



**NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE  
SCIENCES**

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**THE IMPACT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND THE  
INTERNATIONAL MA-TESOL COURSE ON THE  
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF VIETNAMESE STUDENT  
TEACHERS: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated)**

**2015**

## Abstract

In the context of globalisation, English language teaching is a billions-of-pounds-worth business, yet the teacher of English still remains “an almost invisible figure” (Garton and Richards, 2008, p. 4). In Vietnam, thousands of TESOL teachers have been sponsored to enhance their professionalism in Anglophone institutions, yet the results of their sojourn study still remain almost intangible. These vague self-concepts of the TESOL teacher in both global and local contexts have motivated the researcher to conduct this study on the impact of the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers with the assessment process being the main focus owing to its substantial influence on the learner’s identity (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008).

This “divergent multiple case study” is grounded in the school of social constructivism with new developments of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and theories of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010). It adopts an ecological view to analyse the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course by using an “ecological activity system”, a combination of Engeström (1987)’s activity system, Pryor and Crossouard (2008)’s socio-cultural theorisation of formative assessment, and Hodgson and Spours (2013)’s high opportunity progression eco-system (HOPE) as the major conceptual framework. The assessment process, the object of the system, is perceived as encompassing both summative assessment tasks and formative feedback. Meanwhile, the professional identity, the outcome with cognitive, affective, behavioural, and socio-cultural aspects, is regarded as a case of multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), and is to be depicted in two different dimensions: retrospection vs. prospection and projection vs. introjection (Bernstein, 2000).

This research follows narrative inquiry and employs intensive, active, semi-structured interview as the primary data collection method and the documentary analysis of the MA-TESOL syllabi as the supplementary one. It called for the voluntary participation of fourteen Vietnamese student teachers studying in four Anglophone countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States and collated four sets of the course syllabi. The thematic data analysis has yielded insights into (1) the positive impact of the assessment process on four major aspects of the professional identity; (2) the salient impacts of other factors of the international MA-TESOL course: the subject, the mediating artefacts, the rules, the community, and the power relations; and (3) the long-term impact on their continued career paths. The research findings may facilitate cross-institutional understanding of the assessment policies and the international MA-TESOL curricula and serve as a reference to design more beneficial TESOL training programmes for the future student teachers worldwide.

*To my be-loved Grand Dad, parents, and daughter*

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate my sincere gratitude to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the Viet Nam International Education Development Department (VIED), the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Viet Nam National University, Hanoi (ULIS -VNU), and the taxpayers who have sponsored and enabled me to pursue my dream to study abroad.

I would also like to express my in-depth appreciation to Newcastle University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS), the lecturers, the staff members, the guest speakers, and the local and international friends who have partially sponsored me and gradually imbued in me a grounded knowledge base, an insightful understanding, a growing confidence, and an international perspective.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Prof David Leat and Dr Susan Pattison, my supervisors, for their generous intellectual and emotional support without which I might have given up with my study. My special thanks are also due to Prof Nguyen Hoa, Dr Peter Sercombe, Prof Steve Walsh, Dr Dawn Knight, Prof Paul Seedhouse, Dr Alan Firth, Dr Adam Brandt, Prof Sue Robson, Dr Carolyn Letts, Prof Neill Marshall, Dr Robin Humphrey, my uncle Tran Gia Thuyen, my mother Do Thi Ngoan and my close friend Pham Thi Ngoc Phuong whose constructive comments and feedback have become the flesh and bones of my research. I am especially grateful for Dr Kennett Fordyce and Dr Alina Schartner for their kind-hearted willingness to examine my dissertation during the summer holiday.

My gratitude also goes to Prof Neill Marshall and Mr Alan Tuck for their liaison and the MA-TESOL administrators and lecturers for their written permissions for me to incorporate their course syllabi into the documentary analysis. I highly appreciate the reflective and devoted Vietnamese participants who engaged enthusiastically in the interviews with me to co-construct new understanding. Moreover, I would like to thank Buddhism, the academics, and Youtube community for the wisdom, knowledge, and phronesis they freely and generously share.

Last but not least, I would like to send my heartfelt gratitude to my family, my grandfather, my parents, my daughter, my friends, and my colleagues whose motivation gives me strength to keep walking and whose dreams I would like to pursue.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Definitions of Key Terms</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>1.1 Introduction and Context</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.2 Scope of Study</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.3 Research Questions</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>1.4 Philosophical Grounds and Methodologies</i>	<i>16</i>
1.4.1 Philosophical grounds	16
1.4.2 Conceptual frameworks	16
1.4.3 Research methodologies and epistemological stances	18
<i>1.5 Design of the Study</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>1.6 Contributions of the Study</i>	<i>21</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Assessment and Professional Identity</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>2.1 The Conceptualisation of Assessment</i>	<i>23</i>
2.1.1 Definitions of assessment	23
2.1.2 The summative and formative functions of assessment	24
2.1.3 Assessment and its relationship with curriculum, teaching and learning	26
2.1.4 Assessment tasks and feedback	27
<i>2.2 Professional Identity and its Dimensions</i>	<i>29</i>
2.2.1 The conceptualisation of identity	29
2.2.2 Identification	31
2.2.3 Dimensions of identity and identification	32
2.2.4 The professional identity of a TESOL teacher	36
<i>2.3 The Impact of Assessment on the Learner's Identity</i>	<i>39</i>

2.3.1	The cognitive impact	39
2.3.2	The affective impact	41
2.3.3	The behavioural impact	43
2.3.4	The socio-cultural impact	44
2.3.5	Assessment and identity	45
2.4	<i>Summary</i>	47
<b>Chapter 3 Philosophical Grounds and Research Methodologies</b>		<b>49</b>
3.1	<i>Philosophical Grounds and Conceptual Frameworks</i>	49
3.1.1	Social constructivism and sociocultural theory	49
3.1.2	Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT)	50
3.1.3	Theories of expansive learning	52
3.1.4	The ecological activity system	53
3.2	<i>Research Methodologies</i>	58
3.2.1	Divergent multiple case study research	58
3.2.2	Narrative inquiry	60
3.3	<i>Research Design</i>	61
3.3.1	Data collection methods	61
3.3.2	Ethical considerations	64
3.3.3	Thematic analysis	65
3.4	<i>Criteria of a Sound Qualitative Case Study Research</i>	67
3.4.1	Consistency	68
3.4.2	Inter-subjectivity	69
3.4.3	Credibility	70
3.4.4	Applicability	71
3.5	<i>Summary</i>	71
<b>Chapter 4 The Context Settings</b>		<b>73</b>
4.1	<i>The Antecedent Contexts</i>	73
4.1.1	The participants' profiles	73
4.1.2	The Vietnamese backdrops	75
4.1.3	The professional goals	77
4.2	<i>The Assessment Process</i>	80
4.2.1	The assessment tasks	80
4.2.2	Feedback	85
4.3	<i>Summary</i>	87

<b>Chapter 5 The Impact of the Assessment Process on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers</b>	<b>90</b>
5.1 <i>The Cognitive Impact</i>	90
5.1.1 Study skills	91
5.1.2 Criticality and higher-order thinking skills	92
5.2 <i>The Affective Impact</i>	94
5.2.1 The affective impact of the assessment tasks	94
5.2.2 The affective impact of the feedback	95
5.3 <i>The Behavioural Impact</i>	96
5.3.1 Research practice	96
5.3.2 Pedagogical practice	99
5.3.3 Assessment practice	100
5.4 <i>The Socio-cultural Impact</i>	102
5.4.1 Social status	102
5.4.2 Engagement in the communities of practice	103
5.5 <i>The Assessment Process and Professional Identity</i>	104
5.5.1 An autonomy and life-long learning	104
5.5.2 Changes in attitudes	106
5.6 <i>Summary</i>	107
<b>Chapter 6 The Impact of the International MA-TESOL Course on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers</b>	<b>110</b>
6.1 <i>The Subject</i>	110
6.1.1 The educators	110
6.1.2 Their assessment practice	112
6.2 <i>The Mediating Artefacts</i>	114
6.2.1 The library resources	114
6.2.2 The English language	115
6.2.3 The supplementary seminars and workshops	116
6.3 <i>The Rules</i>	117
6.3.1 The course structure	117
6.3.2 The grading schemes	119
6.4 <i>The Community</i>	121
6.4.1 The pedagogical/classroom community	122
6.4.2 The academic community	124
6.4.3 The socio-cultural community	125

6.5	<i>The Power Relations</i>	126
6.5.1	The lecturer-student interaction	127
6.5.2	International student support	128
6.6	<i>Summary</i>	130
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>The Long-term Impact on their Continued Career Paths</b>	<b>132</b>
7.1	<i>Their Role as a TESOL Teacher/ Lecturer</i>	132
7.1.1	Achievements	132
7.1.2	Challenges	135
7.2	<i>Their Role as a Researcher</i>	136
7.2.1	Achievements	136
7.2.2	Challenges	138
7.3	<i>Their Role as an Assessor</i>	140
7.4	<i>Summary</i>	141
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>143</b>
8.1	<i>The Assessment Process and the Professional Identification</i>	143
8.1.1	The assessment process	143
8.1.2	Its impact on the professional identity	145
8.2	<i>The International MA-TESOL Course as an Ecological Activity System</i>	147
8.3	<i>The Boundary Crossings and Expansive Learning</i>	150
8.3.1	The cultural boundary crossing	151
8.3.2	The pedagogical boundary crossing	152
8.3.3	The academic boundary crossing	153
8.3.4	The professional boundary crossing	154
8.4	<i>The Teacher Agency and Professional Identity</i>	156
8.4.1	The process of identification	156
8.4.2	The process of narration	158
8.5	<i>Summary</i>	160
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study</b>	<b>162</b>
9.1	<i>Conclusions</i>	162
9.1.1	Conceptual contributions	162
9.1.2	Methodological contributions	165
9.1.3	Empirical contributions	165
9.2	<i>Pedagogical Implications</i>	168



9.2.1	Assessment and identity	168
9.2.2	TESOL teacher training programme	170
9.2.3	Internationalisation of the MA-TESOL course	172
9.3	<i>Outcomes and Values</i>	174
9.3.1	For MA-TESOL course providers in host and guest countries	174
9.3.2	For MA-TESOL educators and prospective students	175
9.3.3	For the participants and the researcher	177
9.4	<i>Limitations of the Study</i>	178
9.5	<i>Suggestions for Further Study</i>	179
	<b>References</b>	<b>180</b>
	<b>Appendix A Participant Information Sheet</b>	<b>205</b>
	<b>Appendix B Consent Form</b>	<b>208</b>
	<b>Appendix C Debriefing Form</b>	<b>209</b>
	<b>Appendix D Topics of Discussion</b>	<b>211</b>
	<b>Appendix E Participants' Profiles</b>	<b>212</b>
	<b>Appendix F Additional Quotes</b>	<b>227</b>
	<b>Appendix G The MA-TESOL modules</b>	<b>229</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: The ecological activity system (the tentative version)	17
Figure 2: The interaction of two activity systems (the tentative version)	18
Figure 3: A taxonomy of approaches to assessment (Terenzini, 1989)	25
Figure 4: Types of assessment	26
Figure 5: The relationship between assessment and teaching and learning (Bernstein, 2000)	27
Figure 6: Dimensions of identity	33
Figure 7: A quadruple model of professional identity (learning stage)	38
Figure 8: A quadruple model of assessment impact	39
Figure 9: A summary of the boundary crossing process (Engeström and Sannino, 2010)	53
Figure 10: Formative assessment as an activity system (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008)	54
Figure 11: The ecological activity system (the revised version)	55
Figure 12: The interaction of two activity systems (the revised version)	58
Figure 13: A summary of the data collection process	62
Figure 14: A summary of the philosophical grounds and research methodologies	67
Figure 15: The proportions of assessment task types as incorporated in the MA- TESOL course syllabi	81
Figure 16: The ratios of learning outcomes per module as incorporated in the MA- TESOL course syllabi	81
Figure 17: The ecological activity system (the revised version)	164
Figure 18: The interaction of two activity systems (the revised version)	165

## List of Tables

Table 1: Interview schedules	63
Table 2: Criteria of a sound qualitative research	68
Table 3: The participants' profiles	74

## **List of Abbreviations**

ACT: American College Test  
AE: American English  
AL: Applied Linguistics  
AP: Advanced Placement tests  
AUS: Australia  
BE: British English  
CALL: Computer-Assisted Language Learning  
CHAT: Cultural Historical Activity Theory  
CIRP: Cooperative Institutional Research Program  
GNVQ: General National Vocational Qualification  
GRE: Graduate Record Examination  
HOPE: High Opportunity Progression Eco-system  
ICC: Inter-cultural Communication  
IELTS: International English Language Testing System  
LSAT: Second Language Acquisition and Teaching  
M.Ed.: Master of Education  
MA-TESOL: Master of Arts – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
MCAT: Medical College Admission Test  
NAEP: National Assessment of Educational Progress  
NTE: National Teacher Examination  
NZ: New Zealand  
PALS: Psychology Applied Learning Scenarios  
PhD: Doctor of Philosophy  
SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test  
SLA: Second Language Acquisition  
TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language  
TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language  
TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language  
UK: The United Kingdom  
ULIS: University of Languages and International Studies  
USA: The United States  
VN: Viet Nam

## Definitions of Key Terms

MA-TESOL course: a partially generic term to encapsulate a variety of master's courses designed for teachers of English such as Master of Education, Master of Applied Linguistics, Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Master in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, etc.

The international MA-TESOL course: a partially generic term to signify the international trait of the MA-TESOL course on account of its diverse attendants

Assessment: a blend of the two notions: "assessing" which originally means "sitting beside" (Swaffield, 2011) (formative function) and "evaluating" which originally means "finding the value of" (Harper, 2001) (summative function)

Assessment process: either a micro process within a specific module or a macro process within the entire MA-TESOL course

Assessment task: any item of assessment whether examination, test, course work or direct observation (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007)

Feedback: an umbrella concept that captures all *feedback exchanges* generated within the assessment process, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context, being overt or covert (actively and/or passively sought and/or received), and importantly, drawing from a range of sources (Evans, 2013, p. 71)

Professional identity/ identification: an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 315)

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and Context

The Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA-TESOL) and the equivalents are ranked among the most internationally available courses, offered by more than 300 universities in the United States and Canada, 34 in the United Kingdom, 27 in Australia, five in New Zealand, and a plethora of others all over the world (May, 2004; MATESOL, nd.; SI-UK Education Council, nd.). It is deemed an essential qualification for any teacher of English to assert their professionalism in the growing field of language teaching. Originally designed for native speakers, MA-TESOL courses have recently been attended by far more international students, with a steady influx from the Asia-Pacific region including China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Viet Nam. This demand has maintained its upward trend as English for international communication and bilingual education has become a central focus of the educational policy agendas to address globalisation process in these countries (Kam, 2002; Nunan, 2003; Yihong *et al.*, 2007; Gottlieb, 2008; Tang, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2012; Dang *et al.*, 2013; Van, 2013).

In that global context, many Vietnamese teachers of English have been sponsored to develop their professionalism abroad by various funding resources including the local projects of “providing HE at international institutions for provincial staff” (Decision 4277/2011/QĐ-UBND of 20/12/2011), the national projects of “training scientific and technical cadres at international institutions by the national budget” (Decision 322/QĐ-TTg of 19/04/2000, Decision 911/QĐ-TTg of 17/6/2010), and many other international scholarship programmes (Australia Awards Scholarships, New Zealand ASEAN Scholar Awards, Chevening Scholarships, and Fulbright Program in Viet Nam). The development of an internationally accredited teaching staff is considered the key to success in the implementation of the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project, which aims at equipping Vietnamese graduates with adequate communicative, academic, and occupational language competencies to serve for the industrialization and modernization of the country (*Vietnam’s National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*, 2008).

The international MA-TESOL courses, however, have been critiqued for their focusing exclusively on the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of second language education

rather than the complex nature of teacher development (Abednia, 2012). Only up until recently has the teacher education literature come to consider teachers as reflective practitioners, who have the ability to theorize about their practices and practise their personal theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Abednia, 2012). That salient paradigm shift about teacher agency has resulted in more studies to elaborate how language teachers develop their professional identity during their sojourns (Lamie, 1998; Lin *et al.*, 2002; Pavlenko, 2003; Park, 2006; Ha, 2007; Achugar, 2009; Larzén-Östermark, 2011).

On the one hand, optimistic researchers hail international education for being a catalyst for the student teachers' professional development (Brindley *et al.*, 2009; Brown, 2009), facilitating their high-level skills enhancement (Ellis, 1994), language acquisition (Lin *et al.*, 2002; Kinginger, 2007; Leo Collins and Pak, 2008), cross-cultural understanding (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Ha, 2007; Brown, 2009; Lee, 2009), and educational experiences (Andrade, 2006; Larzén-Östermark, 2011; Bui *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, realistic ones point out substantial cultural, academic, and language adjustment challenges (Andrade, 2006; Young *et al.*, 2012) and even the tendency to squeeze the identities within pre-established conventions of the social and academic host culture (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). In what way the international MA-TESOL course influences the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers, therefore, becomes the guiding question for this research project.

## **1.2 Scope of Study**

This study more specifically aims at examining the impact of the international MA-TESOL courses in four major Anglophone countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States where most of Vietnamese student teachers study. However, instead of addressing the entire sojourn experience generally as many other studies mentioned, it takes the assessment process as an anchoring point since research suggests that assessment is powerful in shaping the learners' identity (Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003). It not only "defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates" (Brown *et al.*, 1994, p.7) but also exerts its moulding impact on the internal self: "tests to a significant degree produce the personal characteristics they purport to measure" (Hanson, 1993, p. 4).

There already exists a modest body of impact study to elaborate the social/ educational consequences of assessment, most notably, those of the two internationally influential language testing systems, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Chalhoub-Deville and Turner, 2000; Poehner and Lantolf, 2005; Green, 2006; Wall and Horák, 2006; Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007). Yet, Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) suggest that the impact of specific assessment schemes on the learners' identity is still an underdeveloped theme in literature. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on the consequences of the assessment process, more specifically how the students tackle assessment tasks and respond to feedback and what they internalise from the process to develop their professional identity within the context of the international MA-TESOL course.

The term "assessment process" to be used in this research is basically construed as encompassing both formative and summative functions (Scriven, 1967; Wiliam, 2006), which are inseparable and interdependent like *yin* and *yang* elements in Asian philosophy. Research suggests that formative assessment may illuminate the learners' recognition of their evolving identities through various educational contexts, collaborations, and dialogues while summative assessment can be one of the most powerful institutionalised discourses with socially highly-valued texts (marks, academic reports, qualifications) that create, legitimise, and reify aspects of identity (Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008).

The other key term, "professional identity", to be adopted in this dissertation is based on Larzén-Östermark (2011)'s conclusion that "the intercultural sojourn begins as a trip abroad – to learn the language and discover another culture – but ends in learning most about one's self" (p.455). This notion also resonates in Barnacle and Mewburn (2010)'s research which associates postgraduate study with "a journey of becoming" and "a process of identity transition" (p.433). In this research, the Vietnamese student teachers experienced two particular transitions: (1) from an undergraduate/ in-service teacher to an international MA-TESOL student and (2) from an MA-TESOL graduate to a TESOL teacher/researcher. Accordingly, the impact study will feature both stages of their development during and after the international MA-TESOL course. Though it is an impact study, the participants should not be regarded as passive recipients of the assessment tasks but active learning agents to construct their knowledge, experience, and identity. The primary focus is placed on the assessment and the MA-TESOL course

merely because they are imbued with stronger institutional power that requires conformity and alignment from the participants.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The following set of questions is raised to guide the inquiry:

- 1. What professional goals did the Vietnamese student teachers want to fulfil when taking an international MA-TESOL course?*
- 2. What type of assessment tasks and feedback did they tackle?*
- 3. How did the assessment process (including the assessment tasks and feedback) help to shape their professional identity?*
- 4. How did other factors of the international MA-TESOL course impact their professional identity?*
- 5. In what way do the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course leave long-term impact on their continued career paths?*

The justifications for the design of the question set are as follows. The first question takes into consideration the intended learning outcomes established by Vietnamese students as Norton and Toohey (2011) suggest that research into identity needs to pay close attention to how individuals “place themselves” (p.427) in the system. The second question examines the way the types of the assessment tasks and feedback they tackled, which are assumed to be the most significant and encapsulating processes of their study. Question three features the impact of the assessment process on the shaping of their professional identity (during the learning stage). Question number four expands the scope of exploration beyond the assessment process to other factors of the international MA-TESOL course (the subject, the mediating artefacts, the rules, the community, and the power relations) in an endeavour to address a valid argument that the assessment consequences are inseparable from those of the entire teaching-learning process. The final question aims at eliciting the long-term impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the continued career paths of the student teachers (after the learning stage).



## 1.4 Philosophical Grounds and Methodologies

### 1.4.1 *Philosophical grounds*

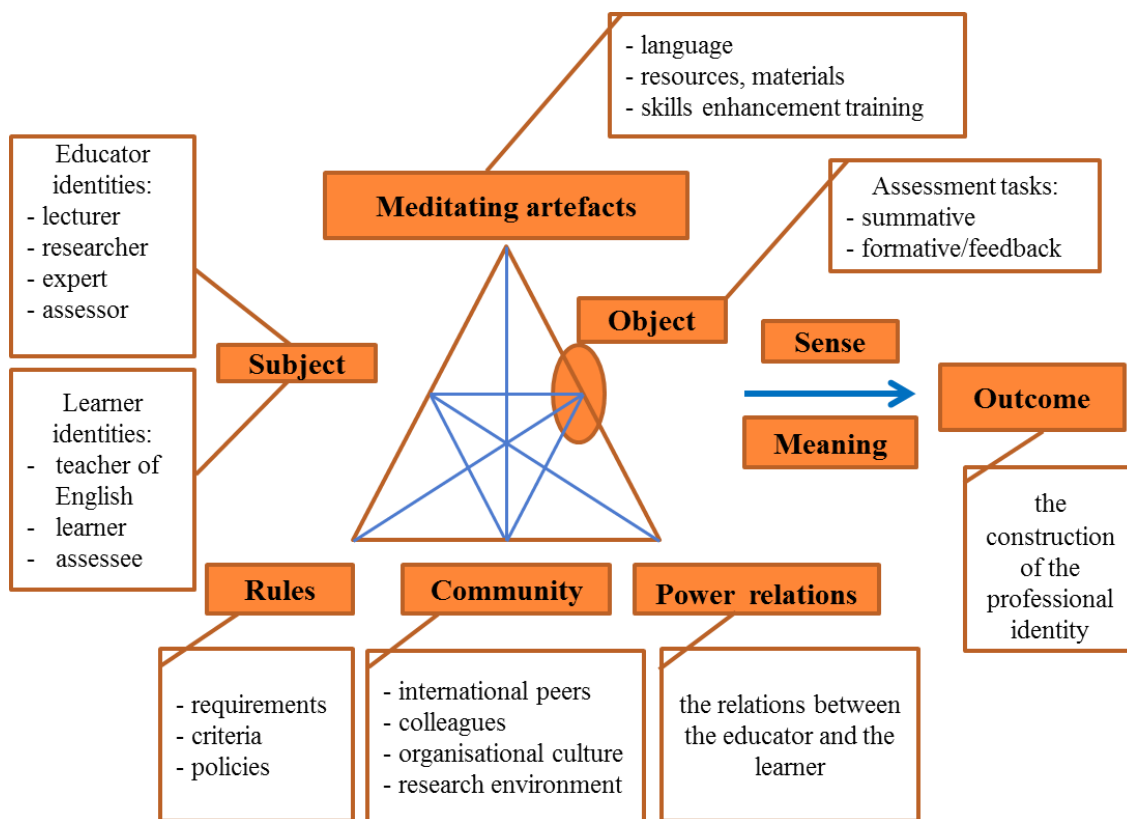
This study is grounded in a broad landscape of social constructivism put forth by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) whose work of sociocultural theory clarifies the strong relationship between cultural, institutional, and historical contexts and mental functioning. This school of thought is anchored by his theory that the learners' participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities influences their psychological development prior to their own internalisation of the impact. Within this paradigm, learning is reconceptualised as “a process of becoming, where the learner identifies within a particular community and learns to participate more fully in its practices, so that learning entails processes of identity construction” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 53).

A crucial development of the sociocultural theory of learning is cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) which sees the activity system as having contradiction and tension at their heart: “Equilibrium is an exception; and tensions, disturbances and local innovations are the rule and engine of change” (Cole and Engeström, 1993, p. 8). The Vietnamese student teachers' engagement in a new assessment process in an international environment is not exempt from that general rule of development. Tension is apparently an integral part of this sojourn study, requiring from them endeavour and investment of resources in order to make “boundary crossing” acts (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 1). This research, therefore, will touch upon such “microgenesis” of problem-solving, adaptation and alignment that mark the “developmental transfer” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13) in their professional identity during their mingling in the new “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998).

### 1.4.2 *Conceptual frameworks*

The two conceptual frameworks to be adopted in this research are developed from the second and third generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system. The first major conceptual framework is a combination of Engeström (1987)'s second generation, Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment, and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression eco-system. It is labelled “the ecological activity system” (**Figure 1**) to reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of the various factors of the international MA-TESOL course and

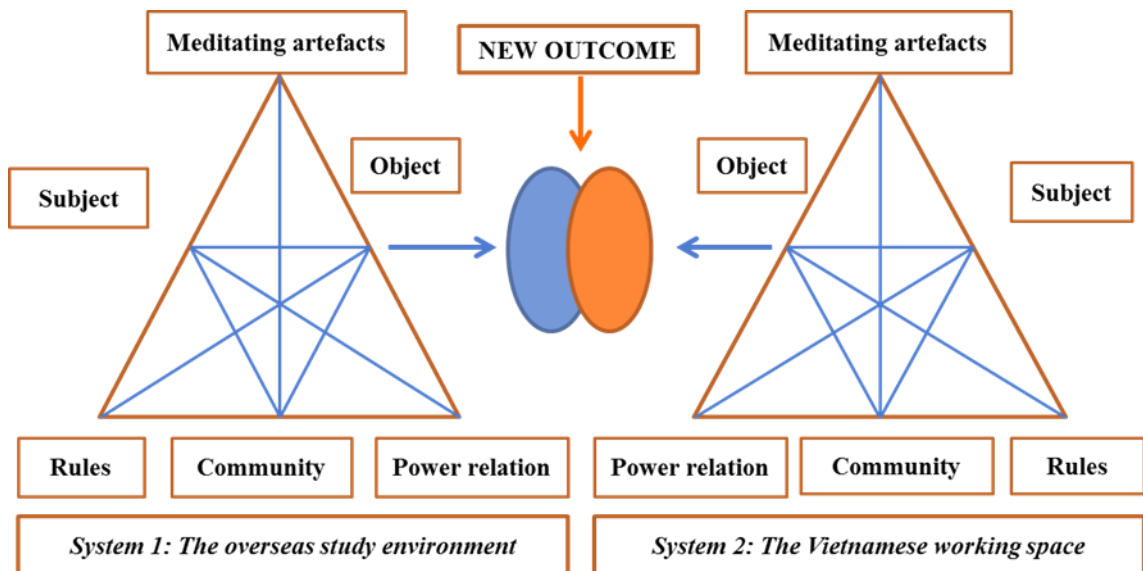
the organic development of the student teacher's identity. Further discussion is to be presented in (3.1.4, p.53).



**Figure 1:** The ecological activity system (the tentative version)

(Adapted from the second generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system, Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s socio-cultural theorisation of formative assessment, and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression eco-system)

The second conceptual framework is utilised to visualise the long-term impact of the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course on their continued career paths (**Figure 2**). It is developed from the third generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system to provide a clear depiction of the interaction between two activity systems in two different contexts: international and national. The rationale for this inclusion lies in the fact that the transposition of the student teachers back to their Vietnamese working spaces is another case of identity renegotiation that may shed light on the far-reaching impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on their career paths. Further discussion is to be presented in (3.1.4, p.53).



**Figure 2:** The interaction of two activity systems (the tentative version)  
 (Adapted from the third generation of Engeström (1987)’s activity system)

### 1.4.3 Research methodologies and epistemological stances

This research is framed as a divergent multiple case study for several reasons. Firstly, a qualitative case study is seen as an appropriate design for a research aiming to address the questions of “how” and “why” in a complex context that cannot be fully explored via surveys or experiments (Yin, 2003). Moreover, this methodology facilitates exploration and explanation of a phenomenon through a variety of lenses with a variety of data sources, allowing for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The multiple cases may enhance a more critical view of a bigger picture illustrated by collaboration and synthesis. Further discussion is to be presented in (3.2, p.58).

Narrative inquiry approach is apparently compatible with this case study methodology and appropriate for this study of identity as the self is, in essence, a “figured self” represented via narrative interpretations and texts that can constantly be revisited and reconstructed (Ricoeur, 1991). Wright (1992) also suggests that the most viable access to the inner self would be along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogues that offers potentials for “the improvement of practice and of how researchers and practitioners might productively relate to one another” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 12).

Employing narrative inquiry to study identity, this research takes the participants’ subjectivity as its first epistemological starting point as “subjectivity stands for granting personal meaning, acknowledging that each human individual has his own outlook on

reality” (Levering, 2006, p. 455). It also implies that their voice is respected and endeavour is to be made to mitigate interference, manipulation, and misinterpretation. Though being subject to prejudices and preferences, the participants’ authentic subjective narratives are highly valued in current social research as they are a means by which “individuals construct themselves and give structure and sense to the world” (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p. 9). It is expected that intentionality or the so-called “moment of intelligibility” will rule out the seeming unreliability of personal encounters and retain the richness of the qualitative data to be collected (Levering, 2006, p. 452).

The second epistemological starting point is inter-subjectivity aiming at shared meanings among the participants and the researcher. Though individually created, the participants’ narratives are shaped by the cultural norms of the community, its traditions and institutions, what Holland *et al.* (1998) describes as a “figured world” and Foucault describes as a “framework for the sense of recognition” (1984, p. 73, cited in Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p.9). Inter-subjectivity is, therefore, “the sphere where each individual uses his own thought to make sense of other people’s thoughts” (Davidson, 1994, p. 58) to form tentative shared patterns of knowledge and understanding.

By and large, the research is framed as a divergent multiple case study and employs narrative inquiry to “understand why things are as they are” (Easton, 2010, p. 119). It takes into account the participants’ subjectivity and aims at achieving inter-subjectivity via a shared pattern of knowledge and understanding. The convincing rationales for the choice of methodologies and epistemological stances are the facts that “the knowledge proffered from a case study is taken to be understood” (Thomas, 2010, p. 23) and inter-subjectivity is more feasible and achievable than objectivity in the strict sense of the word.

## **1.5 Design of the Study**

The dissertation is organised into nine chapters.

The first chapter sketches out a panoramic view of the thesis starting with the social and literature contexts that inspired the researcher to conduct this study. A brief explanation of the philosophical assumptions predetermining the quest for knowledge and the choice

of the research methodologies and epistemological stances is also presented in this chapter. Additionally, the reader may find a map to navigate through the entire thesis with a broad sense of the expected contributions in mind.

Chapter two, the literature review, unpacks two key conceptualisations of the assessment process and the identity and the relation between them. The chapter starts with a brief introduction of the definitions and functions of assessment and its relationship with the curriculum, teaching and learning. It seeks to distinguish among different conceptualisations of identity in general and the professional identity of a TESOL teacher in particular as well as to clarify the developmental and narrative dimensions of the identification process. Research findings regarding the impact of the assessment process on the learner's identity are included to highlight the literature space in which this research is positioned.

The third chapter, the philosophical grounds and research methodologies, investigates Vygotsky (1987)'s sociocultural theory, Engeström and Sannino (2010)'s expansive learning theories and activity systems, Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s socio-cultural theory of formative assessment, and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression eco-system and how they contribute to the development of the "ecological activity system", the major conceptual framework of this study. Information about the research methodologies (multiple case study and narrative inquiry), research design, data collection methods (semi-structured interview and documentary analysis), data analysis tool (thematic analysis), ethical considerations, and criteria of a sound qualitative research can also be found in this chapter.

The research findings for the five research questions are presented in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of the dissertation. The fourth chapter, the context settings, describes two contexts: (1) the antecedent one elaborating the participants' profiles, their backgrounds, and their professional goals and (2) the current one deliberating the assessment tasks and feedback they handle with. Chapter five depicts the short-term impact of the assessment process on the four aspects of their professional identity (as a learner): cognition, affect, behaviour, and socio-culture. Chapter six narrates the impact of other factors of the international MA-TESOL course: the subject, the mediating artefacts, the rules, the community, and the power relations. Chapter seven discusses the long-term impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on

their professional identity (as a TESOL practitioner) in their continued career paths. The achievements and the possible challenges in their readjustment will be the main themes of discussion in this chapter.

Chapter eight, the discussion chapter, revisits the major themes that flow through the data analysis: the interrelation between the assessment process and professional identity, the MA-TESOL course as an ecological activity system, the boundary crossings and expansive learning, and the teacher agency and professional identification and narration. The concluding chapter summarises the conceptual and empirical contributions of the research. Pedagogical implications, outcomes and values for various stakeholders of the international MA-TESOL course are to be proposed to improve assessment regimes and course designs in both local and international institutions. Limitations as well as avenues for further study will leave this dissertation with an open ending.

## **1.6 Contributions of the Study**

As stated in a report by the Higher Education Academy, assessment is a means to assure and express academic standards and “has a vital impact on student behaviour, staff time, university reputations, league tables and, most of all, students’ future lives” (2012, p. 7). Therefore, this research on the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the Vietnamese student teachers’ professional identity can be perceived as an opportunity for, first and foremost, the participants to reflect on their international assessment encounters, internalise the impact on their professional development, and improve their future practice. The prospective MA-TESOL students may also benefit from their predecessors’ experience by avoiding the pitfalls and enhancing good practice.

The research findings may also serve as a valid reference for MA-TESOL course designers, administrators, and lecturers to revisit and improve their course structures and assessment practices for the sake of their students. In the context of internationalisation with fierce competition among key markets of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Carroll and Ryan, 2005), this internationally-situated research may foster a cross-institutional understanding about assessment and the provision of the MA-TESOL courses and

contribute to the development of better-tailored teacher training programmes to cater for the developmental needs of international students and emerging economies.

Within the Vietnamese context, this dissertation will yield a clearer indication of the effectiveness of the international professional development programmes for English teaching staff sponsored by the Vietnamese government and international organisations. The analysis will address questions such as what aspects of the professional identity have been enhanced, whether the student teachers can become the “agents of change” (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 191) to engender contagious effects to their colleagues and have a positive impact on the future generations of students.

## Chapter 2 Assessment and Professional Identity

The fact that assessment is a key in the chain of curriculum, pedagogy, and learner identity has placed it at a “fruitful vantage-point” to view the impact of an education system and its evolution of change (Hounsell *et al.*, 1996, p. i). The first section of this chapter will outline the conceptualisation of assessment, its summative and formative functions, and its relationship with the curriculum, teaching and learning (2.1). The second section will be devoted to explore the concept of identity in general and professional identity of a TESOL teacher in particular as well as the identification process with its developmental and narrative dimensions (2.2). Studies featuring the linkages between assessment and different aspects of the learner’s identity will compose the third section of this chapter (2.3).

### 2.1 The Conceptualisation of Assessment

#### 2.1.1 *Definitions of assessment*

Etymologically, “assessment” roots from the Latin verb *assidere*, which means “to sit beside” (Swaffield, 2011, p. 434) while its twin, “evaluation”, stems from the French verb *évaluer*, a combination of “é” -out- and “valuer” -worth or value-, which means “to find the value of”(Harper, 2001). As assessment and evaluation are inextricably linked, the term assessment in this thesis is holistically conceptualised as a blend of both notions, capturing their pure values of “sitting beside” (formative function) and “finding the value of” (summative function).

Throughout its development, the concept of “assessment” has evolved with various scopes and nuances of meaning, however, its core values remain being an information-based process *both about and for* the learner’s development (Erwin, 1991; Angelo, 1995; Torrance, 1996; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Huba and Freed, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 2001) [*italic added*]. Erwin (1991) defines assessment as a systematic basis for making inferences about the students’ learning and development and increasing them. It resonates in Palomba and Banta (1999)’s conceptualisation of assessment as a systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken to improve student learning and development. Angelo (1995) elaborates this continuous process as to encompass explicating the educators’ expectations; setting

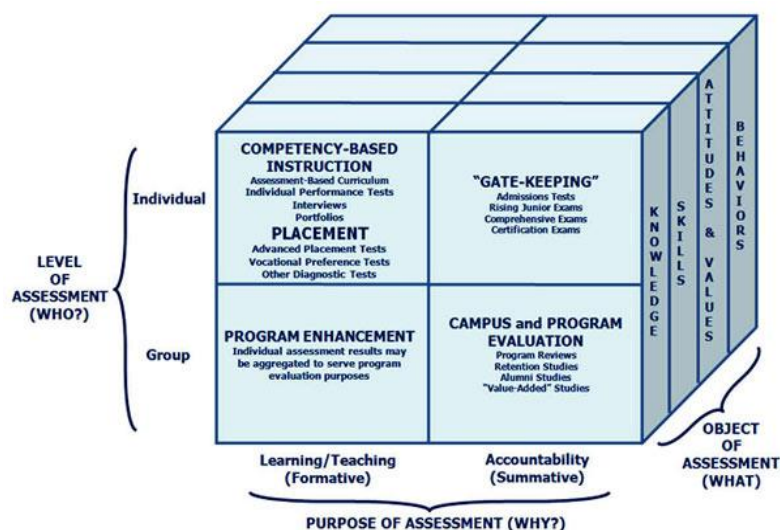


appropriate criteria and standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analysing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance (p. 7). She makes a significant contribution in linking assessment with the macro landscape of the institutional system and drawing the connection between this process and more intangible aspects such as collective attention, assumptions, academic culture, and quality in stating that: “When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of HE” (ibid.).

From a more micro perspective, Huba and Freed (2000) place the learners at the centre of the assessment process, defining it as the gathering and discussing of information from diverse sources to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences. In the same vein, Black and Wiliam (2001) initiate a crucial switch by referring assessment to “all those activities undertaken by teachers, *and by their students in assessing themselves*, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 2) [original italic]. Though not stated in the HE context, their conceptualisations open up an entirely new premise of assessment with the students being on board, having agency, and taking responsibility for the process.

### ***2.1.2 The summative and formative functions of assessment***

In its prolific literature, assessment comes into existence in various forms. Terenzini (1989) proposes an inclusive three-facet model to categorise it in terms of level, object, and purpose (**Figure 3**).



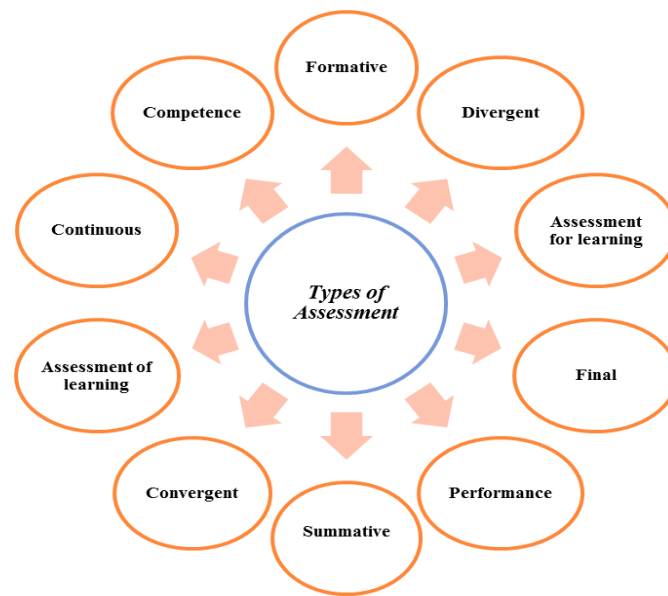
**Figure 3:** A taxonomy of approaches to assessment (Terenzini, 1989)

The fact that the summative and formative division lies at the foundation of the taxonomy reflects its power in grounding the assessment landscape. As its name suggests, summative assessment involves summarising a period of study, measuring performances, generating marks, and accrediting with certifications (Torrance and Pryor, 2002; Price *et al.*, 2010). Meanwhile, formative assessment normally takes place during the teaching and learning process to facilitate students’ understanding regarding their achieved levels of learning, expectations, and standards (Scriven, 1967) though it should necessarily be an evidence-based process:

An assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about student achievement elicited by the assessment is interpreted and used to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better or better founded than the decisions that would have been taken in the absence of that evidence. (Black and Wiliam, 2009, p. 9)

In actuality, it can be safe to state that assessment is never one way or the other but rather a blend of both summative and formative functions with varied proportions in specific cases. The more extended and open-ended forms of assessment in HE such as assignments, projects, and practical activities draw the two functions closer to each other, making the borderline between them flexible and even permeable in most cases. Therefore, this thesis aims at addressing both summative and formative functions of the assessment process in the international MA-TESOL courses but will distinguish written vs. oral form and assessment tasks (“hard power”) vs. feedback (“soft power”) (Nye, 2004). Other concepts in the prolific assessment literature such as assessment of learning/ assessment for learning (Black *et al.*, 2003; Harlen, 2007), convergent/divergent assessment (Torrance and Pryor, 1998), dynamic assessment

(Poehner and Lantolf, 2005), alternative/ performance/ authentic assessment (Balla and Boyle, 1994; Swaffield, 2011), self/ peer assessment (Dochy *et al.*, 1999), continuous/final assessment (Cross and O'Loughlin, 2011), and performance/ competence assessment (Eraut, 1994; Bernstein, 2000) to be mentioned in this dissertation can be clustered around the two poles of formative and summative assessment.

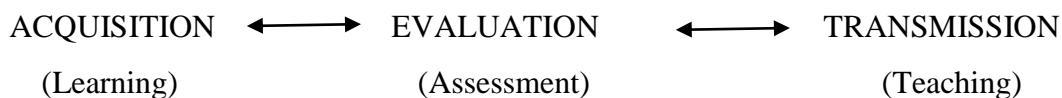


**Figure 4:** Types of assessment

### 2.1.3 *Assessment and its relationship with curriculum, teaching and learning*

It is without exaggeration to state that assessment has the power to shape the identity of an institution by “maintaining the legitimacy of the academy and its procedures” (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000, p. 269). Astin and Antonio (2012) perceive it as a powerful instrument to enhance the three main aims of HE: education, research and public/ community service. Like the constitution of a sovereign nation, assessment policy mainly functions to coalesce other entities of the educational process into a connected and manageable system on assumption that the results are “valuable and significant indicators of educational achievement and quality, and that the overall system can be managed on the basis of such indicators” (Torrance, 1996, p. 148). While curriculum is defined as “a desired goal or set of values that can be activated through a development process culminating in experiences for students” (Wiles and Bondi, 2007, p. 5), assessment can be seen as a bridge routing them to that set of desired goals (Wiliam, 2010).

From the pedagogical perspective, assessment bears a strong relationship with teaching and learning. Bernstein concisely put, “the key to pedagogic practice is continuous evaluation” as “evaluative rules shape any given context of acquisition” (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999, p. 269; Bernstein, 2000, p. 36).



**Figure 5:** The relationship between assessment and teaching and learning (Bernstein, 2000)

Evaluation in its broadest sense is embedded in all pedagogic acts via classroom interaction between and amongst teachers and learners (Shepard, 2000). It sets frames for pedagogy over the selection of communication, sequencing, pacing, and criteria (Bernstein, 2000), and largely influences the quality of teaching and learning via its regulation of the contents and the assessment requirements (Leathwood, 2005). Heywood (2000) adds that it determines whether the students are achieving the required goals and indicates whether changes in instruction ought to be made.

Assessment also “frames learning, creates learning activity and orientates all aspects of learning behaviour” (Bryan and Clegg, 2006, p. 2). It influences the learners’ approaches to learning (Struyven *et al.*, 2005), which can be observed in: “what they attended to, how much work they did and how they went about their studying” (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004, p. 3). Assessment also plays a key role in privileging “learning how to do the learning in a subject – how to think, question, research for evidence, accept evidence, and put evidence together to make an argument that is acceptable in that discipline” (Haggis, 2006, p. 532). However, students’ learning approaches also affect their perceptions of assessment (Struyven *et al.*, 2005) and their responsibility for learning and ownership of learning are required for assessment to be for learning (Crick and Wilson, 2005).

#### **2.1.4 Assessment tasks and feedback**

As Vygotsky (1998, p. 204) emphasises, “education must not measure but interpret students and this can only be accomplished through interaction and cooperation with them” (cited in Poehner and Lantolf, 2005, p. 240), there should not be a division between summative and formative functions of assessment. The assessment process,

therefore, could be more conveniently approached with the distinction between the assessment tasks (the “hard power”) and feedback (the “soft power”) (Nye, 2004).

The term “task” emerged as a fundamental concept in systemic functional linguistics in 1980s (Seedhouse, 1999). Though not having been unanimously defined, a task in language teaching is characterised by several criteria: (1) being a workplan indicating learner activity though a “task-as-workplan” may not match a “task-as-process”; (2) involving a primary focus on meaning, thus incorporating some kind of “gap” that motivates learners to use their resources to bridge it; (3) being authentic in most cases; (4) engaging skills and cognitive processes; and (5) having a clearly defined communicative outcome (Ellis, 2003). These criteria are also observable in most assignments in HE; therefore, the term “assessment task” is adopted in this thesis as a general term to refer to all types of assignments allocated to MA-TESOL students be they examination, test, course work or direct observation (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). Assessment tasks in the MA-TESOL course, however, can be more open-ended, authentic, demanding, and involve the production of a “text” in written or oral form (Hughes, 2009).

Wood (1986) suggests a more theoretical model of tasks consisting of three essential components: products, (required) acts, and information cues, which can be translated into learning outcomes, requirements, and feedback respectively in educational contexts. However, in this research, feedback is separated from the assessment task for a clearer description of the impact. Simply put, it is “any communication that gives some access to other people’s opinions, feelings, thoughts or judgements about one’s own performance” (Eraut, 2006, p. 114). More sophisticatedly, it is defined as “an umbrella concept that captures all *feedback exchanges* generated within the assessment process, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context, being overt or covert (actively and/or passively sought and/or received), and importantly, drawing from a range of sources” (Evans, 2013, p. 71) [original italic].

Meta-analyses conducted by Black and Wiliam (2001) and Evans (2013) yield the same conclusion that appropriate provision of feedback may enhance student learning. Pellegrino *et al.* (2001) explicate that it is essential to “guide, test, challenge or redirect the learner’s thinking” (p.234, cited in Irons, 2010, p. 67). Nelson and Schunn (2009) summarise its three broad functions as: (1) to motivate - influencing beliefs and

willingness to participate, (2) to reinforce - rewarding or punishing specific behaviours, and (3) to inform - changing performance in a particular direction. It is, thus, crucial in facilitating students' development not only in the immediate context of HE but also in their future learning and profession as implied in the notions of *feed-forward* and *feed-up* (Hounsell *et al.*, 2007). Eraut (2006, p. 118) highlights not only its potential in nurturing the students' identity but also the necessity to study this subject further:

When students enter HE . . . the type of feedback they then receive, intentionally or unintentionally, will play an important part in shaping their learning futures. Hence we need to know much more about how their learning, indeed their very sense of professional identity, is shaped by the nature of the feedback they receive.

## **2.2 Professional Identity and its Dimensions**

### **2.2.1 The conceptualisation of identity**

“Identity” or the self has been a major philosophical theme since the early age of human history and has recently become a crucial construct in social research (Wenger, 1998; Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Bernstein, 2000; Ha and Que, 2006; Tsui, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Gu, 2010; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Ushioda, 2011; Fotovatian, 2012; Richards *et al.*, 2012). While Rene Descartes advocates the existence of an isolative internal self, perceivable through justification and reasoning process: “[Dubito, ergo] cogito, ergo sum” (“[I doubt, therefore] I think, therefore I am”) (cited in Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 309), post-modernists emphasise the greater fluidity, multiplicity, and instability of the self on account of its connection with the ever-changing social discourses. Though accepting the existence of an internal core that holds more uniformly across contexts (2000, p. 99), by “identity”, Gee means “being recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context” (*ibid.*). His socio-constructivist conceptualisation implies two fundamental characteristics of identity, multiplicity and contextualisation: “All people have multiple identities connected not to their ‘internal state’ but to their performances in society” (*ibid.*). Accordingly, he proposes four types of identity based on different contexts or “activity systems” they belong (Engeström and Sannino, 2010): (1) nature (a state developed from forces in nature), (2) institution (a position authorised by authorities within institutions), (3) discourse (an individual trait recognised in the discourse of/ with “rational” dialogue individuals), and (4) affinity (experiences shared in the practice of “affinity groups”) (Gee, 2000). However, these

four types could be shrunk into two: the internal/ personal self (nature identity) and the external/social self (institution, discourse, and affinity identity).

The inter-relation between the internal and external self is of interest to many philosophers and educational researchers (Mead, 1934; Wenger, 1998; Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Bernstein, 2000; Hanh, 2013). Beijaard *et al.* (2004) would not conceive the self as a pure intra-psychological process but as a relational phenomenon that reflects the social environment. In the same vein, Bernstein (2000) suggests that such “ascribed” identity with biological referents such as age, gender and race are mitigated resources for the construction of identities under the overwhelming contemporary socio-economic, cultural, and technological influences. Mead (1934) and Wenger (1998) echo that the self can arise only in a social setting where there is social communication in which one learns to assume the roles of others and monitor one’s actions accordingly. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist philosopher, even promotes the emptiness of the inner self and the essential inter-relation between the self and the environment by what he terms the “inter-being”, implying that the self is, in essence, the sum of all its relations with the surroundings (Hanh, 2013). He, however, emphasises that the emptiness of the self should be distinguished from nothingness in the sense that the former has the potential or the capacity to embrace other entities.

To address the inter-relation between the internal and external self, this research approaches the concept of identity in view of Dialogical Self Theory developed by Hermans and colleagues (Hermans and Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 2001; 2002; 2003). This theory is the combination of James (1890)’s I-Me relationships and Bakhtin (1981)’s polyphonic novel. While the I-Me relationship places emphasis on the inner self with such characteristics as continuity, distinctness and volition, the polyphony draws attention on the outer performance of the self in the form of an interpersonal relationship with its multifacetedness, discontinuity, and unfinalisibility (Hermans, 2001). The resulting concept of the I-position implies that “the *I* is always positioned in time and space and not, in any way, hovering above itself or the world” (Hermans, 2003, p. 101). In brief, the dialogical self can be conceived as “a dynamic multiplicity of voiced positions in the landscape of the mind, intertwined as this mind is with the minds of other people” (Hermans, 2003, p. 90).

### **2.2.2 Identification**

On the precondition for identification, Bernstein reasons that the technological, organisational and market contingencies necessitate each individual to possess “the ability to be taught, the ability to respond effectively to concurrent, subsequent, intermittent pedagogics,” which he terms “trainability” (2000, p. 59). This is the ability to profit from continuous pedagogic re-formations and to cope with the new requirements of “work” and “life” (ibid.). He further reasons that in order to respond to a new future, individuals need to have the “capacity” that enables them to project themselves meaningfully rather than relevantly into that future and recover a coherent past. This “capacity” simultaneously is the outcome of a specialised identity formed by the concurrent training and the precedent ability to respond effectively to the subsequent training. Bernstein, therefore, concludes that effective forming and reforming of the identity rests upon something rather than its own process. It rests upon the construction of a specialised identity (ibid.) or a “professional identity” as referred to in this dissertation.

If Bernstein’s constructs of “trainability” and “capacity” are considered necessary conditions for identification, then Norton and Toohey (2011)’s construct of “investment” can be regarded as a sufficient condition. Drawn on Bourdieu and Passeron (1977)’s economic metaphor of “cultural capital” (which refers to knowledge, credentials, and modes of thoughts that characterize different classes and groups), investment is regarded as a sociological construct that seeks to make meaningful connections between learners’ desires and their commitment to learn (and change their identities) (Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 422). They observe that learners “invest” with a belief to acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital or their capacity in Bernstein’s words. The value increase will, in turn, lead the learners to reassess their senses of themselves and their desires for the future (ibid., p. 420).

Beside “trainability”, “capacity” (Bernstein, 2000), and “investment” (Norton and Toohey, 2011), Johnston (1996) mentions the “will to learn” to be at the very heart of the process. This “will to learn” is derived from a person’s sense of deep meaning, or sense of purpose that may lead the energy to act on what is meaningful and to invest effort in learning (cited in Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003, p. 174). This process also involves a form of consciousness characterised by particular values, attitudes, and



dispositions, termed “learning power” (Deakin Crick, 2007, p. 135) with a lateral and a temporal connectivity to what is of self-worth and what sorts of core values the learning communities espouse (Crick and Wilson, 2005, p. 359).

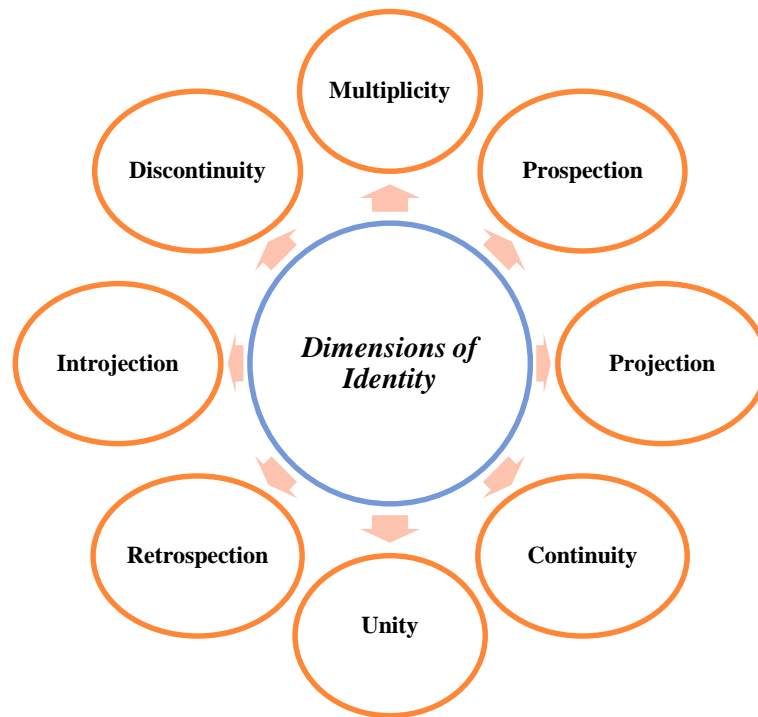
Identification, in a normative approach (Biesta and Tedder, 2007), is associated with the process of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) or the process of coming to know (Barnett, 2009) in which the learners utilize their “learning power” (Deakin Crick, 2007, p. 135), “will to learn” (Johnston, 1996), “trainability” (Bernstein, 2000), and “investment” (Norton and Toohey, 2011) to develop their “capacity” (Bernstein, 2000). This process of becoming is known to be associated with knowledge as a deep and personal encounter with it calls for and helps to nourish and shape certain esteemed dispositions and qualities (Barnett, 2009) or “epistemic virtues” (Brady and Pritchard, 2003).

Identity, however, does not evolve in a vacuum, the empirical approach (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) signifies that it is also determined by the ecology the learners emerge in. This ecological view implies that identity or agency should be conceived as “something that has to be *achieved* in and through *engagement* with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action” (ibid., p. 136) [*italic added*]. This understanding highlights the interaction between the individuals and the context-for-action as they “always act *by means* of an environment rather than simply in an environment” (ibid., p. 137) [*original italic*]. In other words, it acknowledges the influences of economic, cultural and social resources within a particular ecology on the process of identification (Bernstein, 2000; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Hanh, 2013). With this ecological view, identity resembles agency in the sense that it is “a matter of personal capacity to act, combined with the contingencies of the environment within which such action occurs” (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 196).

### **2.2.3 *Dimensions of identity and identification***

The following section will mention various dimensions of identity as discussed by prominent authors of the field with the dialogical lens and an awareness of cultural differences (James, 1890; Bakhtin, 1981; Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Bernstein, 2000; Hermans, 2003; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Ha, 2007; Barnett, 2009; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). The discussion highlights two developmental dimensions of the identity: multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011) and

two narrative dimensions: retrospection vs. prospection and projection vs. introjection (Bernstein, 2000).



**Figure 6:** Dimensions of identity

Multiplicity lies at the centre of the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans and Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 2001; 2002; 2003). In Bakhtin (1981)’s viewpoint, “we continually come into being in relation to each other and that we live in worlds and communities, however fleeting, of our own dialogic making” (cited in Irving and Young, 2002, p. 27). His view of the “polyphony” (multi-voicedness) within a dialogic relationship has revitalised the concept of identity, making it a flexible, fluid, and exuberant notion. The *I* is empowered to move in time and space and fluctuate among different and even opposed positions, resulting in a continuously (re)constructed and (re)negotiated identity (Hermans, 2003). This multi-voicedness, on the one hand, allows a flexible and diverse view of identity in the self-other relation (Irving and Young, 2002, p. 24); on the other hand, it makes the concept of identity highly fragile, fragmented, and even contradictory.

Meanwhile, Vietnamese social researchers appear to advocate James (1890)’s notion of the unity of identity. Identity is expressed in relatively stable, communal or shared concepts such as national identity, cultural identity, and the notion of the “root” that signifies the importance of substantial socio-cultural and historical influences on the growth of each individual in the community (Ha, 2007, p. 22). There is also a sense of

belonging, continuity, and inflexibility attached to this metaphor. On the upside, this view of identity values collectivism, unity, and unified strength; on the downside, it might signify backwardness, stagnation, and faded individuality.

In an attempt to reconcile the seeming paradox between multiplicity and unity, this research takes the view that professional identity is a relatively consistent construct in progress, evolving from the interpretation and reinterpretation of the student teachers' varied encounters, a case of multiplicity in unity (William Stern's *unitas multiplex* as mentioned in Hermans (2001)). This view stems from a natural desire of people to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of self (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 312), which resides in the continuous attempt to synthesize its different parts to form the "inter-being" (Hanh, 2013). "The self can be seen as a synthesizing activity, that is, as a continuous attempt to make the self a whole, despite the existence of parts that try to maintain or even to increase their relative autonomy" (Hermans and Kempen, 1993, p. 93).

Another dimension of identity/ identification highlighted by Beijaard *et al.* (2004) is discontinuity in continuity as identity is perceived as a relational phenomenon, an answer to the recurrent question: "Who am I at this moment?" (p. 108). Identity as such involves shifting from moment to moment and context to context amidst the cultural complexity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), resulting in its fluidity, mobility, dynamism, and instability. Kegan and Lahey (2001) claim that a growth into and out of several qualitatively different views of the world is deemed necessary if an individual is to master the challenges of his life experiences (p. 91). Identity, therefore, is described as "an evolving yet coherent being, that consciously and unconsciously constructs and is constructed, reconstructs and is reconstructed, in interaction with the cultural contexts, institutions, and people with which the self lives, learns, and functions" (Rodgers and Scott, 2008, p. 739). In other words, there is a state of "being" within the process of "becoming" (Ha, 2007, p. 22), and it involves both "what is developing" and "how it is being developed" (Leat, 1999, p. 390).

The identification process, hence, is analogous to a "construct" (Leat, 1999, p. 387), a "trajectory" (Gee, 2000, p. 111) or a path that encompasses various beginnings and endings with all the diversion, stagnation, and progression (Illeris, 2014). Its continuation or status-quo is maintained by a distinct, volitional *I* (James (1890) cited in

Hermans, 2001) and an “immunity to change” (Kegan and Lahey, 2001, p. 79) whereas its momentum is gained “through the work of institutions, discourse and dialogue, or affinity groups” (Gee, 2000, p. 110).

In brief, this view of identification as a case of multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011) is a conciliation between the traditional and Vietnamese view of identity as “natural” and “possessed” and the post-structural view of identity as being “socially constructed” and continually developing through social activities (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). As mentioned in (1.4.3, p.18), identity comes into being via narratives. The following discusses two dimensions to narrate identity: retrospection vs. prospection and projection vs. introjection (Bernstein, 2000).

Retrospection, a backward view, is directed towards religious, national, cultural, and grand narratives of the past which are then appropriately recontextualised to stabilise that past in the future (Bernstein, 2000, p. 67). These collective social bases can be forcefully foregrounded in the construction of identity with exemplars, criteria, belonging, coherence as well as stereotypes and assumptions. In pedagogy, for example, retrospection may involve manners of education and upbringing, past teaching and learning experiences, research findings, institutional regulations, and social expectations (ibid.).

Prospection, a forward view, is also grounded in the past, but with a future focus “to deal *with cultural, economic, and technological change*” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 67) [original emphasis]. Prospection is made by “recontextualising selected features from the past to stabilise the future through engaging with contemporary change” (ibid.). The resulting identities are essentially future and output oriented (ibid., p. 76) and may include elements of imagination (Wenger, 1998), new fusion, and visualisation evolved from certain past narratives. The identities of becoming, however, are prone to heresy, pollution and waywardness, which require close supervision and delicate monitoring before recognition of authenticity and licensing (Bernstein, 2000, p. 76).

If retrospection and prospection expand over a large time scale in a grand context, projection and introjection tend to be confined to the temporary and local one. Projection, is directed outward towards what Bernstein terms “market resources” whereas introjection is inward towards sense-making resources to create internal

coherence. “This projection relays to self and others the spatial and temporal attributes of the identity; that is, it is what, where, who, and progression” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 73). It is characterised by temporal and contingent realisations, permeable boundaries both in time and space, and probable inconsistency among the past, the present, and the future. In an introjection into the internal local resources, the self is regarded as a personal project, an internally regulated construction and relatively independent of external consumer signifiers. It is a truly symbolic construction as the identity takes the form of an open narrative which constructs a personal time (ibid.).

#### **2.2.4 *The professional identity of a TESOL teacher***

In a more confined context of pedagogy, the concept of identity is interchangeably collocated in “pedagogic identity” (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999; Bernstein, 2000), “teacher identity” (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Ha and Que, 2006; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), and “professional identity” (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Bathmaker and Avis, 2005; Rodgers and Scott, 2008). The term “pedagogic identity” was introduced as early as 1971 by Bernstein in his paper, the “*Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge*” to denote the “subjective consequences of pedagogic discursive specialisation (e.g. as a biologist, physicist, etc.)”, which is “the result of embedding a career in a collective base” (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999, p. 270; Bernstein, 2000, p. 66). In that conceptualisation, the career encompasses a knowledge, a moral, and a location facet and the collective base refers to the principles of social order expected to be relayed in educational institutions and institutionalised by states (Bernstein, 2000). This definition of pedagogic identity also highlights the inter-relation between the internal self and the external contexts or the inter-being nature of the self (Gee, 2000; Hermans, 2003; Hanh, 2013). The external contexts, known as contemporary resources or the ecology, is highlighted as of significance in the construction of the belonging and the recognition of the self and others (what I am, where, with whom and when) (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999, p. 272).

The term “teacher identity” is more simply defined as how the teachers perceive themselves as teachers and what factors contribute to their perceptions (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000, p. 749). It involves questions like “who am I as a teacher?”, “who do I want to become?” (Kelchtermans and Hamilton, 2004; Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005) and is concerned with core values, scarce resources, specialised (and possibly scientific) educational backgrounds that presuppose an efficient application of knowledge, a

secured practical and theoretical expertise and a sense of ethical values “regardless of person” (Siegrist, 1994, pp. 3-4). Shulman and Shulman (2004), however, draw more attention to the social engagement of the teacher by associating an accomplished teacher with “a member of a professional community who is ready, willing, and able *to teach and to learn* from his or her teaching experiences” (p. 259) [italic added].

The term “professional identity” is, therefore, closely related to professional development, which is defined as a process of obtaining the skills, qualifications, experience and expertise for both personal development and career advancement (Macmillan dictionary, dictionary.com, Wikipedia). With more insights, McGill and Beaty (2001) in *Action Learning*, define it as an attitude evolution which may result in more effective action:

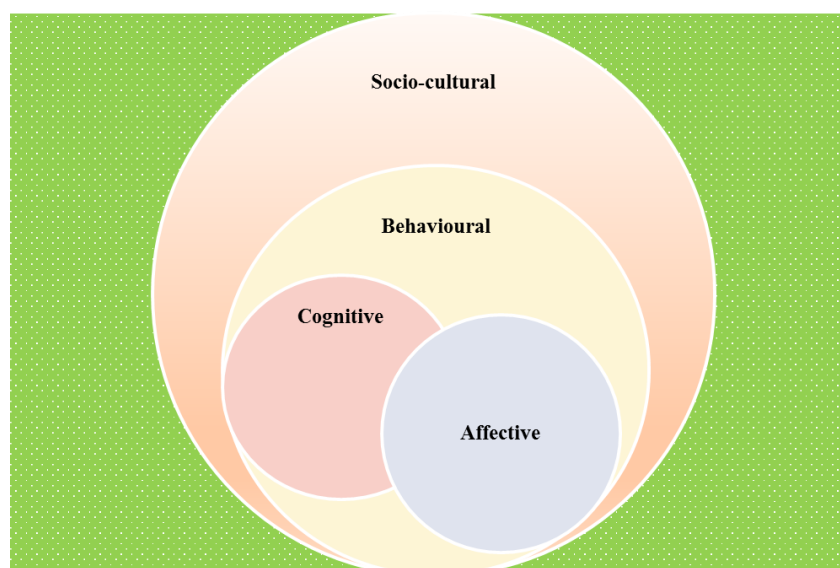
Professional development is the nurturing of an attitude to life and work which promotes a responsible, creative and proactive approach. The development of an individual with a professional approach goes beyond knowledge and skills to the core of personal growth and the ability to harness this growth into more effective action. It acknowledges that this development is never complete, there is always more one can learn about oneself and the complexity of the world in which we live. (ibid. , p. 185)

It could be inferred from the above definition that professional development goes beyond learning to “know how to” and extends to learning “to be someone who” (Kelchtermans and Hamilton, 2004, p. 785). The shaping of a professional identity, therefore, involves the student teachers’ lived experience to regulate and manage moral, cultural and economic changes and theories of personal, cognitive and social development which are mostly unconscious to the learners (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 66-68). Beijaard *et al.* (2004) highlights that this process is often presented as a struggle, because they have to make sense of varying and sometimes competing perspectives, expectations, and roles that they have to confront and adapt to (p. 115).

In the field of TESOL, professionalism is more concretely associated with the possession of a master’s degree or a TESOL teaching certificate (Norton and Nunan, 2002; Lin, 2010; TESOL International Association, nd.-a). Professional TESOL practitioners are conceived as the ones with specialized knowledge of linguistics, education (or some other related fields), advanced pedagogical training, and *ethics* with which they carry themselves while performing a service (Clayton, 1990, p. 29) [original italic]. Officially, the TESOL International Association defines TESOL professionals as the ones who *enhance* [italic added] their career through activities such as developing

materials, administrating programmes, being an active member in a professional organization, conducting language research, presenting papers at conferences and seminars, writing for professional publications, and advancing academically by pursuing postgraduate degrees and becoming lifelong learners (TESOL International Association, nd.-b). In other words, TESOL professional identity is associated with how the teachers construct their professional roles among those of a course instructor, a researcher, an assessor/examiner, a course designer, an administrator, and a life-long learner to name but a few.

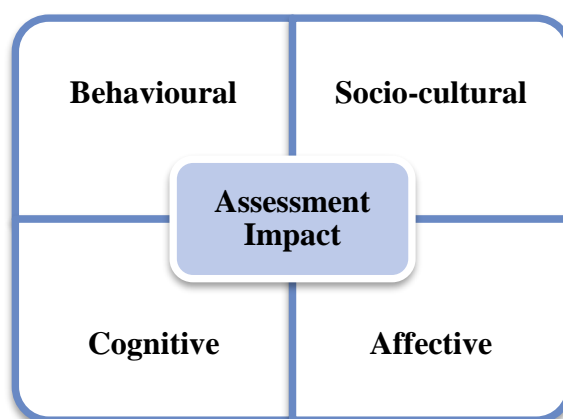
The professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers, however, experienced a transformative process during the international MA-TESOL course. Therefore, during their study stage when they have not undertaken specific professional roles, their professional identity will be analysed in four aspects: cognition, affect, behaviour, and socio-culture. This quadruple model is an adaptation from a similar research about the impact of IELTS on the learner's identity that addresses three facets: intra-personal identity and knowledge, socio-historical constructions of self(ves), and construction of self(ves) in relation to significant others (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007). It takes into consideration the works of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Leat (1993), Astin (1999), Coleman (2001), and Poehner and Lantolf (2005) who mentioned various aspects of competences and learner development. This elastic model is purported to capture both the internal core (the cognitive and affective) and the external representation (the behaviour and socio-cultural) of the identity when it is subject to the participants' interpretations.



**Figure 7:** A quadruple model of professional identity (learning stage)

## 2.3 The Impact of Assessment on the Learner's Identity

Though its consequences are extremely complex to judge (Rea-Dickins and Scott, 2007), assessment has been mentioned to influence different but related facets of the learner's identity such as learning approach, motivation, anxiety, and the sense of success and failure (Hanson, 1993; Black and Wiliam, 2001; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003; Struyven *et al.*, 2005; Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007; Crossouard and Pryor, 2008; Joughin, 2010; Coutts *et al.*, 2011; Dowden *et al.*, 2011; Evans, 2013). As the term "identity" has not been widely used in assessment literature, the following discussion will highlight the impact in relation to the four aspects of identity: the cognitive, affective, behavioural, and socio-cultural as discussed in the previous section. As this field of study is rather under-researched, this review will incorporate studies conducted at various levels of the education system, yet more focus is placed on HE contexts.



**Figure 8:** A quadruple model of assessment impact

### 2.3.1 *The cognitive impact*

There is ample literature featuring either the strong influence of assessment or the lack of it on the breadth and depth of student's learning, their approach to study, and retention. Amrein and Berliner (2003)'s archival time-series analysis using the data of 18 states on four well-respected student achievement measures: the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), the ACT (American College Test), the AP (Advanced Placement) tests, and the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) asserts that high-stakes testing programmes negatively affect the breadth and depth of student learning by narrowing the curriculum and abusing drill activities tied to the state tests. The comparison of each state's data on each summative assessment tool against the national



data yields no measurable improvement in student learning but a much stronger account that “high-stakes testing policies hurt student learning instead of helping it” (ibid., p. 35).

On the contrary, Black and Wiliam (1998)’s extensive review of 250 published studies yields an impactful conclusion that formative assessment does improve student learning with an impressive yet challenged effect size of 0.4. Moreover, many of the reviewed studies conclude that appropriately communicated formative assessment has positive impact on low achievers in particular, as “it concentrates on specific problems with their work, and gives them both a clear understanding of what is wrong and achievable targets for putting it right” (Black and Wiliam, 2001, p. 6). Thus, formative assessment is envisaged to reduce the gap between high and low-achieving students and raise overall achievement.

From a more holistic perspective, Sambell *et al.* (1997) report on a two and a half year longitudinal project on the consequential validity of both traditional and alternative assessment methods on student learning. The study hails a triumph of alternative assessment methods (open-book exams, projects, peer assessment, and group assignments) over traditional ones (multiple choice testing and essay question exams) in long-term retention, educational worth, fairness, and channelling students’ effort to achieve deep learning. The interviewed students voiced that more potential high-quality level of learning is associated with alternative assessment; however, this also implies that the assessment tasks can be more demanding and require far more motivation and time and effort investment to accomplish (Sambell *et al.*, 1997, p. 359). Alternative assessment is also addressed as meaningful and worthwhile with the potential to measure would-be-transferable qualities, skills and competences and encourage and reward genuine learning achievements (ibid., p. 365).

In Slater (1996)’s more focused study, the students praise portfolio assessment, a form of continuous assessment. They believe that it fosters learning and retention better than other assessment formats as they could apply concepts creatively and extensively, internalise, and think deeply over the duration of the course. Klenowski *et al.* (2006)’s investigation into the educational impact of “the learning portfolio” on the students’ professional development shows that the course participants are enabled to understand the learning process itself (the purposes and the effects of context, emotional, and social

elements) and how others have made use of portfolio for learning (ibid., p. 278). As a consequence, the participants become more aware of their own learning through a process of meta-learning and they are able to support others' learning, which makes the learning portfolio an effective form of professional development (ibid.).

On the less bright side, Sadler (1989) observes that good quality teacher feedback does not necessarily result in student development:

... the common but puzzling observation that even when teachers provide students with valid and reliable judgements about the quality of their work, improvement does not necessarily follow. Students often show little or no...development despite regular, accurate feedback. (Sadler, 1989, p. 119)

He further explains that autonomy is required for their improvement. The students must develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work, the appreciation of what high quality work is, the evaluative skill to objectively compare the quality of their work against the higher standard, and a store of tactics or moves for modification if necessary (ibid.).

Norton (2007)'s case study, however, shows positive signs that assessment using Psychology Applied Learning Scenarios (PALS) may discourage students from taking a mark-orientated approach and equip them with the power of knowledge to apply into authentic situations. The entire learning experience was designed upon the combination of a team presentation of a PALS case and a 3000-word essay exploring that case in greater depth and using the assessment as learning criteria. Such criteria as the use of up-to-date journals, the critical evaluation of research methods, and the appropriateness of the selected PALS case were reinforced in the team presentation with resource sharing and further feedback from the peers and lecturer. This study is an exemplary case of how assessment can be blended into teaching and learning to create positive learning outcomes.

### **2.3.2 *The affective impact***

It is a common occurrence that assessment impacts the learners' moods, their victorious moment and haunted despair as they make an emotional investment in it and expect some "return" (Higgins *et al.*, 2001, p. 272). Despite its discernible emotional attachment, this aspect of the assessment consequence has hardly been elaborated in

literature, evidenced by merely 19 relevant studies in a review on the impact of summative assessment on motivation for learning (Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003).

Assessment is alleged to inherently induce stress and tension. Coutts *et al.* (2011)'s quantitative search (n=137) using the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory and the Brunel Mood Scale provides concrete evidence about its impact on mood and motivation of first-year students. Most significantly, they found a time coincidence between the major changes in mood and the greatest number of due assessment items in week seven. The increasing amount of assessment is alleged to be associated with an increase in negative moods such as tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion and a decrease in positive mood of vigour and intrinsic motivation such as interest/enjoyment and perceived competence.

Their claim is supported by the participants in Drew (2001)'s study who viewed the pressure of coursework, the fear of failure, confusion, being overwhelmed and even "bogged down" with crowded deadlines as the downsides of assessment on their emotion. They, however, viewed effective feedback as being critical to build their self-confidence, helping them with self-evaluation and being a powerful motivator, a major propellant for learning. Yet, the extent of affective impact on mature students depends heavily on their self-esteem (Young, 2000): "There is a tendency for students with low self-esteem to take any comment as an indictment of themselves; high self-esteem students see the comments as bearing on their work only" (*ibid.*, p. 414).

Most noticeably, the reciprocal relation between test and anxiety called "test anxiety" has been the theme of discussion by many assessment researchers at different levels of the education system (Wine, 1971; McDonald, 2001; Norton *et al.*, 2001). It appears as if test anxiety is a chronic syndrome. McDonald (2001)'s review yields considerable evidence of the prevalence of fear and its detrimental effect on the children's performance in compulsory tests. Pollard *et al.* (2000) argue that the anxiety that the pupils felt might be a consequence of being exposed to greater risk as performance is attributed with higher stakes by the teachers. In HE, Joughin (2007) and Huxham *et al.* (2010) reach a conclusion that oral assessment might induce more anxiety than written assessment as the former is associated with a richer conception of the oral task, a deeper understanding and a need to explain to others. While Joughin (2007) attributes that

anxiety to the relative lack of experience in oral assessment, many students think that it is more useful than written assessment (Huxham *et al.*, 2010).

On the bright side, if appropriately conducted, assessment is a salient tool to empower the learners (Leach *et al.*, 2001). By using a version of criterion referencing for the learners to select the evidence they will present in portfolios, allowing them to choose and/or negotiate the criteria, and giving them the opportunity to assess their own work and contribute to their grades in a negotiated process, the research group was able to design an assessment regime that balances between the obligation to the society-at-large and the need to respect individual and cultural differences. Though the impact varied due to the learners' different perceptions of assessment and the power relations between them and the teachers, several plausible empowerment influences were observed such as their decision-making, control over self-assessment, judgement of issues, challenge and resistance to hegemonic ideas, establishment of criteria, and affirmation of knowledge.

### **2.3.3 *The behavioural impact***

The “carrot and stick” analogy is a clear indication of how reward and punishment may induce behaviours in education. As mentioned in the cognitive impact, assessment exerts powerful influences on the learners' approach to learning, be it deep, surface or strategic (Marton and Saljo, 1976). Whether they become active or passive is largely determined by assessment. While many traditional types of exams such as multiple choice questions encourage a surface and passive approach (Scouller, 1998; Amrein and Berliner, 2002), alternative types such as assignment essays, problem-based tasks, and e-portfolios are argued to activate student learning (Sluijsmans *et al.*, 2001; Savin-Baden, 2004; Klenowski *et al.*, 2006).

Sluijsmans *et al.* (2001)'s quantitative research indicates that peer assessment stimulates deep learning and critical thinking in a problem-based learning environment. The authenticity of the problem tasks may stimulate active participation in discussion and problem solving, requiring the students to activate their prior knowledge and connect it with other knowledge domains. However, the complex assessment mechanisms in problem-based learning may disempower them when their group work is undervalued or their learning is unrewarded (Savin-Baden, 2004).

In a substantially large-scale research on how well norm-referenced standardised tests (GRE, NTE, MCAT, and LSAT) capture what was actually occurring in student development, involving more than 24,000 learners, 20,000 faculty members at 217 baccalaureate-granting institutions, using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Astin (1999) found that the amount of interaction between students and faculty and the frequency with which the student interacted with other students positively affect the behavioural outcome measures. Though the amount of “time on task” shows no effect on test scores, it shows significant positive effects on all three behavioural outcomes (ibid., pp. 166-167).

Norton *et al.* (2001), on the other hand, point out that contrary to the designer’s intention of creating a fair, reliable, consistent and just system, assessment in actuality can encourage strategic learning, promote competitiveness, and shift students’ focus on the possibly assessed contents at the expense of those that are not. Their research on the “rules of the game” indicates that some students adopt certain tactics, be it plagiarism or cheating, in their essays for the sake of getting higher marks (ibid., p. 269).

#### **2.3.4 *The socio-cultural impact***

The socio-cultural impact of assessment is implicitly and explicitly observable though literature covering this theme is sparse. Since the early history, written assessment has been used for meritocratic selection to recruit government officials and create a good society with the Chinese claiming to be the first to use anonymous examinations to safeguard fairness (Lee, 2000). It has also been an effective and powerful tool for social stratification, placing school leavers and graduates in different positions in the world of work and life. The fact that their future career and earnings potentials as well as health, status, and self-esteem can all be affected by degree results has made assessment an influential extrinsic motivation for them. Various examples of using the test scores to select personnel for key positions, to send people to the armed forces, to judge their competencies or professionalism (Hanson, 1993; Amrein and Berliner, 2003; Leathwood, 2005; Tran *et al.*, 2010) have illustrated the fact that “the issues of power are at stake when assessment takes place” (Torrance and Pryor, 2002, p. 67).

In an egalitarian “learning society”, the issues of assessment power may be more levelled since Broadfoot emphasises the social role of assessment as follows:

Indeed, we need urgently to engage with its role as a “social process” that affects intimately and often forever the quality of an individual’s capacity to learn. We need too to recognise assessment as a social product, in which the values and the traditions of particular cultures and the interests of specific groups within them combine to produce particular definitions of quality and merit. [...], we need to recognise the potential for assessment to be a powerful positive force in supporting life-long learning provided its role as part of the process of teaching and learning is properly understood. (2000, p. xii)

While the pace of the world changing is not just continuing but accelerating, life-long learning has been placed on the education policies of many countries as a needed quality of international citizenship (Crick and Wilson, 2005). The production of confident, independent, and autonomous students to sustain that learning society may largely depend on the assessment regime of each nation and institution (Taras, 2002).

### **2.3.5 Assessment and identity**

The previous parts have presented the assessment consequences on four different aspects of the learner’s identity. This section will cover a more limited number of studies that explicitly use the term “identity” (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007; Pryor and Crossouard, 2010) or the equivalents such as “functioning” (Astin, 1999) and “learning career” (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003).

Though not using the term “identity”, Astin (1999) highlights that students in HE should be regarded as “fully functioning organisms”; the ideal purpose of education in general and assessment in particular, therefore, is to enhance their functioning and develop their talents. Enhancement and its relation with confidence is eloquently explained by Bernstein (2000) as follows:

Enhancement is not simply the right to be more personally, more intellectually, more socially, more materially, it is the right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities. I want to suggest that this right is the condition for confidence. Where that right is not met then neither students nor teachers will have confidence, and without confidence it is difficult to act. This right is a condition for confidence, and operates at an individual level. (*ibid.* p. xx)

In actuality, Reay and Wiliam (1999)’s qualitative research provides convincing evidence that the National Curriculum assessment had undesirable impact on the identity of ten and eleven-year-old students such as anxiety and struggles to meet the requirements imposed by the school and the teachers. Test scores became a primary tool for the learners to label themselves and their friends, a solid judgement of their intelligence or the lack of it.

In a narrative study on the affective and academic impact of the IELTS examination on the students embarking on their postgraduate study in Britain, Rea-Dickins *et al.* (2007) highlight its impact on the construction of their linguistic identities in response to new learning challenges. From the complex narratives emerged several significant messages related to assessment and identity: (1) the IELTS profile is a significant identity factor for all the participants, the scores and achievement affect their engagement in learning: either perseverance or isolation; (2) there is a fairly consistent link between IELTS profiles and success in academic study amid many other factors; (3) the students experienced a clash between their imagined and performed identities, between the safe and stable versus the new and uncertain self in their emerging identity; and (4) all that affects their negotiation of community membership: either acceptance and welcome or rejection, disappointment, and loss of self-esteem.

Ecclestone and Pryor (2003)'s study on the possible impact of the "assessment career" on the young learners' "learning career" offers several insights into how assessment practice, particularly formative assessment, affect their identities and dispositions for learning. They highlight two typical strategies applied by low and high achievers: low-risk or "play safe" and acting beyond their comfort zone. Their significant conclusion is that the GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) assessment regime continues to shape young people's perceptions of their own and their peers' identity developed in compulsory schooling but it also shapes new ideas about desirable or acceptable involvement in formative assessment activities (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003, p. 481). They also suggest that formative and summative assessment should be viewed as emotional events where one's very sense of self might be invested for a possible risk of failure (*ibid.*).

In a more recent in-depth research in the context of a part-time Professional Doctorate in Education programme, Crossouard and Pryor (2008) advocate a sociocultural conceptualisation of formative assessment and encourage postgraduate students to view their learning as entailing the development of new identities as researchers. In doing so, they created an instructional environment with online and face-to-face discussion forum and email feedback that allows spaces for students' legitimate peripheral participation. This model facilitates learning and identity construction via a supportive research culture with critical peer and tutor networks, which diversifies the feedback channels that the students might approach and creates a platform for them to present their

discourse identities. Despite its attractiveness, there remain certain downsides such as its time-consuming and demanding nature and the challenge to be inclusive in a heterogeneous postgraduate environment.

## 2.4 Summary

The literature review on the assessment process and professional identity has acknowledged the works of various researchers on three main themes: (1) the conceptualisation of assessment, (2) the (professional) identity and its development, and (3) the impact of assessment on the learner's identity. Assessment in this dissertation is characterised by four main features: (i) an encompassing concept with both formative and summative functions (Scriven, 1967; Terenzini, 1989), (ii) a longitudinal information-based process both about and for the learner's development (Erwin, 1991; Angelo, 1995; Torrance, 1996; Black and Wiliam, 2001), (iii) its agency being expanded to encompass the educators, the peers, and the students themselves (Huba and Freed, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 2001), and (iv) being mingled in the process of teaching, learning, and the curriculum (Bernstein, 2000; Heywood, 2000).

Identity is conceptualised as “an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life” (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 315). The radical shift in thinking in terms of either/or towards both/and characterised by Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans and Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 2001; Hermans, 2002; Hermans, 2003) has united the seemingly paradoxical dimensions of identity into multiplicity in unity, discontinuity in continuity, retrospection vs. prospection, and introjection vs. projection. Identification is determined by the “capacity” (Bernstein, 2000; Hanh, 2013) to absorb like a hardware memory, made feasible by “trainability” (Bernstein, 2000), “will to learn” (Johnston, 1996), “learning power” (Deakin Crick, 2007, p. 135), and “investment” (Norton and Toohey, 2011). This process of identification is largely analogous to the process of gaining “agency” (Biesta and Tedder, 2006; Biesta and Tedder, 2007) and is substantially influenced by other external factors of the activity system/ the ecology that the learner belongs to (Engeström, 1987; Gee, 2000; Priestley *et al.*, 2012; Hanh, 2013).



Professional identity is conceptualized as “the result of embedding a career in a collective base” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 66) which resonates the “inter-being” nature of identity (Hanh, 2013) and the significance of both the teacher agency and the ecology (Priestley *et al.*, 2012). Professional development, therefore, goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to involve attitude change as well as a search for ethics and a philosophy of teaching and learning (McGill and Beaty, 2001). A TESOL professional is more specifically conceptualised as the one who enhances their professionalism in various academic roles (TESOL International Association, nd.-b). However, during the MA-TESOL course, the Vietnamese student teachers experienced a transition, their identity under construction will be analysed based on the quadruple model with cognitive, affective, behavioural, and socio-cultural aspects; after their graduation, their professional identity will be associated with the prominent academic roles that they undertake.

As this research primarily focuses on the impact of the assessment process during the study stage, the last section of this chapter has elaborated its impact on four major aspects of the learner’s identity: cognition (learning, achievement, and retention); affect (tension, test anxiety, motivation, and empowerment); behaviour (active or passive learning, participation, and cheating); and socio-culture (selection, social status, inclusion, and lifelong learning). It also reviewed a limited volume of studies that discuss the impact of assessment on the learner’s identity (Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003; Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007; Crossouard and Pryor, 2008). The panoramic view can be daunting at times, however, there are promising signs that appropriate assessment may guarantee motivation, empowerment, and positive identity development.

## **Chapter 3 Philosophical Grounds and Research Methodologies**

This chapter consists of four main inter-related sections: the philosophical underpinnings and the conceptual frameworks (3.1), the research methodologies (3.2), the research design (3.3), and the criteria of a sound qualitative research (3.4). The philosophical underpinnings are a thread of development from social constructivism, sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2001) to theories of expansive learning (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). They lay a solid foundation for the construction of the ecological conceptual frameworks from Engeström (1987)'s second and third generation of the activity system, Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment, and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression ecosystem. The ecological conceptual frameworks in turn function as the backbones for the research design and the data analysis. The research methodologies will elaborate the rationales, the practicalities, and the limitations of using a divergent multiple case study and narrative inquiry. The research design will elaborate on data collection instruments (documentary review and semi-structured interview), data analysis method (thematic analysis), and ethical considerations. The criteria of a sound qualitative research will discuss several esteemed indicators that the researcher seeks to abide by to ensure the quality of this research.

### **3.1 Philosophical Grounds and Conceptual Frameworks**

#### **3.1.1 *Social constructivism and sociocultural theory***

The sojourn setting of this research on the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers makes it most aligned with the school of social constructivism. At the core of this philosophy is the belief that learning and understanding are inherently social, and outer factors such as cultural activities and tools (including symbol systems, artefacts, and languages) are regarded as integral to the individual's inner conceptual development (Palincsar, 1998, p. 348). One of the most striking arguments that distinguish social constructivism in the arena of social science is the notion that: "The social dimension of consciousness is primarily in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30). In

other words, the social dimension is assumed to play a dominant role in the development of the individual, which provides a sound explanation for the title of this dissertation to explore the impact of a social phenomenon (the assessment process) on the professional development of the student teachers.

In the light of social constructivism, learning is construed as resulting from the interaction of the individual within the “communities of practice” and involve identity development (Wenger, 1998). Though not all learning induces development, it is one of the most influential factors that may awake abilities and lead to mental development (Palincsar, 1998).

Learning is not development; however, properly organised learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human, psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

Further development of sociocultural theory, however, takes into account the broader social system in which the learning happens (Scott and Palincsar, 2013). In this broader system, collaboration between peers or between the learners and the teacher at the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978) is said to ignite various learning functions with the mediation of cultural tools and signs (Palincsar, 1998). This influential theory corresponds to the “inter-being” nature of the self (Bernstein, 2000; Gee, 2000; Hanh, 2013) and lays the foundation for the development of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and an ecological view of the assessment process and the international MA- TESOL course as an activity system (Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Hodgson and Spours, 2013).

### **3.1.2 Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT)**

The dynamism and vibrancy of the sojourn and the swift transpositions of the student teachers in this research calls for a divergence from Vygotsky (1978)’s sociocultural theory to reflect. CHAT appears to be the answer as it emphasises more explicitly the dimension of time and the process of change:

To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method’s basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes - from birth to death - fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is. Thus the historical study of behaviour is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base. (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 64-65)

Based on Vygotsky and colleagues' initial theorisations, Engeström has made significant contributions to the development of CHAT and the activity system by proposing five principles (Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) as follows.

Firstly, it is foundationally a collective, object-oriented, and artefact-mediated theory. The activity system is collective in the sense that its units of analysis, though relatively independent, can only be understandable when interpreted against the background of the entire system (Engeström, 2001). The object is perceived as the key; changes in the object assisted by the mediating artefacts will manifest learning and eventually lead to a qualitative transformation of all the components of the activity system (Engeström and Sannino, 2010).

Secondly, multi-voicedness (Bakhtin, 1981) is crucial in the understanding of CHAT as “an activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Multi-voicedness derives from the participants' varied positions and diverse histories as well as the multi-layers of the activity itself and the stands of history engraved in its artefacts, rules, and conventions. It is a pool of troubles as well as innovations and it demands actions of translation and negotiation (Engeström, 2001).

Thirdly, CHAT is characterised by its historicity, which means that the shaping and transformation take place over lengthy periods of time and the problems and potentials can only be understood against their own histories. The concept of time here is construed as a cycle that begins when a relatively stable existing pattern of activity begins to be questioned and ends when a new pattern of activity has become consolidated and relatively stabilised. In between, miniature cycles of innovation, stagnation, regression, and failure are deemed to occur (Engeström and Sannino, 2010).

Fourthly, CHAT is associated with the concept of contradiction. As Kärkkäinen explains, “each turning point is characterized by clusters of discursive disturbances (misunderstandings, disagreements, conflicts, and also milder dilemmas), phases of questioning, and concentrations of different voices or perspectives” (1999, p. 111). The inherent internal contradictions, however, are not associated with negative connotations but rather regarded as sources of change and development. These internal contradictions make the object a moving, motivating, and future-generating target (Engeström and

Sannino, 2010). Piaget also confirms that “disequilibrium forces the subject to go beyond his current stage and strike out in new directions” (1985, p.10, cited in Palincsar, 1998).

Fifthly, the activity system in CHAT proclaims to bring about expansive and qualitative transformations to be realised with a wider horizon of possibilities on account of the reconceptualization of the object and motive of the activity. The expansion leads to the formation of a new expanded object, a new pattern of activity oriented to the object, and a new theoretical concept of the new activity based on grasping and modelling the initial simple relationship. The new expanded object is seen as the “germ cell” that gives rise to the new activity and generates its diverse concrete manifestations (Davydov, 1990) though regression or interruption may incur along the process (Illeris, 2014). These principles lay the foundation for the theories of expansive learning that will be discussed in the following section of the dissertation.

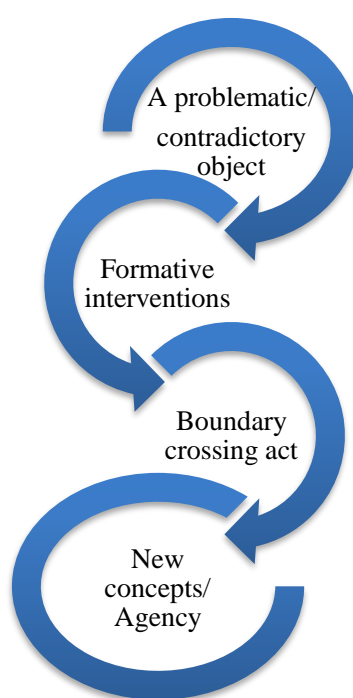
### **3.1.3 Theories of expansive learning**

Under the umbrella of CHAT, theories of expansive learning have altered the traditional depiction of learning and development as a vertical process aiming at elevating humans to higher levels of competence to encompass “the horizontal or sideways learning and development” (Engeström, 2001, p. 153). The consequential spiral path can be regarded as a hallmark of expansive learning theories which thrives in HE contexts where the framing is loose (Bernstein, 2000) and the subjects are uncertain about the learning outcomes.

Theories of expansive learning are anchored by a significant concept of “boundary crossing” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 1). As mentioned in the principles of CHAT, contradictions are inherent and necessary, however, they are not sufficient for expansive learning to happen (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). Learning is only expanded or transformed when the contradictions are dealt with so that an emerging new object is identified and turned into a motive. This process of “boundary crossing” entails stepping into unfamiliar domains, making creative endeavours, using new conceptual resources and even forming collective concepts (Engeström *et al.*, 1995, p. 333). It is expected to result in “a developmental transfer” marked by “reciprocal exchange and adoption of ideas driven by a shared and potentially expansive object”(Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13). This act also is conditioned by as well as

results in “enhancement” as boundaries are “tension points condensing the past and opening possible futures” (Bernstein, 2000, p. xx).

In order for a boundary crossing act to happen, Engeström and Sannino (2010) reason that there must be formative interventions which can be associated with feedback in the assessment process (**Figure 9**). The starting point of formative interventions is when the subjects of the activity system face a problematic and contradictory object which requires them to analyse and expand by constructing a novel concept. The process of formative interventions then calls for negotiation about the contents and the course of intervention; the shape of the intervention is eventually up to the subject who gains agency and takes charge of the process. The outcome is the generation of new concepts that may be used in other settings as frames for the design of locally appropriate new solutions; however, the key outcome of formative interventions is “agency” (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) or “changes in elements of the identity” (Illeris, 2014, p. 573) among the subjects.



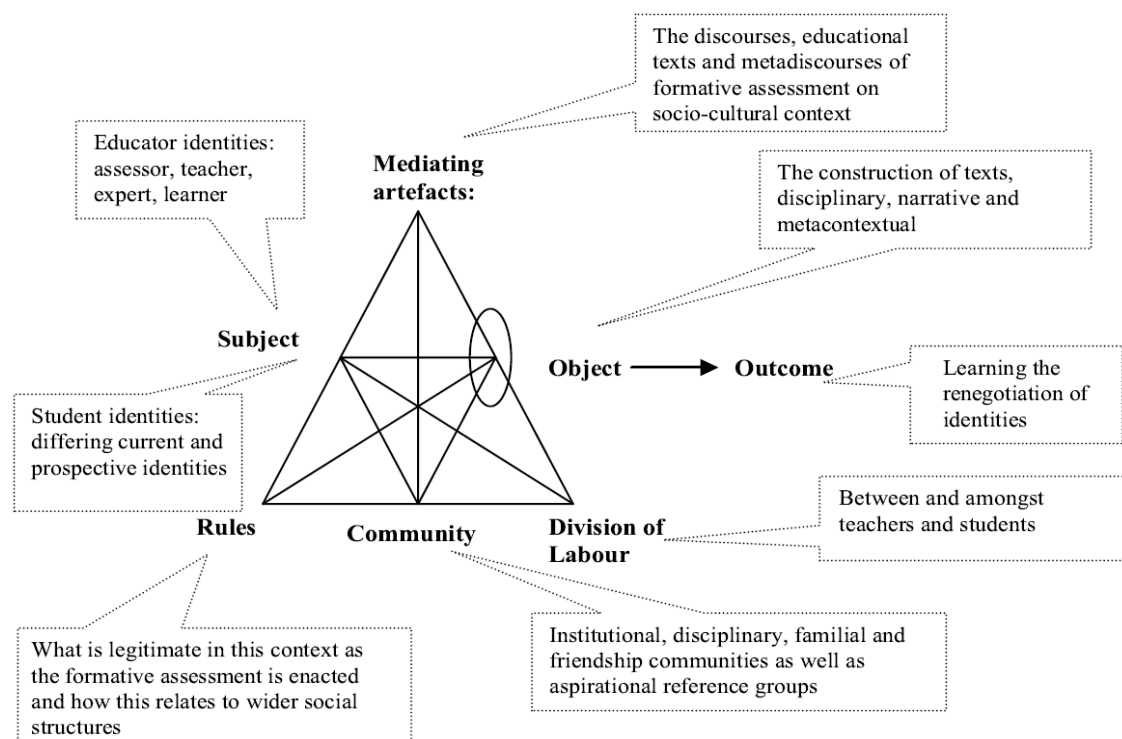
**Figure 9:** A summary of the boundary crossing process (Engeström and Sannino, 2010)

### 3.1.4 *The ecological activity system*

The primary conceptual framework entitled “the ecological activity system” is reconstructed upon Engeström (1987)’s second generation of the activity system with reference to Pryor and Crossouard (2008)’s sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment and Hodgson and Spours (2013)’s high opportunity progression eco-system.

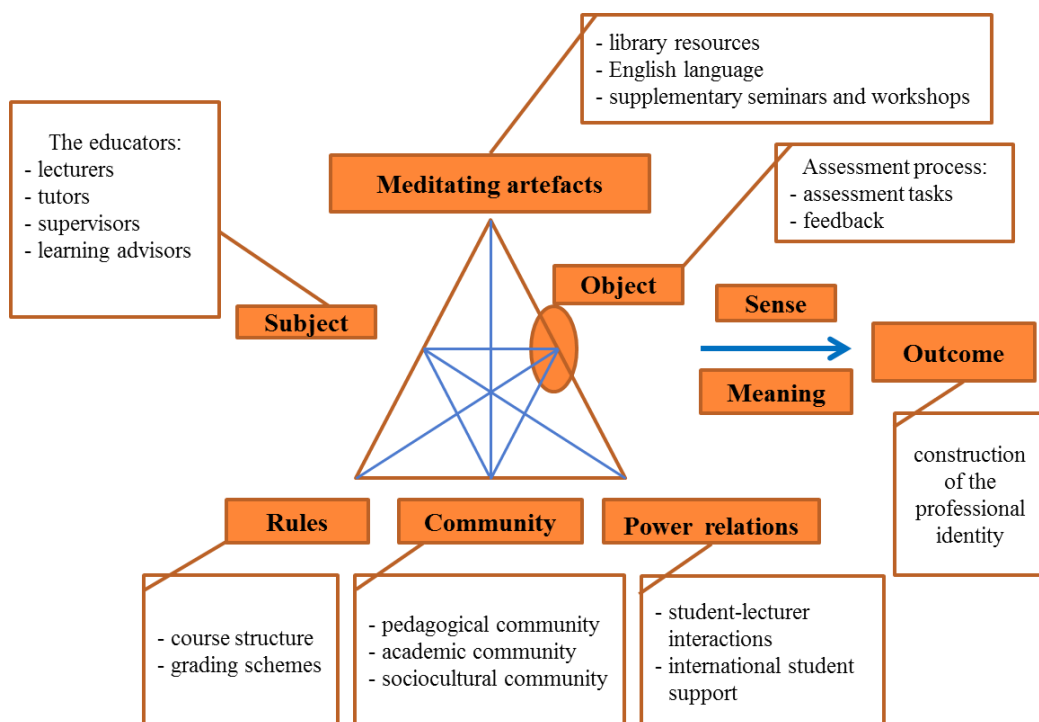
The adapted framework attempts to map the international MA-TESOL course on Engeström (1987) and Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s theoretical models from an organic and ecological perspective as Hodgson and Spours (2013) suggest.

Pryor and Crossouard (2008)'s theoretical model (**Figure 10**) is developed from Engeström (1987)'s second generation of the activity system to reflect the specific discourses of formative assessment. Their theorisation features the multiple identities of the educators and the learners and the interconnection between them. However, it is theorised from the perspective of the educators with more emphasis placed on their complex dispositions of an assessor, an expert, a teacher, and a learner. It is reasoned that the educators' various identities subsequently determine the rules, the division of labour, and the interaction with their students. The outcome of the activity is associated with "learning the renegotiation of identities" (ibid., p. 12), which essentially implies that it is a process rather than a product, a state of becoming rather than a state of being (Ha, 2007). Their theorisation, however, focuses merely on formative assessment, which necessitates several adaptations to encompass the international MA-TESOL course and the holistic view of the assessment process employed in this research.



**Figure 10:** Formative assessment as an activity system (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008)

Hodgson and Spours' work on high opportunity progression eco-systems (HOPE) appears to offer a solution for the necessity to embrace the dynamism of the international MA-TESOL course as they propose “a new ‘language’ to conceptualise stasis and change in a variety of environments, contexts, and spaces of activity” (2013, p. 215). Their proposition of the “local learning ecologies” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 211) not only reflects the complex institutional and social nature of the assessment process (Angelo, 1995; Torrance, 1996; Broadfoot, 2000; Reynolds and Trehan, 2000; Astin and Antonio, 2012) but also the dialogical view of the identity and agency as being fluid, flexible, and context dependent (Gee, 2000; Hermans, 2003; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Priestley *et al.*, 2012). It also fortifies the inter-dependency between the learner identity, the assessment process, and other factors of the activity system (Angelo, 1995; Torrance, 1996; Bernstein, 2000; Shepard, 2000; Bryan and Clegg, 2006; Wiliam, 2010). In brief, the ecological model will be able to capture the “organic growth” (Robinson, 2013) of the learners as an “inter-being” (Hanh, 2013), their humanistic interactions with the various stakeholders (Robinson, 2013), and the dynamism of the international MA-TESOL course, thus, transform the activity system “from equilibria to eco-systems” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 219).



**Figure 11:** The ecological activity system (the revised version)

(Adapted from the second generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system and Pryor and Crossouard (2008) sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression eco-systems)



The following will scrutinise six factors of the “ecological activity system” and highlight the adaptations made to accommodate the international MA-TESOL course (Figure 11). It is noteworthy that the framework has been continually upgraded with the tentative version in the introduction chapter being utilised in the data collection process and the revised version to be presented in this section being adjusted based on the actual data collected.

As stated in the first principle of CHAT, the object is assumed to be the most significant factor of an activity system, “the ‘raw material’ or ‘problem space’ at which the activity is directed” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6). It is first mentioned by Crossouard and Pryor (2008) as “the construction of texts, disciplinary, narrative, and meta-contextual” (p.12) and subsequently defined as “the task in hand” (Crossouard, 2009, p. 80). In an endeavour to simplify the framework, their abstract definitions of the object are to be concreted as the assessment process that encompasses two elements: the assessment tasks (“hard power”) and feedback (“soft power”) (Nye, 2004).

The subject is defined as the “individual or subgroup whose position and point of view are chosen as the perspective of the analysis” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6). Though Pryor and Crossouard (2008) specify two groups of subjects: the educators and the students, the former’s various identities are more emphasised. Therefore, the subject of this “ecological activity system” refers merely to the educators (the faculty staff, the lecturers, the learning advisors, the tutors, and the supervisors). The MA-TESOL students are perceived as being at the centre of the activity system, interacting with various factors of the system to construct their professional identity.

The mediating artefacts are simply put as “tools and signs” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6). In Pryor and Crossouard (2008, p. 12), they are specified as “discourses, educational texts, and meta-discourses of formative assessment on socio-cultural contexts”. In the context of the international MA-TESOL course, the student teachers mentioned three crucial mediating artefacts: the library resources, the English language, and the supplementary seminars and workshops.

The rules are originally defined as “explicit and implicit regulations, norms, conventions, and standards” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6) or “what is legitimate in this context as the formative assessment is enacted and how this relates to wider

social structure” (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p. 12). In this adapted framework, they are more concretely elaborated through the course structure and the grading schemes.

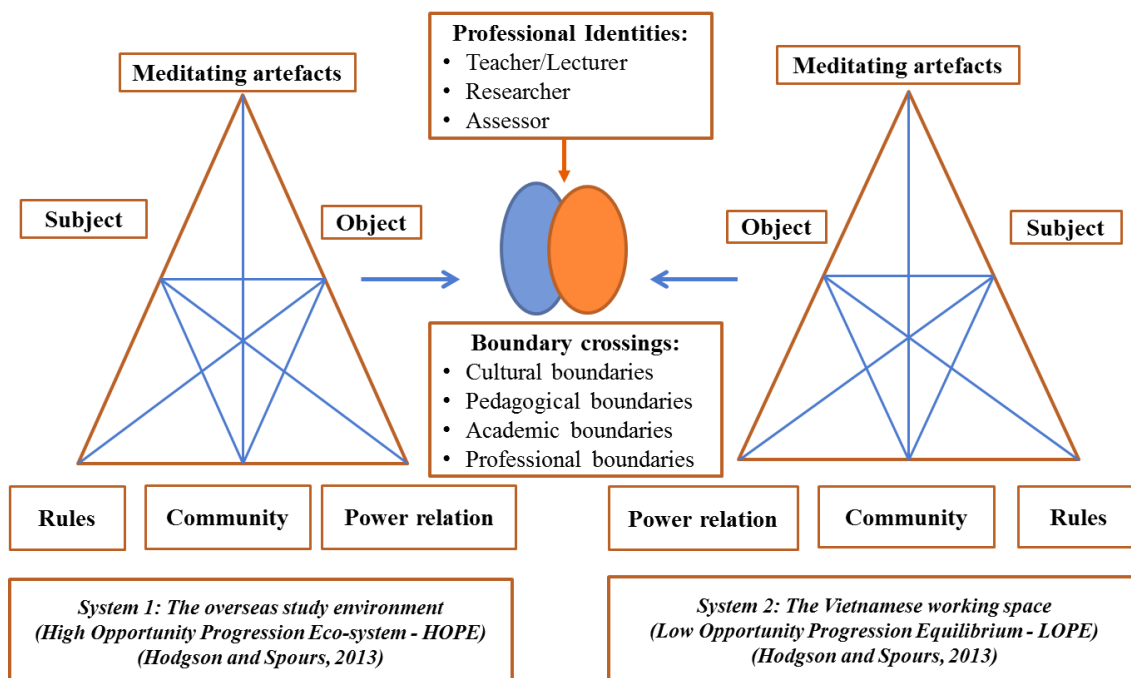
The community is defined as “the individuals and subgroups who share the same general object” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6) or “institutional, disciplinary, familial, and friendship communities as well as aspirational reference groups” (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p. 12). The three communities emerging from the data collection are the pedagogical, academic, and socio-cultural ones.

The final factor of the activity system used to be labelled the division of labour, which is defined as the “horizontal division of tasks and vertical division of power” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 6). However, in this “ecological activity system” it is entitled the power relations which still retains the central meaning of the concept yet may reflect the inherent power of the assessment process (Torrance and Pryor, 2002) and capture the energy and vibrancy of the international MA-TESOL course. The power relations exists in almost any interactions; however, this research will feature that between the students and their lecturers and international student support.

The second conceptual framework is the interaction of the two interconnected “ecological activity systems” (**Figure 12**). This model of Engeström (1987)’s third generation of the activity system emerged as a natural phenomenon from the interview data to feature the dramatic transition of the student teachers from their sojourn back to their working space in Viet Nam. It also reflects the longitudinal development of their professional identity marked with two major boundary crossing acts, becoming an international MA-TESOL student and returning to work as a TESOL practitioner. This second conceptual framework addresses learning as a horizontal and expansive process (Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) but between multiple social systems that involves “establishing continuity in action or interaction across socio-culturally different sites”(Akkerman and Eijck, 2013, p. 62).

As the Vietnamese student teachers took various MA-TESOL courses in four different Anglophone countries and their working spaces stretch through various regions of Viet Nam, this second conceptual framework of the interaction between two activity systems should be perceived as a generalisation purported to capture the essences of the transposition and how the professional identity is reconstructed across boundaries. The

analysis will focus on the sharp contrast between the international and the home spaces which entails contradictions and adaptations at the boundaries of the two activity systems. More discussion about the professional identities in transition and the boundary crossings can be found in Chapter 7, p.132 and 8.3, p.150.



**Figure 12:** The interaction of two activity systems (the revised version)  
(Adapted from the third generation of Engeström (1987)’s activity system)

## 3.2 Research Methodologies

### 3.2.1 Divergent multiple case study research

This research is framed into the model of a divergent multiple case study with the participation of 14 Vietnamese student teachers currently pursuing or having completed their MA-TESOL course in four major sponsor countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The chronological and spatial diversity of the cohort makes it distinct from the traditional single case study, therefore, the term “divergent” is transferred from the concept “divergent assessment” (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008, p. 5) to reflect that variety. More details about the diversity of the cohort are to be presented in the participants’ profiles (4.1.1, p.73).

The justifications for the selection of a divergent multiple case study as the frame for this research include:

- (1) The provision of living examples of “real people in real situations” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005, p. 181);
- (2) The retention of “holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 4) “especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 18);
- (3) The highlight of meaning in context, “recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005, p. 181), which makes it relevant for an impact study;
- (4) The addressing of the uniqueness and dynamism of the context, allowing the researcher to “investigate and report the complex, dynamic, and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships, and other factors in a unique instance” (*ibid.*, p. 182);
- (5) The emphasis of “developmental factors” that evolve in time and in relation to the environment (Flyvbjerg, 2011);
- (6) The ability “to portray truthfully the etic perspective of the researcher as well as the emic perspective of the research participants” (Gall *et al.*, 2007, p. 450); and
- (7) The triple purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, and/or to evaluate the phenomenon (Gall *et al.*, 2007, p. 451).

Beside its upsides as mentioned above, the utilisation of case studies as a research method also raises several concerns regarding generalisability and subjectivity (Easton, 2010). Though generalisability in a case study is confined by the local settings, Flyvbjerg (2011) argues that a case can be exemplary, thus its values can be transferred to other contexts. Though subjectivity is frequently associated with negativity, Holland *et al.* (1998, p. 5) argue that “human agency may be frail, especially among those with little power, but it happens daily and mundanely, and it deserves our attention”. Subjectivity at an extreme would lead to biases; however, when interconnected to become inter-subjectivity, it will benefit the analysis with deep involvement and insights (Davidson, 1994; Fong, 2008; Norton and Toohey, 2011). If good methodologies are judged by their appropriation for the research purposes, their valid and convincing conclusions to the research questions, and their educational values in a wider context (Cohen *et al.*, 2005), then a divergent multiple case study is the optimal approach for this research project for the above mentioned justifications.

### 3.2.2 *Narrative inquiry*

Within the framing of a divergent multiple case study, narrative inquiry has emerged as a natural selection (Tsui, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2011; Menard-Warwick, 2011; Norton and Toohey, 2011). It is defined as “the study of the ways humans experience the world, [...] a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) and is hailed for its capacity to render both personal and social life experiences in relevant and meaningful ways (ibid.). This approach is not only a strong methodological focus in contemporary qualitative research (Norton and Toohey, 2011) but also particularly compatible with this study as identity is considered a narrative about oneself with the “I” being both an “author” of the story and the “actor or character” in it (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 313). Hermans and Kempen (1993) even argue that identity is constructed and reconstructed via narration of their integration into old and new experiences whereas Bakhtin reasons that it is not a monologue, but a dialogue, through which identity comes into being:

Dialogue is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but becomes for the first time that which he is—not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252, cited in Irving and Young, 2002)

Accordingly, this research is to be dialogically conducted via active, intensive, semi-structured interviews (3.3.1, p.61). Though the narratives are subject to misinterpretation even during the data collection process, the collaboration between the researcher and the participants as well as the awareness, reflexivity, and self-criticism of both sides are required to avoid falsehood (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Other methods have been taken into consideration, however, narrative inquiry with active, intensive, semi-structured interviews may match with the time and funding constraint of the project and theoretically foster the participants’ description. Focus group may be less stressful for the participants and encourage more open dialogue, yet the issue of confidentiality in assessment makes individual interview a more appropriate instrument. Fieldwork, ethnography, observation, and longitudinal study may also be an appropriate option as “assessment is a movie, not a snapshot” (Pellegrino, 2003, p. 6) and identities are “being lived, are unfinished and in process” (Holland *et al.*, 1998, p. vi), however, the practicality and the physical distances between the researcher and the participants are major hindrances to the application of these methods. This research

design, therefore, can be regarded as a short film, attempting to capture a long story in a confined period of time.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This research employs a complementary model of two data collection methods: active, intensive, semi-structured interview and documentary analysis as Easton (2010) suggests that the studying of contents and ways of expressing talk is inadequate for interpretation or explanation, reference to the referents of the discourse needs to be made. This combination between verbal and textual data sources is expected to yield well-grounded conclusions for the research questions.

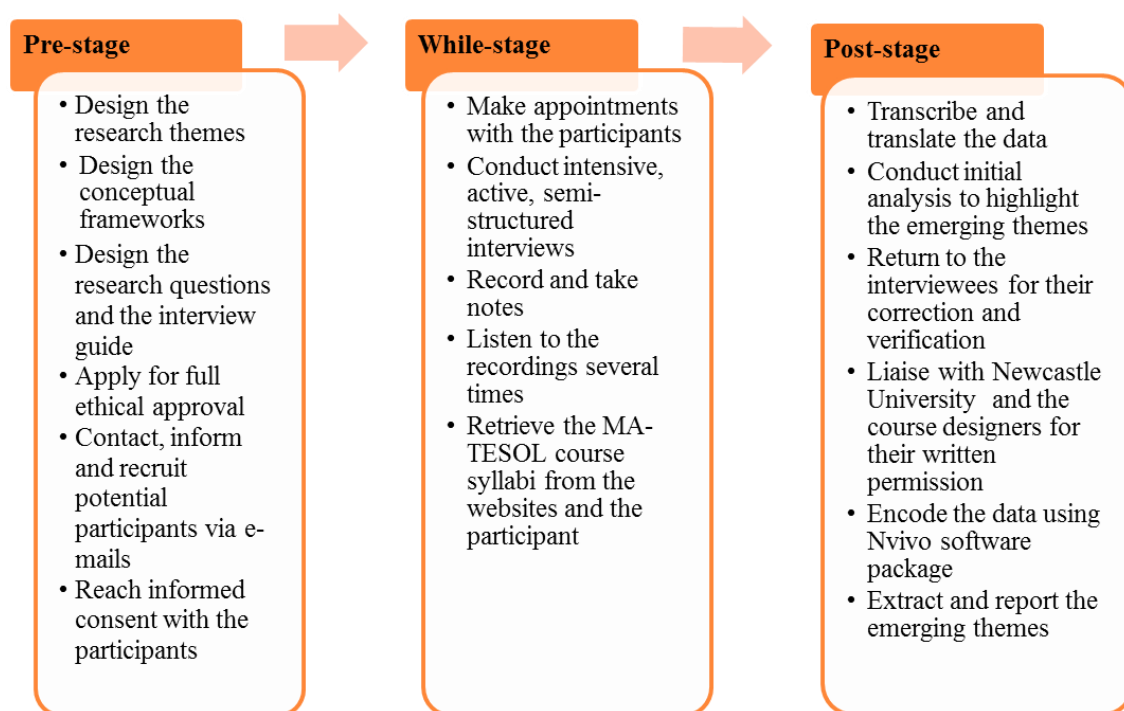
#### **3.3.1 Data collection methods**

As mentioned in (1.4.3, p. 18 and 3.2.2, p.60), this research seeks to follow the “spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation” (Wright, 1992) to narrate the identity formation; therefore, semi-structured, intensive, active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004) are adopted as the primary data collection method. A cohort of 14 Vietnamese student teachers who either are pursuing or have completed their MA- TESOL course in four Anglophone countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States is established using snowball sampling technique that balances between randomness, convenience, and strategic arrangement (Bryman, 2008). The potential participants were to be introduced about the aims, the “big questions”, and the seemingly complicated “ecological activity system” via an interview guide (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). (See Appendix A Participant Information Sheet, p.205 and Appendix D Topics of Discussion, p.211). There can be counter arguments addressing this procedure as “pigeon hole”; however, Richards *et al.* (2012, p. 126) point out that “there is no such thing as an ‘open’ interview in the sense that the interviewer goes in and simply encourages the respondent to start speaking, ready for anything that might emerge”. The interview guide is an essential way to get both the researcher and the participant on the same page, avoid misunderstanding, and save time and energy for both sides in grasping the research focus.

The interview is conceived as an active and collegial interchange of views between the researcher and the participants on the topics of mutual interest (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). It is

not regarded as a pipeline transferring the knowledge from the interviewee to the interviewer but a co-construction process in which meaning is generated through appropriate dialogues (Bakhtin, 1981; Silverman, 2004; Silverman, 2013). The narratives come into full flesh with follow-up questions, clarification, and further elaboration from both sides.

Due to the time constraint, the interview is purported to be intensive, however, the interview guide is to be sent to the participants long before the interview starts to allow adequate time for them to ponder and reflect. It is to be conducted either face-to-face or via computer-mediated environment within an hour in English or the interviewees' mother tongue as to their preference. After being transcribed and translated, the data will be returned to them for any necessary correction and verification to avoid bias and ensure a high degree of trustworthiness before detailed analysis is to be conducted.



**Figure 13:** A summary of the data collection process

In actuality, the computer-mediated environment created a secure, non-threatening, and neutral setting that enabled openness, efficiency, and “active listenership” (Richards *et al.*, 2012). Only one interview was conducted face-to-face, nine via Skype voice calls and four via Facebook text messages. Eight interviews were conducted in English and the other six in Vietnamese. The interview duration varied from 53 minutes to 112

minutes with the total reaching 1066 minutes. Details of the interview schedules with pseudonyms of the participants (selected by themselves) can be found in **Table 1**.

<i>STT</i>	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Host country</i>	<i>Mode of interview</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Interview date</i>	<i>Duration</i>
<b>1.</b>	Nancy	UK	Face-to-face	English	07/11/2013 5pm GMT	64 mins
<b>2.</b>	May	UK	Text message (Facebook)	English	10/11/2013 12pm GMT	75 mins
<b>3.</b>	Joyce	UK	Voice chat (Skype)	Vietnamese	26/11/2013 9am GMT	80 mins
<b>4.</b>	Peter	UK	Voice chat (Skype)	English	25/01/2014 3pm GMT	85 mins
<b>5.</b>	Nelson	UK	Voice chat (Skype)	English	22/11/2013 5pm GMT	64 mins
<b>6.</b>	Sophie	AUS	Text message (Facebook)	English	09/11/2013 1am GMT	90 mins
<b>7.</b>	Andy	AUS	Voice chat (Skype)	English	05/12/2013 12am GMT	53 mins
<b>8.</b>	Alfa	AUS	Text message (Facebook)	Vietnamese	26/11/2013 12pm GMT	112 mins
<b>9.</b>	Jane	AUS	Voice chat (Skype)	English	25/11/2013 9pm GMT	64 mins
<b>10.</b>	PT	NZ	Voice chat (Skype)	Vietnamese	26/11/2013 7am GMT	60 mins
<b>11.</b>	Susan	NZ	Voice chat (Skype)	Vietnamese	24/11/2013 2pm GMT	89 mins
<b>12.</b>	Gau	NZ	Voice chat (Skype)	English	13/11/2013 9am GMT	57 mins
<b>13.</b>	Sarah	USA	Voice chat (Skype)	Vietnamese	22/11/2013 9pm GMT	73 mins
<b>14.</b>	Khanh	USA	Text message (Skype)	Vietnamese	12/01/2014 5pm GMT	100 mins
<b>Total</b>						1066 mins

**Table 1:** Interview schedules

The interview data was subsequently supplemented with the documentary analysis. Four sets of the international MA-TESOL course syllabi were collected as they significantly



govern “the rules of the game” (Norton *et al.*, 2001, p. 269) and serve as a binding contract between the educators and the learners. A total of 51 module syllabi (21 in Australia, 13 in New Zealand, 10 in the United Kingdom, and 7 in the United States) were retrieved either directly from the universities’ official website or the participant with the conditional written permissions granted by the institutions and the course designers.

### **3.3.2 Ethical considerations**

This research complies with the full ethical approval procedure of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Newcastle University, the United Kingdom. The researcher endeavours to address four types of ethics in qualitative research as Flinders (1992) suggests: (1) utilitarian ethics, considering the consequences of the decisions and actions to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people; (2) deontological ethics, referring to absolute values such as honesty, justice, fairness, and respect for others; (3) relational ethics, judging whether the decisions and actions reflect a caring attitude toward others, and (4) ecological ethics, taking into account the participants’ culture and the larger social systems of which they are part (cited in Gall *et al.*, 2007).

During the implementation, there are two specific ethical procedures regarding (1) the informed consent of the participants joining the interview and (2) the copyright of the syllabi to be utilised in the documentary analysis. Regarding the informed consent, a detailed written consent form together with an invitation and a debriefing form was e-mailed to the potential participants explicating their rights and the confidentiality and anonymity procedures to be applied. (See Appendix A Participant Information Sheet, p.205; Appendix B Consent Form, p.208; Appendix C Debriefing Form, p.209). Their participation was completely voluntary with no financial benefit and no physical threat other than possible mild stress when recalling their assessment experiences. Their identities as well as those of the third parties were respected and protected with the use of pseudonyms.

Regarding the copyright of the syllabi, an intellectual rights expert of Newcastle University has liaised with the counterparts of three universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom and obtained their written permissions to include their syllabi into the documentary analysis with certain conditions about the representation of the data. The researcher also contacted the lecturers of the American

institution and obtained their written permission for seven out of ten modules of the course. Due to the dilemmas between confidentiality and acknowledgment of the sources, the documentary analysis was mainly used for the purpose of reference. Synthesis and analysis of the course objectives according to the various aspects of the professional identities, analysis of the assessment modes, and word inquiry of several key terms (assignment, criticality) using the qualitative research data analysis software package Nvivo10 are to be sparsely presented for the readers to obtain a grasp of the institutional discourses of the international MA-TESOL courses.

### **3.3.3 *Thematic analysis***

Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was chosen for this research project for its simplicity, straightforwardness, flexibility, and reader-friendliness (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis is also comparable with this specific theory-driven research design with preconceived frameworks (Crabtree, 1999) and the participatory research paradigm with participants as collaborators (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Its strength lies in the ability to capture the intricacies of meaning within a data set (Guest, 2012), offer a “thick description”, and generate unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is simply put as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes, which are defined as patterns “in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161). It goes beyond clustering and describing the data set to include interpretation and synthesis of various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). The patterns are normally associated with being emerging, capturing, and significant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and good themes or “good codes” are the ones that capture the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1). The coding process, therefore, involves recognising (seeing) an important moment and encoding it (seeing it as something) prior to a process of interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998).

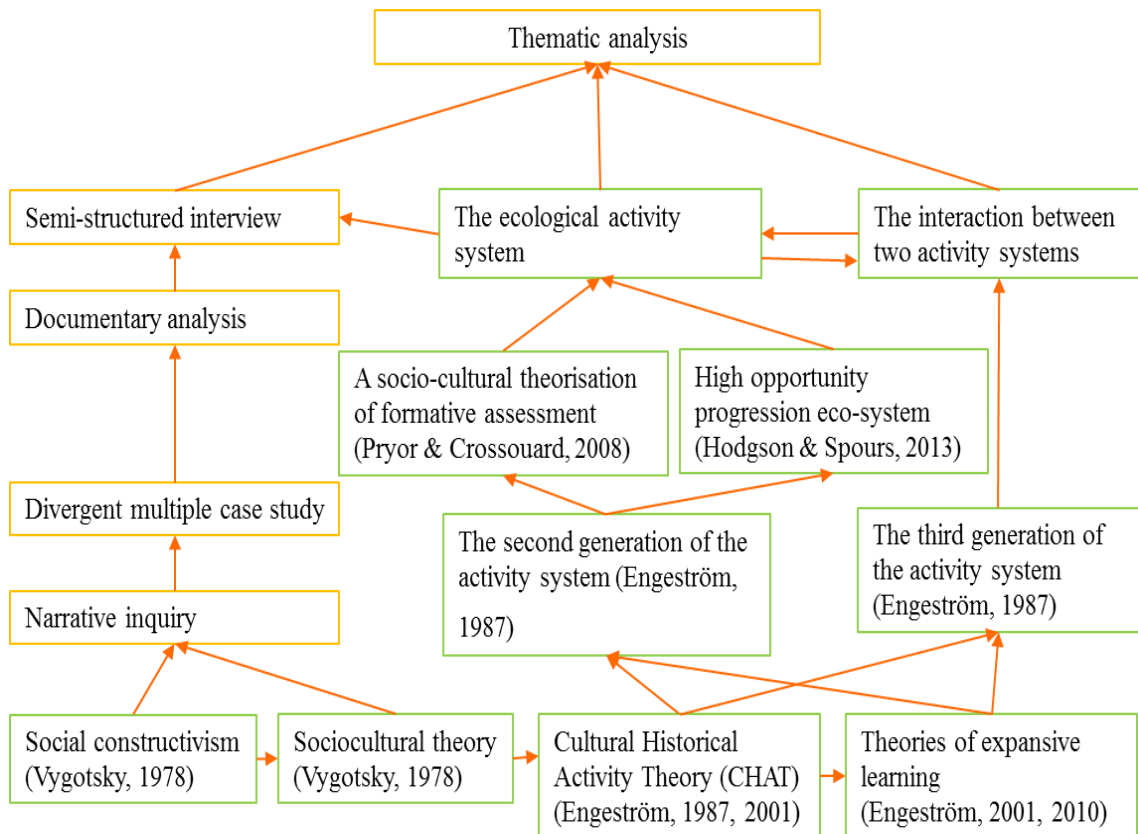
The actual coding process was conducted with the assistance of qualitative research data analysis software package Nvivo10 and the encoding followed a “hybrid approach” of deductive or “top down” way to establish the themes and inductive or “bottom up” way to arrive at the sub-themes as Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) suggest. While deduction embeds the conceptual frameworks informed by the literature into the data

set, induction provides illustration, interpretation, and possible theorisation that “emerge” from the coded data. As discussed in (3.1.4, p.53), the “ecological activity system” is utilised as a priori template of themes (codes) (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) and the sub-themes are tailored based on the actual data set. The criteria to select the sub-themes are (1) the recurrence of the ideas among the participants’ accounts; (2) the significance and newness of the information, and (3) the relevant and coherent development of the ideas.

When it comes to the “level” of meaning at which sub-themes are to be identified: at a semantic level or at a latent level (Boyatzis, 1998), this analysis is more inclined to the former, which concerns about the explicit or surface meanings of the data rather than scrutinising beyond what the participant said in the interview. At a first glance, it may seem that this semantic level opposes the constructionist approach underpinning this thesis. However, it should be regarded as a balancing act to simultaneously respect the participants’ viewpoints and let the connection between the data “emerge” in its most original form.

The following figure (**Figure 14**) summarises the entire discussion of the philosophical grounds, conceptual frameworks (3.1, p.49), research methodologies (3.2, p.58), and data analysis method (3.3, p.61). The research is grounded in the school of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Palincsar, 1998) with a thread of development to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Scott and Palincsar, 2013) (with emphasis on the tools and signs), cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Cole and Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 2001) (with emphasis on the dimension of time and the process of change), and theories of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) (with emphasis on tensions, boundary crossing, and developmental transfers). The second generation of the activity system (Engeström, 1987) is subsequently cross-referenced with the socio-cultural theorisation of formative assessment (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008) and the high-opportunity progression ecosystem (Hodgson and Spours, 2013) to form the “ecological activity system”, the central conceptual framework of this research. This ecological activity system then transforms the third generation of the activity theory (Engeström, 1987) into “the interaction between the two systems”, the secondary conceptual framework.

Methodologically, the divergent multiple case study and the narrative inquiry are also illuminated by social constructivism and sociocultural theory when they emphasise the significance of contexts and social interactions. The triangulation between the documentary analysis (the mediating artefacts), the active, intensive, semi-structured interviews (the social interactions), and the two conceptual frameworks (the theoretical grounds) that merges into the thematic analysis engenders a profound research design for this thesis.



**Figure 14:** A summary of the philosophical grounds and research methodologies

### 3.4 Criteria of a Sound Qualitative Case Study Research

While Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that criteria of a quantitative research such as reliability, validity, generalizability may clash with the philosophical underpinnings of a qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry, some other qualitative researchers employ these criteria with different interpretations (Cohen *et al.*, 2005; Gall *et al.*, 2007) and some others suggest the equivalents for the constructivist paradigm (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). After considering those various perspectives, the researcher would abide to four significant criteria: consistency, inter-subjectivity, credibility, and applicability (**Table 2**) though they are

interlinked, overlapping, and should not be taken as absolutes. The following section will explicate measures to address these criteria as well as the apparent contradictions in the implementation.

<i>Quantitative research</i>	<i>Qualitative research (Marshall &amp; Rossnan (1995))</i>	<i>Constructivist research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011)</i>	<i>The adopted criteria</i>
Reliability	Consistency/ Reliability/ Dependability	Dependability	Consistency
Objectivity	Neutrality/ Not biased/ Confirmability	Confirmability	Inter-subjectivity
Internal validity	Truth value/ Credibility	Credibility	Credibility
External validity/ Generalizability	Applicability/ Transferability	Transferability	Applicability

**Table 2:** Criteria of a sound qualitative research

### 3.4.1 *Consistency*

This research addresses consistency via: (1) the connection between the philosophical underpinnings and the methodologies; (2) the utilisation of the ecological conceptual frameworks as the backbones of the research design and analysis; (3) and the complementary model of the data collection methods. As discussed in (1.4.1, p.16 and 3.1, the entire research is embedded in the social constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Palincsar, 1998) that influences the choices of a divergent multiple case study, narrative inquiry, semi-structured interview, documentary review, and thematic analysis. Further development of the sociocultural theory into cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and theories of expansive learning has provided a solid theoretical foundation for the design of the “ecological activity system” that unifies the literature, methodologies, and findings chapters of the dissertation. The cross reference between the highly subjective interview data with the objective documentary analysis of the MA-TESOL course syllabi is also an endeavour to ensure consistency between the two data sets.

During the data collection process, endeavours were also made to maintain that consistency, however, spaces were also given to flexibility and particularity of the

participants' accounts. For example, the interviewees were able to choose their preferred language and mode of interview. Though saturation and replication were sought, uniqueness and idiosyncrasy were not abandoned in this highly divergent multiple case study with the fourteen informants originating from different parts of Viet Nam, studying in four different countries, and working in different environments.

### **3.4.2 *Inter-subjectivity***

Inter-subjectivity is roughly understood as the rapport or the mutual understanding between the researcher, the participants, and the readers. The mutual understanding between the researcher and the participants was created with the use of an interview guide as a common ground for open discussion. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in a collegial atmosphere in which the researcher and the participants collaborated to construct new understanding (Silverman, 2004; Silverman, 2013). The inherently asymmetrical power relations between them was balanced out with the use of “blind” voice calls and text messages via popular social networks. This secure, comfortable social setting enabled effective interviewing and enhanced a deeper layer of truth that the participants made accessible to the researcher (Powney and Watts, 1987).

The interviewer, however, is aware and cautious about her inevitable “researcher’s influence” during the data collection (Richards, et al., 2012, 124). Despite her emic knowledge of the field with her learning experience in both the home and international MA-TESOL courses, she endeavoured to take an etic perspective by not manipulating the participants’ strands of thoughts other than explaining the conceptual frameworks prior to their responses and sharing similar emic knowledge to create rapport afterwards. She tried to maintain neutrality, mitigate “personal perspective”, respect the participants’ viewpoints, take full responsibility for her interpretation of the data, and analyse them as faithfully as possible (Powney and Watts, 1987). The analysis of the data at semantic level also indicates her respect for their viewpoints and her effort to separate the interpretation from the participants’ original voices and give the merit of judgement to the audience. The combination of both emic and etic perspectives was at times challenging for her, yet a balanced view enabled her to elaborate the essences of the data with credibility and trustworthiness. Gall et al. (2007) suggest that the researchers be the primary “measuring instrument” of quality as they conduct the research design, the data collection, and the data analysis and become personally involved in the phenomenon being studied. Yet, the inter-subjectivity or the shared

understanding between the researcher, the participants, and the readers in the long term is even more crucial to quality assurance.

### 3.4.3 *Credibility*

As many other qualitative studies, this project is, in essence, a “natural experiment” (Astin and Antonio, 2012). There are no artificial conditions, no interventions, merely reflections of the reality (the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course) via the perspectives of the Vietnamese student teachers; the application of the conceptual frameworks is merely a measure to narrate the reality more systematically (ibid., p. 30).

The verification of the interviewed data is a serious attempt to enhance the credibility of this research. The interviews after being transcribed and translated went through the first round of critical reading and initial analysis with the major themes being highlighted. Subsequently, the transcripts with highlighted themes were returned to the participants for their verification. Ten out of fourteen participants completed the verification with corrections of specific details about the course titles, the assessment requirements, and some minor misunderstandings. Several of them also provided further explanation and clarification and some wished to withdraw several details from the original version. The verification helped to identify and correct errors and limit the likelihood of misinterpretation of the recorded data, thus, strengthened the credibility of this study.

Issues related to credibility may also arise in the interpretation of the data, the drawing of causal connections between the assessment process and the professional identity development. Though such causal inferences cannot be proved, Archer, Collier and Porpora (2004) suggest that “judgemental rationality” may make such inferences “acceptable”:

Judgemental rationality means that we can publically discuss our claims about reality as we think it is, and marshal better or worse arguments on behalf of those claims. By comparatively evaluating existing arguments, we can arrive at reasoned, though provisional, judgements about what reality is objectively like; about what belongs to that reality and what does not. (Archer, et al., 2004, p.2, cited in Easton, 2010)

Though making inferences is a common practice (Astin and Antonio, 2012), Eraut (1994) argues that “second opinion” should be taken into consideration as “truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between*

*people collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction*” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110, cited in Irving and Young, 2002, p. 24). The active interview employed in this research is apparently aligned with this constructivist view of the “truth”, however, the research findings should be regarded as “probabilities” or “temporary contributions to knowledge” (Eraut, 1994, pp. 16-17).

#### **3.4.4 Applicability**

Generalisation is said to be “the inescapable ingredient of scientific process, but operates at differing levels in the crystallization of ideas” (Thomas, 2010, p. 22). As this research strives to reach middle axioms, it aims at applicability as a satisfactory and practical level of generalisation. As a qualitative research is characterised by “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 8), local/ working truth or practical wisdom (*phronesis*) appears to be a more reasonable and achievable goal.

This research with the participation of fourteen Vietnamese student teachers may contribute to the national teacher training contexts meanwhile their reflection on the international MA-TESOL courses expand the opportunities to globalise its findings. In other words, the *phronesis* to be found in this small-scale research may contribute to the betterment of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL courses both nationally and internationally. Its applicability to a “broader picture” is reasoned by Leibniz (1973): “Every portion of matter may be conceived as a garden full of plants and as a pond full of fish. But every branch of each plant, every member of each animal, and every drop of their liquid parts is itself likewise a similar garden or pond” (cited in Law, 2004, p. 19). Silverman also postulates the applicability of social studies in general as follows:

“All we sociologists have are stories. Some come from other people, some from us, some from our interactions with others. What matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are, and how we can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life.” (2004, p. 138)

### **3.5 Summary**

In a nutshell, this chapter has elaborated the developmental thread from social constructivism, sociocultural theory, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), to



theories of expansive learning. Those philosophical underpinnings are highly relevant to the dynamic yet contradictory nature of the international MA-TESOL course and the flexible, dialogical, and social-oriented nature of the learner identity (Bernstein, 2000; Gee, 2000; Hermans, 2003; Hanh, 2013). In this premise, learning is viewed as a process of expansion (Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) that involves boundary crossing acts in a contradictory environment in which relevant formative interventions (assessment tasks and feedback) may lead to “changes in elements of the identity” (Illeris, 2014, p. 573).

The chapter also explicated the development of the “ecological activity system” based on the works of Engeström (1987), Pryor and Crossouard (2008), and Hodgson and Spours (2013) to map the entire international MA-TESOL course and systematically analyse the impact of each factor on the student teachers’ professional identity. The second conceptual framework, the “interaction of the two activity systems”, has been incorporated to illustrate the long-term, cross-boundary impact of the entire international MA-TESOL course on their continued career paths.

This research is framed as a divergent multiple case study and follows narrative inquiry to obtain access to the student teachers’ professional identity. The research design follows a supplementary model of active, intensive, semi-structured interviews and reviews of the MA-TESOL course syllabi. The research has complied with the full ethical procedures as stipulated by Newcastle University and informed consents with the participants, the institutions, and course designers have been reached. The data were be thematically analysed at semantic level using the “hybrid” approach of deduction and induction (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and processed by Nvivo 10 software package.

Though the research is characterised by its diversification, it seeks to comply with such criteria of a good qualitative research as consistency, inter-subjectivity, credibility, and applicability. It is with great hope that the combination of the appropriate philosophical underpinnings, the sound conceptual frameworks, and the efficient research design and analysis will generate a coherent model from which the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of the Vietnamese student teachers can be scrutinized and articulated.

## Chapter 4 The Context Settings

As professional identification involves both the precedent ability and the subsequent training (Bernstein, 2000; Fotovatian, 2012), this first finding chapter will discuss both the antecedent contexts (4.1) and the assessment process international MA-TESOL course (4.2). The antecedent contexts will cover the participants' profiles (4.1.1), the Vietnamese backdrops (4.1.2), and the professional goals (4.1.3). The assessment process, the object factor of the "ecological activity system", will be examined under the two sub-headings: the assessment tasks (4.2.1) and feedback (4.2.2). The findings are synthesised as a collective, inter-subjective depiction of the individual participants narrating their past, present, and future stories with their multi-voicedness (Engeström, 2001; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011).

### 4.1 The Antecedent Contexts

#### 4.1.1 *The participants' profiles*

As mentioned in (3.3.1, p. 61), the research cohort consists of 14 participants (two studying in the United States, three in New-Zealand, four in Australia, and five in the United Kingdom) recruited from the researcher's overseas colleagues, the random contacts search, and the social network support. Though the sample size is restricted, the participants are representative in terms of location and learning and teaching experience. They come from different regions of Viet Nam (two from the South, three from the Central and nine from the North). Their MA courses involve Applied Linguistics (five courses), language teaching methodologies (six courses), and specific areas (two about language testing and assessment and one about Computer Assisted Language Learning). At the time of the interview, seven participants (two PhD candidates and five MA students) were pursuing their study overseas (three in the United States, two in the United Kingdom, one in Australia, and one in New Zealand). Their teaching experiences prior to the MA course vary from informal private tutoring to approximately seven years of formal teaching experience. Out of nine participants who had completed their course, one was looking for a permanent job, one teaches in a gifted high school, six work as a lecturer of English in four universities, two continued to undertake a PhD degree, one of them completed her MA-TESOL degree in Australia, was promoted as the Dean of a faculty, and continues with her PhD study in the United

States. Their profiles make the cohort a collection of diversity: “Each person has had a unique trajectory through ‘discourse space’. That is, he or she has, through time, in a certain order, had specific experiences within specific discourses” (Gee, 2000, p. 111).

<i>STT</i>	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>MA course</i>	<i>Study status</i>	<i>Teaching experience</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
1.	Nancy	MA-TESOL	In progress	<1 year	MA student	North/UK
2.	May	MA in AL for MA- TESOL	Completed 2013	<1 year	Lecturer	North
3.	Joyce	MA- TESOL & AL	Completed 2009	<1 year	Lecturer	North
4.	Peter	MA in AL	Completed 2012	>6 years	Lecturer	North
5.	Nelson	MA in AL for Language Teaching	Completed 2013	3-6 years	Lecturer	South/UK
6.	Sophie	MA- TESOL (Language testing)	Completed 2012	3-6 years	Lecturer	North
7.	Andy	MA in AL (TESOL)	In progress	3-6 years	Lecturer MA student	North/AUS
8.	Alfa	M.Ed. in AL	Completed 2013	<1 year	Teacher	Central
9.	Jane	MA- TESOL (CALL)	Completed	>6 years	Lecturer/ Vice Dean PhD candidate	South
10.	PT	MA in AL & TESOL	Completed 2013	<1 year	Lecturer	Central
11.	Susan	MA in AL & TESOL	Completed 2013	<1 year	Lecturer	Central
12.	Gau	MA- TESOL	In progress	3-6 years	Lecturer MA student	North/NZ
13.	Sarah	MA in AL and Technology (Assessment)	Completed	3-6 years	Lecturer PhD candidate	North/USA
14.	Khanh	MA- TESOL	In progress	1-3 years	MA student	North/USA

**Table 3:** The participants’ profiles

Beside the particularities as mentioned, the participants also possess certain common characteristics such as:

- (i) having multiple identities of a Vietnamese, a teacher, a learner, and an international student;
- (ii) carrying within themselves the Vietnamese roots to mingle with international peers and lecturers in a culturally diverse environment;
- (iii) discontinuing their occupation to pursue the international MA-TESOL course for professional development; and
- (iv) experiencing of an exciting international educational system with abundant boundaries to cross.

What is typical about the case of Vietnamese student teachers pursuing the international MA-TESOL course is the transition of their identity from a student to a more professional TESOL practitioner, which will strongly determine their teaching practice, occupational development, and attitudes toward educational changes (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004). Their dual status of being both a social participant in the learning process and an autonomous and self-conscious individual with their own teaching experiences (Illeris, 2014) makes their voices valuable for this research. (See also Appendix E Participants' Profiles, p.212).

#### **4.1.2 The Vietnamese backdrops**

In the light of CHAT, this section will brief about the “historicity” (Engeström, 2001) or the “historical and social baggage” (Sowden, 2007, p. 305) the Vietnamese student teachers carry with them abroad. Culturally, they used to be educated and educate their learners in a Confucian environment in which the students are expected to be diligent and respectful (Ha, 2004; Ka Ho, 2007). However, this culture is also characterised by a number of interrelated stagnant traits such as: (1) passiveness (“*we normally teach the students in the way that they normally listen to what the teacher says and never doubt and try to learn by heart the knowledge the teacher provides*” (Jane-AUS)); (2) conformity (“*I just followed suit what the teachers said and if I included some creative ideas in my papers they were prone to be rejected*” (Alpha-AUS)); (3) hierarchical distance (“*the distance between the lecturer and the student is actually very far. Each time I would like to ask them something, I was anxious, I feared, I found it difficult*” (PT-NZ)); (4) constraint (“*sometimes I just felt that I didn't want to say anything even when I had some ideas. It's just I didn't want to say it*” (Nancy-UK)); (5) suppressed criticality (“*it's considered disrespectful to interrupt the teachers*” (PT-NZ)); (6) deficient independence (“*the students are not encouraged to develop their*

*independence, they are not taught to study, to live, and to think independently because of the authority of the teacher in class is too high” (Peter-UK)); and (7) influenced by collectivism (“if in the class, there was no one raising their voice, and then you did it, you might really stand out” (PT-NZ)).*

Socioeconomically, the Vietnamese education is alleged to have inadequately mirrored changes in the economic structure (Huong and Fry, 2004). Though academic communities have emerged at certain institutions, a research culture is still in its initial stage. The under-developed library systems, electronic databases, and publishing industry (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Harman and Ngoc, 2010) have profoundly impeded the Vietnamese language teachers from developing their research capacity (**Quote 1**). However, the recent globalisation trend and the national language policy to adopt English as a communication tool for the development and modernisation of the country (*Vietnam’s National Foreign Languages 2020 Project*, 2008; Van, 2013) have created more international professional development opportunities for them (**Quote 2**). They are expected to be the “agents of innovation and change” (Priestley *et al.*, 2012) in the educational and academic landscapes with their new knowledge and competences obtained from the Anglophone systems.

Prior to their sojourn, all the participants were recruited in language teacher training institutions where most of them were retained to become a lecturer of English. The education in Viet Nam founded a necessary knowledge base for their subsequent training in international institutions; however, there remained areas of weaknesses such as inefficient study skills, under-developed research skills, and sporadic opportunities for international communication (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Van, 2013) (**Quote 3**).

Upon the completion of their undergraduate study, three participants (Joyce-UK, Nancy-UK, and May-UK) commenced their international MA-TESOL course virtually immediately, which makes the term professional development rather vague to them (**Quote 4**). Alpha-AUS, Kate-NZ, and PT-NZ were early career teachers with less than a year of formal and informal teaching experience. There was an initial lack of confidence among them: “*when I was chosen to be a lecturer of English after graduation I lacked confidence. I thought that teaching English right after my BA graduation, I was not quite at a higher enough level*” (PT-NZ). Andy-AUS, Gau-NZ, Sophie-AUS, Nelson-UK, Khanh-USA, Peter-UK, Sarah-USA, Jane-AUS were more experienced with more

than a year of teaching non-English-major, English-major, and double-major students. They possessed ample English teaching experience; however, at the expense of research one except for Andy-AUS (**Quote 5**). The entire cohort could be categorised as novice researchers despite their attempts in local research activities:

I'm kind of novice with no experience in doing research I mean a real research. Actually, I did one but I just felt kind of like rubbish when you know comparing with what they are doing here from the methodologies, writing styles, everything, it's just so different. (Nancy-UK)

#### **4.1.3 The professional goals**

Obtaining an international MA-TESOL degree has been one of the most prevalent routes for teachers of English to enhance their professionalism when they “reach a point in their careers where they feel the need to explore new aspects of their professional world” (Garton and Richards, 2008, p. 3). This section will brief about the professional goals the Vietnamese student teachers establish prior to their sojourn and relate them to their previous experience and the Vietnamese backdrops as discussed in (4.1.1, p.73; 4.1.2, p.75). Though not all the participants established their professional goals like Sophie-AUS reflected: “*Not really professional goal. I don't know but I just found the MA course interesting so I decided to take it*”, the majority expressed their intentionality to undertake the international MA-TESOL course. There is extrinsic motivation like obtaining credentials to fulfil the institutional requirements. However, the motivation is mostly intrinsic, involving language enhancement, teaching methodology refinement, research skill improvement, cultural knowledge expansion, and fulfilment of the personal dream, which reflects the fundamental criteria of an international TESOL professional (TESOL International Association, nd.-b).

The statutory requirement for a university lecturer to obtain a master's degree was mentioned as the first propelling external motivation for the participants to pursue their postgraduate study: “*I would like to get some credentials because having a high qualification is also a very important requirement for a lecturer at the university*” (Andy-AUS, PT-NZ). An internationally-accredited degree has been commonly regarded as a symbol of expertise, a valid “license” (Clayton, 1990; Bui *et al.*, 2012) for the TESOL practitioners to bolster their identity of a college/ university lecturer: “*I think that I needed to get an MA degree because I am a teacher working at a college so an MA degree is very necessary for my career*” (Peter-UK).

The second ultimate goal to study overseas is to enhance the language proficiency to native-like quality: *“I intended to teach English so my primary purpose was to polish my language skills to near perfection and grammar as well since my high school students need a good foundation to enter a university or study abroad”* (Alpha-AUS). The ample communicative opportunities in the target language are perceived as an optimal condition for their language enhancement (Golombek and Jordan, 2005). It is not only a goal to aim at but a means to develop their expertise as well, particularly for Applied Linguistics students:

One more thing that I want to do when I come here is to update my knowledge. I have the people here in the UK, the hometown of English and use the research in their own language, and I think it’s very interesting to be here and to experience the research here. (Nelson-UK)

The third and most prevailing professional goal to have been explicitly and implicitly mentioned is *“to become a teacher”* (Nancy-UK, May-UK, Joyce-UK, and Andy-AUS): *“the dream of becoming a university lecturer was deeply-rooted. The love is always the same but it also needs an agenda”* (Joyce-UK). However, the participants perceived the TESOL teacher identity differently. Nancy-UK, who shifted her career path from being an interpreter, would like to acquire specific techniques and skills to become a stress-free teacher:

I just felt that it’s not easy to make others understand what I want to convey to them so I want to know more techniques, more skills, how to engage learners in my lessons, how to motivate them, how to make them feel kind of English is fun not kind of stressful when learning English. I just want to be a good teacher in general. (Nancy-UK)

The more experienced teachers, however, aimed at seeking the rationales for and the possible solutions to the unresolvable issues they encountered in Viet Nam:

When I did my teaching back in VN, I encountered some problems like; sometimes, I tried very hard to teach a language item to my students. Despite all my effort, it didn’t seem to work. Sometimes, I wonder why. You know when I started doing this programme; one of my initial purposes was to find out the answers to such questions. (Andy-AUS)

They were enthusiastic to become a more knowledgeable teacher to learn more about the theoretical underpinnings of second language acquisition and different techniques to improve their teaching practice: *“Before I started my programme I thought of myself coming back as an English teacher who knows more about SLA, who knows more about how to teach different skills and components of English better than how I was taught”*

(Gau-NZ). Besides, they aspired to adopt the teaching styles of the native lecturers who are more inspiring and have better techniques to engage the students (**Quote 6**).

Jane-AUS, Sophie-AUS, Sarah-USA, and Khanh-USA had more specialised objectives. Jane-AUS was keen to learn about the application of computers and information technology in language teaching. Sophie-AUS and Sarah-USA majored in language testing and assessment to design tests and assess the learners more effectively. Khanh-USA focused on material development to meet the demand of her department (**Quote 7**). Meanwhile, PT-NZ was more interested in becoming a better learner to acquire new methodologies and resources via her encounters with international peers:

If being emerged in a new environment totally different from the one I used to study in with all my familiar lecturers, I would be able to learn how other foreign students study autonomously, how they develop their research skills themselves, or whether they apply new teaching methodologies or have new teaching resources. (PT-NZ)

The fourth professional goal involves developing research skills to enhance pedagogy: *“I would rather be a researcher than a lecturer. However, because I am teaching at the A. University, I think that the classroom is, in fact, the laboratory for the researcher. So it’s quite good to combine the two roles here”* (Nelson-UK). However, research skills were prioritised by the participants majoring in AL, CALL, and testing (Nelson-UK, Sarah-USA, Kate-NZ, Jane-AUS, Peter-UK, Andy-AUS): *“In fact, I deliberately chose the Applied Linguistics programme not the ELT one because I wanted to find out something else rather than teaching the language. I wanted to find new ways of applying languages into the society. That’s why I came here”* (Nelson-UK). Their research motivation may stem from the expectation that the MA-TESOL course will pave the way for their PhD candidature: *“One of my purposes to study this course is to prepare a background for my future study in a foreign country”* (Peter-UK).

Last but not least, studying abroad is to pursue their personal dream and expand the cultural knowledge. Joyce-UK and May-UK were the two self-funded students with partial tuition fee discounts and were motivated by their own dreams to study abroad: *“Actually, I had a dream to visit Britain since my childhood, so I was determined to go. It was a long-nurtured dream but a quick decision”* (Joyce-UK). Her study abroad was a case of “dream big” and a thoughtful investment from her parents to secure a future lecturing position: *“I thought that I made a great effort to study abroad, and my parents invested greatly in me, it would be such a waste if I couldn’t do something big*



*enough*". With that determination, Joyce-UK deliberately and fortunately engaged herself in a part-time job to support herself and to travel as she would like to "go out there to experience the world of English". Likewise, May-UK was interested in the cultural aspect of the sojourn: "I want to be a lecturer teaching not only the language itself but also the culture of that language speaking country". Sarah-USA also agreed that studying abroad was to broaden her mind, to understand more about cultures and lifestyles, to make friends, and to network.

In a nutshell, the Vietnamese student teachers enrolled in their international MA-TESOL course at different stages of their career "trajectories" (Gee, 2000; Garton and Richards, 2008). A master's degree is not only a compulsory job requirement but also a learning experience for them to refine their language proficiency, improve their pedagogical theories and practices, acquire more research skills, expand their cultural understanding, and pursue their dreams. Many of their aims, like sharpening the language skills and increasing cultural understanding resonate with those of other sojourners (Lin *et al.*, 2002; Ha, 2007; Kinginger, 2007; Leo Collins and Pak, 2008; Brown, 2009; Lee, 2009), yet the crux of the matter lies in their "personalisation of what learning and achievement means for them" (Walters, 2007, p. 59). In many cases, their professional goals reflect not only the personal interests but also other ecological factors such as the demands of their institutions and the occupational prospects.

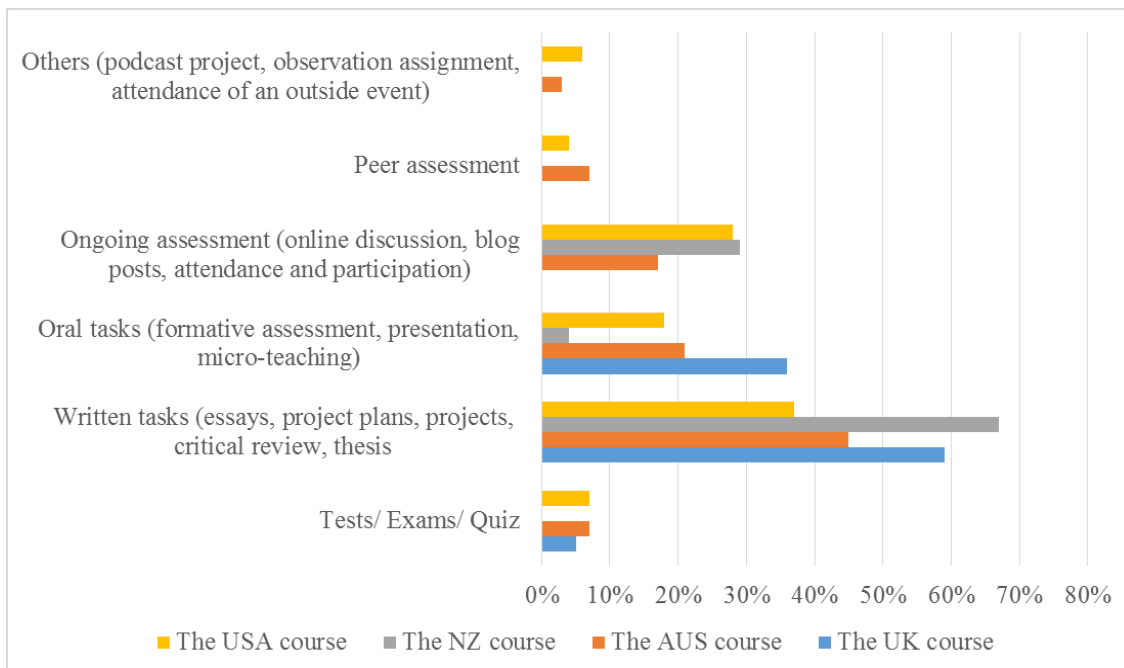
## **4.2 The Assessment Process**

This section of the context settings chapter is devoted to elaborate the subsequent training that the Vietnamese student teachers experienced during the international MA-TESOL course. Focus is placed on the assessment process as it is the most salient factor of the "ecological activity system" anchoring the entire MA-TESOL course. An insight into the assessment tasks the students tackled and the feedback they received will facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the impact on their professional identity, which is to be presented in the following chapter.

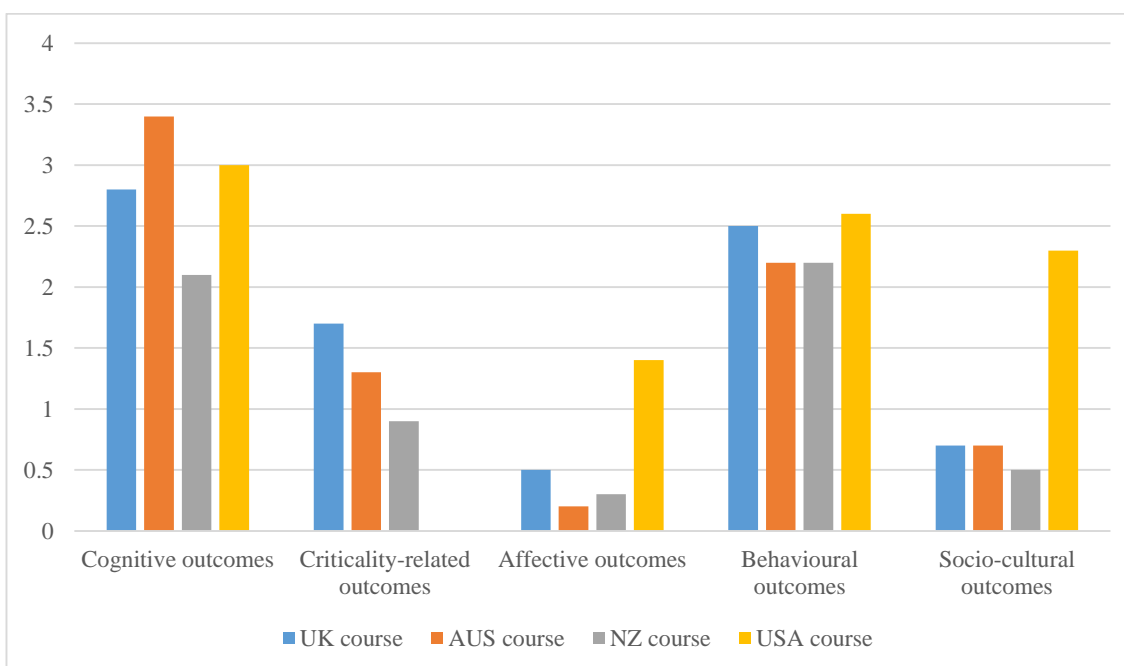
### **4.2.1 The assessment tasks**

A detailed synthesis of the MA-TESOL course syllabi yields two significant results: (1) the assessment process is largely dominated with written tasks which account for over

50% of all the assessment tasks analysed and (2) cognitive and behavioural outcomes outnumber affective and socio-cultural ones with the ratio of approximately 3:1. (See **Figure 15** and **Figure 16**). Further details will be cross-checked and reported via the participants' accounts.



**Figure 15:** The proportions of assessment task types as incorporated in the MA-TESOL course syllabi



**Figure 16:** The ratios of learning outcomes per module as incorporated in the MA-TESOL course syllabi

The documentary analysis results correspond with the participants' accounts stating that written assignments have been the primary measure to judge the postgraduates' academic capacities. Generally, the tasks are well-defined, yet the students were still granted with spaces to incorporate their own experiences: *"The lecturers just gave us general tasks and we were allowed to choose the course book or how we would conduct the lesson. The assessment tasks were open but very interesting"* (Alpha-AUS).

A typical process of handling with these assignments involves comprehending the instructions, retrieving information, applying reading strategies, analysing, synthesising, and writing (**Quote 8**). It also engages the students in conducting research, judging relevant resources, and discussing with their tutors and friends: *"Although the assignment has to be the student' own work, it is likely to be based on a process that involves lots of other people who may contribute to the ideas of the assignment"* (May-UK). Therefore, written assessment has the advantages of creating deep learning opportunities and promoting reflexivity, criticality, creativity, and autonomy:

The upside of writing an essay is that I had to read a lot and combine the knowledge from various references but not just the in-class materials. It helped me to develop my autonomy in learning and doing research [...]. Only in doing the assignment, did I clearly understand the subject matter. I think it's also a useful means of assessment, both assessing and creating opportunities for the learners to retrieve the knowledge. (PT-NZ)

Though written forms were judged to be of more cognitive value in terms of knowledge attainment, oral assessment particularly group presentations has the potential to promote improvisation skills and affective attainment such as confidence and team spirits that are essential in global communication (Warschauer, 2000, Andy-AUS, Nelson-UK). This form, however, was restricted and unofficial in most NZ and UK institutions where *"it was only regarded as a kind of activity in class but not a kind of assessment"* (Peter-UK). Its under-representation there caused discontent among the students: *"I think that having no presentation is a deficiency because it is very necessary for the teacher. During one and a half year of study, the only mode of assessment that I had were written assignments"* (PT-NZ). Though oral assessment may mean insurmountable workload for the lecturers, its authentic and interactive nature will bolster the students' presentation and dissemination skills, their confidence, and professionalism (Joughin, 2007; Crossouard, 2008; Huxham *et al.*, 2010; Turner *et al.*, 2012). The student teachers expressed their robust aspiration to develop those influential skills rather than becoming a "paper researcher" like the current model of written assessment encouraged:

Yeah, we expect more presentations in which you are the main person, you are the main figure of the classroom for about five or ten minutes and after the presentation you have to defend yourself from the questions and I think that's the thing that I expect. [...] I think if we have a lot of chances to practise that skill, we'll get used to it and we'll do more research and we'll get more professional. But here they just ask us to write a lot of essays, short essays. (Nelson-UK)

In several MA-TESOL courses, oral skills were practised in pedagogical modules via peer coaching sessions in which the student teachers had to plan and deliver a lesson and then write a reflective essay about that experience. While Nancy-UK and Alpha-AUS could benefit from their tutor and peer feedback, Joyce-UK pointed out that a similar activity was incorporated in her undergraduate course and the session was artificial as the peers did not fully take the role of a learner. Thus, both Joyce-UK and Jane-AUS would expect more authentic activities such as visiting a language school that offers pre-master courses, observing an English class, or even teaching a session there as those activities would be more beneficial to their professional development.

Recently, oral assessment has gained increasing prominence in the Australian and American courses. Alpha-AUS, Sophie-AUS, who graduated in 2012-2013 and Andy-AUS whose course was in progress reported that they had mock-teaching sessions and group presentations with marks and feedback from both the tutors and peers. Sarah-USA and Khanh-USA added that presentations and group discussions were integral parts of the continuous assessment process. Jane-AUS further reasoned that the USA universities excelled at engaging student teachers in practicum, designing lesson plans, observing classes, and teaching, therefore, she switched to the USA for her PhD study.

Ongoing assessment like writing a short response to an article or a question raised by the tutor or writing entries on the discussion board was not reported by UK participants; however, it appeared quite frequently in NZ and the USA. It is customary in the USA that a variety of tasks be scattered from the first to the final week that continuously engage the students in their study:

Normally, a module has ongoing tasks such as reading papers, and then presenting in class, writing weekly reflection, writing minor essays every three weeks about a certain theme and then writing a big paper about a certain issue and finally there will be a project, like a research project. The research project started at the beginning of the module and the students had to manage it themselves. By the end of the module, we had to present the result like a minor research. (Sarah-USA)

On the upside, ongoing assessment aims at a more holistic development with various learning outcomes such as reading skills, meta-language and syntax development, presentation, discussion, and academic writing. It also requires the students to recycle the knowledge and study continuously rather than leaving everything until the end of the semester:

In Ms. CP.'s module we had assignments on a weekly basis, so I could definitely gain something out of that and I could recycle what I learnt from the previous week in the following week [...]. So the same article has been recycled for several times, which makes it stick to our mind (hopefully). (Khanh-USA)

On the downside, *“the number of assignments here [the United States] is incredible”* (Sarah-USA), evidenced by an average of 7.0 assessment tasks per module compared with 3.9 in AUS, 3.7 in NZ and 2.2 in the UK. This workload is time consuming and requires strict commitment from both the lecturers and the students.

Peer and self-assessment were also mentioned infrequently in the interviews. As *“students are generally only allowed access to peripheral and relatively unimportant forms of assessment”* (Taras, 2002, p. 504), the former was mostly unofficial, yet actively participated by Vietnamese students. The assumed lower starting points made them more inquisitive and eager to learn from their international and local peers who helped correct their writing and speaking mistakes normally taken for granted by the lecturers (Sarah-USA, PT-NZ). The conversations over the assignments and the questions raised encouraged critical reflection on their original ideas (Gau-NZ) and the peer review conducted via the institutional Facebook page added assurance to their assignment submission (Nelson-UK).

Peer assessment was only taken seriously in the US universities where there was excessive workload for the lecturers and they would prefer not to comment on drafts (Khanh-USA). There peer review was incorporated into the marking policy: *“One lecturer even told us that our score will suffer if we don't take peer feedback into account and make corrections accordingly. If we don't agree with any peer's comments then we have to discuss with the lecturer”* (Khanh-USA). The sophisticated technique of *“double-blind reviewing”* (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007) was systematically adopted in the entire process of lesson planning and textbook reviewing before a discussion with the lecturer was had (Khanh-USA). Meanwhile, self-assessment was merely unofficially conducted by the student teachers except for the NZ university where the criteria were included in the front page of the submission paper (Gau-NZ). However, most of the

Vietnamese student teachers were able to employ the criteria, the graduate attributes, and their own marking experiences to prepare for the assignments and estimate the marks they would obtain (Peter-UK, Andy-AUS).

In tackling the various assessment tasks, the Vietnamese students also encountered certain obstacles due to their: (1) being new to the education culture and having little time to adjust; (2) having false assumptions about the new learning environment based on their previous experience; (3) encountering metalanguage barriers; (4) failing to thoroughly follow the guidelines; (5) having to handle a heavy workload; (6) vaguely understanding the lecturers' expectations; (7) not being accustomed to the assessment process, particularly the level of criticality required; (8) possessing a restricted level of criticality and autonomy from the home education system; (9) having limited research capacity and incompatible learning skills; (10) being under peer pressure from more "academically privileged" classmates (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007); and (11) receiving inadequate academic support and feedback from the tutors (Peter-UK, Joyce-UK, Nelson-UK, Nancy-UK, Sarah-USA, Khanh-USA, Jane-AUS, and Kate-NZ). However, with their "trainability" (Bernstein, 2000), "investment" (Norton and Toohey, 2011) of time and effort, "will to learn" (Johnston, 1996), and the educators' support, most of the student teachers were able to attain satisfactory results.

#### **4.2.2 Feedback**

The prevailing type of feedback is again in written form. Back in 2008, when Joyce-UK started her MA-TESOL course, feedback was a peculiar concept in her institution (**Quote 9**). Over time, feedback has been improved, yet, some lecturers were more enthusiastic in giving feedback than others (PT-NZ), with the American lecturers being ranked at the top (**Quote 10**). Generally, the written feedback covers three key instructional questions: (1) where the learners are in their learning; (2) where they are going; (3) what needs to be done to get them there (Wiliam, 2010, p. 150) (**Quote 11**). With a tradition of respecting the educators, the Vietnamese students took their lecturers' feedback very seriously: "*on receiving the lecturer's feedback, I had to read over and over again as I was afraid of not having understood him correctly*" (PT-NZ). Though feedback is considered "formative interventions" in expansive learning theories (3.1.3, p. 52), contradictions emerged in the process as it can be a "face-threatening speech act" (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989, p. 199) to both the lecturers and the students.

The most prevalent contradiction could be perceived via their reluctance to deal with feedback. While the lecturers frequently encouraged academic interaction and normally expressed their availability to address the students' concerns, they were reluctant to give negative feedback for fear of hurting the students' feelings: *"They didn't give negative feedback, they praised, and even if they did, it was not so strong"* (Joyce-UK). While negative feedback may probably result in more reluctance in the receivers, the avoidance of negativity may hinder the students from "identifying their gap of understanding" and lead to a mismatch between the mark and the feedback. In a rare case in the USA, for example, the positive oral feedback even contradicted with the written decision:

They give you a lot of positive feedback: "Oh, you so good", "you're perfect", "you're impressive", "you have provided an impressive analysis" or something like that. They provide very positive comments but I see one of my friends, they just rejected the paper. They say a lot of good things but the decision is in paper. (Jane-AUS)

The contradiction was serious when the student's misassumption about the assessment task and requirement was punished by mark reduction, yet both sides ceased to seek mutual understanding via dialogues:

There was one task related to learning reflection: reflecting on the experience you have gained after the course [...]. I was affected by a similar reading assignment in my undergrad in which I had to summarize a piece of reading and added my own comments. So I just reflected with all my heart, all my experience without any quotation at all. Then I got below 60 and my friend with about 10 citations just outscored me. The lecturer didn't highlight that weakness, however, from that comparison I got a lesson. (Joyce-UK)

It could be argued that the Vietnamese students may not be hindered by negative yet constructive feedback but rather the unintelligible or unreasonable one. They may be deprived of further learning opportunities due to their different presuppositions, the feedback brevity, and the reluctance to communicate: *"sometimes, I saw that the lecturers did not write much in the feedback, which means if we didn't understand we needed to meet and ask them and if we were reluctant to ask sometimes we didn't thoroughly understand their feedback"* (Sarah-USA).

The second contradiction could be found in the mismatch between the modes of feedback the students preferred and received. It appeared that they favoured oral feedback for its advantages of fostering mutual understanding and promptness:

Personally, I prefer oral feedback, meeting the lecturer and talking with him. For example, he may say and I can rephrase in my own words to confirm if I have

understood him or not. Having that way to check my understanding and solve the problem immediately will ease the possible confusion better than receiving written feedback. (PT-NZ)

In reality, the students did not receive adequate oral feedback. Within limited class hours, they were expected to provide spontaneous ideas or immediate answers and the most common type of oral feedback they received was a “social” praise like “‘good job’, ‘well done’, ‘excellent’ or ‘interesting’” (Nancy-UK). They also complimented the effectiveness of ongoing feedback incorporated in periodical discussions with the module tutor: “*It’s kind of a build-up on ideas with adaptations and changes toward the final one. In that module, I could clearly recognize my progress*” (Kate-NZ).

Theoretically, such feedback may feed forward and create a “feedback spiral” (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007) to reflect the students’ development, however, the spiral could collapse due to practical reasons such as the disconnectedness of the essay topics (**Quote 12**) and the failure to follow the schedules (**Quote 13**).

The third contradiction lies in the students’ high expectation about feedback and the brief and time-saving one that they normally received (**Quote 14**). Being teachers themselves, they were fully aware of the difficulty of giving detailed feedback, particularly in HE context (**Quote 15**), yet they pinpointed several reasons that hinder their learning from feedback: (1) it did not give clear detailed suggestions for improvement (Andy-AUS, Kate-NZ, Joyce-UK); (2) it was not generalizable enough to apply into the next assignment (Kate-NZ); (3) the feedback was unclear like: “*the analysis is not deep enough*” or “*you haven’t grasped the entire subject matter*”; (4) it focused more on minor details such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, and citation (Kate-NZ); (5) the instructions and rubrics were thoroughly elaborated and exactly complied with by the students, leaving narrow spaces for comments or suggestions (Andy-AUS); and (6) the student teachers were familiar with the process so there is no new element on that respect (Andy-AUS).

### **4.3 Summary**

This chapter has elaborated the contexts to analyse the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers. The cohort of 14 participants constitutes a divergent multiple case study with ample diversification regarding their region of origin, year of teaching



experience, study programme, and social status. Their accounts reflected the influence of the Confucian culture with esteemed values of diligence and respect as well as inherent drawbacks such as conformity, deficient criticality, dependence, and hierarchical distance (see 4.1.2, p.75). The stagnant socioeconomic condition (Huong and Fry, 2004; Canh and Barnard, 2009; Harman and Ngoc, 2010) impedes many of them from participating in academic activities. However, the Vietnamese integration into globalisation since 2007 (Dang *et al.*, 2013) has opened up more international education opportunities for them.

Generally, they were equipped with sufficient language teaching methodologies in their undergraduate studies; however, there were gaps in their learning skills, a deficiency of confidence to teach among the novice teachers and unpolished research skills among the entire cohort. They embarked on the international MA-TESOL course with six major professional goals in mind: obtaining required credentials, enhancing advanced language proficiency, refining teaching methodologies, developing research skills, expanding cultural knowledge, and fulfilling their dreams (see 4.1.3, p.77).

The MA-TESOL programmes engage them with the assessment tasks of various types, degrees of intensity, and volumes of workload. Written assessment is the most prevailing type being hailed for its creating deep learning opportunities and promoting reflexivity, criticality, creativity, and autonomy. Oral assessment though preferred by many students for its advantages to promote confidence and dissemination skills has not been focused on in NZ and the UK, yet it has been more popularised recently particularly in AUS and the USA. Other alternative forms such as ongoing assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment have emerged most discernably in the USA, yet they are still in the process of refinement and seeking a firmer position in the assessment system (see 4.2.1, p.80).

The most prevailing type of feedback is also in written form. Though over time, both the educators and the students have paid increasing attention to the process of giving and receiving feedback, it is still a premise of contradictions. Several of them were reported by the participants: (1) the reluctance to handle with feedback particularly the educators' avoidance to give negative feedback and the students' hesitation to communicate, (2) the mismatch between the preferred oral feedback and actual written one they received, (3) the contrast between positive oral feedback and unsatisfactory

marks, and (4) the mismatch between the expectation and the reality or the sacred and the profane (Bernstein, 2000). However, contradictions should be perceived as a positive sign as the overcome of such tensions may result in development (Cole and Engeström, 1993) (see 4.2.2, p.85).

## **Chapter 5 The Impact of the Assessment Process on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers**

This central findings chapter will discuss the impact of the assessment process, the object of the “ecological activity system” (3.1.4, p.53), on the professional identity of the Vietnamese student teachers during the MA-TESOL course (their learner identity). The analysis will cluster around four domains of the identity as discussed in (2.2.4, p.36) and are labelled: the cognitive impact (5.1); the affective impact (5.2); the behavioural impact (5.3); and the socio-cultural impact (5.4). The participants’ reflection on the relation between the assessment process and their more generic professional identity will also be elaborated in this chapter (5.5).

It is noteworthy that this is a case of collectiveness and multi-voicedness, a “community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). When perceiving assessment in its isolation, the participants reported a marginal impact due to its monotony and familiarity (**Quote 16, Quote 17**). The tangible changes in their identity were attributed to different factors: (1) their own agency (**Quote 18**), (2) the lecturer’s agency (**Quote 19**); or (3) the mediating artefacts (6.2, p. 114). However, upon reshaping assessment as being integrated into the teaching and learning process, they asserted that the assessment tasks placed them in the “mode” of studying (McCarthy and Walsh, 2003, cited in Walsh, 2006, p. 134): *“In dealing with 6 assignments, I had to read a lot of materials and felt that I gained a lot of knowledge from that reading”* (Joyce-UK). The participants’ accounts together with 817 results for the term “assessment” and 1052 results for the term “assignment” in 51 syllabi yielded by Nvivo word inquiry strongly advocate Bernstein (2000)’s central argument of the dominance of this regulative discourse over the instructional discourse with clear evidence of a substantial impact.

### **5.1 The Cognitive Impact**

Cognition is the most significant learning outcome highlighted in all the four sets of the MA-TESOL course syllabi. Beside the ample expertise knowledge gain, the participants depicted their salient improvement in terms of study skills (5.1.1) and criticality and higher-order thinking skills (5.1.2), which resonates with the positive cognitive impact

of assessment and formative feedback discussed by Sambell *et al.* (1997), Black and Wiliam (2001), and Norton (2007).

### 5.1.1 *Study skills*

First and foremost, the international MA-TESOL course obliged the Vietnamese students to enhance their academic study skills to survive and progress in the higher standard assessment system. Information retrieval and reading skills were mentioned as crucial to overcome the language barrier, access the relevant resources, and process advanced knowledge (Jane-AUS). The overwhelming reading materials necessitated them to swiftly develop strategies to absorb knowledge within the allotted timeframe: “*I told my lecturer that I couldn’t manage to read that much and he told me that I needed to have a strategy and the lecturer wouldn’t expect us to read all the materials thoroughly*” (Sarah-USA). The freedom of choice among those abundant resources also forced them to read with criticality to select the most relevant and high-quality articles.

Moreover, the Vietnamese students had to refine their academic writing skills regarding their writing styles, genres, and organisation of ideas (Gau-NZ, Sophie-AUS) as their previous educational experience and expectations resulted in “inappropriate texts” for the current program (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007, p. 57). The educator’s professional feedback helped them recognise and correct four frequent, culturally-rooted, and interlinked mistakes:

(i) *Writing lengthy text:*

I wrote a lot, I explained, I provided information but then my supervisor just crossed and wrote a note: “start here” [...]. You know as non-native speakers, we spend a lot of time writing but we just like beating around the bush but in English writing style, they just like to go straight to the main points, no explaining, going around, or providing background information. (Jane-AUS)

(ii) *Using complicated words:*

I try to write very long sentences, using very complicated words, big words. I think I am influenced by reading journal articles and they are written in such language so I tend to copy them without awareness. When I showed my writing to the learning advisors, they often told me that I don’t need to use such big words, just simple but effective words. (Gau-NZ)

(iii) *Lacking focus:*

I found it a very big problem for not only me but Asian students as well because we tend to investigate a problem in general, not focusing on a point. And they said that we had to focus on a point and we had to support it firmly with our evidence, with our logics. [...] So I focus on one point, not discussing things generally and I see that my marks improved like dramatically. (Nelson-UK)

(iv) *Being subjective:*

I was kind of giving too subjective opinions in evaluating some of the IELTS tests or designing a test and evaluating it. He also commented that I needed to be more objective, to read more and to check its reliability. (Kate-NZ and Joyce-UK)

During the entire assessment process, the students were constantly required to polish both their receptive and productive skills with assignments, research proposals, and the dissertation. Their academic skills have grown from inadequacy to more competency, evidenced by the final dissertation that encapsulates all their minor improvements during the process:

In dealing with the first assignment, I didn't read a lot and approached it with my personal experience with not much citing and referencing as I lacked study skills and information skills. But after receiving feedback and experiencing six assignments I saw my academic writing skills improved dramatically and it could be clearly observed in the literature review that captured all the important previous studies. (Joyce-UK)

### **5.1.2 Criticality and higher-order thinking skills**

Beside study skills, critical thinking was repeatedly asserted as the most significant skill that the students obtained from tackling the assessment tasks. The manifestation of this skill, however, varied among the cohort, involving (1) evaluating the information (Jane-AUS); (2) critiquing the viewpoints of different scholars ("*no one is without faults even leading scholars of the fields*" (Andy-AUS, Nancy-UK); (3) changing attitudes towards relativity ("*considering whether it's true or it's true to some extent or is it still true in another context, in another usage*" (Jane-AUS)); (4) being cynical before believing (Andy-AUS); (5) forming a habit of inquiry (Sarah-AUS, Jane-AUS); (6) viewing the same thing from different perspectives (Jane-AUS); (7) analysing the issue in more depth (Peter-UK); (8) expressing personal viewpoints (PT-NZ); and (9) supporting them with concrete evidence (Nancy-UK). There was a marked improvement in their comprehension of the skill and the level of criticality they achieved: "*After the study, now I know what critical thinking is. It means that the level of critical thinking must be deep enough and you must analyse the issue more and more, you must look at it from many perspectives and you must analyse*" (Peter-UK).

Their improved criticality can be attributed to both the written and oral assessment tasks with the same focus to enhance criticality: being mentioned 344 times in the document review and "*critical thinking was bolstered through the entire course, we should know*

*how to raise questions, how to think and reason with evidence*” (Sarah-USA). The more challenging “local learning ecology” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 211) with demanding assessment requirements, heavy workload, and abundant resources has also propelled the students to sharpen their criticality to survive. Moreover, the lecturers and peers’ feedback serves as a decisive factor in this skill construction. Nancy-UK’s lecturer bolstered her confidence in critiquing the articles she read, something not customary in Vietnamese culture, by saying *“just be more critical, don’t think that what they said is right, and just don’t be afraid of big figures”*. Nelson-UK also appreciated the way his lecturers encouraged him to express, and defend his viewpoints and accepted them: *“The teachers many times they accept our points. So that’s why we feel very encouraged. We feel that now we have the chances for critical thinking and we are free to be reflective in our essays”*. Peter-UK’s professor gave him critical comments, which pushed him to work hard to investigate the subject matters thoroughly from various perspectives. Sarah-USA added that the feedback during the peer review propelled her to continue nurturing this skill. Probably, her comments captured almost all factors contributing to the enhanced criticality: direct involvement in the assessment process and constructive responses to the lecturer and peer feedback:

Before studying the MA course, I knew what critical thinking is, what an independent thinker is but it was not until I directly got involved in the study programme, doing all the assignments, receiving feedback from the lecturers did I actually understand that I still needed to improve those two skills. (Sarah-USA)

Apart from critical thinking, other higher order thinking skills were also sparsely mentioned and typical for each individual. Sarah-USA mentioned her development of independent thinking thanks to her gained knowledge, skills, and critical thinking (avoiding bias based on the background and prior knowledge or experience, having her own disposition, and reasoning skill). Alpha-AUS highlighted problem-solving skill as it is not just about raising an issue but rather contextualising, comparing, and suggesting personal and “glocalised” solutions. Andy-AUS emphasised synthesising skill particularly when facing information overload. Peter-UK mentioned the significance of creativity: *“Not only critical but also creative. [...] You must think of new ideas, you must introduce new things. So the quality of ‘new’ is important”* while reflective thinking is an important skill May-UK developed.

## 5.2 The Affective Impact

Apparently, the assessment process in the international MA-TESOL course creates learning “spaces” (Leat and Higgins, 2002; Pryor and Crossouard, 2010) for the students to develop both cognitively and affectively. It is obvious that the former substantially influences the latter: *“from the essays, from the feedback, and the discussion afterwards we get more confidence in our language use, we get more confidence in our knowledge”* (Nelson-UK). In an endeavour to cluster the effects, this section of the affective impact is divided into that of the assessment tasks (5.2.1) and feedback (5.2.2).

### 5.2.1 The affective impact of the assessment tasks

The initial feelings when the Vietnamese students faced the first assessment tasks were a combination of being scared, tired, and stressed as signified in (Drew, 2001; Coutts *et al.*, 2011): *“I think that was a lot of work, it was scary; I was tired because except from the knowledge I also had to improve my writing skills and my academic vocabulary”* (Jane-AUS, Andy-AUS). The language barrier and the higher requirements for critical thinking and academic writing could be regarded as “problematic and contradictory objects” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 15) that posed major pressure for them. In the USA, the more demanding workload with diverse assessment channels administered by different course instructors substantially increased the level of tiredness and stress that they had to suffer:

Emotionally, I find it tiresome as there are too many assessment tasks, which can be seen in the syllabus of CALL. There were a number of instructors, which made me feel so stressed. Sometimes, I knew that there was something due, but I couldn’t remember exactly what it was. (Khanh-USA)

Stress apparently accumulated during the ongoing assessment process and was most discernible by the end of the module: *“The study is rather stressful to me [...]. Stress is still stress, by the end of the module, all of us felt exhausted”* (Khanh-USA). Some other negative feelings were also mentioned like boredom as the assessment is monotonous (Andy-AUS); at risk of failure as there were only one or two assignments in the entire module (Kate-NZ); disappointment due to the deficient interaction with the lecturers and limited presentation opportunities (Nelson-UK).

Despite the intermittent negative feelings, the students acknowledged the educational values of the assessment process in expanding their learning (Engeström and Sannino,

2010): *“I did appreciate the values of the assessment tasks. I feel that I learnt the most in the process of completing the assessment tasks”* (Andy-AUS). In return to their diligence and hard work, most of the marks they received were satisfactory and encouraging: *“The marks are quite boosting and I think that they are more or less.... I don’t know whether I am easy or not but I am quite happy with the marks”* (Nelson-UK). Most significantly, the assessment process amplified the motivation for research among the Vietnamese students. They started with little experience about conducting a proper, publishable research; however, *“after doing my dissertation, after doing a lot of reading I got interested in it, not feeling like a headache anymore”* (Joyce-UK). With the acquired knowledge, skills, and competences, they eventually developed a sense of efficacy in conducting research, a sound example of “developmental transfers” in their expansive learning (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13): *“I’m more interested in doing research and more ready to do it”* (Kate-NZ).

### **5.2.2 The affective impact of the feedback**

Feedback, which resembles the “formative intervention” in the theories of expansive learning (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 1), also imparts a combination of emotional responses among the students (Higgins *et al.*, 2001; Dowden *et al.*, 2011). The participants valued the confidentiality in the delivery of written feedback and marks, which gives them *“a sense of security, privacy, and personalized treatment”* (Andy-AUS). Their attitudes towards written feedback were mostly inclined to acceptance: *“I didn’t have any doubt or critical thought like ‘I don’t agree with you’ or something like that”* (Jane-AUS, Nelson-UK). In most of the cases, they comprehended, appreciated, and learnt from it: *“I think I listened to the feedback and tried to improve my performance”* (Jane-AUS) though there was certain disagreement that kept them silent (Khanh-USA). Few of them were confident enough to seek for further explanation or if they were, they: *“[...] tried to gather more questions and e-mailed to book an appointment with the lecturer to ask him many things at a time but not just some minor things”* (PT-NZ).

Apparently, their true satisfaction was associated with specific and comprehensible feedback that details the achievements and positively rephrases their weaknesses (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006): *“Almost all the feedback that I received. No matter how high or low the mark was, I was satisfied as the lecturers could specify for me which part I had done well and which one I needed to improve”* (PT-NZ). One-sentence,



unclear, too general, unintelligible feedback such as “*the analysis was not in-depth*” or “*you were not critical enough*” results in more dissatisfaction than the mark itself:

I would expect it to be clearer so that I could improve the writing myself. One-sentence feedback accompanied by the mark was not useful for me. I read and felt unsatisfied. Though the mark was not bad, I was not as satisfied as having a lower mark but the lecturer specified where I needed to improve. (PT-NZ)

The Vietnamese students appeared to be more active and responsive to oral feedback in an inclusive international environment where democracy and freedom of inquiry are promoted: “*if I like to raise my voice I wouldn’t have to worry about violating this or that and I am more confident in expressing my opinions*” (Alpha-AUS, Nancy-UK). The lecturers’ positive feedback was a source of encouragement and motivation for them to overcome their hardship (Black and Wiliam, 2001; Drew, 2001): “*Ms. PW often gave us feedback, very nice and very encouraging, which made me feel happy and more motivated*” (Khanh-USA). Furthermore, it influenced their deepest level of beliefs, transforming their “*apprenticeship of observation*” (Leat, 1999) into research-based practice illuminated by rationales and theoretical underpinnings:

One of the feedback that most of my lecturers gave is that for a teacher to be successful in a lesson he or she should know why he or she does something in class. So again it goes back to the theories that underpin your activity in class. I think that’s very important and it will change the way I think about teaching and the way I teach in the future. (Gau-NZ)

### **5.3 The Behavioural Impact**

Apparently, the assessment process in the international MA-TESOL courses activated the student teachers’ learning (Sluijsmans *et al.*, 2001; Klenowski *et al.*, 2006), making them notice, construe, construct, and operationalize the instructional ideas advocated by the educators (Spillane, 1999, p. 144). This section will discuss such reforms at “the core of their practice” (*ibid.*, p. 143) under three subheadings: research practice (5.3.1), pedagogical practice (5.3.2) and assessment practice (5.3.3).

#### **5.3.1 Research practice**

The Vietnamese student teachers made the most discernible achievement in research skills as they tend to be prioritised over the scholarship of teaching in Anglophone contexts (Chetty and Lubben, 2010). With a modest research background, the students

literally had to commence from scratch with critical reading, advanced academic writing, statistical analysis, and automatic referencing:

Previously, I didn't know what to do. I used to write a dissertation in my undergrad but it was not so clear [...]. Now, still unclear, but less unclear. I know the procedures, how to read, how to choose the topic, how to come up with the research questions, how to write the literature review and methodology chapter. And I also know roughly about statistics, what tools to use, how to interpret the results; especially, working with the references. (Kate-NZ)

Their research skills were gradually constructed via the process of reading articles, writing assignments, attending methodological modules, and compiling the dissertation. The assignments provided them with repeated practice to correct their mistakes and polish their skills: *"I learnt how to write an assignment properly, how to structure it, how to organise the references to the knowledge that the lecturers introduced in class"* (Alpha-AUS). The research methods modules taught them how to critique published works, familiarised them with various research techniques and provided them with spaces to conduct their own research that reflected their interests and teaching contexts: *"So I think the two courses [research methods] helped me to conduct research, a good research. This trimester we will have to conduct a real study. So we go from evaluation to theory and practice"* (Gau-NZ). The dissertation was a solid indication of the research skills they acquired during their MA-TESOL course: *"I improved a lot because after my MA thesis, I gained a lot of experiences like reading, how to read, how to combine, how to take notes in literature review, how to construct the research questions, how to provide rationales, you know, all those details"* (Jane-AUS).

Consequently, the students gained "agency" (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Priestley *et al.*, 2012) as they were better informed and equipped to identify and pursue their research interests (Andy-AUS). Some of them managed to have their articles published and deliver their presentations at conferences. The training and accreditation from the MA-TESOL course served as a passport for them to enter the academic world more independently and transformed "elements in their identity" (Illeris, 2014, p. 573) from a novice to a more competent researcher:

I think that the MA program was a transitional step for me from knowing nothing much to entering the world of research. Before my MA course, I didn't know much about research, but during the MA study I began to know what research is by reading a lot of articles, being exposed to critical thinking so when pursuing this PhD I am much more prepared and I knew how to orientate myself, which direction I would like to take. (Sarah-USA)

Their marked improvement in comprehending and conducting research was largely attributed to the feedback of the module leaders and supervisors. Thanks to their feedback, Kate-NZ managed to critically compose the literature review, an unfamiliar genre to her: *“My lecturer gave comments about that about how ideas should be related to each other, and the literature review, how it should give me a clue why I should conduct this research, what the gaps in literature are”*. Her supervisor also provided her with valuable guidance along the process, assisting her in clarifying the research topic and making it more “trendy”, more focused, and most significantly, more feasible. PT-NZ mentioned that her supervisor gave her positive feedback, yet simultaneously problematised the data collection and analysis and envisioned the prospective outcomes to assist her with decision making. He motivated her by setting the standard high and pushing her to surpass herself to gain success with his devotion of time and effort:

I find my supervisor really nice as he often created pressure for me but at the same time he was very encouraging, just like “boxing massage” but very effective, creating a motive for me to try. Each time I met him, I was so disappointed about myself but then strongly determined to overcome the difficulty. By the end, I was most impressed by him. He has a method that I can learn, really devoting his time to the students and letting them know that there’s no supreme level of satisfaction, there’s always something that I can learn. There’s an amazing way in him in both encouraging the learners, not letting them take too much pride of themselves, but not feel disappointed and give up either. (PT-NZ)

He made her feel humble and then raised her up with the typical example of his own struggle to success:

When I conducted a research with him, he plunged me off the cliff pitilessly, “not suitable for my style”, “with this writing, you wouldn’t be able to pursue a PhD”. But he just nailed down that: “that’s a good start, a necessary step, that’s good to begin with”. And then he said that when he did his MA like me now, he couldn’t even write like me, he was also challenged a lot. On publishing his very first article, he was fiercely criticised by the reviewers; no one could understand what he wrote. In short, he was overly critical with me and then he belittled himself, saying that when he was at my stage he began even lower but now he is one of the well-known in vocabulary teaching for having published a lot of articles in various journals. He made me realize that everyone has a starting point like that, and we just need to keep trying. And just like that, from this chapter to the next. After each chapter, I was severely belittled and then soothed by him. But by the end, everything was okay. (PT-NZ)

In this case, her supervisor taught her about research by his own role model, his own professional identity transition. His feedback was not seen as a “corrective tool” but rather a “challenge tool, where the learners clearly understand very well and the feedback is an attempt to extend and refine their understandings” (Evans, 2013, p. 72).

### 5.3.2 *Pedagogical practice*

In parallel with improved research practice, the students' accounts also revealed ample evidence of both tangible and intangible improvements in their pedagogical practice as a consequence of the assessment process. The most tangible developments could be observed in their presentation during the peer coaching sessions. Thanks to the holistic feedback regarding manner, organisation, confidence, accuracy, and fluency, they became bolder in their public speaking and more able to organise and manage the class (Shulman and Shulman, 2004). Alpha-AUS and Gau-NZ's lecturers and senior classmates acted as the role models for them to forge proper teaching methodologies and behaviours. Their pedagogical reinforcement via the lecturer-student interaction, the metalanguage used, and the continuous oral feedback (Sophie-AUS) resonates Astin (1999)'s finding about the correlation between the amount of interaction and the change in students' behaviours.

The more intangible improvements occurred in the students' changed beliefs and agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2006; Engeström and Sannino, 2010). The assessment tasks were a valid tool for them to gauge their deeply-rooted pedagogical beliefs against the actual practice to acquire new revelations. For example, Nancy-UK believed in the benefit of giving clear explanation, however, during the peer coaching session, her tutor helped her realise that this task is not practically easy: "*after the mock class, the tutor stressed that it's important to make sure that the learners know what they have to do before leaving some time for them to finish the exercises*". That experience made her aware of the significance of practicality and the possibility for improvement via practice: "*I know I need more experience. I think just teaching can help me change it*" (Nancy-UK).

The most influential factor that transforms the Vietnamese students' pedagogical practice could be the illumination of research introduced to them by the lecturers and then explored by themselves. For example, Gau-NZ experienced moments of revelation when her lecturers questioned her rationales for a common practice of using songs in class, which ignited her "rational capacities" (Kant, 1982, cited in Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 133):

And then he asked: Why do you do that? For what? For fun or for anything? It is at that moment then I asked myself? Yeah why do I do that? Just like for fun as for me music is just to warm the students up, to warm me up and then to give them motivation, and

sometimes if the song is about the topic that is how I can lead it to the topic of the lesson. But actually, to be very effective and to exploit everything we use in class then it's not enough for sure and using songs for me was very superficial. That is something that during the past three years I think I had never thought about. (Gau-NZ)

Andy-AUS also appreciated the values of research in providing him with explanation for his irresolvable problems like the ineffectiveness of corrective feedback, thus enabling him to critically shape his responses to problematic situations (Biesta and Tedder, 2006, p. 11). Enlightened by more advanced knowledge, the Vietnamese student teachers attained agency to form a more scientific working habit to replace their past intuitive routines (Khanh-USA, Gau-NZ). The impact was apparently more discernible among early career teachers who commenced with less presupposition about language teaching:

Generally speaking, the MA course has provided me with theoretical grounds for my classroom practices and the theories to change some. For example, I used to be fixed to the course book but now I think that teaching like that will be so boring. So I will find ways to improve the lesson by combining the course book and the supplementary materials as long as the students do not feel overloaded. (Khanh-USA)

Research offered them a sense of “freedom from constraints” (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 195), empowering them to think outside the box, to explore authentic digital resources rather than being confined to the textbooks or the classroom facilities (**Quote 20**). Research also guided them to be more efficient, being able to set the right focus for their lesson:

When I came back I know what to focus on, what I can cut down on. For example, in the course book, there are certain too difficult grammar points that I could skip as I know from certain research that it's not necessary. Or some pronunciation practice like -th sounds [θ] [ð], which is not important, I might not focus on but I will focus more on final sounds. (Kate-NZ)

In short, knowledge and research result in agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) and enhancement (Bernstein, 2000), which enable the Vietnamese student teachers to teach more practically, efficiently, purposefully, and “educationally” (to address wider educational issues) (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 199).

### **5.3.3 Assessment practice**

The assessment process in the international MA-TESOL course also led to improvements in the student teachers' assessment practice. Sophie-AUS and Sarah-USA, who majored in testing and assessment, were well-equipped with the knowledge and know-hows of testing and assessing learners of English and shifted both their

attitudes and practice from summative to formative assessment (7.3, p.140). The acquired knowledge helped Andy-AUS explain the feedback ineffectiveness and adjust his expectations towards the learners:

I gave them [the students] some writing assignments and when I marked the assignments I corrected almost all the mistakes in their essays and I worked very hard on that marking. When the students got their essays back, they showed appreciation and they seemed to be receptive, they seemed to understand all my corrections. But then I gave them another writing assignment then they did the writing. I marked their assignments again and there were the same mistakes all over again. It happened for quite some times and I was really frustrated. But after the course in SLA, I had a much more tolerant attitude towards mistakes and I kind of understand why my correction didn't work as I expected. (Andy-AUS)

Kate-NZ learnt both the technical knowledge and the practicality of how to design and gauge the reliability and validity of a language test via the assessment module. The metalanguage from the module enabled her to articulate both the direct and indirect lessons she acquired from the assessment process particularly the feedback:

From the lecturers' written feedback I realized that I myself need that kind of feedback and so do the learners. The feedback needs to be both general and detailed that can help the learners to improve rather than just pinpointing the mistakes. They could check the minor mistakes but not the thinking skills, but what we need is the improvement in thinking skills. (Kate-NZ)

She was also able to observe her lecturers' practice, reflect on her past conduct, and realise her subjectivity, inflexibility, and insensitivity. The identification of these gaps has enhanced her assessment practice with more consideration, flexibility, efficiency, and rationality rather than mere intuition like before:

Previously, I was quite subjective in giving feedback when correcting pronunciation for my students, and their speaking and writing. I gave a lot of subjective comments now I am more considerate in questioning if the feedback is really necessary for the learners, things like that. Previously, I just found faults and asked them to correct but now I need to think twice. I learnt about that from the way my lecturers taught. In my class, more than half of us were non-native students, and I witnessed countless mistakes. If they were not flexible in giving feedback, there would not be enough time to correct them let alone doing anything else. So I learnt to be flexible. [...] Now I know how to classify situations, when to give feedback rather than blindly pinpoint their errors. (Kate-NZ)

However, improvements in the assessment practice was merely reported by the student teachers who majored or undertook a module in assessment. The unavailability of the assessment module in most of the MA-TESOL courses and the poor assessment literacy impeded several other students from making improvement out of the educators' feedback:

Something that I feel regretted about is that both our university and V. University taught us so little about testing and assessment. There was no such module in my MA programme so I couldn't make good use of the lecturers' feedback to infer what I needed to improve. (Joyce-UK)

## 5.4 The Socio-cultural Impact

Beside the explicit impact on the student teachers' cognition, affect, and behaviour as discussed above, the assessment process in the international MA-TESOL course also exerts its implicit influence on their socio-cultural image. This section will cover two interrelated sub-themes: social status (5.4.1) and engagement in the "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) (5.4.2).

### 5.4.1 Social status

As Price *et al.* (2010) and Pryor and Crossouard (2010) concisely put, assessment measures the learners' achievement and accredits their learning. An internationally-accredited postgraduate degree is commonly assumed to automatically elevate the student teachers' social status with more appreciation and respect: "*I think if I can get a master's degree in the UK when I am back to VN, it would be definitely appreciated and respected by others*" (Nancy-UK, Gau-NZ). It also offers them certain competitive edge in their job application (Nancy-UK), which mirrors Amrein and Berliner (2003) and Leathwood (2005)'s claim about the social impact of assessment. However, the international credential is also associated with higher expectations from the colleagues and learners: "*I think that my future colleagues if they know that I already received a master's degree in the UK, maybe they will expect more from me and it's kind of a challenge but it's also an opportunity to try more*" (Nancy-UK).

It is widely accepted that summative assessment has substantial impact on the student's confidence as high marks may certify understanding and "it is to say that her state of consciousness being described is worthwhile state of mind to be in" (Barnett, 1994, p. 99). However, the participants' accounts reflected a paradox in the relation between marks and their self-images. While unsatisfactory marks may severely affect their self-efficacy (Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Young, 2000; Rust *et al.*, 2005), high marks do not significantly contribute to their confidence:

The marks, yeah, if you have an A, it's a motivation but I don't think that it's so important in my study. At the beginning of the course, I was quite stressed about that, A

or B or C. But after communicating with the lecturers and the professors I know that more importantly, they want us to develop our thinking. Maybe, my marks were not too bad that I was not stressed about them but I don't think high marks is something that make me confident, they are not the core for my confidence. I feel confident when I have the knowledge, I have independence in my thinking and I am able rather than I have an A. (Sarah-USA)

Sarah-USA's gained confidence, however, was attributed to the obtained knowledge, thinking skills, and experiences that significantly elevated "elements of the identity" (Illeris, 2014, p. 573). Her account not only reflected Bernstein (2000)'s reasoning about the necessity of enhancement for confidence but also acknowledged the role of the educators' feedback in guiding her attitudes towards formative assessment and learning.

In a successful story of Jane-AUS, her MA-TESOL degree provided her with two promotion opportunities though social status was not her professional goal. She strived to enhance her knowledge and professionalism and would not believe in the status-changing power of knowledge, yet her success story proved that knowledge can engender advantage, prestige, and credibility:

Right but I think I kind of have an advantage and an interest in conducting research so that's why I think maybe to some extent knowledge helps you to have not the power but how can I say like the prestige, like something people believe in you, like believe in your ability to do something, your confidence. Yeah they believe in your abilities to do many things to be responsible for many things. (Jane-AUS)

Her ability to conduct research and manage tasks made her more competitive than others in the selection process, however, it also means that she had increasingly more responsibilities to fulfil: "*Actually, when I have a higher position, I have to deal with a lot of things, not only teaching but also you know like planning or developing tests and other stuff in the department I have to take care of*" (Jane-AUS).

#### **5.4.2 Engagement in the communities of practice**

Many of the assessment tasks have helped the students to improve their interpersonal skills and participate more actively in the classroom activities: "*I changed from being passive to active as we studied in group and had to deliver presentations so I must have ideas ready in mind to contribute*" (Alpha-AUS). She became confident in sharing about the Vietnamese teaching contexts and voicing her own viewpoints: "*in studying the module education policy, I was able to list more examples about Vietnamese education policies, several shortcomings and voice my own opinions*" (Alpha-AUS).



The collaboration in the assessment process also taught May-UK a very significant skill of listening: *“It taught me, both academically and socially, that listening to other people is one of the most important skills you need to have [...]. Listening to their opinions and analysing their points give me a chance to reconsider my point of view”* (May-UK).

With better interpersonal and cognitive skills, the MA-TESOL students were more able and eager to engage in the academic communities both inside and outside their institutions (Shulman and Shulman, 2004), which resonates Rea-Dickins *et al.* (2007)’s finding about the relation between the students’ linguistic identity and their engagement in the learning community. A better methodological foundation, sharper criticality, and more access to knowledge have empowered the Vietnamese students to participate in academic events more frequently and efficiently: *“it makes me feel that I am coming to the world of researchers”* (Nelson-UK). Though one year was inadequate, most of them were better equipped to pursue their professional research career and strengthen their ambition to conduct a longer-term research project. *“I would like to do some kind of research or even my PhD here on that topic”* (Nelson-UK, Peter-UK, and Andy-AUS). Further discussion of their participation in the “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991) will be presented in the section about the impact of the community (6.4, p.121).

## **5.5 The Assessment Process and Professional Identity**

The previous sections have elaborated the impact of the assessment process on the four aspects of the Vietnamese student teachers’ professional identity: cognition, affect, behaviour, and socio-culture. This final section will examine the more holistic and difficult-to-categorise impact on their identity as autonomous and life-long learners (5.5.1) and their changed attitudes (5.5.2).

### **5.5.1 An autonomy and life-long learning**

The Anglophone environment requires a high level of autonomy (Fordyce and Hennebry, 2014), therefore, the Vietnamese students had to strive to become independent learners, which can be atypical in their culture. Five out of 14 students (Joyce-UK, Nancy-UK, Andy-AUS, Peter-UK, and Sarah-USA) highlighted autonomy

as a significant quality in their professional development (TESOL International Association, nd.-b). Joyce-UK was a typical case of striving for independence. Back in 2008, she could not benefit much from the under-developed feedback scheme and was pushed to take a more active role in the learning process:

I felt that I autonomously learnt a lot more rather than from the lecturers' feedback. Our results depended largely on us ourselves. [...] I don't know how to say after three years, well I may have gained from the lecturers but not from the assessment feedback I think. Most of the time, I had to draw a lesson for myself. (Joyce-UK)

Her route to autonomy, however, was not a solitary path but involved interaction with the resources, educators, and peers: *"I learnt from their [the peers'] papers and read more books and then my scores were gradually improved. I myself had to find out a way for myself to improve my writing, no one taught me about that"* (Joyce-UK).

Though many novice teachers commenced their sojourn with modest prior knowledge, the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course have imbued them with essential knowledge and confidence to walk on their own feet not only institutionally but also in many walks of their life journey (Larzén-Östermark, 2011):

When I was in VN I did think that the best way to learn English and to become a teacher of English is to study in an English speaking country like the UK. When I came here I realized that it is all about you, yourself. That's a kind of journey. From the very first step, I was like a baby, yeah, like a baby in academic life, knowing almost nothing, and now it's just getting better and I think that I feel more confident when facing the dissertation coming soon. [...] I feel more eager, I feel more prepared for whatever happens to me both in class, in academic life or even the life outside the classroom. Yeah, I just think you know I think in positive ways. I just feel that my relationship with my classmates, with the lecturers, and with other friends here is getting better. (Nancy-UK)

Life-long learning (Crick and Wilson, 2005; TESOL International Association, nd.-b), therefore, becomes as a natural consequence of the autonomy, self-efficacy, and aspiration for the Vietnamese student teachers to retain their academic interests. The self-efficacy to conduct research lays a solid foundation for their academic advancement: *"In the future, I think I myself can write a paper on my own"* (Nelson-UK). Meanwhile, the ever-changing contexts of TESOL education necessitate them to refine their pedagogical research skills (The Higher Education Academy, 2011): *"Given the fact that trends and issues in the TESOL field are changing, I strongly think that research skills are fundamental in my professional development"* (May-UK). The empowerment to comprehend and conduct research has an enduring impact on their

professional identity, particularly when they teach increasingly smarter students: “*I need to read more. I need to keep myself updated with all the research and studies about teaching techniques, teaching methodologies*” (Gau-NZ). In other words, autonomy and life-long learning have become integral parts of their professional routines.

### **5.5.2 Changes in attitudes**

Though the changes might be indiscernible “*me right now and me in the past, there’re not many changes but I think I still improve, but it’s not big enough for me to recognize it now*” (Nancy-UK), upon deeper reflection, the students could recognise tangible changes in their attitudes, which are at the core of their “personal growth” (McGill and Beaty, 2001, p. 185). They reported changing their attitudes towards the teaching profession, their previous teachers, and their future students. Prior to the MA-TESOL course, they would assume that teaching is an easy occupation and that they could deliver better lessons than their previous teachers. However, their similar pitfalls during the practicum made them realise that “*teaching is not an easy task but when you do it you feel everything is more real. It’s not easy; it’s not simple at all*” (Nancy-UK). Therefore, they showed more respect and sympathy to their previous teachers. Their switched role into the students in a more advanced educational institution and their obtained knowledge in social linguistics, social interaction, and identity also taught them to respect the learners’ individuality: “*I understood why each person learn English their own way, some find it easy, some difficult, and their motivations also differ*” (Kate-NZ).

A more salient attitudinal change could be their inclination towards the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings (Fordyce and Hennebry, 2014). There came moments when they realised that teaching is not just about imitating the predecessors, there are theoretical grounds at the centre of this science:

Honestly, during the three and four years I worked in my university, I kind of taught my students the way I was taught in the past and if I liked the way I was taught then I applied it to my students if I didn’t like it then I kind of made some changes. But honestly, now I come to realize that I didn’t have a theoretical background for what I did. (Gau-NZ)

Their philosophical viewpoints became inclined to relativity, a typical HE philosophy (Barnett, 2009): “*In language, there’s nothing that is absolutely right or absolutely*

*wrong so we shouldn't give feedback like: that's wrong*" (Kate-NZ, Andy-AUS). Their viewpoints were said to be shaped by not only the assessment tasks but also the interaction with the lecturers and peers during the process (the "formative interventions" (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 1)). The impact on their perspectives extends far beyond learning and teaching to encompass interpersonal relationships and life in general:

I also found that knowledge is just a part, but thinking and the viewpoints about people and life and many other things beside knowledge is much more important [...]. I see that beside the study, the communication with the lecturers and friends and the assessment of the lecturers have a huge impact on my ways of viewing and judging other people, even how to live, how to study, and how to teach. I see that there are many positive impacts. Though I know that other people they may have other viewpoints, I think that I find my professional identity here (Sarah-USA).

Their accounts are aligned with the view that teacher identity is "not only about whether and how to intervene or about skills and techniques, but also about our entire attitude and stance toward the world, others, and human relations - a philosophy of life" (Irving and Young, 2002, p. 20) or more generally it is about learning "to be someone who" (Kelchtermans and Hamilton, 2004, p. 785).

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has delineated the salient impact of the assessment process on the student teachers' professional identity in four aspects of: cognition, affect, behaviour and socio-culture, and their holistic identity. There is convincing evidence from the students' accounts about their construction and reconstruction of the professional identity during the assessment process (Rodgers and Scott, 2008).

Cognitively, they had to expand their "trainability" by developing more effective study skills to tackle more demanding assessment tasks (Bernstein, 2000; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Engeström and Sannino, 2010). Thanks to the educators' feedback, they managed to identify and correct four prevalent mistakes: writing lengthy texts, using complicated words, lacking focus, and being subjective. However, their most significant cognitive improvement was the ability to think critically, which outperformed other higher-order thinking skills such as independent thinking, problem solving, creativity, and reflexivity.

Affectively, the students worked under stress and pressure when confronting such contradictions and dilemmas (Kärkkäinen, 1999; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004) as the language barriers, the incompatible learning methods, the assessment requirements, and the occasional feedback tensions. However, they hailed the academic freedom and the private and confidential treatment that gave them a sense of security and individuality to fight their own battles. During their boundary crossing, the lecturers' positive feedback served as "formative interventions" (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 1), not only encouraging but also transforming "elements of their identity" from novice to competence (Illeris, 2014, p. 573).

Behaviourally, the assessment process generated "zones of enactment" (Spillane, 1999, p. 143) that fundamentally reconstructed the student teachers' research, pedagogical, and assessment practice, of which enhanced research capacity was depicted as the most salient improvement. Consequently, their pedagogical practice became illuminated by research, which enabled them to be more resourceful, confident, and agentic (Biesta and Tedder, 2006) to teach more purposefully and educationally (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 199). Their assessment practice has also been theoretically and practically improved through the assessment modules and the direct observations. However, such positive impacts like improved assessment literacy and formative assessment and feedback were more confined to those whose courses covered testing and assessment.

Socio-culturally, the MA-TESOL degree is regarded as a professional "license" (Clayton, 1990, p. 29) granting the student teachers with more appreciation, respect, competitive edge, and higher expectation. While they associated their boosted confidence with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences rather than high scores, low scores were reported to affect their self-esteem (Young, 2000). The master's degree also engendered promotion opportunities and prestige accompanied with increasing responsibility for the degree holder. However, it is the improvement in the internal self (cognitive and affective aspects) that gave the student teachers the agency to participate more actively in various "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

From a holistic viewpoint, the participants also reflected on the significance of the assessment process in facilitating their autonomous and life-long learning both intentionally and unintentionally (TESOL International Association, nd.-b). The impact

appeared to expand over the confinement of pedagogical realm to other aspects of their life, including their reconstructed attitudes such as relativity, sympathy, and respect and new ways of learning, teaching, and living, which marked their professional development (McGill and Beaty, 2001).

## **Chapter 6 The Impact of the International MA-TESOL Course on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers**

This third findings chapter of the dissertation is devoted to depict the impact of the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers. As the impact of the object (the assessment process) has been analysed in the previous chapter, this chapter expands to analyse the impact of the other factors of the course as mapped onto the “ecological activity system” (3.1.4, p.53). It is organised under five sub-headings that correspond to the five remaining factors of the system: the subject (the educators and their assessment practice) (6.1); the mediating artefacts (the library resources, the English language, and the additional seminars and workshops) (6.2); the rules (the course structure and the grading system) (6.3); the community (the academic, pedagogic, and socio-cultural one) (6.4); and the power relations (the lecturer-student interactions and international student support) (6.5).

### **6.1 The Subject**

Research has indicated that the subject or the facilitators play a crucial role of in a professional development system in establishing an inquiry-based community of learners and structuring learning experiences for that community (Borko, 2004). This section will elaborate the Vietnamese students’ reflections on the roles of the educators (6.1.1) and their assessment practice (6.1.2).

#### **6.1.1 *The educators***

Generally, the Vietnamese students expressed their respect to their knowledgeable educators, who could “read” their teaching practice and provided them with rationales and explanation: “*They know a lot, they are knowledgeable and they can see what I did in the past. [...] Then my lecturer can show me that something I did in the past was totally wrong even though my intention was very good*” (Gau-NZ). The opportunities to study with prestigious professors at the cutting-edge of the field were delightful, encouraging, and motivating experiences for them (Nelson-UK). The students acknowledged their educators’ expertise, extensive teaching experiences, and high research profiles, which make them esteemed instructors/ supervisors and their lessons practical and efficient:

I can feel that the way they teach me is like they base it on their own experience as a teacher and from what they research and what they know about other research in that field. And they really have the conclusions and very practical tips about dos and don'ts in class about how to help students rather than confuse them. (Gau-NZ)

With their intellect, the educators also guided and channelled the students to relevant research themes and helped them avoid possible pitfalls:

The lecturer, he reads more than us so he said many other researchers have touched upon that topic, there's an abundance of articles there already, so I should follow this direction which is new and more unfamiliar or more highly appreciated. [...] the lecturers helped us to narrow down, to keep on the right track, and to come up with something trendy and useful or they guided us to "trendy" themes. (Kate-NZ)

Though their official title is a lecturer, their actual role was more of a facilitator: "*The lecturers became the facilitators in the true sense of the word, but not the teachers anymore. If I had any concern, they were very willing to answer very pleasantly*" (PT-NZ). They could also be the tutors who connected more with the students offering them with academic support (May-UK). There was no distinction among the native and non-native educators as they were all nice (Kate-NZ) and they left a positive impression of being inspiring, helpful, and supportive (Gau-NZ). Their friendliness and openness encouraged the students to overcome their communicative hesitation and participate more eagerly in class discussion: "*It seems to me that all of them have a sense of humour so the atmosphere of the class was very pleasant, and the students were free to interrupt the lecturers, so my fear gradually faded away*" (PT-NZ).

Sarah-USA summarised the roles of her educators as a knowledgeable resource centre, a source of academic advice, a facilitator during the study process, and a peer coach who made her feel included:

The first role is the knowledgeable resource centre for us to consult any time we need. Any time we have a question we can refer to them for a knowledgeable and informed answer. Normally, the lecturers are updated about the issues so they can give very useful advice. At the same time, they are very good facilitators during our study. For example, if we had any difficulty in the class or we had any issue, the lecturers were the ones who facilitated our in-class study. But they could also be our peers accompanying us, helping, and sharing with us all the issues that we faced. Many of them were very nice; they were a source of intimate sharing; they were very friendly, not just mentioning study all the time but other topics as well like family. It's like a small community at the university. So it's very motivating to go to class and the learning environment is very friendly. (Sarah-USA)



As discussed in (4.2.2, p.85 and 6.5, p.126), there exists an intellectual/ social distance between their educators and the Vietnamese students, however, the affective communication appeared to draw them closer to each other in a cordial, “family style” environment (Tomlinson and Dat, 2004, p. 211) in which the educators were a great role model and a source of motivation (Sarah-USA, Khanh-USA).

Time, however, is a decisive factor conditioning the interaction between the educators and their students. Most of them are busy: *“They [the lecturers] work continuously, being at the office even at weekend, late at night. They consider the office their family”* (Khanh-USA). Therefore, most of them would merely lead the students to the field of study: *“The main task of the professor was to introduce some issues for the students to discuss and the learners had the responsibility to research and work by themselves”* (Peter-UK). This role allocation caused certain tension to non-independent learners: *“My supervisor was just so busy, I couldn’t even ask him how I did that though after finishing each chapter I often had him read for me”* (Joyce-UK). There were moments of doubts when the students’ expectations of their lecturers were not fully addressed: *“My attitude towards the lecturers here has experienced its ups and downs”* (Andy-AUS). However, those moments elapsed when the students gradually and considerably adapted their learning styles: *“I didn’t rely on the lecturers as the source of [direct] information any more but as a source of motivation, like he presented some ideas then I did some further reading about those areas and I was fine with that”* (Andy-AUS). With that reconceptualisation, Andy-AUS felt that he benefited more from his lecturers’ inspiration and initiatives.

### **6.1.2 Their assessment practice**

There were several points the Vietnamese students were impressed about their educators’ assessment practice. Firstly, they were impressed by the time and effort their lecturers devoted to marking and giving feedback: *“The lecturers did some serious marking; they put some sort of effort in marking and giving me feedback”* (Andy-AUS). They also allocated a considerable proportion of their office hours to meet and discuss the assignment requirements or explain their feedback to the students (Jane-AUS). Most of them possessed professional assessment skills (The Higher Education Academy, 2011) and were delicate with their feedback, from which the Vietnamese students could learn: *“They know how to give feedback that helps you move forward but still point out your weaknesses and, of course, without demotivating you”* (Gau-NZ).

However, the interview data also reflected the influence of the educators' identities on their design of the assessment tasks and their marking, which echoed Bloxham and Boyd (2007)'s finding that "experienced staff have usually developed their own criteria and standards for marking which are both difficult to articulate and resistant to change" (p.60):

I was not quite excellent in technology but the lecturer was such an expert. She was both a linguist and a technological expert so the products I created were assessed from the perspective of a professional technician. Therefore, my mark was not so high but just okay. She was also very diligent. She asked us to write blogs and everyone had to contribute to that blog on a weekly basis, about 1000 words about the papers that she delivered. [...] She didn't mark just the language but the technology as well so when she looked into what I did she may have found that they were not professional enough. (Kate-NZ)

Additionally, the educators' varied interpretation of the marking criteria with their own lenses reflects their generosity or strictness towards marking, which forms "unspoken rules" that the students could not address properly:

One of the assessment criteria for the essay is that we know how to acknowledge the sources that we use in our assignment. While some lecturers are very easy, ok if you know how to use APA, how to use Endnote, that's fine. [...] But other lecturers they are very strict; they want everything to be standard. [...] Some other lecturers they even gave me the specific number of references that I need to cite at least, for example, for one thousand words I need to have at least ten references. For others, they don't really require explicitly like that. (Gau-NZ)

On the one hand, the educators' strictness may enforce the students to invest increased effort (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Though their marks were lower than those in other modules, the students would still feel proud: "*He used to teach in M. University, he said that to him, over 60 was really good already and I got 65 for that. I knew that it was a difficult module and the lecturer was so strict, so I made the most effort that I could*" (Joyce-UK). On the other hand, strictness may lead to disappointment when the marks contradict the students' investment of time and effort and the lecturers do not provide them with explicit explanation (Higgins *et al.*, 2001):

Actually, I felt a bit disappointed as I invested a lot of effort to design a class session based on the IELTS test, a lot of effort but the mark was just above average and the feedback was not so clear. I didn't know why she was not satisfied but she didn't explicitly tell me why. (Kate-NZ)

## 6.2 The Mediating Artefacts

The interview data resonated Vygotsky (1978)'s socio-cultural disposition regarding the essentiality of the operational materials in the process of capability development. This section will illustrate the impact of three crucial elements of the mediating artefacts in the international MA-TESOL course: the library resources (6.2.1), the English language (6.2.2), and the supplementary seminars and workshops (6.2.3).

### 6.2.1 The library resources

The technological advancement in Anglophone countries overwhelmed the Vietnamese students with the vast collection of academic books and journals available (Nancy-UK). The library was considered indispensable in their learning process: *“What I like most and am impressed most in the UK university is the library. It hugely supports us in doing assignments; we could virtually eat and sleep there”* (Joyce-UK). The massive database with inter-library loan services and speedy internet access considerably enthused them to search for new knowledge and understanding: *“I am having access to the most updated information in the world. It makes me confident and I'm very happy”* (Nelson-UK, Nancy-UK). Access to academic resources has renovated their working habits “beyond recognition” and immensely elevated the quality of their research:

I guess it has changed my attitude and the way I work, the way I study beyond recognition. [...] The availability of materials has enabled me to search very deeply any topic of interest. In academic studies, the amount of reading you do and the quality of the reading material will determine the quality of the writing, the quality of the final product. So I guess although that's the mediating artefact, it may be the most important factor in my study. And that's what I appreciate most from my experience here, I mean the facility is the number one factor in the success of my study. (Andy-AUS)

It can be argued that the accessibility to certified resources is a necessary condition for the students to develop their learning autonomy. While the educators provide them with instructions and guidance, the library facilities enable them to conduct their research and inquiries: *“The lecturers didn't offer much to us but the environment itself offered us with many things to discover for ourselves. It's not like the lecturers taught us but they just created the conveniences for us to discover for ourselves”* (Joyce-UK, Peter-UK, and Gau-NZ). Digital databases have become the most powerful study tool, without which learning can be severely impeded. That explains Gau-NZ's fear of losing access on her future return to VN: *“Even though now I am still studying I think about when I come back to VN next year then I'll lose all my access to the library, e-books,*

*and online journals. That is what I really miss...being given access to those materials”* (Gau-NZ).

Other digital systems such as Blackboard and Turnitin also enhance the student teachers’ professionalism particularly regarding their working patterns and ethics. For example, they could download the slides from Blackboard to prepare for the lessons and use Turnitin to check for originality and plagiarism: *“I guess it’s kind of a necessary step to hinder plagiarism attempt or at least to make people aware of the importance of referencing, paraphrasing, and keeping their work original”* (Andy-AUS). His account resonates Ruckriem (2009)’s view of the significance of digitalisation though it can be criticised as an overstatement: *“To discuss co-configuration without mentioning computers and the Internet is like studying the results without considering the causes”* (cited in Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 17). The library resources obviously enhance the students’ sense of ownership over meaning making, which in turn enhances their identities as learners and their active participation in learning (Norton, 2010).

### **6.2.2 The English language**

The English language is both a significant element and tool in the professional identity construction of Vietnamese student teachers as it happens in an unfamiliar culture using an additional language (Fotovatian, 2012). As discussed in (4.1.3, p.77), the desire to “standardise” their English is a major motivation for the participants to study abroad as they assumed that international immersion is one of the most efficient ways to improve their language (Jackson, 2008, Gau-NZ). It is obvious that they have more opportunities to converse in the target language: *“When coming here, I have a lot of chances to meet up with local people, British and international students and staff so I have a lot of chances, a lot of experiences to communicate with them”* (Nelson-UK). Many participants like Nelson-UK were able to make good use of the opportunities to improve their international communication and correct the fossilised errors (more or less permanent and difficult to change errors) (Myles, 2002, p. 10).

However, the foreign language anxiety associated with inauthentic, immature second language communicative abilities (Horwitz, 2001) and the cultural barriers hindered some other students from effective communication: *“I cannot understand them very easily and quickly and sometimes they are not patient enough to talk for a long time with a non-native English speaker”* (Nancy-UK). The process to improve their

academic skills and metalanguage involved even more struggles due to their deficient expertise of the field: “*a professional talk wouldn’t last very long*” (Joyce-UK). The resulting reservation hindered them from cross-cultural communication, leaving them with sparse meaningful contacts with the host community (Schartner, 2014), making their aim to enhance the language proficiency more difficult to achieve.

Confronted with such language challenges, gradually the Vietnamese students arrived at several solutions: (1) restricting their use of Vietnamese (Nancy-UK), (2) enhancing communication with international peers (Nancy-UK), (3) changing their attitudes towards “standard” English (Gau-NZ), and (4) respecting World Englishes (Kachru, 1992; Matsuda, 2003, Kate-NZ; Jenkins, 2006):

When I came here, I work and study with international classmates and international lecturers as well. And last semester I attended the sociolinguistics course. I have to say that I change a lot about how I see myself as an English learner and as an English teacher. I came to realize that it is more important to be understandable than to be native-like so now I feel very comfortable being me, being a Vietnamese English learner and being a Vietnamese teacher of English. Maybe I cannot help my students to master American accent or British accent through me as an example but I can teach them international English or English as a Lingual Franca. I think that I change a lot about how I view myself. (Gau-NZ)

But after the course, after studying such modules as identity, social linguistics, and speaking and listening, I realized that accent is not that important, we can keep our natural accent. My accent is a mix of Vietnamese, British, American, and Kiwi. I’m a Vietnamese, learning British English via doing IELTS, watching too many American films, and studying in New Zealand for one and a half year. [...] it was repeated in many modules that we should respect Englishes, different accents from different countries and it is not advisable to force the learners to follow BE or AE. (Kate-NZ)

### **6.2.3 *The supplementary seminars and workshops***

Beside the library resources and the English language, the supplementary seminars and workshops were also mentioned to be impactful mediating artefacts. The students highlighted several sessions that are crucial for their professional development. The short yet essential pre-start or induction sessions orientating them to the new learning environment with new facilities, staff members, and services was time-saving, efficient, and enabling:

During the first two weeks, the organizers invited all the officers and staff that we need to know and then they shared with us what we need to know, where they are and what they can do to help us and they guided us all through the campuses. They introduced to us how to use all the services, how to use the library, how to use the photocopier, for example. So they showed us everything. Everything is very clear. We know what to do

and how to do things. It saves me a lot of time. I know where to go, what to do, who to ask rather than asking around. (Gau-NZ)

The students also made good use of the academic support sessions such as professional academic writing service (Gau-NZ, PT-NZ) or introductions to data analysis tools (SPSS and NVivo software). Though being vaguely aware of the power of those research tools, some of them did not attend the workshops as those sessions were apparently not highlighted at MA level (Sarah-USA). Those who attended found them shallow, incomprehensible and would desire more in-depth sessions to truly master those research tools:

Those are like “watching flowers while horse riding”. They also mentioned ANOVA, SPSS, but just a scratch on the surface; I didn’t know how to use them at first. [...] Only by the final trimester when I had to conduct a real research, I knew how to do it. And I had my supervisor to guide me how to work with ANOVA, how to read the data analysis, and how to understand the results. But now it’s still unclear to me. I guess I need to practise using it more in order to master it. (Kate-NZ)

Several other sessions about research methodologies and dissertation preparation were also found useful but inadequate like a taster packed with bountiful knowledge and references that the students would feel overwhelmed and fail to investigate further (Nelson-UK). Some other workshops to develop specific skills like note-taking, classroom observation and interview were found unnecessary or superficial either due to the technological changes or the shallow coverage of the contents (Andy-AUS, Nelson-UK). However, the absence from those study skill sessions may result in an insecure feeling of missing out something important (Joyce-UK).

### **6.3 The Rules**

The rules or the regulative discourses are associated with inherent power and also serve as the moral discourses and the criteria that give rise to character, manner, conduct, posture, etc. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 34). This section explores two aspects of the rules in the international MA-TESOL course: the course structure (6.3.1) and the grading schemes (6.3.2).

#### **6.3.1 *The course structure***

A typical MA-TESOL course covers three main areas: linguistics, pedagogy, and research. The course structure varies across institutions and individual selection,

however, the AUS and UK ones were attributed to be more theoretical while those in NZ and the USA more practical (**Quote 21**), which is verified by the synthesis of the course modules specified in (Appendix G The MA-TESOL modules, p.229). Three subthemes emerging from the participants' accounts about the course structure are the timing, the modes of assessment, and the workload.

In terms of timing, the one-year MA-TESOL course in AUS and the UK was deemed too short for the students to digest the knowledge (Jane-AUS, Peter-UK). As “time is a key variable in learning, especially when that learning involves constructing complex new understandings” (Spillane, 1999, p. 157), most of them would expect the course to prolong for a year and a half or two years like in several American universities.

Additionally, the sequential nature and the increasing complexity of the modules from semester one to semester two were reported to negatively affect the January intakes: *“The system is from easy to difficult but I had to start from the difficult and went to the easier one. If I had started in September, I would be assessed more properly”* (Nancy-UK).

Regarding the mode of assessment, as mentioned in (4.2.1, p.80), the overall NZ and UK assessment schemes are largely dominated by written assessment meanwhile in AUS and the USA, oral assessment is more frequent with weekly presentations, in class and online Moodle discussions. The deficiency of oral assessment and practicum in NZ and the UK apparently deprived the student teachers of holistic professional development:

I would say if there were a presentation, it would be more complete. Only written assignments could not convey all about the TESOL development. Or in another university here that I know, my friends had a trimester to do the practicum, teaching English classes of the university for non-native students. I found that quite interesting and very practical. If the assessment covers other modes like that instead of writing only, I think it would be more holistic. (PT-NZ)

While the workload in AUS, NZ and the UK were relatively relevant to the participants' learning capacities, the US system is far more demanding with the minimum of four or five assignments per module (**Quote 22**). Their demand forces the students to work more diligently and under more pressure than others. Sarah-USA noted that *“The upside of doing a lot of assessment tasks is that the students are pushed to work hard, to write a lot, to think hard, and to read a lot rather than just attending the class”*. However,

Jane-AUS admitted that overlap and irrelevancy occasionally demotivated her and skills like designing a marketable website could be over-demanding for some students.

The pervasive and demanding written assessment tasks naturally forced the Vietnamese students to learn effective time management skills: *“it’s all about us to know how to manage our time how to meet the deadlines then”* (Gau-NZ, Jane-AUS). Those who chose to take four modules in a semester had to tackle excessive workload with intensive effort investment (Norton and Toohey, 2011, Gau-NZ, Kate-NZ). However, their effort also experienced its wax and wane, which could be generalised into two major trends: the upward and the downward one. Those who were not accustomed to the system or received unsatisfactory results in the first semester had to invest more effort in the second one to upgrade their total scores: *“I was really satisfied with that until I received the mark as that would just mean a pass but not a merit. Afterwards, no one taught me, but I had to read further and tried even more”* (Joyce-UK). Those who already invested their effort heavily and received satisfactory results would choose to save their effort in the following semester: *“But one bad thing is I became lazier this trimester I don’t know how and why... maybe I think that ok I can survive the first trimester so I will survive the second one”* (Gau-NZ).

### **6.3.2 The grading schemes**

The participants highly valued the provision of the assessment rubrics and criteria, which resonates with Dowden *et al.* (2011)’s finding about their significance. Though the criteria were not frequently accompanied with the lecturers’ rationales for giving marks: *“Even when using the list of criteria, the lecturer did not explain why this is 4 out of 5, why 3 out of 5, why the other only 2 out of 5”* (Kate-NZ), the detailed description of the assessment aims, requirements, analytical scoring components, and mechanics provided the students with clear guidelines to comply with (Andy-AUS). Those guidelines serve as a bible for them to study carefully and obtain optimal results: *“I studied such criteria as well as the contents of the module so that I knew how to have a good score”* (Sarah-USA).

The grading schemes in Anglophone universities, however, instigate certain concerns for the Vietnamese students as “grades are often a means to an end, but they have serious repercussions on learning” (Taras, 2002, p. 508). Firstly, the students were



challenged by the two requirements of criticality and autonomy which had not been emphasised in their previous education:

Critical thinking was not taught in VN. That's one reason why I did not get a high degree. [...] Another reason may be the fact that in my course I was required to self-study and to research and to work by myself a lot but when I was in VN, I was not required to work a lot on my own, in fact. (Peter-UK)

The fact that the distinction grade in most institutions particularly in the UK is attached with advanced criticality not only hindered many Vietnamese students from achieving this honour but also induced disappointment among many of them as the average mark range for postgraduate students in VN is from 7 to 10:

A is a distinction and rare, B and C are more common. [...] Among nearly 100 course participants, there were hardly anyone achieving a distinction, the highest was around 67 or 68. [...] So far, there's only one talented teacher that I know got a distinction. [...] I realized that a distinction in MA-TESOL in the UK is worth a sea of effort, but having a merit or a pass is not that hard. (Joyce-UK)

The second concern voiced by the students is related to the discrepancies in the marking schemes among different countries, universities, and lecturers. While a distinction is a certification of excellence in the UK, it appears to be more achievable in AUS, NZ, and the USA: *"I don't know but compared to other faculties, mine seems to be more generous with marks"* (Kate-NZ); *"There's hardly any 10 but there are a lot of 9s. [...]* *Some of my friends they may have lower marks but as long as we can address all the requirements of the professors, we'll be given at least 9"* (Sarah-USA).

Those discrepancies were explained as originating from the rationales behind the marking. Generosity with marks is associated with encouragement and certification of task fulfilment: *"Here the lecturers are quite generous with marks, they are very encouraging. If we can address all the criteria in the assignment then it'll be fine"* (Sarah-USA). Andy-AUS also agreed with his educators' rationality to give full scores for the fulfilment of the requirements:

At first I was quite surprised at their generosity but then I think that they are reasonable. [...] When they could not find fault or they could not find a way to improve that part then that part has met all the requirements then the student would receive a full mark for the part. (Andy-AUS)

Meanwhile, strictness with marks is attributed to the educators' authority and the necessity to press the students to aim higher:

Maybe it's about our culture, as a teacher we may find it hard to accept that our students are so good or are better than us. We just want to give them a mark so they know that there's a lot for them to learn, things like that, maybe because of the culture we think that mark ten is just a reference point, no student could get that. (Andy-AUS)

The discrepancies in the grading schemes, however, lead to two major issues of grade inflation (Knight, 2001) and deflected cross-institutional comparison (Rust, 2007). The grade inflation is not necessarily associated with the students' satisfaction: "*When I first came, I thought B+ was quite okay but then I saw my friends having so many As and A+s, I felt a bit disappointed*" (Kate-NZ). Meanwhile, the cross-institutional comparison is subject to deflection, which poses challenges for the evaluation, accreditation, and scholarship application/granting:

In NZ, distinction is the highest level, but in Australia, they have high distinction and in order to have a distinction you can just have As and A+s, which is really difficult. The ranking systems are not similar among countries. When I would like to apply for a university in Canada they requires a high distinction; the title is different but the grades required are the same as my distinction. (Kate-NZ)

In response to the discrepancies in the grading schemes, most of the Vietnamese students would resort to think that they deserve that mark rather than voicing their concerns: "*I have to admit that sometimes they mark not very correctly but the differences are not very big and I think that is the point I am happy with so I don't have any like appeal or something like that*" (Nelson-UK). In the rare case that they did, they received further explanation on how to improve their assignment with more extensive reading, which may not be fully comprehensible to them due to their different "cultural thought patterns" (Kaplan, 1976, p. 12). Mark moderation can be considered a "face-threatening speech act" (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989, p. 199), thus "rarely, a disputed case is carried forward to the examining board for resolution" (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000, p. 272). In the USA, this issue has been partially addressed with the diversification of the assessment components that include presentation, online discussion, peer review, and participation: "*I like the point that the final score is combined from various channels so my strengths can make up for my weaknesses*" (Khanh-USA).

#### **6.4 The Community**

Bernstein and Solomon (1999, p. 269) refer to the community as the "arena" with an implied sense of dramas and struggles within it. This arena is perceived as a

construction site of the professional identity, the institutional interactions of which offer “avenues for negotiation of positioning, legitimacy, and membership” (Fotovatian, 2012, p. 586). Though much of the institutional discourses were related to assessment: “usually when we meet each other we just ask: How’s your assignment? What do you think about this issue?” (Nancy-UK), this section expands to discuss the impact of three functional communities: the pedagogical/classroom (6.4.1), the academic/research (6.4.2), and the socio-cultural community (6.4.3).

#### **6.4.1 The pedagogical/classroom community**

The pedagogical community in the international MA-TESOL course is highly globalised with the participation of students from the host countries, China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Middle East, India, Bangladesh, Poland, Turkey, Mexico, etc., though most of the classes are dominated by Chinese students: “That’s why I was worried: did I come to the UK or did I come to China?” (Nelson-UK). There existed certain discrepancies that hindered the Vietnamese students from benefiting from the classroom community such as: (1) their reserved personalities, (2) their different learning goals (to conduct research in HE) (Andy-AUS), and (3) their foundations and teaching contexts (Joyce-UK). However, the general learning environment was friendly and cooperative, “there was disagreement but not serious one” (Kate-NZ). Friendliness and openness helped them ease the occasionally raised tensions: “You know, most of the time we have some differences but everyone I mean most people came to Australia with open minds. People are friendly and open-minded so it is not too hard to settle the differences” (Andy-AUS).

Communication with local UK students, however, was mostly ineffective as research suggests that they can be quite inapproachable (Young *et al.*, 2012; Schartner, 2014) while most Vietnamese students are initially reserved. Yet, the Vietnamese students showed respect to their local peers for their superior criticality and independence (Peter-UK). While they were traditionally more inclined to accept the lecturers’ teaching and take things for granted, their British peers were more critical and would demand transparent clarification: “In our university there were some of British students they are quite critical. They said that the assessment criteria are not very clear and I think exactly. But, no matter. I think I just finish my assessment and I am quite happy with my points” (Nelson-UK).

The US peers appeared to be more approachable and supportive to the Vietnamese students in their academic study: *“I think American people they are very helpful. I think they share the knowledge, that’s the part that I really appreciate like they are willing to share knowledge”* (Jane-AUS). They were also open to criticism from their peers as they understood that criticism is a way to learn: *“We share and we argue. When we argue with each other we say something like ‘you’re right but...’ You know we argue with each other to help each other to improve so that’s what I really like”* (Jane-AUS). The culture of sharing knowledge left a good impression on Jane-AUS as she neither was encouraged to do so in VN nor experienced that in AUS.

Meanwhile, the Kiwi peers are independent learners, however, PT-NZ could maintain a fruitful relationship with her classmates as the class size was limited to approximately ten. They studied together, often prepared their assignments together, and even enjoyed timeouts together. Probably, the face-to-face interaction in doing those group activities bounded them together regardless of their nationalities and cultures. PT-NZ also observed that a mixed group of Asian and Kiwi students would facilitate more interaction than a homogeneous group of autonomous learners:

Our group was more Asian-oriented, asking for minor details, each sentence, and each point. I still remember the happy moments when we studied grammar, our Kiwi friends found it difficult to study this subject, but we found this subject very easy. We explained to them sentence by sentence very clearly. If only Kiwi friends studied together, there wouldn’t have been that much sharing. They were also very helpful, giving us a lot of assistance, especially native friends. In other subjects, they helped us in return with our writing, collecting data, recording, and analysing data. We could have mutual support. (PT-NZ)

Communication with international peers appeared to be more engaging and effective than with local ones (Schartner, 2014) as they could share similar issues and problem-solve together (Nelson-UK, Nancy-UK) or exchange encouragement with positive comments (Khanh-USA). The international peers are also efficient gateways for the Vietnamese students to obtain an international perspective about English language teaching: *“[...] but we also share some common ones like large classes or being restricted by the prescribed curriculum. So I could make comparison and contrast to see the similar picture in developing countries”* (Kate-NZ). With improved communication and understanding comes extended networking: *“Everyone can be friends and we can share experiences, opinions, and ideas. I think it’s a kind of helping each other with professional development in the future”* (Nancy-UK).

### 6.4.2 *The academic community*

The academic community refers mostly to the research fostering activities such as seminars, symposiums, and conferences in which the academics convene to share their studies. Via such activities, the Vietnamese students could directly learn from the research experiences of the professional presenters and obtain contagious motivation from them:

Sometimes, it's a very big project; sometimes it's small. But I can learn something from their research, their study, the way they organize their research, the methodologies, or the way they present the results or the way they discuss, all of those things. I think it's a very good chance for me to attend those seminars. [...] I think it just encourages me, they are kind of motivating, motivating me to work harder. (Nancy-UK)

Moreover, the open discussion where everyone could raise their voices, express their own ideas and share knowledge provided ample learning opportunities for the students to seek ideas for their research, develop themselves professionally, and more significantly, form a new academic routine though that routine still requires fostering:

Sometimes, I just came, maybe I could just understand a small part of the seminar but I just feel that it just forms the habit of taking an academic life. But unfortunately, it's just the feeling when I attended the seminar but when I left...eh...when it ended then everything was just back to the starting point... but I mean if I just keep attending those kinds of activities I think they have kind of positive effect.... (Nancy-UK)

Nelson-UK could also enhance his self-efficacy in conducting research as he found the authentic role models for his prospective researcher identity, a case of influential “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991):

I learn a lot more in the conferences rather than from the courses and assessment, from the outside activities rather than the one in the courses. I admit that the ones in the courses are quite clear and dense like compiled by the stars but I think we need more. We study Applied Linguistics so I need to see some of the fields that we can really apply language into. And those talks in the conferences I thought oh it's clear, somebody has done that. It's not that scary. It's not about textbooks. It is real... and we think that yeah that's right they can do it and I can do it, too. (Nelson-UK)

Subsequently, he was able to collaborate with the international peers to publish his debut journal article, a certification of his professional identity. Generally, the students gained “agency” to conduct research, which is a combined result of the personal capacity to act and the enabling contingencies of the surrounding environment (Biesta and Tedder (2007), cited in Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 196).

### 6.4.3 *The socio-cultural community*

The socio-cultural community refers to both the institutional and the external environment that the Vietnamese students interact with to obtain their “social capital” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 420). The former provided them with ample socio-cultural experiences with their peers and academic staff. For example, the NZ university provided additional courses about intercultural communication with dos and don’ts in cross-cultural interaction (Gau-NZ). Though initially reserved, the Vietnamese students were enthused to communicate and explore other cultures in a highly inclusive environment: *“I could get on very well because in my class, most of the classmates came from different countries so that’s a very international atmosphere. I did not experience much kind of culture shock”* (Peter-UK).

Communication in the institutional community offered them with better understanding about other cultures. The diversity of international community enriched their cultural understanding with new encounters about cuisines, religions, and lifestyles (Nelson-UK). More significantly, it instilled in them crucial values of tolerance, objectivity, awareness, sensitivity, and collaboration:

The first thing is that when I studied in the UK, I learnt how to talk and how to communicate with many people, with friends from different cultures. So I think that now I am more culturally tolerant and I think that I can look at people from other cultures in a more balanced and more objective way. If you only live in one culture then it’s very difficult for you to make some judgments about that culture in an objective way [...]. One important thing is that now I can look at my Vietnamese culture in a more objective way. (Peter-UK)

Awareness about other cultures conversely bolstered their understanding about their own culture, which they could not have realised within their national boundary. Meanwhile, maintaining smooth relationships in an international community enhanced their cultural sensitivity: *“you need to be culturally sensitive when you come into contact with people especially from different cultures”* (Andy-AUS). Gradually, the value of collaboration has been imbued in them. Sarah-USA’s presumption of competitiveness as an American value was fundamentally challenged and replaced by a sense of community, which has become a part of her personalities:

Previously, I thought that everything should be competitive, but when being in this environment, I think that cooperation and collaboration with other people is extremely important and essential in order for us to do anything. It’s also very necessary for the

sustainable development of the community, which I really value. Previously, I couldn't recognise clearly the value of collaboration and contribution to the community but now I am highly aware of that. [...] I also think that my university is special, people are really cooperative, really friendly with each other, which I really like. I really like the people here, too. What I learnt from here is to be helpful to others all the time. Beside my study, I also develop that personality. (Sarah-USA)

The socio-cultural community beyond the institution such as the Vietnamese community, the part-time working space, the surroundings, and the visited sites also added substantial “cultural capital” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 420) to the students' identity (**Quote 24**). Joyce-UK highly appreciated her living and working spaces: “*My living place and my working place were much more influential*”. While the academic environment could not satisfy her yearn for more interaction with local people (**Quote 23**), the working space offered her with more communication opportunities with the customers and staff. In her opinion, language and culture are closely related and cultural knowledge could be more genuinely acquired via authentic emersion into that culture rather than via printed or broadcast materials:

I think no way is more effective than experiencing the culture itself. Though we can't experience as much as we read or watch, I still think that travelling broadens our mind. If via books, people wonder why it's still sunny at 9pm in Europe summer. Even via movies, we wouldn't recognize it. Reading books and watching movies couldn't teach us about that. Only by being there could I know about that. That's a very simple experience that I couldn't gain from books. And the way we greet, the way we talk ... (Joyce-UK)

In a nutshell, the community within and beyond the institutions has an influential impact on the Vietnamese MA-TESOL students' professional identity. Their accounts reaffirm Lave and Wenger (1991)'s proposition that identities are formed via their participation in the “communities of practice” and the sense-making in and out of them:

The way I was taught here and the way I interacted with everyone, communicating with them, with friends in class, the way my friends helped me, the way my lecturers treated me has an impact on how I view people and life. Professional development is not just about knowledge but it's about professional identity as you said. [...] I think the community here, the climate here has a huge impact. (Sarah-USA)

## 6.5 The Power Relations

The final factor of the “ecological activity system” to be discussed in this section is the power relations as teaching, like other “professions of human improvement” (Cohen,

2005, p. 278) depends rather centrally on the quality of relationship between the professional and clientele, in this case, the teachers and students (Crick and Wilson, 2005; Grossman and McDonald, 2008). Though power runs deep in the assessment process (Bernstein, 2000; Torrance and Pryor, 2002), the focus of the analysis is placed on two major outer representations of this delicate relation: the lecturer-student interaction (6.5.1) and international student support (6.5.2).

### **6.5.1 *The lecturer-student interaction***

The impact of the lecturer-student interaction depends on several factors: the role setting, the time allocation, and the social/intellectual distance between them. The role setting or the division of labour defines the responsibilities between the faculties and the students: *“the main task of the professor is to introduce some issues for the students to discuss and to research by themselves and the learners have the responsibility to research and work”* (Peter-UK). This rigid role setting was perceived as problematic to non-independent students, however, the others were well prepared for that learning responsibility: *“I think that I pressed myself more than required, in other words, I wanted to have a good paper so I created more pressure for myself than what the lecturers created for me”* (Sarah-USA).

Time allocation is another decisive factor in the lecturer-student interaction (6.1.1, p.110). The Australian lecturers allocated their office hours to meet and discuss with the students (Jane-AUS) and even initiated to make appointments with them to clarify issues regarding assignment preparation (Sophie-AUS). Despite their busy schedules, the lecturers in NZ would also prioritise meeting their students:

They are busy, especially my supervisor. As he won the “inspiring lecturer” award, many students “hunt” him. He supervised students and had a number of conferences but his first priority, I’m not sure, but he prioritised meeting the students first. Whenever, I e-mailed him, he mailed back within a day [...]. The appointment was easy to make and it took him a short period of time to check my work. I don’t know how he could manage the time. Other lecturers they are also busy but meeting them is not that difficult. (Kate-NZ)

The lecturers were very busy but they were always ready to help. We just needed to book an appointment via e-mail, the meeting would follow quite soon. For example, if today I e-mail him I’ll be able to meet him tomorrow. I didn’t often come to see the lecturer, maybe once per trimester per lecturer except for the last trimester when I did my research then I met him nearly every week. (PT-NZ)



The third factor that affects their academic relation is the social/intellectual distance as mentioned in (4.2.2, p.85 and 6.1, p.110). As a tradition, the Vietnamese students express their esteem to the lecturers by maintaining a substantial distance, addressing them formally while the lecturers would adopt a less formal style, using their first names or even their initials in e-mails (Gau-NZ). The maintenance of a substantial distance would result in communicative reluctance (**Quote 25**) that subsequently hinders the Vietnamese students from the benefits of international education: *“That is the thing my British friends told me: Yeah, you just ask them, sometimes, we should not be like autistic, so talk to them, don’t hide your problems because they are there to help you”* (Nelson-UK).

Gradually, many of them managed to adapt to the multicultural learning environment by observing the interactional patterns of their international peers and becoming more confident to approach their lecturers:

When I first came, I was still affected by our culture. I felt distant from my lecturers and was afraid of asking questions. But because it was a multicultural class, everyone was able to quickly adjust, especially when we studied with NZ, US, and UK friends. I could see that they had different learning styles and interacted with the lecturers very differently and the lecturers were very flexible in responding to them. Gradually, I recognized the difference and tried to adapt myself and felt closer to the lecturers. (PT-NZ)

In classroom interaction, they would feel less hesitant to “act beyond their comfort zone” (Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003), presenting, and defending their ideas: *“we kept our own opinions, he didn’t change his mind, and neither did I. It’s like we reserve our opinions”* (Nelson-UK). However, when it comes to written assessment, they would opt low-risk or “play safe” strategy (ibid.), abiding to the professor’s requirements as *“if the students want to get a high score then they should answer the requirements of the professor”* (Peter-UK). The one who they felt most comfortable to approach and discuss academic issues is their supervisor: *“Most of the time, I prefer to talk to I mean to e-mail my supervisor. She’s very kind, very helpful”* (Nelson-UK).

### **6.5.2 International student support**

The Vietnamese students could benefit from a wide range of non-academic and academic support for international students. In a special case, Nelson-UK expressed his genuine appreciation to the university support for his extension:

They are very clear but really considerate. If you have an excuse they are very generous to give you help. For example, in my case of doing my dissertation, I was affected by an event from my family so I sent them a form of special consideration and they were willing to give me a very generous extension. I think that's the point that I really appreciate. (Nelson-UK)

In other academic situations, the Vietnamese students also received ample support from their lecturers and the university staff to overcome the challenges of studying on the same playfield with their international peers. Though being less accustomed to the study system is a huge disadvantage: *"It was very clear that my native classmates got higher degrees. However, my Asian friends they could not get high degrees"* (Peter-UK), they enjoyed and appreciated the support for international students from both the attentive lecturers and considerate staff:

The lecturers in my MA course were very helpful, helpful all the time. Maybe, they knew that I was an international student, maybe not accustomed to the system yet, they were so helpful to me, guiding me with the assignments and other issues. They were very open about the marking of assignments. Sometimes, I met them to express my concerns about marks and how they marked them, they explained very thoroughly and they also considered that it was a kind of formative assessment to help me grow rather than to be strict on giving marks. (Sarah-USA)

Several lecturers tend to support international students by grading them more generously on account of their language disadvantage:

I think the lecturers here are easier with Asian students. I just think maybe they don't say that deliberately but in their minds they may think that English is not our first language and yet we can write like that, that's good enough. It seems to me that it's easier for Asian students to get an A or A+, more possible than native students. (Kate-NZ)

However, some academically able students would not aspire the privilege of being treated as an international student and strived to reach the standards applied to native students and publishable works:

Maybe, they thought that I am not a native student, so their requirement for my writing skill was not so high. Even if I made mistakes, they wouldn't correct them but my supervisor set a really high requirement for me. For an article to be published, it should be free of mistakes, even a minor one. So he asked me to write again and again. For the methodology chapter, I had to write for five times. Only when he felt okay did he allow me to write the next chapter. He also told me from the very beginning that his requirement was higher than others' so if I would like to work with him I need to accept a challenging process (PT-NZ).

International student support is most discernible in the NZ universities:

If I had any concern, they were very willing to answer very pleasantly. They value the students there. Education is truly a service and the teachers are the ones who provide

the best service [...]. In NZ, it's true that the students are the most important; the lecturers are there to respond to their needs. (PT-NZ)

It appeared as if the neoliberalism notion of “education as a service” (Paul *et al.*, 2010) was construed as a positive sign for both the students and the lecturers here despite its inherent tensions. The application of the module evaluation and student feedback scheme can be perceived as an illustration of how egalitarian power relations were experienced there by both stakeholders. While the lecturers created a strictly confidential, secure, and anonymous space for the students to give their feedback, the students would reserve their respect to them by avoiding negative comments though occasionally they thought honesty and transparency can be an optimal practice:

The lecturers they are very good and they were not in class while we gave feedback but I don't know, but maybe because there was just me Vietnamese in the class, I was not really frank about what I thought about the course. There was something I would like them to improve but I didn't write down. I don't know but maybe because of me. But the thing I would like them to improve is very minor so I didn't write them down. But from the next trimester I should be more frank about what I really expect from them. (Gau-NZ)

In return, the lecturers also treated the students' feedback with respect as they become friendlier, more welcoming, using their first names, being prompt in replying to e-mails, and willing to have conversations: “*They always welcome students. They are all friendly, maybe because they fear the student feedback*” (Kate-NZ). It could be argued that (1) module evaluation and student feedback may effectively equalise the power relations in the classroom, (2) empowering pedagogy should move from power as domination to power as creative and cooperative energy (Shrewsbury, 1987, cited in Reynolds and Trehan, 2000, p. 276), and (3) mutual respect can be a solution to the power relations between the lecturers and the students.

## 6.6 Summary

Most of the participants agreed that the one-year international MA-TESOL course has been one of the most praiseworthy periods in their life with ample life-changing experiences: “*I think that my experience here did live up to my expectations*” (Andy-AUS); “*I think studying here actually makes differences*” (Khanh-USA); “*I am not proud of having a certificate from a UK university but of the time I spent and the way I did to get it*” (May-UK).

The Vietnamese student teachers appreciated the opportunities to study with intellectual educators, modern facilities, reliable academic resources, and efficient supplementary seminars and workshops. The pedagogical, academic, and socio-cultural communities served as a nurturing environment for them to enrich their academic, international, and intercultural experiences (Lee, 2009). They also valued the institutional support for international students and perceived “the university as a provider of an educational service” (Paul *et al.*, 2010, p. 2) with positive connotations and respect. Nevertheless, the short duration of the course, the excessive workload in several universities, the intellectual distance, the fixed role setting, the inconsistent assessment practice, the superficial skill enhancement training, the imbalance between written and oral assessment, the criticality-driven grading scheme, and the inadequate mark moderation scheme posed challenges for their professional development.

Overall, the entire international MA-TESOL courses served as a high opportunity progression eco-system (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 211), reinforcing and instilling in the Vietnamese student teachers with such esteemed values and attitudes (Brady and Pritchard, 2003; Barnett, 2009) as: respect for the educators and peers, eagerness to explore new knowledge, open-mindedness about World Englishes (Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2006), self-efficacy to conduct research, active participation, knowledge sharing, international perspective, cultural tolerance, collaboration, objectivity, awareness, and sensitivity. The data analysis strongly advocates Barnett (2009)’s position that it is the process of coming to know rather than knowing that brings forward desirable human qualities and fosters Harlen and Deakin Crick (2003)’s conclusion that institutional support via social and educational activities result in positive norms in the learners. However, it also highlights the significance of the wider community, the “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and the student teacher’s agency in the process of self-construction.

## Chapter 7 The Long-term Impact on their Continued Career Paths

This chapter continues to explore the long-term impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the Vietnamese student teachers' professional identity in their actual career paths as research suggests that the initial period for novice professionals to develop their proficiency continues well beyond their initial qualification (Eraut, 1994, p. 10). The analysis was based on the retrospective accounts of ten alumni and the prospective views of four current students. It will elaborate how they have applied/ will apply their international study into the working spaces where they undertake the professional roles of a TESOL teacher/lecturer (7.1), a researcher (7.2), and an assessor (7.3).

### 7.1 Their Role as a TESOL Teacher/ Lecturer

#### 7.1.1 *Achievements*

There are positive signs that the Vietnamese student teachers are able to apply the knowledge and skills repository obtained from the international MA-TESOL course into their teaching contexts to meet the increasing demand of the learners and the society at large:

I could achieve most of the goals that I had set up prior to my study and what I learnt there, I could apply very well in my teaching. Moreover, I teach in a gifted school with gifted students so it's very suitable. The skills that I acquired in Australia help me feel more confident to search for more resources for them. My homestay with the Australian family also helped me improve my listening and speaking skills so that I could share with my students my own experience and help them to perfect their basic skills. The intensive grammar module is very necessary for my gifted students as they are going to take part in the city and Olympiad language contests. (Alpha-AUS)

Alpha-AUS highly appreciated the knowledge about English language that she acquired during her sojourn. Her improved language proficiency not only directly benefits her students but also empowers her to swiftly respond to various contexts-for-action (Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 132): *"Now I feel that I am quicker in responding to situations, and now I can come up with solutions for almost any situation when I teach in my gifted school"* (Alpha-AUS). Generally, the Vietnamese TESOL practitioners have become more theoretically and practically mature, thus, more able to teach effectively and educationally (to address wider educational issues) rather than intuitively and "instrumentally" (confined by facilities and resources) (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 199):

Previously, it was based more on instinct; I would just aim at a class session with fun in which the learners could learn something by organizing games or discussions. Sometimes, it was more for fun than for efficiency. Now I focus both on motivating them and the effectiveness of the teaching, skipping unimportant parts and focusing more on important ones rather than cramping students with knowledge. [...] I don't have to follow the syllabus or the textbook to the letter. (Kate-NZ)

The high opportunity progression eco-system (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 211) in Anglophone universities has transformed their culturally-rooted passivity into the agency to autonomously develop their professionalism and frequently revise their lessons:

In VN, I used to be quite passive, using one lesson for a number of classes but now I think that teaching is not only to meet the demand of the job but also to meet the demand of myself. For example, after one trial if I find it not quite satisfactory or the class did not favourably respond to the activity, then I will change in the next class, renewing my lesson and also refreshing my mood when coming to class. (PT-NZ)

The international MA-TESOL course could also be observed to exert its impact on the genetic level (or the micro level in Bronfenbrenner's four-level ecological settings) (cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 215). The TESOL practitioner's core identity is enhanced with confidence and comfort as a result of their gained vocation and qualification:

After the MA course, I felt much more confident and more comfortable, feeling that I am well-qualified to a certain level to cater for the demand of the learners. [...] I think that the study was really necessary, not only helping me to develop my professional identity but also boost my confidence, making me feel more comfortable in class. (PT-NZ)

Contrary to the formality and convention normally associated with professionalism, the Vietnamese TESOL practitioners developed more dialogical I-positions (Hermans, 2003), depicting their professional identity as a balance between sentimentality and rationality, as being comfortable, helpful, approachable, and flexible; yet fair, systematic, agentic, and efficient:

I used to be very comfortable in class and on coming back I'm even more comfortable. [...] It's like travelling broadens our mind. Now that I have travelled, my mind is broadened a bit in judging the course book that I was given or the activities that I am going to organize or the learners' performances. I'm more flexible yet more systematic, more flexible in correcting the learners' mistakes but more systematic in aligning them to the purposes, judging its necessity, and behaving in a context-wise manner. (Kate-NZ)

In the class, I would like my identity to be an approachable and fair teacher. After completing my MA and teaching for a year in VN, I tried to be an approachable person,

be very helpful to my students, not being superior to them but being equal. And my classes were pressure free. (Sarah-USA)

The [power] relation between them and their students become more inclined to mutual understanding, tolerance, and sympathy rather than imposition and disrespect:

Seeing that my students are like that [being passive], I think I need to sympathize with them as I used to be like them and it was very difficult to change. On knowing that, I just can't yell at my students though I am puzzled with the class of which I am a head teacher as the students are very passive. (PT-NZ)

I think that when I come back to VN, I will be much more easy-going now that I understand the problems the students have to face. I also understand that studying is a part of their life and they have other concerns, sometimes more pressing than their studies. My role as a teacher should be to help them to achieve their best potentials not to impose some unreasonable expectations or some high standards on them. In VN, I had very high expectations and sometimes it was like putting too much pressure on my students and now I kind of deeply regret about that. (Andy-AUS)

In other words, their role switching to become an international MA-TESOL student has induced them to resign from an authoritative and dominant role in the class to take a more egalitarian role of a facilitator: *"I don't impose but guide them instead"* (Kate-NZ). Moreover, they also utilise their international experiences to infuse their students with international spirits of non-discrimination and respect for differences (Kate-NZ).

Moreover, the MA-TESOL qualification expands the Vietnamese practitioners' socio-cultural spaces, enhancing their employability, energising them to deliver inspiring lessons, and making them more favoured by their students and colleagues. The accumulated expertise and confidence even enable several of them to create their own "zones of enactment" (Spillane, 1999, p. 143) amid a lucrative market of language teaching:

I applied for five language centres from EQuest to Road map and then got admitted and then taught in four centres for about eight sessions per week. I didn't have ready-made resources at that time and everything was a new beginning. I was just so interested in teaching at that time. And I received good feedback from my students. Those were my first teaching experience so I would like to inspire my students, using all my knowledge and enthusiasm, [...]. The positive feedback from the students and the motivation from other talented colleagues [...] made me love teaching more. Then I opened my own classes to meet the need of the students. (Joyce-UK)

In other words, the TESOL teachers with international experiences become more financially satisfied with their professionalism in the developing societal contexts of Viet Nam: *"To some extent, I am satisfied with my professional status. I can live with it; it can still help me earn money so it's okay"* (Peter-UK).

### 7.1.2 Challenges

The reconstructed professional identity, however, posed several challenges or “reverse cultural shock” (the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time) (Gaw, 2000, pp. 83-4) for the TESOL practitioners in their reintegration into the Vietnamese working spaces. The challenges were claimed to lie in the system and culture and could not be tackled individually: *“That’s the problem of the system and it is not easy to make changes to a system”* (Peter-UK); *“In general, culture is largely impactful. Learning there is one thing, but applying to our own environment is another, a challenge that hasn’t been overcome yet”* (PT-NZ).

The first challenge lies in the incompatibility between the international MA-TESOL course contents and the actual regional requirements. While practical-oriented modules related to language teaching methodologies are transferable to renovate their undergraduate-based pedagogies (**Quote 26**), highly theoretical ones though provided a good foundation for research, were hardly applicable to the actual teaching situations. For those whose course focused extensively on AL, the benefit may require more time to harness as most junior lecturers are not assigned to teach theoretical modules: *“Other subjects related to linguistics, semantics, phonology or research skills are conducted by senior lecturers. We are not allowed to and I’m not confident to teach those subjects. But I also want to”* (Kate-NZ).

The second challenge lies in the fundamentally different teaching contexts with poor-quality facilities, large class size, and heterogeneous and passive students (Canh and Barnard, 2009), which sharply contrasts with the modern facilities, small class size, and highly motivated and autonomous students in the Anglophone universities:

The university doesn’t provide enough support, for example, the Wi-Fi signal is just too weak; the library doesn’t have enough resources. The class size is still too large; it has been limited to around 30 students per class but still too large for a language class. I learnt a lot from New Zealand but it’s hard to make a change here on my own. All I could do is within my class and the students sometimes they don’t cooperate, being too passive; they just study for the test so a lot of difficulties that I don’t know how to handle yet. (Kate-NZ)

Apparently, the international MA-TESOL courses are designed on an ideal basis that the learners are autonomous and fully engaged whereas the Vietnamese contexts can be



more discouraging. The deeply-rooted passiveness among most non-English major students and the assessment-led system are the two major obstacles that hinder the TESOL practitioners from effectively applying their acquired teaching methodologies:

At first, it was not easy to adapt again. [...] When I returned to VN, I experienced some shock because I was used to the teaching methods of the professors in R. University. I taught and I supposed that it was the learners' task to study but they did not study. In VN, you have to try to encourage and have many methods to **make** the students study as they are not independent in their learning. (Peter-UK)

The third challenge stems from the dawdling socioeconomic conditions. Back in early 2000s, Jane-AUS was unable to apply the knowledge she obtained in the module Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL): “[...] *but actually I could not. We just dealt with blackboard and chalk and sometimes we had Power Point slides*” (Jane-AUS). After more than a decade, the teaching conditions have been gradually improved; however, imbalanced financial policies such as mundane salary for excessive workload still negatively affect the teachers' motivation and their investment of time and effort into teaching: “*I felt that my effort hasn't been well-paid. At first, I thought that I would teach to satisfy my students but gradually I feel discouraged as I have to cope with such difficulties: the class, the syllabus, and the far from satisfactory salary*” (Kate-NZ);

“We have to teach too much but the salary is just too little. [...] As I teach too much, my interest faded away with the increasing number of classes. [...] If in a better environment, I may have fewer classes but each class, I can totally devote my time and effort to, of course, it would be more effective” (PT-NZ).

## **7.2 Their Role as a Researcher**

### **7.2.1 Achievements**

As discussed in (5.2.1, p. 94), (5.3.1, p.96), and (6.4.2, p.124), the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course have bolstered the TESOL practitioners' motivation to conduct research. This activity has become an intrinsic motivation and an autonomous task to continually develop their professional identity instead of fulfilling the statutory requirement of the institution: “*I have a higher need to do research. Previously, if I was required to do research, I felt like inhibited, like a task falling from the sky to me. But now without anyone's push, I myself have a demand to develop myself*” (PT-NZ). The assessment experience and the international MA-TESOL course

have also equipped them with an expansive knowledge base, an elevated academic capacity, and a strong sense of self-efficacy to conduct research:

I am more inspired to do research, especially action research. My ability to read and conduct research was markedly enhanced. [...] During my dealing with the dissertation, I read a lot, I may have been affected by a number of articles. I felt that with my writing ability, I would be able to write like them. I like to do something that I think I can, so I like that. (Joyce-UK)

Via the international MA-TESOL course, the Vietnamese practitioners gradually recognise the significance of pedagogical research: *“I actually think that doing research is much more important than teaching. [...] Our repetitive teaching without any research foundation can’t prove the effectiveness of the lesson”* (PT-NZ). Research, therefore, is perceived from a more practical perspective. It does not necessarily mean conducting research but rather a habit of reading academic journals to continually enrich their pedagogies: *“Each time reading, I have a new idea to apply into my lesson”* (Joyce-UK). It does not necessarily require a sophisticated understanding about research methodologies but rather a persistent involvement in research activities, particularly action research, to share and improve their experiences:

My research understanding is not exceptionally good as I haven’t read many books about research itself. But I frequently do action research, a kind of experience sharing rather than a huge project. I don’t know much about research theoretically but I’m just so keen on doing it. (Joyce-UK)

A “real” research does not necessarily mean a large-scale one but an insightful finding, a new experiment that is applicable to their own teaching environment on a daily basis: *“By research, I don’t really mean something very big, something very publishable but I mean like you can try out something new, you can experiment something new, maybe just in your class and see whether it works or not or how you can improve”* (Gau-NZ).

Though the academic environment in Viet Nam is not yet favourable, the TESOL practitioners are ready to be the pioneers in research dissemination and publication. In other words, they are agentic to move from peripheral participation to increase participation in a particular professional system of knowing (Sfard, 1998, cited in Akkerman and Eijck, 2013). Conducting and disseminating research has become a part of their academic agenda and their commitment to life-long learning despite sociocultural challenges:

Each semester, I set up an objective to undertake a research-related activity. For example, this semester, I have just delivered a presentation in a conference. And another objective of mine is to have one article published in the University magazine but I haven't been able to do so. So I am just feeling uneasy about that. [...] But I am still trying to carry out the objectives that I set up for myself in NZ. I haven't given up yet; it still lies within me so I think that it's still useful. I hope that it won't fade away in the future. (PT-NZ)

The gained procedural and principled knowledge (Spillane, 1999, pp. 147-8) to conduct research not only transforms the Vietnamese teachers to become more capable, innovative, and confident to lead research projects but also makes their transition from novice to expert better-grounded and more inspirational:

After doing my MA and coming back to my university, I had a lot of research ideas and I was bolder with my research ability. From an issue, I know much more about what I should search for and what research ideas I can work on. I felt much more motivated and I also knew which procedures to make in conducting a research and I less felt like a novice in doing a PhD. It's hard to imagine how I could do a PhD right from undergrad if I hadn't had such a period to tap on to my higher order thinking skills. So I think it is a good transition. (Sarah-USA)

The aspiration to return to an Anglophone country to pursue a PhD degree was intensely felt among the junior lecturers: *"I really want to come back here for my PhD. I have the compassion, the ambition to come back here"* (Nelson-UK). The masters' degree has paved their professional route with knowledge, know-hows, and more clarity about further academic development:

More or less before I came to the UK I thought that I would get a PhD but the idea about the topic of research was not very clear at that time. After coming here, I obtained a lot of knowledge; I got a lot of advice from my classmates and also my supervisor. So I think I have some more ideas so that I can balance between AL, teaching, and sociology, something like that. (Nelson-UK)

The aspiration of the youth, the desire to recycle the knowledge, and the continued support and collaboration with the supervisors are the major bondages for a return:

I would like to pursue my PhD as soon as possible as in the next few years I can become lazy. Now I still feel fresh I can still recycle the knowledge I gained. I am just afraid that in the next few months I might forget it. Now I can still maintain contact with my lecturers in NZ. My supervisor still helps me with co-authoring a paper. I fear time might discourage me or I may feel tired. (Kate-NZ)

### **7.2.2 Challenges**

The most prominent challenge for the TESOL practitioners to undertake their researcher role lies in the institutional policy regarding their research responsibilities (Hien, 2010).

While research is stipulated as a statutory requirement for them, they are not allocated with adequate time and resources for this activity:

There's no time for doing research and if having no research, they will be financially punished. It's just so hard for the lecturers. [...] I found that the lecturers were all too busy with their teaching, so their doing research was just to meet the requirement; it was not scientific enough to me. (PT-NZ)

The fact that research is ranked secondary behind insurmountable teaching responsibility has impeded the TESOL practitioners from engendering quality studies. This reverse priority, which is characteristic of the “ecological activity system” in many developing countries (Chetty and Lubben, 2010), obviously exerts an adverse impact on their research motivation, forcing them to suppress their inspiration to comply with the institutional requirements:

I really want to spend time doing research. I also prepared from NZ that I would do research in such and such areas but over here I am under pressure with the loaded teaching periods. I don't have enough time to prepare my lessons, and still don't know how to find time to do research. (PT-NZ)

Other macro conditions beyond the boundary of the institutions such as limited access to digital resources and under-developed research community (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Harman *et al.*, 2010) also pose challenges for the TESOL practitioners to maintain their research interests (see also 4.1.2, p.75):

I don't think that Vietnamese universities they regularly organize those activities. Maybe that's the reason why the academic life [of TESOL practitioners] in VN just fades away. When Vietnamese students finishing their course in other countries, they come back, they just stop doing research I think so. (Nancy-UK)

Besides, micro conditions such as familial and financial responsibilities even make research a luxury option: “*Since having my baby I am just so busy with lots of things to do and I have to teach more skills so I can't manage to have time for professional development*” (Joyce-UK); “*You can only do research when you can survive. When I come to VN, the first thing I have to do is to earn money to support my family so I do not have much time to do research*” (Peter-UK). In brief, those evidences signify that the current “ecological activity system” in Viet Nam resembles a “low opportunity progression equilibrium” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 216) that exerts adverse causative influences on the TESOL practitioners' research capacity and innovation (Priestley *et al.*, 2012): “*So now I am still a bit stuck, I haven't thought of anything new*” (Kate-NZ).

### 7.3 Their Role as an Assessor

As discussed in (5.3.3, p.100), the TESOL practitioners who took the module testing and assessment reported marked changes in “the core of their practice” (Spillane, 1999, p. 143). Their assessment is more inclined towards giving formative feedback rather than marking and motivating rather than discouraging: *“From oral feedback, I also learnt the way the lecturer talked to motivate me and now I reuse that way: always encourage, be encouraging. The feedback should be a guideline rather than an enforcement”* (Kate-NZ).

Before doing my MA, I was so serious about marking, being very strict, paying attention to their [the students’] mistakes, finding grains and even punishing afterwards by lowering their marks. But after the MA course, I was far less strict in marking, focusing more on giving feedback to the learners, and giving marks more generously to motivate them. (Sarah-USA)

They realised that the core purpose of assessment should be “for learning” rather than “of learning” (Black *et al.*, 2003; Harlen, 2007) and formative feedback (Irons, 2010) has a crucial role in this process:

I think for language learners, especially for our first year students who come right from high school to university then motivating them to study and showing them how to improve and how to move forward and still tell them where they need to improve is very important. (Gau-NZ)

With more apprehension and criticality about assessment, the TESOL practitioners tend to be less subjective, less manipulative, and more considerate when judging the learners. Their enhanced “rational capacities” (Kant, 1982, cited in Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 133) from the assessment experiences in the two contrastive systems makes them realise that there are more than one way of reasoning: *“I had unreasonable expectations of my students and I found myself a bit mean with marks because in the past even though I didn’t find a way to correct that part I still would not give the student a full mark”* (Andy-AUS).

The TESOL practitioners also exercise more mutual respect and “individual emancipation” (Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 133) in their assessment practice, adopting authentic criteria, being more reserved in making judgements about the students, encouraging them to present their unique identities, and using formative feedback to promote their abilities, thinking skills, and autonomy:

I realized that when marking we should base on authentic, real life criteria, not just bookish ones. As a matter of fact, in books they may describe that a presenter should be

like this or like that but in reality, each presenter has their own identity. So the teacher should be reserved in making judgment. For example, we shouldn't boast about something we don't know for sure or we should not be too selling, too bias about a certain thing. I also told my students about that. [...] Through communication with my students in class I help them develop other skills not just following or imitating a certain model but creating opportunities for them to develop their abilities, thinking skills, and autonomy, being more formative rather than moulding them according to a certain appropriate model. (Sarah-USA)

#### 7.4 Summary

Generally, the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course can be regarded as a case of “expansive learning” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010) in progress as the Vietnamese student teachers could overcome substantial contradictions throughout the process and transfer much of the concrete knowledge and skills about pedagogies, research methods, and assessment to their working spaces. The long-term impact of the course is most discernible in the pedagogical domain with the TESOL student teachers being transformed into confident, responsive, agentic, efficient, fair, innovative, and rational; yet comfortable, helpful, and approachable professionals. Their international perspectives and experiences also imbue in them ethical attitudes (Clayton, 1990) such as sympathy, tolerance, non-discrimination, and respect for differences. Consequently, they enjoy their acquired professional status with more financial success outside their institution.

The international MA-TESOL course has also bolstered their researcher identity with intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy thanks to the enhanced principled and procedural knowledge (Spillane, 1999) about research. The TESOL practitioners could raise their awareness about the significance of pedagogical research and be committed to active research involvement to improve their teaching practice. The MA-TESOL course also motivates them to proceed in their academic career with participation in the emerging research communities or a return plan to pursue a doctoral qualification.

Though the assessor role is integral among all the TESOL practitioners, only those who majored in assessment and testing reflected its long-term impact on their assessor identity. They reported their changed practice towards assessment for learning (Black *et al.*, 2003), giving formative feedback (Irons, 2010), and creating deep learning opportunities (Marton and Saljo, 1976) for the students to develop their abilities and

capacities. Their assessment practice is illuminated with enhanced rationality and individual emancipation (Biesta and Tedder, 2007).

The expansion, however, necessarily involves “the possibility of disintegration and regression” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 11) due to the mismatch between the international course contents and the local contexts. The Vietnamese “ecological activity system” confined by passive culture, staggering socioeconomic conditions (Huong and Fry, 2004), and incompatible policies (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Harman *et al.*, 2010; Harman and Ngoc, 2010) has exerted adversities on the application of new pedagogies and the enhancement of research capacity of the returnees. This ecology is expected to evolve when “contexts and colleagues change, skills are refined, knowledge develops and views mature” (Garton and Richards, 2008, p. 4).

## Chapter 8 Discussion

In the three preceding finding chapters, the data have been analysed and presented in a horizontal dimension to elaborate both the short-term and long-term impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers. In this discussion chapter, the findings will be synthesised, however, in a vertical dimension with reference to the quadruple model of the professional identity (**Figure 7**, p.38), the conceptual frameworks (**Figure 11**, p.55 and **Figure 12**, p.55), and the theories of expansive learning (Engeström and Sannino, 2010) to highlight the four major themes: the relation between the assessment process and professional identification (8.1); the international MA-TESOL course as an ecological activity system (8.2); the boundary crossings and expansive learning (8.3); and the teacher agency and professional identity (8.4).

### 8.1 The Assessment Process and the Professional Identification

The research findings assert the influential impact of the assessment process on how the Vietnamese student teachers identify their professionalism, which resonates the salient claim that “assessment embodies power relations between the institution and its students” (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000, p. 268). The participants’ accounts reflected its significance in creating learning opportunities, regulating institutional discourses, and shaping the learner’s confidence, autonomy, and agency. Though the assessment processes are inherently imbued with contradictions (Wilson, 1970; Black and Wiliam, 1998), the overcoming of such tensions marks a new development of the professional identity. This section will review the assessment process implemented in the international MA-TESOL courses (8.1.1) before discussing its impact on professional identification (8.1.2).

#### 8.1.1 *The assessment process*

As discussed in (4.2, p.80 and 6.1, p.110), the assessment process (including the assessment tasks and feedback) has its strengths and weaknesses. On the upside, the “loose framing” of the assessment tasks (Bernstein, 2000) allows adequate spaces for the students to incorporate their experience and develop their independent learning. The prevalent written assessment was hailed for generating deep learning opportunities



(Marton and Saljo, 1976) by promoting criticality, independence, reflection, discussion, and retrieval of knowledge. However, the dominance of the written form, particularly in NZ and the UK, appeared to mould the MA-TESOL students into “paper researchers”. Though formative elements were incorporated in the writing process, the inadequacy of credited oral assessment tasks and practicum in NZ and the UK has been identified as a “structural gap” that impeded the students from developing their pedagogical practice and research dissemination skills. This “structural gap” has been addressed in AUS and the USA with substantial weighting allocated for oral assessment. However, another “structural gap” was raised in the USA institutions concerning the cramping of various tasks into the assessment process that results in excessive workload and pressure for the students.

While the assessment tasks (the “hard power”) set the frames for the student teachers’ development, the feedback (the “soft power”) serves as “formative interventions” (Nye, 2004; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) either bolstering or hindering the process (Yorke, 2003). The micro-analysis of the contingencies revealed that the educators’ feedback was helpful in altering several deeply-rooted mistakes of Vietnamese students such as writing lengthy and unfocused texts with inadequate citation, poor criticality, and subjectivity. However, a number of “feedback gaps” (Evans, 2013, p. 73) have been identified as follows:

- (i) The varied effectiveness due to the influence of the educators’ identity and subjectivity;
- (ii) The educators’ reluctance to give negative feedback and the contradiction between their positive or “social” feedback and their marking;
- (iii) The students’ reluctance to respond to feedback for fear of misunderstanding and interfering in the educators’ busy schedules;
- (iv) The students’ aspiration for more oral, prompt, long, and constructive feedback vs. the more written, delayed, short, and at times ambiguous one they received.

The researcher would argue that

- (i) feedback can be a “face-threatening speech act” (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989, p. 199) for both the educators and the students;
- (ii) the avoidance of giving negative feedback, however, may hinder the students from “identifying their gap of understanding”;

- (iii) the “social/intellectual gap” between the lecturers and the students can be a major cause for their reluctance to handle feedback;
- (iv) the causes for contradictions in tackling feedback stems from the discrepancies at a deeper layer of “cultural thought patterns” (Kaplan, 1976, p. 12), modes of communication, cultural values, and practicality issues such as time availability and commitment; and
- (v) feedback needs to go beyond being a “corrective tool” (Evans, 2013, p. 72) to become a tool for motivating, challenging, and stimulating learning (Price et al., 2010) if its purpose is to ignite changes in the students’ identity.

### **8.1.2 *Its impact on the professional identity***

The enrolment into the international MA-TESOL course could be conceived as a life-changing experience for the Vietnamese student teachers, transforming them from an international student into a more professional TESOL practitioner. Overall, it has left a positive impact on various aspects of their professional identity: cognition, affect (the internal self), behaviour, and socio-culture (the external self).

Cognitively, the assessment process governs the institutional discourses (Bernstein, 2000) and sets the students in a learning mode to improve their “trainability” (ibid.), knowledge capacity, academic skills, criticality, problem-solving skills, reflexivity, and creativity. Though the students must have achieved a high level of cognition prior to enrolment, their encounters with the assessment tasks and their receiving and responding to the formative feedback solidified their comprehension, sharpened their academic skills, and elevated their higher-order thinking skills. There was a strong consensus among the participants that criticality was the most significant cognitive attainment though their interpretations of the concept varied.

Affectively, assessment is inherently associated with stress (Drew, 2001; Coutts *et al.*, 2011) and unintelligible feedback results in dissatisfaction (Higgins *et al.*, 2001). However, the assessment process in Anglophone institutions was hailed for promoting democracy and freedom of inquiry in the classroom and giving the students a sense of security, privacy, and personalised treatment. The students admitted the boosting effects of formative feedback and high scores; however, they attributed their gained confidence to the knowledge, skills, and competences that they acquired through assessment and feedback. Their role switching into that of the assessed imbued in them more sympathy

towards their previous teachers and more understanding towards their future students. A salient indirect affective impact of the assessment process was their increased intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy to read and conduct pedagogical research.

Behaviourally, the students could improve their research, teaching, and assessment practice. Their ability to conduct a systematic research by the end of the course was an accumulation of endeavours along the process including acquiring and applying information skills, digesting and critiquing academic articles, formulating research questions and research design, conducting research, and composing academic essays. Being illuminated by research findings and the educators, the Vietnamese students were able to absorb state-of-the-art theories, gauge their teaching assumptions and beliefs, form effective pedagogies, and develop professional presentation skills. Most significantly, they attained the “agency” (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) to explore new resources and avenues in language teaching to teach educationally rather than instrumentally (Priestley *et al.*, 2012). Thanks to the assessment tasks and feedback, the student teachers also developed more appropriate assessment schemes for their students, attempting to avoid the pitfalls they suffered and optimise the positivity of assessment and feedback from the modelling of their educators.

Socio-culturally, the summative element of the assessment process exerted a positive impact on the student teachers’ social images when it accredits their learning and achievement (Price *et al.*, 2010). Their attained “social capital” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 420) allows them to be more confident, competitive, and prestigious in their profession though that prestige is associated with more occupational and social responsibilities. The cognitive and affective achievements also make them more ready and eager (Shulman and Shulman, 2004) to engage in the wider “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Their attitudes towards their profession and life in general also changed towards autonomy, life-long learning, sympathy, respect, and “relativity” (Barnett, 2009). In brief, the assessment process has implanted the student teachers with new “elements” (Robinson, 2013; Illeris, 2014) at the core that lead to sustainable development in their social images.

## **8.2 The International MA-TESOL Course as an Ecological Activity System**

As discussed in (3.1.4, p.53), the international MA-TESOL course was conceptualised as an “ecological activity system”, an infusion of the theories of Engeström (1987), Pryor and Crossouard (2008), and Hodgson and Spours (2013). This complex system with the inter-junction of “interdependent factors” (Crick and Wilson, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2013) was able to incorporate the peripheral conditions and contexts in which the assessment process (the object of the activity system) occurs. As the object has been discussed in the preceding section, this part will highlight the impact of other factors of the ecological activity system: the subject, the mediating artefacts, the rules, the community, and power relations.

The most sensational impact factor of the “ecological activity system” could be attributable to the MA-TESOL educators. Their esteemed expertise and intellect made the learning a delightful, motivating, and encouraging experience to the Vietnamese students. Simultaneously, they were able to maintain a collegial atmosphere with their friendliness, openness, and sense of humour though intermittently their confined time availability hindered them from further scaffolding their students. While the Vietnamese students would traditionally rely on their lecturers as knowledge transmitters, the international lecturers perceived themselves as facilitators, which necessitated the students to readjust their expectations and learning styles towards independence and autonomy accordingly. When it comes to assessment, most of them were devoted to marking and giving feedback, demonstrating their “connoisseurship” (Flinders and Eisner, 1994, cited in Bloxham and Boyd, 2007) in designing assessment tasks and evaluating students’ work. Their encouraging formative feedback was deeply felt by the students and moulded into them similar practice towards their learners. However, the academic freedom in the international contexts and the “hidden” influences of their identities apparently led to diversified assessment practice. The fluctuation in their level of strictness and the “unspoken rules” behind the assessment criteria posed dilemmas for the students in trying to address their requirements and personal tastes.

The mediating artefacts (the library resources, the English language, and the seminars and workshops) served as enabling tools for the Vietnamese student teachers to construct their professional identity. Access to academic platforms has elevated the quality of their academic work beyond recognition and enabled them to explore

scientific knowledge independently and critically. Their command of English also plays a crucial role in the identification process, either promoting or hindering their integration into the communities (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007). Though the international environment offers more opportunities for them to correct their fossilised errors and refine their English, some faced challenges to maintain professional conversations due to their restricted expertise in the field. In an endeavour to overcome the language barrier, they adopted several solutions: (1) restricting their use of Vietnamese, (2) increasing communication with international peers and local people, (3) changing their attitudes toward “standard” English, and (4) being more open to World Englishes (Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2006). Supplementary seminars and workshops also contributed considerably to their professional development: the induction course orientated and familiarised them with the new environment; the language enhancement ones assisted them with their academic writing; and the research enhancement equipped them with know-how about research tools. Despite their usefulness, the occasional shallow or superficial instruction made it difficult for them to apply the taught skills into practice.

The impact of the rules was experienced via the course structure and the grading schemes. The one-year course was deemed as too short for professional development and the systematic design would negatively affect the January intakes. The students hailed the inclusion of detailed rubrics and criteria (Dowden *et al.*, 2011) and managed to make good use of them in their preparation for the assignments. However, the fact that criticality and autonomy are prioritised in the assessment criteria put the Vietnamese and other Asian students at a disadvantage in obtaining a distinction degree. The discrepancies in the rationales for generous and strict marking also pose certain concerns about fairness and cross-institutional evaluation. Yet, the rules for mark moderation (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000) have not been properly addressed in either the syllabi or the lecturers’ feedback leaving the students narrow spaces to negotiate their marked assignments or clarify the discrepancies in their mind sets.

The community played a central role in both the personal and professional development of the Vietnamese student teachers. In a collaborative pedagogical community, the majority of them are friendly and cooperative team workers. They benefited from face-to-face interactions with their international friends and facilitated their peers as well. There were arguments among them, yet those arguments are for better and deeper

understanding. Peer interactions also expanded their perspectives about the international teaching contexts. Meanwhile, the academic community offered them with authentic experience and motivation from the academics disseminating their own research. The open discussion and the inclusive atmosphere gave them a sense of self-efficacy and readiness to conduct research on their own (Shulman and Shulman, 2004). The socio-cultural community imbued in them cultural sensitivity and objectivity in evaluating their own culture. Their “social capital” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011, p.420) has been vigorously enhanced with ample travelling experiences and interchanges about cuisines and lifestyles. Most significantly, their active participation in a supportive and collaborative environment resembles an enculturation process (Akkerman and Eijck, 2013) infusing in them such esteemed dispositions and qualities (Barnett, 2009) as a sense of community, collaboration, and new beliefs about life.

The delicate impact of the power relations was observed via the educator-student interaction and international student support. The clear role setting with the educators being the module leader introducing the students to the field of research and the students taking full responsibility for their own study initially posed challenges for those who were unaccustomed to independent learning. The educator-student interaction was characterised by initial hesitation affected by the students’ original passivity, inferior feelings (Golombek and Jordan, 2005; Ka Ho, 2007), reverence towards the educators, and consideration for their hectic schedules. However, gradually, the Vietnamese students learnt to engage more actively with the learning communities thanks to their peer support, their educators’ inclusive teaching styles, the democratic classroom atmosphere, and their observation and adaptation. The identity of an international student offered them more attention from the educators and various support services, yet several would aspire to achieve “native-like” treatment. Some students expressed their positive view of educational service (Paul *et al.*, 2010), a noble service, in which relations advance towards more equality and power is viewed as energy for development (Shrewsbury, 1987, cited in Reynolds and Trehan, 2000, p. 276).

Generally, the international MA-TESOL courses have characteristics of a “high opportunity progression eco-system” such as providing high learner support, offering a wide set of experiences by a range of professionals, giving the students high levels of

agency and control, and imbuing in them general confidence about the future (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, pp. 221-3). The vivid encounters in an advanced international system induced the Vietnamese student teachers to absorb state-of-the-art pedagogies, question their past practice, and mitigate some of the culturally-rooted influences such as dependence, passivity, and inferiority. The analysis confirms other researchers' conclusion about the crucial determinacy of external factors and social interaction on the student teachers' identity/agency (Vygotsky, 1978; Palincsar, 1998; Spillane, 1999; Gee, 2000; Hermans, 2001; Black and McCormick, 2010). Though these environments were encouraging and embedded with ample learning opportunities, those opportunities frequently emerged in the form of challenges or contradictions that required from them agency to conduct boundary crossing acts, which reflects clearly the fourth principle of CHAT (Bernstein, 2000; Engeström, 2001; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Engeström and Sannino, 2010).

### **8.3 The Boundary Crossings and Expansive Learning**

As discussed in the theories of CHAT (3.1.2, p.50) and expansive learning (3.1.3, p.52), “boundaries are tension points condensing the past and opening possible futures” (Bernstein, 2000, p. xx) and “crossing refers to establishing continuity in action or interaction across socio-culturally different sites” (Akkerman and Eijck, 2013, p. 62). This section will revisit both the antecedent contexts in Vietnam (4.1, p.73), the concurrent contexts in the international MA-TESOL course (4.2, p.80), and the research findings (Chapter 5, p.90; Chapter 6, p.110; Chapter 7, p.132) to elaborate certain cultural, pedagogical, academic, and professional boundaries that the student teachers encountered during their horizontal learning process between multiple social systems (Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Akkerman and Eijck, 2013). By and large, they managed to overcome most of the boundaries and achieved “developmental transfers” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13), yet they are still struggling with several others. The interactions between the two contrastive international and national activity systems (3.1.4, p.53) have generated more cultural and pedagogical boundaries during the sojourn and more academic and professional ones during their return.

### 8.3.1 *The cultural boundary crossing*

The first and foremost hurdle that the Vietnamese students faced when studying abroad is the language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). Despite their antecedent academic excellence, most of the students initially encountered challenges to attain a professionally functional command of English as required for postgraduate study. The expansion of academic vocabulary, the composition of scientific texts, the fluency, and the standardisation of utterances required incessant endeavours from them (Golombek and Jordan, 2005). Intermittently, the language deficiency and “non-native” accent resulted in avoidance strategy among them (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007). However, the Vietnamese students devised measures to overcome such language hindrances by seeking opportunities to converse with local people and international friends, being more comfortable with their own accents, and changing their attitudes towards World Englishes (Kachru, 1992). There were also marked improvements in their academic writing with robust practice in composing essays to internationally-accredited quality. Several students even co-authored with their peers and supervisors to have their debut international publications, which mark their threshold steps into the international academic arena.

The second cultural barrier was found in their inferior feelings due to their assumed lower socio-economic status and academic excellence (Golombek and Jordan, 2005; Ka Ho, 2007). Their humble attitudes, however, encouraged them to study more diligently, absorb more knowledge, collaborate more eagerly with their peers, and be more responsive to their lecturers’ feedback. They could also reach mutual understanding with other international peers coming from similar economic backgrounds and share with them typical contextual issues. Through the emergence into a level and inclusive playing field, the mingling with peers, the institutional support for international students, the encouragement of the educators, and their good academic results, they gradually gained more confidence and self-worth (Crick and Wilson, 2005) in the “self-other relation” (Irving and Young, 2002, p. 24).

The third major cultural drawback lay in the initial hesitation to communicate, which could be a consequence of language anxiety and feelings of inferiority (Horwitz, 2001; Golombek and Jordan, 2005; Ka Ho, 2007). The Vietnamese students would need time to acquaint with their peers and lecturers, to learn how the new system works, to become familiar with the rules and the policies, and to adapt to the new environment before they could fully engage into the learning communities and have their voices



heard. The transition from a hierarchical to an egalitarian culture (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Volunteer Alberta, nd.) witnessed the Vietnamese students showing overwhelming reverence to their lecturers, addressing them formally, maintaining a substantial social distance with them, and hesitating to contact them except in irresolvable situations, which makes the interaction highly conventional and ineffective. Gradually, they managed to create rapport with their peers and lecturers via their participation in various “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, it is noteworthy that the cultural barriers varied depending on their personalities, volitions, “learning power” (Deakin Crick, 2007, p. 135), and “will to learn” (Johnston, 1996). The following sections will explicate other culturally rooted boundaries in specific pedagogical contexts.

### **8.3.2 *The pedagogical boundary crossing***

This section will elaborate three major pedagogical boundaries the Vietnamese students encountered during their international MA-TESOL course: passivity, criticality deficiency, and system unfamiliarity as well as their ways to surpass them.

Passivity, conceived as the heavy reliance on the lecturers for knowledge transmission, was a major hindrance for Vietnamese students in an international system that promotes independent learning (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Dang, 2010). While some of them were well-prepared to take responsibility for their own learning, some others were struggling to redefine their roles in the system. As the course advanced, they changed to perceive their lecturers as a source of initiatives, a facilitator, and a role model and undertook increasingly active roles in classroom discussions, defending their viewpoints, seeking academic support, and interacting more with their peers and educators.

A deficiency in criticality was another obstacle for the Vietnamese students compared to their Anglophone peers (Ha, 2004). As criticality is conceived as the most significant criteria to judge the quality of a postgraduate-level assignment in many institutions, they were compelled to develop that skill. Despite their prior familiarity with its definition, they could not fully comprehend the concept or know how to achieve it until they tackled the assessment tasks and received formative feedback. Their development of this skill is a clear example of expansive learning when they had to step into unfamiliar domains, make creative endeavours, use new conceptual resources, and form collective concepts (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). Though different students interpreted the

concept differently, they unanimously reported criticality as the most influential “developmental transfer” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13) to be achieved in their sojourn.

The unfamiliarity with the international education system also emerged as unexpected obstacles for the Vietnamese students as the home education and other “historical and social baggage” (Sowden, 2007, p. 305) or “the root” (Ha, 2007, p. 22) still exerted an influential impact on the way they interpreted the assessment requirements and conducted themselves in the new environment. For example, they wrote subjectively, failed to cite proper literature to support their arguments, and delved into clarifying the contexts rather than focusing on the main arguments. Such “hidden rules” about citations, conciseness of the argument, and criticality only became obvious to them after their own pitfalls in writing essays and receiving feedback. The unfamiliarity with feedback culture (such as having to make appointments with the professors) also hindered them from optimising their learning opportunities. Moreover, the high mark inflation in VN would make some students feel discouraged with what they received from prestigious systems. Learning from their own experiences and feedback, many of them have improved their academic writing, critical reading, and academic results. In other words, they have been able to transform their attitudes and practices to harmonise with the international system and embed themselves into a new collective base (Bernstein, 2000).

### **8.3.3 *The academic boundary crossing***

The above are major boundaries that the Vietnamese students had to cross during their sojourn to acquire new knowledge and skills. On their return to VN with an innovated professional identity, once again they had to face with boundaries in their own working spaces (**Figure 12**, p.58) as “when people cross boundaries their position is one of belonging to multiple worlds, but also one of being a marginal stranger to each of these worlds” (Akkerman and Eijck, 2013, p. 63). The following will discuss two major areas where boundaries could be most discerned: the academic environment and the continuous professional development.

The academic situation in VN was elaborated as challenging due to the lack of resources, an active research environment, and a knowledge sharing culture. The deficiency of academic resources (Canh and Barnard, 2009) was depicted as a sharp

contrast to those of the international systems. While the Anglophone institutions provided the student teachers with ample scientific sources, most of the Vietnamese universities have not subscribed to digital databases, which largely disempowers the teachers to conduct research. Whether their aspiration to gain access to accredited resources becomes realistic or not depends largely on the government and institution's investment for research and development.

The rather stagnant research environment in VN (Harman and Ngoc, 2010; Hien, 2010) is another remarkable contrast to the vibrant international communities of practice. The detachment from a thriving global academic environment and confinement into the local one was intimidating to most of the returnees. The emerging agency obtained via the engagement in the international academic communities (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) and the authentic lessons about how international academics conduct research and problem-solve practical issues were on the verge of dwindling in the barren Vietnamese research environment. Together with globalisation, research activities have gathered more momentum (Harman *et al.*, 2010; Van, 2013); however, rigorous endeavours are required to generate a compelling research environment in VN.

At the core of the research environment is a culture of knowledge sharing that needs to be developed. While the international institutions support that culture with open discussion, inquiry, and constructive feedback, the typical hierarchical Asian culture implies that indications of academic superiority of junior teachers are highly subject to rejection by their seniors and colleagues (Ka Ho, 2007; Tsui, 2007). The collectivist culture that supports neither the advancement of individuality nor the development of constructive communities of practice made it difficult for the TESOL practitioners to nurture or transmit their research motivation on their return.

#### **8.3.4 *The professional boundary crossing***

The professional space is by far the most challenging with imbalanced teaching and research ratio, incompatible teaching methodologies, unsatisfactory incentive policies, and other peripheral obstacles. While most of the international MA-TESOL courses prioritise academic and research skills, apparently, those skills are ranked secondary in the Vietnamese environment. The burgeoning social demand for English language training has propelled the TESOL practitioners to devote far more time and effort to their teaching, forcing them to neglect their research obligation. The overloaded

teaching schedules were mentioned as the major hurdle for them to conduct research though they have become more aware of the significance of research in their continuous professional development.

The TESOL practitioners also encountered difficulties when attempting to apply the acquired teaching techniques into the Vietnamese classrooms. Though they returned with more theoretical underpinnings that may enlighten their teaching practice, discrepancies in the learners' motivation and learning styles, the class size, the facilities, and resources constantly pose issues for them to tackle (Canh and Barnard, 2009). Though their refined knowledge about the target language and culture could liven up the lessons, those who aspired to imitate the role model of their native lecturers would have to handle more tailoring and readjustment to the "local learning ecology" (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 211).

The third boundary is the unrealistically low incentives offered by public institutions (Harman and Ngoc, 2010) for the endeavour and intellectuality that the TESOL practitioners devote to their lessons. The demanding institutional workload consumes most of their time, yet the far-from-satisfactory salary policy immensely hinders their further "investment" (Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 412) as their increased "social capital" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 420) does not necessarily correspond to their official salary. Though the TESOL practitioners could enjoy more decent incomes from extra-institutional activities, their below-average official salary negatively affects their sense of professionalism and diverts their investment of time and effort away from their institutional occupation.

Such financial concerns together with other familial and social concerns severely impede the TESOL practitioners from *enhancing* their professional identity with academic activities (TESOL International Association, nd.-b). Those concerns were equally voiced by male and female lecturers who need to work diligently to secure financial support for their family. This reflects Maslow (1943)'s hierarchy of needs in which physiology, security, and love and belonging precede self-esteem and self-actualisation. In that "low opportunity progression equilibrium" (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 216), many teachers voiced their fear about the receding research motivation; many would aspire to another opportunity to study abroad before their motivation fades

away; their advanced skills such as critical and independent thinking are on the verge of being unused, and thus, unlearned.

#### **8.4 The Teacher Agency and Professional Identity**

As discussed in the literature about social constructivism (3.1.1, p. 49), the external factors are allegedly primary to the consciousness of the individual (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Palincsar, 1998; Engeström, 2001; Engeström and Sannino, 2010). However, being embedded in an individualistic “culture base” (Bernstein, 2000; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Management Study Guide, 2015) of the international MA-TESOL course, the Vietnamese student teachers have constantly developed their self-efficacy and agency “in and through *engagement* with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action” (Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 136). The wide-enough “gap” between the two systems (Pincas, 2001) enabled them to distance themselves from the antecedent education background and reflect deeply whereas the simultaneous engagement in multiple practices empowers them to “act as dialogical agents, continuously negotiating these social systems in relation to one another” (Akkerman and Eijck, 2013, p. 69). This section will highlight the actual identification process as an individual developmental project (Bowen, 2004, cited in Mann, 2005) as well as the co-constructed narration process through which the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers emerged.

##### **8.4.1 *The process of identification***

As discussed in (2.2.3, p.32), the process of identification is not a linear route but rather a case of multiplicity in unity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011) in which the Vietnamese student teachers strive to consolidate a coherent and consistent “inter-being” from the constant (re)construction and (re)negotiation of the identity as it is empowered to travel through time and space (Hermans, 2003; Hanh, 2013). They enrolled in the international MA-TESOL course with multiple goals to accomplish: becoming a more grounded, intercultural teacher, a more competent researcher, fulfilling their personal dreams, better serving the institutions they work for, and earning an internationally-accredited degree. Their “historical and social baggage” (Sowden, 2007, p. 305) or their “root” (Ha, 2007, p. 22) placed them in a constant dilemma of *continuity vs. change* (Kam, 2002) [original italic]. The swift ecological changes involve them to interact with

various stakeholders of the communities, adapting, juggling, prioritising, and at times squeezing their identities within the pre-established conventions (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Evidences of their multiple identities were observable via their mixed accent, their acquisition of new learning styles and higher-order thinking skills, and their adaptation and “transposition” between the two contrastive activity systems (Hanks, 1991). Though each student teacher constructed their own development agenda by tailoring the international MA-TESOL course to their own interest and constructing “their own version of the hidden curriculum” (Struyven *et al.*, 2005, p. 336; Engeström and Sannino, 2010), they apparently share the same vision of a balanced professional identity between sentimentality and rationality.

Professional identification is also a case of discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), a case of two-way role-switching between being a teacher and a student. The first role-switching from a teacher to an international student was a delightful experience for most of the student teachers as “coming to know the world is uplifting” (Barnett, 2009, p. 433). In exchange for their sacrifice of teacher authority, they were enabled to escape from routine work pressure and enjoy their student life in a more democratic and convenient environment. They were assiduous to construct solid theoretical grounds, refine teaching methodologies, and expand their knowledge about pedagogy, research, and assessment. The process of gaining agency was turbulent at times when contradictions arose (Kärkkäinen, 1999; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Engeström and Sannino, 2010), when their precedent experiences clashed with the new system like incompatible writing styles, misinterpretation of the assessment criteria, or hesitation to communicate. The demanding international system necessitated them to cross boundaries (Engeström and Sannino, 2010) by improving their academic skills, higher-order thinking skills, and relations with their educators and peers. Through those struggles they gained more sympathy towards their teachers and tolerance towards their students and recognised their unreasonable expectations, irrational marking, and misassumptions even with good intentions (for example, using many songs in a language class merely for recreational purposes). Being more humble in the position of a student, they also learnt the attention and feedback they would expect from their lecturers and aspired to treat their students the way they would like to be treated. Those encounters constructed in them more confidence, perseverance, and resilience to uproot some irrelevant routines and implant more active learning and teaching styles (McGill and Beaty, 2001).

The second role-switching from an international student to a TESOL practitioner in their locality turned out to be more challenging though most of the student teachers were eager to apply their obtained knowledge and in actuality managed to apply certain teaching techniques in their lessons. While their professional identities have markedly changed with fundamental alternations in their rationality and practice, the Vietnamese “low opportunity progression equilibrium” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013, p. 216) could not fully accommodate such changes, which caused initial “reverse culture shock” (Gaw, 2000, p. 83) among the returnees. Gradually, the advanced knowledge and skills attained from the international MA-TESOL course have been consolidated as the core of their agency, enabling them to take more responsibilities, becoming more resourceful and eager to innovate in their lessons, lead research projects, and disseminate their research findings nationally and internationally. On the whole, their process of professional identification involves the struggles between the profane and the sacred self (Bernstein, 2000; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004), which results in discontinuation and regression as well as re-adaptation and elevation of the identity (Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Illeris, 2014). Apparently, in an adverse ecological system, the Vietnamese TESOL teachers have more opportunities to polish their agency and become more adaptive, flexible, and creative though admittedly, they experienced moments of disappointment and desired to escape.

#### **8.4.2 *The process of narration***

As discussed in the literature about narrative inquiry (3.2.2, p.60), the process of identity formation is closely associated with the process of narration in which the “I” is both the “author” and the “actor or character” (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 313). The professional identity of the Vietnamese student teachers emerged via the active dialogues with the researcher, a highly inter-subjective process that actualises their agency.

The narration of the professional identity involves a non-sequential reflection, which suggests that identity is a fluid and evolving concept (Hermans, 2001; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). The collective narrative was largely based on the participants’ retrospection, a voice of the past, depicting the influences of the collective culture, the inactive teaching and learning traditions, and their own encounters as a learner and a teacher in VN. The findings mirror Johnson’s (1994) conclusion that past learning

experiences largely determine the teacher's self-image (cited in Garton and Richards, 2008). Their contradictory sociocultural bases (Bernstein, 2000) posed obstacles for their integration in the international learning environment and caused struggles between the volitional *I* (James (1890) cited in Hermans, 2001) and the inherent "immunity to change" (Kegan and Lahey, 2001). The retrospection occasionally arose in them regret about their unrealistic expectations or the pitfalls they made due to deficient teaching principles, which made them sympathise more with their previous teachers and students. Most significantly, it made them realise the "gaps" between their beliefs and the practicality of language teaching and how research and insights can draw these gaps closer.

The prospection, the voice towards the future, is a rather daunting depiction when the focus is placed on "*cultural, economic, and technological changes*" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 67) [original italic] and the home "ecological activity system" has not evolved swiftly enough to accommodate for and continue to nurture the new competences that the Vietnamese student teachers obtained from the sojourn. During their study, they would envision to return with better philosophical understandings, being more confident, comfortable, flexible, efficient, and agentic. However, the prospection of their return is shadowed with the loss of access to crucial databases, the passivity of the learners, and the unfavourable academic environment. In actuality, the teaching workload, the incentive policies, and the working conditions has deterred much of their effort to conduct research and initiate changes in their working environment.

The projection, the outward reflection that "relays to self and others the spatial and temporal attributes of the identity" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 73), witnessed the Vietnamese student teachers being respectful to their lecturers, collaborative with their peers, and active in the "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Despite initial hesitation, most of them could then maintain harmonious and fruitful social relations. They also managed to adapt to "the rules of the game" (Norton *et al.*, 2001, p. 269) to achieve satisfactory study results. Their identity as an international student was an advantage as they received more support from the system and more opportunities to communicate and expand their networks though native-like treatment was preferred by several of them.



The introjection, the inward reflection, witnessed the Vietnamese students being humble and feeling inferior and reserved to start with. However, through the struggles to survive, continuously learning, being assessed, and being credited, they gradually gathered confidence and agency. Cognitively, they made marked improvement in their criticality, higher-order thinking skills, and autonomy. Affectively, they become more culturally sensitive, sympathetic, and collaborative. Behaviourally, they are more able to teach educationally (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p. 199), conduct research professionally, and assess the students formatively. Socio-culturally, the international MA-TESOL qualification made them more competitive in the job market, more respectable in their occupation, more favorable to their students, and more ready to be “agents of change” (Shulman and Shulman, 2004; Priestley *et al.*, 2012). Though the external conditions may largely affect, the MA-TESOL students would still aspire to continue with their “personal project” (Bernstein, 2000) to become ethical, autonomous, and life-long learners (Clayton, 1990; TESOL International Association, nd.-b), striving to thrive in the system they belong to.

## **8.5 Summary**

The discussion has highlighted the significance of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course in the professional development of Vietnamese student teachers as coming to know the world is edifying (Masschelein, 2000). Though the cultural and pedagogical beliefs are rather rigid (Ha, 2007; Garton and Richards, 2008), the Anglophone assessment process has challenged those long-standing assumptions, uprooting some and implanting some others. The “high opportunity progression eco-system” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013) of the international MA-TESOL courses provided enabling conditions for the Vietnamese students to develop their professional identities both internally and externally via both statutory and “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They were also confident to engage in the struggles of learning (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Engeström and Sannino, 2010) to create the values of the unfolding life (Rea-Dickins *et al.*, 2007) and graduated as competent teachers, being ready (possessing vision), willing (having motivation), able (both knowing and being able “to do”), reflective (learning from experience), and communal (acting as a member of a professional community) (Shulman and Shulman, 2004, p. 259). The double “transpositions” without a “common code” (Hanks, 1991, pp.

17-21), however, presented them with ample cultural, pedagogical, academic, and professional boundaries to cross (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). The process of identification, therefore, is a case of multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011) and the process of narration was complex with the interweaving of retrospection, prospection, projection, and introjection (Bernstein, 2000).

## Chapter 9 Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study

This final chapter is devoted to firstly summarising both the conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions of the research on the short-term and long-term impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers (9.1). Secondly, it will highlight pedagogical implications regarding assessment, professional identity development, and TESOL teacher training in an internationalised context based on those contributions (9.2). The outcomes and values for specific audiences will also be elaborated (9.3). The chapter will end with limitations of the study (9.4) and suggestions for further study (9.5). Throughout the chapter, endeavours will be made to reconnect the research findings with other research in the fields of assessment and identity.

### 9.1 Conclusions

#### 9.1.1 *Conceptual contributions*

This dissertation has conceptually contributed to the field of research with a harmonious and flexible formulation of assessment, a dialogical conceptualisation of professional identity, a development of the “ecological activity system”, and a vision of the “interaction between the two systems”.

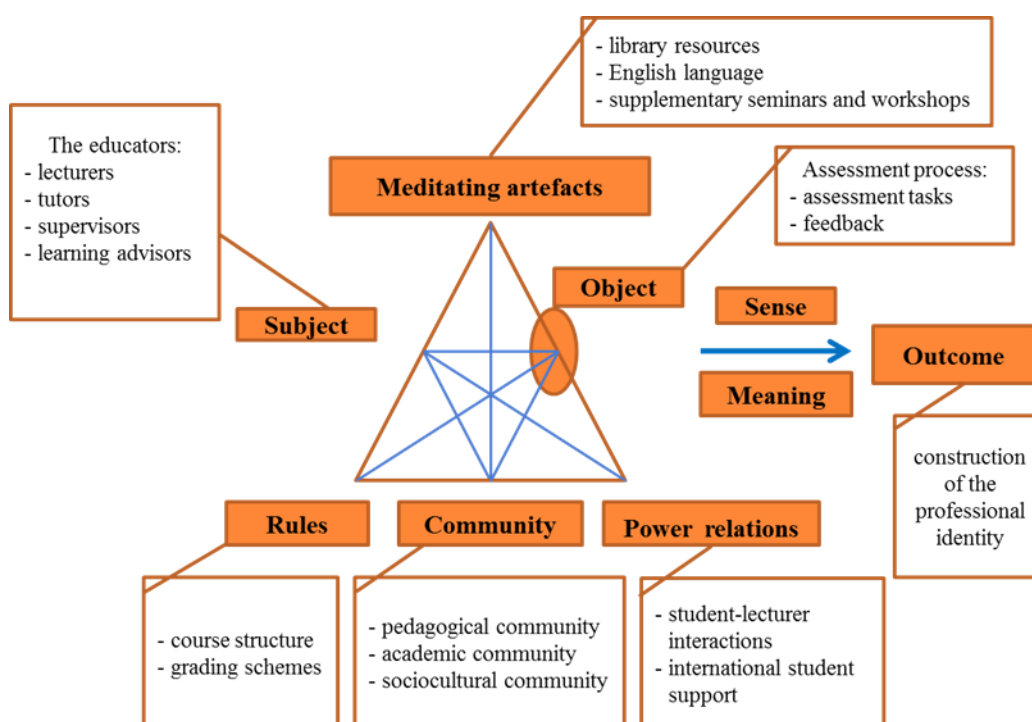
The dissertation commenced with a comprehensive and harmonious conceptualisation of assessment, a “marrying model” of both summative and formative function, which interweaves teaching, learning, and the entire curriculum (Angelo, 1995; Bernstein, 2000; Shepard, 2000; Black and McCormick, 2010). It was observed in its process with two crucial elements: the assessment tasks - the framing (Bernstein, 2000) - and the feedback - the formative intervention (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). This holistic yet simplistic approach to assessment is an endeavour to ease the tensions between the summative and formative and forge a positive relationship between them (Black and McCormick, 2010). It is also an attempt to simplify and unify contradictory views in the assessment literature and still capture the richness of the assessment experiences of the student teachers.

The conceptualisation of identity adopted in this dissertation also follows the “marrying model” combining Vietnamese researchers’ viewpoints of identity as being stable and unified (Ngoc, 1998, Vuong, 2000, Them, 1999, 2001, cited in Ha and Que, 2006; Ha, 2007) and the post-modernist Western view of identity as fluid, flexible, and multiple (Gee, 2000; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Norton and Toohey, 2011) to address the “inter-being” nature of the self (Hanh, 2013). The Dialogical Self Theory approach (Hermans, 2001) further elaborates the multi-voicedness of the I-position within the landscape of the mind and its intertwining with that of others (Hermans, 2003). This theory indicates “a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self” (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 315) as it is embedded in various collective bases/ contexts/ activity systems/ ecologies (Bernstein, 2000; Gee, 2000; Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Hodgson and Spours, 2013). Identification is perceived as a process of learning in which “trainability”, “learning power”, “will to learn”, and “investment” are mobilised to develop their “capacity” (the potentials) and “agency” (the realisation) in and through engagement with the ecology (Johnston, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Bernstein, 2000; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Deakin Crick, 2007; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Akkerman and Eijck, 2013).

In this dissertation, the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers has been analytically examined in four major aspects of cognition, affect, behavior, and social-culture during their sojourn study and synthetically narrated in their three professional roles of a TESOL teacher/ lecturer, a researcher, and an assessor on their return to VN. The process of identification was viewed in two dimensions: multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), which suggests “stability within changes or changes that take place along the lines of continuity” (Ha and Que, 2006, p. 140). The narration is based on Bernstein (2000)’s conceptualisation of the pedagogic identity with four dimensions: retrospection (backward view), prospection (forward view), introspection (inward view), and projection (outward view).

The international MA-TESOL course in which the Vietnamese student teachers engage to develop their professional identity has been schematised into the “ecological activity system” (**Figure 17**), a conceptual framework developed from the foundational works of activity theory, sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment, and high-opportunity progression eco-system (Engeström, 1987; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008; Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Hodgson and Spours, 2013). Three significant alternations have been incorporated to engender the organic connotation for the activity system. Firstly, the

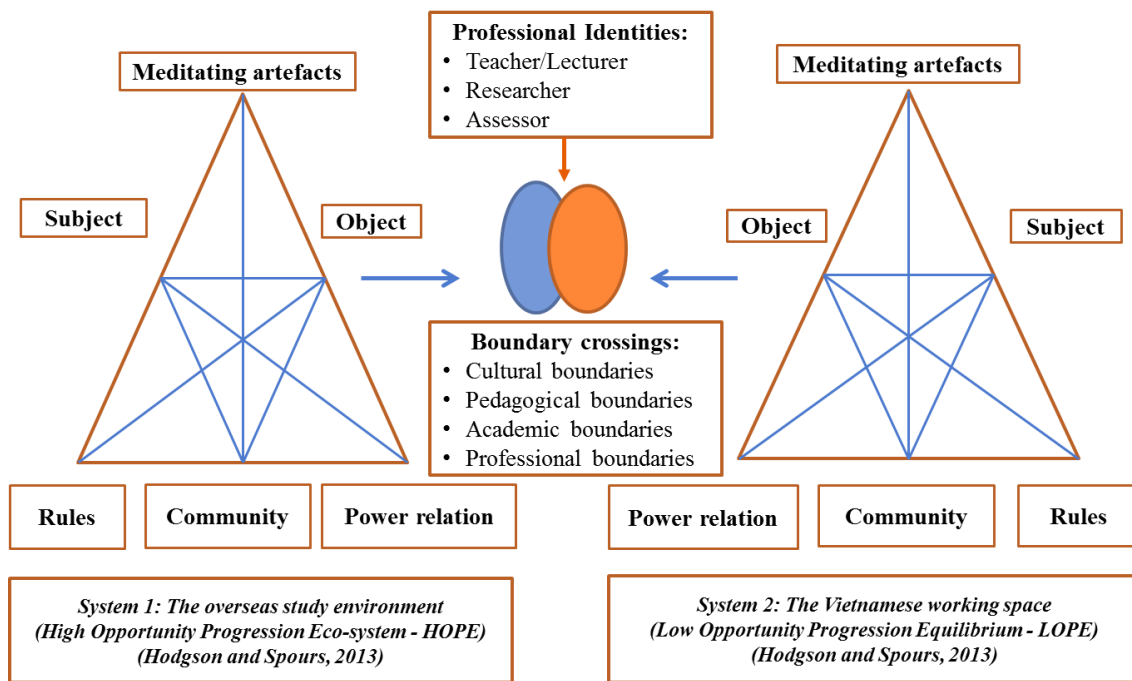
object is established as the assessment process, the scope of which is extended to encompass both the realistic assessment tasks and the humanistic formative feedback. Secondly, the division of labour is replaced with the power relations to appropriate it with the HE contexts and reflect the interactions between the subjects of the activity. Thirdly, the six factors of the system are perceived as being inter-dependent, interwoven to embrace the dynamism of the international MA-TESOL course and reflect the realistic and holistic developmental process of the student teachers' professional identity.



**Figure 17:** The ecological activity system (the revised version)

(Adapted from the second generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system and Pryor and Crossouard (2008) sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment and Hodgson and Spours (2013)'s high opportunity progression eco-systems)

The second framework “the interaction of two activity systems” has also been utilised to visualise and envision the professional identity renegotiation of the Vietnamese student teachers in their actual working space (**Figure 18**). The transitions to a high opportunity progression system (the international MA-TESOL course) and back to the apparently low opportunity progression equilibrium (the Vietnamese working space) have been characterised by cultural, pedagogical, academic, and professional boundaries for them to cross. However, through the continual “developmental transfers” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010, p. 13), their professional identities of a TESOL practitioner, a researcher, and an assessor have been refined and recognised.



**Figure 18:** The interaction of two activity systems (the revised version)  
 (Adapted from the third generation of Engeström (1987)'s activity system)

### 9.1.2 Methodological contributions

Methodologically, the research is framed into a “divergent multiple case study” that diverts from the traditional view of a single conventional organisation-based case study. The participation of the Vietnamese student teachers who undertook their MA-TESOL course in various HE institutions across four Anglophone countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) has erased the geographical boundaries between continents and made international knowledge transfer feasible. The exploitation of the internet connection to conduct interviews has proved to be efficient and fruitful, both saving the cost of travel and creating a secure environment for the participants to express and co-construct insights about their identity formation. This model of a “divergent multiple case study” can be replicated in the context of internationalisation.

### 9.1.3 Empirical contributions

This impact study has addressed Evans (2013)'s recommendation to examine both the short-term and long-term effect of assessment/feedback on the learner's identity from a socio-constructivist perspective. The analytic chapters have answered two context-setting questions regarding the student teachers' professional goals and their assessment

experience and three impact questions regarding the assessment process in particular, the international MA-TESOL course in general, and both of them on their continued career paths.

*Question 1. What professional goals did the Vietnamese student teachers want to fulfil when taking an international MA-TESOL course?*

The data analysis has specified six major objectives that motivate the Vietnamese students to study abroad: to obtain the required credentials, enhance their language proficiency, refine teaching methodologies, develop research capacity, expand cultural understanding, and fulfil their personal dreams (4.1.3, p.77). The analysis appears to support Walters (2007) in the sense that vocational reasons act as a major driving force in their decision making, however, it apparently refutes his argument that academic motivation “is the purest reason for wanting to study, but in reality, is probably the rarest” (ibid., p. 58).

*Question 2. What type of assessment tasks and feedback did they tackle?*

The students’ accounts (4.2, p.80 and 8.1.1, p.143) revealed the dominance of the regulative discourse (the assessment tasks) over the instructional one (feedback) in providing spaces for individuals to develop their unique identities with their own internal rules and special voices (Bernstein, 2000). Contradictory to research on the substantial effects of alternative assessment (Sambell *et al.*, 1997), the current systems still favour written essays. While the students appreciate their educational value in promoting information retrieval, criticality, reflexivity, and independence, they would aspire to experience more forms of oral assessment to develop more holistically and authentically. The educators’ feedback is an influential “formative intervention” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010) in their improvement of academic writing styles, teaching philosophies, research capacity, and assessment practice, however, contradictions such as reluctance to communicate and hesitance to give negative feedback are frequently encountered during the process.

*Question 3. How did the assessment process (including the assessment tasks and feedback) help to shape their professional identity?*

The impact of the assessment process on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers has been categorised into four aspects: cognition, affect, behaviour, and socio-culture. The cognitive impact is by far the most discernible with improved study skills,

criticality, and other higher-order thinking skills. The behavioural impact is the most significant with marked improvement in pedagogical, research, and assessment practice that transforms their professional conduct. The socio-cultural impact is the most influential with increasing competitive edge, respect, social status, and social responsibility. The affective impact is the most intangible though it was frequently sensed with various nuances (Chapter 5, p. 90 and 8.1.2, p. 145). More holistically, the student teachers gradually transforms their core identity into that of an autonomous, life-long learner with ethical attitudes, salient attributes of a TESOL professional (Clayton, 1990; McGill and Beaty, 2001; Shulman and Shulman, 2004; TESOL International Association, nd.-b).

*Question 4. How did other factors of the international MA-TESOL course impact their professional identity?*

The impact of other factors of the international MA-TESOL course has been systematically elaborated using the “ecological activity system” as the analytical framework (Chapter 6, p. 110 and 8.2, p. 147). The course has characteristics of a “high opportunity progression eco-system” (HOPE) (Hodgson and Spours, 2013) with esteemed lecturers, communication opportunities, accessibility to academic databases, vibrant pedagogical, academic and socio-cultural communities, constructive lecturer-student interactions, and international student support. However, the students voiced their concerns regarding the lecturers’ time allocation for their inquiries; the discrepancies in task requirements, criteria interpretation, marking, and tastes, the excessive workload in certain universities; and the ineffectiveness of certain supplementary seminars and workshops. They also realised their own pitfalls such as having deficient professional vocabulary, being reluctant to communicate, and being rather non-critical when receiving marks and feedback.

*Question 5. In what way do the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course leave long-term impact on their continued career paths?*

The long-term impact on the continued career paths on their return to VN has proved a high level of consequential validity (Messick, 1990; Sambell *et al.*, 1997) of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course (Chapter 7, p. 132). Apart from highly theoretical modules, most of the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and competences are transferable to the Vietnamese contexts. The TESOL teachers could form a more balanced professional identity between sentimentality and rationality,



being helpful, comfortable, approachable, yet fair, efficient, systematic, and agentic. The contrastive scenarios of VN and the Anglophone countries posit them in a new process of adaptation with challenges, regressions, and discontinuations (Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Illeris, 2014), however, with obtained agency, they enjoy more comfort with their professional status and aspire to enhance their academic career as TESOL professionals do (TESOL International Association, nd.-b).

## **9.2 Pedagogical Implications**

### **9.2.1 *Assessment and identity***

The analysis of the impact of the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers has highlighted the framing role of assessment on identity via the selection of communication, sequencing, pacing, criteria, and social base (Bernstein, 2000). Whether the student teachers are empowered to develop their professional identity depends largely on the strength of that framing as norms of assessment may give rise to character, manner, conduct, posture, etc. (ibid.) and act as “the axis around which success or failure in global education revolve” (Pincas, 2001, p. 38). If student teacher identity were to become the main starting point in understanding and stimulating professional development (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), then the questions of why, what, and how to assess in the MA-TESOL course need to be revisited.

Regarding the question of why, since 1999, Astin has highlighted the significant mission of assessment to develop talent, character, and excellence (Astin, 1999; Astin and Antonio, 2004; Astin and Antonio, 2012). “Assessment for learning” has been advocated by many assessment researchers (Taras, 2002; Black *et al.*, 2003; Wiliam *et al.*, 2004; Swaffield, 2011) and the formative function of assessment has gathered increasing momentum (Yorke, 2003; Wiliam, 2006; Crossouard, 2008; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008; Black and Wiliam, 2009; Pryor and Crossouard, 2010; Wiliam, 2010; Bennett, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2012). Within that theoretical landscape and a broader framework of social constructivism and internationalisation, should the purpose of assessment be expanded into “assessment for inter-being” (Hanh, 2013) to encompass more social aspects of the learner identity and promote a flourishing ecological system? In other words, should assessment enable “a sense of worthwhileness of being a

learner” (Crick and Wilson, 2005, p. 359) in a constructive environment in which learners can interact, make mistakes and learn from that (Yorke (2001) cited in Rust, 2007; Irons, 2010) as mistakes can merely be different conceptions in inter-cultural communication.

Within that conceptualisation of the purpose of assessment, the question of what to assess is to be taken into account. There have been debates regarding whether the focus of assessment should be placed on performances, competences or capacities (Barnett, 1994; Eraut, 1994; Bernstein, 2000; Crick and Wilson, 2005). However, it can be safe to state that assessment (measurement) is *of* performances and *about/for* competences or capacities as they represent the external and internal form of the learner identity. Though assessment may not directly and accurately measure competences and capacities due to probable mismatches, with its framing power, it can create a favourable ambiance for competences to develop and capacities to expand. For example, assessment activities can be designed not only to judge whether learning has occurred but also encourage the students to learn (Price *et al.*, 2010).

The question of what to assess can also be addressed by using the quadruple model of the identity (with cognitive, affective, behavioural, and socio-cultural aspects). While the research findings echo Black and Wiliam (2001, p. 11)’s conclusion that “assessment, [...], is far from a merely technical problem. Rather, it is deeply social and personal”, the current assessment systems substantially address the cognitive and behavioural domains at the detriment of the others. Therefore, the affective and socio-cultural aspects should be more specifically elaborated in the learning outcomes (Terenzini, 1989). For example, assessment norms should encompass such “internal” qualities as to “heal our societal divisions and to help to create a community that is less competitive and materialistic and more generous and cooperative” (Astin, 1999, p. 174). Though it seems unreasonable to expect assessment to measure all aspects of the learner identity, an awareness of its unintended impact on affect and social images may help course designers to maximise its positivity and minimise its negativity.

The question of how to assess can be addressed with three salient notions: assessment as a process, identifying the gap, and feedback dialogue. If learning is conceptualised as a process of identity formation (Wenger, 1998), assessment should accordingly be perceived as a process encompassing both summative assessment tasks and *formative*

feedback (Barnett, 1994; Crick and Wilson, 2005; Wiliam, 2006) to empower the learners (Leach *et al.*, 2001). While assessment researchers (Taras, 2002; Yorke, 2003; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) emphasise the significance of feedback in helping the students to “close the gap”, this research would emphasise its significance in helping them to “identify the gap” as the international contexts are embedded with ample “hidden” discrepancies. The subsequent task of closing the gap between the local circumstances and the international environment will bolster the effective applicability of professional development programmes back to the local contexts (Supovitz, 2001 cited in Wiliam, 2006) though it is inherently associated with contradictions and tensions (Kärkkäinen, 1999; Engeström, 2001; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004). However, a feedback dialogue with opportunities for the educators and the learners to engage in meaningful and constructive negotiation may ease such tensions and instigate desirable learning outcomes (Higgins *et al.*, 2001; Knight, 2001; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Irons, 2010). It may help the students comprehend “the rules of the games” (Norton *et al.*, 2001, p. 269), the assumptions known to the lecturers but less transparent to them (Carless, 2006, p. 230) so that they can respond with more confidence and mitigate the burden of assessment (Higgins *et al.*, 2001; Carless, 2006; Dowden *et al.*, 2011). A fruitful feedback dialogue, however, does not occur naturally but rather must be constructed on the basis of adequate time allowance (Taras, 2002), mutual trust (Irons, 2010), mutual respect, openness (Lorenzi, 2012, p. 69), and commitment. The feedback is deemed impactful when it is thoughtful, reflective, learner-centred, focused to evoke and explore understanding (Black and Wiliam, 2001), and a “challenge tool” (Evans, 2013, p. 72) that stimulate and promote expansive learning (Engeström, 2001).

### **9.2.2 *TESOL teacher training programme***

This study also offers several suggestions for the design of international MA-TESOL training programmes. Regarding the overall course contents, the research findings advocate balancing between research and pedagogy components. Like many other HE programmes, the current MA-TESOL courses appear to prioritise research capacity building (Chetty and Lubben, 2010). Though research may illuminate pedagogies, more authentic teaching practice should be included to address the student teachers’ aspiration to obtain international language teaching experience and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Another implication to ponder is the “structural gap” in assessment training, which echoes Price *et al.* (2010)’s claim about inadequate assessment literacy among the students. As it is key to pedagogic practice (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999) and the findings show that training results in improved practice, it is strongly advocated that a “scholarship of assessment” (Rust, 2007, p. 229) be made compulsory in TESOL teacher training programmes in form of either a separate module or a significant component of a pedagogical module.

The design of the assessment schemes also needs to strive for a rounded development as the “level of specification of time, text and space marks us cognitively, socially and culturally” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 35). Conversely, the learners’ “capabilities” and “trainability” (Bernstein, 2000) should also be taken into account in determining the time allocation, the pacing, and the synchrony across modules to avoid possible excessive workload. There should also be a balance between summative assessment tasks versus formative feedback and oral versus written mode of assessment and feedback (Black and McCormick, 2010) to create opportunities for the learners to develop holistically.

The adoption of an ecological view (Hodgson and Spours, 2013) to examine the international MA-TESOL course suggests that the complex HE contexts necessitate a more organic perspective about appropriate pedagogy and assessment that may feature possibilities of learner and teacher agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Crossouard, 2010; Pryor and Crossouard, 2010; Priestley *et al.*, 2012). This could be achieved by expanding the scope of teaching and assessment to encompass not only cognition but also craft and affect (Grossman and McDonald, 2008) and addressing not only the intellectual but also the relational demands of teaching (*ibid.*). Accordingly, both sentimental and rational attributes of the professional identity as narrated by the Vietnamese students such as comfort, helpfulness, approachability, efficiency, systematicity, agency, and fairness should be taken into consideration in the design of the course outcomes.

It is also noteworthy that though assessment is a key chain in the education system, it cannot hold accountability for the entire system but rather should function synchronously with other factors to enable the learners to develop their identity. As identity construction is considered a process of meaning negotiation in social

communities (Wenger, 1998, p. 145), assessment should also promote a nurturing and collaborative learning community. The assessment policy, therefore, should be designed from an “organisational perspective” (Grossman and McDonald, 2008) to synchronise all the factors of the activity system: the object, the subject, the mediating artefacts, the rules, the community, and the power relations. The entire system, therefore, should be seen as “a pedagogic vehicle for effecting changes in human beings through particular kinds of encounter with knowledge” (Barnett, 2009, p. 429).

### **9.2.3 *Internationalisation of the MA-TESOL course***

From a broader perspective, the international MA-TESOL course is subject to the influences of the objective socio-cultural contexts of the changing world. To address swift internationalisation, assessment criteria will inevitably have to be re-interpreted in the light of particular real-world outcomes relevant to the learners (Pincas, 2001). The training system may need to embrace the discrepancies among cultures, educational values, socio-economic factors, and technological advancements.

Addressing the discrepancies has raised both an advantages and challenges for the internationalisation process. This research has identified several of them (8.3, p.150) as encountered by Vietnamese student teachers:

- (i) They embarked on their international study with their own “historical and social baggage” (Sowden, 2007, p. 305) or their “root” (Ha, 2007, p. 22) that could not be changed overnight
- (ii) Their non-native accents and deficient academic skills pose considerable challenges for them to integrate into the communities of practice (Horwitz, 2001; Golombek and Jordan, 2005).
- (iii) Their inferior feelings and hesitation to communicate created social/intellectual distance with the educators (Golombek and Jordan, 2005; Ka Ho, 2007).
- (iv) They were not made fully aware of the differences in the new system that they would need to adapt to.
- (v) They may not fully benefit from the technological advancements in the Anglophonic universities without specific demonstrations.

The diversification of the internationalisation contexts calls for more needs analysis research to obtain a better understanding of international students and readjust

assumptions about their starting points (Pincas, 2001). The attitudes, therefore, should be changed towards respecting and embracing the differences.

To attract more international students, global universities would not just “expect all students to adjust to traditional English-Western academic values and uses of language” (Pincas, 2001, p. 47) but rather change their process to accommodate the diversification of a truly international environment. This seeming contradiction might be resolved by the promotion of inclusive learning communities (Robson, 2011), the negotiation of an agreed degree of tolerance, the egalitarian power relations, and the bridging of the social/ intellectual distance in a more collegial, “family style” ambience (Tomlinson and Dat, 2004, p. 211). These can be categorised as enabling ecological conditions with appropriate time and space for the international students to make “boundary crossing” acts and achieve “developmental transfers” (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). On the other hand, the students also need to revisit their feelings of inferiority and their uncritical acceptance of the superiority of Western approaches (Pattison and Robson, 2013) to pursue a middle way of “interiority” (McHugh, 2012) instead as their inter-lingual and inter-cultural skills are subject to the judgement of “relevance” (Pincas, 2001, p. 33) in their “trans-cultural practices” (Pennycook, 2005, p.29, cited in Fotovatian, 2012).

If the old wisdom “human beings are more similar than they are different” still holds true then the International TESOL Association and MA-TESOL course providers should invest more resources to consolidate the common esteemed attributes that international TESOL teachers should possess. Such unifying traits as autonomy, lifelong learning (Crick and Wilson, 2005; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Fordyce and Hennebry, 2014; TESOL International Association, nd.-b), international citizenship (Wheeler and Dunne, 1998), and intercultural competence (Caruana & Ploner, 2011, cited in Robson, 2011) should be addressed in the training programme as “specialization and globalization bring about an increase in multiplicity, diversity, interactions, movements across sites” (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011, p. 1).

### 9.3 Outcomes and Values

The research findings about the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of the Vietnamese student teachers, the assuming minorities in the international system, have highlighted critical issues regarding intercultural assessment, practical MA-TESOL course design, and institutional support for the student teachers' professional identification. Their keen observation indicated a divergence of assessment practice among institutions that should be converged towards mutual understanding, rationality, empathy, and promotion of learners' identity. Their deep concerns about the course contents and the transfer of knowledge between systems have shed more light to how an international MA-TESOL course in Anglophone countries should be structured to relay far-reaching impact on developing countries where most student teachers originated from. Their elaborative narration of the professional identification has promoted more tangible insights into the endeavours, investments, and achievements that Vietnamese as well as other international students have made to be accredited and recognised. This research, therefore, can be of practical educational value to the MA-TESOL course providers of both host and guest countries, the TESOL educators and prospective MA-TESOL students, and the participants and the researcher herself.

#### 9.3.1 *For MA-TESOL course providers in host and guest countries*

In the context of an increasingly interdependent world, the MA-TESOL course providers in both host and guest countries may take into account the following suggestions:

- (i) having a practical gauge about the international student teachers' professional goals and their "trainability" and "capacity" (Bernstein, 2000) to unpack "presuppositions and hidden implications" about them (Pincas, 2001, p. 43);
- (ii) considering the professional identities that need to be promoted via the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course;
- (iii) balancing between sentimental and rational attributes such as comfort, approachability, helpfulness, fairness, systematicity, agency, and efficiency in the course outcomes;
- (iv) considering assessment as a work in progress that is subject to adaptation based on critical course evaluation, student feedback, and practicality issues;

- (v) adopting an ecological view of the MA-TESOL course, synchronising all the factors within the system and positioning it within the broader socio-cultural contexts of globalisation; and
- (vi) being aware of the long-term impact of the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course on the continued career paths of the students.

For the Vietnamese government, the research findings may be of value in

- (i) giving a clear picture of the effectiveness of the scholarship programmes and a broad evaluation about the “return of investment” (Astin, 1999);
- (ii) informing the Department of Postgraduate Studies, ULIS-VNU, and other language teacher training institutions about how to design an effective language teacher training programme and assessment process to improve the teaching quality of local teachers; and
- (iii) identifying socio-economic gaps that need bridging for the implementation of a more effective training programme such as the technological infrastructure, the passivity culture, and the salary scheme for the teachers.

It is expected that over time, the sociocultural scenarios in VN will change towards dynamism, digitalisation, and modernity, making it a more enabling environment for the TESOL practitioners to develop their potential to the fullest.

### **9.3.2 *For MA-TESOL educators and prospective students***

The following points can be beneficial for the MA-TESOL educators to consider:

- (i) Their professional identity is to be mirrored in the student’s identity (Pryor and Crossouard, 2010).
- (ii) They can facilitate learner autonomy by engineering learning opportunities and disciplinary spaces for them (Black and Wiliam, 2009; Pryor and Crossouard, 2010).
- (iii) They can harmoniously combine global and local pedagogies (Ha, 2004, p. 52).
- (iv) They can make “the implicit explicit” (Fordyce and Hennebry, 2014) or make their instructional practice less ambiguous with concrete illustrations to help the students avoid misinterpretation.
- (v) They would also need to be more open to the students’ various interpretations and understanding.



- (vi) They can embrace subjectivity of judgement (Pincas, 2001), however, they also need to reach consensus with their colleagues about how to give feedback.
- (vii) They can provide the students with the rationales for their marking, thus, “permitting learning to become a logical outcome” (Taras, 2002, p. 504).
- (viii) They may need to be more aware of the affective impact of assessment and feedback on the student’s identity.
- (ix) They can initiate feedback dialogue with the students and create a collegial, “family style” (Tomlinson and Dat, 2004, p. 211) ambience to bridge the social/intellectual gap between them and their students.
- (x) Their feedback can assist the learners to “identify the gap” and tactfully enforce them to take actions to “close the gap” (Taras, 2002, p. 505).
- (xi) Their feedback should focus on crucial learning issues such as thinking patterns, interpretation of knowledge, and act as a challenge tool to stimulate learning (Irons, 2010; Price *et al.*, 2010; Evans, 2013).

The prospective MA-TESOL students can also learn from the experiences of the participants by:

- (i) establishing a relatively clear set of professional goals to inform the module selection process;
- (ii) accepting the responsibility to learn and developing independent thinking and autonomy (Sadler, 1989);
- (iii) studying thoroughly “the rules of the games” (Norton *et al.*, 2001, p. 269);
- (iv) being aware of the impact of the “historical and social baggage” (Sowden, 2007, p. 305) and quickly getting familiarised with the host culture;
- (v) tackling the fear and reluctance to communicate with friends and staff;
- (vi) taking responsibility to clarify feedback with the educators and peers and respond to it constructively (Irons, 2010);
- (vii) improving assessment literacy not only to benefit from the assessment schemes but to enhance assessment practice;
- (viii) practising “emotional detachment” in case of contradictions to avoid the undesired affective impact of assessment;
- (ix) constructing a relation of mutual trust and mutual respect with the educators and friends;

- (x) having an open attitude towards World Englishes (Kachru, 1992) and feeling comfortable to communicate with the natural accent;
- (xi) making good use of electronic resources to enhance the quality of learning and research;
- (xii) preserving positive national values, yet learning to adapt to the host culture and live harmoniously with other cultures;
- (xiii) considering learning as a process of forming the professional identity that involves cognitive, affective, behavioural, and socio-cultural aspects; and
- (xiv) developing three fundamental professional roles of a teacher/ lecturer, a researcher, and an assessor simultaneously (Crick and Wilson, 2005, p. 368).

### **9.3.3 *For the participants and the researcher***

For the participants of this research project, they had opportunities to reflect on the assessment process, the international MA-TESOL course, and the critical contingencies that transformed their identity. Together with the researcher, they reconstructed their symbolic professional identity (Bernstein, 2000) with explicit articulation and coherent retrospective narratives (Garton and Richards, 2008). The co-construction of new knowledge and understanding about their own professional identity based on the ecological conceptual framework composed from the works of esteemed researchers could be a worthwhile self-discovery experience for them. They also became more aware of their professional identity and how they can continue to nurture it in their career path.

The researcher, an international postgraduate student of an Integrated Doctor of Philosophy programme, shared with the participants emic knowledge about international study. Through the process of conducting this research, she learnt to construct an inter-subjective perspective about knowledge and understanding and endeavour to view the world in its interrelations. She also has a better understanding about the professionalism she attempts to develop, the professions she would like to pursue, the opportunities and challenges that are waiting for her in her continued career paths. More specifically, she learnt to comply with the ethical procedures, improve her research capacities, and become a more efficient user of technological tools, a more fluent writer, a more confident speaker, a more understanding communicator, a more committed life-long learner, and a responsible social contributor. Through the research

process, she also managed to create rapport with the participants, her colleagues, and attempted to share her understanding about assessment and the learner identity with them afterwards. She is also more aware of the power relations and the significance of using power in a beneficial way via dialogues and conversations rather than generating more power/ heat via insulation as Bernstein (2000) suggests. With the obtained knowledge and competences and the support from her supervisors and the university at large, she is more able to work in the field of assessment and TESOL teacher training as an educator, a researcher, and an assessor.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the Study**

This study about the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers has several inherent limitations. Conceptually, the assessment process and professional identity are both broad and difficult to define. The conceptualisations of assessment as a process and the professional identity as a case of multiplicity in unity and discontinuity in continuity are rather new and abstract to the participants to begin with. Both the participants and the researcher' interpretations of the concepts, therefore, are subject to the test of time and space as Block (2006, p.26) suggests, "identity is seen not as something fixed for life, but as fragmented and contested in nature" (cited in Richards et al., 2012, p. 217).

Structurally, this research employs two data collection methods with the documentary analysis to supplement the interview data. Though they have been cross-checked to ensure the credibility, the documentary data were sparsely reported due to concerns regarding conditional intellectual property rights. The interview data collection was not as complete as the researcher would expect with two participants not having responded to the questions about the impact of other factors of the activity system and four not having verified the data though their narratives are thick and trustworthy. A small number of rather negative quotes have been anonymously cited to protect the participants' identity. The second conceptual framework based on the third generation of the activity system derived from the data collection rather than the initial research design has not been as thoroughly analysed as the "ecological activity system".

Methodologically, the narrative inquiry to explore the professional identity development is subject to the challenge of presenting the data completely in all their ambiguity and inelegance (Leung, Harris & Rampton (2004) cited in Norton, 2010). The divergent multiple case study could capture the diversification of the participants' experiences in various institutions at various stages of their professional development. However, the collation of the complex data set requires tactfulness from the researcher and caution is required from the audiences when interpreting, generalising, and transferring the research findings to their specific contexts as "transferring from one context to another requires further learning and the idea itself will be further transformed in the process" (Eraut, 1994, p. 20).

## **9.5 Suggestions for Further Study**

The fragile context of globalisation requires the governments and the educationalists to incorporate personal development or "spiritual, moral, social and cultural development" (Brown, 1998; Cohen, 2006) into their education policies to promote collaborative "way of being" (Crick and Wilson, 2005). Research into the field of learner and teacher identity, particularly how to maximise their potentials as global citizens is, therefore, highly recommended. The divergent multiple case study method as proposed in this thesis will be highly compatible for such internationalised research.

More quantitative research with the application of modern devices such as heart rate monitors could be considered to yield more concrete evidence about the impact of the assessment process on the students' physiology or to make the generalisation more scientific. Such "soft power" (Nye, 2004) of the assessment process as formative feedback, effective dialogues between the lecturers and the students, emotional intelligence in assessment, assessment for inter-being, and assessment in the contexts of internationalisation deserve attention from interested researchers. Though "assessment needs to be understood in its social, political, and historical context" (Leathwood, 2005, p. 308), this research as well as the activity theories has not adequately mentioned the three crucial macro factors: religion, economy, and politics (Peim, 2009; Dang *et al.*, 2013) on the professional identity of TESOL student teachers. However, the international MA-TESOL courses could be designed to educate them to become ambassadors of peace and unity in this world.

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## Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

### Project Title: The Impact of the Assessment Process and the International MA- TESOL Course on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers: An Ecological Perspective

#### INVITATION

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study on the impact of assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese student teachers. This research is being conducted by me, Nhan Thanh Tran, a candidate of the Integrated Doctor of Philosophy in Education and Communication of the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS), Newcastle University, the United Kingdom. It is supervised by Professor David Leat, Professor of Curriculum Innovation and Doctor Susan Pattison, Programme Director of the Integrated PhD in Education and Communication programme of Newcastle University. The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training is funding this research project.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN

In this study, you will be asked to elaborate the impact of the assessment process and the international MA-TESOL course on your professional identity, which is understood as a case of multiple identities associated with the professional roles of a language teacher.

In the first phase of the *semi-structured interview*, you will be invited to discuss your professional goals in pursuing the MA-TESOL course abroad, your handling with assessment tasks and responding to feedback, as well as the possible impact of the assessment process (including both summative assessment and formative feedback) on your professional identity. In second phase, we can discuss the impact of various factors of the international MA-TESOL course such as library resources, language, research enhancement courses, student communities, the institution's policy, and the relation between the lecturer and the learner. You will be provided with an interview guide to explain in more detail the topics of our discussion.

The one-to-one interview will be conducted in either English or Vietnamese as to your preference. Based on the actual physical distance, the interview may take place face-to-face or via social media networks such as Skype or Facebook. The interview will be audio/video recorded with your consent.

After the data has been transcribed or translated, it will be returned to you for your *verification and approval* before being analysed to avoid any possible bias or misunderstanding and ensure that your voice is truly appreciated.

We would really appreciate if you could send us *unidentifiable documents* of the feedback you received from your lecturers, the assessment instructions, rubrics, criteria, and the certificates and qualifications that may illustrate the points you would like to make regarding the impacts of assessment on your professional identity.

The purpose of this preliminary stage is for you to ponder and reflect on your international experiences with the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course and for the researcher to have a thick description about your study.

### **TIME COMMITMENT**

The study typically takes you up to 60 minutes to participate in the interview. The verification process may take you up to 30 minutes.

Your devotion of time and effort to the project is highly appreciated.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/ deleted.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, please just ask the researcher before the study begins.

### **BENEFITS AND RISKS**

There are no known physical or material benefits or risks for you in this study. However, by getting involved in this research project as a co-structor of new knowledge and understanding, you will be able to reflect on your international experiences with the assessment process and the MA-TESOL course and contribute your original voice to the success of the research project. We understand that there can be positive and negative experiences related to formative and summative assessment, however, it is up to you to decide which experiences you would like to share with us.

### **COST, REIMBURSEMENT AND COMPENSATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Unfortunately, there is no cash payment, yet you will receive our sincere appreciation in return for your participation.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY**

The data will be collected and stored in accordance with the United Kingdom's Data Protection Act 1998. All the information you provide will be confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. The information will be used in a way that will not allow you to be identified individually.

For ethical reasons, you are strictly advised to anonymise all the third parties to be mentioned in all the data you provide us.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have a question or are not sure about any aspect of this study, please contact me Nhan Thanh Tran at tel: +44 (0) 7741167802,

e-mail: [n.tran@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:n.tran@ncl.ac.uk) or [thanhantn81@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thanhantn81@yahoo.co.uk)

You are also welcome to contact my supervisors at Newcastle University, the United Kingdom:

Prof. David Leat, [david.leat@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:david.leat@ncl.ac.uk)

Dr. Susan Pattison, [susan.pattison@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:susan.pattison@ncl.ac.uk)

I promise to debrief you about the final results of this study. With your consent, I will share the final results of this study publicly via social media networks such as Wikipedia or blog posts.

*If you know anyone that might wish to take part in the study, could you please forward this invitation e-mail to them? Thank you very much for your co-operation!*





## Appendix C Debriefing Form

**Project Title: The Impact of the Assessment Process and the International MA- TESOL Course on the Professional Identity of Vietnamese Student Teachers: An Ecological Perspective**

### PURPOSE

Thank you for your agreeing to participate in this study! The general purpose of this research is to explore the impact of assessment process and the international MA- TESOL course on the Vietnamese student teachers' professional identity. We invited a total of fourteen teachers of English who are pursuing or have completed their MA- TESOL courses in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States to take part in this research project.

### BACKGROUND

In this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about your professional goals, your handling with assessment tasks and responding to feedback, as well as the possible impact the assessment process and the international MA- TESOL course have on your professional identity. You are encouraged to support the points you would like to make with unidentifiable documents such as the lecturers' written feedback, assessment rubrics, and certificates to name but a few.

The study is based on social constructivism theory which sees learning as a process of becoming (Wenger, 1998) and Engeström (1987)'s activity theory is adapted to be the conceptual framework for this research. The result of this study will provide a detailed and systematic description of the impact of assessment process and the international MA- TESOL course on the professional identity of Vietnamese TESOL teachers.

### CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data you provide will be securely archived in a password protected destination. Information will not be disclosed to any third parties without your consent. The data will be reported with pseudonyms unless you would prefer your name to be published. For ethical reasons, you are strictly advised to anonymise all the third parties to be mentioned in all the data you provide us.

### FINAL REPORT

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the final report of this study, contact the researcher at  
tel: +44 (0) 7741167802/ +84 (0) 912640722, or  
e-mail: [n.tran@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:n.tran@ncl.ac.uk)/ [thanhantn81@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thanhantn81@yahoo.co.uk)

## CONTACT

If you have *any* questions regarding this study, its purposes or procedures, please feel free to contact the researcher Nhan Thanh Tran at [n.tran@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:n.tran@ncl.ac.uk) / [thanhtn81@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thanhtn81@yahoo.co.uk) or her supervisors at Newcastle University, the United Kingdom:

Prof. David Leat, [david.lead@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:david.lead@ncl.ac.uk)

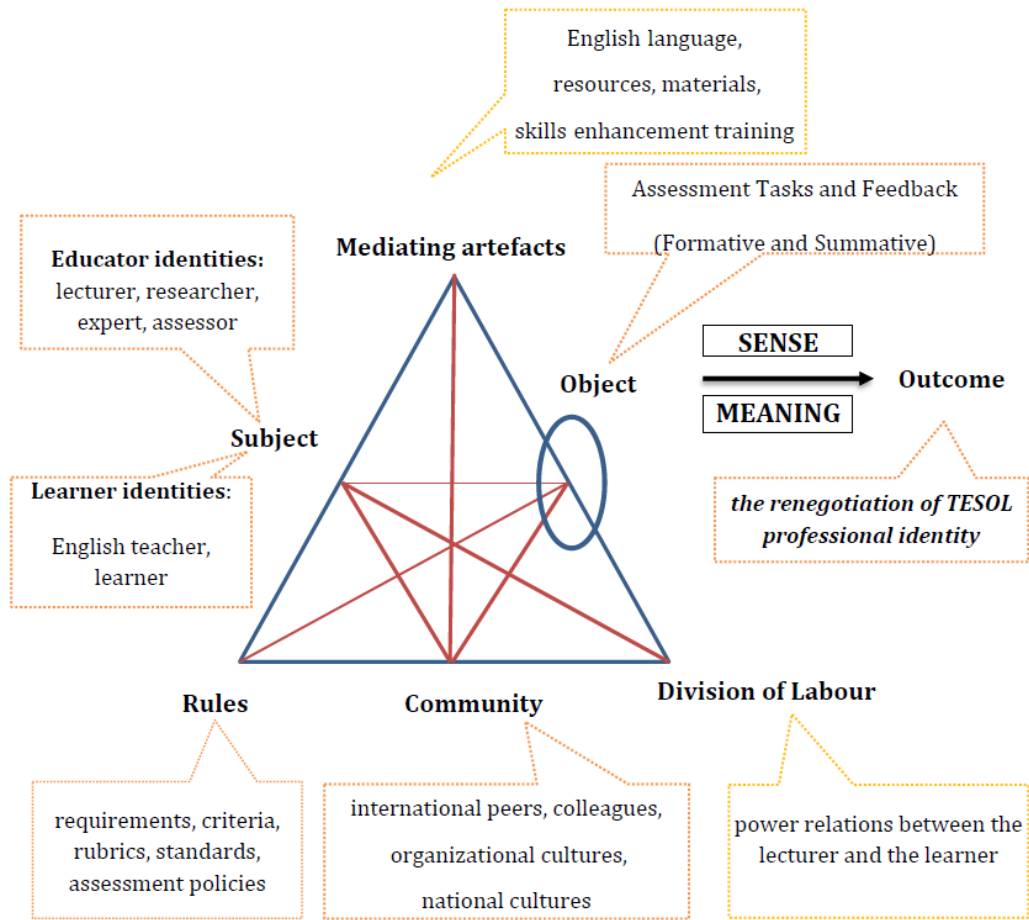
Dr. Susan Pattison, [susan.pattison@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:susan.pattison@ncl.ac.uk)

## FOR FURTHER READING

Engeström, Y. and Sannino, A., (2010) Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges, *Educational Research Review*, 5 (1), pp. 1-24.

Pryor, J. & Crossouard, B. (2008) A socio-cultural theorisation of formative assessment, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 34, pp. 1-20

## Appendix D Topics of Discussion



**Figure 1.1** The construction of TESOL professional identity in an activity system

## Appendix E Participants' Profiles

### **Nancy-UK**

*Date of interview: 7 November, 2013*

*Starting time: 16:40 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Face-to-face*

*Duration: 64 minutes*

*Language: English*

Nancy-UK started the MA-TESOL course with little teaching background as she used to work as an interpreter. Therefore, she aspired to learn more teaching techniques, how to motivate and engage the students. She felt overwhelmed when it was all about herself to navigate and make use of the ample learning opportunities provided for her by the university. She enjoyed and valued the open discussions when she could get involved and listened. She experienced both summative and formative assessment, yet summative, written assessment tasks still dominated. She valued the formative feedback in helping her realise the big gap between theory and practice, become more sympathetic with her previous teachers, generate ideas for the writing, improve her academic writing and criticality, and develop her research skills though pedagogies are highly theoretical.

She was impressed by the organizational culture: the welcoming and inclusive academic environment with real research and real researchers had a positive impact on her motivation, something she could not observe in VN. She could benefit from the way the instructors guided her to suitable resources and materials. She was eager to approach them with questions after lessons and via e-mails though their professionalism created certain gaps in the communication. Initially, maintaining a professional talk with native peers and lecturers was challenging for her, then she expanded her networks, conversing more with native people and international friends. She could feel the positive changes, having better relation with local people, friends and lecturers, being more prepared for life situations and more confident to face the dissertation challenge.

### **May-UK**

*Date of interview: 10 November, 2013*

*Starting time: 12:33 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Facebook text messages*

*Duration: 75 minutes*

*Language: English*

May-UK started the master's degree one year after her completion of the undergraduate. She aspired to become a lecturer teaching not only the language itself but also the culture and was not quite confident with her research skills to start with. She experienced a number of assessment methods like exams, essays, and group work, however, essays were the most influential to her as they require the students to do their own research and use other language skills. She valued the discussions with her tutors and friends and their contribution of ideas to her assignments, something she could not do with other assessment methods. The assessment process taught her how to work with other people, listening to their opinions, analyzing their points, and probably reconsidering her viewpoints. The process made her realise that listening to other people is one of the most important skills both academically and socially.

The tutors helped her academically with clarifying the contents and the directions she would take. She was also able to develop her research skills and was more aware of their significance in her professional development given the fact that trends and issues in the TESOL field are changing swiftly. She could develop two other cognition skills: reflective and critical thinking as most Vietnamese students lack those skills. She is proud of her study in the UK not because of the certificate but of the time she spent and the way she did to achieve the qualification.

### **Joyce-UK**

*Date of interview: 26 November 2013*

*Starting time: 08:56 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 80 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

Joyce-UK started her MA-TESOL course right after her undergraduate study in 2008 on a partial scholarship of a UK university and family support to fulfil her long-term dream, trace back her past achievement, and communicate more with native speakers. She has been working for a Vietnamese university for more than three years after her graduation. The assessment tasks were diverse and she noticed that the UK system was very strict and a distinction seemed to be out of reach for Asian students. Initially, she encountered difficulties in writing academically, addressing the requirements, and identifying the gaps. She was shocked by the marks she received as they did not reflect the effort and enthusiasm she invested into the assignments, yet she did not receive

adequate feedback and had to self-study and consult her peers and seniors to improve her scores. The first assignments she wrote from her own understanding and knowledge, however, through 6 assignments she learnt to read and cite from the literature. Receiving a good mark from a very strict lecturer made her feel proud. She presented strong agency in the development process and received more support from the learning environment rather than directly from the assessment and feedback. The peer coaching was not beneficial to her as it was not new instead she would aspire to get involved in a more authentic environment to reconnect her background education with the international contexts.

She could learn from the new styles and techniques of the UK lecturers. She had several international friends but they could not have deep conversations due to their different teaching contexts and foundations. The academic community was not influential to her though she was appointed to be a course representative. On the contrary, the Vietnamese community and the working place was much more beneficial to her. She was busy with doing her part-time jobs to pay for the living cost and travelling. She believed that more authentic interactions in the working environment would enhance her language skills. She was motivated by the Vietnamese community in the city, believed that language and culture are closely related can be best acquired by experience and that the personal identity needs to develop before the professional identity.

The two most significant gains for her from the MA-TESOL course are the motivations for research and teaching. She did not like doing research to start with, however, writing a number of assignments and reading more academic articles elevated her interest in doing research as she thought that she could write the same. She became more inquisitive to search and improve her teaching practice. She likes to conduct action research to directly improve her teaching practice and could apply her knowledge into teaching in private language centres and receives positive feedback from her students. She subsequently established her own centre, occasionally participates in research conferences, and gradually enhances her reputation. However, the research environment in VN was a bit daunting to her.

**Peter-UK**

*Date of interview: 25 November 2014*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Starting time: 15:12 GMT*

*Duration: 85 minutes*

*Language: English*

Peter started his master's degree in Applied Linguistics in 2011 on a national scholarship programme with 8 years of experience. He deliberately chose the UK for its good social order, its long history, its homeland of the language, and the opportunities to travel to wider Europe. He and other Asian students were not accustomed to the assessment requirements, especially critical thinking as it was not thoroughly trained in VN. However, via doing the assessment tasks he understood what a high level of critical thinking is and his professor's comments made him work hard to improve his criticality. He also recognised the significance of creativity, the quality of being new in research. However, these skills are useful in conducting research rather than in his primary task of teaching in VN. The assessment tasks really bolstered his research capacity, however, the teaching methodologies were not emphasised as he would expect. Presentations were just classroom activities, the assessment tasks were mostly narrow, the feedback was detailed and understandable, and the course was highly theoretical to him. After the course, he knew how to look at a subject matter from different perspectives, analyse it thoroughly, and organize it into a research paper.

He was happy to have a break from his work. He could adapt very well in an international atmosphere, experiencing not much culture shock and enjoying a good time with more freedom. He enjoyed good relationship with international friends, however, the local friends were more difficult to approach. He became more culturally tolerant, looking at his culture and other cultures more objectively.

In the UK, the professors' jobs were to instruct and comment, the students had to be responsible for their study, and the mediating artefacts were for them to develop independent learning. However, he experienced some reverse culture shocks when applying the UK methods to his inactive students. He has learnt to readapt to the environment but it was not very nice at all. He gained more respect from the students but he could not fully apply what he studied in the UK into the Vietnamese situations as the education does not encourage independence and examinations still dominate. His study will be more beneficial to his forthcoming PhD research as he now knows about



the conventions of doing research in a Western culture. The financial pressure is so hard for a male lecturer with a young family that it affects his professional development. He manages to have a decent living with his private classes but could not invest that same effort to his main teaching obligation in the university.

### **Nelson-UK**

*Date of interview: 22 November 2013*

*Starting time: 17:03 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 64 minutes*

*Language: English*

Nelson-UK had three years of teaching experience before enrolling in an Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching course as he wanted to find new ways of applying languages into the society and would like to pursue that path in his PhD thanks to the advice of his lecturers and peers. Though he preferred to be a researcher, he thought that the classroom would be his laboratory. He had two or three essays per one module and the assessment was an ongoing process in which the feedback was designed to feed forward to the final assignment though sometimes the assessment tasks were not strongly related. Other than that, there was a short test and just one presentation, which he would aspire to have more of. One of the best lessons he could learn from the written feedback was to focus on the main points and defend them with evidence. He felt happy and boosted with the marks. He was more of a self-sustained student, trying to resolve problems by himself before seeking assistance for fear of disturbing the tutors' busy schedules, yet he might change that attitude in his PhD study.

To study the language in its hometown with its people and with the instruction and supervision of well-known professors was an advantage for him. The ample communicating experiences with the locals built up his confidence, corrected his fossilized mistakes, and improved his thinking. His criticality was enhanced by the encouragement and acceptance of his lecturers, the guidance of his more critical local friends, and the free academic environment. He improved his criticality and teamwork but the monotonous assessment tasks with hardly any classroom discussion or presentation to some extent minimized the impact. He would aspire more authentic and interactive types of assessment to improve his dissemination skills. The additional skill training courses were at times superficial, however, the access to the vast information

made him feel like being a part of the academic world. He co-authored with his friends in his debut article in an international magazine and was empowered to write on his own in the future. He could learn more authentic lessons to get over the fear of conducting research from the real examples in research seminars. He also learnt about cuisines, cultures and lifestyles from his international friends rather than reading the documents and appreciated international student support services. He became more confident in himself thanks to the obtained knowledge and the skills and more committed to pursue a research career. He attributed his changes largely to the environment and the entire system.

### **Sophie-AUS**

*Date of interview: 10 November 2013*

*Starting time: 01:32 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Facebook text message*

*Duration: 90 minutes*

*Language: English*

Sophie-AUS did her MA course in Language Testing after four years of teaching experience and has resumed for nearly a year. She did not really establish a professional goal and just took the course for her interest as she thought testing is an essential part of learning and teaching. During the course she learnt about types of testing and assessment as well as the benchmarks being developed and applied to assess learners of English. The course highly focused on testing and Applied Linguistics with no elements of teaching methodology or language development. She did not intend to learn teaching methodologies from her professors there but hoped that they could give her new and really interesting themes to learn. She had mid-term assignments, presentations, and take-home exams/ essays but no administered test. She liked take-home type as she did not have to learn by heart and she had time to reflect and search before giving her opinions. Her course focused heavily on conducting research. She received ongoing feedback (for various drafts before submission) and the professors' feedback helped her improve the later version as they corrected the way she wrote and organized ideas.

Her professor also made appointments with each student to clarify issues. She thought that the formative feedback was more helpful as she was informed where she was going, what was wrong, what should have been corrected. She liked the way the teachers gave continuous feedback, informing the students about their progress so that they can

improve themselves. In her case, it was hard to find things that have clear impacts because the kind of assignments and assessment in her MA course were quite similar to what she had experienced at home and she cared more about the way they delivered the course and how she was assessed. She valued the small-size class with more teacher-student interaction on professional themes and continuous feedback.

### **Andy-AUS**

*Date of interview: 05 December 2013*

*Starting time: 12:20 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 53 minutes*

*Language: English*

Andy-AUS worked as a lecturer for 3.5 years before starting his MA-TESOL. His course spans three semesters and at the time of the interview he was writing his dissertation. He had a good professional profile, teaching double major students and working as student research coordinator. He wanted to develop his expertise, seek solutions to teaching issues and receive credentials. The course made him recognize why his corrective feedback did not work and more tolerant with his students. He managed to develop his research capacity with the abundant resources and his supervisors' support. He had around three assessment tasks per module, a couple of which were presentations and group work. Sometimes, he was bored with assessment but via this process he could learn the most. He studied the criteria and rubrics carefully and sketched out systematic strategies to meet the requirements. Most importantly, he learnt critical thinking skills (evaluating the information and critiquing the viewpoints of different scholars) and synthesising skill (using a framework to deal with information overload). While the oral assignments were challenging with cross-cultural communication and the academic input required, it contributed more to his professional development. He was a bit disappointed with the feedback as it was pretty general and mostly positive. He could not learn new things from the comments as he had studied the rules thoroughly. However, he appreciated the personalized and serious marking and the security and privacy of giving feedback.

He knew experts of the fields and core theories that served as the frameworks for his dissertation. He felt much more confident to do research as now he has a good knowledge foundation, support from the supervisors, and access to academic resources.

He made acquaintances with some international and local peers, he could test the stereotypes and learnt to be more culturally sensitive when communicating in an international community though it was difficult for him to network due to their differences in backgrounds, concerns, and objectives. He changed his views about the lecturers' roles considering them as a source of motivation, inspiration, and initiation and felt that he learnt much more from his lecturers. For him, the meditating artefacts changed the quality of his research beyond recognition and they were the number one factor to determine his academic success. He mingled well with the system, using Blackboard and Turnitin to check plagiarism. He recognised that the Vietnamese teachers tend to be irrational in their marking, not giving the maximum score even when they cannot find any faults. He found some of the additional courses like academic writing and note taking either not relevant or obsolete. The switching role taught him to be more understanding and tolerant with his students as studying is just a part of life and his role is to help them to reach their full potential.

### **Alfa-AUS**

*Date of interview: 26 November, 2013*

*Starting time: 12.05 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Facebook text message*

*Duration: 112 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

Alfa-AUS started her M.Ed. in Applied Linguistics with five months of teaching experience and returned to work as a language teacher in a gifted high school. She aspired to teach in a high school therefore her primary purpose was to polish her language skills and grammar to near perfection. She kept practising her English, registered to homestay with an Australian family and registered for Applied Linguistics modules about discourse and intensive grammar. Her homestay helped her improve her listening and speaking skills and the intensive grammar knowledge is very necessary for her gifted students to participate in language examinations. The acquired language skills help her feel more confident to search for more resources for them. She could achieve most of her goals and she could apply very well what she learnt there in her teaching.

She appreciated the authenticity and the freedom to choose the content for the assessment tasks. The lecturers' written feedback was not always detailed but it helped her realise her lengthy and general writing styles. The feedback for the presentations

helped her improve her manner, organisation, confidence, accent, and fluency. The most significant skill that she developed from her lecturer's feedback was problem-solving. She learnt to relate an issue to the contexts and compare, rather than just mention it in theory and suggest solutions based on her personal viewpoints. She also learnt that the solutions need to match with the Vietnamese teaching contexts, the national culture, and the international trends in education.

She felt less stressed, for example, if she liked to raise her voice she wouldn't have to worry about violating this or that and she is more confident in expressing her opinions. When studying in VN, she just followed suit what the teachers said as if she included some creative ideas they were prone to be rejected. But in AUS, she felt free to discuss, the lecturers didn't teach but just raised the problems for her to think and solve. As a result, she felt that she is quicker in responding to situations, and now she can come up with solutions for almost any situation. She would not just focus on raising the problems, but before that she would have to think about how to solve them.

From the taught modules, she learnt how to write an assignment properly, how to structure it, and how to organise the references. She also learnt proper teaching practice and methodologies from her lecturers and senior classmates. She changed from being passive to active in group work. As they had to deliver presentations, she must have ideas ready in mind to contribute, polish her communication skills, and be much more confident. She became bolder in class as she learnt how to organise it and how to manage it from the peer coaching sessions with her classmates.

### **Jane-AUS**

*Date of interview: 25 November, 2013*

*Starting date: 21:06 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 64 minutes*

*Language: English*

Jane-AUS would like to enhance her knowledge of English and technology in language teaching. She learnt to live under pressure and manage her time when learning and working in a non-Vietnamese environment. She learnt much in Australia but found it hard to apply CALL into a classroom with chalk and blackboard when she came back. What she could apply was the knowledge about language testing and it became the

theme of her PhD degree. She attended six courses with normally two assignments per course. She received good feedback from her lecturers, listening to them, trying to improve her performances especially her concise writing style. She was impressed by the very effective on-spot feedback for her skills development. The lecturers were very helpful, however, at that time, her speaking skills impeded her from approaching them for more feedback. Cognitively, she appreciated critical thinking development which contradicted with the way she taught and was taught in VN. She started to question and thought that was the most important skill she learnt from her MA degree.

On her return, she was promoted twice to become the Vice Dean of her faculty. Her increased knowledge and her interest in conducting research made her stand out, giving her financial advantage, confidence, prestige, trust, as well as more responsibility in her work environment. Her lecturers just directed her to the field, and she had to acquire the study skills to approach, digest, and process new knowledge. As a PhD candidate in the USA, she could recognise the differences in the two systems with the USA being more practical and demanding yet more beneficial to her than the relaxing AUS system. She would aspire to have more practicum in AUS as the course was highly theoretical. Some of the values she appreciated were honesty, friendliness, helpfulness, democracy, and the culture of sharing knowledge, they discussed and argued to help each other to improve. She had strong social connections in the USA, joining research clubs, and having social events together.

#### **PT-NZ**

*Date of interview: 26 November, 2013*

*Starting time: 07:28 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 60 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

PT-NZ started her MA-TESOL and Applied Linguistics after a year and a month of experience and returned to teach for four months. She thought that the degree was a compulsory requirement for a lecturer of English. The mere form of assessment was written which gave her opportunities to revise the knowledge, yet she wanted to have more presentations to develop her teaching skills. The feedback was quite varied. Her lecturers were busy but available by appointment. They were helpful and could foresee several difficulties she may encounter and help her to choose the easiest route to study.

She carefully read the written feedback for fear of misunderstanding and would prefer spoken feedback to easily reach a mutual understanding with her lecturers. She developed assessment techniques and her critical thinking as her personal opinions were valued. She was impressed with her lecturer's devotion for her and his "boxing massage" technique, challenging her, making her strive, then encouraging her with his own modelling. She was mostly satisfied with the lecturers' feedback yet felt unsatisfied when it was unclear. In the last semester, she worked hard and obtained a distinction.

She benefited from the Asian-oriented learning group of eight members from the beginning to the end of the course. They discussed, explained, and shared resources. She did not receive much on-going feedback but could learn from summative feedback. In a multicultural class, she could realize the differences in the lecturer-student interaction and managed to shorten the distance with them. Her lecturers were the facilitators in the true sense of the word, which taught her to be less serious in her teaching. She valued the learning autonomy. Good teaching is not for the demand of the learners but the demand of herself. She got more excited and has a demand to develop herself by getting involved in research activities. The Vietnamese working environment with inadequate time for research, too much teaching pressure, and deficient resources impedes her autonomy in doing research. She could apply most of the teaching techniques into the classrooms and felt much more confident when teaching adult learners as she was well-qualified to meet their demands. She also collaborated well with her colleagues to facilitate her students despite finance, workload, and working distance issues and still strived to pursue the objectives that she established during her MA study.

### **Kate-NZ**

*Date of interview: 24 November, 2013*

*Starting time: 14:03 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 89 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

Kate-NZ, started her MA in Applied Linguistics in 2011 with about ten months of teaching experience. She was more inclined to become a researcher and took two modules about research. She was not satisfied with the module to critique a research, however, in the second module to design a research, she could achieve better results

though studying research tools was like “watching flowers while horse-riding” for her. Her expert supervisor guided her to a “trendy” research theme. Most of the feedback was rather general and not really impactful for her, however, she was impressed with the lecturer’s feedback that identified her difficulty in addressing the gaps and forming the rationales in the literature review. The most frequent feedback she received was to read more, be more careful, and have a wider perspective. Each lecturer had their own styles in designing and marking the assessment tasks, but generally they tended to be more generous with Asian students because of their non-native identities. She learnt the formula to design appropriate tests, and changed her attitudes towards feedback, focusing more on formative feedback, guiding rather than correcting, and highlighting the reasoning process.

She is more comfortable and flexible in her class with her mixed accent of British, American and Kiwi, giving her students more options, giving oral feedback, promoting Kiwi culture, and encouraging her students to respect Englishes. She became more considerate and thoughtful in giving feedback not only because of the testing and assessment module but the way her professors taught her. In terms of research, everything was much clearer to her, she knew the procedures, automatic referencing, and how to get a paper published. She was more ready and eager to conduct research and was rather satisfied with the library system which provided access to about 80% of the materials she needed. She however recognized the difference between distinction and high distinction when using her transcript to apply for a PhD scholarship in another institution. “Education as a service” is widely accepted in her institution: anonymous student evaluation feedback was applied but she respected the lecturers; the lecturers though busy still prioritised to meet the students. Through the discussions with her international friends she understood more about the common obstacles of teaching English in developing countries. She could broaden her mind, be more flexible, systematic, effective, agentic and situated rather than relying on her instinct only. She was eager to apply the techniques and go beyond the curriculum yet found herself in difficulty in the Vietnamese classrooms. The financial issues, the students’ passivity, the lack of university support, and her familiarity with the comfort in NZ are still hurdles for her professional development. She would like to pursue her PhD when her memory is still fresh.



**Gau-NZ**

*Date of interview: 13 November, 2013*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Starting time: 09:14 GMT*

*Duration: 57 minutes*

*Language: English*

At the time of the interview, Gau-NZ was in her second trimester of her MA-TESOL course. She envisioned herself to come back as a lecturer knowing more about second language acquisition and teaching methodologies as she realised that she did not have a solid theoretical background or methodological rationales. Besides, she would like to learn about teaching from the native lecturers who can engage and inspire the students, giving them positive feedback, pointing out their mistakes, yet still motivating them. She agreed with the assumption that having a degree in an Anglophonic country is much better than in VN thanks to the lecturers and the facilities. The MA-TESOL course has had a huge impact on her view about her personal identity. Working with international peers and lecturers she came to realise that intelligibility is much more important than having a native-like accent and she changed her attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca. Most of the assessment tasks were written types. Continuous assessment was only applied in on module, however, she received feedback for the first assignments before submitting the second. She made good use of the learning support centre. The lecturers gave more written feedback while the learning advisors gave oral feedback about language use, word choice and the peers sometimes discussed and raised questions so that they could reflect deeply. The typical feedback she received was about her unnecessary usage of lengthy and complicated words and the significance of understanding the rationales for conducting teaching activities. The lecturer helped her recognise her pitfalls in teaching despite her good intentions. She would, therefore, like to get herself updated with the current research in language teaching. She admired her knowledgeable lecturers. The courses were very practical and helpful to her. The important impacts for her are the improved teaching methodologies, life-long learning, and improved research practice. She could benefit from academic, cultural, and practical seminars. She really enjoyed her study in NZ, it is one of the most important decisions that she has made so far. She respected the lecturers addressing them with first names and titles though they are very informal. She contacted them via e-mail when she had questions about the assignments. After several modules, she knew who is strict and who is easy. She also mentioned the course evaluation feedback, which

is very confidential yet she would not dare to be frank though the disagreement is often minor details.

### **Sarah-USA**

*Date of interview: 22 November 2013*

*Starting time: 20:56 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype audio call*

*Duration: 75 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

Sarah-USA started her MA programme in autumn 2009, completed in spring 2011, came back to VN for a year, and returned to the same university to pursue her PhD. She would like to gain foundational knowledge about testing and assessment, broaden her cultural knowledge and expand her networking. She treasured the international networks and colleagues and achieved great results on her return to VN. She would have achieved greater success if she had known more about statistics and data analysis tools to conduct research. Her MA-TESOL course was more about pedagogies and assessment rather than research methods. She experienced ongoing assessment with reading, reflection, online discussion, presentation, and research project tasks which was applied to almost all the modules. Interaction was highly valued and the lecturers were always available. However, the pressure was also high with too many assessment tasks and reading materials that necessitated her to develop her critical reading strategies. The lecturers were generous with feedback and marks and she created more pressure for herself to have good marks. She also received peer feedback via question and answer sessions and peer review process and could learn from her peers as they are of the same level and they had more time to exchange ideas and help with her academic writing. She attributed her gained confidence more to the learning experiences, the developed critical and independent thinking skills, and the positive feedback rather the marks themselves. Only when she directly got involved in the assessment tasks and received the lecturers and peers' feedback did she realize the true meanings of those intellectual tools and would still need to nurture those crucial skills. Her previous education caused bias in the way she presented her work and the new environment helped her to change. Her lecturers were information resources, learning facilitators, and encouraging and friendly peers for her. The way she was treated and the organizational culture imbued in her professional identity a sense of community and collaboration. She found her professional identity in that supportive and fruitful

community not only in terms of knowledge but her views about life as well. It served as an academic foundation and a direction for her PhD research. Some of the values she developed when she returned to teach in VN are being effective, formative-oriented, approachable, and pressure-free.

### **Khanh-USA**

*Date of interview: 12 January, 2014*

*Starting time: 15:22 GMT*

*Mode of interview: Skype text message*

*Duration: 100 minutes*

*Language: Vietnamese*

Khanh-USA started her course in 2012 and would complete in May 2014. In total, she had 12 modules (36 credits) and a comprehensive examination. She aspired to study material development as she taught English for Specific Purposes with not many ready-made recourses. Yet, her course did not specifically cover that area but many design tasks were incorporated into the pedagogical modules. She thought that her study really made differences. It provided her with a theoretical ground for classroom practice, theories to change, and online resources to innovate her lessons rather than relying merely on course books. The excessive workload was tiresome and stressful to her though she valued the fact that the assessment tasks were varied and evenly scattered throughout the course and the final score was combined from various channels so her strengths could make up for her weaknesses. The assessment scheme also required her to study continuously and recycle the knowledge for several times, thus she could recall it better. The course helped her improve her thinking about teaching and be flexible in using recourses. She received ample feedback through which she recognised her weaknesses, knew how to improve her work, and felt happy and motivated. Her lecturers work continuously and are a great source of motivation for her and she values reasonable and clear feedback the most. Peer assessment was taken very seriously in her programme as it was applied throughout the assessment process and counted towards the final scores. The peer feedback was also a source of encouragement for her.

## Appendix F Additional Quotes

**Quote 1:**

In VN, we usually just google and the research results are not so focused. (Nancy-UK)

**Quote 2:**

I was lucky to meet the ambassador, not the agents. I just attended the Education UK exhibitions at the hotel. Until now I couldn't explain why I could manage to obtain a 70% tuition fee discount. It was just after a talk with the programme coordinator who was also a teacher of English and she guided me to the international officer. Moreover, the pound exchange rate was so low at that time after Mr. Obama's inauguration. All those factors combined to help me reach the decision to study abroad. (Joyce-UK)

**Quote 3:**

I felt fairly satisfied with what I gained from ULIS, especially language teaching methodologies and the four skills. They are very practical and the procedures were somewhat the same though the UK lecturers may use some new techniques. I felt that the background I gained from ULIS served me very well in doing my MA. There's only one thing I felt regret about it is the inadequate training about study skills. (Joyce-UK)

**Quote 4:**

I tried to teach some classes in actual classroom rather than tutoring one-by-one then I felt that I had no teaching skills. (Nancy-UK)

**Quote 5:**

For almost like 3 years, I worked as a student research coordinator. So I organized research workshops for students in my faculty and also coordinated some of the student research conferences as well (Andy-AUS)

**Quote 6:**

When I worked with my native colleagues they are very inspiring and they know how to engage students and get students involved in the classroom activities. So I would like to be like them, to deliver a lesson that can get the students involved and inspire them. (Gau-NZ)

**Quote 7:**

Material development is more necessary in my department as I teach English for specific purposes, with not many available resources. Developing and applying new materials into teaching is more crucial and more interesting to me. (Khanh-USA)

**Quote 8:**

So what I did was first to read very carefully the instructions. Every assessment task came with very detailed instructions and marking rubrics and so on. So what I did was to study them thoroughly and then I started to search for relevant references from the library website. I didn't collect like up to 20 or 30 articles at the same time but I tried to read thoroughly 3 or 4 major articles, the ones that I found the most important in that area and then I followed the references of those major articles to enrich my list of references. And I gradually synthesized the information from those articles then I often had a word document for each assignment so I would collect all the important extracts or ideas from each articles then I put them together and then I developed my own framework and added my own ideas. So basically after that I would arrive at a very detailed outline before starting the writing process. The article reading and the library research took up most of my time, and the actual writing took I guess less than a day. So that's basically how I approached all the assessment tasks. (Andy-AUS)

**Quote 9:**

I didn't receive feedback for my dissertation. I only knew my score without feedback. (Joyce-UK)

**Quote 10:**

I receive a lot of feedback for all the assignments. I even received feedback for my final comprehensive exam. (Khanh-USA)

**Quote 11:**

Basically, they gave directions and comments on the content of the assignment, telling me whether the direction I was going was ok, what point I should make clearer, or sometimes some suggestions. (May-UK, Khanh-USA)

**Quote 12:**

Sometimes we know that yeah we have that point but we have no chance to apply the new point into our new essay. I think sometimes we forgot what we had before because we have to jump into our new essay before the deadline. (Nelson-UK)

**Quote 13:**

It was not very effective as when I received the feedback I already nearly completed the assignment. (Kate-NZ)

**Quote 14:**

Normally, the instructors gave me like written feedback, kind of short feedback like: 'oh, your work is good', kind of short paragraph. (Jane-AUS)

**Quote 15:**

It's very hard to give feedback to assignments at this level as the knowledge and information is really complex and it's not like giving feedback on a writing assignment for a language student. I don't know but I don't think there's anything much to be done about the feedback. (Andy-AUS)

**Quote 16:**

In my case, it's hard to find things that have clear impact because the kind of assignments and assessment in my MA course were quite similar to what I experienced at home, as a learner 5-6 years ago and as a teacher now. (Sophie-AUS, Nelson-UK)

**Quote 17:**

Yeah, I changed a lot especially in critical thinking and also in teamwork. Yeah, but the changes were not very significant as I told you the assessments are the same all the time. (Nelson-UK)

**Quote 18:**

Knowledge is not gained from the assessment but from the study I mean my self-study in the library and from books. (Nelson-UK, Joyce-UK)

**Quote 19:**

They taught me how to approach the knowledge and after that I could digest the knowledge by myself. (Jane-AUS)

**Quote 20:**

Teaching doesn't necessarily need to be in class, it can be online with various supporting tools. The available resources can be retrieved online, very authentic, but we haven't noticed before. (Khanh-USA)

**Quote 21:**

All the seven courses I take, they are very practical. They are not just about theories how learners acquire a second language but it is like they go from theory then they ask us to design a lesson plan or come up with some ideas, share them with the whole class or share them in the assignments and they point out whether that idea may work or cannot work. So I find it very practical and helpful. (Gau-NZ)

**Quote 22:**

I've never seen a course that just asks me to complete two or three. So here we have to produce a lot of knowledge in assignments. (Jane-AUS)

**Quote 23:**

The lecturers just gave a few lessons, and there were not many tutorials, I mean we didn't have much interaction. International students are just so diverse, not all of them were native. (Joyce-UK)

**Quote 24:**

I think I prefer to study in Europe rather than in the USA because I really like the history, the long history and I really like travelling. (Peter-UK)

**Quote 25:**

We shouldn't contact them except in case we have big problems. [...] I was quite reluctant to disturb or contact my personal tutor because she's also the programme manager. So I think that she should be very busy so... (Nelson-UK)

**Quote 26:**

I was well accustomed to ELT before starting the MA programme. What the lecturers introduced to us there was just bolstering what I was taught in my university but not quite new. (Joyce-UK, Sophie-AUS, Andy-AUS)

(Note: The quote was articulated by the first participant, yet the ideas were shared by the others named in the same bracket.)

## Appendix G The MA-TESOL modules

(Compiled from four sets of the international MA-TESOL course syllabi – UK, AUS, NZ, USA)

<i>Linguistics modules</i>	<i>Pedagogical modules</i>	<i>Academic modules</i>
Investigating Second Language Acquisition E.S.A.P. in FADSS Level 7 Investigating Language for TESOL Cognitive Linguistics Investigating Language Usage	Issues and Trends in Classroom Language Teaching Syllabus and Materials Design Creative Writing for Language Learning	Research Methods in Linguistics
Introduction to Linguistics: Syntax, Morphology & Semantics Introduction to Linguistics: Phonetics and Phonology Applied Linguistics & Language Studies Second Language Acquisition Classroom Second Language Acquisition: Theory, Research & Practice Portfolio & Synthesis Language and Technology Independent Reading Course A	Special Topics in Education TESOL Curriculum & Pedagogy: Classroom Strategies Critical Perspectives on TESOL in Educational Contexts Second Language Teaching Second Language Reading Language Testing & Assessment Networking & Multimedia	Project B: Master of Educational Studies Qualitative Research Methods in Language Studies Quantitative Research Methods in Language Studies
Pronunciation of English Understanding Second Language Learning Learners And Second Language Learning Language For Specific Purposes Issues In Sociolinguistics	Listening and Speaking in the Language Classroom(NZ) Teaching reading & writing Pedagogical Grammar Of English Teaching and Learning Vocabulary Language Assessment Globalisation, Culture and Second Language Pedagogy	Evaluating Research in Applied Linguistics The Research Process
Introduction to Second Language Acquisition English Structures and Functions Language Identity and Ideology in Multilingual Settings	ESL Classroom Practices Assessment for Language Teaching & Research Teaching Second Language Reading and Writing Technology-mediated Language Learning	Research Methods

