusions and concerns for the transitioned teachers. These resulted from its irrelevance to the transitioned teachers’ actual teaching practices, its lack of contribution to their professional development, the gaps between their preferred training and test-oriented preparation and issues with the implementation process. In other words, rather than taking for granted the benchmark and sitting the test, the transitioned teachers reflected on these by considering their own teaching and the issues involved with their profession. With the sense-making and evaluations that the transitioned teachers perceived, how they positioned themselves with the required benchmark through the transition process is discussed in the next section.

**5.3.4. The transitioned teachers’ positioning with the benchmark and the change**

The ways in which the transitioned teachers positioned themselves in response to the required proficiency benchmark were reported to be complex. They positioned themselves as passive
recipients and directly involved with this benchmark. The transitioned teachers also talked about the dichotomy between themselves and the other English teachers who did not experience the transition. First, the transitioned teachers acknowledged their powerless position in relation to the benchmark. On the one hand, they critiqued its relevance and benefits to their teaching. On the other hand, the transitioned teachers still attempted to obtain the required standard. As they explained, obtaining the benchmark was to fulfill the responsibility of their profession and they could not refuse to take the test. Rather, their decision was heavily controlled by the hierarchical working style in Vietnam, in which the leaders of the university and the faculty decided what the teachers should do (see more of the influences of leaders on teachers’ responses in Chapter 6).

The transitioned teachers perceived another dichotomy between themselves and the “real English teachers”. The term “real English teachers” was mentioned many times by the transitioned teachers when they referred to English teachers who had started their career with the English language and did not undergo the transition. Even though the transitioned teachers agreed that their English language knowledge and skills were adequate for their current teaching to non-English major students at the university, they thought their knowledge was not on par with the other English teachers. Therefore, they were not satisfied to regard themselves as “English teachers” but positioned themselves as distant from and with a clear distinction from the real English teachers. In other words, even though the transitioned teachers aimed to be engaged with English teaching, there remained a division and a hidden dichotomy between the transitioned teachers and English teachers in the faculty. The distance between the two groups was widely shared among the transitioned teachers. TT 10, for example, said that such dichotomy “can never be erased”.

When being asked how the transitioned teachers considered themselves, as a transitioned teacher, a teacher teaching their first foreign language, an English teacher or a
foreign language teacher, most chose to regard themselves as either transitioned teachers or foreign language teachers. They explained that they were not confident enough in English to be called an English teacher. TT 1, for example, revealed that although he was “equipped with adequate degrees”, that is BA and MA in English, and recently the C1-level benchmark, he did not have sufficient knowledge and adequate expertise compared to the other English teachers who majored in English at the beginning. As a result, he regarded himself as not meeting the requirements to become a real English teacher. Likewise, TT 4 confirmed that because of the requirement, she had to transition to English teaching. However, she believed that her main major was still Chinese and thus she regarded herself as a transitioned teacher.

Noticeably, many of the transitioned teachers felt that they were labelled as being socially inferior to the English major teachers. For example, TT 12 felt this affected her “mặc cảm” {self-esteem}. She explained that if she revealed she was a transitioned teacher, “người ta” {others/society} would not highly appreciate her and her students might think she was not good enough. It is notable from TT 12’s account that she was strongly influenced by how society regarded her. In addition, being a transitioned teacher was seen for her as negative because she could not be highly regarded. Placing her view into the sociocultural context of Asian countries such as Vietnam, where face is important, how other people and society regarded the transitioned teachers strongly influenced how the transitioned teachers wanted to be seen.

Overall, the transitioned teachers did not position themselves as real English teachers but as having their own specific characteristics which required specific policies or re-training rather than achieving a required benchmark. In addition, having been transitioning to English teaching, they were keenly aware of the dichotomy between themselves and the other English teachers who did not undergo the transition. They were receivers of the benchmarks, who had to prepare for and sit the test many times in order to achieve it. They were also critics who
presented critical evaluations of the benchmark not only in relation to their teaching practices but the broader context of the policy enactments. Some of them, however, felt like outsiders who were not the actual English teachers to follow the requirements and policies.

5.4. Closing remarks

This chapter has presented the transitioned teachers’ responses to the English proficiency benchmark. In the first section, I described the benchmark’s implementation at the university through document analysis. The findings showed that this was a hierarchically controlled process that put pressures on the university as well as on each transitioned teacher to achieve the required standard. The findings also highlight the mismatches between Document #2 and the actual situation at the university regarding foreign language education and teacher professional development. The chapter has also disclosed the gaps in the implementation process as a result of inconsistencies and changes in the test types. Importantly, although the proficiency benchmark raised the awareness of several transitioned teachers of the need for professional development, the discrepancy between the required C1 level and the transitioned teachers’ actual teaching contexts questioned and diminished the benchmark’s value. Hence, according to the transitioned teachers, the proficiency benchmark only covered the superficial level of raising their awareness rather than helping them understand and see the need for achieving it for their teaching.

In the second section, the chapter showed different ways the transitioned teachers responded to the proficiency benchmark. There were two aspects of the transitioned teachers’ responses. On the one hand, they were passive and powerless recipients of the policy, who had no power or involvement in its introduction and passively met the requirement for proficiency benchmark, despite their uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, the transitioned teachers also played reflective and critical roles in the policy enactment. They had their own
interpretations of the benchmark not only for their own teaching but in line with a broader context for the faculty’s and the university’s image in general foreign language education in Vietnam. The transitioned teachers also showed their ways of adapting to and achieving this benchmark. More importantly, the transitioned teachers expressed their own evaluations and reflections, especially in line with their actual teaching and their students’ needs as well as their long-term professional development in the new field.

The findings presented in this chapter have highlighted the industriousness of the transitioned teachers, who tried their best to achieve the benchmark and be involved with English teaching. In addition to the revision classes held by the university, individual transitioned teacher also took their own actions to meet the standard and to engage with the field and with the current educational industry. They were also critical reflectors on issues in their teaching as well as potential contributors to policy making by suggesting different modifications or actions to the policy. As shown in this chapter, the transitioned teachers commented on various facets of their teaching and the long-term development of foreign language education at the university. Such valuable comments, evaluations and reflections indicate their agency as responsible teachers.

In a different vein, the findings in this chapter also show a range of impediments in the policy implementation process. First, the introduction of the policy benchmark lacked clarity about its purposes and had insufficient preparation time. As evidenced from the transitioned teachers’ comments, the process was arbitrary and led to divergent perceptions of its purposes between the transitioned teachers, the MOET and university’s leaders, which created difficulties and uncertainty for the teachers. This process did not show the connection between the MOET who drafted it, the university leaders who disseminated it and the teachers who directly enacted it. In fact, there was a lack of a clear relationship of the benchmark and classroom teaching as well as to the transitioned teachers’ professional development. The C1
level set by the leaders was far above their needs in the transitioned teachers’ actual teaching.

Considering the classification of teachers’ roles in the policy enactment process by Ball et al. (2012), the transitioned teachers’ responses to the required proficiency benchmark presented in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- The majority of the transitioned teachers considered themselves to be passive receivers of the benchmark
- The transitioned teachers demonstrated their industriousness and commitment to meeting the required standard in English teaching
- The transitioned teachers carried out collective actions to achieve the benchmark
- Many transitioned teachers showed their ability to be strong critics who interpreted and judged different aspects of the benchmark
- Many transitioned teachers expressed a sense of being outsiders, who did not regard the benchmark to be necessary and did not consider themselves to be ‘real’ actual English teachers.

These findings are further discussed regarding teacher agency in Chapter 7. To capture a more in-depth understanding of why and how the transitioned teachers responded to the required benchmark and the transition, the next chapter describes how sociocultural factors and teacher identities influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses.
CHAPTER SIX

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TRANSITIONED TEACHERS’ RESPONSES

6.1. Revisiting the subject-centred sociocultural approach

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 illustrated the ways in which the transitioned teachers responded to the transition and the proficiency benchmark in ELT. This chapter describes the factors that have influenced their responses to educational change. The data analysed in this chapter were mainly drawn from the second stage interviews, which included 28 with the transitioned teachers and three with the leaders of the faculty and the university. The findings aim to address the third and final research question of the thesis:

Research Question 3: What factors influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the required benchmark?

3.1. How did sociocultural factors influence the teachers’ responses?

3.2. How did teacher identities influence their responses?

Using a modified version of the subject-centred sociocultural approach (see Section 2.6.2), this chapter discusses two main strands that may have influenced the ways in which the transitioned teachers responded to the changes and the ways in which they exercised their agency. I have labelled them ‘sociocultural factors’ and ‘teacher identities’ (see Figure 6.1).
Figure 6.1. Factors influencing the teachers’ responses (modified from Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Under the heading of sociocultural factors, Section 6.2 explores the potential influences of power, work culture, and material circumstances on the transitioned teachers’ responses. In Eteläpelto et al.’s model (2013), only sociocultural factors of the workplace were presented. Section 6.2 in this chapter, however, covers sociocultural factors in both the workplace of the transitioned teachers, i.e. TriThuc University, and in the broader context of foreign language education in Vietnam. Under the heading of Teacher Identities, Section 6.3 examines the transitioned teachers’ work history and experience, their professional knowledge and competencies, their professional commitments, motivations and interests, and their professional goals and ideals. At the end of this chapter, I reflect on the influences of these factors as guided by Eteläpelto et al.’s approach (2013) and present other significant influential factors embedded in the Vietnamese context.

6.2. The influence of sociocultural factors on the transitioned teachers’ responses

The data analysis identified a combination of sociocultural factors which influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the required proficiency benchmark (see Figure 6.1). In this section, I present these factors under the following themes: power (Section 6.3.1), work culture (Section 6.3.2) and material circumstances (Section 6.3.3). This is followed by comparing the relative influences of these factors on the transitioned teachers’ responses.

6.2.1. Status and power

The data consistently showed that status and power were among the most influential elements
affecting the transitioned teachers’ responses. This section firstly focuses on the status of English in relation to other foreign languages, and then analyses the influence of the power of both faculty and university leaders at TriThuc University. Although both these forms of power may potentially correlate, they were examined separately in order to form a clearer picture of their influences.

6.2.1.1. The status of English

During both transitions, the differential power and status of English in relation to the transitioned teachers’ first foreign languages were reported to be particularly significant factors in their transitioning decisions. They also influenced their subsequent actions in response to the transition and the proficiency benchmark. First, it was evident that the dominant status of English played a key role in the transition. Both in Vietnamese society in general and at TriThuc University, English is perceived as a superior foreign language. According to the university leader participating in the study, “English is the language of globalisation”. Hence, it was chosen as the only foreign language to be offered to non-English majors at the university. This choice further reinforced the status of English and caused a concomitant drop in status and visibility of other languages at the university. Apart from English, only French was offered to English major students as a second foreign language. Other foreign languages, including Chinese and Russian, were phased out by the Foreign Languages Faculty.

The dominance of English also created challenges in the transitioned teachers’ professional lives, especially during Transition Two. By transitioning to English, the transitioned teachers were put in the difficult situation of studying and then teaching English (see details in Chapter 4). In addition, they felt that their first foreign languages were not valued in the university and society. TT 12, for example, explained that English had better social recognition than French. According to TT 12, French teaching was “teaching a language that they [society] do not highly appreciate or recognise your proficiency, whatever level [how
good] you are at…”. Consequently, after completing her BA in English in order to transition, she also decided to drop her MA in French and start one in English instead.

6.2.1.2. The power of the leaders

The power of the university and faculty leadership also influenced the transition. This power was highlighted through the hierarchical process of administrating educational changes from the national to the institutional level in the Vietnamese context. The university and faculty leaders had a fundamental impact on the transitioned teachers’ responses throughout the transition process. Their influential role can be first identified through the way they spoke about the transition policy to the transitioned teachers. As several transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 11, 16) revealed, in the faculty meetings to disseminate the idea of transitioning, the university leader presented an optimistic scenario of ELT, saying that “English is a long-term language for the university’s development”. The leaders also promised to support the transitioned teachers and tried to convince them that they “should not worry but transition to English” (TT 2). As TT 12 admitted, the leaders’ talk and encouragement gave them confidence in their decision to make the transition.

The leaders’ accounts in their interviews also confirmed their impact on the transitioned teachers’ transition. The university leader presented his strong belief that all transitioned teachers in the faculty should transition to ELT. In his view, the transitioned teachers from Transition One (see Section 4.2.1) moved successfully from teaching Russian to English. He described these transitioned teachers as “the previous generation” and the transition in general as “khủng hoảng trong dạy học” {crisis in teaching}. He acknowledged the transition as a crisis that the teachers had to face in their teaching. However, he emphasised that transitioned teachers from Transition One could “stand firmly [in the field of English teaching after the transition]”. Their successful stories had provided evidence to support Transition Two, and the transitioned teachers in Transition Two should “nói theo thế hệ đi trước” {follow the previous
generation} and make the transition.

It is necessary to point out that, when drawing on CDS, this statement carried meaning at a deep cultural level. The idea of “noi theo thế hệ đi trước” {follow the previous generations} has been deployed throughout Vietnamese history, through the wars to the current daily life of the Vietnamese. The slogan is used to praise previous generations for their sacrifice and success in fighting for and maintaining the country’s independence, and to encourage the next generations to follow their example. In the current time, the slogan of “noi theo thế hệ đi trước” is generally used to encourage the next generations to follow the ancestors out of respect and responsibility. With regard to the transition, the leader was intentionally persuading the teachers of other foreign languages to be good citizens by following in their suit.

Such taken-for-granted interpretations and expectations on the part of the university leader about the benefits of transitioning strongly influenced the ways in which the transitioned teachers in the second generation undertook the transition. As these transitioned teachers pointed out, there were no forums or opportunities for them to express their thoughts, concerns or their perceived problems about the leaders’ suggestions or decision. TT 14, for example, voiced this sense of powerlessness, “Teachers had no voice… No one hears [the teachers]” and “... [We] just have to accept”.

The leaders’ impact on the transitioned teachers’ actions during the transition process was also shown in their control over the transitioned teachers’ preparatory teaching. Several transitioned teachers revealed that it was the leaders who decided which transitioned teachers were eligible and ready to teach. In particular, the faculty leaders arranged which transitioned teachers could start teaching students on campus right away (e.g., TTs 5, 6, 10) and who should prepare more by teaching “sinh viên tại chức” {distance learners} before commencing formal teaching of students (see Section 4.2.2.2). Likewise, the leaders were again the ones who selected which transitioned teachers were to be placed in teaching observational sessions.
While several transitioned teachers (TTs 5, 6, 10) were allowed to teach English immediately without any observation after they completed their English study, the rest of the transitioned teachers had to be assessed by the faculty leaders who observed their lessons to determine their readiness to teach. It is evident that the faculty and university leaders played a decisive and controlling role over the transitioned teachers’ English preparatory teaching practices in their transition.

Furthermore, the power of leadership has been constructed firmly through Vietnamese history. TT 20 confirmed that “dân mình ít khi phản ánh” {people here are rarely against the leaders}. TT 14 explained this fact as differences between Eastern and Western culture in questioning an issue. “In Western countries, if you want something, you can request or protest for it. However, here, we could not request to teach the language we want”. Rather, the transitioned teachers tried to adapt while still following the leaders’ requirements. For example, TT 14 said that, even though he was trained in French, if he was required to teach English, he would take on this new role rather than request what he really wanted. Instead of asking for other solutions or raising his voice, he accepted the requirements from the leaders and improvised to meet the needs of the university.

In explaining why they did not challenge the need to transition, some transitioned teachers explained that it was virtually impossible within the university structure. According to these transitioned teachers, the process involved many stages. First, the transitioned teachers’ concerns could only be raised in division meetings, documented in the minutes of meetings and then sent to the faculty leaders. The faculty leaders would then decide whether to pass this on to higher levels, or to university leaders. However, the transitioned teachers revealed that they did not know whether the faculty would even send the minutes or whether the university would take any action or not. In fact, they rarely saw follow-up actions from the university and were not informed if the issues raised would be addressed. This long and unclear process contributed
to the transitioned teachers’ perceptions that they saw no point in challenging the leaders because their voices would not be heard anyway.

The influence of leadership power was also shown in the hierarchical approach through the change enactment process, from the national level to institutions and then to teachers. Concerning the introduction of the proficiency benchmark, at the national level, as discussed in Chapter 5, the transitioned teachers reported that the MOET pre-decided at a much higher level of proficiency that all English teachers had to meet, compared to the level needed for their actual teaching contexts and everyday pedagogy. The transitioned teachers thus argued that the decision on the level of required proficiency benchmark was not based on their practical teaching needs, especially the teaching to non-English major students. The follow-up tests were also imposed on institutions from the MOET at a national level. Only when the university teachers achieved the benchmark would they or the faculty be eligible to teach and issue English certificates to the English learners who needed them. As the faculty leader reported,

TriThuc University is one of the leading universities of the National Project 2020. It is allowed to train and issue the certificate for people who need it in society. If you cannot achieve the required level and standard, you are not qualified to participate in the programme.

This evidence shows that TriThuc University was under pressure from the MOET to be eligible to participate in its programmes. Being one of the leading universities in National Project 2020, the university also had the responsibility to ensure that its teachers were qualified for it. In other words, as shown in the leader’s account, the achievement of the benchmark was not just for the transitioned teachers’ own benefits but also for the benefit of the university. The leaders’ power over the transitioned teachers’ responses was also constrained by the pressures of the university’s image and its position and development in national foreign language education. The pressure the university had from the MOET shaped the leaders’ actions in response to the proficiency benchmark. They called many meetings to disseminate the required standard and to encourage the transitioned teachers to try to achieve the English proficiency benchmark. For
the university’s benefit, the university and the faculty also monitored exam review classes to support the transitioned teachers before the tests. In turn, English teachers and the transitioned teachers had to sit the test to check their proficiency and make efforts to achieve the required standard.

Taken together, different forms of power influenced the transitioned teachers’ transition and their actions in response to the proficiency benchmark. Power is particularly significant in the Vietnamese cultural context where this influence meant the transitioned teachers did not have the agency to challenge leadership decisions. The next section describes how work culture influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses.

6.2.2. Work culture

This section presents the influences of work culture on the transitioned teachers’ responses. Work culture is described through administrative and organisational style and the transitioned teachers’ professional networks or solidarity among the transitioned teachers and other teachers in the faculty. As a result of the transition, the transitioned teachers from different first foreign languages worked and collaborated with each other in English 2 Division. For one group of transitioned teachers (8), a common English working field of English 2 Division brought an interesting and diverse working environment with transitioned teachers from different language backgrounds. TT 13, for example, compared the working culture of the new division with his previous division (French Division): “Previously, there were only French transitioned teachers in a limited working condition of few French teaching hours. It was a bit stressful and not equal [because there was] too little work but too many members”. TT 13 added that, before the transition, French transitioned teachers only taught French to students from certain faculties. Compared with teaching English to all students in the university, there was an imbalance between a small workload and a large number of French teachers.
However, regarding support for the transitioned teachers’ first foreign language activities, most of the transitioned teachers considered the administrative style of the new division to be less efficient than the previous ones. A group of former French teachers, for example, reported that they had received more support from different French-related organisations; for example, short course training held in other cities or even in France had been provided to enhance their French language proficiency. However, they felt that the new joint division was biased towards English. Even though French was still offered to English students, most activities in this division focused on teaching English. In addition, as mentioned in Section 4.3.2.3.3, there was no French-majored leader to take charge of academic affairs in French. Rather, the leader of the new English 2 Division, who was a Russian TT, coordinated all academic issues, including French. Because of these differences, some transitioned teachers, such as TT 14 and TT 15, preferred the previous arrangement. Many of the French transitioned teachers said that the change in the administration of foreign languages in the faculty caused an unfavourable environment for French.

It was also noticeable from an online observation that as members of French groups on Viber, TT 14 and TT 15 were not in the Faculty Viber Two online group chat (see Section 3.6.2.4 for more details of this group chat), which included other faculty members. Although there might be many possible reasons for this, it suggests a probable correlation between their perceptions of the administrative style and their involvement in the general English working culture in the faculty. While the change led to the construction of a new working culture which encouraged one group of transitioned teachers to be engaged with ELT, it distanced others from being involved.

In a significant respect, the transitioned teachers created a close connection and developed a strong sense of solidarity in their work during the transition process. Several transitioned teachers pointed out the age range among the transitioned teachers created a better
working atmosphere and culture in the new division. For example, TT 12 mentioned that the age gap among the transitioned teachers in the new division was not as great as in their former divisions. Age is one of the critical factors that shape the ways Vietnamese communicate with each other. According to TT 12, the hierarchy that resulted from the age gap in previous divisions created a distance between the members. In contrast, the majority of the transitioned teachers (16) were close in age which made communication easier and gave them the sense of connectedness. It also provided a more comfortable working atmosphere in the division throughout the transition process.

In addition, many transitioned teachers mentioned the “hỗ trợ tinh thần” {emotional support} of the faculty and the division throughout the transition process. TT 13 said, “As for the division activities, they were related mainly to “khía cạnh tinh thần” {emotional aspects}. In Vietnamese culture, emotional aspects are perhaps more significant than other aspects of life such as physical or materialistic conditions. These emotional values play an important part in Vietnamese people’s lives. As reported by some transitioned teachers, emotional support was a form of care and solidarity among the transitioned teachers, which also created a united environment and supported them during their transition. This emotional link can be seen as a form of collective agency among the transitioned teachers.

The sense of belonging to a common group also boosted the transitioned teachers’ confidence through the transition process. As mentioned by several transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 3, 16), seeing that everyone who taught other foreign languages except English had to transition, they felt less afraid to make their own decisions to transition and deal with the issues in this process. TT 2 explained “only me transitioning, it would be scarier. However, there were many of us, so it was not too frightening.” In other words, the sense of being one of many others in a group experiencing the same situation of transitioning supported many of the transitioned teachers in this process. The solidarity among the transitioned teachers is also
shown through the ways they worked collectively as a group to face difficulties and achieve the required standard. In their interviews, several transitioned teachers (TTs 5, 13, 15) repeated many times words like “anh em” {brothers and sisters or siblings} to mention other transitioned teachers in the division and faculty. In Vietnamese perceptions, family members are vital and influential. Referring to the other transitioned teachers in the faculty as members of a family, these transitioned teachers confirmed the close relationships among the transitioned teachers.

The close connection among the transitioned teachers was also disclosed in the interviews and was confirmed by my observations. The transitioned teachers had a common email address, to which different materials and information were shared. They also created their own Viber account to discuss all the issues related to their ELT. They often exchanged materials and collaborated to reach agreement on the materials used. I also observed in Viber chats that if the transitioned teachers had problems in their work, they often posted them on their Viber group-online platform. The problems were then collectively tackled, and solutions were worked out. For example, when some transitioned teachers had trouble with their teaching timetable, they addressed it on Viber. They then communicated in the group and set the date and time to together meet the authorities to solve the problem. Although these incidents can be traced back to the fact that these transitioned teachers were working in the same division, the commonality they had in their teaching created a strong bond between them.

Overall, according to many transitioned teachers, the sense of belonging to a community was a strength for them through the transition process. This close connection influenced the ways they acted and the ways they exercised agency. The working culture among the transitioned teachers reflects Vietnamese culture, in which solidarity is highly regarded, and was a supportive platform for them to address and solve difficulties as a group.
6.2.3. Material circumstances

The data showed that material circumstances also influenced how the transitioned teachers responded to the transition and the benchmark. These material circumstances included financial and professional support from the university and the faculty. Firstly, throughout the transition, there were different financial policies in the university to support the transitioned teachers. For the transitioned teachers’ English study in Transition Two, the university funded their tuition fees. For the transitioned teachers who enrolled in different universities (i.e., TTs 5, 10), the university also reimbursed their study fees after completing their degrees. According to the transitioned teachers, such advocacy from the university provided an incentive for them to transition.

Similarly, the university and the faculty created favourable material conditions for the transitioned teachers to participate in the preparation course and prepare for the test. In particular, they held free exam review classes for the first proficiency test. TT 18 added,

From the university’s side, especially from faculty’s, there was a lot of support regarding preparing for the tests. These included organising free exam review classes or giving away course books. As for the first test, the university also funded travelling fee for each teacher [including the transitioned teachers].

The university also reduced the required number of teaching periods for the transitioned teachers who took part in exam review classes (TTs 6, 11, 17). According to many transitioned teachers (TTs 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, 14, 17, and 18), these supportive activities from the university positively encouraged them to achieve the required benchmark.

Nonetheless, the transitioned teachers pointed out other material constraints. In terms of infrastructure, the transitioned teachers did not have adequate teaching conditions compared to the other English major teachers. My observations confirmed that most English major classes were taught in multimedia rooms equipped with practical facilities such as computers for both lecturer and students. In contrast, non-English major classes were in rooms with basic facilities and often without data projectors. For the transitioned teachers, this lack of adequate facilities
compared with equipment provided in other English major classes caused difficulties, especially in large classes. TT 14, for example, pointed out that she wanted to deliver effective lessons and employ different methods in her teaching. Yet, in a class of more than 50 students, not having a projector was an undeniable barrier for her to introduce new vocabulary. She said she found this demotivating.

The poor infrastructure contrasted sharply with the university’s solutions for foreign language education as noted in Document #2 (see Section 5.2 for more details of this document). Document #2 stipulates that “[the university] has an adequate facility with good English-teaching environment, multimedia-equipped rooms and other necessary teaching materials and equipment to meet the standard of teaching and learning foreign languages”. This evidence shows that the material conditions at the university and the faculty did not adequately support the transitioned teachers in delivering English lessons in the ways they wanted. It also created the gaps between teaching conditions of the transitioned teachers and the English teachers of English major students.

In addition, with regard to the material circumstances in foreign language education, TriThuc University and the area where the university is located possessed historic strengths in Chinese, Russian or French rather than English. TT 15 explained, “Vinh, Da Nang, or Saigon, Ha Noi are the places where foreign languages, especially English, flourish. In our area, previously it [the developed and focused language] was Russian, then Chinese and French.” This transitioned teacher pointed out that the transitioned teachers had early and close exposure to Russian, Chinese and French but did not have a supportive English language environment. TT 14 and TT 15 also presented other examples about the material disadvantages of the area in ELT. For instance, the city did not attract many native English teachers, and the few who taught at the language centres were mostly backpackers. The transitioned teachers saw this as disadvantageous to creating and becoming involved in a practical native speaking environment.
In turn, it led to ineffective preparation for the international test to achieve the required proficiency benchmark. TT 14, for example, said,

This city is far from big centres. Many of us wanted to take part in an IELTS course taught by English-native teachers. However, in this city, we hardly ever see [foreign teachers]. If there are any, they are not graduated from teaching English major like those in other cities, but mainly backpackers. Therefore, for the first test, we decided to self-teach and review for IELTS.

Overall, material conditions at the faculty and the university both supported and constrained the transitioned teachers in their transition to English. The next section reflects on the influences of sociocultural factors, especially in the Vietnamese contexts, on the transitioned teachers’ responses.

6.2.4. Reflection on the influence of sociocultural factors on the transitioned teachers’ responses

The findings presented in this chapter have shown that sociocultural factors, including language status and leaders’ power, work culture and material circumstances, had diverse and complex influences on the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and the proficiency benchmark. This section first summarises and reflects on the influences of sociocultural factors on the transitioned teachers’ responses to educational change. They can be grouped into strong and weak influences. I go on to highlight the factors in the Vietnamese context, which are considered to be influential in the transitioned teachers’ responses.

Among the sociocultural factors, I have shown that material circumstances played a less significant role while language status, power and work culture had fundamental influences on the ways the transitioned teachers acted during the transition. Material circumstances caused challenges for the transitioned teachers in their transition but did not strongly affect the transitioned teachers’ decision to transition or meet the required benchmark and their subsequent actions. In contrast, data presented in this chapter suggest that different forms of
status and power, including the power of English, and the hierarchical process of enacting change, strongly influenced the transitioned teachers’ transition. While power created a strong force for the transitioned teachers in their transition, work culture significantly supported them through the transition process. Thanks to the transitioned teachers’ supportive work culture, especially their solidarity and close connection, they had confidence in transitioning and engaging with the field. The sense of being a member of a common group or community and the creation of safe spaces, such as the Viber group chat, assisted the transitioned teachers during the transition. In addition, despite challenges and obstacles in their professional lives many transitioned teachers found their own ways to retain their first foreign languages, for example, teaching night classes or working as a tour guide.

The influences of power and work culture are important in the Vietnamese context where power is generally a hierarchical process passed from the previous generation to the younger generation, and from senior to junior. The hierarchical and, to an extent, bureaucratic process of raising an opinion or suggesting a change in Vietnam created hesitancy among the transitioned teachers in expressing their opinions to the leaders. Considering the influences of power in Vietnam, when responding to educational change, the transitioned teachers did not openly show their resistance in making decisions regarding whether to transition and comply with the required benchmark. Rather, their interpretations and evaluations of the changes revealed more of their actual thoughts and responses. In addition to power, work culture at TriThuc University had significant influence on the transitioned teachers’ transition. Age range was one of the factors influencing the connectedness and communication among these transitioned teachers’ responses to the changes. While power put the transitioned teachers in a voiceless position, the solidarity and connectedness among members sharing the same situation, was a soft but flexible form of strength for the transitioned teachers.

Overall, Figure 6.2 summarises the influences of sociocultural factors, including power,
work culture and material circumstances, on the transitioned teachers’ decision to transition and their actions through this process.

![Diagram]

Figure 6.2. Complex influences of sociocultural factors on teachers’ responses.

The bold lines in the figure indicate strong influences of power and work culture in shaping the transitioned teachers’ actions and responses to the transition and the required proficiency benchmark. The dotted lines show less fundamental influence of material circumstances factors to these changes. Apart from these general sociocultural factors, the transitioned teachers’ responses were also influenced by their individual identity, which are presented in the next section.

6.3. The influence of teacher identities on the transitioned teachers’ responses

In addition to sociocultural factors, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) presented teacher identities as factors influencing the exercise of teacher agency in response to educational change (see Figure 6.1). In this section, I illustrate how teacher identities influenced the ways in which the
transitioned teachers enacted the transition and their efforts to achieve the proficiency benchmark. Five aspects of the transitioned teachers’ identities are presented: their work history and experience, professional knowledge and competence, professional commitment, motivation and interests and teaching goals and ideals. As noted earlier, within the current research scope, I explore the influences of the transitioned teachers’ identities on their responses, rather than examining teacher identities post-transition.

6.3.1. Work history and experience

The transitioned teachers reported that their work history and professional experience, which created the sense of both language learner and teacher identities among the transitioned teachers, assisted the ways in which they acted in the transition to ELT. Having studied, been well-trained in and taught another foreign language before, the transitioned teachers already had a strong sense of being foreign language learners and teachers and this sense supported their actions and their engagement in the new context of ELT. According to most of the transitioned teachers, this perceived role brought them confidence in studying and teaching another foreign language, in this case English, and thus made them determined to transition. TT 15, for example, explained, “I already studied and taught a foreign language so studying another foreign language could be possible”. In addition, the pedagogical experience, especially in teaching methodology, that most of the transitioned teachers had gained as learners and then teachers of their first foreign languages contributed to their English learning and teaching. For instance, many transitioned teachers (TTs 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19) felt they could apply the teaching methodology of their first foreign languages to ELT, because they were not dissimilar. TT 6, for example, applied her ways of teaching Russian to teaching English,

Teaching methods of different foreign languages have similarities. [The methods I studied in Russian] cannot be applied for Russian [because there was no Russian class
resulted from the transition], but can still be used in teaching English... I employed what I had studied about teaching methods in Russian into teaching English.

In agreeing with TT 6, TT 8 also confirmed that he had no difficulties with English teaching methodology thanks to the training he received when he was a student teacher specialising in Russian.

Previous work and experiences also created the transitioned teachers’ sense of how to be a foreign language teacher, which in turn influenced how they took action in their ELT after the transition. TT 1, for example, said that he regarded himself as a considerate and meticulous teacher thanks to the ways in which his previous Chinese teachers had treated him. He presented an example that he and his classmates had not had access to technological sources such as printers when starting to learn Chinese. Their previous teachers therefore used to hand-write all coursebooks and deliver them to each student in class. According to TT 1, this experience of learning and receiving such care and love from his former Chinese teachers helped him to form a clear picture of being a teacher who should be considerate and responsible for his students. This might also explain why, although TT 1 did not feel comfortable to transition to ELT, he tried his best in his new role to devote himself to his students. As he said, although this is not required in this teaching, he still spent time creating a website to support his students to self-learn English.

6.3.2. Professional knowledge and competence

In this study, the transitioned teachers’ professional knowledge and competence refer to the knowledge and competence that they gained from their teaching profession. This includes pedagogical and cultural knowledge and competence in their teaching. This section presents the influences of pedagogical and cultural knowledge on transitioned teachers’ responses to the change. Where relevant, these influences are related back to the transitioned teachers’ previous work and expertise.
The transitioned teachers’ mastery of professional knowledge and competence in their first foreign language teaching, especially cultural knowledge, shaped them as confident first foreign language teachers and supported their teaching of these languages. As many transitioned teachers (TTs 3, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16) explained, they had professional knowledge of their first foreign languages reinforced through meticulous training in their BA and extra short courses (see Chapter 4). Specifically, studying abroad in the countries where the transitioned teachers’ first foreign language was spoken was reported to be crucial in constructing insights into their teaching profession. Through overseas courses, they had close and direct exposure to the culture of their first foreign languages which helped them gain insightful understanding of both the culture and the language.

However, many transitioned teachers pointed out that they did not gain equivalent knowledge of the culture in English-speaking countries. According to these teachers, when studying English, they only studied the language itself, such as pronunciation or grammar, rather than culture. Although some cultural knowledge was derived through reading in their English learning and teaching, they had never taken any training or courses in an English-speaking country. This prevented them from establishing direct contact with or becoming immersed in the culture. TT 12, for example, admitted that,

In teaching one foreign language, understanding its culture is very important. To some extent, I understood the French language and its culture more [than those of English-speaking countries] … French language thus gave me more confidence, but not in English.

Such lack of confidence in understanding the culture in English-speaking countries also influenced the transitioned teachers’ ELT. TT 16, for example, pointed out that she absorbed different aspects of French culture through her previous experience in living and studying in France. However, although she had gained some knowledge of culture in her English study, she had never been to a native English-speaking country or immersed in the reality or the life of the people in English speaking countries. Therefore, she thought these pieces of cultural
knowledge she gathered during the transition to ELT were “not practical”. Consequently, in her English lessons, when teaching lessons on culture, e.g., food or traffic, she used her knowledge of French culture, instead of English.

The transitioned teachers’ lack of English linguistic and cultural knowledge also led many to question their ability as English teachers and resulted in difficulties in preparing for English proficiency tests. Some of the transitioned teachers reported a lack of practical cultural knowledge influenced their English test results. TT 2, for example, said that reading passages in these tests contained many cultural features. Regarding herself as a foreign language teacher of an Asian language with more knowledge of Chinese and Asian culture than that of English-speaking countries, she thought she could not perform in the tests as well as the French transitioned teachers. She further explained that French transitioned teachers already had some exposure to Western cultural knowledge, which is closer to the culture in English-speaking countries compared to Asian cultures, through their previous study of French, but she did not.

Overall, the transitioned teachers’ knowledge and competence both in their first foreign languages and in English brought different levels of confidence in being teachers of that language and constructed the transitioned teachers’ different identities. The majority of the transitioned teachers regarded themselves as confident first foreign language teachers, but incompetent English teachers. This in turn influenced their responses, particularly their feelings of resistance to the transition to ELT at the early stage of the transition.

6.3.3. Professional commitment

Professional commitment is another factor of the transitioned teachers’ identities which influenced their transition. The data consistently indicated that the transitioned teachers’ different professional commitment to general teaching profession encouraged them to transition to English teaching to maintain their career. Their commitment to their first foreign
languages and ELT also directed the ways in which they were involved in these two fields. One group of the transitioned teachers, who still had strong commitment to their first foreign language teaching, attempted to retain their work with these languages. Other transitioned teachers, however, who were not profoundly committed to their first foreign languages, reduced the amount of their work in these languages and changed their focus to teaching English only.

First, it is worth presenting the transitioned teachers’ expressed commitment to the profession of being a teacher. Most of the transitioned teachers (18 out of 20) admitted that transitioning to ELT helped them to keep their job as a teacher. TT 15 said, “If you want to be a teacher, you have to transition to teaching English. It is inevitable.” As revealed in interviews, if they had not transitioned, they would have had to cease their teaching at the faculty. In other words, due to strong commitment to teaching, the transitioned teachers decided to transition to be able to stay in their profession.

The transitioned teachers’ professional commitment to teaching was also intertwined with their belief that it helped to maintain stability in their professional and personal lives. Some transitioned teachers (TTs 2, 13, 14, 15) explained that they had been working at TriThuc University for many years and they were familiar with its working environment. Moving to another area to find different jobs would involve changes in both their job and the working environment. In other words, changing their current profession was challenging for these transitioned teachers. Furthermore, these changes would also disturb their personal lives, particularly their families, who were already settled in the area. Stability in work is regarded as one of the important targets in life for many people. TT 15, for example, said that “everything had been stable” before her transition to English teaching. Her saying generally described the transitioned teachers’ working state before transitioning. This also indicated the pressures to keep stability not only for herself in her work but also her families in their personal lives. When
considering the value of stability, the commitment the transitioned teachers had for their profession of being a teacher at TriThuc University was thus even stronger. This explains why the transitioned teachers decided to transition to English teaching and why they had many concerns at the time of hearing about the transition.

Apart from commitment to the general teaching profession, the transitioned teachers also showed their commitment to their first foreign language learning and teaching. One group (TTs 1, 13, 14, 15, 18) said that they had a close connection with their first foreign languages. These teachers described these languages as a “flesh and blood” language, “native language”, or “mother tongue language”. Their “love” and “passion” for their first foreign languages were also widely and frequently mentioned by these participants. This evidence showed the transitioned teachers’ strong sense of being learners and teachers of their first foreign languages. As explained by many of them, the commitment that they had for their first foreign languages was formed through a long and close exposure to them. TT 1, for example, said that he was exposed to Chinese from an early age. He revealed that the Chinese language was nurtured in his family, from his grandfather who knew Chinese and worked as a Chinese teacher and a Chinese medicine doctor. In addition, as mentioned in Section 4.3.2.3.2, TT 1 pointed out that he had a bookshelf at home to keep all his Chinese documents. His family tradition firmly formed his love and passion to learn Chinese, as well as his decision to follow it as his career and become a Chinese teacher. Likewise, other French transitioned teachers (TTs 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20) and Chinese transitioned teachers (TTs 3, 4) also confirmed that their “love” and “passion” for French or Chinese had been cultivated since they studied these languages at high school. TT 15, for example, decided to study French-language teaching as a second major when he was studying a different major at university.

The degree of commitment to their first foreign languages influenced the transitioned teachers’ actions throughout the transition process. The close relationship with their first
foreign language can account for the first foreign language retention activities of these transitioned teachers (see Section 4.3.2.3). Despite unsupportive working conditions, these transitioned teachers still attempted to teach or work in related areas. In contrast, lack of commitment to the first foreign language teaching influenced the decision of a group of transitioned teachers (TTs 5, 6, 10, 12) to cease working in this area and devote their time to teaching English only.

Notably, the transitioned teachers’ commitment, passion and love for their first foreign languages were constrained by the responsibility of being an English teacher, which caused a quandary for the transitioned teachers. Many transitioned teachers struggled between retaining commitment to their first foreign language and responsibility for their ELT. For those who decided to devote themselves to English, feelings of “tiếc” {pity or regret} or “thấy phí” {waste} of their first foreign language persisted. As a result, TT 1, for example, considered himself to be living with two different versions of himself. During the day time, he taught English as “a required, compulsory job”, and in the evening, he lived with his “hobby or as his own person” by teaching Chinese.

In short, the transitioned teachers’ commitment to the profession of teaching and their first foreign language shaped the identities of the majority of the transitioned teachers as being language teachers, especially committed first foreign language teachers. These forms of identities explained why the transitioned teachers decided to transition to retain their passionate profession and why the majority retained their first foreign language teaching after their transition to ELT. The mixed identities with two versions of being committed first foreign language teachers and responsible English teachers were also identified. However, in turn this caused challenges for the transitioned teachers in trying to work in both fields through the transition.
6.3.4. Motivations and interests

In line with the transitioned teachers’ commitment, their motivations and interest in language learning and teaching were also factors influencing their involvement in ELT. These motivations and interests are also linked with the transitioned teachers’ professional commitments. In regarding themselves as learners and teachers of their first foreign languages, the majority of the transitioned teachers (14 out of 17) did not have integrative, but rather mainly instrumental, motivations when transitioning to ELT. To be more specific, they were motivated by the benefits that English brought, such as secure jobs and salary in English teaching. TT 13, for example, commented, “My aim was just for work, a job, income, for earning a living...” Likewise, TT 1 presented a forthright view, “…[I] had no goals [in English teaching], no motivation. [I am] working in this job [teaching English] grudgingly, reluctantly and feeling really uncomfortable”. These accounts show that even though these transitioned teachers initially did not have an interest in transitioning to English, the need to earn a living and keep their jobs forced them to be involved. For similar reasons, although many of the transitioned teachers did not show much interest in taking the tests, they took them as required by the MOET. The attachment to the first foreign language, according to many transitioned teachers, hindered their interest in English in their ELT during the transition. For example, TT 13 said, “I carry the big love for the first language [French] so the love for the second language [English] is lessened”. In other words, this transitioned teacher held a strong sense of being a teacher of her first foreign language, rather than in becoming an English teacher.

In a different vein, the interests that several transitioned teachers had in learning and teaching a new language had strong positive influences on their transition process. Several transitioned teachers (TTs 7, 8, 10) described English learning as their hobby. TT 8 said that his learning of English was partly from his “interest” in this language and believed that a language learner should learn different foreign languages rather than just one. Similarly, TT 10
also said that her English study was a hobby so that she could explore a new language and new knowledge. These transitioned teachers’ motivations for English were formed by their identities as language learners in general.

Not surprisingly, such motivations influenced the ways in which these transitioned teachers acted and performed in the new field of English. For example, TTs 7 and 8 taught English to English major students, who were expected to have a higher standard of English than the non-English major students. TT 10 also pursued a PhD in the field of ELT. These cases showed that they flourished in the new academic field. It is thus arguable from this evidence that the interests that these transitioned teachers had for English positively corresponded to their English teaching and learning through the transition process.

To sum up, for most of the transitioned teachers, lacking integrative motivation in transitioning to ELT and becoming English teachers was the result of their perceived identities as learners and teachers of first foreign language. In turn, they showed resistance to the transition and worked in the field of ELT out of a sense of duty. In contrast, for those who had interest in learning English, they actively transitioned to ELT and flourished in this new field.

6.3.5. Professional goals and ideals

The transitioned teachers presented different goals and ideals in their teaching profession before and after their transition to ELT. Given that, for several transitioned teachers, these goals changed over time, the differences in their professional goals and ideals formed by their identities partly influenced their actions in the transition process. The transitioned teachers had different goals when they moved to ELT and these goals related to their perceived identities. In one respect, some transitioned teachers, who saw themselves as teachers of their first foreign languages, had no “ambitious goal” in studying and teaching English. TT 13, for example, asserted that “I had no ambition of building an English teacher model in a higher degree of
proficiency... no intention...”. Likewise, for other transitioned teachers, the first aim when transitioning to English teaching was “to meet the teaching requirements” (TT 15) and this transitioning was “a must, not a bonus” (TT 16). They had no ambition to become better teachers with a higher degree in the field of ELT. Their goals at first were only to fulfil the requirements and keep their jobs.

In contrast, several transitioned teachers (TTs 5, 7, 8, 10) had clearer goals and ideals in studying and transitioning to ELT. As presented in previous section, these transitioned teachers had interest and motivation in learning and teaching English and positioned themselves as language teachers in general. TT 8, a transitioned teacher from Transition One, said that he had decided to study an MA in English because he had believed that his English proficiency level had not been adequate to teach English major students. His further MA study was a planned step in his ELT career. Several transitioned teachers in Transition Two also had positive ideals regarding teaching English, which directed their actions through the process. TT 20, for example, set himself a goal to work in the English 1 division in the future and teach high level or advanced English, which was similar to the level of French he had taught to French-major students. In his view, being a language teacher meant having an in-depth knowledge of that language. Likewise, TT 5 and TT 10 decided to study another MA in English to be more involved in the English field. It is notable that these transitioned teachers had completed their MA in French before transitioning to English, which means they did not have to study an MA, but only a BA, in English. However, they acknowledged that a BA English would not guarantee a stable position in an English teaching career. In other words, they strategically planned to gain broad knowledge and be able to develop their career in ELT.

Overall, in considering themselves as first foreign language teachers, the majority of the transitioned teachers did not formulate any goals in ELT. They tried to meet their required duty and responsibilities in this field. In a different vein, in taking their views as language
teachers in general, a small group showed clear goals to devote themselves to ELT and thus undertook subsequent actions to achieve these goals.

6.3.6. Other factors to be considered: Professional ego and family roles

The previous sections presented the influences of teacher identities, as suggested by Eteläpelto and her colleagues (2013), on the transitioned teachers’ responses. This section focuses on other factors which were not mentioned in the framework. These factors showed significant influences on the ways the transitioned teachers responded through transition: the transitioned teachers’ professional ego and their perceived family roles. First, the transitioned teachers’ pride in being teachers, or their professional ego, was one of the controlling factors that directed their actions through the transition process. Regarding themselves as responsible teachers, the transitioned teachers attempted to do their best for their students. For instance, TT 1 had no specific goal or motivation when he transitioned to English but experienced uncomfortable feelings of anger and outrage about this transition. Nonetheless, he fulfilled his required tasks and responsibility in ELT and, especially, created a self-learning website to help his students learn better even though this activity was not required in his teaching.

In addition, it was high professional ego that encouraged the transitioned teachers to acquire more knowledge, especially, language cultural knowledge, in the language they taught. The transitioned teachers thought that their English proficiency level was adequate to teach their students. However, many of them questioned the effectiveness of professional development activities in their retraining process. Professional ego can be traced back to the decisions and actions of many transitioned teachers. TT 1, for example, thought that achievement of the benchmark was irrelevant to his teaching. However, with strong professional ego or self-esteem of being a teacher, he carefully prepared to achieve the required benchmark and obtained satisfying results from the tests. Furthermore, high professional ego
can explain why many transitioned did not see themselves as “real” English teachers. This sense of being a real English teacher was not formed by a position or a job that the transitioned teachers took. Rather, the sense of being a real English teacher came from self-perceptions of their capabilities, especially their knowledge of the language that they taught.

In addition to professional ego, family roles and responsibilities were also shown in the cases of many transitioned teachers (TTs 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) as reasons for the ways they acted through the transition process. TT 12, for example, confirmed that in her roles as a wife and a mother, she needed to spend time taking care of the children and the family. Therefore, even though she still had passion for French, to make time for her family, she devoted herself to only one language, rather than maintaining teaching both French and English. Likewise, family roles were also noted as a reason for TT 13 to become involved in ELT. As he explained, being the primary breadwinner, he needed to provide for his family. Following the closure of French-major at TriThuc University, he at first wanted to refuse to transition (see Chapter 4). However, due to the pressure of his role as breadwinner, he ended up transitioning to English teaching. Overall, as shown in these examples, the transitioned teachers’ family identities influenced their subsequent decisions and actions throughout the change.

6.3.7. Reflection on the complex influences of teacher identities on the transitioned teachers’ responses

The previous sections have presented the influences of identity factors on the transitioned teachers’ responses throughout the change and shown the interconnectedness among these factors. The transitioned teachers’ professional knowledge and competences were also constructed through their work history and experiences. Likewise, the transitioned teachers’ motivation and interest for the English language were intertwined with their goals and ideals,
as well as with their commitment to ELT and to their first foreign language teaching. The teachers with strong motivation and interests for the English language also had clear goals for teaching it. In contrast, those who did not have an interest in English did not reveal clear goals and plans.

Although the transitioned teachers’ instrumental motivation and interest had an impact on their decisions to transition to ELT, they did not play a decisive role in directing the transitioned teachers’ subsequent actions. Many transitioned teachers did not have motivation or interest in English; however, they transitioned and made efforts to achieve the benchmark. In addition, although the motivation and interest for English improved over time, for some transitioned teachers (TTs 13, 14), their passion for their first foreign language persisted. In contrast, the transitioned teachers’ previous work and experience, and more importantly, their professional knowledge and competences influenced their decisions and actions throughout the transition. Thanks to their experience in foreign language learning and the sense of being foreign language learners and teachers, the transitioned teachers had confidence and hence held a stronger belief in their transition. At the same time, it was due to their robust competence in their first foreign language compared to that in English that many of the transitioned teachers showed reluctance and discomfort in their transition.

Likewise, the transitioned teachers’ professional goals and ideals and their professional commitment showed prominent influences that shaped the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition. The transitioned teachers’ professional goals and ideals mainly directed the transitioned teachers’ decisions. Those transitioned teachers (TTs 5, 8) who had clear and strong goals and ideals in their career had their own plans, devotion and dedication for their transition. Similarly, although some transitioned teachers expressed lack of motivation and interest for learning and teaching English, their professional commitment to teaching in general led them to transition. Those (TTs 1, 13, 15) who presented their closeness and commitment to
their first foreign languages were also actively tried to maintain their first foreign language teaching despite lack of support from the university and the faculty.

Two other factors, which were not mentioned in Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) model, the transitioned teachers’ professional pride or their professional ego and family roles, also had strong influences on the transitioned teachers’ actions. The transitioned teachers discussed challenges of the transition and gaps in their knowledge or competence in English learning and teaching. However, it was the strong pride that the transitioned teachers had in their career of being a teacher that directed them to transition and to try their best to engage in ELT and to achieve the required proficiency benchmark. Family roles also influenced the ways the transitioned teachers made decisions and took actions during the transition.

Overall, the transitioned teachers’ identities had different influences on their actions through the transition. Figure 6.3 summarises these influences. Strong influences included professional commitment, goals and ideals, professional ego and family roles. Less significant factors were work history and experience, professional knowledge and competence and motivation and interest. The bold arrows indicate fundamental influences, whereas dash arrows show less significant influences. The bold line linking the factors highlights the connection and relations of these factors regarding their influences on the transitioned teachers’ responses and their agency.
6.4. Closing remarks

The findings in this chapter have provided further insights into the transitioned teachers’ ways of responding to the educational change. Sociocultural factors were influential in supporting or holding back the transitioned teachers’ transition. While sociocultural factors were common to all the transitioned teachers, their identities were unique and individual aspects shaped their distinct ways of responding. Different sociocultural factors and identities also had effects on the transitioned teachers’ responses, ranging from minor to significant. However, it was notable that these factors were all interconnected: the transitioned teachers’ work experiences and competence, their interests and their ideals, as well as status, power and motivation and professional commitment. The connection among these factors created a complex, dynamic and unstable environment that influenced the transitioned teachers’ responses to educational
change.
CHAPTER SEVEN

TEACHER AGENCY, INFLUENTIAL FACTORS AND ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY ENACTMENT

7.1. Introduction
In the previous chapters, I have described the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition and to the proficiency benchmark, and analysed how these responses were influenced by the sociocultural factors and teacher identities. In this chapter, the teachers’ responses are considered in terms of what they reveal about the nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency in the light of the research literature. The main sociocultural factors which were related to the Vietnamese context and influenced the transitioning teachers’ agency are then discussed. Finally, the connection between my exploration of teacher agency at TriThuc University and the broader picture of educational policy change and teacher education in Vietnam is examined. The case of the transition process and the required proficiency benchmark are linked with general educational change in the country. I then discuss teacher agency in relation to teacher professional development, issues of foreign language provision and the importance of collaboration between leaders and teachers in educational policy enactment.

7.2. Features of teacher agency
In considering the issues raised in agency and teacher agency literature, this section discusses how these were manifested in the case of the transitioned teachers in this study. In the light of Figured Worlds, Chapters 4 and 5 presented the ways in which the transitioned teachers responded to the change through their perceptions, feelings and improvisations in response to policy changes. In the following sections, I question the view of agency as a form of free will and resistance (see Ahearn, 2001, for relevant information). Rather, I suggest that the transitioned teachers’ improvisations and critical judgments of the change and related policies
are strong indications of agency. Besides these aspects of teacher agency, my study brings into focus the importance of exploring the emotional and collective aspects of agency as a useful way to extend the field of teacher agency in times of educational change.

7.2.1. Agency as a form of free will and resistance

The transitioned teacher participants in this study did not exercise free will by initiating the change; nor did they resist the change or refuse to make the transition. Several philosophers, such as Davidson (1980) and Rovane (1998) have posed a view of teacher agency as a synonym for free will (see Ahearn, 2001, for relevant information). When exploring teachers’ responses to educational change, previous studies also show that one form of teacher agency is resistance (e.g. Ali & Hamid, 2018; Zacharias, 2013), distantiation (e.g. Luttenberg et al., 2013) or reframing of a change (e.g. Petrovic & Kuntz, 2013). However, in this study, the transitioned teachers conformed to the leaders’ orientations towards the change. They saw themselves as powerless and having “no choice” but to go along with it. Likewise, even though they did not agree that the proficiency benchmark supported their everyday pedagogical development, they nevertheless took action to achieve it. They hesitated to raise objections or challenge the leaders’ decisions because they accepted that their voices would not be heard.

The transitioned teachers’ apparent passivity towards the change resonates with the findings in other studies which highlight teachers as passive objects in the policy enactment process rather than active subjects whose opinions and ideas matter (e.g. Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2014; van Veen & Sleegers, 2009). The transitioned teachers’ responses also corroborate Hamid and Nguyen’s (2016) conclusion that teacher agency in relation to policy enactment is a type of response to “policy dumping” (p. 26) in which policymakers impose policies on educational institutions and teachers without paying due attention to the
implementational implications. In this type of enforced process, it is thus questionable whether
teacher agency involves free choice.

7.2.2. Teachers’ improvisations and critical judgments

Even though the transitioned teachers showed their apparent passivity in response to the
change, their actions throughout the change indicated other aspects of their agency. In the light
of Figured Worlds, agency is a matter of orchestrating multiple and competing discourses
through acts of improvisation (Holland et al., 1998; Holquist, 2001, cited in Sisson, 2018). The
transitioned teachers’ agency was not only demonstrated through their decision to act in
accordance with policy change or resist it, but through the ways in which they adapted to their
situations and improvised throughout the change process. These adaptations include their
efforts to retain their first foreign languages alongside learning and teaching English, despite
the difficulties and challenges. These actions demonstrate agency as the capacity to act
(Ahearn, 2001; Gao, 2010) in response to change. They also demonstrate agency as an
emergent phenomenon, supporting the view of agency as the ability to “act purposefully and
reflectively” (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63).

The transitioned teachers’ critical evaluations of the policy were another significant
feature of their agency. They made the transition but at the same time they questioned the
reasons for it, as well as its effectiveness. Many transitioned teachers also questioned the
suitability and relevance of the proficiency benchmark to their classroom teaching, especially
in relation to the proficiency level of their students. This evidence confirms that they did not
simply accept change but were critical enactors of change. This resonates with the views in
previous studies that teachers are not merely passive acceptors (e.g., Li, 2010; Nguyen & Bui,
2016; Ollerhead, 2010; Wang, 2008), but rather they are critical enactors of educational and
policy change.
Thus, these findings show that it is insufficient to simply look at teacher agency through the teachers’ decision to accept or resist the change, but what is equally important, if not more so, is why and how they implement the change. All the transitioned teachers decided to make the transition; however, this decision was made in order to follow the leaders’ suggestions rather than stemming from their intention or initiatives (why). They made efforts to adapt to the transition. At the same time, however, they expressed in the interviews their uneasy feelings towards this change, presented critical concerns about its benefits and relevance to their teaching, and took every possible opportunity to retain teaching their first foreign languages (how). Therefore, I argue that understanding the teachers’ responses in the light of the Figured Worlds can produce a nuanced understanding of teacher agency in times of policy changes and policy enactment. Rather than simply describing the transitioned teachers’ decision to transition or not, my study investigated the ways in which these teachers interpreted, improvised, and judged the change. These explorations thus shed light on the reasons for their decisions as well as their ways of enacting the change, including both their emotions and improvisations. Other studies have suggested that teachers’ capability to adapt to change reflects their role as “transformative intellectuals” (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), who are committed to policy action despite the contextual constraints and the inadequacy of professional and social support. In shedding another light on teachers’ roles, my study highlights transitioned teachers’ agency as their manoeuvrability, industriousness and resilience in accommodating change.

7.2.3. Emotional aspects of teacher agency

By paying attention to the transitioned teachers’ emotions in response to the change, my study corroborates Datnow’s (2018) argument that educational policy change and reform can bring a range of emotions to teachers’ professional lives, including fear, anxiety and frustration. My
study shows that the transitioned teachers were strongly emotionally affected by the transition. Most of them expressed in the interviews their uneasiness, anger and outrage in the early stages of the process. The feelings that the transitioned teachers experienced in the face of change can be traced to the fact they were coerced into following leaders’ and policymakers’ orientations.

As Schmidt and Datnow (2005) argue, teachers’ emotions can vary a great deal depending on whether they feel powerful or powerless in the reform process. In this study, the transitioned teachers perceived themselves as powerless to resist the transition and the required proficiency benchmark. Their opinions about the change were not sought and their actual teaching needs during the change process were not canvassed. These findings concur with other studies that show how the powerless position of teachers can give rise to uneasiness in response to change processes (e.g., Datnow, 2018; Day, 2002; Hargreaves, 1998; Miller, 2018; Van Veen & Sleegers, 2009). Nevertheless, studies have also pointed out that the impact of emotions is usually ignored when investigating teachers’ experiences in the process of change (Hargreaves, 2005; Kelchtermans, Ballet, & Piot, 2009; Nias, 1996; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Van Veen & Sleegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2010; Zembylas, Charalambous, & Kendeou, 2011). Highlighting Vähäsantanen’s (2015) view that teachers’ actions and decisions are not purely rational but also emotional, my study thus suggests that emotional aspects deserve greater attention in research on teacher agency.

7.2.4. Teachers’ collective agency

Studies have emphasised the importance of teachers’ collective agency (Bandura, 2000; Datnow, 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015). Archer (2000) argues that agency is always collective, because agentic actions are necessarily the result of interactions embedded in contexts, cultures, and structures. My study contributes to this scholarship by highlighting the importance of collective agency in response to education and policy change. The transitioned
teachers’ collective agency was shown through the ways they worked together in small, first foreign language groups, and as a bigger group which included all the transitioned teachers. Their agency is also shown in the way they contacted transitioned teachers in other institutions in order to maintain their first foreign languages and reconcile difficulties and challenges that they faced throughout their transition. These findings confirm Hargreaves and O’Connor’s (2017) observation that teachers in these generative forms of collaboration have a sense of collective efficacy and initiative, as well as collective autonomy (see also Fu & Nashon, 2014; Spicer, 2011).

Teachers’ collegial relationships have been confirmed to be an important and a powerful aspect of agency (Datnow, 2012; Priestley et al., 2012; Robinson, 2012). The transitioned teachers’ collective agency was a catalyst for developing individual agency. Collective actions gave them personal confidence and encouragement to enact their roles in the process of change. Many transitioned teachers said that they felt less afraid to make the transition and the challenges of the change process were alleviated by their collaboration with other transitioned teachers in the faculty and by receiving support from both faculty and university leaders throughout the change process. This finding partly supports Zembylas and Barker’s (2007) view that a sense of collectivity among teachers can serve as a source of emotional support and a space for coping with change. Like the teachers in Zembylas and Barker’s (2007) study, the transitioned teachers in this study benefitted from being part of professional communities that helped to mediate the demands of reform by providing a space, such as Viber group chat, for working through various emotional and instructional challenges. While previous studies have pointed out different forms of support that enable teacher agency, such as networking with like-minded colleagues (Schweisfurth, 2006) and support for novice teachers (Eteläpelto et al., 2015), in my study, the transitioned teachers networked with the other teachers in the same situation. Belonging to this common group created a robust
collective sense among the transitioned teachers, which supported them throughout the transition process.

In summary, the transitioned teachers in this study manifested a strong sense of collective agency and demonstrated a preference for working collectively. This difference can be traced back to traditional Vietnamese beliefs in the strength of a common group or community, in this case the transitioned teachers, and solidarity in achieving targets and overcoming difficulties. I will discuss these aspects further in Section 7.3.

### 7.2.5. Dynamic manifestation of teacher agency

Considering the core features of agency (see Section 2.2.3), my study confirms that agency is not possessed but enacted either by individuals or collectively. The findings show that there are subtleties in the ways the transitioned teachers exercised agency. Their agency was not their intentions or initiatives to create the transition; rather, it was played out through their critical judgments, improvisations and ability to manoeuvre and adapt to change. Following Ball et al. (2012), my study shows that the transitioned teachers played the roles of critics, active enactors and entrepreneurs in response to the transition. In the light of Figured Worlds, the exploration of agency through the ways people feel, interpret, improvise and judge change, is worthy of close attention.

### 7.3. Factors influencing teacher agency

Taking the view that agency mediates and is mediated by sociocultural contexts and following the modified subject-centred sociocultural approach of Eteläpelto et al. (2015), my study highlights the influence of sociocultural factors and teacher identities on agency. As Frost (2006) claims, “humans do not simply act according to some predetermined pattern, but rather each action is influenced by a range of norms, traditions, overt formalised rules, and so on” (p.
My findings corroborate the conceptualisation of teacher agency as “individually varied... and both socially and individually resourced” (Vähäsantanen, 2015, p. 1). In this section, I discuss the factors influencing teacher agency that have been revealed in this study.

7.3.1. **Power, work culture versus material circumstances**

In Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) framework, power, work culture and material circumstances are identified as factors that influence teacher agency. My findings show that, while material factors were not significant influences on the ways the transitioned teachers responded during the transition, power and work culture were two fundamental factors. My study concurs with other studies in finding that structural aspects, particularly power, influenced the ways the teachers acted during educational policy enactment and change (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2013; Priestley et al., 2012). In this study, the status of the English language and the power of the leaders, were highly influential in the transitioned teachers’ decisions and actions during the transition process. While the power and influence of English as a global language have been widely emphasised (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2002; Kirkpatrick, Sussex, & Ebscohost, 2012; Phillipson, 1992), my study casts another light on the influences of English. The dominant status of English at TriThuc University led to the suspension of other foreign languages and forced the teachers to transition to first learning and then teaching English. Regarding the influence of the leaders’ power, although the transitioned teachers did not agree with the reasons for transitioning, they were required to comply with the leaders’ suggestions on transitioning. These findings thus support the view that teachers’ agency is regulated by the demands and constraints of their work (Fullan, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006; Vähäsantanen, Saarinen, & Eteläpelto, 2009).

Furthermore, my findings resonate with Root’s (2014) argument that social and cultural restraints may limit the degree of agency that an individual or group perceive to be possible. In
some Asian countries such as China and Vietnam, the power of leadership is stronger than in other contexts. Several studies in China have indicated that bureaucratic processes curtailed teacher professional development activities (Lin & Zhang, 2016; Yao, 2005). My study also shows that the hierarchical process of change implementation was an important factor influencing teacher agency. The transitioned teachers had no say but were coerced in this top-down process of implementing change which was first issued and pre-decided by the MOET, then disseminated to the university and down to the transitioned teachers, who had to enact it.

As Edwards (2015) notes, “agency cannot be discussed without reference to culture” (p.779). Other studies have also pointed out that support from colleagues and a positive professional climate, as a form of work culture, is strongly related to teacher satisfaction and motivation to learn (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). In my study, the sense of belonging to a community provided a source of strength for the transitioned teachers during the change process. In fact, my study shows that solidarity, which is a highly regarded aspect of Vietnamese culture, was a supportive factor for the transitioned teachers. The idea that being part of a group means that you have more strength to overcome difficulties is widely expressed in Vietnamese literature; as shown, for example, in the following Vietnamese proverb,

“Một cây làm chẳng nên non
Ba cây chüm lại nên hòn núi cao.”
(A tree cannot make a hill
Three trees can make a high mountain.)

Material circumstances also influenced the transitioned teachers’ agency. As described in Section 6.2.3, because of the lack of classroom equipment and lack of resources in their ELT, the transitioned teachers did not deliver their English classes in the ways they wanted. In other words, to an extent, unsupportive material circumstances hindered the transitioned teachers’ agency in their ELT.
7.3.2. Teacher identities

While the transitioned teachers were embedded in similar sociocultural contexts, their identity and how they positioned themselves, contributed to different ways of exercising agency. In addition to sociocultural factors, my study strongly supports the view that teacher identity has a fundamental influence on agency (Franzak, 2002; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; Leander & Osborne, 2008; Sloan, 2006). Previous studies, however, have not explicitly explored the role of these factors in teacher agency. My study shows that the transitioned teachers’ professional commitment, goals and ideals, professional knowledge and competence and their work history and experiences were crucial factors connected with their identities in shaping their actions through the transition.

My study supports Beauchamp and Thomas’s (2009) view that a heightened sense of professional identity is likely to lead to a stronger sense of agency. A group of the transitioned teachers, who regarded themselves as committed first foreign language teachers, attempted to find ways to retain their teaching and involvement in their first foreign languages despite an unsupportive environment at TriThuc University. Notably, for this group, the change created a role conflict between ELT and their first foreign language teaching. They wanted to retain their commitment to their first foreign languages but also struggled to maintain their workload and fulfil their ELT responsibilities and activities. These findings support those in previous studies about the critical role of teachers’ commitment in the production of their agentic actions towards the reform and change (Kayi Aydar, 2015; Tao & Gao, 2017; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

Work history and experience was another strong factor influencing the transitioned teachers’ agency. Recent studies suggest that teachers’ prior experiences affect how they make sense of reforms. Biesta et al. (2015) observe that “the achievement of agency is always informed by past experience, including personal and professional biographies…” (p. 627). My
study supports this view in showing that because the transitioned teachers were foreign language teachers, they thought that the likelihood of learning and teaching another foreign language – English – would be possible. In addition, my study resonates with the findings in previous studies that teachers often approve of reforms that fit with their prior experiences, but they can also resist reforms because they miss what is familiar to them (Goodson, Moore, & Hargreaves, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). In this study, the transitioned teachers complained about the lack of support for retaining their first foreign language and the pedagogic value of the proficiency tests they had to pass. They were also highly critical of some of the activities that were introduced to enhance their professional development. These complaints and criticisms can be traced back to the support they had received for teaching their first foreign languages. The influences of work history and experience on the transitioned teachers’ agency also emphasises the view of agency as a chordal triad (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In other words, teacher agency is structured by the experiences and habitualised routines of the past.

The transitioned teachers’ professional goals and ideals and their professional knowledge and competence were also influential in their responses. As discussed above, a group of the transitioned teachers were only committed to teaching and retaining their first foreign languages and did not have any goals in ELT. These transitioned teachers thus found ways (e.g. working as tour guide, teaching at language centres) to continue teaching these languages. In a different vein, the transitioned teachers who had clear goals and ideals regarding English teaching (e.g. to become English teachers) made efforts to study another MA in English. Furthermore, in supporting the findings from previous studies (e.g. Day, 2002; Fives & Buehl, 2008), my study shows that the transitioned teachers’ professional knowledge and competence also influenced their agency. The transitioned teachers’ perceived lack of professional, especially cultural, knowledge and competence in English led to their perception
of themselves as not being real English teachers. In turn, these transitioned teachers did not feel confident or satisfied in their ELT. They shared in the interviews their concerns and complaints about specific retraining and professional activities in ELT particularly for transitioned teachers.

Although the transitioned teachers’ motivation and interest played a role in the transitioned teachers’ decisions and actions throughout the change, they did not appear to have a fundamental influence. The transitioned teachers had instrumental motivation to transition to ELT, but this decision was also mainly to follow the leaders’ orientations. Likewise, although several transitioned teachers had significantly more interest in their first foreign languages, they ended up devoting themselves to English because of the contextual constraints in keeping these languages. These findings highlight that the transitioned teachers’ motivation and interest did not fundamentally control their decisions and actions in response to change.

### 7.3.3. Teacher professional ego and family roles

In addition to the influential factors suggested in the subject-centred sociocultural approach by Eteläpelto et al. (2013) and discussed so far in Section 7.3, the findings in this thesis have highlighted two further aspects of teacher identities influencing teacher agency: teacher professional ego and their family roles. While teacher professional ego highlights the transitioned teachers’ individual pride and self-esteem in their teaching career, family roles indicate the influences of Vietnamese culture from sociocultural perspectives on the transitioned teachers’ actions.

Teacher professional ego was a controlling factor that shapes the ways in which many transitioned teachers enacted through the transition. Teachers in many Asian countries have been generally viewed as authorities of knowledge and role models, especially for students (e.g., Nguyen, 2009; Sullivan, 2000). In China, for example, it is a well-known truism that “to give students a bowl of water, the teacher must have a full bucket of water to dispense” (Hu,
As shown in this Confucian maxim, teachers should have adequate knowledge to be able to teach their students because they are the main sources enriching students’ knowledge and learning. Being embedded in such Confucian philosophy, the transitioned teachers in my study also took students as the motivation to gain more knowledge, especially cultural knowledge to support their English teaching.

The transitioned teachers’ desire to become qualified teachers equipped with more in-depth knowledge created a strong professional ego which in turn shaped the transitioned teachers’ actions. Their ego was rooted in knowledge gain, rather than from the certificates or degrees they obtained (see Section 5.3.3. for information about the transitioned teachers’ views of the proficiency benchmark). Several transitioned teachers achieved an MA in English. Yet, they believed that their knowledge gain was not adequate to be called English teachers. They thus preferred to attach themselves to the terms of transitioned teachers or first foreign language teachers. Consequently, they attempted to maintain their work in the field of their first foreign language in which they felt more confident. These findings highlight the importance of the transitioned teachers’ sense of professional competence in their professional ego. These aspects contributed to these teachers’ identities and their subsequent actions through educational change.

My study also shows that the transitioned teachers’ family responsibilities put pressure on them in their decision whether to transition or not and shaped their decisions and actions in their teaching during this process. In Vietnamese culture, family values and responsibilities are very strong. As Kim and Park (2005) assert, even after the dramatic social change in Asian countries following the cultural interchange between Asia and the West, the importance and value placed on family in Asia has not changed. Taking a Confucian values and collectivist orientation, Vietnamese people endorse the family, not the individual, as the major unit of society and take family into careful consideration in their personal decisions and actions (Tran,
Stability for the family, including financial issues as well as time for families and children, were considered by many transitioned teachers when they made their decision to transition or not. Their views of being mothers and fathers with expected roles in family also influenced the transitioned teachers’ professional decisions and actions in their teaching. Concerning Vietnamese culture, it can be argued that the influences of family roles on the transitioned teachers’ decisions and actions are prominent. My study thus shows that different cultural contexts and values which construct teachers’ identity and their influences on teachers’ agency are important to be explored.

7.3.4. Dynamic influences of interconnected factors on teacher agency

Overall, my study has supported the findings of previous studies that sociocultural factors and teacher identities are the two main factors that influence teacher agency in educational policy enactment. However, in light of Eteläpelto et al. (2013), my study cases further light on the interconnectedness of these factors as well as their complex and dynamic influences. The transitioned teachers’ decisions to transition to ELT were not only shaped by the power of leaders and hierarchical processes of implementing change in work culture but also their identities as committed language teachers and the responsibilities of family roles. In some situations, the influences of power and work culture were stronger when the transitioned teachers had to conform to the required benchmark and leaders’ suggestions on transitioning. In other circumstances, the identities of committed first foreign language teachers shaped the actions of a number of the transitioned teachers more significantly. Concerning the Vietnamese context, power, work culture, teachers’ professional ego and family roles were notable factors. I thus argue that when exploring factors influencing teacher agency, a wide range of factors should be examined to obtain a broader and more valid view of their influences. The exploration of one set of features, either only sociocultural aspects or teachers’ identities, will
limit the development of a broad picture of teachers’ agency. I now move on to discuss teacher agency in relation to other issues in educational policy enactment arising from my study.

7.4. Teacher agency and issues in educational policy enactment

This section first revisits the transition process and the required benchmark and teacher roles in response to these changes. I then discuss three main aspects of teacher agency in line with educational policy enactment. These are teacher professional development, foreign language provision and the collaborations between leaders and teachers.

7.4.1. Educational change in Vietnam

This thesis has delineated two significant changes in Vietnamese tertiary education: the transition and the required proficiency benchmark. The findings show the complexities in the enactment processes of educational change as well as highlight the necessity to pay more attention to teachers’ roles and their voices in these processes. My study enabled the transitioned teachers to express their views and concerns about general language policy enactment. Many transitioned teachers believed that too many changes were happening in the Vietnamese educational system, and that foreign language education policy was fragile and unstable. An illustrative case is TT 14, who had to shift from Russian to French and then English to keep up with the policy change. This teacher is an example of the transitioned teachers’ industriousness and adaptability in the face of change. As the transitioned teachers in my study point out, more stable steps and policies in foreign language education planning are recommended.

The findings of this study closely accord with the claims that, in line with educational change, teachers need to adapt their new professional roles and incorporate new insights into their classroom teaching (Day & Kington, 2008; Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard, &
Korthagen, 2009). In my study, the transitioned teachers had to adopt a new professional role of being English teachers to respond to the university policy of offering only English in their educational system. The transitioned teachers also had to construct new professional insights to be able to enact their new roles and meet the required standard (see Section 4.3.2 and 5.3.2).

7.4.2. Teacher agency and teacher professional development

In discussing teacher agency in response to educational change, the findings of my study highlight issues in teacher professional development for transitioned teachers and for foreign language teachers in general. On the one hand, in agreeing with Mai’s (2014) study on primary Vietnamese English teachers, my study shows that the majority of the transitioned teachers believed that their English proficiency was adequate for their current teaching of non-English major students. On the other hand, even though the transitioned teachers underwent retraining, they expressed concerns about its consistency and quality. These findings echo Le’s (2007) conclusion that the retraining of former teachers of Russian “was not properly delivered” (p. 172). While Le (2007) only mentioned the case of Russian teachers, my study added cases of French and Chinese teachers.

In addition, my study supports the observations in previous studies that in relation to their professional development, teachers’ agency was seen as their capacity to prepare themselves for intentional and responsible management of new learning (e.g. Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2012; Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2014). As described in Section 4.3.2, the transitioned teachers prepared themselves for their new learning and teaching English by taking a BA and, for some, an MA course in ELT. Likewise, even though their first foreign languages were not supported by the university, many of them made their decisions and were responsible for their professional development in these languages through teaching, doing tour guide work or engaging in social networks with speakers of these foreign languages.
In addition to their management in their new learning of English, the transitioned teachers presented their dissatisfaction and concerns with their English training and their proficiency level of English (see Section 5.3.3). These findings converge with those in other studies in raising concerns about teachers’ proficiency and satisfaction levels in response to educational policy change (e.g. Mai, 2014; Nguyen, 2011). The transitioned teachers’ evaluation of the retraining also indicated their positions as critics (Ball et al. 2012) of their professional development in response to the change.

Regarding cultural knowledge, the transitioned teachers did not have much direct exposure to English culture through overseas living and/or training in English speaking countries as they had in that of Chinese, Russian and French languages. Consequently, they felt insecure and did not regard themselves as committed bona fide English teachers. Such reported feelings by the transitioned teachers possibly hindered their actions or limited their agency when engaging in ELT professional development initiatives. The case of the transitioned teachers corroborates the view that only when teachers’ professional development is built into educational reform, can they make agentic choices and take action in a way that sustains their dedication to new enterprises (Day et al., 2005; Sannino, 2010 cited in Tao & Gao, 2017).

Furthermore, the above findings indicate that the transitioned teachers’ previous experiences in their first foreign languages and contextual factors shaped the ways in which they responded to their professional development in ELT. The majority did not initiate other activities such as exposing themselves to English culture through the internet; rather, they compared the overseas training courses that they had in their first foreign languages with those in ELT and complained about the lack of support for overseas courses and training in ELT. These responses can be traced back to the ways in which the transitioned teachers learned English during the transition. As commented by the transitioned teachers (see Section 5.3.3.4),
their English studying was similar to learning for a driving-test, focusing more on test-driven
learning style rather than enhancing their skills or knowledge. The transitioned teachers’
passive learning styles, which were shaped by the educational system in Vietnam, can partly
explain why they did not take initiatives in their learning of cultural knowledge activities.
Concerning the transitioned teachers’ agency in relation to professional development in the
Vietnamese contexts, government initiatives for teachers’ skill enhancement (Shahab, 2013,
cited in Hamid & Nguyen, 2016) are thus recommended.

7.4.3. Teacher agency in retaining diverse foreign language provision

As presented in the previous chapters, despite the loss of a supportive environment at the
university for other foreign languages other than English, the transitioned teachers still
managed to retain their first foreign languages. These efforts included teaching, translating and
interpreting jobs, being tour guides as well as participating in different social activities or
communities related to these languages. However, due to the lack of support for their first
foreign languages, the majority of the transitioned teachers gradually ceased their first foreign
language teaching. The transitioned teachers’ improvisations in retaining diverse foreign
language provision, or their agency, was thus reduced.

My study shows that the preference for English has negatively influenced the
development of other foreign languages in TriThuc University and has caused the downgrading
of diverse language provision generally. The overemphasis on English and the neglect of other
foreign languages as at TriThuc University has led to an imbalance and deterioration in the
range of foreign languages on offer. As mentioned in Saigoners newspaper, “Vietnam adds 5
new foreign languages” (2016), other foreign languages, including Chinese and French, are
likely to be added to primary level teaching. Thus, the support for and maintenance of these
languages would probably be effective as a strategic approach for the long-term development
of the university. Supportive actions to maintain these languages are therefore to be encouraged.

7.4.4. Teacher agency and collaboration between leaders and teachers

The discrepancies and mismatches in the leaders’ and the transitioned teachers’ opinions as well as the existing gaps in communication between them are revealing. While the transition was considered by the leaders to be a matter of choice for the transitioned teachers, the transitioned teachers claimed it was a mandatory requirement and was the only choice that they had if they wished to keep their jobs at the university. In a similar vein, the transitioned teachers had no idea how it was decided which foreign languages were to be taught. Instead, several of them still believed that students should be the ones who chose the languages they wanted to learn, rather than having those choices imposed by the university.

These discrepancies and mismatches were the catalyst for the transitioned teachers’ concerns as well as their doubts about other policies implemented. The lack of forums or opportunities for them to express their opinions on these mismatches meant that the tensions between the transitioned teachers and the leaders were unresolved. The mismatches between leaders and the transitioned teachers in this study resonate with results in other studies about language policy implementation, especially the call for more connection between the top-down level, those who design the policy, and the grass-roots level, those who enact it (Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Phyak & Bui, 2014). The lack of communication between the two levels of actors shown in my study could lead to the failure of the educational enactment process. My study thus supports Nguyen and Bui’s (2016) conclusion that the gaps and disparities between the top-down and the reality at grass-roots level in Vietnam thus deserve greater attention.

Overall, the findings highlight the mismatches between the transitioned teachers’ and the leaders’ perceptions and evaluations of the change. These findings confirm the complexities
of educational policy enactment, discussed in previous studies (e.g. Ball, 2015; Ball et al., 2012). In addition, studies have called for more collaborative discussions among teachers for consensus in decision-making (Hamid et al., 2014; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). My study highlights the need for communication not only among teachers, but also between leaders and teachers to bridge the gaps in their perceptions, or to cater for needs on the teachers’ side in policy.

7.5. Closing remarks

This qualitative case study shows the complex, dynamic, multifaceted and culturally nuanced nature of the transitioned teachers’ agency. The transitioned teachers’ complex and sometimes contradictory responses indicate the dynamic nature of their agency. On the surface, they showed their roles as followers of the change through superficial decisions to transition, but at the same time expressed their resistance to the change through their talk about uncomfortable feelings, complaints and concerns about the change. While becoming English teachers, many transitioned teachers still attempted to find ways to retain their first foreign languages and questioned their proficiency of these languages even though they were no longer offered at TriThuc University. Notably, the transitioned teachers’ responses and agency were culturally nuanced. The hierarchical bureaucratic process of implementing the change in Vietnam, transitioned teachers’ perceived family roles and teachers’ position according to Asian values and beliefs also shaped their agency. The transitioned teachers were enmeshed in complex historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical Figured Worlds of first foreign languages, English, policy enactment and their agency in response to change was thus also dynamic and multifaceted. Through discussions on dynamic aspects of transitioned teachers’ agency and factors influencing their responses, my study hopes to contribute to the broad picture of teacher agency in response to educational change and policy enactment in Vietnam and other research contexts.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction
In exploring teachers’ agency in response to educational policy change in Vietnam, my study has focused on the case of 20 university teachers who had to transition from teaching Chinese, Russian and French to teaching English. The study pursued two lines of enquiry: how the transitioned teachers responded to the transition and the English proficiency benchmark, and what factors influenced their responses to these changes. Semi-structured interviews were mainly employed, complemented by a preliminary survey, documents and observations. Figured Worlds by Holland et al. (1998) and the modified version of the subject-centred sociocultural approach by Eteläpelto et al. (2013) were used as dual interpretive lenses to explore the transitioned teachers’ agency and the factors influencing their agency respectively.

In this final chapter of the thesis, I first present a summary of the key findings of the study. I then draw implications for both theory and practice regarding teacher agency in times of educational change, teacher education, and the communication between leaders and teachers in the context of policy enactment. The limitations of the study are then presented. I close this chapter and the thesis by suggesting directions for future research.

8.2. Summary of key findings
Research Question 1 examined the transitioned teachers’ responses to the transition. Although the majority expressed negative attitudes and unease, they improvised various pathways through the transition. Many of them attempted to retain teaching and other activities in their first foreign languages although they were no longer offered at the university. The transitioned teachers positioned themselves as powerless followers of the transition but, at the same time,
they were active policy enactors who demonstrated the ability to manoeuvre and critique the change.

Research Question 2 addressed the transitioned teachers’ responses to the required proficiency benchmark for English teachers. Even though they were not happy with the benchmark, they made individual and collective efforts to achieve it. Although most of them positioned themselves as passive receivers of the benchmark and did not consider themselves to be legitimate English teachers, they also expressed critical views of the benchmark and questioned its relevance to their everyday pedagogy and the effectiveness of the implementation process. They also raised concerns about the efficacy of the professional development activities provided for them.

Research Question 3 set out to identify the factors influencing the transitioned teachers’ agency. My findings show a strong interconnection between sociocultural factors and teachers’ identities. The status of English language and the leaders’ power in the hierarchical process of implementing change, were shown to be highly influential factors in shaping the transitioned teachers’ decisions, improvisation and subsequent actions throughout the transition. Material circumstances, including strong support for English in wider society and the long history of other foreign languages in the region also played a role in their responses. Different aspects of the transitioned teachers’ identities also played a role in their agency. For some, their previous work history and experience as well as their professional knowledge and competence formed a strong sense of commitment to, and passion for, foreign language teaching. A strong professional ego also shaped their desire to act as responsible teachers in whichever languages they were teaching. In contrast, others did not see themselves as bona fide English teachers with clear goals and ideals in this field. These identities influenced their subsequent actions such as attempting to retain their first foreign languages or/and doing the minimum required to keep their job in ELT. However, the conflicts between being passionate first foreign language
teachers and responsible English teachers, created challenges for them. Family roles and responsibilities also shaped their decisions and actions in their new profession.

Overall, the findings have shown the complex and culturally nuanced aspects of the transitioned teachers’ agency. Their agency cannot be described as an exercise of free will, but rather a conditioned response to policy dumping from the MOET and the university. Their agency is not seen in their resistance to change, but rather in their reactions to it. Their agency took the form of manoeuvrability and adaptability. In this sense, they were active and critical enactors of change. Solidarity and collectivity were also powerful culturally-formed elements of their agency through the change process. The transitioned teachers’ agency was influenced by hierarchical sociocultural contexts in which the power of the leaders was superior, and the transitioned teachers had little choice. Their agency was also shaped by their family roles and responsibilities which restrained them from pursuing their passion in teaching their first foreign languages but had to transition to teaching English in order to keep the university job. The transitioned teachers’ identities as language teachers, committed first foreign language teachers and responsible English teachers also shaped their agency.

8.2. Implications for theory and practice

The findings have significant implications for research on teacher agency as well as other issues in policy enactment and language teacher education policy and educational change. In this final discussion, I draw these implications together.

8.2.1. Teacher agency in times of educational change

Teacher agency in response to educational policy change has been examined in various political and educational contexts. However, there are few effective theoretical frameworks to explore teacher agency. The concepts of space or improvisations in Figured Worlds (see Section 2.6.1),
allowed me to highlight the nuances in the transitioned teachers’ responses by revealing the ways they felt, interpreted, improvised and judged the change, rather than only focusing on their superficial decisions. My study thus suggests that the concept of Figured Worlds has much to contribute to the scholarship of agency and teacher agency in times of educational change.

In addition, my study shows that it is important for research on agency to pay close attention to the interconnectedness of sociocultural factors and identities on people’s responses to change. Investigating only one of these two strands could not have shown a broad enough picture of the influences on the teachers’ responses. The modified subject-centred sociocultural approach used in my thesis (see Section 2.6.2) deserves attention in future research on teacher agency. Furthermore, teachers from different sociocultural backgrounds have different ways of expressing their opinions, which are potentially embedded in their cultural values. The distinct sociocultural aspects in my study, especially the issues of power and culture in Asian contexts in general and in Vietnam in particular, clearly shaped the transitioned teachers’ responses. Using Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS) (Shi-xu, 2012) as an analytical approach to exploring sociocultural factors contributed valuable insights to the transitioned teachers’ accounts. CDS is worthy of greater attention in future studies of teacher agency.

8.2.2. Teacher education in response to educational change

Exploring the teachers’ agency in response to the transition and the required proficiency benchmark, my study aimed to emphasise the role of teacher education in response to educational change. As Hamid and Nguyen (2016) emphasise, “if English language policies have produced only modest outcomes in many Asian societies, it is largely due to teachers and teacher education and professional development” (p. 37). My study shows that policymakers should pay attention to the practical requirements of policy implementation, particularly with reference to personnel policy, including teacher training and ongoing professional
development. Studies have noted the urgent need for qualified English teachers in Asian countries (e.g. see Nguyen, 2011 for the case of Vietnam). Hamid and Nguyen (2016) also question whether English language policies will succeed in creating an army of qualified English teachers to cater for the English learning population in Asia. Adequate retraining for the transitioned teachers at TriThuc University in my study and at other universities could significantly contribute to building such a workforce.

8.2.3. Policy enactment and the communication between teachers and leaders

While the important roles of teachers in policy enactment have been emphasised (e.g. Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007); how to enhance their roles in this process is more crucial. As shown in my study, the transitioned teachers’ emotional responses to and evaluations of the change were critical components shaping their agency throughout the change process. The mismatches in communication between the transitioned teachers and the leaders resulted in a sense of unease and powerlessness on the part of the former group. My study thus raises the questions of how policymakers can acknowledge the emotional dimension of reform and policy enactment, and how tensions and miscommunications between the leaders and the teachers can be resolved. Concerning these, my study suggests that clear lines of communication between teachers and leaders are vital to successful educational policy change. Providing fora for the teachers to share their emotions, perceptions and evaluations about various educational aspects resulting from change, should also be part of the process of change enactment. These forums can be located at different levels, at each university or college and at national level, when one educational change is introduced. The local forum can encourage the participation of all teachers from different universities and colleges to hear their voices and to bridge miscommunication with the leaders’ ones if any. The
national forum which may include representatives from those institutions can then capture broad ideas and resolve necessary aspects in the change process.

8.3. Limitations of the study

My study was not able to cover all aspects of teacher agency in response to educational policy enactment. First, it did not assess the retraining programme for the transitioned teachers by examining their training curriculum or observing training sessions. Instead, judgment of the retraining programme was shown from the transitioned teachers’ point of view. The transitioned teachers’ accounts highlight their perceptions and responses. These perceptions of the retraining and professional development activities showed the transitioned teachers’ dissatisfaction with and concerns about these aspects, which in turn indicated their critical views on these aspects in their teaching.

In addition, my study did not compare the views of English teachers with the transitioned teachers about the change but focused only on the transitioned teachers’ views. The reflections of other English teachers on the transitioned teachers’ identities and agency might contribute other perspectives on the transition and transitioned teachers in the process of change. However, in my view, in exploring teacher agency, the transitioned teachers’ perceptions and actions are more important. Furthermore, they were the group placed under the most intense stress during the change, and the ways in which they positioned and defined themselves reveals significant aspects of agency under strong duress.

Another limitation of the study resides in my involvement as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. I played the role of both insider and outsider researcher and each role had advantages and disadvantages. However, as discussed in Section 3.8.2, I managed to balance these two roles to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. In addition, the limited nature of a case study, particularly its generalisability, was also considered and discussed (see
Section 3.8.2). The participants in my study were 20 transitioned teachers at a university in Vietnam. Nonetheless, concerning analytical generalisation, the analysis of their agency drawn from different sources of data and in-depth exploration of their perceptions and responses suggests ways and directions to research and analyse teacher agency in times of educational change in other contexts.

8.4. Directions for future research

Given the size of my research sample, there is room for further studies to explore teacher agency, and particularly transitioned teachers’ agency, in response to educational change at more Vietnamese universities. This might broaden the analysis and cast further significant light on the transitioned teachers’ agency in response to educational change in Vietnam. Future studies could also examine transitioned teachers in other sociocultural contexts. The findings could then be compared with those presented in my study to capture the influences of diverse sociocultural factors on teachers’ agency. Considering the implemented analytical approach in my study, future studies could be also conducted to explore the agency of different group of teachers, who might experience other changes. Overall, the findings of my study on teachers’ complex and culturally nuanced agency in times of educational policy change hopes to contribute theoretically and practically to future studies on teacher agency.
REFERENCE LIST


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http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n2.2


doi:10.1002/tesq.278


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doi:10.1080/00131910500352648


Appendix A
Information Sheet for Teachers – Stage One

Teacher agency in times of educational policy change: A Vietnamese case study
Information Sheet for Teachers – Stage One

Research Team

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Why is the research being conducted?
With the emerging role of English as the major and the most preferred foreign language in the Vietnamese education system, language education in Vietnam has witnessed various educational changes. One of these changes is the retraining of a group of teachers who have taught French, Russian or Chinese to become English teachers. This change would have had profound impact on these teachers’ professional lives. In 2008, in order to foster quality in English teaching and learning, the Ministry of Education and Training implemented a nationwide policy known as the National Project 2020 and established required benchmarks for teachers’ English proficiency and students’ outcome standards at different levels. Although a large number of English language education policies have been introduced and implemented across all Vietnamese education sectors, teachers’ opinions about these policy enactments and educational changes as well as their impact on teachers’ personal and professional life have not been widely sought.

The current study (GU ref no: 2016/769) aims to explore how the teachers transitioned from teaching other languages to teaching English language manifest their professional agency in relation to educational changes including the transition and the new requirements on teachers’ proficiency and students’ outcome standards. In particular, the study seeks to investigate the ways these teachers exercise professional agency by eliciting their attitudes towards the transition and the current requirements of English teachers’ proficiency and students’ outcome standards issued by National project 2020. The research also explores how
these teachers improvise and engage with the educational changes, including how they exert influence on the transition and the new requirements of the policy reforms, and how they make choices and take stances in relation to these reforms. The ways in which teachers perceive or evaluate and reflect the transition process and their engagement with the reform will also be investigated.

**What you will be asked to do**

You are invited to participate in a preliminary survey and an interview to discuss your opinions regarding the transition from teaching other languages to teaching English language. The discussion will focus on your attitudes and experiences through the transition, your perceptions towards the current requirements of English teachers’ proficiency and students’ outcome standards issued by National project 2020 as well as general educational changes in Vietnam.

Questions of the survey will be asked to explore the demographic data, your source language (the foreign language you taught before transitioning to teaching English), your attitude and experiences in English language teaching, preliminary opinions about the transition as well as policy changes in general. The link of this preliminary survey will be sent to your email to be completed online.

The interview will further explore your opinions towards the transition and policy changes in general. Your attitudes and adaptations through the transition process will be focused. The interview will be conducted at your convenient time, face-to-face in a private booked room in library for approximately an hour and a half. This interview will be audio-recorded only for analysis purpose.

Both survey and interview will be conducted in Vietnamese.

**Voluntary participation**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation at any time during the research.

**Expected benefits to you**

The main benefit that will derive from this research is your contribution to our understanding the transition and policy changes in Vietnam. You can reflect your experiences as well as opinions towards the educational changes in Vietnam, which can support your current teaching as well as future plans in your profession.

**Risks to you**

There is no expected risk to you in relation to participating in this research. The chance of you experiencing any discomfort or emotional harm is very low.

**Your confidentiality**

The conduct of this research involves accessing or usage of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to their parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for academic publications. However, your anonymity will be safeguarded at all times. For further information, consult the University’s Privacy Plan at


**The ethical conduct of this research**
This research is conducted according to Griffith University policy and as such is in accordance with the National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact Mr. Rick Williams, Manager Research Ethics and Integrity at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia on +61 7 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

**Feedback to you**

Once the results have been analysed, they will be aggregated and presented as part of Ms. Hao Tran’s doctoral thesis. An executive summary report will be presented to you at your request.

**Data storage and deletion**

As required by Griffith University, all video and audio recordings will be erased after transcription, and identifying information will be removed from data and not included in data analysis. However, other research data such as interview transcripts and analysis will be stored in a password protected electronic file at Griffith University for a period of five years before being destroyed.

**Questions/further information**

If you require any further information concerning this research project, please contact the research team detailed above.
Appendix B
Consent Form for Teachers – Stage One

Teacher agency in times of educational policy change: A Vietnamese case study
Consent Form for Teachers – Stage One

Research Team

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STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
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Griffith University, Queensland, Australia
Email: hao.tran@griffithuni.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include my participation to a preliminary survey and an interview(s) to discuss my opinions regarding the transition from teaching other languages to teaching English language in Vietnam as well as general educational changes in Vietnam.
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 7 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;
- I agree to participate in the project (GU Ref No: 2016/769).

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Appendix C
Survey
PHIẾU ĐIỀU TRA
Bài điều tra này được thực hiện để lấy thông tin về quá trình chuyển đổi từ giảng dạy ngôn ngữ khác sang giảng dạy tiếng Anh, cũng như ý kiến chung về những sự thay đổi trong chính sách ngôn ngữ và chính sách giáo dục nói chung.
Tất cả các thông tin cá nhân sẽ hoàn toàn được giữ kín. Những thông tin về câu trả lời chỉ phục vụ mục đích nghiên cứu.

● Thầy/Cô làm ơn đánh dấu “✓” (hoặc tô đỏ) vào phương án phù hợp nhất với câu trả lời của mình.
● Ngôn ngữ nguồn: Khái niệm này được dùng trong bài điều tra này tương đương nghĩa với Ngôn ngữ mà giáo viên dạy (ví dụ: tiếng Trung, tiếng Nga, tiếng Pháp) trước khi chuyển đổi sang dạy tiếng Anh.

I. Thông tin về người tham gia:
1.1. Độ tuổi của thầy/cô là:
   A. Dưới 30
   B. Từ 30 đến 45
   C. Trên 45 tuổi
1.2. Thầy/cô đã đi dạy được bao nhiêu năm (kể cả tiếng Anh, và ngôn ngữ trước đây)?
   A. Dưới 10 năm
   B. Từ 10-20 năm
   C. Trên 20 năm
1.3. Thầy/cô thuộc bộ môn chuyên ngành nào?
   A. Bộ môn Ngoại ngữ chuyên ngành
   B. Bộ môn khác: ..............................
1.4. Nhiệm vụ chính của bộ môn chuyên ngành của Thầy/cô là gì? (làm ơn nêu một số nhiệm vụ chính)?
   ............................................................................................................................

II. Ngôn ngữ nguồn:
2.1. Ngôn ngữ trước khi chuyển đổi của Thầy/cô là gì?
   A. Tiếng Trung
   B. Tiếng Pháp
C. Tiếng Nga

2.2. Thầy/cô đã dạy ngôn ngữ này được bao nhiêu năm trước khi chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh?
A. Dưới 5 năm
B. Từ 5 – 10 năm
C. Trên 10 năm

2.3. Bằng cấp cao nhất của ngôn ngữ nguồn (tiếng Trung, tiếng Pháp hoặc tiếng Nga) của Thầy/cô là gì?
A. Bằng Cử nhân
B. Bằng Thạc sỹ
C. Bằng Tiến sĩ
D. Bằng cấp khác (Làm ơn nêu rõ)............................................

2.4. Thầy/cô học những khóa học này ở đâu?
Bằng:..........................Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ............................................
Bằng:..........................Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ............................................
Bằng:..........................Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ............................................

2.5. Thầy/cô có vẫn còn dạy ngôn ngữ nguồn (Tiếng Trung, Tiếng Pháp, hay Tiếng Nga) không?
A. Không
B. Có, ở đâu? ………………………………
Trong trường hợp nào? ………………………………………………………

2.6. Thầy/cô có đang tham gia những hoạt động liên quan tới ngôn ngữ nguồn?
A. Không
B. Có, làm ơn liệt kê? ………………………………………

3. Tiếng Anh

3.1. Thầy/cô dạy tiếng Anh được bao lâu rồi?
A. Dưới 5 năm
B. Từ 5-10 năm
C. Trên 10 năm

3.2. Theo Thầy/cô, điểm khác biệt nhất giữa giảng dạy ngôn ngữ nguồn và giảng dạy tiếng Anh là gì?
A. Đặc điểm ngôn ngữ (i.e., đặc điểm chữ viết, cách viết, ngữ pháp…)
B. Văn hóa
C. Phương pháp giảng dạy
D. Yếu tố khác (Làm ơn nêu rõ)............................................

3.3. Trước khi chuyển từ dạy ngôn ngữ nguồn sang dạy tiếng Anh, Thầy/cô đã dạy tiếng Anh bao giờ chưa?
A. Có
Trường hợp nào? ..........................................................
B. Chưa

3.4. Bằng tiếng Anh cao nhất của Thầy/cô là gì?
A. Bằng Cử nhân
B. Bằng Thạc sỹ
C. Bằng Tiến sĩ
D. Bằng cấp khác (Làm ơn nêu rõ)............................................

3.5. Thầy/cô học những khóa học này ở đâu?
Bằng:..........................Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ............................................
Bằng:..........................Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ............................................

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Bằng: .................................. Tên cơ sở đào tạo: ..........................................

3.6. Thầy/cô có đang học khóa học liên quan tới tiếng Anh nào khác không?
   A. Có
       Làm ơn nêu tên: ............................................................................................
   B. Không

3.7. Thầy/cô đang dạy những môn nào?
   A. Môn dạy liên quan tới Tiếng Anh: ..........................
   B. Môn dạy liên quan tới ngôn ngữ nguồn: ..........................
   C. Môn dạy liên quan tới các ngôn ngữ khác:..........................

4. Chuyển đổi
4.1. Thầy/cô chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh từ năm nào?
........................

4.2. Thầy/cô đã nhận được thông báo/tài liệu chính thức nào về việc chuyển đổi (từ ngôn ngữ nguồn sang tiếng Anh) không?
   A. Có
       Làm ơn nêu tên?: ...........................................................
   B. Không

4.3. Thầy/cô có ý định chuyển đổi sang dạy Tiếng Anh từ đâu?
   A. Đồng nghiệp
   B. Lãnh đạo Khoa
   C. Trưởng bộ môn
   D. Người khác hoặc nguồn khác, (Làm ơn nêu rõ):

4.4. Lý do chính Thầy/cô chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh là gì?
........................

4.5. Khi Thầy/cô chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh, trong Khoa Thầy/cô lúc bấy giờ, đã có khoảng bao nhiêu giáo viên khác đã chuyển đổi trước đó?
........................

5. Những thay đổi chính sách nói chung
5.1. Theo Thầy/cô, ai đóng vai trò quan trọng nhất trong việc đề xuất một chính sách giáo dục?
   A. Các nhà hoạch định chính sách (policy maker)
   B. Giáo viên
   C. Sinh viên
   D. Bộ trưởng Bộ giáo dục
   E. Đối tượng khác (làm ơn nêu rõ)

5.2. Theo Thầy/cô, vai trò của Thầy/cô trong việc đề xuất một chính sách giáo dục là gì?
........................

5.3. Theo Thầy/cô, giáo viên nói chung có thể đóng góp cho việc đề xuất một chính sách giáo dục trên những phương diện nào?
........................

5.4. Lần đầu tiên Thầy/cô biết về yêu cầu mới của Bộ (về trình độ tiếng Anh đối với Giáo viên tiếng Anh tại các cấp học) là từ nguồn thông tin nào?
   A. Đồng nghiệp
   B. Lãnh đạo Khoa
   C. TV và phương tiện truyền thông
   D. Nguồn khác (làm ơn nêu rõ):
........................
5.5. “Thầy/cô hiểu đầy đủ và rõ ràng yêu cầu của Bộ/ Đề án 2020 về trình độ tiếng Anh của Giáo viên tiếng Anh”. Nhận xét này là:
   A. Đúng
   B. Sai
   C. Không chắc chắn

* Câu hỏi phụ: Tôi (người nghiên cứu) có thể liên hệ Thầy/cô qua email (hoặc số điện thoại) để tham vấn thêm các thông tin liên quan tới câu trả lời của Thầy/cô ở bài điều tra này được không?

   A. Không
   B. Có,

   Email/Số điện thoại là: .................................................................
Appendix D

Consent form for faculty and university leaders

Teacher agency in times of educational policy change: A Vietnamese case study
Consent Form for faculty and university leaders

Research Team

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Ms. Hao Tran
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Griffith University, Queensland, Australia
Email: hao.tran@griffithuni.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include an interview(s) concerning my opinions in relation to educational changes in Vietnam such as the transition of teachers from teaching other languages to teaching English and the current English policy requirements in Vietnam.
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
• I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 7 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;

• I agree to participate in the project (GU Ref No: 2016/769).

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Appendix E
Guided Questions – Interviews with teachers - Stage One

Phỏng vấn
Bài phỏng vấn này được thực hiện để tìm hiểu cách nhìn nhận của giáo viên về quá trình chuyển đổi sang giảng dạy tiếng Anh và những thay đổi của giáo dục và chính sách giáo dục nói chung.

Những câu hỏi đưa ra sẽ thảo luận về những chủ đề chính sau:

1. Quá trình chuyển đổi của giáo viên từ dạy ngôn ngữ nguồn sang tiếng Anh
2. Sự khác biệt giữa dạy ngôn ngữ nguồn và tiếng Anh
3. Những khó khăn trong quá trình chuyển đổi
4. Những sự giúp đỡ trong quá trình chuyển đổi
5. Những thuận lợi và bất lợi trong quá trình chuyển đổi so với các giáo viên chuyển đổi khác trong Khoa, từ cùng một ngôn ngữ nguồn và khác ngôn ngữ nguồn.
6. Những thuận lợi và bất lợi trong quá trình chuyển đổi so với các giáo viên chuyển đổi ở các trường Đại học khác
7. Nhận xét chung về quá trình chuyển đổi
8. Nhận xét chung về những sự thay đổi trong chính sách giáo dục ở Việt nam
Phỏng vấn

Những câu hỏi trong bài phỏng vấn này sẽ tập trung vào những nội dung chính sau:

**Yếu cầu với giáo viên**

1. Ý kiến về yêu cầu của Bộ đối với giảng viên về việc đạt chuẩn C1?
2. Những khóa học liên quan tới giảng dạy tiếng Anh, phát triển chuyên môn đã tham dự?
   (Tên những khóa học này? Tại sao Cô/Thầy tham gia những khóa học này? Cô/Thầy có hài lòng với những khóa này không?)
4. Những giúp đỡ để đạt được yêu cầu của Bộ đối với giảng viên tiếng Anh (các giáo viên chuyên đổi khác, các giáo viên tiếng Anh trong Khoa, lãnh đạo Khoa, nhà trường, vv).
5. Hoạt động cá nhân/tập thể của tổ/ Cô/Thầy liên quan tới yêu cầu của bộ với giảng viên.
6. Ý kiến của Cô/Thầy về những thuận lợi/bất lợi của Khoa để đạt được yêu cầu của Bộ đối với giảng viên so với các trường khác.

**Yếu cầu nói chung**

1. Quan điểm của Cô/Thầy về việc tham gia của giáo viên vào các hoạt động của đề án 2020 nói chung.
Guided Questions - Interview with a faculty leader - Stage One

Những câu hỏi trong bài phỏng vấn này sẽ tập trung vào những nội dung chính sau:

1. Khi Cô/Thầy làm lãnh đạo tại Khoa, thì các giáo viên tiếng Pháp, Trung, Nga đã chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh chưa? Cô/Thầy có thể kể về quá trình chuyển đổi của các giáo viên từ tiếng Pháp, Trung, Nga, sang tiếng Anh trong Khoa?

2. Nhận xét của Cô/Thầy về việc chuyển đổi của các giáo viên tiếng Anh trong Khoa?

3. Với vai trò lãnh đạo, Khoa và Cô/Thầy đã làm những gì liên quan tới việc chuyển đổi này (i.e. quản lý, phát triển chuyên môn …)

4. Sau khi chuyển đổi, thì Khoa đã có những hoạt động, kế hoạch gì (phát triển chuyên môn, đánh giá năng lực, giảng dạy, …)

5. Đánh giá của Cô/Thầy về nhóm giáo viên này về việc tham gia vào giảng dạy tiếng Anh từ thời điểm chuyển đổi cho tới nay?

6. Cô/Thầy nhận xét thế nào về công việc của Khoa hiện tại và đánh giá của Cô/Thầy về vai trò của đội ngũ giáo viên này với sự phát triển của Khoa hiện tại?

7. Cô/Thầy nhận xét thế nào về việc tham gia của Khoa vào các hoạt động của đề án 2020? Vai trò của các giáo viên tiếng Anh chuyển đổi trong giai đoạn này?
Appendix H

Guided Questions - Interviews with faculty and university leaders - Stage Two

Những câu hỏi trong bài phỏng vấn này sẽ tập trung vào những nội dung chính sau:

1. Nhận xét của Cô/Thầy về yêu cầu của Bộ đối với năng lực ngoại ngữ của giáo viên (C1)?
2. Trường/Khoa có những chính sách hay quy định riêng đối với yêu cầu này không?
3. Khi có yêu cầu này từ Bộ, thì Trường/Khoa đã làm gì? Những chiến lược đã có của Trường/Khoa liên quan tới vấn đề này là gì?
4. Việc đạt được các chứng chỉ này có vai trò gì với sự phát triển của Trường/Khoa?
5. Theo thầy, Trường/Khoa mình có những khó khăn gì so với các Trường/Khoa khác trong việc đạt chuẩn ngoại ngữ của giảng viên?
6. Nếu có 1 số giáo viên vẫn chưa đáp ứng yêu cầu này thì Trường/Khoa có kế hoạch như thế nào?
7. Việc đạt chuẩn là tiêu chí đánh giá thi đua? Vì sao mình lại có chính sách này? Và nhận xét của thầy về việc áp dụng tiêu chí này?
8. Trường/Khoa có kế hoạch phát triển chuyên môn của nhóm giáo viên chuyển đổi không?
Appendix I

Consent Form for Teachers – Stage Three

Teacher agency in times of educational policy change: A Vietnamese case study
Consent Form for Teachers – Stage Three

Research Team

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By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include my participation to multiple interviews, including both semi-structured and unstructured interviews, to discuss my attitudes and experiences in relation to the current requirements of English teachers’ proficiency and students’ outcome standards issued by National project 2020, as well as being observed in meetings/activities if any.
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 7 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;
- I agree to participate in the project (GU Ref No: 2016/769).

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Những câu hỏi trong bài phỏng vấn này sẽ tập trung vào những nội dung chính sau:

1. Cô/Thầy có thể cho em biết là các hoạt động của tổ thường được tổ chức, liên hệ qua các kênh thông tin nào?
2. Đợt tham gia tổng kết học kỳ của Khoa, em thấy không ai có ý kiến gì nhiều, và mọi người chủ yếu xem điện thoại mà thôi? Có phải bởi vì họ không quan tâm tôi các vấn đề của Khoa không?
3. Cô/Thầy nắm bắt các hoạt động của tổ qua các kênh thông tin nào? (Viber? Email? Facebook?)
4. Các hoạt động của tổ Cô/Thầy thường diễn ra như thế nào? Cô/Thầy nhận xét thế nào về các kênh thông tin này?
5. Hiện tại Khoa có mấy nhóm Viber và Cô/Thầy thuộc những nhóm Viber nào?
6. Khoa có hay tổ chức các cuộc họp tổ không?
7. Cô/Thầy có những dự định gì trong tương lai liên quan tới giảng dạy ngôn ngữ ban đầu và tiếng Anh không? Việc duy trì ngôn ngữ ban đầu, hay việc tham gia vào các hoạt động trong ngôn ngữ mới?
8. Nhìn lại toàn bộ quá trình Cô/Thầy chuyển sang dạy tiếng Anh, tham gia vào các hoạt động tiếng Anh thì Cô/Thầy có điều gì suy nghĩ hay muốn chia sẻ?
Tên hoạt động: (Họp Khoa? Viber? Distance teaching session):
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Nội dung chính: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

Thời gian: ………………………………………………………………………………………………

Người tham gia: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

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<th>Hoạt động</th>
<th>Liên quan tới chuyển đổi</th>
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Appendix L

Sample of coding process

Code 1
Worried

Code 2
Angry

Theme: Feelings

Category:
Perceptions of the transition

Transition_Perceptions_Worried

Transition_Perceptions_Angry