AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THE PRACTICE OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION: THREE CASE STUDIES OF LECTURERS' PRACTICE

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Abstract

Assessment for Learning (AfL) has gained increasing prominence in international educational discourse and practice as a promising way to promote student learning. However, its implementation represents complexities, as the term and effectiveness are still contested. While a great deal of research has been conducted on assessment for learning in primary and secondary Western schooling, limited research has been done in higher education in Asian settings where Confucian culture remains the greatest influence on the processes of teaching and learning. Drawing on a constructivist paradigm and sociocultural theories of learning, this exploratory, qualitative research investigated assessment practices of three lecturers in one Vietnamese university. Analysis is based on data collected by classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with lecturers, focus group interviews with students, and documents. This study found that the three lecturers engaged in assessment for learning practices such as questioning, observation, oral feedback, and peer assessment to promote learning in their classes to some extent. Despite the lecturers' significant efforts, Vietnamese sociocultural factors such as hierarchy, students' passivity, examination-oriented learning, face saving, and respect for harmony and effort, considerably hindered their assessment practices. Findings of this study support the recommendation that there is a need to design appropriate forms of AfL that are more applicable and assessable in higher education in Asian cultural contexts such as Vietnam.

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List of Abbreviations

AfL   Assessment for Learning

ARG   Assessment Reform Group

ZPD   Zone of Proximal Development

EU   Education University

MoET   Ministry of Education and Training

FPE   Faculty of Psychology and Education

FoH   Faculty of History

FMI   Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics

TTL   Tran, Thi Ly

DTH   Duong, Thi Hoa

NVT   Nguyen, Van Tung

Statement of Original Authorship

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this document does not contain any work that has been previously submitted for an award at this or any other university. Any ideas or quotations from others' work included in this document are fully acknowledged and referenced according to 6th APA style.

Signature:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> If we think of our children as plants...summative assessment of the plants is the process of simply measuring them. The measurements might be interesting to compare and analyse, but, in themselves, they do not affect the growth of the plants. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is the garden equivalent of feeding and watering the plants - directly affecting their growth (Clarke, 2001, p. 2).

Assessment by examination has been an inextricable part of teaching and learning processes in global education systems. However, over the last decade, the way in which we understand the purpose and function of assessment has changed. While acknowledging its practical summative function, many have agreed that assessment serves "a much wider range of purposes and takes a greater variety of forms" (Broadfoot, 2009, p. v). Based on Black and Wiliam's seminal review (1998b) of "Assessment and Classroom Learning", assessment has been recognised as a powerful tool to support and promote learning. Assessment to support learning is often referred to as formative assessment or Assessment for Learning (AfL). The latter has gained much attention in the educational literature and in teaching and learning practices, inspiring many assessment reforms around the world (Berry, 2011a; Broadfoot, 2009; Earl & Timperley, 2014; Klenowski, 2011b; Tan, 2011b). Apart from successes, these reforms have faced challenges due to the influence of sociocultural factors in various cultural contexts (Berry, 2011c; Carless & Lam, 2014; Hayward & Spencer, 2010). A great deal of research regarding the role of assessment to support learning has been conducted in Western schools (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2005; Black, McCormick, James, & Pedder, 2006; OECD, 2005; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004), whereas limited research has been conducted in non-Western schools and higher education (Carless, 2011). In response to the limited research conducted in assessment for learning in non-Western higher education, this study forms an exploratory investigation of assessment practices to support learning, specifically that of higher education students in Vietnam.

This chapter introduces the thesis by giving the background to the research problem. The aims of the study and the research questions are presented. The

significance of the research is discussed and a brief overview of the research design follows. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of this thesis.

1.1   BACKGROUND

The knowledge-based economy we live in requires individuals to be capable of lifelong learning (Delors, 1996; Dewey, 2007). An important catalyst to nurture lifelong learning is to motivate students to appreciate learning and to learn how to learn effectively (Black et al., 2006; Boud, 2000; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Kvale, 2007; Wells & Claxton, 2002; Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski, & Colbert, 2014). This aim raises the question of how to promote student learning at all levels. A group of British researchers, who were interested in investigating assessment policies and practices, the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (1999, p. 3), argue that "promoting children's learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process". This understanding has led to a rethinking of the role and function of assessment at all education levels.

Assessment was traditionally understood as an end point of study, and separate from teaching and learning (Brew, 1999; Mansell, James, & Assessment Reform Group, 2009). Such assessment involved students sitting for examinations, the purpose of which was to certify students' achievement and to award a qualification. Students' ownership in their learning process is often limited in this conventional approach to assessment (Brew, 1999; Stiggins, 2007). Such a conventional approach to assessment has been associated with assessment *of* learning or *summative assessment* (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Earl, 2003).

Assessment for Learning was introduced by the Assessment Reform Group in 1999 as an alternative approach to assessment, emphasising the potential of assessment to support learning in progress. Such an approach is also widely known as formative assessment in educational discourse and practices. Assessment is designed for learning when it is integrated into teaching and learning, and involves interactions among the teacher, students and peers. Philosophical principles or the "spirit" (Marshall & Drummond, 2006) of assessment for learning include a central role for students in their own learning and assessment. This principle assists students to understand their learning, their strengths and their weaknesses, and aims to develop goals and methods to assist the student to progress learning (Wiliam, 2011; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2014).

Assessment for learning has been shown to be crucial in the support of learning (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Black et al., 2005; Black & Wiliam, 2003).

In much educational literature, the terms formative assessment and Assessment for Learning are used interchangeably. However, they are different in that while formative assessment focuses on the role of the teachers' decisions and the adjustments in their teaching practice, AfL emphasises the role of the student in their own learning (Broadfoot, 2007; Klenowski, 2009; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2014). Development of the learner's autonomy becomes one of the major aims in higher education. As this study focuses on investigating assessment for learning practice in higher education in Vietnam, analysis of assessment practice is aligned with the term Assessment for Learning.

Much research conducted in primary and secondary schools in Western countries has found that AfL has brought about a number of benefits for student learning (Black et al., 2005; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Willis, 2010). For example, constructive feedback can enhance students' outcomes, confidence and motivation in learning (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Harlen, 2012; Stiggins, 2005, 2007). Additionally, data from assessment helps teachers adapt subsequent teaching to meet students' diverse learning needs (Griffin, McGaw, & Care, 2012). These examples illustrate how assessment can be used to support and enhance student learning, as well as to improve teaching.

The term AfL and its effectiveness are still contested in the education field, and many researchers (Black & Wiliam, 2005; Carless, 2011; Mansell et al., 2009; Pham, 2011c; Wiliam et al., 2004) recognise that while assessment can help to promote student learning, a number of questions remain around how to effectively apply AfL in an era of accountability as well as in diverse sociocultural milieus. Vietnam presents a sociocultural context that has received little research attention in regard to AfL.

Personal background

As a Vietnamese student, my experiences of university learning are typical. When I was a student from 1998 to 2002, I sat for examinations in many subjects to become a teacher. At that time, the results were calculated by averaging the total grades of the final examinations. The most common model of teaching and learning was through transmission, acquisition, and recall of 'content'. Lecturers tried to transmit

the knowledge of a subject, while as students we usually adopted a passive learning style. In other words, we listened, recorded the lecturer's words, and reproduced them in written examinations.

When I became a lecturer at university, I noticed that in terms of teaching and assessment practices, little had changed. As lecturers we still tended to transmit knowledge while students listened and took notes in classroom lectures. This realisation motivated me to think innovatively about my own teaching. I decided to examine the way I assessed students when I taught the subject 'Pedagogy' for major students of Psychology and Pedagogy. This class had 20 students and as a lecturer I was permitted to develop assessment tasks for both mid-term and end of term examinations. I decided to use assessment to enhance student learning by designing my lectures with a wide range of in-class activities: sharing the learning intentions and assessment criteria, group discussions, role play, project work, peer and self-assessment. Students seemed to be enthused with my subject, but many said that at the beginning of the course they felt overwhelmed and overloaded with the new assessment requirements. However, over the semester, students began to feel confident to give and receive direct feedback from me and their peers. Through classroom discussions and presentations they learnt new skills such as critical thinking. Reflecting critically on this experience changed my teaching philosophy. I realised that the way I assessed had an impact on student learning.

I attempted to apply the same strategies to another subject called General Pedagogy for non-major students of the Psychology and Pedagogy course. This subject is compulsory for all students enrolled in teacher-training universities in Vietnam. I was confronted with larger class sizes of over 100 students and struggled to apply my previous strategies. The final exam result was the sole determinant of the final grade awarded to the students. The majority of my students adopted a passive approach to learning. In other words, they accepted the assessment process without question, memorised information and reproduced that information during a written assessment in essay format.

In the years 2006-2007, the assessment policy at the university changed. For the first time, grades from mid-term exams as well as final exams were used to calculate the overall grade to be awarded. I was beginning to see changes in both teaching and learning at the university. My colleagues and I tried to adopt interactive teaching

methods such as group discussion, role play, discussion questions, and case studies to encourage learners' autonomy. We also spent a lot of time marking and giving feedback to our students. We noticed that the students were becoming more interested in learning and engaging in more discussion during class.

However, it was clear to me that applying assessment to support learning was problematic when teaching a large class. Logistically I faced many challenges. First, I could not finish teaching the curriculum in the given timeframe. To meet all course requirements, I had to revert to a transmission mode of teaching rather than involving students in authentic learning activities. Further, I tended to omit academic content which would not be tested in final exams. In this way, the teaching and the curriculum were narrowed and the tendency of teaching to the tests occurred in my practice. I realised that it was challenging to reform assessment without changes in approaches to curriculum design and development. Although I knew the benefit of giving detailed feedback, it was impossible to provide this for all students. Some of my colleagues had the same experience, and they decided to change their ways of assessing to multiple-choice questions for the mid-term exams to save time. Other logistical problems included accommodating a large class in a room with limited ventilation. Further, technological resources such as audio-visual equipment were scarce and had to be booked in advance. There was limited access to the internet. Although I was aware that applying interactive teaching and assessment strategies did not necessarily require modern facilities, such physical conditions made prolonged engagement in learning activities difficult and restricted the learning opportunities for students in my class.

Issues also arose due to a lack of conformity amongst lecturers regarding the way the subject was taught. Not all lecturers adopted interactive teaching approaches. Many still encouraged their students to memorise, with little critical reflection. This experience demonstrated to me that to truly enhance learning, changing the pedagogic practices of only some lecturers was not enough. Changes needed to occur from the policy level to influence student behaviours and teaching practices. These thoughts inspired my study of assessment practices for the improvement of student learning at my university.

1.2 CONTEXT

Vietnam has a long tradition of higher education, beginning with the establishment of the Royal College in 1076. Along with historical and cultural changes, the higher education system in Vietnam has undergone many significant reforms (Hayden & Lam, 2010; Pham, 1995). The structure of the current Vietnamese higher education system was regulated by Decree No. 90 of the Vietnamese government in 1993 (Tran, 2012). As shown in Figure 1.1, the system includes two levels: undergraduate (college and university education) and postgraduate (Master and Doctor of Philosophy) levels.
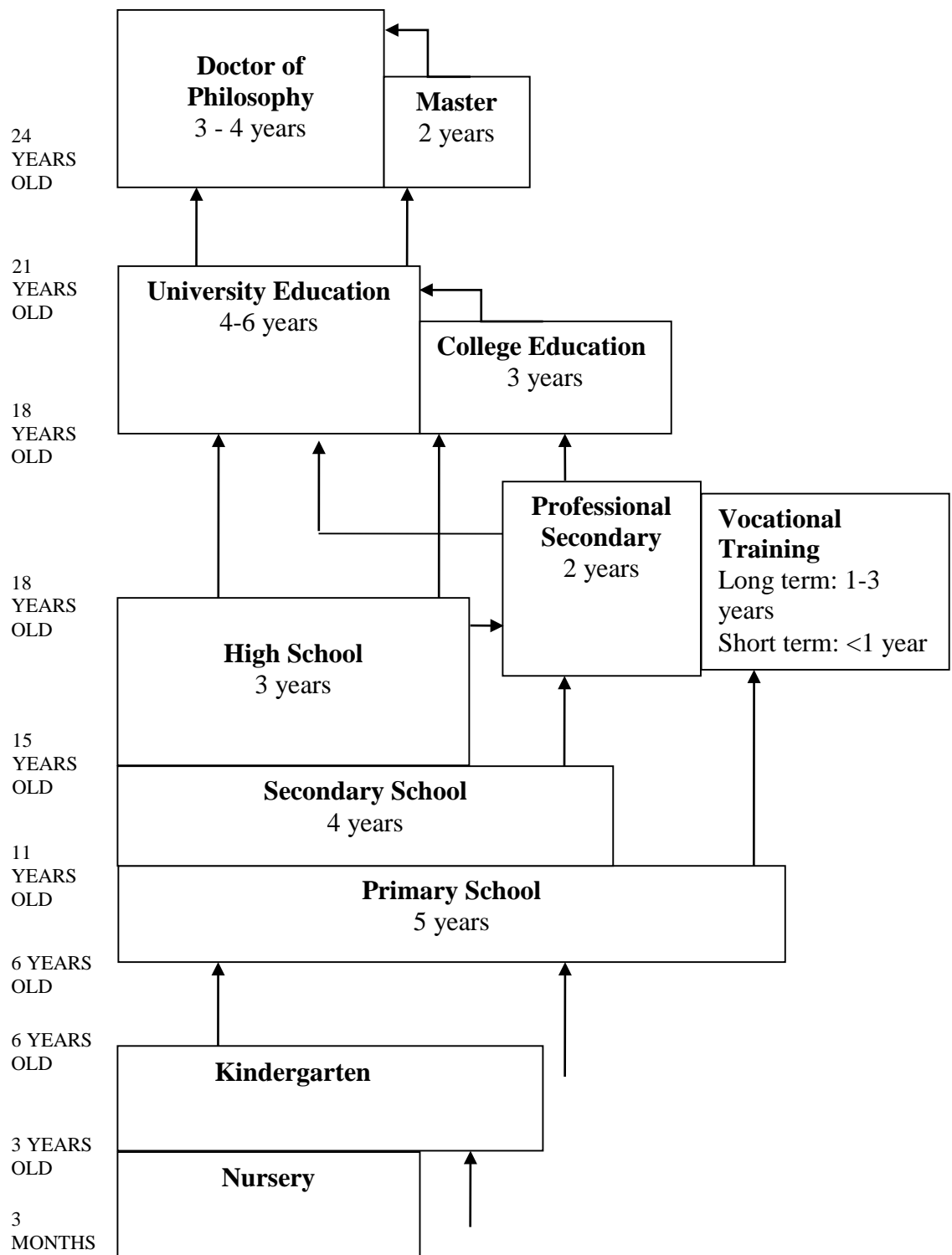
Figure 1.1. The National Education System of Vietnam (Adapted from Tran, 2012).

Although the system has been reformed many times, the quality of the system is still considered low (MoET, 2012b) and therefore is challenged in attempting to meet the country's needs to become an industrial and modern country by 2020 (Harman &

Nguyen, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2010; MoET, 2005, 2012b). There have been many contributing factors to the quality of Vietnamese higher education, such as limited finance, poor educational management, and the low quality of lecturers (Harman, Hayden, & Pham, 2010; Harman & Nguyen, 2010).

Limitations in teaching, learning, and assessment are considered as significant barriers to the development of the system (MoET, 2009, 2012b). Research has found that the teacher-centred approach remains dominant in Vietnamese universities due to the strong influence of Confucian culture from the ancient Chinese occupation (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Pham, 2010a). Assessment has been used mainly for summarising and certifying student learning results. Formative use of assessment has not been addressed sufficiently in classrooms at any level, particularly in higher education (Huynh & Le, 2009), where examinations remain the norm.

Many recent official documents such as the Resolution of Higher Education Reform Agenda (MoET, 2005), the Higher Education Law (MoET, 2012a), and the Strategy for Educational Development by 2020 (MoET, 2012b), argue for the transformation of teaching, learning, and the assessment system. These documents highlight the need for a shift from a teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities, to a student-centred approach. For example, the Vietnamese Government states that ideally the system requires: "Innovating teaching and assessment methods, focusing on development of learners' positiveness, self-awareness, activeness, creativity and independent learning capacity" (MoET, 2012b, p. 12). In particular, these policies call for teaching methods that lead to the development of autonomy in learners, and diversified assessment methods that provide reliable and valid results of student learning. The focus of assessment is not only on summative testing, but also on formative assessment at the classroom level so that assessment can promote students' ongoing learning.

The Vietnamese Government has encouraged lecturers to apply many Western teaching and assessment approaches in their classes, including the incorporation of assessment for learning strategies. However, although the principles and strategies of assessment for learning have been effectively implemented in some Western schools, the sociocultural and contextual factors of Vietnamese higher education are different. Strategies need to be adapted to be effective within this context (Luong, 2015; Pham & Gillies, 2010). Recent research conducted in Vietnam has found that contextual

factors which include teachers' assessment knowledge, universities' management policies and high-stakes testing have strongly impacted on the language assessment practices (Tran, 2015). Therefore, there is a need for further research into the current use of AfL practices in Vietnamese universities to explore how strategies of AfL are adopted and adapted to the context of Vietnamese higher education.

1.3   AIMS OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This qualitative study explores the practices of AfL in the Education University (EU-pseudonym), which is a teacher-training university in Vietnam. A sociocultural approach to learning that incorporates ideas from Vygotsky (1978), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Rogoff (1990) are drawn upon to develop the multiple case study approach. The research examines how assessment strategies are currently employed by Vietnamese lecturers to support learning. The research also aims to explore what sociocultural factors support and/or inhibit the current practices of AfL in Vietnamese universities. Implications are identified for effective use of assessment for learning strategies in EU. It is acknowledged that the site for the present study is not representative of Vietnamese higher education as a whole. However, the sociocultural and institutional factors that influence AfL are typical of the Vietnamese system. Therefore, the overarching research question for this study is:

What are the practices of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?

Sub-questions have been developed to focus the study. They include:

- What assessment for learning strategies do Vietnamese lecturers currently use in higher education?
- How do Vietnamese lecturers enact their assessment strategies for learning?
- What are Vietnamese students' experiences of assessment for learning?
- What are the sociocultural factors that support or hinder the implementation of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?

1.4   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted as an attempt to respond to the Vietnamese government's demand for enhancing quality in higher education, and the lack of research in the practices of AfL in non-Western higher education settings. This study has the potential for both practical and theoretical contributions.

First, the findings of this study have the potential to improve the quality of teaching and assessment in Vietnamese higher education. This research aims to inform Vietnamese lecturers, students, and policy makers of AfL and its contribution to the development of lifelong skills for learners. Students today need to develop their lifelong skills, such as communication, critical and creative thinking, to respond to globalisation and the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. Currently, the education system in Vietnam practises an examination-oriented learning culture, in which teaching and learning are more likely to be driven by marks and qualifications. This study encourages shifts in practices to better educate students who need to respond well to demands of today's societies. Further, by identifying supports and hindrances, this study aims to provide an insight into how AfL might be used effectively in Vietnamese higher education. Other Vietnamese practitioners could draw lessons to implement and develop appropriate AfL strategies in their own classes.

This study is an individual attempt to add to the body of the work on the appropriation of Western concepts and practices, such as assessment for learning and learners' autonomy, in contributing to a successfully comprehensive and radical reform of the Vietnamese higher system. The study also aims to the development of the educational assessment field, which is still considered embryonic in Vietnam (Lam, 2012; Nguyen, Oliver, & Priddy, 2009).

Second, the findings of this study provide theoretical gains. The findings provide empirical evidence of the use of AfL in a non-Western setting such as Vietnam. In particular, the study provides evidence of AfL use in a Vietnamese university and the response of participants to innovate more 'Westernised' pedagogical approaches. The findings reveal factors that supported and stymied the implementation of AfL in an authentic, tertiary setting. Despite sociocultural challenges, the lecturers in this study appeared to successfully adopt and adapt some aspects of the formative use of summative tests and giving useful feedback to their students. While acknowledging that the study investigated only three cases and cannot be generalisable to other higher education settings, it may provide an example and some lessons of using AfL in a particular Confucian-influenced society. Educators, policy makers, researchers, and lecturers in other Confucian settings could draw on this evidence in conducting further important research based on AfL.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilises a constructivist paradigm and a sociocultural perspective of learning as a theoretical framework. To gain a rich picture of the practice of AfL in various disciplines and class sizes, a multiple case study design of three cases was developed. Three lecturers from three different faculties in EU were purposefully selected for this study. Their assessment practices were observed in Semester Two of the academic year 2012-2013.

Data collection

Data were collected using multiple methods. Video-recorded classroom observations of five teaching sessions of each lecturer occurred. Documents, such as the University's assessment policy and annual report, lecturers' lesson plans and students' work were analysed. Semi-structured interviews with the three lecturers prior to and post each of five observed teaching sessions took place and focus group interviews with 19 students from each of the three classes occurred to gain information about their experience with assessment strategies.

The strengths of each research method were optimised in order to collect rich data regarding the assessment practices of the three lecturers. Non-participant observations with the support of video-recording were used to help "gain [a] comprehensive picture of the site and [to] provide rich description" (Simons, 2009, p. 64). The analysis of documents was "a helpful precursor to observing and interviewing" (Simons, 2009, p. 64). Document analysis helped to explore why and how policies contributed to shaping assessment practices in EU. Interviews helped identify the perceptions and attitudes of lecturers about learning and assessment, and also revealed the assessment strategies that the lecturers used to support learning. The factors that supported or hindered the use of assessment strategies for learning were revealed in the interviews. Similarly, the lecturers' expectations on how to use assessment for effective learning became clearer via interviews. The student focus group interviews were conducted to identify the impact of assessment practices on their learning.

Data analysis

A constant comparative approach (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Glaser, 1965; Simons, 2009) was adopted to analyse and interpret data. That is, incidents were constantly compared and contrasted within each and across categories in order to identify emerging themes. As this research involves learning about assessment practices in a particular social and cultural context, the research findings were interpreted through the lens of sociocultural theories of learning. That means that examination of assessment practices in Vietnamese universities must be based on an understanding of Vietnamese history, culture and social norms. To ensure trustworthiness of data, a range of techniques was used, including a rich description of the EU context, back-translation, data and methodological triangulation, and an audit trail.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter One presents an introduction to the study, providing background information about AfL and the system of Vietnamese higher education. This background contextualises the research problem, aims, and the significance of this study.

Chapter Two presents the rationale and the implications of sociocultural theories of learning that underpin the research. A review of the literature on the origin and definitions of AfL, as well as discussions regarding the effectiveness and conditions for the implementation of AfL, are considered. This chapter also provides an overview of the Vietnamese educational context and the need for transformation in teaching and assessment in Vietnamese universities. The chapter ends with the identification of the research gaps, which led to the formation of the research questions of this study.

Chapter Three outlines the research design, starting with the rationale for the selection of the methodology and a multiple case study design. Data collection and analysis methods of this study are described. The chapter also considers the ethical issues and limitations of the research design.

A case study approach highlights the impact of a real context to the phenomenon under study. Therefore, Chapter Four provides an analysis of EU, contextualising the assessment practices of the three lecturers profiled.

The AfL practices of the three lecturers are reported in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the lecturers and their teaching philosophies, which is followed by a description of key classroom assessment strategies and students' experiences with those strategies. Factors that impacted on each lecturer's assessment practice for learning are identified and analysed.

Similarities and differences in the enactment of AfL strategies of the three lecturers are considered in Chapter Eight. In this chapter, major patterns and possible reasons for implementation of AfL strategies are explained. To gain a deep understanding of the lecturers' assessment practices, a discussion, guided by sociocultural theories of learning, is also provided. Through this lens, tensions created by the use of AfL in the Vietnamese context, are outlined.

Chapter Nine reviews the process of conducting the research and draws together the conclusions, implications, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of current theory and practice of assessment for learning in higher education. A sociocultural perspective of learning informs the theoretical framework through which the practice of assessment for learning in Vietnamese higher education was investigated and analysed. The chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework, followed by the theoretical and practical issues relating to assessment for learning. The following section considers the Vietnamese educational context outlining the historical and cultural characteristics of Vietnam, the higher education system, and assessment policy, as well as historical assessment practices in higher education. The final section summarises the main points of the literature review as these relate to higher education in Vietnam.

2.1   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was conducted using sociocultural theories of learning. The following section provides an overview of the origin and the development of sociocultural theories of learning and how the main concepts of these theories were applied to the analysis and interpretation of AfL practice in Vietnamese higher education. Justification for choosing sociocultural theories as the theoretical framework of this study is also provided.

2.1.1 Origin and the development of sociocultural theories of learning

Sociocultural ideas are derived from Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, which examined the relationship between human learning and social context (Hatano & Wertsch, 2001; Rogoff, 1990; Tsui, Edwards, & Lopez-Real, 2009). Sociocultural theories focus on the interactive influence of cultural contexts on human development and on learning as appropriation through participation in the social world (Cole, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Tsui et al., 2009).

Sociocultural theories have developed along with the notion of the situated nature of learning. In 1991, Lave and Wenger proposed the model of situated learning to emphasise that learning is located in a particular context and influenced by a variety of sociocultural factors. Learning, as these authors discussed, occurs as a consequence

of interactions of members in a particular community. Through a process of legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers or apprentices learn the practices of a community. Initially, newcomers learn easy and basic tasks and observe experts so that they may imitate the practices of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As participation increases, apprentices are involved more deeply in more complex activities, until finally they take on the responsibility of an expert within the community of practice.

Wenger (1998) identified mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire as three actions through which individual members learn in communities of practice. He added reification, a dual process to participation, to describe how individuals can construct their identity in relation to their communities of practice. Reification allows newcomers to participate, and at the same time, produce objects such as tools, symbols, stories, and concepts which reflect their experiences and the practices of the communities (Wenger, 1998, 2008).

Rogoff (1990, 2008) uses the model of apprenticeship to describe how individuals can learn through interactions with experienced members of a community. She argues that this model comprises three interrelated planes in which newcomers are considered as apprentices who take part in culturally organised activities (community process). Through observing and performing activities under the guidance of more skilled people (guided participation), novices gain advanced knowledge and skills, that are part of the community, and possibly contribute to the community's development (participatory appropriation) (Rogoff, 1990). Models of situated learning and apprenticeships have created a major change in understanding the nature of learning, moving from simple acquisition to students' active participation (Handley, Sturdy, Findcham, & Clark, 2006).

While many researchers acknowledge the usefulness and relevance of sociocultural perspectives to explain human learning, they also indicate the limitations of this approach. First, some claim that a sociocultural perspective overemphasises social determinism (Roth, 2008), and tends to neglect the cognitive aspect and active role of an individual in their contribution to communities (Vosniadou, Vamvakoussi, & Skopeliti, 2008). Addressing these criticisms, in the apprenticeship model, Rogoff (2008) uses the term 'participatory appropriation', instead of the term 'internalisation' in Vygotsky's theory. This conceptual change is to highlight the active role of an individual when involved in social interactions. The process of participatory

appropriation helps learners not only to learn social and cultural values, but also contribute to the development of communities (Rogoff, 2008).

Much debate has focused on the limitations of the theory of communities of practice related to the possibilities for learning. The most common criticism is that Lave and Wenger's notions and examples of communities of practice are simplistic and idealistic as a theory of learning (Fox, 2000; Roberts, 2006), and are more suited to understanding newcomers in small communities (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). Critics claim that Lave and Wenger insufficiently addressed learning in communities in terms of the complexity of diverse organisational contexts (Roberts, 2006), unequal power relations (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Fox, 2000; Roberts, 2006), and unresolved tensions between individuals (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; Handley et al., 2006; Roberts, 2006). In response, Wenger explains that the theory is "a learning theory, not a political theory" (Wenger, 2011, p. 8). However, he acknowledges that power and the complexities involved in class, gender, and race are "inherent in social perspectives on learning", and therefore it is important to review some concepts to incorporate issues of power. Jewson (2007) also raises concerns about the outdated value of the term 'community of practice' in a digital world, and suggests the term 'network' would be more appropriate in today's world. Clearly, social models of learning have been evolving, catering to changing technological forms of communication.

Socioculturalists have developed various sociocultural models of learning based on the core assumption of learning as a mediated and situated process (James & Lewis, 2012). These models need to be carefully examined when they are applied or adapted to different contexts. This understanding is central to a sociocultural perspective of learning. This research aims to explore how AfL is understood and used in the context of Vietnamese higher education. Therefore, an understanding of the diverse influences of Vietnamese sociocultural factors on assessment practice needs to be considered in the research design, approach to investigation and interpretation of the data collected from interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, and documents. The following section addresses the sociocultural factors in relation to learning as relevant to the study of assessment practice for learning in one Vietnamese university.

2.1.2 A sociocultural perspective of the nature of learning

2.1.2.1 Learning as a mediated process

The mediated nature of learning was first presented by Vygotsky, who was influenced by the claim of Marxist ideology on the importance of labour with tools and language in human development (Cole & Scribner, 1978). He viewed learning not as pre-fixed or individualistic, but as an internalisation process of interactions with other people and artefacts in the social world. Other people and cultural tools play a mediating role through which human knowledge and skills are passed onto new generations (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 1990, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, Rio, & Alvarez, 1995).

The mediating role of other people is reflected more specifically through Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and is further expanded in Rogoff's idea of "guided participation" in communities of practice. Vygotsky defines ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adults' guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). This suggests that students are limited when acting on their own, but can do much more in collaboration with and guidance by knowledgeable peers. Social interactions are a vital condition for learning through which students internalise historical and cultural values. This internalisation process, guided by others, is an ongoing spiral in which mental functions have not matured; they are in "the process of maturation" and will "mature tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Rogoff (2008) believes that assistance is related to interpersonal engagement in a community in which apprentices "become more responsible participants" (p. 60). The assistance of others, individuals' active participation, and the quality of relations are important mediating factors to facilitate individual learning in a community of practice.

The assistance of others is considered to be scaffolding, an essential process of learning as this reflects the mediated character of learning, to assist an individual to move from a present developmental level to a more advanced developmental level (Bruner, 1996; James, 2006). Scaffolding is a metaphor used to compare learning with the process of building, in which scaffolding is used to frame a house. When the frame is formed, the scaffolding is removed. To scaffold learning effectively, the teacher

needs to assess and gain an understanding of the student's current knowledge and to intervene appropriately to move the student's learning forward (Murphy, 2008).

Rogoff (2008) argued that the scaffolding in the guided participation process was offered by "cultural and social values, as well as social partners" (p. 60). Opinions on the role of expert-partners and peer-partners on individual learning are divided. Vygotsky's ZPD theory suggests that to support cognitive development, ideal partners should be more knowledgeable. This is in contrast with Piaget, who believed that a child's cognition would grow better from working with same-level peers. Piaget reasoned that as peers generally have equal status, they are more inclined to discuss topics openly. In contrast, more knowledgeable partners are often authoritative, and this therefore inhibits discussions. Rogoff (2008) argues in her expanded model of learning that an individual benefits from interacting with others, regardless of whether they are experts or novices, because she believed that development occurs in "all three planes" (p. 62). It means that a mix of same level and more knowledgeable peers presents the optimal environment for learning through interaction.

Another crucial element which facilitates learning is the agency of the learner (Rogoff, 2003, 2008). Learner agency refers to human positiveness and proactivity. Humans are not only the products of social circumstances, but also contributors and creators to their life through self-organisation, self-regulation, and self-reflection (Bandura, 2006). From a sociocultural perspective, a learner is viewed as an active constructor of knowledge (Steiner & Mahn, 1996) who creates an identity and contributes to the knowledge and practices of communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 1999, 2008; Wenger, 2008). To be an agent in communities of practice, newcomers become involved in different relations with various activities, such as talking, thinking, feeling, doing and belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Apart from observing what others are doing in the community, they need to be immersed directly into the activities through communication, negotiation, renegotiation, coordination, and adjustments to gain shared understanding of new goals and modes of activity among the co-participants (Rogoff, 2008; Wenger, 2008). Active participation will contribute to the effectiveness of learning because an increase in the newcomer's participation and a desire for belonging help to advance their knowledge and skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991). More importantly, this process leads to identity formation for

the participants and "a way of being in the social world" which is understood as learning (Wenger, 2008, p. 106).

The third influential factor in learning is the quality of relations and social interactions in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This can be affected by power relations and trust in relations among members of a community of practice. For instance, old-timers are generally more powerful than newcomers; therefore, they have more opportunities to access resources and knowledge in their communities (Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011). If power relations in communities remain hierarchical, this may inhibit learning possibilities for newcomers. Socioculturalists believe that sharing perspectives among participants in order to provide them with "opportunities to participate in a joint decision-making process" is a crucial factor to support learning (Rogoff, 1990, p. 149). Further, a trusted relationship, where newcomers can articulate their voices and openly negotiate with others, will create conducive conditions for learning.

Viewing the learner as an agent in social interactions has resulted in a revolutionary change in teaching, learning and assessment approaches (Davydov & Kerr, 1995; Gipps, 2002; Griffin et al., 2012; Lidz & Gindis, 2003; Moore, 2000). Conventionally, teachers were seen as the authoritative source of knowledge and assessment of their students. Through a sociocultural lens, teachers are not perceived as the sole source of knowledge since their students can also learn through interactions with their peers and other sources. It should also be noted here that technological advances and the Internet as a repository and mechanism for peer-to-peer communication has also contributed to undermining the sole authority of a teacher, and challenges those cultures that support a hierarchy of teaching/learning. From a sociocultural view, cooperative learning and interactive classrooms are conducive conditions for learning (James, 2006; Moore, 2000). The way assessment is viewed has also changed. Assessment is now understood as interaction and negotiation between the teacher, the students and amongst the students (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008), in which students are encouraged to self-assess and monitor their own learning (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Gipps, 1999). To facilitate learning, teachers may create various classroom activities and opportunities for students to participate and learn mutually, as well as support learners to become owners of their learning (James, 2006).

The theory of ZPD also created a new approach for assessment in education as it helped to shift the focus from only measuring what students have learned, to also supporting students to progress in their learning (Gipps, 1999, 2002; Griffin et al., 2012; Lidz & Gindis, 2003; Moore, 2000). Thus, assessment "must be formative in both function and purpose" (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002, p. 243) and should be integrated into the teaching process to scaffold student learning, rather than be an isolated activity at the end of the course to certify student achievement. When assessment is implemented as an interactive process between teacher and students, it will allow students to "produce best performance" versus "typical performance" (Gipps, 1999, p. 378). This is because students are provided with appropriate time and opportunities to correct and develop their learning skills throughout courses.

The notion of learning as a mediated process provides a starting point to explore assessment practices for learning in Vietnamese higher education. This research investigates to what extent and how Vietnamese lecturers and students currently use AfL to improve their teaching and learning practices, and whether classroom assessment practices align with both teachers' and students' understandings of assessment. In particular, it is essential to examine whether and how Vietnamese lecturers focus on engaging students in the assessment process. For example, do Vietnamese lecturers share assessment criteria with students; create opportunities for students to negotiate forms of assessment and criteria; or employ peer assessment and self-assessment in their classroom? The research also looks at the degree to which Vietnamese students are aware of their agentive role as a learner in assessment practices. Sociocultural theories were also used to examine the mutual influences of education policy, the participant lecturers' experiences and assumptions of teaching and learning, and the social and cultural characteristics of Vietnamese student learning, given the lecturers' current assessment practices.

2.1.2.2 Learning as a situated process

The social and cultural practices of a community can both support and inhibit learning within that community. Lave & Wenger (1991) describe learning as "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31), and further, that "learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world" (p. 51). That is, learning is shaped by the social, cultural, and historical contexts (Bruner, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which

the structure and characteristics of a particular cultural activity impact on the participants and their identity formation (Rogoff, 1990, 2008). For example, students are now exposed to many different perspectives of knowledge, compared to those who were at their age in the past, because they are living in a global and open world characterised by a rapid change of information and communication technologies. According to Rogoff (2008), understanding "the historical and institutional contexts" (p. 61) of activities is essential to gain insight into personal and interpersonal processes. While acknowledging the crucial impact of context on learning, socioculturalists also believe that changes and development are an inherent characteristic of events and activities. As Rogoff argues, individuals not only appropriate what has already existed, but continually create new values and products to develop practices in their communities.

This sociocultural perspective suggests that the social and cultural setting of learning needs to be taken into consideration when assessing student learning (Gipps, 1999; Rogoff, 1999). This is because both social level (institutions, technologies, and norms) and classroom environments (the classroom culture and cultural artefacts in the classroom) can affect student learning. Learning involves not only the cognitive process but "the whole person", including bodies, emotions and social relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). While expectations and understandings of assessment criteria by students influence their response to assessment (Black, 1999), effective assessment should lead to a positive impact on students' learning motivation.

The concept of learning as a situated process has application for this study when examining the contributing factors to AfL practices in Vietnam. First, when looking at how lecturers use assessment to support learning, Vietnamese social, historical, and cultural characteristics and the classroom culture must be considered during the processes of investigation and data interpretation. Second, viewing learning as a situated process also suggests that case study is the most appropriate methodology, because the intensive analysis of assessment practices at EU, in relation to its particular context, allows the researcher to explore and interpret AfL practices as they are culturally situated in the Vietnamese context.

2.1.3 Rationale for choosing sociocultural theories of learning for the study

A sociocultural perspective was selected to research and analyse assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education for two main reasons.

First, a sociocultural perspective, which views learning as occurring within social interactions, has implications for educational assessment and how the requirements of learning in the 21st century may be met (Wells & Claxton, 2002). This approach has been claimed as a dialectical perspective to support the recent emergence of using assessment as a powerful tool for nurturing learning. Sociocultural lenses have already contributed to explanations of assessment practices in diverse international contexts (Black, 1999; Black & Wiliam, 2005; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Wells & Claxton, 2002). For example, the implementation of AfL in Hong Kong schooling faced a number of challenges due to the powerful impact of examination-oriented learning, which is common in Confucian heritage contexts (Berry, 2011b; Carless, 2011). Much of this research relied on a sociocultural perspective to understand and analyse the process.

Second, sociocultural theories highlight the inseparable impact of social, cultural, and historical issues on learning and students' identity formation. Therefore, this approach helps to explain the practices of AfL localised in Vietnamese higher education. As an Eastern culture, Vietnam provides a unique social context at societal and classroom levels. This context has contributed to shaping Vietnamese lecturers' beliefs and assessment practices, as well as policymakers' approaches. A sociocultural perspective underpins the exploration of how assessment strategies for learning are used in the Vietnamese context.

The following diagram summarises how the assessment practices of the three lecturers in EU were investigated and interpreted using sociocultural theories of learning. This perspective considers learners as agents who are proactively involved in their learning and assessment under the teacher's guidance and in collaboration with peers. The assessment practices of the three lecturers were considered through interactions embedded in their classrooms as well as within the Vietnamese context. In addition, the beliefs and habits about learning of the lecturers and students, learning resources, subjects, and EU's policies, as well as MoET requirements, acted as mediating factors. A sociocultural framework is a useful lens to explain how the practices of AfL are culturally situated in Vietnamese higher education.
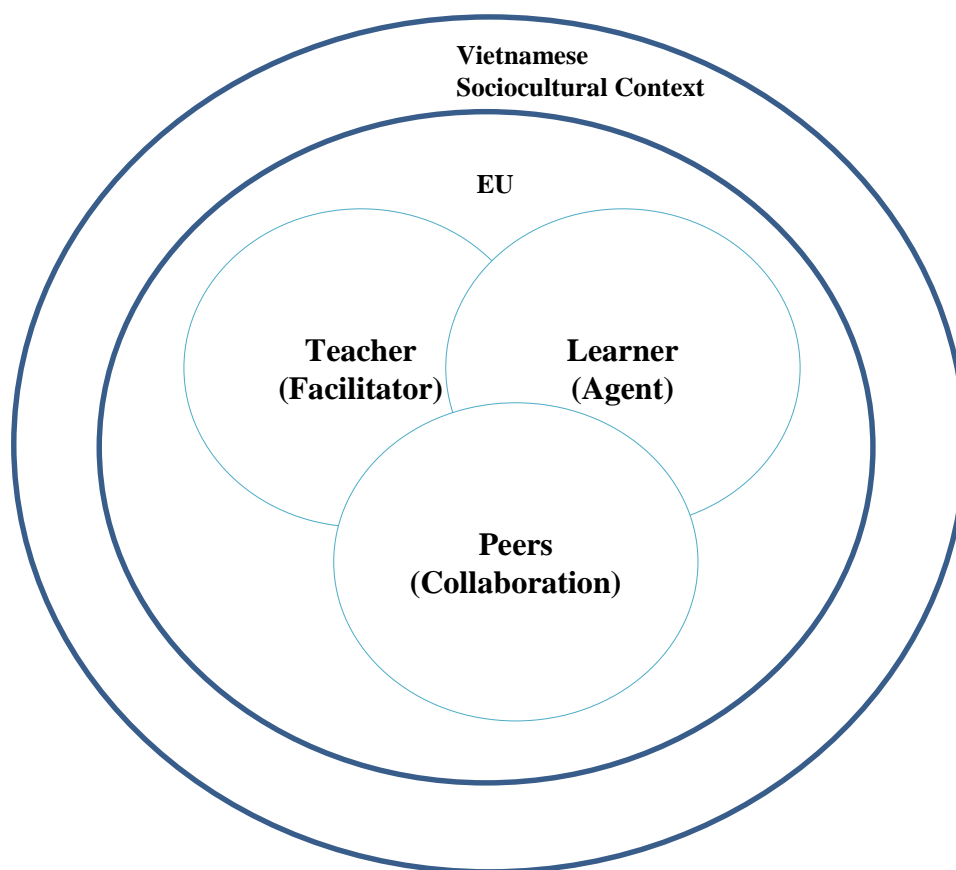
Figure 2.1. Diagrammatic Representation of Assessment Practices Using a
Sociocultural Lens of Learning.

2.2 ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

2.2.1 Origin and the development of Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning, which focuses on the potential of assessment to support learning, has gained significant attention in educational domains over the past 40 years (Earl & Timperley, 2014; Torrance, 2012; Wiliam, 2011). This approach is also defined as formative assessment in educational discourse and practice (Bennett, 2011; Torrance, 2012). However, the two terms need definition.

Formative Assessment

Understandings about the formative use of assessment or assessment for learning have developed over the years since Scriven first used the term *formative* in 1967 to distinguish the formative and summative roles of program evaluation (Scriven, 1967). Unlike summative evaluation implemented to judge a program's value in its completion, formative evaluation aims at discovering how a program can be improved while it is working (Scriven, 1967). The term formative evaluation and its meaning

were later transferred by Bloom, Hastings and Madaus (1971) to the process of student learning assessment. Bloom and his colleagues described formative evaluation as the process of helping learners to achieve mastery of learning. Formative evaluation was also understood in contrast to summative evaluation, in terms of time, purpose and level of generalisation. Bloom et al. (1971) considered timing as the main factor in distinguishing whether an evaluation is formative or summative. That is, formative assessment is conducted during a program of study while summative assessment concludes a period of study. Researchers' views of what differentiates formative from summative assessment have changed over the years.

Sadler (1989) examined the nature and function of formative assessment, arguing that the purpose and effect of assessment distinguish formative from summative assessment. In addition, he developed an understanding about formative assessment which relates to feedback. According to Sadler, feedback, or information related to how well an activity has been, or is being performed, is an important part of formative assessment which is used to improve students' performances. This understanding has received agreement from many researchers in the assessment field (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless et al., 2011) when discussing the nature of the formative use of assessment.

The term formative assessment became popular after the publication of Black and Wiliam's review of classroom assessment practices (1998b). Through the analysis of over 250 research articles and book chapters from more than 160 journals published over nine years, these authors found that formative assessment can improve the outcomes of all students, especially low achievers. Black and Wiliam's conclusion opened up investigation into formative assessment both theoretically and practically. Although Black and Wiliam's claims have received some criticism (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Sebatane, 1998; Torrance, 2012), their review has become a seminal work (Swaffield, 2011) to further develop understandings about formative assessment in Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Apart from the positive values of formative assessment identified by Black and Wiliam, the growing interest in formative assessment has been motivated by many changes in educational policy and problems in educational practices. For example, in the United States, formative assessment was expected to be a powerful intervention for improvement to the American education system since the introduction of the No

Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Shepard, 2005). In addition, formative assessment has gained more attention due to recognition of the drawbacks of assessment practice which over-emphasised grades and standardised summative assessment. Stiggins (2005, p. 326) points out that "summative standardised testing" only provides a snapshot of student learning, and related data takes a long time to affect instructional decisions at the classroom level. The uptake of formative assessment by teachers in the United States brought the new hope of enhancing teacher's practices and improving the quality of schooling (Popham, 2008; Stiggins, 2005, 2007).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, there has been a growing interest in formative assessment since the findings of Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b), and the recognition of the negative consequences of the dominance of summative assessment, including the financial burden, the practice of teaching to the test, and a narrowed program of instruction (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). The development of research on formative assessment in the United Kingdom is closely associated with the Assessment Reform Group (ARG). One of the ARG's significant contributions is the introduction of the term, 'Assessment for Learning', in preference to 'formative assessment'.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning was introduced as an alternative approach to assessment which might hold potential for assessment to nurture learning (Stobart, 2008). The ARG introduced the first definition of AfL, and the ten principles of AfL in 1999. The ARG reasoned that the use of the term Assessment for Learning might avoid some misunderstandings about formative assessment, and help to emphasise assessment's supportive function for learning. AfL was distinguished from *Assessment of Learning*, which was defined as focusing on summarising and reporting learning results. This idea has substantially influenced the assessment field not only in the United Kingdom but also in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

Regarding the terminology, formative assessment and Assessment for Learning are widely used in the literature. In recent years, there have been different interpretations of these terms. To avoid misunderstanding, Carless and his colleagues (2006) have proposed the use of the term 'learning-oriented assessment', highlighting one of fundamental purposes of assessment, which is to improve learning (Carless, Joughin, Liu, & Associates, 2006). Due to various interpretations of the terms and its

implementation in different national contexts, successive discussions about the existence and effectiveness of assessment for learning have been found (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009). To clearly understand these discussions, a review of the development in understandings about formative assessment and Assessment for Learning over the past years is provided. This review focuses on four main questions, as these reflect the basic themes of the theory and practices of assessment for learning:

1. What is formative assessment and how does it relate to assessment for learning?
2. What is the role of assessment for learning and how effective is it in practice?
3. What strategies of assessment for learning are used to support ongoing learning?
4. What factors encourage or inhibit practices of assessment for learning and what conditions make assessment for learning more effective in the support of learning?

2.2.2 Definition of assessment for learning

What is formative assessment and how does it relate to assessment for learning?

The philosophical principle of assessment for learning considers students as agents in their learning. This approach is usually referred to as 'formative assessment' and 'Assessment for Learning' in much literature. These terms are related as they both imply a similar philosophical principle of using assessment as a learning tool rather than for certification. However, they are different in terms of their timeframe and emphasis. The term Assessment for Learning was coined by the ARG, based on discussions around understandings of 'formative assessment' (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). Therefore, to gain an insight into Assessment for Learning, it is important to review definitions and understandings of formative assessment.

There is no global consensus on what formative assessment or assessment for learning means (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Bennett, 2011; Cech, 2008; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Torrance, 2012). This term is interpreted differently by many authors from different sociocultural contexts, including in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and other Asian Pacific countries such as Australia and New Zealand (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Klenowski, 2009). Various interpretations of

formative assessment and the advantages and disadvantages of each are examined in this review to highlight the development in understanding of Assessment for Learning over time and contexts. Importantly, this summary finds a definition most relevant to the Vietnamese higher education context.

The first definition can be traced back to Black and Wiliam (1998b, p. 7) who claimed that formative assessment comprised "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged". This definition highlights feedback as central to formative assessment and its transformational function in relation to teaching and learning. Although this definition does not describe when formative assessment occurs and what kinds of activities are conducted as formative assessment, it provides the foundation for a variety of subsequent interpretations of formative assessment.

Another common interpretation of formative assessment is that it can serve a diagnostic function to identify student learning difficulties. According to Stobart (2008), such an understanding is dominant in the United States and in France. This may originate from the explanation of Bloom and his colleagues (1971) about the diagnostic potential of formative evaluation for mastery learning. For example, in the United States, Cech (2008) states formative assessment is interpreted as

> [A] tool that teachers use to measure student grasp of the specific topics and skills they are currently teaching. It is a "midstream" tool to identify specific student misconceptions and mistakes while the material is being taught (Cech, 2008, p. 1).

Likewise, in France, Allal and Lopez (2005) describe three kinds of formative assessment, including interactive, retroactive, and proactive. The retroactive

> [o]ccurs when a formative assessment is conducted after completion of a phase of teaching and allows identification of the instructional objectives attained or not attained by each student. The feedback from the assessment leads to the selection of means for correcting or overcoming learning difficulties encountered by some students (Allal & Lopez, 2005, p. 245).

Such interpretations have led to serious consequences. First, in some cases, the purpose of formative assessment has been narrowed to diagnosis or resulted in mini-summative tests which have inhibited the development of formative assessment theory

and distorted assessment practices (Kahl, 2010; Sadler, 1989; Stobart, 2008; Swaffield, 2011). Second, test publishers, in the pursuit of profits, have developed formative test banks that are free of important contextual considerations (Bennett, 2011; Cech, 2008).

Formative assessment is also understood as a process in countries such as the United States and Canada (Heritage, 2009; Popham, 2008). Formative assessment occurs during the teaching and learning cycle that involves the teacher making decisions about students' learning, providing constructive feedback to support students' learning, and adapting teaching to cater for individual and diverse learning needs. This understanding clarifies the main characteristics of formative assessment in terms of timing (during teaching and learning), site (classroom/online), frequency (high frequency), teacher's task (giving students constructive feedback about their responses and adapting their teaching), and purpose (to support student learning). However, this interpretation has been criticised as it only focuses on the role of the teacher in giving feedback to students. The role of students and their peers seems to be ignored (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

The most common understanding of formative assessment entails a contrast to summative assessment. Attempts to define formative assessment in terms of time, purpose, and level of generalisation started from the work of Bloom et al. (1971), and remained in many debates about the term formative (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Bloom et al., 1971). In the past, timing was the main aspect to identify formative assessment. The majority of authors now agree that the prime difference between formative assessment and summative assessment is the purpose of using assessment data (Bennett, 2011; Newton, 2007; Sadler, 1989; Wiliam, 2006), which, in formative assessment is to facilitate students' ongoing learning.

The recognition and development of the potential of assessment to support learning must include the ARG's contribution. The ARG introduced the term Assessment for Learning instead of the term formative assessment to distinguish it from Assessment of Learning or summative assessment (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Bennett, 2011). According to Crooks (2011) the use of these alternative terms can help to clarify "the nature" of two purposes in which assessment data is applied (p. 71) . The first definition of AfL was provided by ARG as

> [T]he process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group, 2002a, p. 2).

This definition describes tasks implemented by both teachers and students in assessment for learning, which include helping students to reach their learning goals. The active role of students is very evident in this definition. However, this definition does not put enough emphasis on the aspect of AfL as everyday classroom practice. In addition, the words in the definition have sometimes resulted in different explanations (Klenowski, 2009; Stobart, 2008). One of the misinterpretations has been indicated by Klenowski (2009) as

> [A]n exhortation to teachers to (summatively) test their students frequently to assess the levels they attain on prescribed national/state scales in order to fix their failings and target the next level. In this scenario, scores, which are intended to be indicators of, or proxies for, learning, become the goals themselves. Real and sustained learning is sacrificed to performance on a test (p. 263).

For these reasons, the Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning held in 2009 in New Zealand proposed a new definition of AfL as

> [A] part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning (cited in Klenowski, 2009, p. 264).

This second definition of AfL is different from the previous definition in that it indicates AfL is an everyday practice which occurs as a part of teaching and learning. Actors of assessment activities are not only teachers but also students and their peers. They all reflect and respond to assessment data through dialogue, demonstration and observation with the purpose of enhancing ongoing learning. This definition is considered as an operational definition, which describes particularly what AfL is and how it can be used in practice.

The understanding of formative assessment as assessment for learning has clarified the concept of formative assessment, particularly in comparison with summative assessment. However, it is also problematic in that both formative and summative assessments have the potential to support learning and both are important

in education (Bennett, 2011; Broadfoot, 2007; Harlen, 2005; Stiggins, 2005). To some extent, final tests can also motivate students to learn. The dilemma is that by contrasting formative with summative assessment, the positive aspect of formative assessment becomes idealised (Torrance, 2012). As Torrance argues, formative assessment, as understood by ARG, is always presented as a "good thing" for student learning (Torrance, 2012, p. 327). Yet summative assessment can have a formative function, and formative assessment may not always result in positive benefits to student learning.

Some authors have been sceptical about the existence of formative assessment as one type of assessment (Bennett, 2011; Newton, 2007, 2010; Wiliam, 2006). They argue that the promotion of learning is the function of all assessment. Newton (2007, 2010) identified three levels of assessment purpose, including the judgment level, the decision level and the impact level. The term formative is associated with the decision level of assessment while summative assessment is used for the purpose of judgement. From this argument, Newton proposed that there is no particular type of assessment as formative assessment; rather, the focus should be on the *purposes* of using assessment data. When assessment results are used to identify students' learning needs and to adjust subsequent teaching and learning activities to improve learning, it is a formative use of assessment data.

Carless and his colleagues in Hong Kong have coined the term 'learning-oriented assessment' (Carless, 2015; Carless et al., 2006). This term, it is anticipated, will help to avoid confusion in thinking and practices of assessment for learning. Learning-oriented assessment is identified by three main elements: assessment tasks that are designed to help students achieve desired learning outcomes; involve students as self-evaluators; and involve feedback as feed forward. This approach provides fundamental principles and characteristics to identify assessment which is designed for learning.

Using sociocultural theories of learning as the theoretical orientation, this study aims to examine how the use of assessment in the interactions between the teacher and the students, and peer to peer in the classroom can support students' ongoing learning. Therefore, the second definition of AfL, which is linked to the ARG's arguments about the characteristics of AfL, is the most suitable interpretation for this study, as it not only offers philosophical principles of assessment for learning, emphasising the central role of the student in their own learning, but also provides a comprehensive description

on how assessment for learning could be implemented in practices through classroom interactions. The following section details these characteristics of AfL.

Characteristics of Assessment for Learning

To distinguish AfL from other types of classroom assessment, the ARG (1999, p. 7) identified seven characteristics of assessment that promote learning:

- It is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part
- It involves sharing learning goals with students
- It aims to help students to know and to recognise the standards they are aiming for
- It involves students in self-assessment
- It provides feedback which leads to students recognising their next steps and how to take them
- It is underpinned by the confidence that every student can improve
- It involves both the teacher and students reviewing and reflecting on assessment data.

These characteristics demonstrate how assessment can be used to support student learning at classroom level. While understandings of AfL have evolved, along with the second definition of AfL, the seven characteristics identified by the ARG were used as a framework to interpret the practice of AfL in EU.

Having provided an overview of the various interpretations of AfL throughout the years, discussion now turns to the question: How do assessment practices for learning fulfil the important role of supporting learning?

2.2.3 Role of assessment for learning and its effectiveness in practice

What is the role of assessment for learning and how effective it is in practice?

Assessment for learning is considered a promising approach to assessment to motivate effective learning (Stiggins, 2005, 2007), defined as the adoption of deep learning strategies which brings about high achievement, nurtures the inspiration for learning, and forms lifelong learning skills for students. Stiggins (2005) explained that assessment for learning can positively influence student learning as it provides students with continuous and detailed feedback, and encourages them to self-assess and adjust their own learning. Assessment for learning can therefore help students achieve their expected learning goals. Further, assessment for learning also has an emotional effect on learners (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Stiggins, 2005). Using

feedback as scaffolding can help students understand their current level of knowledge and aim for new goals. Students can be motivated to have a positive belief in their ability, and make more of an effort to reach their expected level. As a result, involvement in these assessment practices can lead to success (Stiggins, 2005). The feeling of being successful in learning can be a driving force to move students forward. Assessment for learning can contribute to enhancement of students' motivation to learn (Harlen, 2012).

Assessment for learning is also valuable for teachers to improve their pedagogic practices (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002). Constantly collecting information about students' learning helps teachers to identify how their students are progressing and to establish their learning needs. This information is crucial for teachers to revise instruction in a timely manner to enhance their teaching effectiveness.

Based on the findings of Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b), projects were mainly conducted in primary and secondary schools in Western societies. In the United Kingdom, two typical projects are the King's Medway Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Projects (KMOFAP), led by Black and Wiliam, with 24 participant teachers in six schools (Wiliam et al., 2004) and the Learning How to Learn (LHTL) project led by James with 1500 participant teachers in 40 schools (Black et al., 2006; Swaffield, 2011). In Scotland, the program Assessment is for Learning (AifL) was initiated in 2002 to improve the quality of assessment. This program included 10 projects, one related to formative assessment. Notably, since 2002 the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also examined the practices of formative assessment in secondary schools in eight countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, and Scotland).

Although those research projects were conducted with different numbers of participants in different contexts, there were similar findings in terms of positive influences of AfL practices on both learning and teaching. The most common finding was that AfL contributed significantly to an increase in students' test scores (Hayward & Spencer, 2010; OECD, 2005; Wiliam et al., 2004). The projects' findings also recognised the power of feedback for effective learning. Detailed and constructive feedback helps students to understand their own learning and to plan to move forward. Moreover, the implementation of AfL led to positive changes in teachers' awareness

and pedagogic practices. It is reported that teachers focused more on assessing students' existing understandings, and finding ways to develop the skills of independent learning for their students.

Significant research in Western higher education shows the positive impact of AfL on students' academic achievement. For example, Weurlander and colleagues (2012) conducted a study in a cohort of 70 pathology students in Sweden and found that AfL motivates students to study and help them understand their own learning. Similarly, Carrillo-de-la-Pena et al.'s (2007) study with 548 health science students from four Spanish universities revealed that students who were involved in midterm formative assessment, gained higher marks and success rates in the final assessment, than students who did not take part. Balan (2012) conducted a quasi-experimental research approach for first year mathematics students in Sweden. The intervention group was engaged in AfL strategies, while there was no change for the control group. Findings indicated that the intervention group enjoyed AfL strategies, and results from pre and post-tests indicated an improvement in the problem-solving performance for this group.

Despite positive findings of the use of AfL, there are issues related to its effectiveness in different contexts. First, examining the effectiveness of AfL based only on test results, such as improving students' test scores, may not reflect learners' mastery of meta-cognitive skills (Torrance, 2012). Tests are designed based on curriculum objectives which do not generally encourage divergent responses. Therefore, this can limit the development of learner autonomy (Torrance, 2012). This creates a conflict between assessment practices and the aims of learning in higher education, which is concerned with the training of graduates who are capable of higher order thinking skills. Further, research showing positive changes in learning as an outcome of AfL has been slow to emerge and AfL is not always shown to be of value in every class and every context (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009). Researchers suggest there are "no shortcuts to a real and meaningful change" (Hayward & Spencer, 2010, p. 174) in the practice of AfL. Successful implementation requires a strong commitment from policy makers and active participation of all actors such as parents, employers, teachers, researchers, and students. Importantly, suitable resources in the assessment process are also critical (Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Wiliam et al., 2004).

A critical review of literature reveals that there is a clear lack of research based around AfL conducted in higher education, specifically in non-Western settings (Carless & Lam, 2014). One question which emerges from the literature review is whether the theory of assessment for learning, developed and applied in Western countries, can be used effectively in the context of an Asian country such as Vietnam.

2.2.4 Strategies of assessment for learning

What strategies of assessment for learning are used to support ongoing learning?

The main objective of AfL is to help students become aware of their existing knowledge and their desired knowledge, and then plan for progress in their own learning. Several effective strategies in the practice of AfL have been identified in Western schooling. For example, Black and others (2005), explored four critical classroom assessment practices: (1) sharing learning intentions and success criteria (to help students know where to go in their learning); (2) questioning (to help students know where they are in their learning); (3) feedback, including the teacher's feedback, peer assessment, and self-assessment (to help students know how to progress their learning from their current level to the expected level of attainment); and (4) the formative use of summative tests.

Wiliam (2011) reviews definitions of assessment for learning, and identifies three categories of assessment strategies for learning. These strategies are illustrated in Table 2.1

Table 2.1

Assessment for Learning Strategies (Adapted from Wiliam, 2011)

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is	How to get there
Teacher	Sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria	Engineering effective discussions, tasks, and activities that elicit evidence of learning (i.e questioning, observation)	Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peers		Activating students as learning resources for one another (Peer assessment)	
Learner		Activating learners as owners of their own learning (Self-assessment)	

The table shows that the philosophical principle of AfL is to assist students to understand their learning in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, and aims to assist students to progress their learning. This process involves the teacher, peers and student in three categories of strategies: sharing learning intentions and success criteria; eliciting evidence of learning; providing and receiving feedback from the teacher, peers and self. These major principles of AfL strategies have been identified and developed at all educational levels. In higher education, the development of students' autonomy and agency is the main target and knowledge content is not fixed. As a result many researchers have advocated for the active involvement of students in the practices of self-peer assessment (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Brown & Murti, 2003; Carless, 2013; O'Donovan et al., 2015; Torrance, 2012). Further, it has been suggested that the students are involved in developing assessment criteria (Rust et al., 2005), and the divergence in students' responses should be acceptable (Torrance, 2012).

A range of specific AfL strategies for higher education, and how to employ these strategies effectively, are identified and discussed by several researchers (Carless et al., 2006; Yorke, 2003; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). For example, in the UK, Rust et al. (2005) developed an assessment model using a social constructivist approach which highlights students' active engagegment in the process of creating assessment criteria and giving and receiving feedback. Similarly, Sambell et al. (2012) claimed that AfL is narrowed if the focus is only on the practice of feedback. These authors proposed a holistic model to ensure that the spirit of AfL is implemented in higher education. This model highlights the importance of using teacher's feedback, involving students in peer and self assessment within authentic assessment tasks, and ensuring the balance of summative and formative assessment. AfL strategies which are more culturally appropriate to the context of Confucian-influenced settings have also been identified by many researchers. Carless and colleagues (2006), in the project of Learning Oriented Assessment, identified 39 specific assessment practices from lecturers in Hong Kong institutions. One example of the assessment practices is the student engagement in "a reflective discussion" of assignment feedback before "a mark is awarded" (Carless et al., 2006, p. 46). Pham and Renshaw (2015a) contended that as student learning in Confucian heritage culture is greatly influenced by examinations, principles of formative assessment might be implemented if formative process is integrated into summative assessment in order to improve students'

examination results. The following section analyses the use of AfL strategies in primary schools and, and how these findings are applicable in higher education.

2.2.4.1 Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Sharing learning intentions and success criteria is an important component of assessment for learning. It helps students understand what they are going to study and provides the expectations for their performance (Boud, 1995a; Stiggins, 2005). Research findings reveal that when students understand success criteria clearly, they are more likely to be motivated to take control of their learning to target success. More importantly, research by Jonsson (2014) found that when assessment is made transparent, students' performances could be significantly enhanced.

In higher education, the explicitness and transparency of assessment can be achieved through the use of a scoring rubric. A rubric is a document that describes the assessment expectations to students by listing assessment criteria and different levels of quality (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Reddy and Andrade (2010) conducted a review on using rubrics in Western higher education and found that most studies report improvements and positive experiences from students. For example, research conducted by Jonsson (2014) in one Swedish institution revealed that students considered rubrics useful, and they used rubrics as a guide for their performance and for self-peer assessment. The rubrics helped to reduce students' anxiety in assessment; to recognise where they should invest more time and effort to produce higher quality work, and therefore gain higher grades.

However, some issues emerged in the practice of using rubrics. For example, students sometimes had difficulty understanding the meaning of the terms used in rubrics and this limited their positive impact on learning (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Further, the validity and reliability of rubrics were compromised when the process of creating rubrics was not clearly described in the literature (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). To tackle these problems, Jonsson (2014) suggested that rubrics should be designed clearly to enable students' accurate understanding. The rubrics should be shared with students prior to assessment tasks with careful explanations about items and their references. It is also suggested that involving students in the development and active use of rubrics is important to enhance its effectiveness. Rubrics are found to be more beneficial for student learning when combined with the practices of giving and receiving feedback from teacher peer and self (Jonsson, 2014).

To maximise the value of rubrics, providing appropriate exemplars, which illustrate specifically how assessment criteria and standards are achieved, is recommended in practice (Hendry, Bromberger, & Armstrong, 2011; Jonsson, 2010). Exemplars could explicitly illustrate and explain expected standards to students, and consequently could improve the quality of students' performance. The use of exemplars is considered useful, especially for first year students (Jonsson, 2010; Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002).

However, there have been concerns about the explicitness of the assessment criteria, as clarity in assessment may lead to the problem of "compliance criteria" (Torrance, 2012, p. 330). Torrance (2012) claims that if we are over-dependent on the criteria, we tend to accept convergent responses. In this way, the practice of AfL can be more aligned to a behaviourist model of learning rather than a constructivist and sociocultural perspective, which appreciates the agency of the learners. Explicit criteria are more applicable in school contexts where there is an established domain of knowledge, while in higher education, knowledge presented as a contestable and exploratory domain, and the development of learners' autonomy and creative thinking is major purpose (Torrance, 2012).

2.2.4.2 Questioning

Questioning can be a powerful tool in the practice of assessment for learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black et al., 2005; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Crooks, 1988). Questions are used to not only promote student thinking, but also to help both teachers and students gain information about students' current understandings in order to create the next interventions in teaching and learning.

Black and others (2005) have identified three requirements for effective questioning. First, the quality of questions is important to motivate deep learning. Questions that require only factual recall may lead to a superficial approach to learning. To promote deep learning, open-ended questions or problem-based questions should be used. Second, "wait time" is considered as a vital factor in effective questioning. Students' poor responses occur because teachers have not given sufficient time for students to think and form their answers (Black et al., 2005). If "wait time" is utilised appropriately, then students will give more thoughtful answers. In addition, it also allows more students to be involved collectively in classroom discussions.

The use of follow-up activities is suggested as an essential technique for effective questioning. Black and his team (2005) recognised that teachers may have poor teaching practices because they do not have effective follow-up activities after asking questions and receiving answers from their students. Teachers should use incorrect answers from their students to challenge students' thinking and to provoke whole class discussions. Active participation of all students will result not only in the development of their thinking skills but also help teachers assess the effectiveness of their teaching. Teachers are encouraged to build a constructive and respectful climate in the class so that all students feel comfortable to voice their thinking.

Research by Black and his colleagues (2005) found some difficulties in the practice of questioning. For example, teachers found it difficult to change their questioning technique. Some felt it was unnatural when more time was given to students as there was a "dead period" of time in their classes (Black et al., 2005, p. 33). Other teachers tended to give comments immediately after students' responses. Teachers were more familiar with simple closed questions than open-ended questions and it took longer for them to frame open questions. Black and colleagues (2005) argue that teachers' pedagogic capability in questioning could be enhanced if teachers are given opportunities to participate in professional development.

2.2.4.3 Observation

Observation involves teachers in observing students' performance during teaching and learning processes (Maxwell, 2001). This is a useful assessment strategy as it allows the teacher to gain authentic, comprehensive and contextualised information about student learning. Despite its importance, observation is an underutilised assessment strategy because information obtained from this method is usually claimed to be subjective and contain potential bias (Brown, 1999). This limitation requires teachers to carefully plan classroom observation with transparent and explicit criteria (Brown, 1999; Tran, 2004b). Further, the use of observation combined with other assessment strategies is suggested to enhance its effectiveness (Maxwell, 2001) .

2.2.4.4 Feedback

In general, feedback is understood "as information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82). Feedback can be oral or in written form provided by the teacher, by peers and

through self-assessment. Feedback is considered as central to assessment for learning and the benefit of providing feedback has now gained significant agreement among researchers (Black et al., 2005; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Boud, 2000; Crooks, 1988; Evans, 2013; Sadler, 1989; Stobart, 2008).

Feedback, however, is a complex issue (Askew & Lodge, 2000), as it does not always lead to further learning. Research has identified that students can respond negatively to feedback by ignoring their teacher's comments and valuing only their final grade (Falchikov, 1995; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Other complexities have been found: students may not understand the feedback, and therefore not know how to act on it (Falchikov, 1995; Mumm, Karm, & Remmik, 2015; Weaver, 2006). One reason for this may be the quality of the feedback provided. Many teachers tend to write confusing or superficial comments, or focus only on negative aspects of students' work without providing specific advice for progress (Falchikov, 1995; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001). Further, students' lack of critical background knowledge may lead to difficulties in understanding the feedback and identifying the aspects of their work that need improvement (Sadler, 2010). Timing for receiving feedback is another problem. Students consider feedback as useless when it is given 'too late', for example, after they have finished a course (Carless et al., 2006; Jonsson, 2012). Other obstacles causing feedback to be unhelpful can result from students' lack of effective skills and strategies for using feedback (Jonsson, 2012). Complexities in giving feedback also arise from the fact that students have their own personalities and learning style (Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012), and therefore there is no "best type of feedback for all learners" (Shute, 2008, p. 185).

Researchers have identified factors that contribute to the effectiveness of feedback on learning. For example, Sadler (1998) argues that the quality of feedback determines its effectiveness. Effective feedback should satisfy specific requirements in terms of content and techniques. Regarding content, Black and Wiliam (1998a, p. 85) claimed that feedback "should be about the particular qualities with advice on what he or she can do to improve". Sadler (1989) proposed three essential elements in feedback: recognition of the expected level of achievement, knowledge of the students' existing level, and the recommendation of a way to progress learning towards the desired performance. Hattie and Timperley (2007) summarised the three main components in feedback as follows: where am I going? (Feed up), where am I? (Feed

back), and how can I get there? (Feed forward). They also added four levels: task level (focusing on information about students' actual work, compared to expected requirements and standards of a learning task), process level (referring to information about how students complete the learning task), self-regulation level (commenting on learning strategies that students used to complete the learning task), and self level (focusing on students' personality and qualities). Hattie and Timperley suggest the levels should form the focus for each question. Feedback appears to be most effective when it reflects the three first levels. The focus of feedback on the self level has been reported as less effective (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Stobart, 2008), because it is a criticism of the person rather than of behaviour. Further, feedback should value students' efforts to develop a mindset which helps to nurture student confidence and then create high productivity in learning (Dweck, 2006). Dweck also found that feedback which is short and contains only praise is not effective for learning. Addressing this issue, Carless et al. (2006) found that useful feedback must include a forward-looking perspective so that it will maximise students' opportunities to progress learning. Further, feedback needs to support the development of students' self-regulation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Comez, & Crook, 2013), because this assists students to become continuous learners.

With regard to the technical structure, feedback should be timely, accurate, comprehensive, appropriate, and accessible to learners' work (Brookhart, 2013; Sadler, 1998). The language of feedback should carefully avoid negative emotional effects (Boud, 1995a; Falchikov, 1995). Building a trusting relationship between givers and receivers is important to make feedback effective (Carless, 2009; Hargreaves, 2011). More importantly, feedback should be given and acted on by students.

Many researchers (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2013; Carless et al., 2011; Hayward & Spencer, 2014) argue that effective feedback requires students' involvement in the process of assessment dialogues between the teacher and students. This requires a shift from the traditional view of feedback as a 'gift' from the teacher (Askew & Lodge, 2000) to an alternative understanding that learners should have a key role in generating and driving feedback. This kind of feedback is called sustainable feedback, which can assist students to develop their own capability to learn both immediate and future tasks. The idea of sustainable feedback stresses students'

responsibility for their own learning, which relates to the use of peer and self-assessment in practices of assessment for learning.

2.2.4.5 Peer assessment

According to Falchikov (1995), peer assessment is the process through which groups of individuals make judgements on the performance of their peers. Apart from the teacher's feedback, feedback from peers is considered a vital element of formative assessment in the classroom (Sadler, 1998). Research has found that peer assessment contributes benefits for both givers and receivers. These practices enhance learning as they motivate students to learn together in a collaborative environment (Black et al., 2005; Falchikov, 1995; Pham, 2014; Topping, 1998). Further, peer assessment helps students to develop certain skills such as teamwork and meta-cognition (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999; Topping, 2009).

Several strategies are suggested to organise peer assessment such as group discussions and oral presentations. Carless (2013) has identified that oral presentations are a common and useful tool for peer assessment. This form not only stimulates classroom dialogues through giving and receiving peer feedback, but also helps students to recognise quality performance. Involving students in dialogues and raising awareness of expected standards are considered crucial to develop the culture of sustainable feedback in classrooms (Carless, 2013).

Although studies on peer assessment have found its positive influence on student learning, many issues were also identified in its practice. One major issue is students' lack of trust in peers as assessors (Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2009; Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 2009). The 'equal' status makes peer feedback less convincing. Students find it difficult to rate their peers' work because they perceive that they are unqualified to assess (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Orsmond et al., 2002). Reliability of results of peer assessment is another concern. For example, there is a tendency to 'friendship marking' in which students mark or rate their peers' work based on their relationships rather than on the work's quality (Dochy et al., 1999). Sluijsmans (2001) found that students felt uncomfortable in marking their peers and they preferred just giving feedback. Peer assessment can be difficult to organise in a large class as it usually takes time for students to think, analyse, and communicate their ideas.

There are several conditions for organising effective peer assessment. First, as peer assessment is an interpersonal and interactive process, development of a shared understanding of assessment procedures and criteria among students is important. The effectiveness of peer feedback depends on the "climate of trust and respect" (Stobart, 2008, p. 161) in the classroom. It is necessary to create a classroom culture in which students feel comfortable to voice their views, and teachers encourage their students to cooperate and support each other (Gipps, 1999; Stobart, 2008). More importantly, students must be trained in the skills to effectively engage in peer assessment (Tillema, 2014). Sluijsmans (2002) suggested that any training needs to consider major aspects: explaining assessment criteria; judging both strengths and weaknesses of peer performance; and providing advice for progress. Further, sociocultural factors need to be taken into account in organising peer assessment, as the fundamental principles of peer assessment may be contradictory to the learning culture of a particular context, such as Vietnam (Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2009; Pham & Gillies, 2010; Pham & Renshaw, 2015b). For instance, research consistently revealed that ideal principles of group learning, such as forming heterogeneous groups and rotating roles of students within a group, failed when applied in the Vietnamese higher education context (Nguyen, 2008; Pham & Renshaw, 2015b). Students who participated in this research expressed preferences to work with their friends under an assigned leader of their group due to the impact of the collectivist culture. These findings reveal that to maximise the effectiveness of peer assessment, it is important to consider the impact of local learning traditions in different contexts.

2.2.4.6 Self-assessment

Self-assessment is "the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards" (Boud, 1995b, p. 12). This reflective process, created by and for students through using success criteria to evaluate and monitor their own work, is an integral element of self-regulated learning (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013). It is therefore considered a core aspect of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Clark, 2012; Glasson, 2009). When students effectively self-assess their work, they must understand the assessment criteria which helps them take responsibility for their learning, form meta-cognitive skills and act as autonomous learners (Allal, 2010; Boud, 1995b; Dochy et al., 1999; Earl, 2003; Elwood &

Klenowski, 2002; Klenowski, 2002; Lew, Alwis, & Schmidt, 2010; Sadler, 1989). To become effective lifelong learners, students need be self-assessors (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Cassidy, 2007; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002).

Although self-assessment can be valuable to improve learning, several issues have been identified in the implementation of self-assessment. According to Boud (1995b), self-assessment requires students to be clearly aware of the criteria for success and capable of making honest and reliable judgements about their work. However, Black and Wiliam (1998a) argued that it is hard for students to be honest about their own learning and that many students do not have a clear picture of the expected performance. These facts are more likely to reduce the effectiveness of self-assessment. In addition, research has found that inexperienced students, such as first year students, tend to either overestimate or underestimate their performance. This requires students to be trained with appropriate self-assessment skills (Sadler, 2010, 2013). Other findings from a meta-analysis by Falchikov & Boud (1989) revealed that there was a difference between teacher and student marks of the same performance. These authors explained that a lack of consensus in understanding criteria may lead to that situation. For this reason, making the criteria and the assessment process transparent, and engaging students in assessment activities, are important to develop self-assessment capacity, which is understood as a way to support learning (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002).

2.2.4.7 The formative use of summative tests

The difference in purposes of using assessment results has led to many tensions between formative and summative assessment. However, some researchers have found a positive relationship between formative and summative assessment (Biggs, 1998; Black et al., 2005; Brookhart, 2010; Harlen, 2005). Summative tests can be used to improve learning, while formative assessment can support summative assessment by preparing students with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence for their tests. In addition, data from formative assessment collected in portfolios may become a useful source of summarising learning results (Klenowski, Askew, & Carnell, 2006).

Black and his colleagues (2005) identified three innovations in using summative tests to support learning. One of the initiatives is to use formative strategies to help students set a reflective plan for revision. For example, feedback during teaching and learning may help students to recognise their limitations, and then focus on revising

carefully for exams. Requiring students to set questions related to the tests and practise answering those questions can also help them understand the assessment process and build their confidence before exams. Another effective technique is to discuss problems identified in previous tests. Through discussing problems, students may be aware of the criteria for delivering a good performance. This may encourage them to monitor their learning in relation to the expected performance (Carless & Lam, 2014).

Although the formative use of summative assessment has been identified as a successful practice of AfL in the KMOFAP, some concerns remain (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; OECD, 2005; Wiliam et al., 2004). For example, it may be difficult to apply AfL if the requirements of summative tests do not align with AfL principles. Harlen (2005) contends that the "synergy between formative and summative assessment requires that systems should be designed with these two purposes in mind and should include arrangements for using evidence for both purposes" (p. 221).

Some of strategies, such as 'test preparation' and 'test follow-up activities', were trialled experientially in a Hong Kong primary school by Carless and Lam (2014). The findings revealed that there was a positive influence on students' learning as a consequence of using these strategies. For example, students were involved actively in revision for tests, and also recognised their strengths and weaknesses in a collaborative way through discussing correct answers with their peers after the tests. Carless and colleagues (2014) suggest that these strategies could be effective to synergise formative and summative assessment, especially in a Confucian-influenced setting such as Hong Kong. However, they also suggest that the positive impact of these strategies needs more evidence from other educational levels and in various national contexts.

The strategies of AfL have been identified mostly in Western educational contexts. However, it is unclear whether these strategies would be equally effective when used in different levels of education in different countries. The diversity of contexts might inform other effective strategies in practices of AfL. The next section will examine how sociocultural factors influence AfL practices, and to what extent these factors facilitate assessment in the support of learning.

2.2.5 Impact of sociocultural factors on the use of assessment for learning

What factors encourage or inhibit practices of assessment for learning and what conditions make assessment for learning more effective in the support of learning?

Although assessment for learning can play a vital role in enhancing student learning, there are a number of questions around how it can be applied widely in practice (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Boud & Associates, 2010; Newton, 2007; Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013). In their review conducted in 1998, Black and Wiliam stated that formative assessment was "weak in practice" (p. 20). Sebatane (1998) criticised Black and Wiliam's (1998b) claim about the positive influence of formative assessment in enhancing student learning outcomes as an over-generalisation. He questioned "whether the same kind of results would be obtained if the experiments cited were replicated in a different contextual setting" (1998, p. 126). Further, a great deal of following research showed that although recent decades have witnessed a great wave of assessment reform in many countries around the world, shifting the focus from only summative assessment to more formative assessment, few changes have been seen in assessment practices (Berry, 2011a; Tan, 2011a).

There are several sociocultural factors involved in the effective implementation of AfL. Black and Wiliam (1998a, p. 88) emphasise that assessment "… is far from a merely technical problem. Rather, it is deeply social and personal". As highlighted in the previous section, a lack of consensus in the understanding of formative assessment or AfL has led to restrictions in using and measuring its effectiveness. Further, as the ARG (1999, p. 2) asserts, the implementation of AfL "calls for different priorities, new procedures and new commitment" and these changes must align with sociocultural factors in a situated context (Black & Wiliam, 2005).

At the school level, practices of AfL faced a number of challenges when applied in different contexts. The greatest threat for the use of formative assessment is the dominance of an accountability purpose (Berry, 2011c; Broadfoot, Oldfield, Sutherland, & Timmis, 2014; DeLuca, Luu, Sun, & Klinger, 2012). Research has found that under pressure of accountability, "teaching well is incompatible with raising test scores" (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 50). This is because when teachers focus on maximising students' scores, they may reduce attention to developing higher order-thinking skills. Second, teachers' limited understanding of AfL was also indicated as

one barrier in England (Black et al., 2006), because this limitation has resulted in a mechanical and superficial implementation of AfL in practice (Klenowski, 2009; Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Stobart, 2008; Torrance, 2012).

Time, class size, and resources have been reported as either supportive or inhibitive elements for applying AfL in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong (Carless, 2011; OECD, 2005; Torrance & Pryor, 2001). It was found that using AfL is more difficult in large classes because teachers are challenged to evaluate each student's current level and to have suitable interventions for every student (OECD, 2005; Sadler, 1989; Torrance & Pryor, 2001; Yorke, 2003). Carless (2011) further found that difficulties related to time are varied. It includes not only limited time for AfL under pressure of content delivery, but also teachers' workload and its impact on their limited time for self-reflection or other professional development activities. The lack of appropriate models for teacher professional development on assessment was found to create challenges for the integration of AfL (Lee & Wiliam, 2005).

At the tertiary level, the application of AfL was complex and problematic. In China, research conducted in two universities by Chen et al. (2013) revealed that formative assessment was interpreted as 'process assessment', which consisted of midterm assessment and student participation. This process assessment result was then calculated for final results of a subject. It appeared that the focus of this interpretation was on summative assessment, and consequently directed assessment practices in English education in China towards summative assessment. Similarly, Tran (2015) explored the practices of assessment for learning in teaching languages in two Vietnamese institutions and found little evidence of implementing assessment for learning in current practices of both universities due to contextual and sociocultural factors such as high-stakes testing and universities' policies.

Pham and Renshaw (2015a) contended that the adoption of AfL in Confucian-influenced settings was hinderd by the potential mismatch between principles of AfL and the local learning culture. For example, while peer assessment often requires students to discuss with their peers, the collectivist culture in Asian countries, such as Vietnam, might make students hesitate to challenge their peers' opinions as well as to assess their peers' work (Pham & Renshaw, 2015b; Nguyen et al., 2006; Nguyen, 2008). Nguyen and Walker (2014) conducted a comparative study on sustainable assessment practices at one university in the UK and one university in Vietnam. They

found that self and peer assessment tasks were not commonly used in either university. It was a surprising finding as the UK is the home of the theory of AfL. Further, according to Price et al. (2011), from the 1990s, the culture of AfL was encouraged in UK universities. However, there has been much criticism of assessment practice in this context (Medland, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Rust et al., 2005) because of the continuance towards a testing culture (Medland, 2014; Price et al., 2011). These findings reveal that AfL faces many challenges in all higher education contexts.

A number of sociocultural factors impact the use of AfL. The next section analyses the influence of major sociocultural factors: policy, teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching skills, students' beliefs about learning and the learning culture, as well as school and institutional factors.

2.2.5.1 Policy in education

Although it now is fairly widely accepted that AfL and feedback are important, the development of practice in this area will need a concerted push from policy makers (Assessment Reform Group, 1999, p. 1). The over-emphasis on testing scores for accountability has been claimed to negatively influence teaching and learning practices (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Black & Wiliam, 2005; Klenowski, 2011a). Such testing may inhibit learning for active practice in a knowledge-based economy which requires individuals to become continuous learners (Stiggins, 2007), and may also inhibit the incorporation of AfL into teaching practices (OECD, 2005; Stobart, 2008; Wiliam et al., 2004; Yorke, 2003). Findings show consistently that in an assessment culture which focuses on summative tests, there is little room for formative feedback because teaching and learning are strongly directed by tests (Berry, 2011b; Boud, 1995a; Carless, 2011; Stobart, 2008). Although it is difficult to balance formative and summative tasks, AfL practices can be promoted by focusing policy statements on the principles of AfL at a classroom level.

2.2.5.2 Teachers' beliefs of learning, and teaching skills

Teachers' beliefs about learning influence the way they apply principles of AfL to their practices (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). For example, some teachers view learning as the process of acquisition. From this view of learning, they understand assessment as the teacher's authoritative responsibility. Students are seen to have inadequate skills and expertise to evaluate their own and others' work. Such views of assessment may lead teachers to limit opportunities for peer and self-assessment

(Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Sadler, 1989). Another concern is that if students engage openly in giving feedback, this may undermine the teacher's authority in the classroom. It is important that teachers believe that students can learn best through actively participating in classroom activities (Wren & Cotton, 2008), and understand how to apply the "spirit" of AfL (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). This understanding may lead teachers to use an interactive model of teaching which focuses on students' participation, in a culture of respect, risk-taking and accepting mistakes as learning opportunities. Such a classroom culture is an important factor for effective implementation of AfL (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Boud & Associates, 2010; Glasson, 2009; OECD, 2005).

Teachers' teaching skills have substantially impacted the effectiveness of assessment for learning. As AfL is an integral part of teaching, its effectiveness directly depends on teachers' perceptions and teaching skills. For example, if teaching practices focus on assessing the quantity of work and grading, providing limited advice for improvement, and knowing little of their students' learning needs, then these practices will limit AfL in their classrooms (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black & Wiliam, 1998a). The reason for this stems from teachers' limited understanding of AfL (Mansell et al., 2009). Both beliefs and teaching skills of teachers affect the use of AfL. For this reason, many authors have recommended that teachers should learn how to use AfL through professional development (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; DeLuca et al., 2012; Sadler, 1989; Stiggins, 2005).

2.2.5.3 Students' beliefs of learning and learning culture

Many students may not be motivated by assessment for learning due to their cultural beliefs about assessment. Some students believe that assessment is always associated with grades and ranking (Carless et al., 2006). When feedback does not affect the final results, students may believe it is not worth acting on. In addition, many students maintain an inherent belief that assessment is the sole responsibility of the teacher or that they lack the ability to accurately assess their own performance. Such views of assessment may reduce the use of AfL.

The effectiveness of AfL requires students to change their ways of thinking about learning and assessment. Successful learning occurs when learners take control of their own learning and collectively contribute to the creation of knowledge rather than passive absorption of facts. Assessment for learning is shown to be effective if

students are responsible and active in their learning, and actively engage in the assessment process to become self-assessors (Sambell, Mcdowell, & Montgomery, 2012). This leads to a rethinking of the traditional role of the teacher and student.

2.2.5.4 School and institution factors

Research has found that school factors, which include "school leadership, assessment policy and practice, school culture, available teaching materials, class size and factor of time", can become supporting or inhibiting factors in the practice of AfL (Carless, 2011, p. 95). Tension arises when school culture is dominated by traditional beliefs about learning and assessment (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004). In contrast, teachers' cooperation, leadership support, and available teaching resources facilitate AfL (Carless, 2011). The same factors exist at the higher education level. Leadership, curriculum, policy, resources and the university culture all impact on the introduction of new practices. For example, the structure and content of curriculum can support or hinder AfL practices. To support learning, allowing time for student improvement is an important factor. On the other hand, designing curriculum as modules of 'topics' or 'content' may not create the opportunities for students to improve their work (Sadler, 1989). To facilitate AfL, it is important to design useful and informative curriculum for learners (Crooks, 1988) and clearly state the expected outcomes in the curriculum so that it may effectively direct formative assessment tasks (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Carless et al., 2006; Stiggins, 2005).

Effective practices of AfL involve a number of sociocultural factors, in which the teacher plays a crucial role. However, as Black and Wiliam (1998b) argued, it may be unfair to put pressure on teachers alone. The improvement of AfL also depends on a number of changes in educational policy, curriculum, school culture, and the agency of the learner. Change needs to occur in the perception of the nature of learning and assessment in the 21st century which "does not only focus on immediate achievement but on building the capacity of students to act well in the future" (Boud, 2010, p. 2). This means that while the summative function of assessment should not be undermined, the formative purpose of assessment must gain appropriate attention in policy and practice. Black and Wiliam (1998b, p. 88) remind us, "there is no quick fix that can alter existing practice by promising rapid rewards" because the effective implementation of AfL involves a range of factors. From a sociocultural perspective, each country has to build an idiosyncratic approach for their assessment system which

"effectively serves both [a] formative and summative function" (Black & Wiliam, 2005, p. 260).

In conclusion, improvement of learning is the main purpose of any education system at all levels (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). Theoretically, there are several ways to reach this goal and the potential of assessment to support ongoing learning can be powerful (Carless et al., 2006). Assessment for learning has developed over several decades, yet it is "both conceptually and practically still a work-in-progress" (Bennett, 2011, p. 21). Like other innovations, AfL needs time to be effective in classrooms, and more research is needed to develop its theory and practices, especially in different contexts. What is lacking is research conducted in higher education and in Asian countries such as Vietnam (Carless, 2011). Due to a recent wave of reform in the Vietnamese education system, many Western educational approaches are being adopted to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham, 2010a, 2011c). Although there has been some evidence of the effectiveness of AfL, these findings were reported mainly within Western education systems and in schools. Sociocultural theories of learning suggest that in a different culture, the use and effect of AfL may be different. Therefore, Western educational models and practices such as AfL need to be adapted to align to the context of Vietnam, where teaching and learning is strongly influenced by Confucius culture and educational characteristics of the colonial influence of the French, Russians, and Americans.

From a sociocultural perspective, any examination of Vietnamese education and particularly assessment practices must be based on an understanding of the historical and cultural context of Vietnam (Fry, 2009; Pham & Fry, 2004). The following section provides a brief description of the Vietnamese educational context and how this context may influence the implementation of AfL in higher education in Vietnam.

2.3 THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN VIETNAM

The development of the Vietnamese education system can be linked with changes in Vietnamese history and culture. The next section outlines the major points and characteristics in the history of national educational development.

2.3.1 Vietnamese historical and cultural context

The history of Vietnam can be traced back to the second millennium B.C.E (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Pham, 1995) and includes many wars to protect its

independence from foreign invaders. From 111BC to 938AD, a period of over 1000 years, Vietnam was dominated by the Chinese (Pham, 1995). This occupation brought Taoism and Confucian ideologies to Vietnam and these core tenets have strongly influenced Vietnamese culture. In 938 AD, Vietnam gained independence from China. This was followed successively by the Ly, Tran, Ho, Le, and Nguyen dynasties which existed until 1945. Buddhism came to Vietnam in the Ly Dynasty and became one of the main religions. The influences of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism on Vietnamese culture are still significant.

French influences occurred during nearly one century of French colonialism in the Indochinese Peninsula from 1858. In 1945, the newly-established Vietnam government gained power from the French in the August Revolution, which ended the feudal Mandarinate period in Vietnam, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was born (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Ngo, 2011). The French returned to invade Vietnam one year later but they were completely defeated by the victory of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The history of Vietnam witnessed American influence in the South of Vietnam for nearly 20 years from 1956 to 1975. During this period, the Northern Vietnamese economy and the structure of society were built on the communist model of the former Soviet Union, which was strongly influenced by Marxist ideology, while those in the South were influenced by capitalism. In 1975, the North and the South were reunited. Vietnam faced a number of challenges after reunification, which included "an economic embargo" by the United States, and "border wars with China in the North and the Khmer Rouge in the Southwest" (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 207). These factors caused numerous difficulties for the education system of Vietnam. It has been described as a 'chaotic situation' because of the incorporation of different types of educational systems (Pham & Fry, 2004), as well as the lack of facilities and teachers (Le, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 1985).

During the next decade, the Vietnamese economy was greatly influenced by the command economic model of the former Soviet Union, in which the planning of production, distribution and investment in the main sectors of the economy were highly directed and controlled by government. It has been claimed that this model has hindered Vietnamese development (Bui, 2010). In 1986, Vietnam initiated a market-oriented economy under the policy of 'Đổi Mới' (economic innovation), which marked

and created significant changes in political orientation and socioeconomic fields in Vietnam (Harman et al., 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2010; Pham & Fry, 2004). For example, Vietnam expanded bilateral relations with other countries and encouraged the involvement of the private sector in both economy and education (Nguyen, 2014b; Pham, 2006, 2011a). These radical changes opened up the potential for significant reform in Vietnamese higher education.

In 2006, Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organisation. Economic integration led to a rapid increase in Vietnam's development over the last decade and this has put high pressure on the system of higher education to train high-level human resources for the country's demands.

In terms of culture, Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia where 'water-rice' agriculture dominates (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Whitmore, 1987). Water-rice agriculture appeared in the outset of human history in Vietnam, and requires people to live in a settled community for a certain time in order to grow rice and harvest crops (Le, 1997; Tran, 1995). This living situation constitutes the collective cultural characteristic of the Vietnamese people. In recent years, many Western cultural values have influenced Vietnam due to the process of economic integration and globalisation. However, Vietnamese cultural values shaped by 'water-rice' agriculture have remained (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Tran, To, Nguyen, Lam, & Tran, 1996), alongside the cultural influences of Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and Communist ideologies (Whitmore, 1987). These very significant values include respect for harmony and effort, saving face, and fondness of learning (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Pham & Fry, 2004; Tran et al., 1996; Whitmore, 1987). The following section analyses the formation, demonstration and impact of these cultural values on the lives of Vietnamese people and teaching and learning systems.

2.3.1.1 Respect for harmony

Vietnamese people value the maintenance of harmony in their social relations. This cultural value is rooted in the water-rice agriculture (Tran et al., 1996), characterised by a dependence on nature, a need to cooperate to protect crops, a collective spirit and the importance of community. Generally, Vietnamese people view maintaining harmony as the basis of community.

The respect for harmony is also influenced by Buddhist ideology. One of the tenets of Buddhism is to live in harmony with others and to avoid conflict. This is linked to the belief that there is a next circle of life and the individual current life can have an influence on the next circle, according to the principle of cause and effect (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). It follows then, that if anyone behaves cruelly to others, they will be punished. The punishments could either be an inability to enter heaven or to be reincarnated.

Respect for harmony is also shaped by Confucian culture due to the thousand-year period of Chinese domination (London, 2010; McCornac & Phan, 2005; McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009). One of the major Confucian values is to achieve social order through setting up hierarchical relationships in society (Hofstede & Bond, 2005). In this framework, junior members (children and students) are required to be compliant and obedient to senior members (parents and teachers). Confucian philosophy teaches people to behave appropriately according to their role and position, which are fixed to avoid disorder in the society (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001).

Communist ideology continued to reinforce this cultural value of harmony (Doan, 2005). National unity and collectivist spirit, which highlight the importance of group benefit over individual needs and benefits, are the main characteristics of Communism. The lesson drawn from the wars is that the national unity and collective spirit created the national strength for Vietnam to defeat foreign invaders.

In recent years, Western culture has influenced the collective spirit of Vietnamese people because of globalisation. It is claimed that Vietnamese generations born in this century may have a less collective spirit, such that, they are less likely to devote their needs to others than previous generations (Dang, 2012; Nguyen, 2012c). However, respect for harmony is still considered a core cultural tradition (Tran et al., 1996). This value has a strong influence on the processes of teaching and learning in Vietnam.

The respect for harmony in Vietnamese culture brings about both gains and drawbacks for teaching and learning. On the one hand, the collective spirit can encourage students to build up team-work skills so that they mutually help each other to maximise their learning. On the other hand, the collective spirit can make students avoid giving direct comments to others because of the fear of creating conflict in the

group. This may be a barrier for the implementation of peer assessment (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham, 2011b; Pham & Gillies, 2010). The respect for harmony may give the teacher an authoritative power in 'delivering' knowledge and skills to students (Yang, Zheng, & Li, 2006). This hierarchy has contributed to the long lasting transmission model of teaching in Vietnamese classes. The persistence of the transmission model is considered a main obstacle for improving learning in Vietnamese higher education (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2010; Nguyen, 2010a; Pham, 2010a).

2.3.1.2 Face saving

Face saving refers to how Vietnamese people generally try to maintain a respectable image in the minds of others. It has been argued that to Vietnamese people, reputation is more important than material possessions (Tran, 1995; Tran et al., 1996). This means that Vietnamese people are careful in selecting their words and behaviours to protect their image (Tran et al., 1996). They also avoid providing comments which might cause offence to others, in order to maintain harmony (Kemp, 2009; Tran et al., 1996). The formation of a face-saving culture in Vietnam originates from the collective spirit and the impact of Confucianism. The social hierarchy in Confucian culture makes junior members avoid confrontation or conflict in relationships with seniors in particular.

Many suggest that the culture of saving face has negatively influenced the Vietnamese student learning style (McCornac & Phan, 2005; Pham, 2010a). For instance, students in Vietnam can be unwilling to express their own opinions, to ask questions and to participate in class in case they lose 'face'. This cultural behaviour may limit students in the development of critical thinking (McCornac & Phan, 2005; Pham, 2010a, 2011b, 2014), because students perceive critique as personal criticism. In addition, when students receive negative feedback from their peers and teacher, the fear of losing face may cause students, who achieve poor results, to become pessimistic and thus inhibit the next phases of their learning. This type of behaviour contrasts with the principles of AfL, where teachers are advised to create a supportive atmosphere in their classroom so that students are willing to give and receive constructive feedback (Pham, 2014; Stobart, 2008).

2.3.1.3 Respect for effort

Under the influence of water-rice agriculture and Confucian culture, Vietnamese people believe that hard work leads to good results. With limited understanding of nature in the primitive period, Vietnamese ancestors worked hard to fight natural forces to protect their crops (Tran, 1995; Tran et al., 1996). When a crop failed, Vietnamese people would try to maintain positive thinking and then continue to cultivate with better hope for their next crops. Vietnamese people believe that "if you put in the work to sharpen the steel, it will eventually turn into needles" (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Phan, 2009, p. 55) (*as translated in Vietnamese: Có công mài sắt có ngày nên kim*). Similarly, Confucius believed that effort, practice and drilling leads to success (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). He valued students' effort and encouraged candidates to re-sit exams in order to pass.

Hard work and resilience is now believed by many to be a crucial factor for improving learning. For example, Dweck (2006) argues that ability level is not fixed, but determined more by effort and strategy. This belief contributes to the development of a growth mindset in which students are self-motivated to achieve success.

Respect for effort is a worthy tradition that Vietnamese teachers value (Tran, 2004a). While not dismissing the Vietnamese respect for hard work, it is important to note that for AfL, 'hard work' entails not merely the time a student spends on homework, but also their use of higher order thinking skills where they engage deeply with the content, making links to other learning and contexts, and evaluating different perspectives.

2.3.1.4 Fondness for learning

Vietnamese people have a great love for knowledge and learning (Ngo, 2011; Pham & Fry, 2004; Tran et al., 1996). The origin of Vietnamese fondness for learning can also be explained by the Confucian influence. Confucian philosophy claims that filial piety is considered as the core value in human ethics (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Tran, 1929). The best way to demonstrate filial piety is to study diligently to pass exams and to achieve success. The love of learning, according to Confucian culture, is the best way to bring happiness to parents, family and the family name. Vietnamese students are encouraged to appreciate learning and to make a great effort in learning.

The Vietnamese tradition of fondness for learning was evident in the Temple of Literature in Hanoi, built in 1070 by the Ly Dynasty. This temple was built to worship Confucius and Chu Van An, a well-known Vietnamese teacher, who was both excellent and kind, in the Tran Dynasty. The names of the candidates who gained a Doctoral Degree in the feudal Mandarin period were written on stone stelae attached to stone turtles to be honoured by society. In Vietnamese culture, the turtle is one of the nation's four holy creatures, and symbolises longevity. According to Pham & Fry (2004), "this cultural heritage demonstrates the great significance placed on learning, and the special respect and honour bestowed by the Vietnamese on teachers, scholars, students, and mentors" (p. 201). In many Vietnamese villages, some 'family names' maintain an organisation called 'Learning Encouragement'. Annually, this organisation will give rewards to excellent children in the 'family name' to encourage them to learn.

Figure 2.2. Stone Stelaes and Turtles in Literature Temple, Hanoi, Vietnam; the First 'University' (Ho's photogragh).

The respect for learning was also reflected in Ho Chi Minh's ideology and Communism. In 1945, President Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to Vietnamese pupils in which he stated that "Whether the Vietnamese mountains and rivers will attain glory and whether the Vietnamese land will gloriously stand on an equal footing with the powers in the five continents, this depends to a great extent on your study" (cited in

Fry, 2009, p. 237). This sentence has become the motto for teaching and learning in many Vietnamese schools. The recognition of the importance of education and learning is also reflected in the 7th Party Congress, 1991 of the Vietnamese government:

> With science and technology, education in general and higher education in particular is considered as the first national priority policy, as the driving force and the basic condition in ensuring the realization of the socio-economic objectives, and of building and defending the Fatherland (cited in Tran, Vu, & Sloper, 1995, p. 67).

Due to this respect for learning, Vietnamese people always show respect for teachers. It is believed that since teachers usually possess knowledge and human wisdom, they deserve appreciation from society. Teachers are often thought to be a good role model for students (Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002). Therefore they have an equal responsibility as parents in inculcating moral values in students. For the Vietnamese, teachers are respected as parents (Tran et al., 1996). Vietnamese educational history records many stories about teacher-student relationships. Although a student can hold a high position in society, he always shows respect for his teachers because Vietnamese people believe that "without a teacher, you cannot have any success" (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 201).

The Vietnamese tradition of respect for the teacher also means that Vietnamese people have high moral and intellectual expectations of teachers and this demands/stimulates teachers to constantly develop themselves as role models (Nguyen & Mcinnnis, 2002). The respect for teachers may contribute to the quality of the teacher-student relationship, which is believed to be an important factor to enhance the effectiveness of AfL and the quality of teaching and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). However, on the other hand, respect for teachers, directed by Confucian culture, may make Vietnamese students think that teachers and text-books alone represent the truth. This can limit chances for students to develop their own thinking, and inhibit their development of critical thinking skills (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002).

2.3.2 The origin and development of the higher education system in Vietnam

Vietnam has a long history of higher education (Fry, 2009; Pham & Fry, 2004; Pham, 1995). In 1076, the Royal College (*Văn Miếu Quốc Tử Giám*), considered as

the first university in Vietnam, was founded at the Temple of Literature during the Ly Dynasty to transmit moral education to children of dignitaries (Pham, 1995). The history of modern Vietnamese higher education has been generally examined since 1945 when the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established. The new government rebuilt the higher education system in reaction to French legacies. For example, French colonialism led to over 90 percent of the Vietnamese population being illiterate even in their own language, with few colleges founded in Vietnam between 1858 and 1945 (Bui, 2008). It was reported that there was only one university in the Indochinese Peninsula until 1945 (Bui, 2008). The new Vietnamese government focused on eradicating illiteracy and establishing new universities.

According to Le (2008), the higher education system in the North of Vietnam experienced many difficulties from 1945 to 1975. Institutions had to move to mountainous and rural provinces due to the French re-invasion and the American escalation in the North, resulting in less classroom time and fewer teaching facilities, a factor which has had serious consequences for higher education in Vietnam since the end of the occupation (Le et al., 1985; Pham & Fry, 2004) .

Between 1954 and 1975, Vietnam was divided into the North and the South, resulting in the existence of two parallel systems of higher education (Fry, 2009; Le & Sloper, 1995). In the North, the Communist school model of the former Soviet Union was applied to Vietnamese universities. This model favoured education in politics and ideology; therefore, Marxism and Leninism became official subjects in higher education in the North. Many Russian experts came to Vietnam to help build universities, while outstanding Vietnamese students were sent to Russia and other Eastern European countries to study. These students later returned to Vietnam and held key positions in many fields, explaining the persistence of elements of the Soviet education system.

In the South, under American educational influence, the higher education system included four autonomous institutes, namely Saigon, Hue, Can Tho, and Thu Duc Technology institutes, divided into universities or faculties. After unification in 1975, Vietnam's system of higher education was unified and the Communist model of universities was also applied in the South of Vietnam.

The policy of economic innovation in 1986 in Vietnam resulted in crucial changes for the Vietnamese higher education system (George, 2010; Le, 1991; Pham,

1995). During the 1990s, the government recognised the importance of education in the social and economic development of Vietnam and the need for the higher education system to be reformed and expanded (Hayden & Lam, 2010; Pham, 1995). In 1993, the government introduced new regulations to significantly reform the system of higher education (Hayden & Lam, 2010). It replaced the Soviet model which was generally small, specialised colleges and institutes, with a unified national system of large, comprehensive, research oriented universities. The reduction of the government control, the expansion of training quantity, and diversification of training modes were the transformative changes for higher education in this period (Nguyen, 2014b; Pham & Fry, 2004).

The last decade has witnessed further significant changes in Vietnamese higher education due to Vietnam's integration in the global community. There has been a pressing need to train a more skilled labour force to meet the requirements of global integration and the country's goal of industrialisation and modernisation by 2020 (Harman & Nguyen, 2010). During 2001-2010, the system of Vietnamese higher education was directed towards the Strategy for Educational Development (2001-2010), which has the prime guiding principles for education: "Education as a top national policy; Develop a Vietnamese popular, national and modern education; Education as a common cause for the State and all people" (Nguyen, 2010a, p. 200). The objectives for higher education in Vietnam in this period were "to provide high quality human resources in line with the socio-economic structure of the industrialisation and modernisation of the nation; enhance the competitiveness in fair co-operation for Vietnam in its international economic integration" (MoET, 2001, p. 24). In 2004, the government identified fourteen "key" higher education institutions in order to provide more resources, and encouraged innovation. In 2005, the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) indicated the main shortcomings of the system, and passed new visions for improvement by 2020.

According to the Resolution of HERA (MoET, 2005), Vietnam has reformed the system of higher education fundamentally and comprehensively. The major points are summarised by Hayden and Lam (2010) as follows. It is important to note that the last two points show the Government's commitment to innovate teaching and assessment approaches in Vietnamese universities.

- Expand the higher education system

- Increase the number of qualified teachers to ensure a staff/student ratio of (1:20)

- Establish two types of higher education institutions, one to be research-oriented and the other to be more vocationally applied

- Expand the private sector (40 percent of all higher education enrolments by 2020)

- Develop an advanced research and development culture

- Transit from annual training to credit-based training

- Innovate curriculum which must be linked to practice

- Innovate teaching methods by applying interactive teaching modes and information and communication technologies

- Adopt teaching methods in higher education which focus on developing the autonomy of learners.

It has been argued that these reforms are ambitious in the context of Vietnam (Brooks, 2010; Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2010; Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham, 2010b). Hayden and Lam (2010) believe that there is a paradox because while the system has attempted to expand rapidly, it has been difficult to ensure a sufficient number of qualified academic staff and thus enhance the quality of the system. This predicament provides challenges for Vietnamese higher education.

Many significant achievements of Vietnamese higher education have been recorded since 1986. There has been a rapid growth in the number of universities and colleges in Vietnam, from 101 in 1987 (Bui, 2010; MoET, 2009) to 436 in 2015 (MoET, 2015). Young Vietnamese people now have a number of opportunities to participate in higher education (Hayden & Lam, 2010). According to Nguyen (2010a), these achievements include an increase in social equity, and in social participation in education. This means Vietnamese higher education has changed significantly from the model of "ivory-tower' education" (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009, p. 123) influenced by the ancient Chinese, French and the former Soviet Union, to an educational model for the masses. This achievement is considered as a positive change to build a knowledge society in Vietnam.

Despite these positive achievements, the higher education system in Vietnam continues to face many challenges. Quality has been a major concern, because most universities have been in transition from annual training to credit-based learning. This means that teachers are now expected to adopt a student-centred approach in their teaching and assessment in order to develop students' autonomy in a more flexible

curriculum. Despite these changes, research has found that the numbers of staff, curriculum, teaching methods, and facilities have remained almost unchanged (Nguyen, 2011). According to Nguyen, Oliver et al. (2009, p. 123), "the government is under great pressure to increase access while simultaneously raising the quality of higher education".

Some characteristics of Chinese and the former Soviet Union education systems remain (Bui, 2010; Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009), as impediments to quality. Educational approaches such as the separation of teaching and research, and centralised management in the former Soviet Union's education system, combine to prevent Vietnamese higher education from striving for autonomy and building research-oriented universities (Hayden & Lam, 2007; Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009). Further, the model of transmission influenced by Confucian culture is believed to limit students' critical and creative thinking skills, and has a negative impact on the quality of training (Harman & Nguyen, 2010).

The Vietnamese higher education system has attempted to perform a radical transformation to meet the country's needs. At the policy level, the Vietnamese government passed the Higher Education Law on 18th June 2012, to regulate the process of teaching and learning. The regulations in this law strongly assert the autonomy of universities, the expansion of private universities, and diverse training modes to enhance the quality of training. At a practical level, profound changes in financial investment, curriculum, teaching methods, modern facilities for study, and educational management have been supported and implemented to enhance quality. To integrate into the global higher education community, many Western educational approaches have been introduced and applied (Pham, 2011b). However, Vietnamese cultural, social and historical factors need to be considered if Western policies and practices are to be adopted or adapted for successful inclusion in Vietnamese education (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham & Gillies, 2010).

2.3.3 Teaching and learning in current Vietnamese higher education

Because of the cultural, historical and political factors described above, Vietnamese students are used to learning through memorisation of facts (McCornac & Phan, 2005; Pham, 2010a). In recent years, innovation in the practice of teaching and learning has been encouraged by the government. Interactive models, which focus on developing the autonomy of learners, are now promoted in Vietnamese universities

(Harman & Nguyen, 2010). Information and community technologies are also increasing in popularity.

Despite policy changes and directives, many issues still need to be addressed in the practices of teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities. Teaching is still predominantly teacher-centered (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Nguyen, 2010a; Pham, 2010b). One reason for this is that many lecturers lack understanding of concepts such as 'learner autonomy' and how to motivate students' autonomy (Nguyen, 2014a; Phan, 2015), while some also lack the confidence to implement these new concepts in their classes (Nguyen, 2014a). The rigid teacher/student hierarchy continues (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Luong, 2015; Pham, 2010b) and poor teaching facilities have also contributed to limitations in teaching and learning (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Sloper, 1995; Pham, 2010b).

Furthermore, teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities tends to be directed by tests (Can, 2011). As educational qualifications are considered as the most important factor to get well-paid jobs, Vietnamese students usually try their best to attain high scores in their exams. As a result, Vietnamese lecturers are under pressure regarding their students' scores due to the common understanding that students' scores reflect a lecturer's teaching ability and the reputation of a university. In credit-based training, as students have a choice of lecturers for their subjects, so the scores of students in the previous course may impact on the decisions of students in the next course. To improve the quality of teaching and learning, it has been suggested that the system needs more resources and significant changes in all areas (Hayden & Lam, 2010).

Changes in the assessment system should be a critical part of this reform. Such changes could shape teaching and learning because assessment, teaching and learning are closely interrelated (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Boud & Associates, 2010). For instance, if assessment tasks only require students to recall knowledge, then a student's approach to learning will be at a surface level (Trigwell, 2010). This is in conflict with the expectations for students in higher education to build and demonstrate critical and creative thinking skills. For this reason, reforming the assessment system is believed to be important to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Vietnam (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2010b).

2.3.4 Historical assessment policy and practices in Vietnamese higher education

Assessment in the feudal Mandarin period (1075-1919) was characterised by Mandarin competitive examinations (Bui, 2008; Pham, 1995; Tran, 2010). Confucian exams were first held in 1075, in the Ly Dynasty and ended in the Nguyen Dynasty in 1919 and were organised only for men and for elites in the society (Bui, 2008; Pham, 1995). These exams aimed to choose talented scholars to become functionaries. The curriculum for the examinations included Confucian textbooks which contained "the essential contents of Confucianism" (Pham, 1995, p. 45). Candidates were required to memorise the classic texts to learn how to effectively manage the country. The candidates often considered the experiences and quotes of the previous generations as perfect models.

Throughout eight centuries from 1075 to 1919, Confucian examinations exerted both positive and negative influences on current assessment practices in Vietnam. On the one hand, Confucian values encourage Vietnamese students to work diligently to pass exams. On the other hand, these values encourage rote type study. Even today, Vietnamese assessment questions tend to encourage memorisation and superficial learning (Le & Can, 2006; Le & Pham, 2011). Naturally, some assessment practices in Vietnam have evolved since Confucian exams. It is well known that this style of learning is unsuitable for learners in the 21st century (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Pham, 2010a).

In the period of 1858-1945, parallel to imperial education, Vietnam experienced French colonised education. For colonial purposes, the French replaced the feudal Confucian education system with an elitist French educational system. For example, only a few schools and universities were founded (Bui, 2008; Pham & Fry, 2004). This system was considered irrelevant and unrelated to Vietnam, as the language of teaching and curricula were designed to serve mainly the children of local French colonialists and to train a few Vietnamese to work for colonisation. Examination was a common assessment practice in the French colonial education system (Bui, 2008).

In the period of 1945-1975, while Vietnam was at war with the French and the Americans, there were limited records of assessment practices in the higher education system. After 1975, two parallel higher education systems, which had existed in the North and the South of Vietnam, were unified. Huynh and Le (2009) described assessment practices as empirical. That is, the Ministry of Education and Training did

not issue any documents on assessing student learning. There was also no assessment subject in teacher-training programs and little research on assessment was conducted in the period (Huynh & Le, 2009). This continued until the 1990s.

Since 1999, assessment of student learning has gained more attention from the Vietnamese government. In 1999, the MoET issued Regulation No. 4, considered the first official document regarding assessment in higher education. Student outcomes were calculated by the average of grades of final exams. However, this document also required students to gain at least a grade of 5 in mid-term exams to gain entry to final exams. In 2003, the Board for Educational Measurement and Accreditation, which is responsible for assessment activities at all levels in Vietnam, was established. Since 2006, the "Two No" campaign, which means saying "no" to "cheating on examinations" and "exaggerated achievements in education", has been conducted (MoET, 2006b). The introduction of this campaign shows MoET's attempt to enhance the reliability of examinations.

In 2006, to make assessment results more reliable and valid and to develop the autonomy of learners, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Regulation No. 25 for assessment in higher education (MoET, 2006a). This document regulated learning outcomes to be assessed during the course and at the end of the course, with a wide range of methods such as questioning, multiple choice questions, essay responses, assignments, and performance assessments (MoET, 2006a). Assessment methods that can assess and stimulate performance skills and creative thinking and problem solving skills of learners are encouraged.

Since 2007, the total grade of a unit is the combination of attendance, midterm and final scores. The calculation of learning outcomes has become more complicated. According to Decision No 43 in credit-based training (MoET, 2007), the grade is first marked on a scale of 10, and then transferred to a letter system. The system translates scores to letters: A = (8.5 – 10): Distinction, pass; B = (7.0 – 8.4): Credit, pass; C = (5.5 – 6.9): Survive, pass; D = (4.0 – 5.4): Under-survive, pass; F = under 4: Poor, fail. This letter system is later transferred back to the number system, ranging from 4 to 0. For example: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0. Although many changes were made in recent assessment policy, the use of assessment results is mainly for classification and certification (Huynh & Le, 2009).

There has been little research on the theory of assessment and measurement in Vietnamese higher education. The terms 'Formative Assessment' or 'Assessment for Learning' are relatively new in Vietnam. In 2014, at the elementary level, MoET has issued Circular No.30 which stipulates the shift from a summative assessment approach to the philosophy of assessment for learning (MoET, 2014). Some researchers in Vietnam have started to highlight the importance of assessment for learning. For example, Thiep (2012) introduced a theoretical overview of assessing student outcomes and included formative assessment as one type of assessment. In some recent official documents, MoET includes the term classroom assessment as an area which will be the focus of assessment transformation in Vietnam by 2020. The term 'classroom assessment' is understood by MoET as an increase in continuous and periodical assessment at the classroom level. The aim is to motivate student learning through giving frequent, small classroom tests.

Current assessment policy (MoET, 2005, 2012a, 2012b) shows significant changes in the future of assessment in higher education in Vietnam. The main points are listed below:

- Innovations in assessment and teaching methods, focusing on the development of the autonomy of learners
- Use of a wide range of assessment methods
- Assurance of the reliability and validity of assessment
- Addressing continuous assessment

Practically, many limitations in assessment practices are still reported. Huynh and Le (2009) outlined an overview of assessment practice of student achievement in Vietnamese universities from 1975 to 2009. They concluded that there have been few changes to the assessment practices which currently tend to rank students rather than use assessment for learning. Other authors identified other shortcomings in assessment practice: outdated assessment methods, lack of reliability and validity (Le & Can, 2006), and teaching and learning to the tests (Nguyen, 2012b). Le and Pham (2011) investigated three teacher-training universities and found that essay responses were popular in final exams, representing 76.5 percent of total assessment methods; almost all of the questions in examinations required students to use lower order thinking skills (96.1 percent).

Some researchers have explored peer assessment in South Vietnam. Pham and Gillies (2010) conducted research with 145 second-year university students in Ho Chi Minh city using a questionnaire, observations, and interviews over one semester. These authors indicated that while Vietnamese students hesitated to give direct feedback to members in their group, they participated more actively in evaluating other groups' work. The most powerful peer assessment technique for the Vietnamese students was "a combination of intra-group confirmation and intergroup confrontation" (Pham & Gillies, 2010, p. 81). In their groups, students collaborated to create a common piece of work; peer assessment was then conducted among groups. This research is important as it presents a way to use peer assessment that may be effective for Vietnamese college students, who highly appreciate the collective spirit and fear losing face. However, due to the relatively small sample size, the results may not be generalisable across Vietnam. Further, Pham and Gillies focused on peer assessment, which is only one part of assessment for learning.

2.3.5 Summary of the Vietnamese educational context

The higher education system in Vietnam has developed over many centuries and has undergone many significant reforms. The reform initiated in 2005 is expected to bring about positive changes for the system as it integrates into the global educational community. Although significant effort has been made to enhance the quality of the system, a number of problems have been identified. The quality of Vietnamese higher education is still believed to be low. This may lead to an inability of the system to develop adequate human resources to cater for the needs of industrialisation and modernisation.

There are several factors contributing to the current state of Vietnamese higher education. The historical and cultural context of Vietnam needs to be taken into account when the quality of its system is assessed. Further, the poor practice of assessment, which focuses mainly on summarising and certifying student achievement, is retarding quality. MoET has now recognised this limitation and is determined to make significant changes in the field of assessment. Extensive research by Western researchers has found tensions between summative and formative assessment. The issue of AfL becomes even more difficult when it is applied into different contexts. Therefore, more research is needed to inform the application of AfL in the Vietnamese context.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Globalisation and the emergent knowledge-based economy have required education systems to assist students to become lifelong learners. Researchers and teachers have questioned the domination of summative assessment as inhibiting the goal of lifelong learning, which has led to a rethinking of the role of assessment. The formative use of assessment was introduced to support the vision of lifelong learning, where students must learn how to learn, more than what to learn.

Understandings of formative assessment or assessment for learning have varied over time and across contexts. This has led to diverse practices, and new findings about the effectiveness of AfL in different contexts. Extensive research conducted in Western countries (Black et al., 2005; Black et al., 2006; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Mansell et al., 2009; OECD, 2005), particularly in the United Kingdom, has found positive values of AfL in learning outcomes and pedagogic practices at school level. A review of current literature has also revealed that AfL has been acknowledged as a complex issue because its effectiveness involves a range of sociocultural factors. This literature review highlights the issues associated with applying AfL in Vietnamese higher education, a different social and cultural educational setting.

The system of higher education in Vietnam has been under significant pressure to enhance the quality of teaching and learning as it attempts to integrate into the global educational community. International educational knowledge and experiences can be used by Vietnam as a shortcut to the development of its own education system. However, the effective implementation of AfL needs adaptation in the Vietnamese context.

This study examines the question: *What are the practices of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?*

Four related sub-questions are:
- What assessment for learning strategies do Vietnamese lecturers currently use in higher education?
- How do Vietnamese lecturers enact the assessment strategies for learning?
- What are Vietnamese students' experiences of assessment for learning?
- What are the sociocultural factors that support or hinder the implementation of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?

Through analysing the AfL practices in EU, this research aims to highlight how AfL might be implemented in the Vietnamese context, to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning quality in the higher education system. Further, this study aims to provide evidence of the use of AfL in the Vietnamese context, to develop the theory and practices of AfL in Asian cultural contexts.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter outlines how the research was designed to explore the practice of assessment for learning in Vietnamese higher education. It starts with a rationale for the selected methodology, then moves to a detailed description of the case study design, which includes the research site, the boundaries of the case study and participants, research methods, and the procedures and timeline for completion of each stage of the study. The data analysis is explained in the following section. Finally, ethical issues, trustworthiness and limitations of the study are examined.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

3.1.1 A constructivist paradigm

The overall aim of this study was to examine the practice of AfL in the Vietnamese tertiary sector and to identify the sociocultural factors that may influence these practices. The study involved an in-depth analysis of the Education University's context, with the aim of discovering what AfL practices are occurring and how AfL is enacted in practice in this cultural and social context. For this reason, a constructivist paradigm was chosen as the theoretical orientation of this study.

Constructivist inquiry or naturalistic inquiry is based on the assumption that there are "multiple constructed realities that can be studied holistically" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). This approach is primarily concerned with the natural history and meaning of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). Meaning, as argued by Merriam (1988), "is embedded in people's experiences and mediated through the investigator's own perceptions" (p. 19). That is, a constructivist approach involves the researcher interpreting the events through a particular theoretical lens and through their own experiences. This embedded meaning needs to be acknowledged. In this study, interpretations of the practice of AfL involved viewing this practice through the lens of sociocultural theories of learning and through the researcher's experience as a lecturer in higher education.

This study was based on an understanding of learning as situated, which highlights the social nature of human knowledge construction. That is, knowledge is jointly created by members in a community of practice when they participate in diverse

activities in a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). The development of knowledge occurs within a specific cultural context and is situated within that culture (McCormick & Murphy, 2008). This is a sociocultural understanding of learning. From this lens, understandings about the social and cultural context of Vietnamese higher education are necessary to interpret assessment practices. For this reason, case study was an appropriate methodology to study assessment practices at EU. It enabled the researcher to probe the assessment practices of each participant lecturer in-depth and to identify how sociocultural factors shaped these practices.

3.1.2 Case study approach

Case study has been understood in many ways by different authors (Simons, 2009). In discussions of case study, Yin and Stake, two seminal authors, are usually considered. However, they have different approaches in terms of how a case study is designed and implemented.

Issues regarding the design and implementation of case study focus on defining the boundaries of the case and the role of the researcher in the study. On the one hand, Yin (2003) argues that case study is a suitable research strategy for research questions such as how and why, because it "investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). According to Yin (2003), the research findings of the case can be "generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 10). The researcher and the phenomenon are separate. On the other hand, Stake (1995, 2006) adopts an interpretivist approach in his definition of case study. He contends that case study is not a method, but is an event or a program itself. Although a researcher can conduct either single or collective case study design, the focus of a case study is to "understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Stake also believes that there is a boundary between the case and the context. The purpose of studying the case is to understand "what it is" within its context, and the researcher is an integral part of the phenomenon. As a result, there is no aim for generalisation.

Although interpretations of case study vary, many key authors agree on the purpose and focus of case study as an in-depth understanding of a certain issue within its context, with each case characterised by its particularity, complexity and uniqueness (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995; Thomas,

2011). According to Simons (2009), case study is an approach which orients the selection of methods of collecting data.

> Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led (p. 21).

The scientific values of case study have been a controversial issue in the literature. Positivists have usually criticised case study as a subjective approach in research because the interpretations of a case involve too much subjective experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, constructivists consider that the researcher's involvement is a major characteristic of human knowledge. They believe that all human knowledge is constructed and subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researching is the process by which humans try to make sense of a phenomenon requiring the researcher to be involved to understand the phenomenon. Flyvbjerg (2004) indicates common misunderstandings of case study, which often stem from its characteristics, including issues of bias, generalisation, and its scientific values. For example, one misunderstanding relates to the value of findings. Some suggest that as a case study is usually conducted with a small population number, research findings of the case cannot be generalised. However, Flyvbjerg (2004) points out, a lack of generalisation does not mean that concrete knowledge obtained from each case is not valuable.

Many authors now acknowledge that case study is useful for exploring intensely complex issues or events within a real-life context (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006). Case study allows the researcher to understand the culturally situated factors that may contribute to the development of the phenomenon from the past to present and into the future. For this reason, "the case study is a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 432).

Assessment for learning, when considered from a sociocultural perspective, involves complex interactions of a number of interrelated elements (Berry, 2011b; Carless & Lam, 2014; Torrance, 2012; Wiliam, 2006; Wiliam et al., 2004). This qualitative study aims to explore in-depth the practice of AfL within the context of EU. As the sociocultural characteristics of the context are believed to influence the practice of AfL in this university, case study is considered an appropriate approach for

addressing the research question: *What are the practices of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?* Investigating detailed cases from EU provides an analysis in context and portrays a rich and particular picture of the practice of AfL. This research explores how individual and sociocultural issues impact on the practices of AfL in a particular context. The case study research design is provided in the next section.

3.2   CASE STUDY DESIGN

3.2.1 The research sites

This study was conducted in EU, a major public university in Vietnam. The University has been in transition from annual to credit-based programs, and aims to become a multiple disciplinary research university by 2020. Along with other Vietnamese teacher-training institutions, EU has attempted to transform curriculum, teaching methods, and facilities to enhance quality over the last ten years. However, EU has faced many challenges. Further analysis of EU's context is provided in Chapter Four.

Three lecturers, Ly, Hoa, and Tung who participated in this study, were selected purposefully from each of the following faculties: the Faculty of Psychology and Education (FPE), the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics (FMI), and the Faculty of History (FoH) in EU. The FPE is a vocational faculty, which is responsible for teaching compulsory vocational units for pre-service teacher students, and also training teachers specialising in Psychology and Pedagogy. The other two faculties focus on training teachers for teaching Maths, Informatics, and History at schools.

There are two main reasons for choosing the three given faculties. First, being major faculties in EU, these faculties usually encourage their lecturers to advance the quality of teaching and learning. This offered an opportunity for the researcher to see how lecturers in the faculties use assessment to support learning. Second, this selection allowed the researcher to investigate the use of AfL in different disciplines and with diverse class sizes.

3.2.2 Case study and participants

A multiple case design (Stake, 1995, 2006) was used to illuminate the practice of AfL in EU. The use of multiple cases aims to gain a deep exploration of the assessment practices of each lecturer in comparison with other lecturers. As Stake

(1995) contends, "we cannot understand this case without knowing about other cases; the evidence can be more compelling and this leads to better understanding of larger collection of cases" (p. 3). Adopting an interpretative approach, the assessment practices of the three lecturers were interpreted according to the sociocultural theories of learning which serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

When using a case study approach, it is important to determine the boundaries of each case "in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (Creswell, 2008, p. 476). These factors locate the exploration and interpretation of information within a detailed context. In this study, the boundary of each case study entailed the assessment practices of each lecturer, which were investigated over a semester, within a single institution. As noted in Chapter One, data collection and an in-depth analysis of the practice of AfL focused on the following sub-research questions:

- What assessment for learning strategies do Vietnamese lecturers currently use?
- How do Vietnamese lecturers enact their assessment strategies for learning?
- What are Vietnamese students' experiences of assessment for learning?
- What are the sociocultural factors that support or hinder the implementation of AfL in higher education in Vietnam?

Three lecturers in this study were chosen purposefully to observe how AfL was enacted in different disciplines. Patton (2002) believes that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (p. 46). Although the first priority in the selection of case study is to "maximise what we can learn" (Stake, 1995, p. 4), the information gathered needs to respond to the research questions and the case study needs to be conducted within the available time and resources (Punch, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Ly, Hoa and Tung have been working for three different faculties in EU and they were purposively selected because they reported that they use AfL strategies in their current classes. They were also identified based on their teaching experience as early, middle or late career; their training process; level of qualification; and the country where their qualification was obtained, as this may have influenced the lecturers' pedagogic beliefs and assessment practices. From the lens of sociocultural theories, the development of identities and pedagogic practices of the participant lecturers may result from individual, social and cultural factors. The three lecturers were also chosen

based on their subject and class sizes. Examining the different subjects and sized classes enabled the researcher to explore diverse practices of AfL in EU and to recognise influential factors in a situated context. Two kinds of lectures, categorised by the number of students in the classroom, were investigated. Ly taught a Communication Skills subject in a large elective class with 120 students, while Hoa and Tung worked with smaller classes for general and specialised subjects, with 20 advanced students. It is assumed that different class sizes would bring certain advantages and disadvantages for the use of AfL strategies. Using the range of criteria, profiles of the three lecturers are described in the following table.

Table 3.1

Profiles of the Three Lecturers

	Tran, Thi Ly (TTL, pseudonym)	Duong, Thi Hoa (DTH, pseudonym)	Nguyen, Van Tung (NVT, pseudonym)
Faculties	Psychology and Education	Mathematics and Informatics	History
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Teaching experience	Late career	Middle	Early career
Qualification	PhD in Vietnam	PhD in Vietnam	Masters in an Asian country
Professional development	Courses with Vietnamese and overseas experts	Courses with Vietnamese and overseas experts	Self-study
Teaching subject	Communication Skills	Research Methodology	History
Class	Elective large class with 120 first year students from different faculties in EU	General class with 20 second year advanced students from the FMI	Specialised core class with 18 first year advanced students from the FoH

It should be noted that although Ly, Hoa, and Tung were at different stages of their careers, they all have opportunities to access contemporary Western teaching approaches through professional development or overseas training experiences. However, none of them had specific training in assessment.

Student participants

A total of 19 students studying in the classes of the three lecturers were invited to participate in this study. To obtain a diverse group of students, students were purposefully chosen based on their willingness to participate, a mix of gender, and a range of learning results. This selection allowed the researcher to see the different

experiences of a wide range of students who had been exposed to the same strategies of AfL in the classes. The following table profiles students who participated in the study.

Table 3.2

Student Participants

Three Cases	Students in Focus Groups (Pseudonyms)	Gender
Tran, Thi Ly *Communication Skills Class*	Hoang, Van Thai	Male
	Nguyen, Lan Anh	Female
	Vo, Thị Lan	Female
	Tran, Đuc Lam	Male
	Bui, Hoang Phap	Male
	Nguyen, Thị Ba	Female
	Vu, Nhan My	Female
Dương, Thị Hoa *Research Methodology Class*	Nguyen, Thi Thu	Female
	Nguyen, Van Nam	Male
	Hoang, Thanh Tram	Female
	Tran, Thi Hang	Female
	Nguyen, Van Thong	Male
	Vu, Thị Giang	Female
Nguyen, Van Tung *History Class*	Nguyen, Ngoc Lan	Female
	Vu, Thu Hoai	Female
	Nguyen, Thị Huyen	Female
	Nguyen, Thi Lien	Female
	Pham, Thi Hue	Female
	Tran, Thu Hong	Female

3.2.3 Research methods

A sociocultural perspective is connected with the social nature of knowledge which requires the researcher to access multiple sources of data within the context to gain an in depth understanding of the assessment practices. Data for this study were collected from multiple sources, including the analysis of observations of lecturers and students in their classes; interviews with lecturers and students; and written documents of EU. In the following sections, the use of these research methods is discussed.

3.2.3.1 Observation

This study used observation to collect information of how the lecturers use assessment to support learning, as observation is considered a powerful tool for understanding phenomena in particular contexts (Merriam, 1988; Simons, 2009). Within constructivist inquiry, researchers need to immerse themselves into the natural context to explore the phenomenon. The researcher visited the lecturers' classrooms

to capture a comprehensive picture of their practices of assessment. The observation focused on collecting data of what and how lecturers and students used strategies of AfL. Observed information about the classroom context was noted to assist the investigation and analysis of the assessment practices [Appendix A]. Simons (2009) identifies that without knowledge of the context, the researcher may not clearly understand an issue.

In this study, non-participant observation was utilised. Observing without being involved in classroom activities helped the researcher gain a focused comprehensive picture of the assessment practices for learning of the three lecturers in EU. The researcher visited five sessions of Ly and Tung and four sessions of Hoa to observe their assessment practices. The observations focused on the following aspects of each session:

- AfL strategies as used by the lecturers;
- ways in which lecturers used the feedback, peer and self-assessment, questioning, sharing learning intentions and success criteria;
- the participation and reflection of students about the assessment activities; and
- the classroom atmosphere and the context of classes, such as number of students and the teaching resources.

Non-verbal cues such as gesture and facial expressions in classroom interactions were also important to note because these can provide additional information for understanding the phenomenon (Simons, 2009). Following is an excerpt of fieldnotes compiled in the third observed teaching session in Ly's class. This part constitutes the general comments at the end of the lesson.

Nhận xét chung

TRANSLATION OF THE EXCERPT

The teaching session was interesting with a lot of classroom activities. Students' participation was generally active. The learning environment was democratic and safe. The teacher used many active teaching methods to stimulate students' thinking and interest. For example, case study, role play and group discussion. The teacher encouraged her students to share and voice their own ideas. The technique "writing a learning diary" combined with the technique of "three and three" was expected to be a useful strategy to develop self-assessment and also gain feedback on teaching. The lecturer was planning to review the lesson and then adjust teaching accordingly. The teacher gave feedback (FB) to her students, suggesting many ways to enhance their Communication Skills

The teacher focused on eliciting students' experience and created opportunities for them to learn by doing (co-construction), which encouraged more students to engage in their learning.

Parts of lecture were structured logically and clearly, usually by her use of questioning. She used a range of questions such as yes/no and wh-questions to stimulate student learning. She also used brainstorming strategies.

As the lesson occurred after a long public holiday (30/4), it impacted on student learning, i.e. attitude, tiredness. Also, they had to move to a new lecture hall as projector in the current room was broken and the technician came to repair it. The teacher had to use chalk and blackboard to write the main ideas of discussion or content of the lesson. It was very blurry so students at the back of the lecture hall could not see it (poor facilities - hindrance).

Place, 02/05/2013
Observer
Signature

Apart from using field notes, the researcher asked lecturers for permission to record their lectures by video. To reflect the practice of AfL in classrooms, interactions between lecturer and students as well as among students in five teaching sessions were video-recorded. During the process of observation, the researcher remained non-judgemental about what occurred in the classrooms. Observations occurred five times to ensure that the data collection of assessment practices was comprehensive. This is one way to enhance trustworthiness. Information from the interview prior to each session and from the documents was linked with the observation process.

3.2.3.2 Interviews

Interview is considered a useful method of collecting data for understanding the phenomenon as perceived by the participant (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). In this study, interviews were used to elicit experiences of both lecturers and students in assessment activities in their classrooms. The lecturers' perceptions of learning and assessment were articulated and further probed through the use of interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with lecturers

This study used semi-structured interviews, a flexible and adaptable implementation of a set of predetermined questions, to collect data (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Robson, 2002). A list of open-ended questions was prepared before each interview to investigate beliefs and experiences of the lecturers in their assessment practices. During the interview, apart from the predetermined questions, probes and follow-up questions were used to encourage respondents to provide a rich description of their assessment practices. Ly and Tung were involved in ten interviews, while Hoa participated in eight interviews before and after observed sessions in the unit that they were teaching.

Interviews prior to lectures

Interviews conducted before the lectures aimed to gain an understanding of the teaching and assessment strategies that the lecturers intended to use to support learning. The interview before the first lecture was the longest, approximately one hour in duration [Appendix B]. It was conducted to gain information on the learning intentions of the lecture, and also to understand the particular teaching approach that the lecturer adopted. It was assumed that their approaches to teaching may influence the preparation and the implementation of the particular lectures. The next four

interviews took around 15 to 20 minutes and included questions which focused on teaching and assessment strategies that lecturers intended to use in their lectures to promote learning; their justification for choosing these strategies; and the outcomes that they hoped to achieve with these strategies (Appendix C).

The interviews after lectures

Interviews were also conducted after each of the observed sessions for each lecturer. Interviews after the observations helped to delve into the perceptions and attitudes of the lecturers about student learning and assessment during a particular lecture; the ways the lecturers had been using assessment strategies in these classes; and the factors that supported or hindered lecturers in their use of assessment strategies. The interviews took about 30 to 45 minutes and involved questions that related to the observed assessment practices. Other questions depended on what had been observed, as well as probing for further details [Appendix C].

Focus group interviews with students

From a sociocultural perspective, it is also very important to gather information from students to gauge the impact of assessment strategies on their learning. Therefore, the study employed focus group interviews in which the researcher sought information from small groups of students. This research technique was used because it is "economical" (Simons, 2009, p. 49) and could provide a sense of the agreement level among students concerning current assessment practices.

Focus groups were conducted with seven students in Ly's class and six students in Hoa and Tung's classes after each of the five lectures. Each group interview was 45 minutes to one hour in duration, and consisted of students who had achieved high and low assessment results in their previous semester. Each group had both male and female students, except for the student group in Tung's class, which was all female, reflecting a gender preference for teacher training and social science. This purposeful selection aimed to discover the range of experiences of different students with the same teaching and assessment activities.

The first group interview in each class lasted around one hour in order to collect data on students' experiences with assessment strategies in that lecture, as well as EU's assessment practices [Appendix D]. Some follow-up or probing questions were raised in the group interviews relating to data collected from the specific classroom

observations. Further, questions to facilitate group discussions were also conducted to gain a rich picture of the students' experiences with the assessment strategies [Appendix E].

Simons (2009) identifies issues with group interviews related to students' responses, including responses being either too convergent or too divergent. Another issue is the dominant voice of one member in the group while others tend to be quiet (Simons, 2009). These issues were also seen in focus group interviews of this study. To deal with these unintended phenomena, the researcher attempted to create a comfortable environment for dialogue and asked questions evenly of each student in the group. In this way, the researcher ensured that every student had an opportunity to respond to the questions. Moreover, prompt questions were asked of students when they had different experiences and opinions about the same assessment strategies. These questions included:

> In terms of ....A said that, what about your experience of this, B? Do you agree
> with him/her or do you have different ideas? And why do you think that?
> In the lecture, I saw this situation...Could you tell more about...?
> How did you feel when the lecturer...?

For interviews, predetermined questions play an important role in eliciting information from participants. To ensure academic standard interviews, questions for lecturers and students were devised and then trialled with one lecturer and one fourth-year student in EU via Skype. This process is detailed in section 3.2.4.

Apart from refining predetermined questions, a range of considerations were made in the conduct of the interviews. First, interviews were conducted in a private area on the University campus to facilitate open communication. As interview involves the exchange of information through language, the effectiveness of an interview depends on the interactions between the interviewer and interviewees. Ideally, the researcher should be able to actively listen to respondents (Merriam, 1988; Robson, 2002; Simons, 2009). Robson (2002) suggests that regular reflection or rephrasing of what interviewees are saying is necessary. Moreover, being EUtral and nonjudgmental of interviewees' responses is also suggested by Simons (2009). Non-verbal cues such as gesture and facial expressions were noted during the interviews, since these may add meaning or clarify the participants' words. Further, consciousness of these distractions or prompts is necessary in research to avoid collecting unreliable data.

Along with the support of audio-recordings in interviews, the researcher combined both observation and note taking when required.

3.2.3.3 Documents

In this qualitative inquiry, documents were a useful source of data (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Simons, 2009) for revealing the practice of AfL in EU. Documents are often understood as written documents, containing "a ready-made source of data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 104). Along with interviews and observations, the analysis of documents is known as a common research technique in case study design. According to Simons (2009, p. 64), the analysis of documents provides "a helpful precursor to observing and interviewing". For example, information on assessment policy in Vietnamese higher education was used to develop questions in interviews, and to frame intentions compared with the lecturers' enactment of these in their teaching practices.

There are many types of documents which may provide relevant information to explain a phenomenon. Although data in documents can be a useful source for research, careful selection of documents is necessary. Merriam (1988) highlighted that documents are not usually created for research purposes and therefore their accuracy needs to be carefully considered. For this study, data from the formal documents included MoET's assessment policies in higher education, the University's annual reports, vision statements, rules and regulations, and examination results. Informal documents gained from newspapers, and EU's website were analysed. The study also used information collected from other documents such as lecturers' lesson plans and students' work. These documents helped the researcher to explore the following:

- how these policies shaped the assessment practices in this University;
- if the lecturers' assessment practices aligned with the policies of this University and MoET;
- what individual, social and cultural factors may have created synergy or tensions between assessment practices and the policy;
- the relationship between the intent, the performance, and the outcomes of assessment activities in the classrooms; and
- validation of information from interviews and observations.

In conclusion, interviews, observations, and documents were employed to collect data in this study. The following table summarises the participation in the research of the three lecturers and 19 students.

Table 3.3

The Participation of the Three Lecturers and Students in the Research

Research Methods	Case One *Tran, Thi Ly*	Case Two *Duong, Thi Hoa*	Case Three *Nguyen, Van Tung*
Observation	5 teaching sessions	4 teaching sessions	5 teaching sessions
Interviews with lecturers	10 (5 prior – 5 post)	8 (4 prior – 4 post)	10 (5 prior – 5 post)
Focus groups interviews with students	5 post each observed teaching session	4 post each observed teaching session	5 post each observed teaching session
Documents	MoET and EU's assessment policies, annual reports, and websites Lecturer's lesson plans and students' work		

3.2.4 Procedure and timeline

This section presents the completion of the study through stages of data collection and analysis.

3.2.4.1 Data collection

Data collection occurred in two phases, the pilot period and data collection.

Pilot period

The pilot study was necessary to identify areas for improvement in the design. When research methods are trialled, the necessary changes can be made to increase the trustworthiness of data. In this study, the pilot was conducted with one lecturer and one fourth-year student at EU via Skype. These interviews demonstrated that most questions were appropriate to the research questions. However, the pilot interviews allowed the researcher to recognise some areas for improvement. These areas included the following.

Some questions were redundant. The researcher integrated some questions into one.

For example, the researcher asked the trial lecturer two questions: 'How do you feel after teaching the lecture today? Are you satisfied with what happened in the class?' These questions focused on eliciting the lecturer's attitude about the lecture. Both questions were problematic because they were too general. Although the second question might be more specific in terms of attitude (feel satisfied or dissatisfied), it was still ambiguous in terms of the issue asked. Therefore, the revised question was:

> 'Are you satisfied with how the learning intentions were achieved in the class?
> Why or why not?'

Some questions were difficult for the lecturer and the student to understand and therefore to answer because they were too complex. This feedback helped the researcher to divide one question into different questions.

For example, the researcher asked the trial lecturer about the impact of peer and self-assessment on her students. The question was: 'How do you think peer and self-assessment impact on student learning?' This question is complex because the lecturer was asked at the same time to consider the influence of two feedback sources (peers and students themselves). It was decided that this question would be easier to answer if it was divided into two separate sections:

> 'Do you often encourage your students to give and receive peer feedback?
> Why? In what ways do you organise peer assessment?
> Do you often encourage your students to self-assess their own learning? Why?
> In what ways do you organise self-assessment?'

The order of some questions was changed to ensure a flow of thinking in answers.

For example, the researcher interviewed the trial student about his experiences with assessment practices. The student was given questions in the following order: (1) 'Describe how assessment is practised in your university? (2) How satisfied are you with the current assessment methods? (3) How do you learn for the current assessment tasks? (4) What are your expectations for future assessment methods?' Interview results show that the order should be changed between the second and the third questions to create a logical flow for interviewees.

These adjustments were made and new versions of the interview questions produced [Appendix B, C, D, E].

These trialled interviews were helpful in refining questions. However, the interviews that were mediated through technology limited interactions between the researcher and interviewees. For this reason, the pilot study continued in the field visit to Vietnam in early April 2013. The researcher focused on trialling group interviews and classroom observation with one lecturer and her students in another Vietnamese teacher-training university. This helped the researcher to master skills of using field notes, camera and audio recordings, as well as managing the time and discussion during interviews before the major data collection period.

Data collection period

When the researcher obtained permission to conduct research at EU, data collection began by sending invitation letters, which clearly described the purposes of the research, expected participation, and benefits and risks to the Deans and lecturers of the three faculties. There were three lecturers in the Faculty of Psychology and Education who wished to participate; one lecturer in Mathematics and Informatics and two lecturers in the History faculty. Based on prescribed criteria, the researcher decided to invite Ly, Hoa and Tung to participate in the research.

The researcher met with the three lecturers and discussed the research plan, including the timing of the research, the place of interview, requirements of audio-recording and video-recording of classroom observations. The data collection in the main study started in Semester Two of the academic year 2012-2013, from April to June 2013. Key areas for data collection were determined by the following:

- the beliefs and attitudes of the three lecturers and students towards learning and assessment;
- strategies which aligned with AfL in observed teaching sessions and the effectiveness of these strategies to support student learning;
- the responses of focus students to AfL strategies that were used in the classrooms; and
- the influences of sociocultural factors on lecturers' practices of AfL.

Data collection methods and schedules for each teaching session are presented in the figure, below:
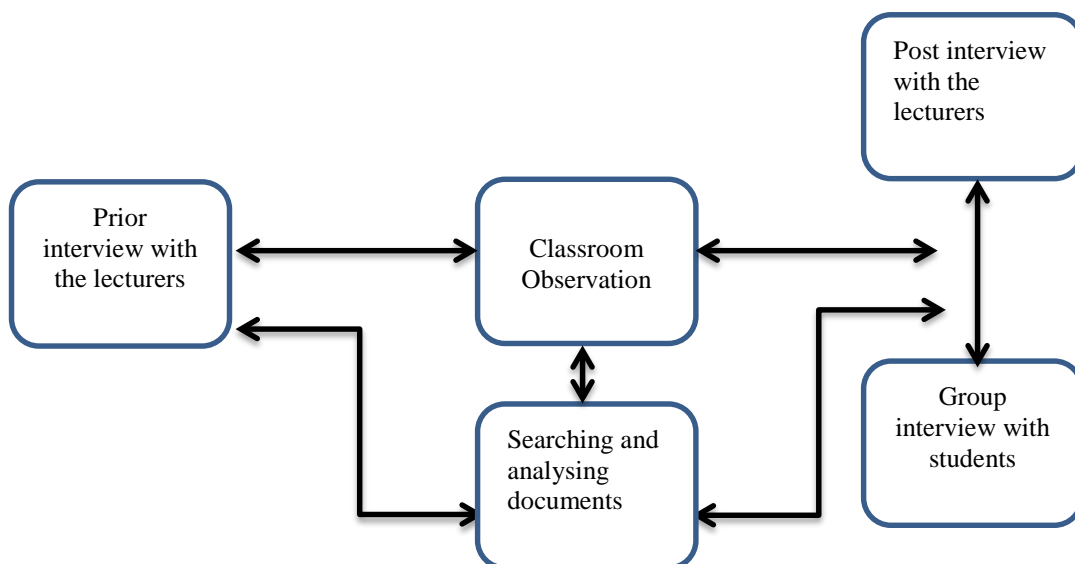
Figure 3.1. Procedure of Data Collection in Each Teaching Session.

3.2.4.2 Data analysis

The following table summarises the sequence of data collection and analysis procedures.

Table 3.4

The Procedure and Timeframe for Data Collection and Analysis

Period	Purpose	Description
Pilot study (January and early April 2013)	Trialled and adjusted data collection methods	Conducted pilot interview with one lecturer and one fourth year student in EU via Skype Conducted focus group interviews and observations with one lecturer in another Vietnamese teacher-training university Refined research methods
Data collection (April to June 2013)	Collected data as in the research design	Gained access to the research site Sent invitation letters to Deans and lecturers of the three faculties Selected the participant lecturers and students Discussed the research plan with participant lecturers and students Conducted interviews, observations, and researched documents
Data Analysis (April 2013 to April 2015)	Answered the research questions	Transcribed data in Vietnamese and conducted member-checking Coded data in Vietnamese; Vietnamese quotations were translated into English Identified emergent themes Reported cases and found research findings Discussed research findings Drew conclusions and implications

3.3   DATA ANALYSIS

This study used a constant comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Simons, 2009), which requires the researcher to make constant comparison of incidents with others obtained from different data sources. The comparative analysis of identified themes was first completed in one case. The identified themes from the constant comparative analysis then involved a cross case comparison. The sociocultural theoretical lens was used to identify key themes during analysis.

In terms of detailed analysis procedure, according to Simons (2009), "there are no set rules or procedures to follow" (p. 118), since approaches to data analysis are diverse. Despite differences in number and names of steps proposed, four core steps are usually agreed by most researchers, including: transcribing, coding, categorising, and identifying emergent themes. This study used steps proposed by Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen (2010), because this analytic approach comprehensively covers both procedures and tasks in a data analysis process. That is, the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were analysed according to three stages: organising and familiarising; coding and reducing; and interpreting and presenting. The following section describes the steps.

3.3.1 Organising and familiarising

First, data from this study, which included field notes, audio and video recordings, and documents, were organised according to cases in both electronic and paper files. The researcher immersed herself in the data by initial reading and rereading notes, listening and watching audio and video recordings to gain a general understanding of each case. This process was followed by the transcription of the interview and observation data.

Data transcription

After completing the records of the three cases, the researcher started transcribing in Vietnamese, using pseudonyms in keeping with ethical principles. Transcription is considered an important precursor to the analysis. Further the researcher is aware that assurance of transcripts' trustworthiness is necessary, since the quality of transcription can impact on the quality of qualitative analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). According to King and Horrocks (2010), the transcription process usually involves two key questions that qualitative researchers must consider, based

on their methodological positions and resources in terms of time and finance. These include: who would transcribe and what level of detail do they need to transcribe? In this study, data were transcribed by the researcher, as this process made her "become closely familiar with the data" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 143). Further, transcription included both words and non-verbal language such as gesture, laughter, tone of voice, and pauses, as this information provided additional meaning to the interpretation, and therefore enhanced reliability and validity of the data (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004; Silverman, 2011). This level of analytical detail was included, particularly to take into consideration the Vietnamese cultural respect for harmony and various reactions from both the lecturers and students in their classes. Content of the language used by the lecturers and students was the main source for analysis; however, the attitude displayed through their non-verbal language signals was also considered. This could sometimes give congruent or contradictory meanings that the researcher needed to focus on in the transcription. Following is an example of how Ly's non-verbal language added a different meaning from a literal interpretation.

LY'S FEEDBACK

I agree with one of your ideas. The way that Phuong first used to persuade Thai could be [pause] a pattern [smile] [pause and thinking]. We might call this a 'typical approach' [different tone of voice]. Therefore, other students felt her claims were a little bit impractical…..

The non-verbal information in the previous transcript, Ly's pauses and smile, explain that she tried to think of appropriate words to give constructive and encouraging feedback to her student without hurting her feelings.

In addition, trustworthiness of the information collected was ensured by using a member checking technique (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). When the transcription was completed, the transcripts were sent to Ly, Hoa, and Tung for verification, clarification and addition of further information if they wished. Subsequently, the researcher became more familiar with data by continuously reading or re-reading the checked transcripts. Notes and memos were also written to capture initial thoughts of the assessment practices of the three lecturers.

3.3.2 Coding and reducing

Coding, the process of breaking down "the data into segments, and assign[ing] a name to each" (Simons, 2009), was conducted in Vietnamese. This approach to coding was chosen because it appeared to help the researcher to save time and finances. More importantly, coding in Vietnamese could help minimise possible misinterpretation (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008), as the intended meaning could be lost in the translation from Vietnamese to English. Initial (open) coding was first adopted. The researcher looked carefully for words, phrases and sentences to define concepts. This process included many codes and was directed by a framework derived from AfL theory and sociocultural theories of learning. Subsequently, axial and selective coding, which involved grouping and rearranging codes of similar topics into one category, were used. The number of codes was reduced and then the researcher searched for the connection and meaning between the categories to identify emerging themes. The Vietnamese quotations and concepts were then translated into English. Back-translation technique was used to ensure accuracy between the Vietnamese and English versions. This step is analysed further in section 3.4.2.

This processes of coding and categorising involved the researcher as a vital instrument to create the meaning of data based on a particular view of the world (Merriam, 1988). Further, the research questions, literature of AfL and a sociocultural perspective were used as fundamental sources. Consequently, main categories included: context of the cases; key classroom assessment strategies; and factors that supported or hindered the lecturers' assessment practices. Two major themes were identified, including the mediation and situation of learning in the three classes. Examples of data coding in the assessment practice of Tung are given below.

Table 3.5

Examples of Data Coding in the Assessment Practice of Tung

Texts	Initial coding	Axial and selective coding
There is no true or false knowledge. Knowledge is the product of individual thinking processes and experiences	Values learning is constructed	Constructivist philosophy
Students can learn not only from their teacher, but from their peers…	Values social interactions/ peer learning	
The role of the teacher is much more important in that they teach not only knowledge and skills of the unit, but also inspire their students to learn.	Values inspiration of learning	
Students only learn from each other when the teacher is truly a facilitator	Teachers as facilitators	
Innovations in assessment are considered as a key solution to enhance our education system	Values assessment	Alternative approach to assessment
The changes in assessment will lead to alteration in the ways teachers and students approach knowledge and select teaching and learning strategies	Values assessment	
Teachers assess directly what their students have achieved, and at the same time teach their students how to self-assess. Guiding students how to self-assess is more important	Values self-assessment	

Table 3.6

Example of Coding for Interviews with the Lecturers and Students

Coding	Meaning
Interviews with the three lecturers	
TTL, prior L1	Tran Thi Ly, prior interview of lecture 1
TTL, post L1	Tran Thi Ly, post interview of lecture 1
DTH, prior L1	Duong Thi Hoa, prior interview of lecture 1
DTH, post L1	Duong Thi Hoa, post interview of lecture 1
NVT, prior L1	Nguyen Van Tung, prior interview of lecture 1
NVT, post L1	Nguyen Van Tung, post interview of lecture 1
Focus Group Interviews with students	
FG, post L1	Focus group interview, post lecture 1
Lam, FG, post L1	Students' name, focus group interview, post lecture 1

3.3.3 Interpreting and presenting

The assessment practices of the three lecturers were described and interpreted through the lens of sociocultural theories. A rich description and interpretation of each case required the researcher to see the data from "different angles" (Simons, 2009, p. 140), that is, the process of making sense of the assessment practices for learning involved not only cognitive but also intuitive skills. The three cases were developed as a portrayal within each case, and then comparisons of emergent themes were made across the three cases.

One case analysis

The assessment practice of each lecturer was considered from a constructivist approach, characterised by an inductive analysis of data. Each case record was categorised into themes. The category helped to see emerging patterns of the assessment practices of that lecturer. According to Stake (2006), a case has its features such as operating in real time and having stages of life. For this reason, analysis within the case needs to describe clearly these characteristics. The interpretation of the case also focused on contextualising the assessment practices and considering the sense of the history, the present, and the future of the assessment practices of each lecturer.

Cross case analysis

To gain an in-depth understanding of a case, it is important to examine the case in interaction with other cases. Data analysis focused on comparing the AfL practices of the three lecturers. This comparison across the three cases aimed to recognise the similarities and differences in all manifestations of assessment practices. The following aspects were considered in the cross case analysis:

- the assessment strategies the lecturers used in their classes;
- the ways lecturers enacted these strategies;
- the students' learning experiences with assessment strategies;
- the classroom contexts;
- regulations that shaped the assessment practices of the three lecturers; and
- individual factors such as teaching experience.

Sociocultural theories of learning underpinned the theoretical framework. Two main themes that emerged from the data were considered and discussed: the mediation of learning in classes of the three lecturers and how learning was situated in the context

of the three classes in the university and in Vietnam as a broader context. The process of data analysis is summarised in the following figure.
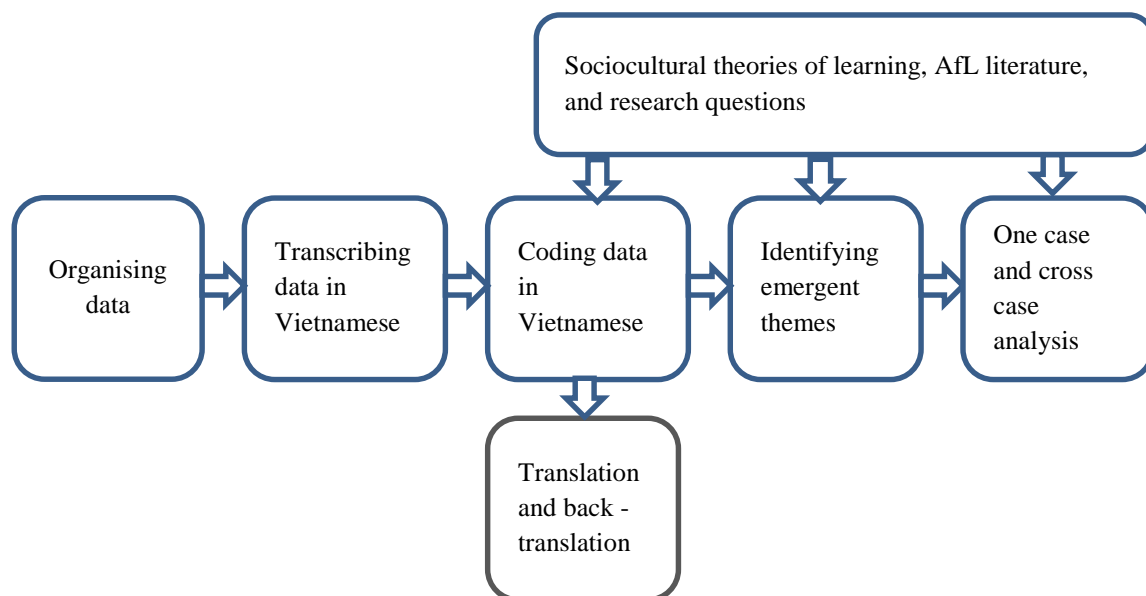
Figure 3.2. Steps of Data Analysis.

3.4   ETHICS, TRUSTWORTHINESS, AND LIMITATIONS

3.4.1 Ethical issues

Ethical principles were addressed in conducting this research. Punch (1994) contends that "in essence, most concern revolves around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data" (p. 89). This research was evaluated and categorised by the QUT Ethics Committee as low risk research, and was granted ethics approval (number 1300000200). A number of measures were put in place in accordance to four ethical principles of QUT in human research, including the assurance of research merit and integrity, justice, respect for human beings, and beneficence.

First, research merit and integrity refers to potential benefits of research and the development of appropriate methods to collect and store reliable information from participants. This study aimed to identify what sociocultural factors support or hinder the AfL practices in Vietnamese higher education and to provide theoretical and empirical insights into how AfL may be incorporated successfully in the sociocultural tertiary context of Vietnam. It is significant in contributing to teaching and learning reform in the Vietnamese education system and also developing theorisation of AfL in

non-Western higher education settings. In qualitative research, reliability of data is usually of great concern and needs to be considered carefully by the researcher during data collection and analysis. Approaches to ensure reliable data such as the use of reflexivity, back-translation, triangulation and audit trail, are discussed further in section 3.4.2

Second, justice is associated with the researcher's responsibility to assure fairness to participants when involved in research. The participation of lecturers and students was based on their volunteering and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Lecturer participants also had rights to confirm or correct the accuracy of information in the transcripts before they were analysed. When the project is completed, its findings will be sent to participants for their own use, in further development of their AfL strategies.

Third, respect for humans requires participants' autonomy in research, as well as their rights to be protected during and after the completion of the research. To do this, the comprehensive research information sheet and consent forms were sent to the Deans and lecturers of the three faculties for permission to conduct the research. Second, the procedure of interviews and classroom observation was explained fully to the participants. The researcher was responsible for the implementation of principles and schedules discussed with the participants.

Finally, beneficence is often referred to as harm avoidance to participants. According to Simons (2009, p. 96), "doing no harm" is the fundamental ethical principle in research. This research might potentially create inconvenience for participants in terms of their time; discomfort when talking about assessment policy or lecturers' practices; and their reputation. To minimise these potential risks, the researcher arranged interviews suitable to their time. Further, this study used a pseudonym for participants' names and places to ensure that when research findings are made public, the identity of the participants is kept confidential (Punch, 1994; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). The researcher and supervisors were the only people who had access to information obtained during the study. At the outset of any focus group interviews, the researcher reminded students not to mention their lecturers' name in responses and that the focus of interviews was on individual lecturers' assessment methods that were effective for their learning. The researcher also emphasised that their responses were not shared with their lecturers.

3.4.2 Trustworthiness of data

There are several ways to enhance the trustworthiness of collected data. Four primary criteria used to ensure the trustworthiness of data are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Ary et al., 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following section describes how these criteria are applied in this research.

3.4.2.1 Credibility and transferability

Characteristics of the context are considered an integral influence in development of the case (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). The researcher therefore provided a detailed description of the social, political, cultural, and economic factors of the research sites and classroom contexts. This rich description helps to locate the interpretation of the assessment practices within a sociocultural context. It also helps other researchers to make decisions about conducting similar studies in similar contexts.

Further, data in this study were collected in Vietnamese, but research findings are presented in English. Assurance of the accuracy of data when translated in English is very important. There has been no 'standardised procedure' for translation in bilingual research (Brislin, 1970; Temple, 1997). Researchers usually choose ways which are considered safe in terms of time, finance and effort, while still ensuring the trustworthiness of data. In this study, the researcher adopted a back-translation technique (Chen & Boore, 2009).

The back-translation technique relates to the comparative bilingual process in which one translates an original document to the target language, and another translator then blindly translates this version back to the original language (Brislin, 1970). The two translated versions are later compared to identify and adjust any confusion or ambiguities. Back-translation is considered as the most common and recommended technique to ensure the accuracy in data translation for cross-cultural research (Chen & Boore, 2009; Smith et al., 2008), as it allows the researcher to evaluate the meaning equivalence between the original and target language documents.

In this study, the processes of translation and back-translation were conducted through the following steps. Once transcription of interviews and observations was done in Vietnamese, the researcher analysed the data in Vietnamese. Then the researcher translated emerging concepts, categories and quotations in English before

asking another bilingual colleague, a lecturer fluent in both English and Vietnamese, to check the translation. The final English version was reached through agreement between the researcher and the colleague. This English version was then sent to another bilingual lecturer to back translate into Vietnamese. The next step was to discuss discrepancies between the back-translated version with the original Vietnamese version. To ensure equivalence in terms of word choice and expression that a native speaker would use, the researcher revised the English version after discussion with a language adviser and supervisors.

3.4.2.2 Dependability

Triangulation is a common way to ensure dependability of data (Merriam, 1988; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). Triangulation is usually understood as seeing a case from different perspectives and sources to deepen understanding of that case (Simons, 2009). Although there is not a perfect interpretation of the phenomenon according to constructivist philosophy (Given, 2008; Stake, 2006), triangulation is necessary to ensure that the process of making sense of the case has not been oversimplified (Stake, 2006).

Several approaches were used to triangulate information in this study. The use of multiple methods to collect data was considered as a useful way to clarify meaning of the assessment practices in the University. It is believed that each method of data collection has its own functions and different strengths and weaknesses (Merriam, 1988). Multiple data sources were collected to "overcome the deficiency or bias of any one method" (Simons, 2009, p. 130). Validation was done within each method, such as comparing data in the first observation with the second from one case to across cases. According to Stake (2006), this can help to verify the repeatability of information of the phenomenon. Furthermore, data collected from one source was cross-checked with other sources. In this study, data obtained from the three lecturers was always linked to data in documents and students to ensure the validation of information. This study also used a member checking technique (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995) to gain more accurate information from participants. Transcribed data was sent to participants for verification before analysis.

3.4.2.3 Confirmability

An audit trail of the raw data and the research schedule was retained so that others could follow and check the analysis or research findings [Appendix F].

Trustworthiness of data was also enhanced by conducting the pilot study which helped to refine and elaborate the research instruments before data collection. Another way to establish trustworthiness of data was an awareness of the research limitations. These limitations are discussed further in the next section.

3.4.3 Limitations

Recognising the limitations of the research design is also an important way to establish trustworthiness. Three main concerns were identified as limitations of the research design in this study.

First, there is the potential of bias as the researcher is a practitioner at the research site. Using a constructivist approach, understandings of the practice of AfL in EU was mediated through the perception of the researcher. In the position of a practitioner, the researcher might be familiar with teaching and learning styles in the context. Moreover, the participant lecturers were the researcher's colleagues. This led to both advantages and disadvantages in conducting this research. On the one hand, the researcher's familiarity with the site and the participants helped the researcher to easily gain access and conduct the study. On the other hand, the researcher's previous knowledge of the practices limited adverse criticism of AfL activities.

To minimise this limitation, the researcher was clearly aware of herself as a researcher during data collection and analysis. This awareness was achieved by the use of a reflectivity strategy (Ary et al., 2010). That is, after each interview or observation, the researcher critically self-reflected on her own perceptions about the assessment practices in the context. Further, the multiple data sources were also triangulated to reduce bias occurring because of the researcher's insider, observer status. During the process of collecting and interpreting data, the researcher engaged in periodic debriefing with her research supervisors to assist in reviewing and refining interpretations of the findings.

Second, the use of a predetermined sociocultural lens from the beginning of data analysis to examine the assessment for learning practices can bias data analysis. Simons (2009) points out that identifying a theoretical framework from the beginning of research can be a double-edged sword. Despite the fact that a theoretical framework can provide a focus during the data collection and analysis, it can lead to "a false

consensus - making the data fit the framework - or failing to see the unexpected" (p. 33).

To deal with this problem, the researcher acknowledged that sociocultural theories are only one of several possible approaches to explain the practice of AfL in the University. Although data was interpreted based on the lens of sociocultural theories, it was important to keep an open-mind, thinking about new data appearing during fieldwork. This concern was reduced because a constructivist inquiry allows a certain modification of the research design in the process of data collection.

Finally, the unique and particular characteristics of case study may not lead to a generalisation of the assessment practices for learning for all lecturers in this University or in Vietnamese universities. The research findings are in-depth understandings of the assessment practices of three participant lecturers within one site. This limitation is recognised as one of the major disadvantages of case study (Merriam, 1988; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). However, Stake (1995) also points out that "the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation. We take the picture of case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does" (Stake, 1995, p. 8). Although the research findings are not generalisable to all lecturers in EU, they can be a starting point for further research at a larger scale on assessment practices for learning in Vietnamese higher education.

3.5   CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the practice of AfL in the context of a Vietnamese university. This chapter has presented a methodological approach to gather and analyse the data collected from the assessment practices of three lecturers. A constructivist paradigm and sociocultural theories of learning have been used as theoretical orientations for a multiple case study design using a range of data collection techniques. An overview of the method of using the constant comparative analysis approach has been briefly summarised. The issues of data trustworthiness and ethical considerations have also been described. In the following chapter, the EU is detailed to contextualise where the three lecturers have been working and how these conditions have had an impact on their assessment practices.

Chapter 4: Context of the Cases: Education University

This study explores how assessment for learning is currently implemented in Vietnamese higher education and further aims to identify what factors support or hinder lecturers' assessment practices within a traditional Confucian teaching context such as Vietnam. The Education University was chosen as the site to explore the types of assessment practised, as it is one of the leading teacher-training Vietnamese universities.

A case study approach was used to investigate the assessment practices of three lecturers from three different faculties of EU: Tran Thi Ly, Duong Thi Hoa, and Nguyen Van Tung. From a sociocultural perspective (Lave & Wenger 1991; Rogoff, 1990), the lecturers' assessment practices are considered to be inextricably linked to the institutional context. This chapter describes the particular EU context. It begins with a general introduction to the University. The subsequent section addresses recent changes at EU to advance teacher training quality. Following is a discussion of the challenges that EU faces from participants' perspectives.

EU is recognised as large teacher-training university at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Vietnam. Currently, the University has over 1000 staff in total. Many lecturers at EU are national experts or scientists in their fields. In the academic years 2012-2013, there were over 20 separate training faculties and over 20 research and technology centres in the University. Over 2000 new undergraduates and 1500 postgraduates enrol at EU each year.

EU is one of 17 national key universities for which the government prioritises resources to advance the quality of training. In the field of education, EU is expected to be a model of high standards in the provision of educational services. To achieve this expectation, EU has reformed its training processes, policies, and teaching and learning practices in the last five years.

4.1   RECENT CHANGES IN EU

In 2009, EU replaced annual training by a credit-based training system under MoET's mandated policy for all Vietnamese universities (MoET, 2007). This is one attempt to reform comprehensively and radically the higher system to enhance its training quality from a teacher-centric to student-centric. Curriculum is designed according to modules with a number of electives from a wide range of courses. Students are allowed to choose subjects and teachers suitable to their own pace. Their learning results are easily transferred between fields or universities. Credit-based training is applied widely in global higher education systems because of its appropriateness to a knowledge-based economy.

While benefits of a credit-based system and a strong commitment to reform of the system from policy level are clear, operationalising the policy to Vietnamese higher education has presented many challenges. Two major challenges have been found by Nguyen (2011). The first is a conflict between established pedagogic beliefs and practices of the annual training and the new demands of the credit-based system. These changes require radical shifts in concepts and practices of managers, lecturers, and students in all aspects curriculum design, teaching and learning methods, assessment, and resources. The second challenge is conflict between changed policies and limited actual conditions in terms of finance, facilities, teacher and student preparation for the successful implementation of a credit-based system in Vietnamese universities. In terms of challenges when changing the training mode, EU is not an exception.

However, in its attempt to be a leading university, EU has made many significant changes. Since 2012, the core values of the University have been reinforced strongly and they are exemplified in a new focus that articulates the promotion of high standards of learning alongside the development of creativity. All faculties and students are expected to respond to this direction of the University. The aim of EU is to become a multiple disciplinary research university by 2020.

4.1.1 Changes for lecturers

Lecturers at EU have the responsibility to teach, conduct research and participate in professional development courses. As a lecturer's quality is considered a key factor to enhance the quality of training, the University has made changes in recruitment

policy and requirements for lecturers over the last ten years. These changes in EU's policy have encouraged lecturers to enhance their teaching quality.

Since 2005, the University has started to use contracts instead of a permanent recruitment policy to encourage EU lecturers to work more productively. Under the contract policy, lecturers need to pass an exam before being recruited for a one-year contract. During this year, they work with the support of a mentor, usually an experienced lecturer. If the lecturer meets the requirements of the organisation, she/he will be offered a three-year contract followed by a long-term contract. This contract recruitment policy appears to be increasing the accountability demands on lecturers for their courses and learning.

Further requirements regarding the quality of foreign language levels have been established for lecturers of EU. Young lecturers have to demonstrate a good command of foreign languages by submitting international language certificates at or above a set cut-off score within the first two years of working at the University. They need to hold a PhD degree before they reach 35 years of age. Annually, these lecturers are required to prepare one teaching period for their colleagues to observe and provide advice on their teaching content and methods. To enhance lecturers' research capacity, the university requires every lecturer to publish annually at least one article in specialised journals or at conferences. Further, an annual scientific conference is also organised for young lecturers to present their research findings.

In recent years, EU has attempted to enhance lecturers' qualifications, and facilities for learning. Many lecturers have been sent to study in developed education systems. Notably, under the project of Teaching and Research Innovation Grant (TRIG) sponsored by the World Bank since 2009, more modern facilities have been installed. Many overseas short courses have also been provided for lecturers to advance their skills.

To motivate lecturers to reform their teaching practices, EU has used peer and self-evaluation. At the conclusion of each academic year, lecturers self-assess their contributions in teaching, research, and extracurricular activities according to the University's criteria. Those who gain high scores and are voted for by their colleagues receive the award of "Good Emulator" at university level. The effectiveness of this policy was questioned by the lecturer participants in this study. Although the policy is intended to encourage lecturers to work more effectively, the limitation of awarding

to only five to six percent of the total staff in each faculty reduces its effectiveness. Further, the evaluation criteria require lecturers to excel in many fields of which innovation in teaching is only one component.

In 2009, EU introduced teacher evaluation through student feedback provided at the end of a unit. The Centre of Education Quality Assurance and Assessment administers this evaluation each semester. Although feedback from students is only one source of information about teaching effectiveness, it is intended to create momentum for lecturers to regularly improve their teaching practices. However, this reform is still sensitive and complex in the context of Vietnam, where relationships are historically hierarchical (Nguyen, 2012a; Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002). Many lecturers find it difficult to accept student evaluations. Other concerns are issues regarding the reliability of the evaluations and the effective use of the evaluation results. Ly, Hoa, and Tung reported that the evaluation results were not given back to them, and as a result, they did not know where they should improve.

4.1.2 Bachelor of Education course changes

New students enrol in EU each year in September. One academic year comprises two semesters: the first occurs from mid-August for continuing students to the end of December; the second starts in January and ends in early June. Some faculties at EU provide two types of classes for students: advanced and non-advanced.

An advanced model has been used at certain universities in Vietnam for over 15 years. In EU, this model has been applied since 1998 in order to train high quality teachers in the fields of mathematics, literature, history, biology, geography, physics and chemistry (FoH, 2013). These classes are small in size with around 20 students. Students who study in advanced classes are high achievers at school or have gained awards in provincial or national competitions. To gain entry into advanced classes, students must obtain high marks at entrance exams to EU and compete with other outstanding students in an exam. Advanced classes provide "both benefits and challenges" for students, as two students said:

> Students in the advanced class are required to study specialised subjects **more intensely with additional books** and documents in both Vietnamese and English. My lecturers usually have **high expectations** of their students (Tram).

As there are **many outstanding students** in this class, every student has to **try their best** to study. We often put high pressure on ourselves and **set up goals** to achieve (Nam). (FG, post L3)

Statements from students reveal that advanced students are taught by experienced lecturers with a more challenging curriculum. Further, a class with capable students may create a learning environment that is positive, cooperative and competitive and these conditions will assist students to learn from each other and to strive in their learning. After graduation, the students with the highest results are often invited to become lecturers at EU, while others may have improved employment opportunities. Conversely, students in the advanced classes are put under immense pressure. For the first two years, they need to gain high scores to remain in these classes. If these students fail to maintain high grades, they are required to participate in an exam to compete with other excellent students from non-advanced classes. Achieving high scores is a goal for students in advanced classes. Additionally, lecturers teaching the advanced classes have high expectations of these students, including high quality accomplishment of learning tasks. This requires students to work diligently and autonomously to succeed.

In contrast, non-advanced classes are common classes applied for all faculties in EU. Compared to the advanced class, these classes usually have a large number of students with around 50, and include students with range of results. Students in non-advanced classes study with a general standard curriculum without the pressure of gaining high marks to continue.

Since 2009, students in EU have been required to attain 130 credits over four years to graduate, except for students in advanced classes, who are required to attain 140 credits. These credits can be awarded through completion of three categories of subjects: core, general, and elective subjects. To support students' professional skill formation, they are required to participate in two internships at schools. The first occurs for one month in the third year and the other for one and a half months in the fourth year. During internships, students observe teaching practices at schools and practise their own teaching under a supervising teacher.

Under a credit-based training system, students in EU usually participate in two kinds of classes: core units and electives. The core units are offered when students all enrol in the same specialisation in their faculty. Core units continue until all students

graduate. In contrast, the general and elective subjects are generated each semester and include students from different faculties, who register for the same subject with the same lecturer. The elective classes usually take place over the period of one semester.

Core unit classes are always highly structured and organised. In these classes, students' learning and extracurricular activities are normally directed by both a lecturer working as teacher-in-charge and also the student faculty association. Some active students with high academic results are nominated by their classmates each academic year to act as class president, vice class president, general secretary, and vice-general secretary. These students assist the teacher-in-charge and the student association with the organisation of learning and extracurricular activities in their classes. In contrast, lecturers teaching in elective classes are responsible for choosing an active student to be the class president. This student supports the lecturer in monitoring students' attendance and guiding study in the class.

In comparison with a core unit, an elective class is often large, incorporating students from different faculties with fewer interactions between the lecturer and students and amongst students. This characteristic of an elective class often creates obstacles for lecturers who wish to engage students in more classroom activities. Levels of interaction in an elective class were described specifically in the following interview excerpt with Ly:

> Many students come to class without knowing and remembering the name of their lecturer. In general, there is "**little interaction" between the lecturer and students**. Some lecturers only focus on transmitting and then leave the class without caring **how their students are learning** (TTL, post L1).

This lecturer's statement revealed that with "little interaction" occurring between lecturer-student and amongst students, then the mode of delivery for these classes places lecturers in the authoritative position of knowledge provider.

4.1.3 Changes in unit assessment policy

Since 2007, assessing student learning in a unit in EU has followed the Ministry's regulation that stipulates the total grade of the unit is a combination of a midterm exam (30%), attendance (10%) and a final exam (60%) (MoET, 2007). This change was expected to motivate students to learn during the course, rather than 'cram'

at the end. However, despite these grading changes, the focus of assessment is still summative. Figure 4.1 outlines how student learning in a unit is assessed in EU.
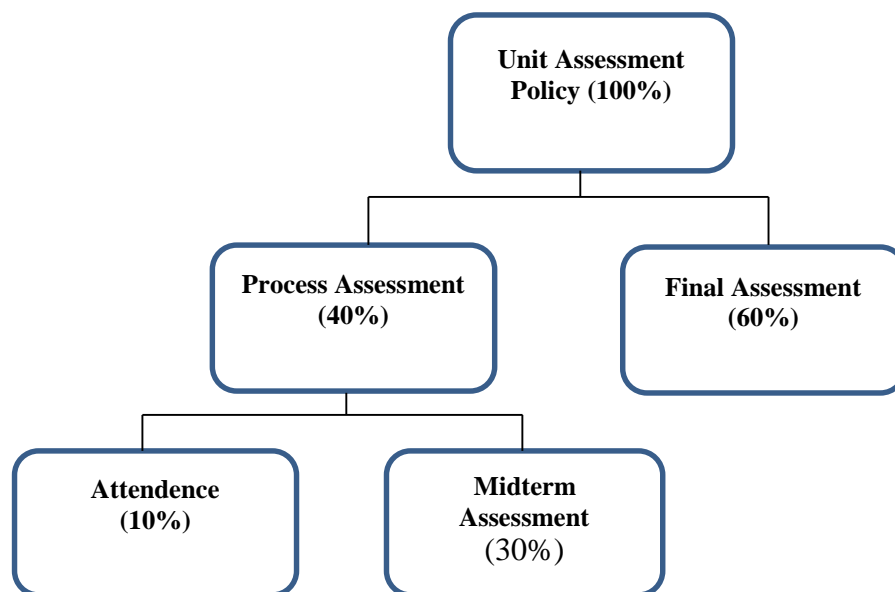
Figure 4.1. Unit Assessment Structure.

Attendance accounts for 10 percent of the assessment of each unit, and is compulsory. Students must turn up to at least 80 percent of all classes. When student absence exceeds the limit they are not permitted to take the final exams. This implies that attendance is implicitly weighted at more than 10 percent, as not being able to take the exam means potentially failing the unit. According to Ly, attendance is considered important for two main reasons. First, attendance is a factor to consider in determining one's learning attitude, which is an important trait for pre-service teachers. Second, checking attendance is intended to encourage students to learn more diligently. The loss of 10 percent or not being able to sit for the final exams is considered to motivate students to attend all classes.

MoET's assessment policy and regulations regarding the assessment methods to be used by lecturers and students differ for each subject. For general and elective subjects, lecturers are allowed to choose methods to assess their students in midterm assessment, while the final assessment of these classes are usually written tests and organised by the Training Department of EU. This department is responsible for collecting exam questions, organising the exam, and reporting marks to students via the Internet. For core subjects, lecturers are allowed to choose assessment methods, and have responsibility to mark and submit grades to coordinators in their faculties. It

is hoped that this greater flexibility in assessment choices may support lecturers to trial new and innovative teaching and assessment methods in these core subjects.

EU uses both number and letter systems to calculate students' results (EU's Handbook for Students, 2012). The unit is marked on a 10 point scale, and then converted to a letter system: A (8.5-10); B (7.0-8.4); C (5.5-6.9); D (4.0-5.4); F (under 4). The letter system is later converted to the number system, ranging from 4 to 0: A = 4, B = 3; C=2; D=1; F=0. Students have permission to re-sit an exam in following years if they want to improve their score. The following tables show how the grading system is used in EU.

Table 4.1

Grading System in EU

Numerical system (10 point scale)	Converted to the letter system	Converted to the numerical system (4-0 scale)	Ranking
10 - 8.5	A	5	Excellent
8.4 – 7.0	B	4	Good
6.9 - 5.5	C	3	Satisfactory
5.4 – 4.0	D	2	Poor
Under 4	F	1	Failure

Table 4.2

Graduation Ranking in EU

Numerical system	Graduation ranking
4.0 – 3.6	High Distinction/Excellent
3.59 - 3.20	Distinction/ Very good
3.19 - 2.50	Credit
2.49 - 2.0	Satisfactory

The above tables show that there are large differences between scales, which can impact on the reliability of assessment and result in confusion for students. Students in focus groups expressed their concerns regarding the "wide disparity" in each category when marks are converted from the 10 point scale to the letter system. For example, a student who gains a score of 7.0 is given a B, similar to a student who achieves 8.4. Some students claimed that this wide disparity may lead to "an

inaccuracy in assessing [their] learning results" (Thong and Lam, FG post L1). Furthermore, students' unfamiliarity with the 4.0 point numerical scale has led to unexpected graduation consequences. To be assessed as passed and graduated, students need to earn a grade of five within a 10 point scale, while students must reach at least 2.0, according to the 4 - 0 scale. Score conversion from a 10 point scale to 4-0 scale has caused failure for a lot of students because their scores were lower than 2.0 (EU graduation rate 2013). For example, a student who has received a result of 5.4 in the 10 point system, may end up with a result of 1.0 in the 4-0 scale.

Another issue identified by lecturers was a tendency towards 'grade inflation' (Sadler, 2009), as lecturers in EU tended to give students high marks, usually within the A and B standards. Ly critiqued this practice as "students may not actually have completed work to achieve these grades" (TTL, post L4). She also explained that due to pressure of accountability and requirements of a credit-based training, many lecturers were willing to give current students higher marks to protect their reputation as well as to attract more students in future.

Participating lecturers acknowledged that the introduction of attendance records and midterm exams into the new assessment policy has positively impacted on student learning since this "has encouraged many students to attend classes more frequently and learn diligently during the entire semester" (TTL, post L4; DTH, post L4; and NVT, post L5). However, students' learning approaches depended on lecturers' teaching and assessment requirements and organisation. Tram said: "if the lecturers regularly assign us exercises and homework, or require us to give a presentation, then I study more frequently and diligently. If lecturers just organise exams, I only study at exam time" (Tram, FG, prior L1). The interviewed students reported that their common learning strategy was only studying prior to an upcoming exam. However, there were variations in students' learning strategies in general, elective, and core subjects. Students considered core subjects as specialised units, contributing to their expertise, and therefore they tended to spend more time and effort on these units. For general and elective subjects, students might not attend classes regularly and their typical learning strategy was to wait for their lecturers to give them a list of questions for revision that could appear in the final exams. Research by Nguyen (2013) indicates that the number of students satisfied with the assessment methods in EU was low: 18.4 percent of students commented that their lecturers used inappropriate assessment

methods. Students' dissatisfaction was reflected more clearly during focus group interviews in the three classes.

Students' responses revealed that although oral and multiple-choice exams were also used in some core and English subjects, written examinations requiring only memorisation of knowledge were common at EU. To motivate students to learn, some lecturers gave an extra half or an extra mark as an incentive for students who participated actively. Students reported that the majority of lecturers focused just on transferring the content without addressing how their students learnt and whether they were motivated to learn. Lecturers' feedback on individual student learning was reported by students as minimal, especially in large classes for general and elective subjects. Further, assessment methods and questions did not seem to reflect accurately students' ability in midterm exams. Students reported that some lecturers tended not to take midterm exams seriously and they usually gave students high marks. Students indicated that they wanted lecturers to adopt various assessment methods to motivate them to learn deeply and also to accurately measure their ability.

It would be insufficient to change teaching and assessment methods without also considering how aspects such as facilities, curriculum, assessment policy, and the attitudes, habits, knowledge and skills of lecturers and students impact on student learning, in a particular sociocultural context. Although credit-based training has been implemented in EU for four years, it is claimed that there have been few changes in areas such as curriculum, facilities and teaching and learning practices. This was reflected in Ly's statement: "Everything seems to remain unchanged as it was with the mode of annual training (TTL, post L2). Ly's comments indicate that there is a perception that existing resources in EU have not addressed the demands of a credit-based training system.

4.2   CHALLENGES

Participants identified the main challenges for the University as poor facilities, inappropriate teaching strategies, poor working conditions, and a lack of instruction in assessment theory.

4.2.1 Substandard facilities

Facilities in EU have been described as poor and inadequate for students' learning needs (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2012). Participants in this study felt dissatisfied

when teaching equipment in EU was sub-standard. In particular, the lack of small group rooms has led to an increase in class size, considered a barrier to innovative teaching and learning. According to lecturers and students, limited internet connection inhibits participation in many aspects of university life. For example, students have difficulty registering for credit classes, due to capacity limitations. One student claimed, "my friends and I had to stay overnight in order to register. The system is very poor" (Lam, FG, post L5). The unavailability of projectors in the classrooms was reported by the three lecturers as a significant obstacle for their innovative teaching intentions.

4.2.2 Traditional teaching practices

Another concern arises from the traditional teaching practices of the University. It has been claimed in an EU report that because the University has been implementing certain policies for a long time, the uptake of new ways of teaching is inhibited (EU, 2013). It can be difficult to change teaching, thinking and habits that have existed for a long time. Transmission and acquisition teaching and learning practices are widely practised, as one student said "many lecturers who teach general subjects, even in some core subjects, only transmit knowledge (translated in Vietnamese as 'đọc – chép'). They talk for almost the entire lecture and we just try to listen and take notes. We feel sleepy and bored" (Anh, FG, post L1). This student's statemen and many similar student statements suggest the dominant teaching approach is the traditional lecture style.

4.2.3 Working conditions

Working conditions in EU have been argued as a barrier for changing teaching practices. A low salary and lack of timely encouragement have done little to motivate lecturers to reform their pedagogical practices. There are limited numbers of awards for excellent lecturers. Tung indicated that as EU does not issue "a practical encouraging policy for innovative lecturers", innovation occurs only at "an individual level". According to Ly, "lecturers do not have either materialistic or spiritual encouragement" (TTL, post L1). It is argued by Ly that "when lecturers cannot survive with their salary, they cannot focus on improving their teaching" (TTL, post L4).

4.2.4 Teaching Assessment

Teaching assessment at teacher-training universities in general, and particularly in EU, has been neglected, according to Tran and Nguyen (2013). Theory on assessment is usually integrated in the subjects related to pedagogy or particular subject-teaching methodology, which accounts for only six to 20 periods out of 60 of the entire course. Only eight out of 42 training programs in EU offer an independent compulsory assessment subject for students with two credits.

It has been claimed that the absence of an assessment subject at EU is the reason for a lack of sufficient understanding of assessment theories for both lecturers and graduating students (Tran & Nguyen, 2013). Naturally, this lack of knowledge has created difficulties for lecturers and graduates in their successful application of assessment methods and techniques. There appears to be a pressing need to build and teach assessment subjects to students and to provide professional development courses for staff.

In short, although EU is a large university in the teacher-training field in Vietnam, many barriers to effective teaching and learning practices have been identified. Poor facilities, inappropriate teaching habits, challenging working conditions, and the neglect of assessment understanding constitute major challenges to staff at EU. However, the three lecturers who participated in this study, through their own experiences and effort, have made significant attempts to support their students' learning. The next chapters specifically examine these lecturers' assessment practices.

Chapter 5: Confucius Says "Follow Your Teacher" – The Case of Ly

This case presents a comprehensive description and analysis of the assessment practices of Tran Thi Ly, a female lecturer from the Faculty of Psychology and Education (FPE). This chapter describes how Ly viewed herself as a facilitator, sharing power and establishing a trusting relationship with her students in an interactive learning environment. She also organised peer interactions and used assessment to scaffold student learning within the context of a large elective class.

The analysis draws on data collected from non-participant observations of five of her teaching sessions of the Communication Skill subject. A total of ten semi-structured interviews were held with the lecturer prior to and after each of the five observed teaching sessions. Further, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of seven students after each observed lecture. Documents such as the lecturer's lesson plans, students' work and EU policies and regulations pertaining to assessment and learning were also collected for analysis in the development of this case.

The chapter begins with a description of the FPE where Ly is working, and then introduces Tran Thi Ly. The subsequent section describes the Communication Skills class, including the lectures, classroom and students. Profiles of seven students in the focus group are also provided followed by an examination of the lecturer's assessment practices. Students' participation and experiences with a variety of assessment strategies are presented and analysed. The chapter concludes by addressing the research questions of this study.

5.1   FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION

The FPE, a vocational faculty, plays an important role in EU as it contributes directly to the formation of pre-service teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills. There are 46 lecturers, of whom one is a Professor, and ten are Associate Professors; 20 have Doctorates, and 15 have Masters. These staff are responsible for teaching

vocational subjects such as Psychology and Pedagogy for both major and non-major students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

As EU expects the FPE to become a pioneer in teaching and learning reforms, great effort has been made by the Faculty to enhance its training quality. In addition to reforming the curriculum, lecturers have been given more opportunities to advance their own pedagogic knowledge and skills. In particular, the Faculty has encouraged lecturers to adopt teaching approaches and practices using a student-centred approach, including group discussions, case study and questioning. Young lecturers have been sent to study in countries with advanced education such as America, Germany, and Australia. Workshops have been conducted for lecturers to exchange their innovative teaching experiences.

5.2   TRAN THI LY

5.2.1 Background and experience

Tran Thi Ly is a lecturer who is at a late stage in her career with over 20 years of teaching. She was awarded her PhD in Vietnam during the last decade, and she is now teaching vocational units to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Apart from teaching, Ly has taken part in many research projects at institutional and ministerial levels as a chief investigator or as a team member. Ly's expertise and passion for teaching has helped her become a prestigious lecturer at EU. Her reputation has been recognised by generations of her students and colleagues. In recent years, she has consistently received the award of "Good Emulator" at University level each year. One factor that she believes has led to her success is her participation in training courses.

5.2.2 Professional development

Ly has participated in many professional development training courses with both Vietnamese and foreign experts and this has contributed significantly to her teaching views and skills. She greatly appreciates the teacher training course where she was taught by professors from an Australian University. Attending this course was a turning point in her teaching career as she learned advanced teaching theories and techniques. Ly recalled the following about this course.

> The most important course that I felt I was very lucky [to attend] was a joint teacher-training program between Vietnam and Australia. We studied two years in Vietnam and were taught by some professors from [name] University. We were taught **a comprehensive and fundamental system of active teaching methods** such as how to teach, how to use technology, how to give feedback and build curriculum (TTL, post L5).

Knowledge and skills that Ly gained from training courses were applied to her own pedagogical practices.

5.2.3 Teaching philosophy

Ly has a well-developed teaching philosophy. She believes that effective learning requires students to participate actively in classroom activities. She also thinks that students should be autonomous and independent learners while the teacher should be a facilitator to support learning. She further elaborated her role, and that of her students, in the teaching and learning process: "I had to work very hard at home to design classroom activities and then work as a facilitator during lectures. I believe that my students learn a lot because they learn by themselves" (TTL, post L5). Ly's perception and experience were that using a student-centred approach requires the teacher to work harder, but students received more benefits in their learning.

Ly values learning by 'doing' and identified four areas of focus that she employed to promote her students' learning: making the unit meaningful to students' lives; using problem-solving learning and case studies to stimulate students' thinking; creating authentic learning experiences; and using assessment to promote students' learning. In her class, Ly created many opportunities for her students to be actively involved in a variety of classroom activities. She used interactive teaching strategies such as questioning, role play, group discussions and case study as she believed that "these strategies can promote [my] students' thinking and inspire them to learn" (TTL, prior L1).

Ly believes that assessment has a great influence on student learning because "how assessment is used, will determine how students learn" (TTL, post L5). For this reason, she critiqued the use of a written test in EU's assessment policy for elective subjects. According to Ly, a written test would encourage students to employ a surface approach in their learning. Furthermore, she believes that assessment has an important and long-term impact on students' futures, as their employment opportunities are

usually based on their grades. As in other Asian countries influenced by a Confucian teaching culture, Vietnamese teaching and learning processes have centred on examinations (Luong, 2015). Historically, results of exams were used to certify and rank student learning and later for selection of government officials. Ly understood the importance of grades for her students and indicated that assessment needs to be done carefully and accurately.

Ly valued the co-construction of knowledge in her classroom as an effective pedagogical practice. Ly was identified as an expert, who elicited students' experiences to inform her teaching and to guide the participation of her students. When she observed the cognitive difficulties her students were facing, she engaged other participants in the class to solve problems. Ly also participated and contributed to the co-construction of knowledge.

Ly shared her own knowledge and experiences as well as examples with her students to help them progress further in their understanding. For example, after drawing a brief theoretical picture of a lesson, she started to tell a story related to theoretical knowledge or reflecting communication experiences from her own or her friends' experiences. In the third observed class, Ly talked about one of her teachers at university whom she admired and from whom she had learnt a lot. This lecturer always had a positive view about his students. Ly's story effectively illustrated the necessity of adopting a positive view in communication processes. Students who were asked after this class agreed that they gained profound messages from her example for their future profession and lives. Further, Ly used her stories and experiences to engage students in her lectures. For example, she described a situation when she worked as a school psychologist with a student who was addicted to playing online games. This student did not respond to her comments and then said hurtfully: "my playing of games is not related to you. You do not have to care about me and my family". Ly asked: "What would you do if you were the consultant in this situation"? Her students got involved actively in thinking and contributing to possible solutions for this case.

Students evaluated this sharing as an effective teaching strategy to support their learning. They described Ly's stories as "diverse, interesting and real", which made understanding the knowledge of the unit easier. Moreover, they learnt how Ly used primary communication principles in her career and own life. Ly's experiences appeared to help the students apply the communication principles to their own practice.

Students recognised that they behaved differently before and after the lesson, and one student claimed: "The communication skills that Ly used in her stories provided me with a model to behave well in my life" (Thai, FG, post L5). The way that Ly presented both her stories of success and failure brought genuine feelings which created trust in students (Ba, Lam, Lan, Anh, FG, post L3, 5).

Ly not only shared her experiences, but also encouraged her students to share their own experiences and stories. These experiences were used to build knowledge related to the lecture content. Ly sometimes put students in the position of an expert to teach other students. For example, in the first observed class, when two students finished role play, Ly asked them to share their feelings and strategies when adopting the roles of the characters of an angry father and a principal. Ly believes "when other students observed the performance, they only knew something outside. They did not know how the character felt inside" (TTL, post L1). For that reason, their sharing would help other students understand more clearly characters' psychological characteristics and how they controlled their emotions in that situation. In doing this, Ly helped students to move gradually to greater participation in the learning community.

Ly usually encouraged peer learning, particularly in the revision that Ly organised in the last teaching session. Students were required to apply the theory of the unit to solve unknown communication situations in a limited time. In particular, each student group took part in a competition of solving communication situations with two other groups. One group gave a prepared communication situation to the other group, which had one minute to discuss their possible response, and then performed this in front of the class. The group which gave the situation also shared their response. This was a more challenging learning task from the usual lessons. Ly contended that her students could learn more since they had opportunities to interact with peers not only in their own group, but also in other groups.

Ly not only acted as an expert to guide her students, but also constructed knowledge with her students in the position of co-participant. The following snapshot illustrates how she participated in the negotiation of meaning in the third observed teaching session: the skill of adjustment of communication processes.

SNAPSHOT

CO-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN LY AND STUDENTS

(The third observed teaching session - The Vietnamese version is in Appendix H)

Ly entered and said: We had a long holiday, five days. Let's share our emotions and activities that we spent on our long holiday. What was your holiday like?

Students said very excitedly: Very fun.

Ly: That is good, she smiled and asked: Tell us what you did in your holiday?

Students: Doing volunteer work; doing part time job; visiting our hometowns; travelling; sleeping; meeting up with friends from high school, staying at home.

Ly: Do you think all of the activities that you did in your holiday were meaningful?

Students: Yes.

Ly: How about Trang who stayed in her room during the holiday? Could you share with us more about your holiday?

Trang: I just stayed in my room and did nothing. I was sad because my boyfriend went abroad to study. Although he called me to tell that he arrived safely, his image and questions such as "What was he doing? Was he thinking of me" were always in my mind.

Ly: Do you think this sharing was meaningful to you?

Trang: Yes, I feel more relaxed. If I kept it inside, I feel even sadder.

Ly: Thanks Trang for a genuine sharing. We knew that she had a sad holiday. What about me? Do you know what I did in my holiday? Ask me questions so that I can share with you about my holiday.

Students: Where did you go?

Ly: Visited my hometown (looked towards windows)

Students: What did you do?

Ly: Cooking

Students: Who did you cook for?

Ly: My family

Students: What food did you cook?

Ly: I cooked food that I like

Students: What food do you like most?

Ly: Every food

At this time, students seemed to become disappointed with the teacher's responses. Although being encouraged by the teacher: "Please ask me more", few students

> *continued the conversation. Only two students asked questions in an uncomfortable way.*
>
> Students: How was your holiday?
>
> *Ly: Very fun*
>
> Students: Do you like holidays?
>
> *Ly: Everyone likes holidays*
>
> Ly thanked her students for their participation in her role play, then asked
>
> *Ly: What was the difference between your sharing and my sharing?*
>
> *Some students volunteered to talk:*
>
> Anh: While we were so open and genuine, it seemed that you did not want to share with us, therefore we did not want to ask you anymore.
>
> Thao: Your responses seemed to stop our questions.
>
> Thai: I felt you did not want to continue our conversation.
>
> *Ly: What did you feel when communicating with me in the previous situation?*
>
> Students: We did not want to talk with you. We felt disappointed with you and wanted to stop our conversation.
>
> *Ly: Did you achieve your communication purpose in the previous situation?*
>
> Students: No
>
> *Ly: You realised that you had made a good attempt at a communication process but the communication subject did not want to share and communicate with you. How can you adjust yourself as well as the communication subject to achieve the communication purposes? To achieve this, we need to learn the fourth communication skill: the skill of adjustment of the communication process.*

The above snapshot illustrates that Ly and her students interacted together to co-construct knowledge in a lesson. They shared experiences about their long holiday in a conversation which was later used to connect with knowledge of the new lesson. Ly deliberately played a character in the conversation. As her students were unaware, they got involved naturally in the conversation. Negative reactions to their teacher were real when Ly pretended to be unwilling to share experiences about her holiday. Clearly, Ly was willing to take a risk with her identity to bring authenticity. Ly's involvement was valued by students in the focus groups. They all felt surprised, interested and active when they and the teacher interacted together to build knowledge.

Ly's teaching experiences, expertise and belief in the social situation of learning have directed her teaching practices in the Communication Skills unit and the ways she uses

assessment as a tool to enhance student learning. Ly is an important participant in this study as her well-developed philosophy and teaching practices provide one example of how assessment for learning is implemented in a large elective class in EU.

5.3   COMMUNICATION SKILLS CLASS

5.3.1 The Communication Skills subject

The Communication Skills unit is one of the elective vocational subjects, which awards two credits. This subject was introduced in the teacher-training program in 2009, when the University started to transit to a credit-based training system. The subject aims to help students to understand primary communication principles and develop skills that they can apply in their lives and teaching careers.

5.3.2 The Communication Skills classes

The Communication Skills class was a large elective class with 120 students, including 95 females and 25 males who enrolled in 20 different faculties of the University. Lectures took place in an old building between 10 am and 12 pm every Thursday, and each teaching session lasted for two periods of 50 minutes each, with 10 minutes for a short break. However, students in this class often studied without a break. My impression of the first class was that there was a large number of students in a very old, large, pitched floor lecture hall, which seated a maximum of 130 students. It was quite dark. The desks were fixed and the room was used for general teaching to a large number of students of elective subjects. It lacked fresh air because the roof was very low and only the front door and some windows were open. This room was quite noisy as it was located next to a high school, situated within the EU campus. Facilities for teaching were simple and included a projector, a computer and a microphone. A technical support officer managed the room and electronic devices, and was responsible for opening and closing the room when there was a lecture. If lecturers wanted to use the projector and microphone, they needed to come to this officer's room to borrow the equipment.

This room did not appear to be conducive to student learning. Ly and her students who were interviewed all complained about the many inconveniences and the challenges this room presented. It was described as too tight, crowded, noisy, stuffy, and poorly equipped. Ly described her feelings when she was teaching in this room.

The class is **too crowded** while the equipment is **too poor** … I think this is not good for student learning. Another issue is the lack of microphone. There is **only one microphone** for all in such a large room. When my students role play, I sometimes **cannot hear** what they are saying because there are not enough microphones for them. The computer and projector are **now broken**. I feel **so tired** because I have to teach **without technology** (translated in Vietnamese as Dạy chay) (TTL, post L5).

Ly's statement revealed that poor facilities for teaching and learning de-motivate and interrupt her teaching. Consequently this would have a negative impact on student learning.

5.3.3 Students in the Communication Skills class

Students in the Communication Skills class were in their first year of university, aged 18 or 19 years, and most came from the provinces in Northern and Central Vietnam. As these students had just passed the entrance exam and experienced the first semester at the University, they were described by Ly as in an "over-relaxed" mood, with a passive learning style and a lack of intrinsic learning motivation. She identified these characteristics of the first year students as challenges to her teaching.

They have not worked out their learning goals, or appropriate learning responsibility and attitude. They are also **not familiar with learning methodology** at tertiary level such as self-study while they **often 'wait to be fed'**…. So, it **is hard for me to stimulate** their participation because they have developed this passive learning habit (TTL, post L4).

Typical characteristics of students in this class can be understood by considering the seven students who participated in the focus group interviews. The table below profiles each student. Grades are given to indicate that this was a mixed ability class.

Table 5.1

Interviewed Students' Profiles in Communication Skills Class

Students' Names (Pseudonyms)	Profile
Hoang, Van Thai	Thai is from a province in Central Vietnam. In the 2012-2013 academic years, he had the role of secretary in his major. Communication Skills was an extra unit that Thai registered in. He had the option of deleting his name from the class list. However, as Thai really enjoyed studying the unit, he participated actively, responding, questioning, role playing and having discussions with his group. He said he studied actively not because of grades, but because he wanted to try his best to learn. He got 3.0 in the last semester.
Nguyen, Lan Anh	Anh studied in a gifted high school in a rural area near Hanoi. She is studying to become a teacher. She chose to study in EU because she does not have to pay a tuition fee. Anh participated quite actively in her group discussions. She sometimes role played in cases or responded to the teacher's questions. She got 3.12 in the last semester.
Vo, Thi Lan	Lan lives in Hanoi, the capital. She is studying in the FPE to become a psychologist within a school. As Lan was assigned to be the president of the class, she helped the lecturer to pass the microphone during discussions, inform new plans to other students in class and organise some performances. She took part actively in other classroom activities, responded to the teacher's questions and role played in cases. She got 3.0 in the last semester.
Tran, Đuc Lam	Lam comes from a province in the North of Vietnam. At high school, he studied in a gifted class in Hanoi. He is now studying in an advanced science class. In the first semester, Lam got only 2.8, which was relatively low compared with his classmates. In this semester, he had to learn to achieve high scores to keep him in the advanced class. Lam actively took part in the class by discussing, presenting the group discussions, role playing, and responding to questions of the lecturer and peers.
Bui, Hoang Phap	Like Lan, Phap lives in Hanoi, studying to become a psychologist in a high school. As EU was not his first preference, he felt bored because it seemed that this major was not suitable to him. As Phap's personality is very quiet, he took part in some performances as the main character because of group tasks (there are only two men in his group). He got 2.8 in the first semester.
Nguyen, Thi Ba	Ba lives in Hanoi and is a classmate of Lan and Phap. She intended to become a businesswoman rather than a teacher or a psychologist. She got 2.75 in the first semester. For her, scores are not very important. She just wants to study psychology and hopes to apply it to her business. She rarely spoke in front of the class. She is a secretary of her group, responsible for collecting and taking notes for members.
Vu, Nhan My	My is from a province in the North of Vietnam. She studied in a gifted high school, and followed her mother's footsteps to study in EU to become a teacher. She is now a member of an advanced class in a science subject. In the last semester, she got 3.52 – a high distinction. She still needs a high score to stay in this class. My participated in class as a group leader. She often responded to the teacher's questions, played in cases, and presented group discussions.

Ly faced many challenges when teaching this class. Her students were generally passive learners with mixed levels of motivation. They could be described as novices or peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in the context of university learning. Observations revealed that students' participation relied on the lecturer's direct intervention. Further, Ly's teaching space was noisy, stuffy, poorly equipped and crowded. However, being an experienced lecturer, Ly attempted to maximise her student learning within this challenging context. How she engaged her students in learning and her students' experiences of assessment are analysed in the next section.

5.4   KEY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

This section presents emerging themes related to what, and how, AfL strategies Ly enacted. Students' attitudes and reactions to these strategies are also described.

5.4.1 Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Ly believes that making learning visible to students will "direct their entire learning process, specifically learning methods" (TTL, post L4). She used three major strategies to make learning clear to her students, including "learning contract", "sharing learning objectives" and "explaining expected outcomes for final exam".

5.4.1.1 Developing a learning contract

In the first teaching session, Ly involved her students in the establishment of a learning contract by asking questions. She believed that a learning contract helped her to "determine students' learning needs; to recognise students' expectations of the unit and lecturer; to identify their learning obstacles and to guide [her] students to overcome their obstacles to achieve expectations" (TTL, prior L2). She recognised the benefit for both the lecturer and the students in terms of adjusting teaching and inspiring appropriate motivation. Ly incorporated a student-centred approach in the negotiation and development of a learning contract. She described how she established a learning contract with her students as follows:

> I told them about the unit objectives, curriculum, teaching and learning methods, assessment tasks and criteria. I used **a brainstorming technique** to **involve students in the establishment of the contract**. I **asked them some questions**: Why did they register for this unit? What were their expectations of this unit and the lecturer? What were their barriers in this unit? To achieve these expectations, what did I need to do? What did they need to do? I wrote

all their ideas on the blackboard. When they had told all their ideas, **I summarised the main points** that indicated what needed to be done by me, and my students. **We undertook the plan together**. We also discussed what happened if I, or they violated the plan. In the last class, if I had time, I intended to ask my students to self-assess their participation and results in comparison with their learning contract (TTL, prior L2).

Students' involvement in building a learning contract brought much excitement, and appeared to develop trusting relationships, and responsibility for their learning. The seven interviewed students realised the value of a learning contract as a "new strategy which created trust" in the lecturer (My, Ba, Lan, Anh, Phap, FG, post L5), and a "democratic atmosphere" where they had the chance to share their expectations (Lam, Thai, FG, post L5). They felt more responsible for their learning and admitted that their teacher completed more than the learning contract, while they did not fully perform their roles, by still "being lazy" and "arriving late" (Phap, Lam, FG, post L5). Ly confirmed this: "...during our teaching and learning process, we did not add any items. However, some students broke some rules such as being late. I know this was not their fault. They had to move from other lecture halls to my class without extra time..." (TTL, Prior L2). Ly's statement shows an understanding of her students' perspectives.

The learning contract appeared to help students in Ly's class to be aware of the content, type of lessons, and the order of communication skills that they learnt. For example, Lam valued this strategy as useful to his learning because it "clearly outlined the content, teaching, learning and assessment methods". The learning contract is illustrated in [Appendix G].

5.4.1.2 Sharing learning objectives

Ly shared learning schedules and expectations with her students in every lesson, usually at the beginning or after a role play which reflected the topic of a theoretical session. Ly used questions that raised problems to transition from an existing lesson to the next. At the end of a lesson, she concluded and reminded students about the tasks of the next session, which made her teaching clear and logical to the students. She believed that by doing things in this way she would facilitate students' learning. As a result, they would participate more in the main parts of each lesson. How Ly explained learning intentions in the first observed class is presented below.

SNAPSHOT

LY'S SHARING OF LEARNING INTENTIONS WITH STUDENTS

Lesson: The skill of controlling emotions

The teaching session began with a dramatic scene acted by two students in Ly's class. This involved a conversation between an angry parent and the principal of a high school. Other students in the class observed and took notes on the development of attitudes and behaviours of the two characters. They then discussed the role play in their groups. Representatives of each group presented group comments from the front of the class. Ly gave feedback about each group's comments and judgements related to the role play.

Ly used the information gained from this situation and experience to introduce the new lesson. She highlighted the need to study new communication skills to ensure communicative competence and effectiveness in daily lives and the teaching profession. Ly raised four questions to direct students into the main parts of the lecture.

- What was the name of this communication skill?
- Why do we have to learn this skill?
- What were the values of understanding the nature and demonstrations of this skill in our daily lives and teaching profession?
- How could we practise to develop this communication skill?

Ly introduced the title of the lesson THE SKILL OF CONTROLLING EMOTIONS. Subsequently, she spoke about her learning expectations for students in this lesson.

There was a consensus among student participants regarding the benefit of shared learning objectives and schedules:

> I became "active and well prepared" for each section (Lan, Anh);
> It directed our learning with "a focus on major knowledge and followed the lesson easily" (Ba);
> The experience allowed "self-assessment for both lecturer and students" (Thai); and
> It "stimulated understanding of knowledge" (Phap). (FG, post L3)

More strikingly, Lam was very interested in this strategy as he contrasted Ly's strategy with that of teachers in science classes: "Teachers in my faculty never share

their learning objectives and schedules with us. They come to class and teach. I do not know what will be taught in a day's lesson. When the time is over, they stop teaching and we continue on to the next teaching session" (Lam, FG, post L3). The student's statement revealed that explaining learning objectives and schedules was not common in many classes at EU and consequently students highly valued this strategy as used in Ly's class.

5.4.1.3 Explaining criteria for midterm assessment

Ly outlined her three criteria for midterm assessment in her first class. The first criterion was the quality of the case prepared in practice sessions, which was assessed in terms of its authenticity and students' demonstration of using communication skills effectively in solving problems in cases. Another criterion was the group's participation, shown through numbers of students included in the role play and quality of their participation. The final criterion was the accuracy of peer feedback on the use of the communication skills in cases. Ly indicated that "every criterion is important and equal" (TTL, post L2).

Students indicated that they used these criteria as a "frame" to build their cases and give comments (Lan, Thai, Phap, Ba, FG, post L2). However, they claimed these criteria were "too general", which created difficulty in assessing other groups' performances. For example, students were too focused on watching the role plays without taking notes, resulting in a reduction in quality of student group discussions and evaluation. It was evident in the fourth observed class, as all interviewed students felt that they gave and received "surface comments" (FG, post L4). Assessment criteria were described as "not detailed enough" for them to give "deep comments" (all students, FG, post L4). Students expected assessment criteria to be "more specific". Thai felt it was easier to evaluate if the teacher gave them "a paper which indicated clear assessment criteria", while Lan wished for "a detailed scale to follow".

However, students expressed concern that specific assessment criteria might limit their creativity (Thai, FG, post L4). Another issue might include students' overdependence on detailed criteria, as they "would not have to think or read more documents" (Ba, FG, post L4). The views of students on specific assessment criteria and their impact on their learning is understood as "criteria compliance" (Stobart, 2008; Torrance, 2012). This issue was seen in Ly's teaching practice, as illustrated in the following snapshot.

> **SNAPSHOT**
>
> **ISSUE OF "CRITERIA COMPLIANCE"**
>
> *(The fourth observed teaching session)*
>
> The case of Group One described a little girl who witnessed a discussion between her parents about their decision to divorce. Her mother did not agree and ran out of the room. The daughter was shocked and asked her father why the father decided to separate. First, the father was quiet and did not want to share anything with his daughter. The girl tried to ask more questions, considered one way to maintain a communication, to elicit her father to share his thoughts. At last, the father talked more with his daughter. However, he did not change his decision.
>
> Although this case was evaluated as interesting and real, this group received some criticism from peers and the teacher and therefore got a low mark. The reason for this related to the assessment criterion of achieving the communication purpose which in this task was for the role play to result in a solution to the problem posed.

Based on given assessment criteria, both students and the teacher expected a 'happy ending' for the case. Group One felt disappointed with this feedback because they believed that changing the father's decision was not a reality. An over-dependence on assessment criteria has been claimed as unsuitable for learning at higher education where students may have different responses. It is advised that at a certain level, 'divergent responses' should be accepted to develop learners' creativity (Torrance, 2012). However, respect for students' creativity does not mean that assessment criteria should be general. A clear and specific provision of expected outcomes is needed to direct student learning (Black et al., 2005; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Jonsson, 2014).

5.4.1.4 Sharing expected outcomes for final exam

In the last teaching session, Ly guided her students specifically about the structure, content and appearance that examiners expect in exam papers. Ly indicated two reasons for this guidance. As her students were in their first year, they should be taught explicitly how to complete an exam paper. Second, an exam paper in elective subjects may require different standards in comparison with requirements in their own specialisation. It appears that Ly, as a facilitator, understood her students' learning needs at this stage in university and tried to cater for these needs. Ly's guidance for the final exam is shown below.

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EXPECTED FINAL EXAM PAPER

(The last observed teaching session: The revision)

Ly introduced the structure of the written test, which consisted of two questions, one a theoretical question and the other a situational question. The value of each was 50 percent (five points for each). Her students were advised to read the exam questions carefully and to try to complete all of them. Ly explained that if students could not finish both questions then they would lose marks in their total. She emphasised that scoring requirements in a "credit-based training course" differ from that in an "annual training" course. That means they would fail if they received a grade of five as the total.

Ly then introduced the features of a good exam strategy.

   1. Provide the definition of working concepts: for example, if students were asked to analyse the use of a particular communication skill, they should first define "the communication skills".

   2. Show their theoretical understanding by providing real examples and experiences.

   3. Draw practical implications for the pedagogical field and their lives.

Ly introduced to her students the main types of situations that could appear in the practical question and how to apply theoretical understanding and experiences from their role plays to effectively complete the question.

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Student participants appreciated the teacher's explicit teaching regarding exam standards, because "no one had told them about this" (all students, FG, post L5). They had learned through experience and therefore got low marks in their first semester. Students claimed that they benefited not only for this unit, but also for other general subjects. Sharing success criteria with students appeared important for supporting learning (Black et al., 2005; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2014). As many lecturers in EU did not use this approach, Ly's instruction was valued by students. As can also be seen, the importance of grades was emphasised in Ly's guidance for the final exam.

5.4.2 Questioning

Questioning is a common strategy that Ly used to stimulate student thinking and to understand students' current level.

Ly used open questions to learn about her students' life experiences and then she used their responses to illustrate knowledge in the unit. Ly sometimes used closed questions, followed by the question of "why?" to help her students delve deeper into their opinions. For example, in the third observed class, Ly asked students if they felt they could easily control positive emotions such as happiness or negative emotions such as sadness, and why? This question engaged more students in the classroom activities.

Ly also used questions to encourage more ideas and to receive feedback, such as "Do you have any ideas about this topic? Do you want to add more ideas? Are there any other ideas about this?" She stated that she never ignored any idea from a student, as she believes that "in group discussions, the person presented only representative ideas. Other members may have different ideas" (TTL, post L5). This questioning practice showed that Ly gave her students opportunities to express their opinions and negotiate meaning in the classroom community. However, many students did not take advantage of these. This may have resulted from a 'face saving' habit that is part of Vietnamese culture, or the historic practice of being a passive learner (McCornac & Phan, 2005; Pham, 2010). In response to such a learning culture, Ly used brainstorming and showed her respect for students' answers.

5.4.2.1 Brainstorming

Brainstorming was used regularly in Ly's lectures. Students were required to give as many ideas as possible without careful consideration. Ly wrote all ideas on the blackboard and then required students to categorise them into groups of ideas.

Students described brainstorming as a new teaching strategy which made them "alert" and "less sleepy" and allowed them to say a range of things without being judged. Students enjoyed this strategy because they had few chances to speak at high school and even in some subjects at university. One student described the values of brainstorming.

> Brainstorming was **a new strategy**. **From elementary to high school, my teachers always talked and we only listened**. In many other classes in university, I said to my teachers that this knowledge was wrong. My teacher said it was never wrong without further explanations. I felt very distressed. Now I had a chance **to talk and communicate freely**. I had a feeling that I was **the owner of knowledge**. Both teacher and students **negotiated** to have

an agreement of knowledge. In Ms Ly's lectures, I **remembered everything** because they were ideas that **I contributed to**" (Lam, FG, post L1).

This student's statement indicates that the transmission model of Vietnamese education, which encourages the authoritative role of the teacher in a classroom, may inhibit students' engagement and independent thinking. The way in which Ly allowed students to negotiate meaning brought them interest and a sense of being a creator of knowledge rather than simply a receiver of knowledge. It also highlights the principle that when students are placed in the centre of the learning process as agents, it helps them to learn more effectively (Rogoff, 2003, 2008). Brainstorming also allowed Vietnamese students to give their own opinions without the fear of losing 'face', since the focus is on a list of ideas rather than the person contributing those ideas (Osborn, 1942).

5.4.2.2 Respect students' responses

Ly believed that respect for students' responses was "a minimum culture in teaching", and reasoned that "generating ideas was difficult; however, they dared to speak that was even more difficult. Therefore, we should respect their ideas" (TTL, post L4). In particular, Ly avoided criticising her students' responses, as she said: "I never evaluate immediately students' responses as right or wrong. I respect every idea and behave politely with all ideas" (TTL, post L4). This created a safe environment for "all students to speak and to perform" (all students, FG, post L3, 5). For any response, Ly always said "thank you" and sometimes smiled, which created a friendly environment for student learning. Thai said: "My answer was either right or wrong, she always smiled in a very friendly way. In this way, I wanted to share more" (Thai, FG, post L5). Students in focus groups evaluated Ly's respect for their responses as an effective practice in Ly's questioning. They explained that this practice was in contrast with that of some teachers who "just talk and never listen to students' ideas" (Lam, FG, post L1). Students described their positive feelings in Ly's class as follows.

> I was so afraid of talking in front of the class because I was afraid of being criticised by other people. However, when I worked with Ms Ly in this unit, I **did not hesitate to speak** my responses even when I was unsure **if the answer was right or wrong** (Anh).
>
> I have chances **to talk freely** in this unit. My responses were **not judged** (Lam). (FG, post L3)

It appears that Ly's respect for students' responses led to a supportive learning environment where students could raise their voices and take learning risks. In this way, Ly built a conducive learning environment for co-construction of knowledge (Stobart, 2008).

5.4.3 Observation

Ly used observation to recognise what was happening in her class and how her students participated and developed knowledge. Ly valued information gained from observation as feedback on her teaching. She believed that this feedback was vital to adjust her teaching or to provide timely interventions to support her students' learning. Ly not only observed the performance of her students during group discussions and role play, but also focused on students' body language. For example, in group discussions, Ly visited each group to observe and listen to their discussions. If any student was not involved in the group discussion and did private or personal work, she usually asked them to tell their ideas to the group, and assigned them a learning task, such as the role of a presenter in the next session. She also required group leaders to deliver discussion questions to other students. In role play activities, she stated that she had to observe carefully to give her students precise and fair comments which helped them to feel comfortable and make changes. Lam said that Ly observed carefully even in some of the "smallest activities" and gave them "detailed feedback" (Lam, FG, post L1).

5.4.4 Role play

Ly used role play frequently in her classes, especially in practice sessions. She organised the class into six groups and required each group to prepare a case related to a particular communication skill. Students' selection and building of a case needed to fulfil certain requirements: a real case of the teaching profession or life; a demonstration of a communication skill and achievement of communication purposes.

Using role play seemed to align with Ly's teaching philosophy in that she valued authentic learning and learning by doing. She explained that the purposes of using role play in her teaching was to help students become immersed in a real situation and to practise communication skills. Through students' performance, Ly gained an understanding of her students' current level:

I used role play to give my students **opportunities to practise the skills** through which I could realise **how much they understand** the knowledge of the unit. If they showed an incorrect understanding, I must **adjust them immediately** (TTL, post L4).

Ly used role play to elicit students' existing understanding and to adjust her teaching accordingly. For example, in the last teaching session, through the role play of the first three groups, Ly realised that her students used their 'everyday' experiences to solve their cases. She advised students to revise the theoretical knowledge and to apply communication principles in solving situations relevant to the exam and in their daily lives.

There was consensus on the value of role play when the students stated that they were all excited about participating. Students claimed that role play made lessons more exciting and comfortable. Role play helped them to understand knowledge in an "entertaining way" and, they had to "work harder" (Lam, FG, post L4), to recognise their own limitations (Lan, FG, post L4), and to engage in "mutual learning" (My, FG, post L4). It is evidenced by the idea of one student: "I really like learning by role play. It was a very interesting, real and entertaining way to gain knowledge" (Lam, FG, post L4). It appears that through the use of role play, Ly created opportunities for her students to participate and at the same time apply their theoretical understanding and experiences of communication skills. This is a way to construct and negotiate meaning and then support the development of students' identity (Tsui, Real, & Edwards, 2009; Wenger, 2008).

Despite being a good practice, role play was not always a favourite activity of all students. Learning diaries of students revealed that some would have preferred a greater diversity of activities such as games or video clips, rather than repeated role play. Students in the focus groups indicated that changing parts of this activity would make it more interesting and challenging from lecture to lecture. For instance, the lecturer could "participate as a character in their role plays" (Anh, Phap, Ba, FG, post L2), or "one group could give situations for the other five groups to role play" (Thai, post L2). It is apparent that for this group of students, even an innovative learning activity gets boring with repetition, and therefore diversification or frequent change of activities in a classroom is needed to engage students in learning.

5.4.5 Feedback

Ly often gave her feedback about students' performance at the end of each lesson, particularly in practice sessions. After organising peer learning, Ly decided to be the last giving oral feedback to students. She explained that this helped students learn from each other and if they had divided opinions, Ly acted as facilitator.

Her comments focused on common things in the performance of the six groups and then focused specifically on each group. Ly acknowledged that as she always valued student effort, her feedback tended to be positive and constructive to promote learning. Ly shared the content of her feedback.

> My comments to students' work are usually like '**a sandwich**'. First, I had to 'kiss' them... [laughing]. What I mean is that I needed to **praise them first**. I showed that I recognised what they **have achieved**. After that, I gave them information about their **limitations or weaknesses**...I gave this information **in the middle**. I also gave them **my advice and expectations**… (TTL, post L2).

Her statement reflects a model which many researchers have suggested: feedback should include giving students information about what they have done well, what they need to work on and what should be done to reach target learning goals (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989). This model of giving feedback on her students' performance is shown through the following snapshot.

LY'S ORAL FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

(The second observed teaching session)

Firstly, I would say that **all groups prepared [their] drama and cases well**. **Compared with last time**, your cases today were all real and diverse, which reflected cases not only in the teaching profession, but also in our daily lives. Although each case had a unique characteristic, all cases demonstrated the controlling skill of emotions. However, the level of demonstration varied from group to group.

In general, each of the six groups attempted to apply the theory of the controlling skill of emotions in their cases. However, I will remind you that this achieved different outcomes and there were some limitations.

I **highly appreciated your effort and positive attitudes** when applying the theory in your cases. All cases demonstrated a basic content of the controlling skill of emotions. For example, you demonstrated a negative impact on physical and mental health when we could not control our emotions and some approaches to control emotions. However, the levels achieved were different from group to group.

In terms of limitations, I agreed with My [group 6] that all groups acted too long. Some cases did not demonstrate clearly the skill and how to control emotions. **Almost all cases only showed that we were controlling or not controlling our emotions.** Some groups did not fully achieve the communication purposes in their cases. Some cases had **unreal and unnatural endings**.

Take Group Four as an example. The case described a conference between the teacher and parents. The teacher came to the conference one hour late because she had to take a student who had had an accident to a hospital. Parents were so angry and reprimanded the teacher. They demanded the teacher-in-charge withdraw from the position.

For me, the parents' performance in this case was not aligned to Vietnamese culture where the teacher is always respected. It was also **unreasonable** when the teacher was so quiet to listen to the parents' fierce reprimand. Although this might show her ability to control emotions, it was not real. I would say that you built a case which was 'exaggerated'. You should notice this aspect and take note for next time. However, I still highly appreciated this case. This situation happened in our teaching career when many Vietnamese families

wanted to choose good teachers for their children. However, the way you demonstrated this was 'excessive'.

For Group Two, I agreed with peer comments that **your case was not very logical**. Although your case was about the idolisation phenomenon among teenagers, which was real and good, you turned off the light and changed the scenes successively and this made your case lack coherence.

For Group One: I **really liked your drama because it was real**. Your case mentioned a common situation when a good student failed the entrance university exam. You demonstrated very well the controlling skill and how to control emotions.

Group Five built a very good case and you shared common good things with Group One. The two groups knew how to apply the theory of the skill in your cases.

I emphasised that the controlling skill of emotions did not stand independently. It was combined with other communication skills such as listening skills. I realised that **you combined well the communication skills** that we have learnt already and we will learn more about them in future. For example, Groups One, Four, Six used the skill of persuasion which will be learned in the next lectures. However, since you have not learnt this skill, **your use was based only on your experiences, so it was not really effective.**

The above snapshot shows that Ly's feedback focused more on the task and process levels, compared with Hattie and Timperley (2007)'s model of four levels: the task, the process, the self-regulated and the self. She compared the six groups' performance against the assessment criteria that she gave students at the beginning of their role play. She also valued her students' effort. Emphasis on students' effort, according to Dweck (2006), is considered important to develop a "growth mindset", which helps students to progress in their learning. However, it can be seen that her feedback included praise for what was done well and general suggestions for improvement for groups. Specific feedback for each group to go further in their learning was limited. Ly explained this was an unintended consequence due to shortage of time. Ly also realised an improvement in selecting students' cases, compared with the last practice class. This may indicate that students acted on Ly's feedback to build more diverse cases.

Ly was fully aware of three main purposes in providing detailed and constructive feedback to her students. Firstly, students can learn from how Ly gave feedback to emulate this in their future teaching careers. Second, students can recognise the lecturer's responsibility in student learning. Third, students can be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve their communication skills. Ly's beliefs on the role of feedback align with respect for the teacher which is significant in Vietnamese cultural values. The teacher is always considered as a role model for students to emulate (Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002; Tran, 2004a). For lecturers working for teacher-training universities in Vietnam, this role is heightened. Students in focus groups claimed that they paid attention to learn not only the knowledge of the unit, but also focused on Ly's teaching methods and other pedagogical skills.

Ly described her experiences in giving feedback to her students as "stressful". To have accurate, detailed and fair comments that support student learning, Ly had to observe and take notes intensely during the students' performances. She also listened to groups' comments to compare these with her own comments. She carefully selected how she would phrase her feedback, and tended to reconcile conflicts during classroom discussions. She also chose "softer words" to express dissenting ideas.

LY'S CAREFUL SELECTION OF LANGUAGE IN GIVING FEEDBACK

(The fifth observed teaching session)

Ly gave feedback on a student's performance in the drama at the beginning of the lesson. The student's role was to persuade her close friend to give up carrying drugs as a courier.

Her friend, Thai, needed to make some money to cure his mother who was seriously ill and needed an urgent operation. His family had only Thai and his mother and was very poor. One of his neighbours asked him to carry some 'special goods' [drugs] to the city. The neighbour promised that he could earn enough money for his mother through only three trips. Thai wondered if he should accept the offer or not. Thai met Phuong, his close friend, to get her advice. Phuong persuaded him not to get involved in this activity.

The female student who acted in the role of Phuong did not fully persuade her friend. Firstly, she tended to talk more about moral lessons without practical solutions to help her friend. Other students in the class realised this limitation and commented that her theoretical claims were impractical and ineffective.

> **Ly's feedback**
>
> *Ly: I agreed with one of your ideas. The way that Phuong first used to persuade Thai could be [pause] a pattern [smile] [pause and thinking]. We might call this a 'typical approach'. Therefore, other students felt her claims were a little bit impractical. However, this style could be effective for particular 'communication subjects' that preferred this style. However, was this style effective in persuading the 'character' in this drama? We needed to ask this character. What did you think, Thai?*
>
> Thai: I did not like this way very much. To persuade me, she should give applicable solutions.
>
> *Ly: There are many ways to persuade other people. Giving moral and legal rules is important, however, it is only one way to persuade others in communication processes.*

The above snapshot illustrates that Ly avoided hurting the female student who acted the Phuong character by careful selection of language. This shows that she understood the language of feedback can negatively affect students' emotions (Boud, 1995a; Falchikov, 1995), given the inherent fear of Vietnamese students to lose face (McCornac & Phan, 2005). Further, she gave non-directive feedback by asking other students to demonstrate their opposing ideas. That is, she involved her students in peer interactions to assist students to recognise their limitations. After that, Ly further explained the question or topic. Another way of demonstrating appropriate feedback to her students was her use of body language as feedback. This was only partly valued by one student in the focus group interview.

> I expected to get more direct feedback from the teacher on what I have not done well. She just explained in a more detailed way and **looked at me**. She seemed to send me a message that I was wrong. I admired the way she behaved. However, I **still wanted to get more direct feedback** on my weaknesses (Thai, FG, post L2).

The student's statement shows that non-directive feedback is considered effective due to the creation of a psychologically safe learning environment (Topping, 2010). However, it is not always effective for every student. Students such as Thai are active students who are intrinsically motivated, and may prefer receiving explicit and directive feedback to improve their learning.

Students in the focus groups described Ly's feedback as "detailed, comprehensive, concise, precise and profound". They elaborated that her feedback was "the most anticipated part" in every lesson (all students, FG, post L2). Students felt relaxed and accepting of Ly's feedback. Moreover, they recognised their strengths and limitations in providing effective feedback, and understood that her advice would progress their learning. Lam described Ly's feedback as:

> My teacher tried to find out **good things to genuinely praise us**. Therefore, everyone was happy [laughing]. In this way, she **reduced stress in discussions**. Moreover, she **critiqued our work accurately**. She indicated persuasively things that were wrong. She also **suggested ways to improve**. I recognised my strengths to develop and weaknesses to avoid. I felt studying in this unit was very satisfying (Lam, FG, post L5).

Other evidence of the benefits of Ly's feedback was in the fourth observed class. Students stated, "[they] had thought that they understood the skill of adjustment in communication processes" before class. However, feedback from the teacher on their performance helped them to recognise that they did not fully understand the skill, which led to their poor performance. As a result, they needed to revise the theoretical knowledge related to the skill.

Ly considered equitable comments as important to her feedback to promote student learning. Ly recited the case of Group One which included students specialising in Psychology. However, she realised that these students did not work hard nor expend sufficient effort, resulting in their poor performance in the first practice session. Ly compared the quality of Group One's performance with groups majoring in other specialties. Thanks to Ly's feedback, this group made significant improvement in the following practice sessions. Ly's comparative feedback appeared to contribute to improvement in student learning.

Ly used assessment for both formative and summative purposes by combining her oral feedback with marking students' performance. She gave marks for each group based on her comments and assessment from their peers. Her marks ranged between 8 and 9.5, equivalent to A and B standard in the letter system. Ly's marking practice for the midterm score and how it impacted student learning is analysed in section 5.5.2.4

5.4.6 Peer assessment

As highlighted in Ly's teaching philosophy, she values interaction as an effective way to stimulate learning through making students more actively and creatively involved. She also believes that students can learn more with their friends, as there is a popular Vietnamese saying that "it is better to learn with friends than with a teacher" (Học thầy không tày học bạn). It is also argued by researchers that with equal status, students may easily share and negotiate with their peers.

Ly always created opportunities for peer assessment, specifically in practice sessions. Techniques for peer assessment and how these were enacted in Ly's class are described. Effectiveness and some issues that emerged as the result of using peer assessment are analysed.

5.4.6.1 Techniques of peer assessment

Ly integrated the fishbowl technique and group discussions to implement peer assessment. The following snapshot describes how she organised peer assessment.

FISH BOWL TECHNIQUE IN LY'S TEACHING PRACTICE

Fishbowl is a metaphor that compares students and their learning process with fish in a bowl. The idea is that one student group performs while other groups observe. Observers look at what and how each 'fish' is swimming in the 'bowl'. In turn, the group observing swaps positions with the group being observed. Observation and evaluation at the same time can bring about many benefits for students because they observe others and put themselves into the other's position. There is the potential for students to learn from their experiences.

PEER ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE SESSIONS

1. Ly organised her class into six groups, each including students studying the same sciences. She appointed a monitor and vice monitor for the whole class, and nominated leaders for each group, who were assigned clear and specific responsibilities and workload. Groups were required to prepare and role play a case in which they used knowledge and skills gained in their theoretical lectures.

2. One group of students performed while the other group members observed and took notes, and used certain criteria to comment on the other group's performance of the activities. Ly built four main assessment criteria for peer assessment, including how real the cases were; how a communication skill was demonstrated

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in the cases; how the case was enacted; and how the use of the communication skill led to effective communication.

3. Groups discussed the performance for 5-7 minutes.

4. Representatives of each group presented the group's comments.

5. Other groups added new comments without repetition of comments already made. Further discussion and explanation was allowed.

6. Teacher's feedback was included.

7. Groups marked their own group and the other group members' performance in front of the class.

8. Ly commented on each group's marking, and then explained the mark that she would give to the performance of each group.

9. Ly concluded the session and reminded students about the next lesson.

Ly used the fishbowl technique because it created an opportunity for her students to "support and learn from each other" (TTL, post L1). Students gained judgement practice through observing and evaluating others. Ly considered this a very effective strategy for student learning, as it involved self-assessment and peer feedback which was then moderated with the lecturer's feedback. Through such an activity, students come to know the standard of work expected, and the qualities that would demonstrate the standard.

In the group discussions, Ly allowed her students to provide comments and mark the other group's work. Initially, her students worked in their own group, discussing the other five groups' performance and then presenting these comments before the class. Ly explained that this process helps students practise their thinking skills and identify the key skills valued in the task. That is, "they continuously generate, transmit, and evaluate ideas" (TTL, post L4). Peer assessment in Ly's class was facilitated through the fish bowl strategy combined with group discussions to support students to feel safe in expressing both agreeable and disagreeable ideas with their peers. Importantly, the feedback provided was from a group rather than an individual. Pham and Gillies (2010) considered this group assessment format adaptive and suitable for Vietnamese students where 'saving face' is highly valued.

5.4.6.2 Effectiveness of peer assessment practices

Students evaluated peer assessment as effective for their learning. Students claimed that they learned different ideas from their classmates, as My explained: "Each one has their own ability and therefore they would provide ideas from different angles" (My, FG, post L1). Their communication, teamwork and self-efficacy skills were enhanced (all students, FG, post L3). Based on peer feedback, students had to reconsider the standard of their performance and comments, which helped them to be aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses. Peer assessment helped students in Ly's class to learn not only the expected knowledge of the discipline, but also develop their self-assessment skills (Vickerman, 2009).

5.4.6.3 Issues of using peer assessment

Ly came to realise that competition among groups in her class became a problem as a consequence of the peer assessment. Ly explained that the main reason for this was rooted in Vietnamese culture. There is an old saying that "It is natural to be much poorer in knowledge than a teacher, however, it is embarrassing to be a little poorer in knowledge than your peers" (translated in Vietnamese as *Thua thầy một vạn không bằng kém bạn một ly*). A student's status is redefined by their performances and marks, making peer assessment a tense process. Ly stated this situation as follows:

> Giving and receiving comments between students was sometimes **so stressful**. Students tried to defend their ideas and argued strongly. In the first classes, they **tended to refuse to accept others' ideas**. They tried to argue fiercely to win (TTL, post L2).

Ly indicated that debates among her students sometimes continued after the lecture had finished. Some groups did not agree with the other groups' comments, and decided to send Ly an email to ask for further explanation from the teacher. In this case, Ly explained in more detail to help them understand the other group's comments. The equal status between peers may have led to a distrust of peer assessment (Carless, 2011; Topping, 2009; Vickerman, 2009) and therefore the teacher, with higher status and experience, needed to become involved in the learning process.

Student participants confirmed that competition occurred in peer assessment. They admitted that in the first classes, students tended to "talk for no reason" (Lam, Thai, FG, post L1), and to "argue obstinately to defend their ideas" (Phap, Lan, Anh, FG, post L1). Criticism between groups affected students' emotions and relationships.

For example, one student stated, "I was very happy if the comment was accurate and complimentary. If there was a criticism, I felt sad and tried to defend our ideas" (Phap, FG, post L1). My expressed negative feelings about someone who always had opposing ideas to her: "I do not like to talk with them any more" (My, FG, post L1). This was because students all expected to receive balanced peer feedback that reflected both positive and negative aspects of their work.

The interviewed students recognised the importance of the lecturer as facilitator in peer assessment. Ly's students acknowledged that their teacher played the role of a 'good moderator' who controlled debates in class. Otherwise, as one student said, "discussions would turn to arguments" (Lam, FG, post L1). Ly described her role in group discussions as the person to "reconcile [debates] by suggesting that they should not reject the other groups' ideas, rather, they should provide more firm evidence to substantiate and disprove them" (TTL, post L2). Through the teacher's timely interventions, students recognised significant changes in the way comments were given and received between the first and the last lectures, such as "evaluating more comprehensively" (all students, FG, post L5).

Vietnamese cultural values such as face saving and respect for harmony and effort were evident through the peer assessment practice in Ly's class. After the teacher gave feedback, students were required to publicly mark other groups' performances. Students tended to give high marks to other groups, usually A or B standards. They explained their marking principles as follows.

> We were influenced by **the groups' performances** and also **the grades other groups gave to us**. For example, if they gave a grade of 9 to us, we **could not give a grade of 7 to them**, even when they did not perform very well. We should mark at least 8 or 8.5. We **should not make them lose face or affect our harmony** (Ba, FG, post L4).

Ly confirmed the practice.

> The first time when I required students to mark other groups' performances, **they all gave similar, high marks**. Students **did not want to offend others**, so they **said a grade of 10 for all** (TTL, post L2).

The fear of making peers lose face impacted on the accuracy of peer assessment results in Ly's class. To tackle this problem, Ly guided her students by advising that "there were different levels of achievements and therefore a fair evaluation needed to

be done" (TTL, post L2). Further, according to Ly, peer assessment was not always accurate as she realised that her students "did not always stick to given assessment criteria" to give their comments. Instead of focusing on particular communication skills that led to effective communication, they may only have commented on their role playing. Group paper work in the fourth observed class exhibited a lack of criteria usage. Students' written comments were general and focused primarily on each group's role playing. For example, comments from Group Five regarding other groups were: 'There were too many characters in their case' (Group Three's scenario); 'Good case. The daughter listened to her dad, but had not really sympathised with him' (Group One's scenario); 'The way the Group Four displayed attracted to audiences' (Group Four's scenario); 'The story was not really impressive' (Group Six's scenario). The practice of peer assessment in Ly's class illustrates that an effective use of peer assessment requires students to be prepared and trained with the necessary skills for this practice (Carless, 2009; Tillema, 2014).

As described in the snapshot of peer assessment, assessment criteria which were too general and imparted from the teacher to the students were often misunderstood by the students and caused confusion in their assessment. While student participation enables students to better understand the expected quality, including students in the development of the criteria was not a part of Ly's practice. The necessity for assessment criteria that are specific and involve students in their development is apparent (Stiggin, 2007; Klenowski & Elwood, 2002).

Data reveals the students' perception that the teacher played a vital role in giving feedback and marking students' work in Ly's class. The students interviewed did not value marks from their peers as they believed that Ly would give more appropriate decisions about the grades they deserved. This can be explained by the impact of Confucian culture in terms of a teacher's authority (Carless, 2006, 2011). Although peer marking was usually high, students confirmed that they gave different marks to other groups depending on the teacher's feedback, valued as the most influential factor in their learning.

5.4.7 Self-assessment

Ly tried certain techniques to develop self-assessment among her students, through the fishbowl technique, peer feedback, and teacher feedback. The fishbowl technique was used to provide students with opportunities to not only learn mutually,

but also to self-assess. Feedback from peers and the teacher provided students with the chance to "reconsider their responses and performance" (all students, FG, post L2, 4).

Notably, Ly used learning diaries combined with the "three and three" technique in the third observed class. This technique is described below.

LEARNING DIARIES COMBINED WITH "THREE AND THREE" TECHNIQUE

At the end of the third observed class, Ly required students to write learning diaries which reflected three aspects of the lecture:

- What were three things that they gained from the lecture?
- What were three things that they assessed as difficult to understand or had trouble with?
- What did they expect or recommend for an improved lecture?

Ly evaluated the writing of learning diaries as an objective and effective technique with a dual purpose: the teacher could obtain students' feedback on her teaching and at the same time, students could self-assess. However, the use of learning diaries in Ly's class did not seem to be effective since not all students prepared them. When the teacher required students to submit their diaries, some students started to write in class, while others borrowed their friends' to copy. The limited effectiveness of the use of learning diaries on student learning was also demonstrated through interviews with students in the focus groups. A contradiction between students' thinking and actions on learning diaries was seen. Students expressed high appreciation of writing a learning diary at the outset, describing it as a "new, interesting, and useful technique" for their learning. It would help them to understand their learning process as they "rarely looked back [over] their learning" after each lecture (Thai, Lan, Anh, Ba, FG post L3). However, after the third lesson when students were interviewed again, they reported that they had forgotten to write their learning diaries at home, citing different reasons such as:

> I **did not remember** anything because it was last week (Anh, Thai)
>
> I **just thought** about it in my mind, but did not write about it on paper (Lan, My).
>
> I **did not write** because I thought the lecturer would not read my learning diary as the class was too crowded (Ba). (FG, post L4)

This data suggest that students' ownership of their learning was low. Their learning seemed to be directed by extrinsic factors. Reflecting on students' own learning processes seemed not to be motivated by their learning needs.

Another technique that Ly used to help students practise self-assessment was to mark their own group's performance. Students tended to overestimate their performance by marking their group using the range of 9 to 10. Ly reasoned that students wanted to "assert themselves" and therefore, "they tended to assess their performance as the best" (TTL, post L2). Although students' self-assessment results were not accurate, Ly at times continued to use this strategy with some activities. Self-marking would provide a supplementary indicator in the assessment process, and also teach her students how to assess. However, However, Ly's reasoning did not explicitly link self-assessment to student learning, and this revealed challenges in both the teacher's perception and students' practices of self-assessment in Ly's class.

5.5   SUPPORTING AND INHIBITING FACTORS

5.5.1 Supporting factors

The usefulness of the subject and the lecturer's personal characteristics were found as enabling factors in the implementation of assessment practices in Ly's class.

5.5.1.1 The usefulness of subject

One factor that engaged students in learning in Ly's unit was its practical values. By "relating to students' daily lives and teaching careers" (TTL, post L5), Ly made the unit's knowledge "essential and meaningful" for students (Thai, Anh, Ba, FG, L5). The students in the focus groups stated that they could "apply all communication principles learnt in their daily lives" (all students, FG, L5). This realisation about the practical values of the unit seemed to inspire students to learn more actively. This attracted them to regularly attend class and participate in learning and assessment activities; this enthusiasm is evident in Thai's statement: "this was my extra unit even though I did not receive any grade for it. However, I really liked this unit. I felt very disappointed if I was absent" (Thai, FG, post L2).

Students suggested that the teacher helped them recognise the unit's usefulness by using teaching strategies such as role-playing and discussing case studies (all students, FG, post L5). It appears that the authentic learning experiences that were a feature of this class inspired student learning and enhanced participation in the learning

process. Providing students with opportunities for authentic learning experiences demands more effort, passion, and expertise from the teacher (Willis, 2010), and the active cooperation of students (Vickerman, 2009). Ly found teaching in this way 'stressful', and students did not always respond positively.

5.5.1.2 The lecturer's personal qualities

Ly is passionate about learning and trialing new teaching strategies to improve her pedagogical practices. She believed that "no lecturer is perfect, so, feedback about teaching style is necessary to improve [her] teaching" (TTL, prior L2). She stated that my attendance in her class did not affect her decisions about teaching strategies (TTL, post L4), perhaps indicating that she felt comfortable about her teaching, despite an observer, and that the attempt to innovate in teaching was a part of her everyday practice. Ly often reflected on her teaching after each lesson and incorporated her refinements in subsequent classes.

It is evident that Ly puts significant effort into her teaching as she has attempted to "trial new teaching strategies many times in her teaching practice and overcome many barriers" (TTL, post L4). One of the barriers she faced came from peer pressure: teachers in the next rooms "may not be satisfied with [her]", because her class was often very noisy during group discussions, role plays, and brainstorming. Some colleagues may have thought that Ly taught differently because she "tries to stand out". Other teachers compared Ly's teaching approach with their own, and "doubted the effectiveness of [her] teaching approach" (TTL, post L4). Further, as highlighted in the description of Ly's class, students positioned themselves as unwilling participants.

Ly's pedagogical practices related to her teaching experience and professional development courses by both Vietnamese and foreign experts, which allowed her to understand and apply current theories in relation to teaching methods and assessment. This added to her expertise and allowed her to develop an effective teaching philosophy. In particular, Ly attempted to motivate and stimulate her students' involvement in learning activities. While her colleagues chose lecturing as the most suitable teaching method for a large class, Ly adopted an alternative teaching approach, which required her students to interact with the teacher and their fellow students to develop their thinking skills. Ly believed that when students "learn by doing and through experience, they would be involved in deep learning" (TTL, post L4). She seemed to distribute her power with the students in a collaborative way

through her encouragement of peer and self-assessment. The result of students' role play and group discussions were used for midterm scores in Ly's class, which was different from her colleagues who selected written tests. Ly believed that this assessment helped students to not only learn actively, but also participate confidently in their final exam. Further, Ly attempted to establish trust and democratic relationships in her class, which have been argued as important to facilitate learning in a community of practice (Tsui et al., 2009; Boreham & Morgan, 2008), in contrast with conventional Confucian teacher-dominated approaches.

All interviewed students valued their teacher's dedication, commitment, enthusiasm and talent. They claimed that she performed more than in the learning contract. Two students in the focus groups gave their positive comments on the teacher as:

> I was attracted by her teaching and her stories. The way she behaved with students created a feeling that I have met her already. She was like a character who was **very gentle, friendly and humane** (Lam, FG, post L5).
>
> She might be the best lecturer in the pedagogical area. Her teaching methods are so **consistent and of a high standard**. I can learn from her **style, language, methods**, and **gestures** and **apply** what I have learnt in my life and career (Thai, FG, post L5).

Positive comments on the lecturer were also demonstrated in almost all students' learning diaries. Following is an excerpt from one student's diary.

USEFUL LEARNING GAINED IN LY'S LECTURES

I **gained a lot** through lectures such as how to create a good first impression, and how to listen and adjust to useful communication processes. These skills are very important in our daily lives and help me a lot in my life. Furthermore, [her] stories were very **useful and meaningful**. I learnt many lessons from [her] sharing. More importantly, I felt I was really an **active student** who had the chance to **interact with the teacher and other students**. This was so important for studying in higher education.

Thanh's Learning Diary (a student in the Communication Skills class)

Ly, through her teaching experiences and expertise, inspired many students to learn and helped them gain useful knowledge and skills for their future lives. She was recognised as an enthusiastic, experienced, and talented teacher in her field. She worked hard and used a variety of assessment methods to support student learning. However, if the educational change only occurs in the teacher, it is insufficient for an effective implementation of AfL. As shown in Chapter Four, the training mode at EU has been in transition from annual to credit-based training. This period has presented practical barriers that have impeded assessment practices in Ly's teaching. How sociocultural factors have an impact on the integration of AfL in Ly's class is analysed in the next section.

5.5.2 Inhibiting factors

A number of factors inhibited Ly's implementation of AfL. Students' passive learning style was a significant factor. Further, the large class size, lack of time and EU's assessment policies, as well as its facilities for teaching and learning appeared to be barriers. Finally, many Vietnamese cultural values were also identified as barriers for the implementation of AfL strategies in Ly's class. These factors are discussed in the following section.

5.5.2.1 Students' passive learning

Although Ly made great efforts to engage the students in their learning, the historic practice of passive learning was prevalent, creating a significant hindrance to the implementation of her assessment practices. Ly realised that "students focus mainly on memorising knowledge and learning for exams" (TTL, prior L1). Almost all students adopted a passive learning habit, "preferring to listen to the teacher and to be quiet". In the first class, "they were reliant on others, afraid of talking in front of the class or talking in group work" (TTL, post L5). Ly stated that this learning habit and style was common in Vietnamese high schools, but was unsuitable for higher education.

Students were aware of their own passive learning style. One student described: "My group sat back in the class, and I saw that all of the students sitting behind me did not get involved in my group discussions" (Lam, FG, L5). Further, some students complained about the limited number of students who participated in group work: "Only some students actually participated, while some students did not care much

about their group work" (Anh, FG, post L2). The disengagement of students in group work became more serious for groups which included students from many different faculties: "We tried to use Facebook, email or telephone, but only a few members cared about group work" (Lam, FG, post L2). The students also reported that many students tended to 'wait to be fed' information in group discussions, as one student claimed:

> My group leader asked: "Do you have any idea about this topic?" A lot of students said: "No". Only **I and the leader talked together**. I was disappointed because few ideas came from the others. When we nominated presenters, **no one volunteered to talk**. The leader and I had to **present again and again** (Lam, FG, post L5).

Observation data revealed that students in the front desks were focused and actively involved, while the majority of students at the back of the class ignored the lectures. Instead, they used their mobile phones for texting and doing homework for other subjects. In discussions, students actually created a circle, however, most students only observed and listened to friends. It seemed that only the group leader, secretary, and a few active students discussed the group work.

Students' disengagement could be understood when they were part of a large group, which may have prevented them from being able to share their ideas. However, this situation also occurred commonly in pair discussions. This is shown in one student's claim below:

> In pair group discussions, I asked the person who sat next to me: what is your idea about this? He said to me, "It is better to just open the document and read it". Then we **did not discuss anything**. Instead, we just read the document and wrote down summaries of the text (Lam, FG, post L3).

Some students who participated actively in classroom activities were motivated by external pressures. This is evidenced through two students' statements:

> My participation in the role-plays was nominated by the group. I **did not volunteer**... (Phap, FG post L3).
>
> In the group discussions …while all students were focusing on discussing topics, we were **forced to pay attention**. In this situation, we felt it was **impolite** if we **talked privately** (Lan, FG post L3).

Students explained possible reasons for this. Some students wanted to only pass the unit or to "have enough credit accumulation" (Thai, Lam, My, FG, post L1, 5). The

group marking policy discouraged learning for both diligent and reluctant students (Lam, FG, post L5), as reluctant students thought that the diligent students would do all the group tasks. In contrast, diligent students felt that they were losing their motivation because they worked diligently while others did nothing. Another concern was related to the timing of the unit. Some students felt tired and did not participate actively because it was "lunch time" (Thai, FG, post L1).

There was a mismatch between Ly's teaching strategies and the students' learning approach. While Ly tried to motivate and engage students in interactive learning activities, the students' historical practice of passive learning hindered the lecturer's implementation of these strategies. The students' passive learning style meant that the learners did not have agency in their learning, affecting the effective use of AfL. Students must be taught to take more responsibility for their own learning (Sadler, 2013; Tillema, 2014).   .

A large class appears to increase passive learning for many students, as the teacher cannot manage all students' learning activities. Both Ly and her students reported that a large class impacted negatively on effective learning, including limited possibilities for providing feedback and individualised learning.

5.5.2.2 Large class

Large class sizes in elective subjects are a "permanent problem" in Vietnamese universities, representing "a great barrier for effective teaching innovation". One factor cited as the main reason for this was a "lack of classrooms" (TTL, post L4). Ly claimed that lecturers wanted to teach in smaller classes; however, they had "no choice" because of a lack of smaller rooms and financial pressures.

Ly was clearly aware of the limitations of her large class. For example, opportunities for every student to participate in classroom activities was limited because "not all students have chances to talk or to role play" (TTL, post L4). Ly felt that it was difficult to manage and follow all students' involvement in her class. Data from observations, interviews, and students' learning diaries revealed that Ly tended to focus only on active students. This is contrary to AfL principles, which encourage all students to become involved in discussions and the assessment process. A large class also increased the workload for the lecturer; Ly felt it was "hard, tiring, and stressful" to teach, particularly to give feedback.

A large class also presented difficulties in applying interactive assessment methods such as group assessment. One concern in Ly's class was the reliability of the group assessment. Ly realised that it was unreasonable when every member in a group gained the same mark, because students have "different efforts and ability". This impacted on students' learning motivation in various ways. Some active students lost their motivation, while reluctant students became over-dependent on their friends.

Students did not have enough time or chance to practise communication skills in the large class. In the fifth observed class, only three of the six groups could participate in the revision practice activity. Students felt it was difficult to "give detailed comments" for the remaining five groups at the same time. Students were usually reminded about timing when performing and presenting their ideas and comments.

Ly's assessment practice revealed many inhibiting factors for implementing AfL strategies into large classes. It has been suggested that inclusions of strategies such as computer-based instruction, group assessment (Carless et al., 2006; Knapper, 1987; Xu, 2015), and a focus on teaching how to learn rather than transmission of information (Knapper, 1987) may facilitate the adoption and adaptation of AfL to a large class. However, given the current context of EU, students' passivity and time and technology restriction, it could be difficult to directly use these strategies or change the teaching approach.

A classroom with a large number of students created a stuffy atmosphere, especially in summer. It appears that the teaching and learning process in the Communication Skills unit occurred in a disadvantageous learning environment both physically and socially. The large class also created pressure on the fixed time for teaching this unit.

5.5.2.3 Lack of time

A further challenge for AfL practice reported by both lecturer and students was the lack of time. Although lectures always exceeded the allocated time by 10 to 15 minutes, the two periods for each teaching session were shown as insufficient for a practical unit in such a large class.

Lack of time influenced the quality of interactions in the classroom. Both lecturer and students were dissatisfied when some activities were not completed due to

insufficient time. For example, if an issue was raised which needed more discussion, it had to be stopped to move to a new activity. Ly stated that:

> If we had had more time, I would have required my students **to use feedback to role play again**. I think that learning skills were only effective if students **have chances to adjust** their skills **right after getting feedback** (TTL, post L4).

Ly expressed her dissatisfaction when she could not fully complete her scaffolding process. She explained that although she recognised her students' learning needs and wanted to intervene with further explanations or provide detailed guidance, all she could do in the fixed time was the provision of general suggestions.

Students in the focus groups claimed that the two periods were "too short" (all students, FG, L5), for detailed feedback, further explanation, practice or discussion. Students expressed their intentions if they had been given more time in this unit:

> I would like to **ask her for further explanation** about the skill of adjustment of communication process. I feel I do not really understand this skill (Thai, FG, L4).
>
> I wanted to **add one interesting scene** in our drama. However, our group leader said "stop there because of limited time" (Lam, FG, L4).
>
> If there was 10 extra minutes, **every problem would be clear**. Our teacher could give more examples to illustrate (Lan, FG, L4).
>
> I would like to ask my lecturer for **further explanation**. I was not satisfied with peers' comments. They seemed not to understand our drama's purpose (Phap, Lan, Anh, Ba, FG, L4).

Interactive classroom activities were time-consuming, which impacted on completion of the curriculum. This was shown in the last teaching session when Ly had to teach quickly to deliver the content of the curriculum. Students felt disappointed as they were required to self-study certain content that they expected to learn in class. Many activities that Ly intended were not implemented. For example, her students did not have enough time to assess their learning results with the 'learning contract" at the beginning of the unit. Data from students' learning diaries and interviews of students reflected a wish to increase teaching time for this unit.

Students recognised their teacher's efforts to provide them with learning opportunities. She used interactive teaching approaches suggested as effective to

engage students in large classes, but lack of time curtailed their effectiveness, as one student claimed that "my lecturer could not do differently because she tried her best in a given time. Her teaching met a majority of students' needs in the class" (Lam, FG, L5).

5.5.2.4 EU's assessment policies and practices

EU's assessment policy for elective subjects

Ly indicated that the use of a written exam for elective subjects such as the Communication Skills unit was a constraint on her assessment practices. Both Ly and her students in the focus groups claimed that the written test is the "traditional way" to measure students' knowledge. They also agreed that it does not "suit all students" (TTL, post L5; all students, FG, post L5). Ly explained that as a written exam often requires students to recall specific facts, some students who possess a passive learning style may get high scores in written tests, while those who prefer an active and collaborative style may face difficulties in a written exam.

Ly stated that assessment and teaching were interrelated: "assessment corresponds with how [the lecturer] teaches and their teaching in turn follows how they assess students" (TTL, post L5). Consequently, a written exam may be suitable for transmission approach, and include students to surface learning, because they learn by "taking notes and memorising knowledge and this would prevent them from creativity" (TTL, post L5). Ly and her students expressed a wish to use an oral exam or performance assessment instead of a written test so that students could "perform their skills" (TTL, prior L2), and consequently a wider range of skills would be assessed. To better support student learning, she wished that lecturers of elective subjects were given the right to choose appropriate assessment methods for their own classes.

Assessment practices under EU's policies

Checking attendance

Ly followed EU's assessment policy to record attendance by the group leader. Ly would take the checked list and compare it with the actual number of students in each group. Ly recognised that checking attendance had encouraged more students to come to class. She explained how one student in her class was very sick yet tried to attend class for fear that he would not be eligible for the final exam. Ly acknowledged

that managing a large number of students in class was stressful, as some students may cheat in their attendance.

Interviewed students claimed that as they enjoyed learning in this unit, they never thought of being absent. However, they expressed reservations about this policy as it was used in an "annual training system" rather than a "credit-based training", requiring independent learning. Students claimed that due to this policy, some students only came to class to have their attendance recorded. These students were mostly non-active participants.

Midterm assessment

As highlighted in Chapter Four, the midterm score contributes 30 percent to the total in each unit. In Ly's unit, the midterm score was calculated by averaging the scores that students earned through their performances in both theory and practice sessions. Every student in one group was awarded the same score except in some cases where a student was nominated by the group to receive a higher mark. Ly believed that this calculation was her effort to motivate students to learn during the course rather than only at the end. Ly described how she marked student learning in the midterm assessment.

> Basically, every student in one group would receive the **same scores** because
> they have the **same product**. Some active students such as group leaders and
> secretaries might have different scores (TTL, post L4).

To encourage more students to engage, Ly implemented a reward for active students in each group. Each group was required to elect two students who were the most active in their group to receive extra marks. This decision appeared to motivate more students to participate in classroom activities. For example, they volunteered to talk and present in front of the class.

Student participants valued the reward for active students. However, they expressed a wish to have more students in this category because their group was large, so not all students could receive a bonus mark. Some students in focus groups asserted that this reward did not work for them (Phap, Ba, FG, post L3). They explained that the teacher often gave them high marks (8, 9, 9.5 = A, B), whereas extra marks were often 0.5 or 1.0. Thus, these extra marks would not considerably change their mark.

Students' comments revealed that high grades from the teacher may not always have positive impact on their motivation to learn.

As Ly explained, she marked student's work based on not only their performance, but also their effort. Her marking principles are described.

> I marked on a 10 point scale. Basically, I gave my students A and B standards for many reasons. I wanted to **acknowledge my students' effort** since my students had to work very hard in a credit-based training system. I myself found that they **deserved these scores**. If we evaluated them **accurately and developmentally**, our students would be more confident when applying communication skills in their lives (TTL, post L4).

As evidenced from Ly's statement, Vietnamese cultural values such as face saving and respect for effort, impacted on Ly's marking practice. Ly recognised her generosity in grading as she believed that these marks would benefit students in their future. For students, high marks help them to "save face" and have better employment opportunities after graduation. It is evidenced in Thai's statement, as he tries to get high scores because of his status in major class as a secretary. He felt that it "would be ashamed" if he got a low mark.

There were also other factors that led to generous grading in Ly's class. Students' grades seemed to be important for both the lecturer and students. Ly indicated that "scores of students partly reflected the teacher's teaching effectiveness" (TTL, post L4). It can be interpreted that under the pressure of accountability, lecturers appear to give students high marks to encourage future students to enrol in their courses (Sadler, 2009). Another possible reason was the issue of being reluctant to 'fail students' (Carless, 2009; Hawe, 2002), as traditionally teachers in teacher-training universities tend to support learners, which leads to "grade inflation".

Some issues were found in Ly's marking practice. The first concern related to the accuracy of assessment results. Some students claimed that it was "unfair" when the same score was awarded to every member in one group because each member contributed differently to their group's results (Lan, Thai, and Lam, FG, post L1). It appears that students were concerned about the reliability of assessment results. Some students expressed their expectations in learning diaries that the teacher should use assessment methods which could differentiate their learning results. Further, students revealed a conflict between summative and formative purposes in Ly's marking

practice. Ly encouraged a range of students to present their group discussions. However, as the quality of a presentation was marked for a summative purpose, few students were given this task because their individual performance impacted on the group mark. As My admitted, "our performance was marked, so we should let someone who was good at speaking because this was related to the grade of our group" (My, FG, post L3). Finally, Ly's grading practice also reflects an important role of the teacher in marking, as Ly said:

> I was **the last person who evaluated student learning**. As students tended to overestimate their performance, results of peer assessment and self-assessment were used **for triangualtion**. My marks were sometimes similar or lower than my students' scores, depending on **their actual performances** (TTL, post L4).

Her statement may indicate that Ly mainly used self and peer marking to triangulate her marking. This practice may reflect two issues. First, the lecturer did not fully trust her students' assessment. Second, the role of the teacher in Ly's class was still strong due to Vietnamese cultural influences. This reveals that when incorporating aspects of AfL into Vietnamese classroom practices, such as self-assessment, difficulties emerge.

5.5.2.5 Facilities for teaching and learning

As noted in Chapter Four, EU has been in the transition from annual training to a credit-based training system. Although a new training mode has been used for four years, Ly stated that little preparation for this significant change was seen at EU.

The students considered facilities in EU "better" than in some private universities in Vietnam and "corresponded to a university which exempts tuition fees" (all students, FG L5). However, they stated that facilities were not appropriate for a key university like EU. As highlighted in the previous chapter, resources for learning may not meet the learning demands of many students. In Ly's class, the classroom was poorly equipped in terms of technology. When students were performing their drama or involved in discussions the bell from the high school rang and many students stopped and looked out of the windows. Furthermore, as there was no air conditioning in the classroom, many students felt tired in Summer. Also, classroom interactions were interrupted at times, because of technological problems.

Ly and the interviewed students reported that due to a lack of suitable classrooms, elective subjects were overcrowded and included students from many different faculties. They had little interaction and this created difficulties for group work. A lack of time for students to move from other buildings to the class made many students often late. However, Ly claimed that although facilities were important to enhance student learning, it did not determine the quality of the teaching and learning process. The teacher and student were the two key factors: "students can learn best when they realise the value of the unit for their life and their learning is motivated by appropriate learning motivation. More importantly, the teacher knows how to encourage and promote their learning" (TTL, post L4).

5.5.2.6 Vietnamese sociocultural factors

Vietnamese cultural values which include "face saving", a passive and examination-oriented learning approach, and the hierarchical relationship between lecturer and students created significant tensions in Ly's assessment practices. It was evident that students highly appreciated the lecturer's guidance, while peer contribution appeared to be devalued. Ly tried to create learning opportunities for her students, whereas students performed learning tasks with a view to summative assessment. Learner's agency was limited due to the students' passive learning approach.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Ly was an experienced and motivated lecturer who attempted to use a variety of AfL strategies to promote learning. Interviews reveal that students preferred her approach and benefited in terms of learning; however AfL implementation in Ly's class has also presented many challenges.

Ly's approach has many positives. First, she made learning visible to her students by the use of a learning contract, sharing teaching objectives, her own stories and experiences, and the expected standards of a final exam. Classroom assessment, such as observation, role play, brainstorming and questioning were constantly conducted to inform Ly's teaching and to adjust student learning. To improve student learning, Ly also provided and received feedback for her students from lecturer, peers and self. She created a supportive learning environment where students could take risks and interact with other students and the teacher to co-construct knowledge.

Students in the focus groups valued these strategies as helping them to learn from each other, to recognise their own strengths and limitations, and know how to progress in their learning. However, the implementation of AfL has also presented many tensions, including issues of reliability of assessment, ambiguity of success criteria, power relationships, and the dominance of summative assessment.

Ly's assessment practices were strengthened by her individual qualities. Training courses in professional development as well as the teacher's passion, teaching experiences, and expertise in the field of teaching methods acted as supportive factors for integration of AfL in Vietnamese higher education.

However, contextual factors which included a passive learning tradition, hierarchical relationship, large classes, and lack of time, significantly hindered Ly's AfL practices. In particular, there was a problem implementing new teaching ideas with students because of their passive learning style. Even with Ly's skills and passion, it was not possible to overcome the historical hierarchy. Further, her credibility, knowledge and innovation resulted in reinforcement of the current system where the teacher is highly revered. While Ly attempted to apply principles of a constructivist approach to promote student learning in her class, the EU and Vietnamese sociocultural context appeared to restrict the potential of AfL in higher education. Despite Ly's attempt to introduce a more learner-cented approach, her assessment practices seemed to be "mainly teacher directed and controlled", and therefore can be aligned with a "restricted" form of AfL (Carless, 2011, p. 105).

This chapter has described and analysed how AfL strategies were integrated in a large elective class in EU. How AfL approaches were used in core classes with a smaller number of students taught by younger lecturers will analysed in the next chapters.

Chapter 6: Innovation in Practice – The Case of Hoa

Duong Thi Hoa is a young female lecturer in the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics (FMI) at EU. She is passionate about reforming her teaching and assessment practices to enhance student learning. This chapter explores how Hoa enacted assessment for learning strategies in a Research Methodology class with second year advanced students.

Data included four observed teaching sessions; eight interviews with Hoa prior and post each observed teaching session; four focus group interviews with six students; and documents, such as the Faculty's reports, the lecturer's lesson plans, and students' work. These were analysed using a constant comparative approach, guided by sociocultural theories of learning.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the FMI, contextualising Hoa's work situation. Hoa is introduced with an overview of her background, teaching experience, professional development, and her teaching philosophy. These factors are considered for their influence on her pedagogic beliefs and practices. The Research Methodology class is also described to set a context for Hoa's pedagogic strategies. Next, the practices of AfL in her class are described through the experiences of both the lecturer and her students. Factors that supported or impeded Hoa's assessment practices are identified and analysed in the fifth section. Finally, the chapter returns to the research questions of the study.

6.1 FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS AND INFORMATICS

The FMI is a major faculty and attracts the largest number of internal and external students in EU, with approximately 1100 undergraduates and 300 postgraduates. Eighty-two staff, two professionals and 80 academics, work for six divisions in the Faculty. Of the academic staff, four are professors, eight are associate professors, and five are postgraduates; 28 have doctorates, and 35 hold a Masters degree. The Faculty's major function is to train mathematics teachers for high schools in Vietnam and to train experts in mathematics at a postgraduate level.

The Faculty has encouraged its staff to advance their expertise in both mathematics and pedagogy. Many young staff members have been sent to study for their doctorates in France, Japan, and America. Some senior lecturers and professors have taught and conducted research at many prestigious universities around the world. Currently, the FMI has established a cooperative relationship for teaching and learning and research with some universities and institutions in developed countries. Many professors from France, Japan, Germany, and America have contributed to lecturing and training for the Faculty. In terms of training quality, FMI is regarded as one of the leading faculties in the field of mathematics in Vietnam.

6.2 DUONG THI HOA

6.2.1 Background and experience

Hoa has over 10 years' teaching experience in the mathematics field at EU. She was born into a family of teachers in suburban Hanoi, and was an excellent student in both learning achievement and social activities from primary to high school. Hoa followed her mother's footsteps to become a student in the FMI. She was selected to study in an advanced class sponsored by the French government. Students studied this class using French as the medium for learning in specialised subjects. She successfully defended her undergraduate thesis in both Vietnamese and French and was invited to become a lecturer at the FMI. She obtained her doctoral degree in Vietnam within the past decade, and has conducted research projects at institutional level. She also published many articles in national scientific journals, and compiled mathematics course-books for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Apart from teaching at the FMI, Hoa has applied her knowledge of innovative practice in private ventures that support student learning.

Due to her social and business roles and her passion for educational research, Hoa has won high admiration from her students. Her students value these qualities which add to her power and reputation as a credible expert.

6.2.2 Professional development

Hoa has taken many short training courses taught by foreign experts in pedagogical skills. In 2005, she participated in a curriculum development course with Dutch experts. In 2006, she was trained to effectively integrate technology in classrooms by Intel and Microsoft experts. During 2007, she studied teaching theories

in higher education taught by German experts. Hoa studied the Lesson Study approach with Japanese experts in 2010. She worked with Danish experts on learning how to develop an integrated curriculum during 2012. Hoa valued these training courses as she has had opportunities to "constantly update advanced knowledge and skills in pedagogy" (DTH, post L2). This inspired her to implement new teaching approaches in her practices; however, she had no specific training course in assessment.

6.2.3 Teaching philosophy

6.2.3.1 Beliefs about learning

As a reflective university student, Hoa recognised that a great deal of research on teaching mathematics for Vietnamese children focused only on high achievers. This caused her to question whether or not a teacher could inspire students by attending to students' different learning needs, abilities, and attitudes to mathematics. Hoa valued Gardner's multiple intelligence theory (1993) as this intensified her belief that "each student has her/his own potential. The teacher participates in guiding the students to optimise their potential" (DTH, prior L1). This belief has led her to pursue and adopt the differentiated teaching approach. In the Research Methodology class, Hoa attempted to identify her students' learning needs using questioning at the outset, to understand their motivations for studying in the FMI and what they thought about the subject. Further, Hoa often observed and conversed with her students to review their learning needs and then adjusted her teaching accordingly.

Hoa stated that she was impressed by Piaget's cognitive theory premise that students act as constructors in their own learning through interactions with the environment. This confirmed her belief that "learning is performed and done by individuals" (NTH, post L4). According to Hoa, students learn best when they are autonomous learners. Students' autonomy is characterised by their capability to determine their own goals, and flexibility to adjust their learning process to achieve these goals. As such, Hoa did not check attendance as she believed that "the most important thing is that students achieve their own goals in studying the subject, not their turning up or just studying for exams" (DTH, post L4).

Hoa valued not only students' autonomy, but also social interactions in the classroom to enhance learning. She believes that to maximise students' learning, students need to cooperate and interact with other people from whom they can learn,

as she stated: "everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. When they cooperate in learning, they can learn from each other" (DTH, prior L1). This belief has led Hoa to adopt interactive teaching strategies such as questioning, oral presentation and group discussion in her class, so her students had more opportunities to work together in the co-construction of knowledge. Apart from encouraging students in peer learning, she provided guidance to scaffold learning. Her students were required to conduct their own projects, applying steps of research. They could make an appointment via email to have a meeting with her and receive her suggestions during their project. Hoa's feedback usually included further explanation or advice to help students understand their topics and research experiences.

Hoa claimed that students' beliefs and learning habits, and the institutional and classroom learning environment, significantly impacted on their learning approaches. The institutional environment, including facilities, training organisation and policies, curriculum, lecturers' teaching and assessment methods, are paramount in supporting effective learning. Hoa realised that "although five years ago, EU moved from annual to a credit-based training, there has been little change in practice" (DTH, post L4). Hoa had thought that with the introduction of credit-based training, the University might introduce courses of a generic nature such as essay writing and independent learning skills. She felt disappointed as students are not taught generic learning skills. According to Hoa, teaching these skills should be required to orientate entering students.

Hoa believed that the classroom environment that occurs through interactions and the relationships established by the lecturer and students should be democratic and interactive to support learning. She acknowledged that John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (2007) had significantly impacted on her view on the interactions between the teaching environment and effective learning.

Hoa developed trust through her enthusiasm and genuine sharing of her own research experiences, adopting narrative manner to convey her message. She explained her motivations and how she developed her research ideas while a student at the FMI. Hoa was interested in finding out how students who struggled in learning mathematics studied and how to help these students enjoy studying the subject. She pursued this idea over ten years despite difficulties. Hoa explained the research process and its

findings with her students, and how she and her colleagues have applied these findings to improve learning mathematics at schools.

Students in the focus groups highly appreciated Hoa's personal experience, as one student said: "we were students and had no experience in doing research. The lecturer's transmission of her experiences was very helpful" (Thu, FG, post L1). The student's statement highlights the importance of understanding and catering for students' preferences in learning support. Hoa's enthusiasm, personal narrative and authentic experiences made research an exciting process with theoretical, practical, and commercial implications. These factors engaged and motivated her students. They emphasised that hearing the lecturer's own research experiences not only assisted them in "recalling theoretical knowledge on the subject" (Thu, Thong, Hang, FG, post L1), but also "inspired them to self-assess their learning goals" (Nam, Hang, FG, post L1). Moreover, open and genuine sharing created a "rapport between the lecturer and students" (all students, FG, post L1). Sociocultural theorists have argued that a trusting relationship is a supportive factor for learning in a community of practice (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This benefit was clearly displayed in the experiences of the interviewed students.

Further, Hoa encouraged students to question and discuss topics related to the subject. She rarely commented immediately on students' responses or work. Instead, she encouraged them to think deeply with her guiding questions. She also waited for peer discussion to complete her comments on both the presenting group and class contributions. Hoa seemed to limit her own remarks on students' work as she did not want to impose her ideas on her students. The interviewed students appreciated her efforts to engage them in co-construction of knowledge. Giang claimed: "The way she taught was different from other lecturers in my faculty. She was always open for discussions" (Giang, FG, post L1).

6.2.3.2 Belief about assessment

Hoa values the importance of assessment in the support of learning, as she said:

> Assessment is like **a tail of a fish** to help the fish move. Assessment acts as the **direction for learners** to understand expected learning outcomes and **motivates them** to achieve these outcomes (DTH, prior L1).

Hoa shared assessment criteria in written form with her students and recorded their progress through the entire subject. Instead of using a written final exam, similar to other colleagues, Hoa chose an oral exam, as she believed that this required students to learn more thoroughly and also help them to practise speaking skills, which are critical for teachers.

6.3   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY CLASS

6.3.1 Research Methodology subject

Research Methodology is a compulsory general subject which awards two credits for second-year students in the FMI. It aims to provide students with fundamental knowledge and skills of conducting research in the educational field in general, and in mathematics education in particular. After learning this subject, students are expected to identify research problems, build up a research proposal, use appropriate research methods, and disseminate and apply their research findings.

Students in the focus groups seemed to devalue the subject as they thought it was only suitable for students who wished to become researchers. They commented:

> This subject is only meaningful if I study further, for example, postgraduate level. If I only teach at high schools, I **do not know** whether it is **necessary or not**? (Hang).
>
> Only some students will be working as researchers in the future. Therefore, this subject is **unnecessary for all pre-service teachers** (Giang). (FG, post L3)

Hoa realised the students' lack of interest when she started the semester. In the first two classes, only five students completed their homework and showed an interest in the subject. Almost half of the students did not want to be teachers and felt that they had made the wrong vocational selection. At this point, it seemed clear to Hoa that she would face challenges motivating and teaching this class.

6.3.2 Research Methodology classes

Research Methodology classes were held on the fourth level of an old building every Tuesday morning, between 10:00 am and 12:00 pm, covering two periods. The classroom was spacious for 20 students; however, it was noisy, as the building was located near a busy road. Teaching equipment was basic, with one blackboard, one screen, and a broken projector. Whenever Hoa and her students wished to use

technology, she had to borrow another projector, and bring her personal computer and power switches to connect to the projector. Hoa complained that this process wasted time and impacted negatively on the progress of her class. Hoa sometimes had to change her teaching plan due to incompatibility between the computer and projector.

6.3.3 Students in the advanced class

The class was a second year advanced class with 13 female and seven male students. All were high achievers at high schools, especially in mathematics, gaining high scores in the entrance exam to the University. Many had specialised in mathematics at high schools for gifted students. Some students chose teaching because of familial pressure and were therefore not highly motivated.

As analysed in Chapter Four, advanced classes are characterised by students' commitment, outstanding intellectual capability, and self-regulation. Such conditions should mean high levels of student engagement and collaboration (Allal, 2010). This could be advantageous for Hoa in implementing interactive teaching methods. Further, as students have already spent one year at the University, it could be anticipated that they are accustomed to the university's learning methodology. Students' experiences should have given them time to determine their suitability for a teaching career. However, many were unmotivated. The following table provides the profiles of students interviewed.

Table 6.1

Interviewed Students' Profiles in Research Methodology Class

Students' names (Pseudonyms)	Profiles
Nguyen, Thi Thu	Nguyen Thi Thu lives in Hanoi. She specialised in mathematics and was a high achiever at a high school for gifted students. She entered the FMI due to pressure from her family. After two years at EU, she loves her teaching career. She was a class manager, whose task was to receive documents, plans, and announcements from the lecturer in person or via email and then pass them on to her classmates. In the first semester of the second year, she got 3.27, a distinction, and received an EU scholarship. She tended to be a listener during observed teaching sessions.
Nguyen, Van Nam	Nguyen Van Nam comes from an urban area in the North of Vietnam. He was an excellent student at high school, especially in mathematics. He was a class manager, who managed studying activities in the advanced class. In the first semester of the second year, he was an outstanding student with a result of 3.40 and, consequently, received an EU scholarship. He actively engaged in classroom activities with questions and discussions with the lecturer and classmates.
Hoang, ThanhTram	Hoang Thanh Tram lives in a suburban area of Hanoi. She registered to the FMI because of her parents' advice although she was actually interested in economics. After nearly two years of studying in the Faculty, she decided on a teaching career and realised that her parents' advice was sound, though she was slightly concerned about employment opportunities. She started the first year in a non-advanced class. Due to her excellent achievement, she took part in a competitive exam at the end of the first year to enter the advanced class. She felt very worried when she first moved to the class because of the fear of being left behind. However, she gained confidence after a few weeks and was happy in the class. In the first semester of second year, she gained 3.00 and received an EU scholarship.
Tran, Thi Hang	Tran Thi Hang lives in the North of Vietnam. She chose to study in the FMI because of her parents' wishes. After two years of studying, she felt she was unsuited to a teaching career, but felt compelled to finish the rest of her study. She was also a class manager, who was responsible for organising extracurricular activities. In the first semester of the second year, she got a comparative low mark, 2.67. She seemed to be an active student in the class.
Nguyen, Van Thong	Nguyen Van Thong studied in a normal high school in Hanoi and was good at mathematics and physics. He enrolled in the FMI because he wanted a teaching career, but mostly because of his family's wishes. Apart from studying, he worked part-time as a tutor. This job intensified his desire to pursue a teaching career. He gained a 3.29 a distinction, in the first semester of the second year, and therefore received an EU scholarship. He participated actively in giving and answering questions in the class.
Vu, Thi Giang	Vu Thi Giang comes from a province in the North of Vietnam. She specialised in mathematics in a high school for gifted students in Hanoi. She entered the FMI because she loved mathematics and wanted a teaching career to inspire her future students to learn mathematics. However, she felt disappointed when she started at EU, and considering suspending her study in Vietnam for studying abroad

In summary, Hoa appears to teach in a class with both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, her passion and advanced beliefs about learning and assessment encouraged her to adopt an interactive and cooperative pedagogic approach to support student learning. This seemed to be encouraged by the class, which was small in size and included advanced students. On the other hand, Hoa had several difficulties in this classroom context, including students' devaluation of the subject and sub-standard facilities. The following section details how Hoa implemented assessment strategies for learning and the experiences of her students with these strategies.

6.4   KEY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Hoa adopted assessment as a key factor in stimulating student learning. Her students claimed that Hoa's assessment was different from other lecturers in the FMI. This section analyses how Hoa made learning transparent to her students and then used classroom assessment strategies to scaffold learning processes. The affordances and hindrances in her AfL practices are also identified.

6.4.1 Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Hoa seemed to realise the importance of making learning transparent to students and therefore shared learning intentions and success criteria with her students in several ways. She explained her teaching plan at the outset, shared her learning schedules at both the beginning and the end of each teaching session, provided exemplars, shared marking criteria in midterm assessment and explained how final oral exam works.

6.4.1.1 Sharing learning intentions

Hoa shared with her students the semester's plan on EU's website: the learning objectives, the main content, learning activities, reading list, and assessment methods for the midterm and final scores. Students considered this to be significantly different from the processes adopted by other FMI lecturers. In the first teaching session, Hoa referred to her plan again, and students could ask questions. However, students queried only the assessment methods and how to pass the final exam. They asked that the lecturer design easy tasks in the exam so that they could pass. It appeared that although Hoa attempted to create opportunities for students' involvement in discussion of her teaching plan, students did not take advantage of this opportunity to negotiate with

their lecturer regarding teaching and assessment methods. Students' questions reflected their focus on examinations. Nevertheless, Hoa proceeded to teach according to her initial plan.

Hoa always started her teaching sessions by explaining the structure and tasks that students would undertake. At the end of class, she reinforced the tasks for the next teaching session. Students in the focus groups considered this as supportive for their learning, as it helped them to prepare well for the next class. For example, Hoa told her students that in the next class she would talk about her own experience doing research. Students consequently attempted to search for her papers and projects from various resources to read before the class, and this preparation assisted them with both listening and research processes.

6.4.1.2 The use of doctoral theses as a model for research

Hoa required students to read her doctoral thesis and those of her colleagues in the FMI. Her purpose was to assist students to learn how to conduct educational research. She guided her students' reading with particular questions. For example, students were required to read a thesis and take notes regarding how the researcher justified selection of the research topic and methods; and the differences between structures of theses completed in Vietnam and in foreign countries. Students then presented and discussed with the lecturer and classmates what they gained from their reading.

Despite her positive intentions, Hoa realised that only a few students were interested in doing such homework and exercises. The interviewed students explained that as their main purpose was to pass the unit exam, they felt doctoral theses were "too complex" to understand. In response, Hoa decided to change her teaching strategies. She asked each student to find a research article and then present the research problem and methods to the class, and talked with her students about their motivation in developing an appropriate attitude for learning and how important it was to take it seriously.

Hoa's students subsequently engaged positively as a consequence of Hoa's adjustment of her teaching approach. The students felt "[the activity] was more exciting and enabled them to more easily understand the subject's content" (Giang, Tram, and Thu, FG, post L4). This suggests that for these students the use of exemplars

may be a powerful tool in the support of learning, but the exemplars needed to be appropriate in length and complexity to their current knowledge.

6.4.1.3 Sharing marking criteria in midterm assessment

Hoa told her students at the beginning of the unit that she would allocate results based on their participation and group presentation. However, it seemed that she did not make these criteria explicit and specific. For example, it was unclear what percentage contributed to participation and what percentage was for their presentation. The interviewed students said that they did not clearly know how the lecturer marked their midterm scores. Hang claimed: "As the lecturer said we should not worry about the marks. I understood that she had her own way of marking our midterm score. I thought she knew each student's ability" (Hang, FG post L4). The student's statement illustrates that although she was not told how the lecturer marked her midterm score, she seemed to rely on her lecturer's judgement.

In the last teaching session, Hoa explained her views on marking: "There were differences in marks that each group received. In each class, I recorded your progress in my little book. Due to your different participation during the entire subject, each person, in each group will be awarded a different mark" (DTH, snapshot in L4). Although Hoa informed her students of her views on marking, her specific criteria were not made clear. Without an agreed understanding of criteria, standards, and marks, there was a difference in opinion between the lecturer and students about assessment results, as Hang explained:

> According to our lecturer's rankings, the three groups which were considered better than the two remaining groups were Group 1 [her group], Group 4, and Group 5. Group 2, and Group 3 were ranked second. The peer assessment results shown in the bar chart **were contradictory**. My group was assessed lower than the other groups in some criteria, but as best in the last criterion....
> I thought my group **performed more poorly**, compared to Group 2 (Hang, FG post L4).

The student's statement reveals that an unclear awareness of how marks were awarded caused confusion for students in their learning and impacted on developing autonomy.

6.4.1.4 Explaining carefully how the oral exam works

Hoa spent a period in her last teaching session to specifically answer students' questions about the final oral exam. She understood that this was what her students were most concerned about at the beginning of the course, which is a typical expectation of Vietnamese students in an examination-oriented learning culture. Hoa also realised that although her students were in second year, they had had no experience of an oral exam. Hoa asked students to write their questions on a piece of paper and hand this to the Class President. Hoa carefully responded to students' questions concerning the exam time, number of questions, content and kinds of questions, and she modelled how to answer each type of question, encouraging students to display their independence and thinking skills in their answers.

Hoa understood that her students might hesitate to ask her questions in front of the class, so she encouraged them to use email or Facebook for any questions related to the exam, the content, or ideas for doing research. This was valued by all students in the focus groups as it created learning opportunities after classes, and some students admitted that they were afraid of asking publicly for face-saving reasons. Furthermore, they felt private digital communication with the lecturer was helpful for revision for the exam if they had any problems. The following comments illustrate students' experiences:

> I was **most impressed** by her stating at the end of the lesson that we could send her **an email to ask** any questions related to marks and the subject. Other lecturers only required us to self-revise (Thu).
> I think this way of communication is **very good for students**. If there is something that I am **not confident to ask** her in front of the class, I can send my questions to her via email (Giang). (FG, post L4)

Students' statements reveal that encouraging them to use digital tools to communicate with the lecturer was not only appropriate for Vietnamese students' learning style, but also maximised the effectiveness of the lecturer's scaffolding.

6.4.2 Questioning

Hoa utilised questioning to help her students to review their knowledge and to encourage students' contribution to the creation of knowledge. Questioning also helped Hoa to measure students' existing learning. The following snapshot illustrates how Hoa used questioning to assist students in revision.

SNAPSHOT

HOA'S ADOPTION OF QUESTIONING

(The first observed teaching session)

Hoa recited how she identified the research problem.

Hoa: Once we have identified the research problem with careful justification, what is the next step in conducting research?

Giang: We start to conduct the research.

Hoa: Can you start to conduct immediately?

Thong: I think we must consider if we can do it or not?

Hoa: How do you know that you can do the research?

Thong: We have to review previous research to see what they have done and how this topic is approached by others. After that, we can decide if we should develop the research problem or choose another direction.

Hoa: Do you mean that we need to review literature?

Thong: Yes, that is what I meant.

Hoa: Yes, the next step is to review literature.

The above snapshot reveals that Hoa was not a 'provider' of knowledge. She utilised questions to guide students' thinking processes, and in this way students became contributors to their own knowledge.

Hoa used questioning to stimulate students' participation in learning; for example, she asked "Are there any more questions? Do you have any questions or different ideas?" Students' first reaction to these questions was usually silence. Hoa had to repeat her questions three or four times to elicit students' participation. Proactive students tended to ask questions, while a majority of other students remained silent, observed and listened to these discussions.

When students were interviewed after the lectures, they reported that they actually had many questions to ask and to discuss with the lecturer. However, they did not ask for many reasons. First, they indicated that they were afraid of interrupting the lecturer, since this might show disrespect. Second, some students reported that passivity (*translated in Vietnamese as sự thụ động*) was an "inherent characteristic" of Vietnamese students, developed from primary school to higher education. They realised this traditional habit constrained their learning. However, they felt it was

difficult to change. Students' passivity in learning combined with Vietnamese cultural values such as respect for the teacher, as well as a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students, impacted on the students' active involvement in questioning. This finding has also been discovered in similar cultural contexts where Confucian heritage has been a strong influence (Carless, 2011; Carless & Lam, 2014).

The students' reaction to the same questions was different in the second and third observed classes. After each student group completed their presentation, Hoa asked other groups to ask questions and to add more ideas through discussion. She used open questions such as: "Do you have any questions for the presenting group?". Many students posed questions to the presenters, and they enthusiastically discussed the topic. Students explained that their reaction was because they were at "the same age and level" as the presenters and therefore felt comfortable asking and arguing. Further, questions that were given and answered by peers helped students to develop their own self-assessment skills. Some students said:

> Thanks to **my friends' questions**, I realised that our group's preparation was **not good enough**. As many aspects of our work were **presented unclearly**, it did not persuade our classmates. Our team work skills were **not effective too** (Hang).
>
> I usually **asked other groups** issues that I felt were unclear or made me confused. My questions were sometimes **expressed unclear** [smile…] and therefore I had to **reconsider my questions** to avoid confusion. I also **learnt how to discuss** constructively (Nam). (FG, post L2)

Students' experiences in questioning may support the suggestion that learning with peers who have 'equal-status' encourages students' participation and contribution to the co-creation of knowledge (Rogoff, 1990; Topping, 2009).

6.4.3 Observation of students' engagement

Hoa usually observed her students closely to gauge the effect of her teaching strategies as well as students' attitude to learning. For example, she observed one student playing games on his phone during a friend's presentation, and demanded that he listen. Further, Hoa correlated her notes on participation and attendance with student scores on mid-term tests. She followed and recorded students' participation every teaching session, and explained that this was done to encourage her students to commit to study during the whole unit.

Hoa valued observation as "the fast and sensible way" to obtain feedback on her teaching strategies. When observation was combined with questioning, she realised that the majority of her students were not interested in the subject when she began teaching. Not all students attended the classes or had completed their homework prior to classes. Their body language reflected their tiredness when attending her class. She was required to adjust her teaching strategies to engage them in learning.

6.4.4 Feedback

Hoa usually provided students with feedback on each group's work as observed.

HOA'S FEEDBACK ON GROUP TWO'S PRESENTATION

(The second observed teaching session)

When class discussion around Group Two's project was completed, Hoa summarised and commented as follows:

I listened to your discussions and realised that there was conflict in the work of Group Two. Group Two said that you investigated in two schools. However, your analysis only showed data from one school. It was correct when other groups identified this conflict. Group Two said there was one teaching session per month for vocational education. Was this MoET's policy or the policy of these schools? It was unclear. In our educational system, every activity in schools has to follow MoET's policies.

Moreover, you need to cite references properly and accurately. Someone asked Group Two to advise how vocational education was integrated in Biology and Information Technology in these schools. Group Two could not answer this question. Please remember that you investigated the practices, you must understand how they are integrated.

HOA'S FEEDBACK ON GROUP FOUR'S PRESENTATION

(The third observed teaching session)

Other students were concerned about reliability of your sample. It was correct. You only conducted the survey on a small sample, you cannot generalise for all schools in Hanoi. Remember that when you conduct future research, you must justify why you choose a particular sample.

It is clear from the above snapshot that Hoa's feedback focused on issues that classmates identified, thus validating and rewarding student judgement, an important factor in self-directed learning (Boud, 1995a; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Her feedback

also included advice and suggestions for students to improve. However, it seemed that she did not base her feedback on criteria that she provided to students. Hoa indicated that she would like to provide further explanation and comments for the work of each student group, but her feedback in the second observed lecture was very brief, including some general advice because of lost time at the beginning of the lecture. Hoa stated in her interview after this class: "It took 20 minutes to connect students' personal computers with a borrowed projector". She explained that the issues with the technology had significantly constrained the detail of feedback that she was able to provide to her students.

Hoa's feedback, however, was usually comprehensive and this was particularly evident for Group Five where the technical preparation was completed well in advance of the following class, this is depicted in the following snapshot.

HOA'S FEEDBACK ON GROUP FIVE'S PRESENTATION

(In the third observed teaching session)

Group Five was the last to present their work, which was about identifying students who were gifted in mathematics in Vietnamese high schools. As this project related to mathematics education, students in the class engaged actively in the discussion. They asked many challenging questions and Group Five seemed not to answer all the questions convincingly. The teacher had to participate in the discussion:

Please remember that **all groups were just practising theory** of research methodology**. I am happy** when there are many questions from classmates to your groups. It showed that your project attracted their interest. The foundations proposed by Crutexki in 1973 are now outdated. Although the theory is outdated, you still used it, and you all **were involved in the discussion process.**

Your peers' questions were centred on the suitability of your research questions and solutions. I realised that many students were concerned about the foundations of the solutions. **When you provide solutions, your solutions must be feasible**. This is what you must notice. Your test is used to identify students at grade nine who are born with mathematical talent. There are many ways to identify students' talent, for example, observation, test, and interview. Here, you used a test. However, this test was not very persuasive. For example, you said students who gain 40 marks/ total of 80, which means they have gained 50% in the test…, are categorised as talented

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students in mathematics. Other students were concerned about what was the foundation for this mark?

Views on gifted students and education for gifted students are still controversial. You **are encouraged to pursue** this interesting topic. However, you **need to do further reading** to understand this area. Although you **have not answered your classmates' questions**, you should **feel satisfied** with what you have done so far. You have **just started your research journey**.

The above snapshot illustrates that Hoa worked as a facilitator in giving feedback to her students. When the class discussion around Group Five's presentation seemed to be at a stalemate, she intervened in a timely manner, as an expert, to reconcile and acknowledge what the presenting group had done, and validated comments from their peers: *"I am happy when there are many questions from classmates... Your peers' questions were centred on the suitability of your research questions and solutions. I realised that many students were concerned about the foundations of the solutions"*.

Hoa also indicated major limitations that students needed to be aware of, and suggestions for their improvement: *"When you provide solutions, your solutions must be feasible. This is what you must notice....However, you need to do further reading to understand this area"*. Hoa's comments can be categorised into three essential elements: "feedback, feed up, and feed forward", which Hattie and Timperly (2007) have suggested as effective. Moreover, Hoa utilised encouraging language which stimulated students' efforts: *"You are encouraged to pursue this interesting topic.... You should feel satisfied with what you have done so far. You have just started your research journey"*. This way of providing feedback seemed to create a safe climate in the classroom, and therefore encouraged and supported learning of both the presenting group and their classmates.

Students claimed their lecturer's feedback was helpful to their work as she provided them with accurate comments. Thu and Nam felt they were encouraged to pursue their research ideas. Tram said she tried to listen carefully to the lecturer's feedback to understand what Hoa expected. The interviewed students acknowledged that groups that presented in the next teaching session tended to perform better than the first two groups, due to the following groups having more time to prepare. More

importantly, they had learnt from the first two groups. The students learnt from each other and from the feedback.

In addition, students highly appreciated Hoa's feedback because of her power as an experienced expert, as two students claimed:

> *Interviewer: Could you tell me your view on the teacher's comments of today's teaching session?*
> Tram: My lecturer's comments on our work were more powerful and useful for our learning because she is **a reliable experienced lecturer**.
> *Interviewer: How about Nam? Your group presented today and your teacher commented on your group's presentation. Do you agree with Tram? Why or why not?*
> Nam: Yes, if similar comments came from any classmate, I was sure that these comments would be disputed by his/her peers. However, the comments **came from the lecturer**, so we were **persuaded**. Why? Because these comments came from a **more respected and learned person** (FG post L3).

However, students were not always satisfied with Hoa's comments, as they expected detailed feedback, which reflected both the content and method of their work. In contrast, Hoa's comments were sometimes general and focused more on students' learning attitude. The following snapshot describes Hoa's feedback in the last class, which may reflect this issue.

There was dissatisfaction with Hoa's feedback among the interviewed students after the last teaching session. Two students commented:

As the lecturer also commented that peer assessment was not accurate, I expected to receive **the lecturer's own comments** on our work. She should have provided us with her opinions. I only **believe in the lecturer's assessment** (Nam, FG post L4).

She just gave us **general comments** on our **learning attitude**... I would like to receive her **detailed comments on the edited version** so we may know where we have not done well and how to fix these weaknesses (Tram, FG post L4).

Detailed feedback would further assist students to better recognise their current academic level and how to best improve. Students' responses may suggest that to support student learning, constant and detailed application of teacher feedback is crucial (Brookhart, 2013).

6.4.5 Peer assessment

Hoa incorporated oral presentation as a key strategy for her students to interact through peer assessment, as illustrated below.

ORAL PRESENTATION

1. Students were required to choose a research project, then share it with the class. Students voted for the five most interesting projects and these were later allocated to five groups in the class. Students were given the right to choose their members and select their group leader.

2. Each group had four weeks to conduct their research using theoretical knowledge gained in the subject.

3. During the project, students could ask the lecturer directly or via email for further guidance. Two weeks prior to presenting, the lecturer sent her students an assessment sheet, which included criteria she would require them to follow.

4. The structure comprised teaching sessions for five groups to present their projects.

5. Each group presented for 30 minutes. Class discussion was for around 15 minutes.

6. Hoa re-marked assessments taking into consideration peer comments, questions and answers, and the presenting group. Finally, students used the given assessment sheet to assess the presenting group's work.

Hoa designed a criteria sheet, which can be described in the form of a "rudimentary rubric" for peer assessment. It consisted of nine criteria: (1) Justification for choosing a particular topic; (2) Title of the research; (3) Research objectives; (4) Research methods; (5) Scope of the research; (6) Structure of the research; (7) References; (8) Research findings; and (9) Reliability. Students were required to rate each criterion (A: Good; B: Satisfied; C: Unsatisfied). For each level, students were required to rate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least quality, and 5 the highest quality. Students could also add their comments for each criterion. Hoa expected that the 'rubric' would guide students while conducting their projects, and help them improve skills of listening and self-assessment. The lecturer's adoption of an assessment form aligned with her intention to make learning transparent for her students.

Students reported that their learning benefited as a result of using the 'rubric'. They learnt "how to design assessment criteria" (Nam and Thu, FG, post L3). The 'rubric' assisted students with critical listening as they "had criteria to guide them

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during listening" (Nam and Thu, FG post L3). It also "guided the groups to better prepare their presentations" (Thong, FG post L3). Observation data reflected that listeners focused on the main criteria in the form when questioning the presenting groups.

However, the 'rubric' did not achieve all expected outcomes. Not all groups adopted it to guide their presentation. Hang claimed: "As our group presented first, we did not rely on the assessment sheet. We thought we needed to present only the main ideas" (Hang, FG, post L3). Further, most students did not understand how to use the 'rubric', and consequently they might not have accurately evaluated their classmates nor learnt from this process. This is evident from one student's comment: "peer assessment was not accurate as I believed that at least half of us rated other groups' work without understanding the criteria and how to rate" (Thong, FG, post L4). Students commented that the 'rubric' was "ambiguous and difficult to understand" (all students, FG post L2); "not detailed enough, therefore difficult to rate" (Hang, FG, post L2); and "very complex" (Giang, FG, post L2). Nam thought that the assessment criteria were "not comprehensive". Many students were struggling to use the 'rubric' even in the second class, as one student said: "Although I got used to the assessment sheet, I still did not know how to assess" (Tram, FG, post L3). When the peer assessment results were analysed and reported by the lecturer at the last teaching session, Nam still felt confused and claimed that "I believed that I was not equipped with enough skills to recognise the quality of the research" (Nam, FG, post L4).

There were several contributing factors that impeded the effective use of the 'rubric'. Hoa and her students agreed that this was a novel practice. In many Vietnamese classrooms, students usually wait for their teachers' judgement, as they consider assessment is the lecturer's responsibility and only the lecturer is able to assess (Pham, 2014). Second, students' passivity was another factor that impacted on the effective implementation of the 'rubric'. Hoa complained that although she sent the sheet to students two weeks before their presentations, none of them read it or asked her questions. Third, Hoa acknowledged that she did not specifically explain the assessment criteria to students when they were required to rate their classmates. This led to the lack of shared understanding between the lecturer and students regarding the criteria and how to apply them in assessing student performance. Students felt

confused and this therefore affected the reliability of their judgement. Students claimed:

> She just said that she **would consult** the assessment results as 20 people would
> have different ideas on the group's work (Hang).
>
> I **did not understand** how she analysed the data from the peer assessment
> sheet (Thong).
>
> The lecturer **valued the reliability** of research while I considered it as **only**
> **one criterion** which was equal to other criteria (Nam). (FG post L4)

Without the lecturer's further explanation, students did not understand the purpose, criteria and analysis of the assessment criteria. Furthermore, as Hoa did not guide students in how to give peer feedback, students focused on asking questions regarding weaknesses of other groups' work. This was viewed as unbalanced, resulting in discomfort for some students. One student said: "I felt annoyed by the attitude of some classmates as I thought they were harsh on my group since my group was the first group who presented" (Hang, FG, post L2).

To assist students in peer assessment practices, the students wanted the lecturer to guide them in how to give peer feedback and what aspects of the work they would focus on. The purpose and structure of the criteria sheet needed to be explained in more detail at the outset. In fact, in the last observed class, Hoa referred to students' existing learning skills and taught them how to learn independently and how to be involved effectively in peer learning. She said: "…*your independence is still a problem…. Our memory is not good enough to remember everything. When you listened to your friends' presentations, you should have taken notes on your ideas and judgments…*" (Snapshot, L4). This advice addresses explicit teaching of learning skills for students. However, students may have benefitted more if this advice had been given during the semester rather than at the end of the course.

Reliability of peer assessment was also influenced by Vietnamese culture such as the respect for harmony, and respect for the teacher; as two students claimed:

> I thought that as we were studying in the same class, we **should not evaluate**
> **our peers harshly**. For example, a group did very poorly in a particular
> aspect. However, as we were classmates and we all wanted to gain high marks;
> we should evaluate more 'appropriately' (Thong).

She created a feeling that students were involved in the assessment process. That is, we also contributed to the assessment results. In fact, she was **still the person who decided and controlled our assessment results**, but she tried to **create opportunities** for us to think that assessment results are **objective** because we are also **involved in** them (Nam). (FG post L4).

The first student's statement reveals that his comments on classmates' work were affected by respect for harmony, a central cultural value. He was well aware that his comments should not be too "harsh" to his classmates as they all wished to achieve good marks. The cultural context impacted on the accuracy of peer assessment. The second student's statement reveals the influence of respect for teachers. Despite valuing the lecturer's attempt to engage students in the assessment process, the student realised that Hoa was still the final authority in assessment. Interviews with Hoa revealed that she wanted to ensure active involvement by using peer assessment, and was less concerned that student grades should actually be used in a summative way.

Students' views on the importance of peer assessment varied. Some students valued peer assessment as it "added to make assessment results more objective" (Giang, FG, post L2), and "provided different comments that made [them] view [their] work more comprehensively" (Tram, FG, post L4). However, all of them acknowledged that peer assessment results were not completely accurate, partly due to their lack of understanding of the assessment criteria sheet. Students suggested that "the lecturer should allow the three groups to present [before assessing] so that [they] can compare the groups' presentations more accurately" (Tram, post L4). It revealed tensions between Hoa's intention and her students' expectations. While Hoa wanted to use the criterion-referenced assessment approach, her students preferred a norm-referenced assessment. Further, students believed that they needed an experienced and knowledgeable person to give them feedback. Nam said: "I did not believe in the peer assessment...I only believed in the lecturer's judgement". Students' responses revealed that they adopted a traditional belief about assessment, which highly appreciated teacher's authority in classes (Brew, 1999).

6.4.6 Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a core part of assessment for learning through which students develop their immediate and lifelong learning skills. Hoa fostered students' self-

assessment through sharing her own experience and the use of her feedback and peer assessment.

Her success inspired students to reflect upon their existing learning attitudes and goals. Her experience motivated them to set up short and long-term goals for their improvement. Some students said:

> After the class, I needed to **change my ways** to view education and **adjust my attitude** to complete our project. My group did not take the project seriously (Hang).
>
> My today's homework was to **reconsider my current goals** and to set up appropriate goals while I was studying and after graduation (Nam). (FG, post L1).

Hoa's personal experiences encouraged her students to self-assess and monitor their learning process. Moreover, students indicated that the frequency of receiving the lecturer's feedback and engaging in peer assessment practices was useful for the development of students' self-assessment. However, students were not uniformly positive about Hoa's teaching, due to the influence of sociocultural factors, as outlined in the next section.

6.5 SUPPORTING AND INHIBITING FACTORS

6.5.1 Supporting factors

A small class size containing advanced students and the lecturer's knowledge and enthusiasm were identified as supporting factors in Hoa's assessment practice.

6.5.1.1 Class size and type

Hoa realised that her small class, with advanced students, was advantageous to support learning through a variety of interactive teaching strategies. With only 20 students, it was not difficult for her to follow students' participation, and to organise group activities with appropriate scaffolding. According to Hoa, her students "had good thinking skills and learning attitude, compared to students in the non-advanced class", and this therefore supported Hoa in the implementation of teaching strategies encouraging students to be autonomous learners.

6.5.1.2 Lecturer's personal factors

Hoa was well aware of her role in Vietnamese classes where teachers are considered as role models for students to emulate. She believed that "to inspire

students to learn, the lecturer should be passionate about a teaching career" (DTH, post L1). Hoa's passion, along with advanced knowledge and skills that she obtained from professional development courses, motivated her to explore new ways to support student learning. She said: "In this subject, if I followed the division's suggested teaching strategies, I felt bored. I could not teach like that" (DTH, post L2). Hoa's students recognised that her use of a written form in peer assessment was a new practice, illustrative of Hoa's efforts in teaching innovation. Tram appreciated Hoa's enthusiasm as she believed that "the teachers' passion will encourage them to seek the best methods to support student learning" (Tram, FG, post L1). Hang felt she "was inspired by [Hoa]'s personality and intellect" since these attributes created "a great change" in her mind (Hang, FG, post L1).

Hoa's passion motivated her to frequently identify and review students' learning needs and modify her teaching strategies accordingly. Hoa stated that she always attempted to continue to make her lectures more interesting and more practical for her students. Her adjustments developed students' active learning attitude. Interviews reveal that students gradually developed interest in learning the subject over the semester. Hoa's teaching strategies were preferred as these helped students to reflect on their own learning and prepared them well for the final exam. They acknowledged that they became interested in doing research. Thu and Nam wanted to join Hoa's projects, while others developed their own research ideas.

6.5.2 Inhibiting factors

There were many factors that hindered Hoa's uptake of assessment for learning. These included students' lack of interest in the subject, students' passivity in learning, poor facilities for teaching and learning, EU's assessment policies and reluctance for innovation. Further, the Vietnamese values of respect for teachers and harmony, and examination-oriented learning also hindered AfL adoption.

6.5.2.1 Students' lack of interest in the subject

Although Hoa considered Research Methodology was a "useful subject" for students' teaching careers, her students did not appreciate its practical value. Students believed that the unit was a general subject, and therefore not as important as specialised subjects such as mathematics. One student stated: "Initially, I heard the word 'subject about methodology', and disliked this subject. I just wanted to learn to

pass the exam. By the tenth class, then I started to pay attention to her lecture" (Hang, FG post L4).

Hoa faced many challenges in relation to students' lack of interest. Students did not invest time or effort to study the subject. Many students neither attended the classes nor completed their assigned homework, others did not pay attention during class. In response, Hoa had to adapt her teaching strategies to stimulate her students to learn. As an expert, Hoa shared her authentic research experience with students to persuade them that conducting research is an interesting process with valuable implications in science and teaching practice. She encouraged students to recognise conflict and controversial issues in the educational field, and be motivated to discover more about them.

6.5.2.2 Students' passive learning

Hoa attempted to offer her students many learning opportunities. She invited questions, was willing to answer questions through emails or Facebook, provided opportunities to negotiate with her one to one, and provided guidance for students' projects. However, not all students took advantage of these opportunities. Hoa said that only two out of five groups asked for her further guidance during the preparation of their projects.

Students were unwilling to communicate their expectations with the lecturer during classes. Although students had many questions regarding the subject content and assessment criteria, they displayed their passivity by simply focusing, listening, and accepting Hoa's instructions. A lack of interactive exchanges between participants impacts on the processes of shared interpretations and negotiated meanings in class (Carless, 2013). One example was that although students were confused about the assessment criteria and did not know how to rate their peers, they did not ask Hoa for further explanation. Hoa felt dissatisfied as her students were not proactive in communicating their wishes and this made it difficult for her to cater for their learning needs. However, she understood that this was a typical characteristic of Vietnamese students.

6.5.2.3 Facilities for teaching and learning

Sub-standard facilities have been identified as one challenging factor in Hoa's assessment practices. Due to the time lost in technical preparation, Hoa had to adjust

her intentions to fit the facilities of the classroom. For example, in the first observed class, while she had prepared a PowerPoint, she had to lecture without it because her computer could not connect to the projector. Although Hoa spoke expressively, the interviewed students felt tired when simply listening.

6.5.2.4 EU's assessment policies and practices

Hoa highly appreciated EU's assessment policies which allow lecturers of specialised subjects the flexibility to choose assessment methods. Hoa chose an oral final exam instead of a written exam as she believed an oral exam would assess understanding more accurately. An oral exam also helps students to practise a variety of skills necessary for their teaching career. However, she faced challenges when proposing the oral final exam to the professional staff at the FMI. Hoa claimed that they first rejected her idea, and argued that a written exam was traditional, and that an oral exam would change existing procedures for organising the exam. A lack of cooperation and conformity among different sections at EU to reform assessment methods was a barrier for Hoa's innovation.

Further, Hoa's assessment practices and her teaching philosophy conflicted with EU's assessment policies. While Hoa valued independent learning, she followed EU's assessment policies and incorporated attendance as a part of students' midterm score. It was evident when Hoa did not take a roll call of attendance, but she frequently took notes on individual students and their participation. This recorded information was later used towards the students' midterm scores. Students' midterm scores were high with eight out of the 20 students awarded a 10, ten students awarded a 9; one student a 5, another student a 7. Hoa explained that two students who were frequently absent were given grades of 5 and 7.

In Hoa's classes, students did not attend regularly since attendance contributed only 10 percent to their final score of the subject. Thu said:

> In today's lecture [the first observed class], you could see that 19 out of 20 students attended to the class. Normally, there are around 15 students because we are not interested in the content of the subject. The increase was because the lecturer changed her way of teaching. More importantly, as the **exam time is coming** very soon, students attend frequently **to prepare for exams** (Thu, FG, post L1).

Thu's statement reveals that what attracted more students to the class was the lecturer's adjustment in teaching and the upcoming examination. This again reflects the impact of an examination oriented learning culture on Hoa's teaching. Further, the statement also indicates that neither Hoa nor her students valued the incorporation of attendance into learning achievement as this did not enhance learning. However, they had to follow EU's assessment policy.

6.5.2.5 Vietnamese sociocultural values

Vietnamese cultural values such as respect for teachers, harmony, and examination-oriented learning created tensions for the adoption of AfL in Hoa's class.

Students' respect for the teacher led to their reliance on Hoa's direction and therefore restricted their potential to become autonomous learners. Students expected Hoa to participate more in peer discussion by providing further guidance prior to discussion and by giving more detailed feedback on their work. One student said: "The role of the lecturer is very important, particularly in higher education. I do not think in higher education, students can perform at their optimal level without support from their lecturers" (Giang, FG, post L1). Students' expectations were for a lecturer to direct their learning.

Students' respect for harmony also limited their participation and co-construction of knowledge. To keep a harmonious climate in the class, students tended to not critique their peers' performance. There was evidence of "friendship marking" (Dochy et al., 1999) in which Hoa's students tended to give high marks to their peers. Further, Hoa's students showed traditional learning habits focused on the examination. This historic habit oriented students to focus their learning on gain high mark rather than for learning itself.

6.6   CONCLUSION

Hoa is a motivated and experienced lecturer who had opportunities to gain advanced pedagogical knowledge and skills through professional development programs. She attempted to adopt a range of assessment strategies to enhance student learning. She sought to make the standard of learning more transparent for her students by incorporating exemplars and sharing her own experiences. Hoa also adopted classroom assessment strategies to scaffold student learning such as questioning, observation, teacher's feedback, peer assessment, and self-assessment. Students in

Hoa's class appreciated her efforts in adopting and adjusting pedagogical strategies to cater for their preferences. This contributed positively to the development of students' attitudes towards the subject and their learning skills.

Hoa appeared to be well aware of her students' learning habits and the impact of Vietnamese cultural values. She strove to adapt her teaching strategies to fit within her class. However, she still faced many difficulties in the implementation of assessment for learning due to historical, social, and cultural factors within the EU and the broader context of an Asian country like Vietnam. These tensions resulted in many issues in Hoa's assessment practices, including reliability of peer assessment, shared understanding of assessment criteria, as well as the hierarchical power relationship and the restriction of learner's agency.

The analysis of this case reveals that continuous professional development for lecturers regarding principles and techniques of effective implementation of assessment for learning is crucial. Students are products of their culture and context and therefore lecturers need to know how to teach students to participate in peer and self-assessment. There is a need for lecturers to introduce new assessment strategies gradually, and at the same time, to teach students to improve their generic learning skills. Further, cooperation between lecturer and students is essential. However, this cooperation is an insufficient condition for innovation unless all parties can also be persuaded to participate and change, and policies are supportive of innovation and assessment for learning.

Chapter 7: Challenges of a Western Teaching Style – The Case of Tung

Nguyen Van Tung is a young male lecturer in the Faculty of History at EU. He is passionate about teaching and exploring new ways to engage his students. He has studied coursework Masters in both Vietnam and in another Asian country, which provided him with opportunities to experience alternative educational approaches and added to his desire to reform his teaching practices.

> I really want to make changes... I decided to **move from a traditional to a positive teaching style** in which students have to work more actively while the teacher facilitates by providing more documents with different views.
>
> Firstly, I am **a product of the Vietnamese educational system** from primary to high school education, and I know this system has its own strengths and weaknesses. Another factor that motivated me is what I have **learnt from foreign countries**. I find that foreign education is **open and has respect for students' independence, autonomy and creativity**. This way of teaching supports students to become active learners. The most important factor is that I really **want to contribute to successful reform** in this University, particularly in my faculty, and to create a wave of change in our educational system (NVT, post L5).

To support student learning, Tung has attempted to implement a student-centred approach in which the teacher is a facilitator and students participate actively. He has also focused on using teaching and assessment strategies to develop critical thinking and lifelong skills for students because he believes, as the quote above indicates, that students need generic skills as well as content knowledge. As this was the first class he taught at university, not all his attempts at changing his teaching practice were successful. Tung had to adjust his early teaching strategies according to feedback and negotiation with his students in an advanced class.

Tung's assessment practices are described and analysed in this chapter using sociocultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2008; Vygotsky,

1978). The analysis draws on data from a number of sources. Ten interviews were conducted with Tung before and after his five observed lectures, and five interviews were conducted with a group of six students after each of these lectures. Data from observations and documents were also gathered to triangulate data from interviews with Tung and his students.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the Faculty of History (FoH). The introduction is important since it provides the context that may have influenced Tung's pedagogic practices. The second section explores Tung's background, experiences, and teaching philosophy. Tung's beliefs about learning and assessment help to explain why he adopted particular assessment strategies to enhance learning in his class. The students in his History class are described in the third section. The fourth section details how Tung enacted assessment strategies to support his students' learning. The students' experiences in Tung's class are discussed. Factors that supported and inhibited Tung's assessment practices are explored. The chapter ends with conclusions by relating Tung's experiences back to the research questions of the study.

7.1 FACULTY OF HISTORY

The FoH was one of the first faculties established in EU. Currently, it has 43 academics and three professional staff. Among the academic staff, there are two Professors, and six Associate Professors; 15 have Doctorates, and 20 have Masters. In the academic years 2012-2013, a total of nearly 1,000 internal and external undergraduate students and over 100 postgraduate students were studying in the Faculty. The FoH is responsible for training undergraduate and postgraduate history teachers for Vietnamese schools.

The Faculty has recently made great efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Currently, it is reforming training curriculum, teaching and assessment methods. The Faculty encourages lecturers to use a variety of teaching and assessment methods to support student learning, instead of relying only on written exams as in the past. Several lecturers have now chosen oral exams for various subjects. More attention has been given to training young lecturers in the Faculty. They are encouraged to study abroad to gain new knowledge and skills in education. A few were sent to EU's training courses in the application of technology and innovative teaching methods. Under the Trig Project, two other lecturers were also designated to undertake

a three-month course at one Australian university, and the Faculty assigned experienced lecturers as mentors to young lecturers. Workshops have been organised quarterly to share lecturers' experiences in using innovative teaching and assessment methods.

7.2   NGUYEN VAN TUNG

7.2.1 Background and experience

Tung was born to parents who were teachers at schools in a central Vietnamese province. As Tung's mother was a history teacher, he had an early opportunity to read historical books and became intrigued by history. Tung was a history-specialist student at a high school for gifted students. He gained second place in the national history competition and was given direct entry to the advanced class in the FoH at EU. Tung graduated from EU with distinction and was invited to become a lecturer in the FoH.

Tung has been employed by the FoH for five years, but much of that time has been studying in postgraduate courses in both Vietnam and in another Asian country. After completing his study he returned to the FoH and was assigned to teach core units in World History. The advanced history class was the first class he taught at the University. Despite having limited teaching experience, Tung has gained positive comments from his colleagues, who were also his teachers at EU. Many students admired Tung because of his enthusiasm, English proficiency and creative approach to teaching history. He has had many published conference papers and journal articles both domestically and internationally. Tung is now undertaking his PhD in History in Europe.

7.2.2 Professional development

Although lecturers must have a high level of disciplinary knowledge, they also require teaching capabilities (Deluca et al., 2012). Tung acknowledged that he has had limited opportunity to attend training courses related to teaching methods or assessment, except for FoH workshops organised quarterly for lecturers to discuss innovative experiences in teaching and assessment. He appreciated these workshops as they provided him with several teaching strategies that he could trial. Being a young and passionate lecturer, Tung expressed a wish to attend more training courses so that he could provide his students with the best learning opportunities.

Tung has attempted to self-study in a number of ways to improve his own pedagogic knowledge and skills:

> I have learnt pedagogy from **many resources and from many places and from many people**. I **learnt this subject** when I was a student at this University. I also learnt how to teach from lecturers who taught me in the **Masters courses**. I learnt through **observing teachers** in my faculty and **attending workshops**. I observed and tried to learn how **professors taught on YouTube**. I think I need to **practise more** to master my teaching skills (NVT, post L5).

Tung was a student at EU, but claimed that the knowledge about assessment he learnt in this period was a "little out-dated" and therefore "unhelpful for his teaching practice" (NVT, prior L1). Apart from training, observation of other teachers is also an effective method. Tung highlighted the role of self-education through the use of social media and through attendance at history-related international conferences. He was well aware that to master teaching skills requires practice. This inspired him to trial new teaching methods in his first class at the University.

Tung's experiences in his professional development suggest that although self-study plays a vital role in the development of teachers' pedagogic knowledge and skills, these are insufficient for developing the knowledge and skills desired. Tung's statements reveal that there may be a need to include more advanced knowledge about assessment in teacher-training courses for pre-service teachers.

7.2.3 Teaching philosophy

7.2.3.1 Purposes of Education

Tung is supportive of equity education where everyone has a chance to advance themselves. From such a viewpoint, education is not used to rank students, but to help students fulfil their potential (Delors, 1996; Dewey, 2007). Tung stated:

> Education is **not to compare one individual with another individual** because everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses. Education needs to help everyone to **develop themselves as they are**. Education aims to allow students' hidden abilities to be exposed and advanced (NVT, post L5).

He also believes that the core objective of education is to "prepare students for their lives", and therefore teachers and students need to reconsider their focus during

the teaching and learning process. Instead of short-term gains such as marks or knowledge, the focus should be on lifelong skill development. Tung indicated that "... teachers should teach their students how to apply knowledge and be adaptive while students should not learn because of marks, but for their long-term future" (NVT, post L5). According to Tung, lifelong learning skills are a direct tool for students to be successful in their lives. He stated:

> …learning lifelong learning skills and how to be successful is **extremely important** for my students. This **directs their thinking**, working habits, and the ways they may interact with their peers, the lecturer, and others. Our students also **need to know where to go**; otherwise, they may work or study like a ship captain without a compass (NVT, post L5).

Tung's belief about the broader objectives of education has significantly shaped his teaching practice. He purposefully created opportunities for students to "develop their self-confidence, meta-cognitive and communication skills" (NVT, post L5). Tung also shared his own experiences enthusiastically and genuinely with students during classes to illustrate the importance of setting goals whereby students seemed to gain an understanding of the lecturer's success. This appeared to inspire their learning.

7.2.3.2 A constructivist approach to learning

Tung believes that knowledge is constructed rather than transferred. He claimed that "there is no true or false knowledge. Knowledge is the product of individual thinking processes and experiences" (NVT, post L2). He contends that the best learning occurs as a result of social interactions in the teaching and learning process:

> Students can learn not only **from their teacher**, but from **their peers**. Therefore, I encourage my students to **ask questions and give and to receive comments** between peers.... Just one comment from their peers may be more effective than their teacher's lengthy talk (NVT, post L3).

Tung added that social interactions in class not only support learning, but also help to improve teaching. He claimed: "interactions between the teacher and students are very useful to adjust [my] teaching to cater for students' learning needs" (NVT, post L2). Tung's comments indicate his belief that an interactive learning environment benefits both student learning and the teacher's learning regarding pedagogy and assessment practices.

It has been argued that social interactions in class are important to support student learning (James, 2006; Moore, 2000). Tung's belief about the benefits of social interactions informed his choice of teaching and assessment strategies that encouraged students to become involved in discussions, as well as giving and receiving feedback from both teacher and peers. He developed a democratic learning environment by sharing power with students where each student felt safe and supported, so they could negotiate learning with their teacher. An interactive classroom is considered as effective for learning, if students work as agents in the process of guided participation, within a community of practice (Rogoff, 2008).

Using oral presentation, Tung let students role-play as experts in given topics to teach their classmates, giving them an opportunity to practise authentically as teachers. Consequently, they could learn not only from 'doing', but also from each other. Tung always asked about the experience of the presenters and audiences after each presentation and encouraged them to self-reflect and learn lessons from each other. Tung's teaching approach is captured in the snapshot below, on the roles of teacher and students.

TUNG'S TEACHING APPROACH

He began teaching the advanced class with an announcement that he **would not be "a traditional teacher, but a facilitator"** (Tung, post L1). Tung believed that "a good teacher should establish teaching activities based on his students' learning needs rather than simply transmitting his knowledge" (TVT, post L2).

Tung gave students more power to negotiate their learning by asking students to share what they expected from their lecturer and what sections in the unit they wished to study more thoroughly. **Students expressed excitement** regarding Tung's teaching approach. They expected Tung "not to adopt a model in which 'the teacher talks and students take notes' [*translated into Vietnamese as đọc – chép*], and encourage them be more active" (all students, post L1). Students also wished to be given more materials for the unit. Since their English was still limited, they wanted the lecturer to assist them to translate English documents.

Tung completely agreed and attempted to satisfy all students' needs. In particular, he required students to read materials before lectures. Tung **introduced students to diverse approaches** in understanding a history topic, and encouraged his students to ask questions or to critique his ideas during lectures. Students could also send their questions via email or Facebook after lectures. Tung had two lesson plans. The first was compiled in PowerPoint to be presented and given to his students. The other was used only by Tung. In this, he carefully planned the content of the unit.

Role of the teacher

Tung believes that the teacher plays a vital role in the support of learning, especially when performing as a facilitator. He claimed: "Students only learn from each other when the teacher is truly a facilitator. If this role has not been performed well, then the class may become chaotic" (NVT, post L4). Further, he agreed that teaching needs to cater for students' learning needs, including assessment tasks. Tung also contends that the teacher needs to inspire students to learn.

> The role of the teacher is much more important in that they teach **not only knowledge and skills** of the unit, **but also inspire their students to learn**. If the teacher **only focuses on transmitting knowledge**, it is **not enough** and this is an obsolete educational style (NVT, post L5).

His statement reflects the teaching philosophy that learning occurs through discussion and analysis, not merely reproducing facts (Dlors, 1996). Further, teaching should inspire students to learn, as this is an important factor to help students become continuous learners (Kvale, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Wells & Claxton, 2002). In his teaching practice, Tung participated in discussions as co-participants, sharing his views on a topic, as he claimed:

> I just evoked some new approaches to help my students to open their minds. I indicated that apart from traditional understanding, there were **alternative approaches** to understand a particular event. Instead of thinking that something was only right or wrong; my students **developed their lateral thinking and accepted multiple views** on the topic (NVT, post L4).

Tung also maintained a democratic learning environment where students could share their thinking with the lecturer. He believed that "in an academic environment, everyone is equal" (NVT, prior L1). He attempted to remove the hierarchical relationship between the lecturer and students, which has been considered inherent in Vietnamese classes (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; McCornac & Phan, 2005). This was shown through his use of language and participation as a knowledgeable member of the class. For example, Tung used the language of young people in a humorous way to encourage student learning. He said: "Try to give questions to the presenting group now. Otherwise, they will seek "revenge" on you next time... [smiling]". Further, Tung always invited students to interact with each other first. He listened carefully to students' opposing views and asked more questions. When students seemed to not have any other ideas, he became involved in the process with comments on the different views. Tung played the role of more knowledgeable member in the co-construction of knowledge in a community of practice.

Role of the student

Tung dismissed superficial learning, considering it "a waste of time as [students] can easily forget what they have learnt quickly" (NVT, post L4). He suggests that learning to become a critical thinker is important in a knowledge-based economy. Tung also believes that the learner's agency, which includes student autonomy and self-regulation (Rogoff, 1990, 2003), is a crucial factor in effective study: "Students should be autonomous learners. They need to know what their goals are, what they are

lacking and how to achieve their goals" (NVT, post L3). For this reason, Tung set high expectations for his students in the advanced history class.

Tung's encouragement caused students to become involved in learning activities. They were not hesitant to show their confusion after the very first lectures and asked Tung to adjust his teaching approach. Some students sent Tung emails and told him that "all students disliked his classes and felt it was difficult to learn" (Hoai, FG, post L2). Further, they negotiated for a reduction in requirements. Feedback from students required Tung to reconsider his teaching approach.

Students also negotiated assessment methods with the lecturer. Tung first required students to submit a written paper for the midterm assessment. Students would complete the exam question at home and submit to the teacher. However, as the submission date approached, the class president proposed a new method of oral presentation assessment before the class. She thought that the exam question was uninteresting and unsuitable to a knowledge-based economy because it required them to work individually. The class president proposed oral presentation as an alternative assessment method, since she realised a number of its significant advantages to learning, including "creating an interactive learning environment, strengthening students' relationships, and developing many skills" (Lan, FG, post L2).

This suggests that involving students in discussing assessment processes supports their learning as this helps them become responsible and active learners (Carless, 2013; Hayward & Spencer, 2014). In this example, the class president was proactive in proposing the new assessment method. She showed that she was an agent in her learning. This is partly because Tung encouraged students' involvement. This example illustrates that when students are actively engaged in the assessment process, they can change teaching strategies to improve their learning (Carless, 2013; Boud & Molloy, 2013).

7.2.3.3 Beliefs about assessment

Tung was aware of the importance of assessment in the enhancement of educational quality. He stated that "innovations in assessment are considered as a key solution to reforming our educational quality" (NVT, post L5). This suggests an understanding of assessment as being "at the heart" of educational transformation (Assessment Reform Group, 1999, p. 3). He explained further:

> The changes in assessment will **lead to alteration** in the ways teachers and students approach knowledge and select teaching and learning strategies. This is implemented along with **innovations in curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, and teacher-training processes**" (NVT, post L5).

Tung's understanding of the importance of assessment is closely linked to his belief about lifelong educational objectives. His statement also reflects the interplay between assessment, curriculum, resources, teaching, and learning. Assessment reform may be unsuccessful without corresponding and simultaneous changes in other areas. Tung further contends that "successful reform in assessment demands a united and innovative wave rather than relying on the commitment of only one individual" (NVT, post L5). He appears to recognise that although assessment is important to enhance student learning, it is also a complex area (Black & Wiliam, 2005; Willis et al., 2013).

Tung indicated that one limitation in the Vietnamese education system was an over reliance on written final exams. Tung valued all assessment methods such as written tests, assignments, oral exams, and projects. However, he employed an oral exam for the final assessment as he believed that an "oral exam creates opportunities for direct interactions between the examiners and students. Students would practise speaking skills, which were considered very important for future careers as teachers, and also helped to assess students' understanding with follow-up questions" (NVT, prior L1). Interviewed students supported an oral exam as it encouraged them to study harder. Moreover, they had to use learning strategies to understand knowledge rather than only memorising facts. However, some students admitted that they were nervous since this method was new to them and they might lack confidence when "confronted" directly by their examiners with unpredicted questions.

Tung believes that to enhance learning, assessment should be implemented in a variety of ways and must be done frequently. In addition, it is necessary to develop a self-assessment capability in students from which they may become continuous learners. Tung explained this more specifically:

> Teachers assess directly what their students have achieved, and at the same time **teach their students how to self-assess**. Guiding students **how to self-assess is more important**... If the teacher instructs them in **how to self-assess**, this will become **the students' lifelong learning skills** (NVT, post L2).

His statement reflects the importance of developing self-assessment for both immediate and future learning. Students must be taught to become self-assessors (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002).

7.3   HISTORY CLASS

7.3.1 History subject

The History subject is a core unit which awards a total of seven credits for first year students in the FoH. It aims for students to clearly understand ancient and medieval societal models in Western European and Asia through examining the development of major countries in these areas in terms of their economic, political, cultural and societal fields. Students are able to practise skills of analysis, synthesis, using maps and developing appropriate understandings of the development of human society from ancient to medieval times.

Three lecturers in the FoH were responsible for teaching the subject during two semesters. In Semester Two, this core unit awards four credits. Tung was assigned to teach the section on Southeast Asian history, the last part of the unit contributing to one credit (15 teaching periods). For students in the focus groups, the subject was challenging as it covered a large amount of historical knowledge over a long period of both Western and Eastern countries. However, as it was a specialised subject, students spent more time on it and made a greater effort.

7.3.2 The History classes

The History class was held in an old building Monday and Wednesday afternoons and consisted of two and three periods respectively. Since the classroom could hold 45 students, it was very spacious for the 18 students enrolled. However, the space was quite dark and stuffy as only the front door and windows remained open. The room was noisy as the building was located adjacent to a busy road. The teaching equipment consisted of one screen. Prior to borrowing a projector for the class, Tung was required to register with the building officer. Tung contended this process was "extremely irritating" since he was required to expend time organising teaching equipment for each lecture (NVT, prior L1).

7.3.3 Students in the advanced History class

This was a first year class of only 18 female students. Most of them came from rural areas of North Vietnam, and all achieved high marks in history at school. Further, they gained high scores in the entrance exam to the University, and performed well in the exam for entry to the advanced class. They were seen as diligent, active, and smart students who had an intrinsic motivation to study. Attracting a group of outstanding students may be advantageous for teachers who want to adopt interactive teaching methods. However, as the learning environment at university was still new to these first-year students, they needed more guidance and scaffolding to study effectively. The characteristics of students in the class can be illustrated through the student profiles of those who were interviewed.

Table 7.1

Interviewed Students' Profiles in History Class

Students' Names (Pseudonym)	Profiles
Nguyen, Ngoc Lan	Nguyen Ngoc Lan lives in Hanoi, the capital. She specialised in history at a prestigious gifted high school in Hanoi. Lan was attracted to study at EU because she "loves teaching". Further, EU offers a fee-exemption policy and a supportive teaching and learning environment. She participated actively in classroom activities. It seemed that her classmates admired her due to her confidence and capability. She achieved 3.58, which is a distinction and also the highest result in her class, and therefore received an EU scholarship. Besides studying, she participated in several social activities.
Vu, Thu Hoai	Vu Thu Hoai studied in a prestigious high school in a rural area in the North. She chose to study in EU because of "her dream". When she was in grade 12, she was impressed by a history teacher who was kind, enthusiastic, and excellent in teaching. This experience motivated Hoai to change her attitude to history, and became a committed student of history. Hoai aims to obtain a distinction for her degree at the University. She got 3.47 and received an institutional scholarship for the first semester at EU. She was an active student in class who always asked questions of her teacher and peers and got involved in discussions confidently.
Nguyen, Thi Huyen	Nguyen Thi Huyen lives in a suburban area of Hanoi. She specialised in history in a gifted high school in Hanoi. Huyen entered the FoH at EU because she loves this subject and because she is aiming for a teaching career. She also felt suited to the teaching profession. In the first semester, she obtained 2.89. She participated in classroom discussions actively and confidently.
Nguyen, Thi Lien	Nguyen Thi Lien comes from a rural area in the North. She decided to study at EU for three reasons. First, she "loves history" and wants a teaching career. This was inspired by an excellent history teacher at high school. Second, she realised that Vietnamese students are not interested in learning history. She wanted to become a history teacher so that she could change students' attitudes about history. Further, she does not have to pay tuition fees at EU. She sometimes commented and asked questions in class. In the first semester, she got only 2.79.
Pham, Thi Hue	Pham Thi Hue lives in a rural area near Hanoi. She loves history and studied this subject successfully at school. Being a quiet person, she focused more on listening and discussing with students in her group. She got 3.05 in the first semester.
Tran, Thu Hong	Tran Thu Hong lives in a rural area in the North. She studied in a gifted high school in her province. She seemed to be a quiet person and therefore rarely talked in class. Although Hong sometimes had ideas or questions, she was not very confident in expressing herself. She usually listened to the teacher and her classmates and took notes during lectures. Her result in the first semester was 2.89.

In summary, Tung, a young lecturer with advanced beliefs regarding education and assessment, was passionate about implementing a student-centred approach in his classroom practice. From a sociocultural perspective, his pedagogic practices were

mediated through his beliefs, experiences and the context of the advanced history class at EU. How Tung enacted assessment strategies to support learning and whether these strategies were effective with students in this class are considered in the next section.

7.4 KEY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

As mentioned, Tung valued the Western education principle of developing independence as well as critical and creative thinking. This led him to adopt a student-centred approach to develop his students' thinking skills. Although well researched, Tung's approach and ambitious teaching objectives created issues in the context of his advanced history class. The students felt pressured, and at times overwhelmed by the content and methods. This section describes how Tung enacted teaching and assessment strategies to make learning expectations clear to students; to elicit their current understanding level; and to scaffold their learning. An exploration of affordances and hindrances in Tung's assessment practices is given last.

7.4.1 Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Students were excited about becoming agents of their own learning. However, they also initially resisted Tung's teaching approach. Students in focus groups reported that they were "shocked and became nervous" as they did not understand what the teacher said (students, post L2, 5). Hong described this situation more specifically as follows:

> We **were shocked**. As he has a wide range of knowledge, his speech was rambling. While he was talking about Southeast Asia, he suddenly moved to globalisation. He required us to read the book named "The World is Flat" [Thomas L. Friedman]. I did not understand what he said at the initial classes. **I asked him what he was trying to impart to us** (Hong, FG, post L2).

The above statement shows that students faced challenges trying to adapt to Tung's new methods. The student's statement also indicated that she needed to know the lesson goals or learning intentions.

Observation data illustrated that limited attention was given to clarifying the learning intention during the observed teaching sessions. Tung began lectures without telling students what they were going to learn and to do. At the end of class, Tung informed his students of future lessons, but without detailed explanation. Students felt Tung did not make learning objectives explicit enough during the five observed

classes. Students claimed they did not have a clear direction to guide their own learning, and expressed their wishes that the lecturer "shared with [them] what [they] were going to learn and to do so at the beginning of the lecture" (Hue, Lien, Hong, FG, post L2). Explaining learning intentions with the students appeared to be fundamental in supporting their learning. This finding was also evident for UK students (Black et al., 2005) and appears not to be bounded by the cultural context. However, Tung attempted to provide expected standards through modelling, which was valued by his students. He also explained marking criteria in midterm scores to his students.

7.4.1.1 Provision of expected standards through modelling

Although Tung had high expectations of his students, he guided them by modelling thinking and expression skills for students, as illustrated in the following snapshot.

SNAPSHOT
TUNG'S MODELLING

In the fourth observed class, when Group Four finished answering questions, Tung required them to summarise their topic in ten sentences. Although the students attempted to complete the task, the response was poor. Tung modelled how to answer the question. In the fifth observed class, when Tung instructed students to revise knowledge, he employed a diagram displaying the main periods in the history of Japan. Later, he required students to use a similar method to revise the history of China and other countries.

Tung modelled how to answer questions in oral exams. He acted the role of a student whose lack of self-confidence resulted in low marks. He highlighted that, apart from self-confidence, structuring an answer in a deductive approach was important to show deep understanding of a topic.

Students of the focus groups appreciated Tung's modelling, which they claimed assisted them to "deepen their knowledge and develop skills in expression". These benefits were evident when Tung modeled how to best answer a typical question in the revision list for an oral exam. Tung did this because he realised most students felt nervous about oral exams as they had had little experience with such forms of assessment. Tung's modeling benefited learning as one student claimed:

When I participated in an oral exam in the first semester, the examiners asked me questions, I felt **very nervous and scared of the teachers**. Accordingly, his guidance today was **very useful to me**. I realised that self-confidence was very important (Lien, FG post L5).

The students' statements highlighted the importance of making learning expectations explicit to students (Assessment Reform Group, 2002a; Black et al., 2005; Hayward & Spencer¸ 2014).

7.4.1.2 Sharing marking criteria in midterm assessment

To help students prepare for their presentations, Tung referred generally to assessment criteria when he assigned each group's topic, as he stated:

I **did not give criteria to students in detail** but I mentioned assessment criteria when I talked about the midterm assessment. I **suggested approaches** to performing their group work, but **never forced them to follow** a particular direction. They were to select content and methods that worked best for their group. I also suggested that **their work should show their own creativity** (TVT, post L5).

Tung encouraged his students to be creative in their learning, stating that this is considered necessary at a higher education level (Torrance, 2012; Yorke, 2011), and aligned with the MoET's policy (MoET, 2012a). However, his general assessment criteria created certain difficulties for students in the class when they prepared their presentation and performance. For example, as Tung did not guide and enforce a consistent time limit for each presentation, student groups tended to take more time. One student claimed:

At the beginning of today's class, the teacher claimed that we **were allowed to present within 30 minutes**. We felt **disappointed because we had prepared so much**… When the teacher limited the time, we **had to change our plan**. Instead of asking questions and waiting for responses, we decided to answer immediately (Hong, FG, post L3).

Another challenge was that students felt it was difficult to assess their own and other's work without specific criteria. This occurred when Tung required the students to self-mark and to mark the group's performance. The presenting group marked their own performance at 60 percent while their peers gave them 80 percent. Higher percentages from peer marking may reflect the Vietnamese cultural value of respect

for harmony, not wanting the presenters to "lose face" (Tran et al., 1995), or 'friendship marking' (Dochy et al., 1999). However, in an interview, students showed confusion and subjectivity. The following excerpt illustrates the challenges that the students faced:

> Interviewer: Could you tell me how you assessed your own presentation? Could you tell me how you assessed presentations together?
>
> Hue: As he **did not tell us what aspects to assess and how much percentage** for each, I told Lan that **I did not know how to assess** our work. It was based on my own criteria, but I was not aware of the teacher's criteria. According to our group's criteria, we reached 90 percent.
>
> Hoai: I **thought that we assessed two aspects**: content and delivery of presentation.
>
> Lan: According to our **group's standard**, we **achieved 90 percent**, but we did not answer questions well and our content was poor. I was ashamed of the 90 percent mark the group gave but I was not able to speak up and say so. 60 percent was reasonable. (FG, post L2)

The students' statements reveal that without specific assessment criteria, students faced challenges in peer and self-assessment. Students' marks were mainly based on their own views of the criteria and, therefore, they could not accurately assess their own presentation or that of others. Lan's statement reflects her honesty in self-assessment and appears to be independent of the lecturer's criteria. She believed that "the teacher's purpose was to help us to be more active in learning. I thought we achieved this purpose though it was at the beginning". It is evident that the lecturer and students had achieved this purpose at a certain level. However, to support student learning, clear assessment criteria should be provided and discussed at the outset (Black et al., 2005; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Torrance, 2008).

A lack of transparency in assessment criteria led to discomfort among some students as they were uncertain about how the lecturer marked their work. Tung believed that detailed feedback was given to students when they presented in class, so he marked students' work and submitted scores to the FoH without returning marked work to students. Issues about his marking emerged after students received their midterm results.

Although all students received an A, they had divided views when asked about their marks. Lien claimed that her teacher showed "latitude" because she thought her

group might have performed well in the written work, but their presentation was fairly poor. Lan felt satisfied with her group's mark, though it was "lower than other groups". However, she felt the grade was unfair for Huyen's group. Lan said: "I think Huyen's group should complain about their score because her group presented and answered questions better than Linh's group. However, her group received a lower score than Linh's group" (Lan, FG, post L5). Huyen herself felt disappointed and indicated her group mark was unfair.

> The score is something **to recognise and encourage what we have attempted**. At first, **I intended to complain** because I felt my group performed better than Linh's group. After that I thought it was **not worth doing as our score was 0.5 less** than the group. The class president advised us **not to complain** because this **might cause conflict** in the class. I was only disappointed as our effort had not been recognised. (Huyen, FG, post L5).

Despite this, due to the collective spirit and small disparity in marks between her group and the other groups, Huyen decided not to complain. Lan expected that the lecturer would explain the criteria.

> I wish the teacher would have **shared with us the marks and how he marked our work in class**. In this way, everyone would feel more comfortable. Otherwise, this may impact on students' learning motivation. For example, Huyen was active, but what she received was a lower score. Next time, Huyen might dislike working in groups because she **could obtain a high score when she works independently** (Lan, FG, post L5).

Transparency and explaining success criteria are necessary to enhance reliability of assessment results and develop positive learning motivation in students (Harlen, 2012; Stiggins, 2007). Tung's grading practice may imply that group marking reflects inaccurately each student's effort and ability. Students' comments reflected their examination-oriented learning culture, which might impede the potential of AfL in Tung's class.

7.4.2 Questioning

Tung utilised questioning as one of his most common techniques, because it was "an effective way to develop students' thinking skills and to assess students' current understanding" (NVT, post L2, 5). According to Tung, questioning was also "the fastest and the best method to receive students' feedback on teaching" (NVT, post L5).

The following sections detail the types of questions he used, his purposes and the effectiveness of questioning to support learning.

7.4.2.1 Types of questions

Tung used a variety of question types to optimise questioning in the support of learning including problem-raising and 'wh-questions'.

Tung regularly employed problem-raising questions involving conflict to stimulate discussion. For example, he asked "Southeast Asian countries used to be 'developed' in the 'commerce era' [1400-1600]; why do you think these countries are now poor?" Further, Tung realised that social sciences such as history can involve different explanations for the same historical events. He took advantage of this understanding to ask questions to challenge students' thinking. For example, "Documents from Laos show that its population in 1416 was 700,000. However, about 400 years later, French records indicate that there were only 500,000 Lao in 1893. What do you think about these numbers? And Why?" For these kinds of questions, students had to compare and connect events to form possible arguments. They were also required to discuss and give a rationale for information in the various documents. Tung believed that "the question of 'why' or questions which provided conflicting viewpoints on the same topics stimulated students' thinking and debate in [his] class" (NVT, post L4).

Although understanding and reasoning for historical events are required in learning history, memorising facts is also useful. It is argued that foundational knowledge of an event can assist in developing critical thinking (Stahl, Hynd, Britton, & McNish, 1996). Tung used questions to help students recall facts, such as: "Could you tell me from which European countries, people first came to the Southeast Asia to sell their products?" Tung usually commenced his questions by reminding students of existing knowledge: "You have learnt about Indian history, could you tell me when the first Europeans came to India?" Using Vygotsky's theory of ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), Tung's questioning can be seen to encourage students to use their current knowledge to best answer his questions.

Tung sometimes asked questions which required his students to reconsider their thinking, such as: "Are you sure that event happened in...?" Tung believed that "when the lecturer asked them a skeptical question, students were forced to re-evaluate the

information they provided" (NVT, post L3). The development of students' thinking was Tung's first priority over providing knowledge. Tung's factual questions were always followed by questions requiring further explanation from his students. He claimed:

> The most **boring questions in learning history** are questions requiring only a **description of events**. The 'why' question could be the most important question as it requires students to relate and argue. They have to **understand historical events and practise thinking skills**" (NVT, post L3).

Tung believed that learning history always required detailed examples and evidence. He asked questions such as: "What else? Please give us one example? What evidence"? To answer, students needed to interpret information rather than simply recalling facts and memorisation.

7.4.2.2 Purposes for questioning

Tung employed questioning as a powerful tool to assess student learning and recognise learning difficulties. Data collected from questioning was later used to inform teaching and to support learning in Tung's class. Tung explained his use of data from questioning as follows:

> At the beginning of the lecture, I had intended to **ask students many questions. However, w**hen I asked students to summarise Japanese history in the ancient and medieval period within three minutes, m**y students felt confused**. This might illustrate that my students' understanding and summary skills were limited. They only **focused on memorising single facts**. I had to **change my teaching strategies**, adjusting discussing key points in the subject. I asked leading questions and then answered them myself (NVT, post L5).

Further, Tung used questioning to engage students' participation; to develop students' thinking; and to help students learn pedagogical skills. Tung encouraged his students to question him and their classmates and considered students' questioning as a criterion to assess their participation. Tung believed that this use of questioning would enhance student learning. He said:

> At the beginning of teaching the subject, I **encouraged my students to ask questions**. The number and quality of questions were also a criterion to assess individual and group activities. In this way, they not only **worked on their**

group's topic, but also responded to other groups' topics. I believed that this method could **encourage students to think and engage actively** (NVT, post L2)**.**

As Tung valued learner's agency, he guided students to find answers for themselves and to develop independent learning skills. He explained:

> I **did not provide students detailed answers** targeting their questions. Instead, I guided students to approaches which would answer the questions and to books they should read to assist them with possible responses. Students should **develop independent learning skills** (NVT, post L4).

In addition to focusing on developing thinking skills and assessing current understanding, Tung used questions to create an authentic learning experience. Tung wanted to replicate a teaching environment for his students and determine if they were capable of conveying important concepts in a concise and understandable form, as they would have to do as teachers. He asked students to explain the "commerce era" in ten sentences. Tung's purpose was "to check if students had a deep understanding of the topic. Once they are independent and critical thinkers, they can talk about the topic either briefly or in depth. This was also a very necessary pedagogical skill" (NVT, post L4).

Tung's questions created opportunities for students to share their experiences as thinker, speaker and listener. He asked: "What did you think or feel as speaker/viewer/audience"? In doing this, students learnt from each other through their own experiences.

7.4.2.3 Effectiveness of questioning

In Tung's observed lectures, almost all students were engaged in class discussion and responded to the lecturer's questions. Students in the focus groups responded positively to questioning:

> *Interviewer: What do you think about the lecturer's questions in the revision lesson?*
>
> Lan: I felt very **excited** about his questions. They **stimulated me to think deeply** and helped me to recognise my strengths and weaknesses.
>
> Hoai: His questions made me think of what I have learnt and how to synthesise knowledge. I felt **upset** because I did not answer many questions. I **have to revise** carefully.

Lien: His questions helped me recognise that **I have not understood many areas** of the subject. I have a limited knowledge of Indian history and none for Chinese history. (FG, post L5)

The above quotes suggest that questioning appeared to support student learning in Tung's class. Questions stimulated students' thinking and involved them deeply in their learning process. Of most benefit was that Tung's questions made students reconsider their understanding of the subject and self-assess their learning.

Tung felt satisfied when realising that his students had learnt how to ask questions to challenge their classmates. He stated: "There were many questions that I asked students when I taught these topics. I was happy because in discussions, my students could use them as tools to challenge other groups" (NVT, post L4). Tung's students used this style of questioning to formulate their own questions.

It appeared that Tung's success in questioning came from his understanding of the Vietnamese fear of being criticised. He understood that students were typically passive, but used questions and their desire to avoid criticism, to draw them into the class. As a result, Tung encouraged students to raise their voices in the class, even to critique the lecturer. All students' responses were respected. Tung was careful in choosing constructive feedback language. To help students recognise their own limitations, Tung commented: "Are you sure...?", "Is that correct?", "Why do you think so?" These questions required students to reconsider their answers carefully.

7.4.3 Observation

Observation was also an assessment strategy used by Tung to adjust his teaching, as he said: "During my teaching, I observed all students in the class and intervened accordingly" (NVT, post L3, 4). This was clearly shown in the third and fourth observed classes. Tung described how his observation was helpful for timely intervention and student learning.

Due to **a long presentation** with a range of facts by Group Four, other students seemed to **be distracted and bored**. Some started to **talk privately** to people next to them while others **yawned and felt asleep**. I had to stop the presenters and **ask them some questions to engage students' attention** (NVT, post L4).

Tung also deviated from his intention to use peer assessment for a summative purpose as a result of his observation:

> I decided not to use peer marking as intended after the first oral presentation. I **observed how students discussed and recognised** that some students **turned the discussion into argument** and this might **create discomfort** in their relationship. In Vietnam, we do not separate academic argument and personal emotional relationship (NVT, post L4).

The Vietnamese culture of respect for harmony created a significant barrier for the use of peer assessment in Tung's class, as discussed further in section 7.4.5.

7.4.4 Feedback

Tung was well aware of his role as facilitator in the class and giving feedback about his students' learning was considered an important facilitator skill. When students responded well to his questions, he usually acknowledged this by saying: "correct", "accurate", "good/excellent question". Although this kind of feedback was less detailed, and consequently has been argued as unhelpful for learning (Hattie, 2009; Dweck, 2006), it encouraged students to actively engage. These comments were helpful not only for the student who gave the response, but for the whole class, as Hoai said: she "felt happy when [her] answer was acknowledged by the teacher" (Hoai, FG, post L3), while Lan, Lien, Hong, Huyen, Hue "felt stimulated to study more diligently and to seek praise like [their] friends" (FG, post L3).

Tung's longer and detailed feedback was provided at the end of each oral presentation. Tung claimed that he was careful when giving feedback on their presentations, because he had to give feedback not only to the presenter, but also for the peers' assessment. He stated:

> Students' comments and discussion are only supportive to learning when the **teacher works as a facilitator**. If the teacher has not performed his role of facilitator well, the class becomes chaotic and this leads to **argument and conflict**. This occurred because students would **never be convinced by their peers' ideas** (NVT, post L3).

The students relied heavily on the lecturer and his feedback. This put Tung under pressure to provide fair, accurate and persuasive comments for both presenter and audience. The Vietnamese culture of respect for the teacher is reflected in this scenario. It is understandable as the teacher has expertise and more experience in the field, so

the authority of the teacher is always considered superior to students' classmates (Carless, 2011; Pham, 2010). However, the lack of trust in classmates' capacities in giving useful feedback could lead to restrictions in students' collaborative learning opportunities with their peers (Carless, 2009, 2013).

Students in the focus groups also valued Tung's feedback during the mediation of peer comments. In the interview after the second observed class, students complained about the facilitative role of the lecturer as he "tended to participate in their discussions as 'a member' of the class rather than a lecturer who had more experience and power" (FG, post L2). The following quotes illustrate the students' expectations.

> He **did not intervene quickly** when our discussion created tension and led to a stalemate (Hong and Lien).
> He should perhaps have reconciled conflicts. Instead, he **exacerbated** our conflicts (Lan and Hoai). (FG, post L2).

There was conflict between the teacher's intention and students' expectations. Tung tried to diminish his authority by considering himself a 'member' of the class. He participated in discussions by observing students and sometimes asking questions of the presenting groups. He encouraged and stimulated peer interaction with the hope that students could freely talk, argue and learn from each other. Initially, students enjoyed discussion; however, discussion appeared to develop into argument and no group was swayed by another group's ideas. This led many students to feel stressed and annoyed. They expected the teacher to be involved earlier and to adjudicate.

Tung adjusted his role in the third observed class, where he participated fully for the duration of the discussion. He gave feedback directly to the presenting group. When students in focus groups were interviewed again after the third observed class, they felt more satisfied with Tung's participation, though some students felt disappointed at their level of involvement compared to the previous lecture. Although students were interested in voicing their ideas, their responses indicated that they still expected Tung's instruction. Students considered the lecturer's opinion the most persuasive (Carless, 2011; Berry, 2011b). This reflects the Vietnamese culture of respect for authority in the class.

7.4.4.1 Content of the lecturer's feedback

Tung's feedback sometimes included instructional correction of students' mistakes in terms of years and events. He believed that "specific facts were the foundation of history studies, I would be lacking if I did not intervene to correct mistakes immediately" (NVT, post L3). At the end of each presentation, Tung tended to provide lengthy and detailed feedback. The focus group students evaluated Tung's feedback as "detailed, accurate, constructive, and persuasive" (FG, post L2, 5). The following snapshot illustrates Tung's feedback.

SNAPSHOT

TUNG' S FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' PRESENTATION

(The second observed teaching session)

After Group One presented their topic, they received comments and discussed questions from their classmates and the lecturer. Tung summarised and gave the group his oral feedback as follow.

One of the strengths in Group One's presentation was **their creativity** in presenting information, particularly in utilising mind mapping. I knew it took time to design such diagrams. However, one weakness of diagrams was that it reflected only core ideas. Accordingly, some comments emphasised this weakness. Remember that every method has its own advantages and disadvantages. You should try to take advantage of each method's strengths, **but never overplay them**. Some students in Group One presented confidently, while others still showed their lack of confidence though they might have understood the topic.

Your content **covered almost all major aspects** of the topic. However, I agreed with comments from other students that some important aspects were still ignored in this presentation such as Angkor's role. We only knew how Angkor developed when we considered Angkor in relation to other countries in Southeast Asia. As a result, we could understand how Angkor influenced other countries. There were many materials to substantiate that Angkor's temple architecture was used in Thailand. However, the group has not done enough reading in this area.

Secondly, history always requires a detailed description. When you spoke about Angkor's social economy, **there were many materials** describing Angkor's painting/sculpture and maps. When you referred to interactions between Angkor and other places, why didn't you use maps to show its territory expansion to Laos and

---

Thailand? While you had tools to make your presentation more compelling and effective, you did not use these. You might have considered diagrams "the most perfect product of human beings" …[laughing] and therefore used only this method to convey content. Please remember that there are other methods.

Perhaps, you had not done enough reading, even in Vietnamese. That was why other students asked you many questions. Why? You did not provide us detailed evidence and examples.

Anyway, I still **liked your presentation**. You showed that you knew how to do a presentation, select appropriate information in materials to substantiate your points. Your team work skills were quite good. Some students were still timid though some of you understood the information. This was an opportunity for you **to practise speaking skills**. I hope you have learnt from this experience and will give improved presentation next time. Please **remember that history requires detailed evidence** and examples. I hope that the next groups pay attention to these lessons and perform better.

The above snapshot reveals that Tung's feedback highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the students' presentation. He also commented on peer feedback. His feedback contained advice suggesting how to improve content and speaking skills, demonstrating his constructive attitude and intention to help students improve. Although Tung did not specifically explain assessment criteria, his comments on content, students' effort, their speaking, team-work skills, and presenting methods, were covered.

Tung used experiences that he identified from previous summative tests to provide students with advice on their learning and preparation for the final test. Tung stated:

> I realised another flaw in Vietnamese students when I was an **examiner in the oral exam of the first semester.** They **did not use maps** in their learning. Students learned about Greece and Rome, but they did not know where Greece and Rome were when I asked them to show them on the map. My feedback highlighted the importance of using maps in learning history (NVT, post L5).

When students adopted a rote learning style, they were incapable of displaying their knowledge in a practical manner. Evidently, Tung's previous experiences as an

examiner positioned him to provide feedback and strategies to support his students' learning approach.

7.4.4.2 Impact of the lecturer's feedback

Students in the focus groups recognised and valued the positive impact of Tung's feedback on their learning. In the interviews, the students discussed what they had done to follow his advice and how effective, feasible, and useful his feedback was on their own learning. However, many interviewed students tended to be unsatisfied with Tung's feedback when he criticised too many points in their presentation. Lan, Hue, and Lien were upset when their group received many criticisms and questions from peers, and they expected the teacher to 'rescue' them or 'defend' them. Instead, the teacher 'sided with' their peers and emphasised their weaknesses. Hoai felt "stressed" by her teacher's feedback. She thought she was a good student and her group had prepared carefully. However, Tung still found limitations. These students had a feeling that the teacher was "harsh". They also admitted that this negative reaction only appeared when they first listened to Tung's feedback. When the teacher explained in more detail, their disappointment disappeared: they were all "completely persuaded" and tried to act on Tung's feedback. It appears that providing specific and detailed feedback achieved more positive responses from students and further enhanced learning.

Students in the focus groups showed their dissatisfaction with the feedback that reflected a comparison between advanced and non-advanced classes. They also admitted that this type of feedback motivated students to increase their effort in learning. Hoai claimed: "My lecturer complained that our class did not know how to use maps. He emphasised the phrase "Advanced Class". This made me very upset and I had to try more" (Hoai, FG, post L3). This may indicate that 'face saving' can act as a motivating factor for student learning, although it may have harmful effects as well.

Not all Tung's advice was adopted by students. Students' research limitations were shown when they had difficulty in finding suggested documents in EU's library, and were further exposed when they were unable to use maps. Tung questioned himself as to why his students "did not use maps though [he] had suggested this many times". When the group gave their presentation on Malacca, he complained that "after two weeks, I asked them to show me where Malacca was. Though students could talk very well about Malacca, they did not know where it was" (NVT, post L3). Tung

acknowledged that some of his advice would not be adopted immediately, but might be used in future.

> Students were not expected to immediately act on the advice or feedback given. More importantly, they needed to be aware that there were many approaches to a topic. Students learnt **methodology** and consequently they could utilise these methods even five or ten years later (NVT, post L4).

Tung rationalised that students would adopt his feedback in a variety of ways and timeframes. Importantly, Tung emphasised teaching methodology rather than simply transferring information.

7.4.4.3 Lessons from providing feedback

Tung indicated that to be effective, feedback should focus on acknowledgement of the students' effort and strengths.

> My feedback reflected my recognition of **their dedication in terms of effort and time**. This must be done first as we should not overlook students' effort in completing their work. At the same time, **I must show my students what they have not done well without reprimand**. I **did not completely reject students' results**. The teacher must also be **positive about students' improvement** (NVT, post L4).

Further, Tung realised that it is crucial to ensure that not only detail but also balance and fairness is attended to when giving feedback. He said: "The teacher's face was always pleasant... [smiling]. More importantly, the teacher's comments had to be balanced between the positive and negative aspects and be fair to every student with the purpose of helping them progress" (NVT, post L5). He cited Group One as one example: Tung said their presentation was limited, but he admitted that they were very creative in designing their PowerPoint and delivery. Tung gave them a high mark (8.5) equal to an A standard. Tung's experience was that apart from the lecturer's facial expressions, the lecturer must be aware that the ultimate objective of feedback is to enhance student learning. More importantly, Tung's marks for students in the midterm exam were still high despite his criticisms. As a result, students in Tung's class probably did not feel threatened.

However, there were some 'side effects' when Tung indicated the weaknesses of Group One's presentation. Some students showed dissatisfaction because they thought Tung was 'too harsh' on them. These students first thought that Tung "disliked

[their] group" (NVT, post L3). Tung also realised the powerful impact of Vietnamese cultural values which included 'face saving' and supposed that this created "the most challenging" aspect in giving constructive criticism to students.

> The most challenging aspect in giving feedback to students was **how much**
> **critique** I included. As students were still **young**, if I indicated too many
> mistakes, they would be stressed and disappointed and would not be willing
> to expose themselves next time. Vietnamese people do not want to be
> criticised (NVT, post L4).

Tung also acknowledged that 'face saving' is important to students. However, this did not mean that the teacher should avoid mentioning students' weaknesses, so Tung had adapted to the Vietnamese culture as he "tried to select a different language to express feedback. As such, this made the teacher's comments softer... [smiling]" (NVT, post L4). Careful selection of language in providing feedback has proved important to avoid negative emotional consequences (Boud & Falchikov, 1995). Tung often used historical circumstances and discussion to transfer his message. The following snapshot illustrates how he applied this strategy.

SNAPSHOT
TUNG'S CAREFUL SELECTION OF LANGUAGE IN PROVIDING
FEEDBACK
(In the fourth observed teaching session)

Linh who represented Group Four, exhibited confidence. She began her presentation by a short warm-up exercise. Her classmates seemed to be very excited about the presentation as it started in an unusual way. To ensure the quality of her presentation, Linh instructed the class that when she was presenting, everyone must listen and believe completely in what she said. Other students must not disrupt her. This requirement, however, made almost all classmates annoyed. They tried to support her at the beginning, but later showed their discomfort. Instead of listening to the presenter, some students talked privately to each other.

When the presentation finished, Tung stood in front of the class and said:

> *Tung: Dictatorship has existed for many years, but currently progressive people have pursued democracy. It was surprising, in this class, there was a student who still adopted the dictatorship style of the past... [smiling].*
>
> Students in the class laughed and showed their agreement with the teacher.
>
> *Tung: What did you feel as a listener? What lessons could you draw from this experience if you were to become a teacher*
>
> Hoai: Well, I thought if the teacher adopted that style, students would get bored and disruptive. I was sure that they were not interested in learning. When students do not pay attention to lectures, the teacher must consider their attitude and responsibility. I thought the teacher must position students in the centre of their teaching.
>
> The class applauded....

The snapshot above shows that Tung used history to give indirect feedback on the student's presentation skills. This created an ideal environment to receive and learn from the feedback. In the interview which followed the lecture, he explained further: "I wanted to emphasise that we needed a 'democratic atmosphere' in presentation and discussion. The 'latent message' was that the student should not display such an attitude towards the audience. I did not want to 'tell her directly' (NVT, post L4). Tung's application of history in feedback in a humorous way brought benefits for both presenter and audience as they were less distressed while also learning presenting skills.

7.4.5 Peer assessment

Tung values student-student interactions as a basis for learning. He believes that "students can learn from not only the lecturer, but also from their peers" (NVT, prior L1). This pedagogic belief has impacted on Tung's teaching practices as he encouraged his students to perform through discussion and by giving feedback. Tung used oral presentation as the main method for peer assessment.

> **ORAL PRESENTATION**
>
> *The second, third, and fourth observed teaching sessions*
>
> **1**. Students in Tung's class were divided into four groups. Each group was assigned a particular topic relating to the history of Southeast Asian countries in ancient and medieval periods. They had two to three weeks to prepare. During this time, students worked in their groups and they could ask the lecturer for references or further guidance. Choosing presenters was each group's decision. Tung shared general criteria, for example, the time limit for each presentation was about 30 minutes.
>
> **2**. Groups presented their work in front of the class in different sessions. When each group finished, they received classmates' comments on their performance. Peer feedback took the form of questions, comments or advice.
>
> **3**. Tung adjudicated discussions amongst groups and the process of giving peer feedback. He was also the last person who gave comments and further explanations.
>
> **4**. Tung also used oral presentation to assess students' learning outcomes for the midterm score. 5. Students had opportunities to improve their final written work based on feedback from peers and the lecturer. Their midterm score was calculated by an average of their performance in the presentation and final written work.

Tung introduced each presenting group without mentioning criteria or aspects of the presentation they should pay attention to, or the schedule of class activities. For example, when students in Group One finished their presentation, Tung said: "Now, it is time to assess the presentation. What is it lacking? What is needed to be clarified? What can be done to improve the presentation?" (Field note, L2). It appears that *positive aspects* of the presentation were ignored in his guidance for peer assessment. Tung directed students to two main aspects in their comments: (1) identify weaknesses of the presentation; (2) give advice to improve the presentation. Tung explained his purpose was to "encourage competition" amongst groups. Competition was evident in Tung's class when Group One completed presenting. Classmates engaged actively in giving successive questions which focused on where the presentation was not done

well. However, some students in the focus groups stated their negative thinking and feelings when they received questions from their peers.

> I **felt shocked** at the beginning because my group did not understand clearly about the topic with poor preparation. When we finished presenting, many questions from our peers made us nervous … We did not know how to respond at that time. Perhaps, I should have stood up and said "please stop questioning; we cannot answer your questions anymore". I **felt very annoyed with Hoai** as she gave us so many questions. I thought that she did not understand the topic. She asked us as if she made fun of us with a negative attitude. It showed that she did not have a constructive attitude towards us...[laughing] (Lan).

> I **first was annoyed** with Hoai because I thought that she knew we had not prepared well, she deliberately **"attacked"** us. She created pressure on us. At the end, I realised that Hoai asked the questions seriously (Hue). (FG, post L2)

These students were discomforted when they received successive questions. Hoai, the student who asked Group One many questions, explained her reaction as: "At first, I thought Group One undermined my ability. They might have thought that I just asked for fun. Actually, I carefully read about their topic and consequently my questions naturally occurred". Hoai's statement revealed that encouraging a competitive learning environment can impact on learning both positively and negatively. It motivated outstanding students to perform, but at the same time some can attempt to dominate interactions.

Students' responses in the focus groups indicate that students might lack knowledge and skills for giving and receiving peer feedback. This highlights the need that students must be taught protocols to be involved in effective peer assessment (Topping, 2009; Carless, 2011). In fact, students expected to receive supportive and constructive feedback. Lien, Lan and Hue stated: **"**We expected Hoai to give us questions in a gentle way. She should talk more slowly and ask one question and let our group answer before asking the next question". Students' expectation of receiving constructive peer feedback was shown through their negotiation with the lecturer, as illustrated in the following snapshot.

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SNAPSHOT

NEGOTIATION OF HOW TO PROVIDE PEER FEEDBACK

In the second observed teaching session

Students completed their discussion on Group One's presentation. To encourage students to compete with each other, Tung required students to give comments on Group One's presentation.

Tung: Now could you give comments on weaknesses of Group One's presentation?

Linh: My comments were not only about their weaknesses, but also their strengths because they were actually creative in designing their presentation.

Tung: I required you to just tell about their weaknesses.... [Smiling].

Linh and many students in class: No, we must be fair.....It would be better if I praise them first and then critique later.

Tung: That is fine... [Smiling]

</div>

Tung claimed his purpose in asking students to comment only on weaknesses was to "encourage competition amongst groups", which seemed to be contradictory to his belief because he admitted he was well aware of the value of balanced and fair comments. When students proposed this idea, he felt it was reasonable and agreed. This created a significant positive change in the manner of asking and giving comments on classmates' work in the next teaching sessions.

Impact of peer assessment

The interviewed students all agreed that oral presentations supported their learning. They listed many benefits such as "learning from each other, reading more books, learning how to design PowerPoint, public speaking, understanding each other, and having more fun". Students also felt "more confident" and "realised their strengths and weaknesses". These benefits were evident after Group One's presentation. Students all enjoyed the lesson as Group One's presentation was "very creative in designing slides and displayed excellent cooperation among the members" and students had the chance to discuss it freely in the class, evident in one student's claim:

> I really **liked this lesson**. From grade one up to now, teachers were always the main people talking in any class and students had to accept their ideas.

However, in this lesson, **the lecturer role-played a student who contributed to classroom discussion**. Every student was allowed to **freely raise their opinions** (Huyen, FG, post L2).

Most students in the focus groups felt "nervous" after watching Lan present confidently and persuasively and learnt from her presentation. Hoai commented: I compared myself with Lan and realised that I might have knowledge, but I could not attract audiences as she did. I thought that I had to practise speaking (FG, post L2). Oral presentations appeared to help students to learn from each other. Lan claimed that the use of oral presentation led to "a significant change in the teaching approach". Tung asserted the oral presentation method was effective in terms of supporting students' learning and indicated that he would use this method in future.

However, students admitted that discussions among groups and peer comments were not always supportive for their learning. They were not always convinced by peers' views. Hong and Hue claimed:

> I was impressed by Linh's presentation at the beginning as her voice was beautiful. She was also very confident. However, when she talked about the concept of 'commerce era', **I could not follow her**. From that time until the end of her presentation, I could not understand anything. I felt bored and fell asleep. I was **only alert and understood when the lecturer explained** about the topic (Hong).
>
> I was first excited about Linh's presentation as she started very creatively and attractively. However, **the more she talked, the less I understood**. Her presentation was too long without focus. I seemed to gain nothing. I only **understood when the lecturer asked and analyse**d later (Hue). (FG, post L4)

Tung acknowledged that peer assessment was effective when the lecturer had expertise in resolving conflict and tensions that might arise as a consequence of discussion among groups. Data from both the lecturer and students show that peer feedback had less influence on student learning than the lecturer's feedback. This practice reflects the vital role of the teacher in student learning in Vietnamese education.

However, Tung claimed that the implementation of peer assessment was still considered sensitive because of Vietnamese culture: frank comments from peers could

result in broken friendships due to the collective spirit and respect for harmony. Tung stated: "Vietnamese people are concerned about harmony. Students might not be willing to give direct feedback to others" (NVT, post L4). The culture impacted on students' feeling in peer assessment practices. Students indicated that although much of their peers' direct feedback was accurate, they sometimes felt annoyed. The respect for harmony was shown through students' marking practice, when they tended to give their peers high marks, though their peer's presentation was not outstanding. Tung explained: "Vietnamese students have not been equipped with enough willingness and skills to peer assess independently and accurately" (NVT, post L4). For this reason, Tung only used peer marking as a guide to view how students viewed their peer's work. In fact, Tung predominately graded students through his own assessment. It appeared that due to the influence of Vietnamese culture, peer assessment was not considered by either the lecturer or students as a trusted source of data about students' learning.

Vietnamese culture also impacted on the process of students' negotiation of assessment methods with Tung. When Lan suggested oral presentation, a new method for the midterm assessment, not all students agreed and some students refused to present their work. Lan stated:

> When I proposed the idea of oral presentation, **many students in the class disagreed**, especially Hoai. I said: "This is my own idea. You can choose any method that you like, but you need to give your opinions before class. We will discuss it further. If no one has another idea, this means you agreed with me". At that time, no one stood up to present their own ideas. Linh, a vice president, asked the whole class: "Do all of us accept Lan's idea?" Everyone still kept silent. The assumption was that everyone accepted my idea. The teacher also **concurred with me and gave the class questions** right after. Hoai had not questioned the proposal at that time, but turned to the person next to her and **muttered** her **dissatisfaction** (Lan, FG, post L5).

Most students in the focus groups showed their disagreement with the suggested new assessment method. They presented reasons, including that they did not believe in their ability to present; they could not see the benefits for their learning; and they were concerned about the scores they could earn. As highlighted in the previous section, it is paramount for every student within an advanced class to maintain high scores. Hoai claimed that "I first did not support an oral presentation because I could do well in

independent learning tasks and therefore receive high scores" (Hoai, post L2,5). This situation may reflect a combination of respect for harmony and passive learning in Vietnamese culture. Although many students did not agree with the class president about the new method, they did not openly display their opposition or discuss it further. These cultural values appear to impede students' active involvement in negotiation in Tung's class.

7.4.6 Self-assessment

Tung expected his students to "be agents" in their own learning. He valued self-assessment as a core factor of effective learning. He stated:

> Self-assessment is **an important skill** in individual learning. Marks represent the teacher's acknowledgement, which is the **only external factor**. Learners have to develop their independent learning capacity. This capacity is developed when students know where they are, what they want to achieve. This process creates **internal motivation** for students in their learning (NVT, prior L1).

Tung utilised some strategies to develop students' self-assessment. He incorporated questioning and feedback which students acknowledged as helpful strategies for self-assessment. Further, he focused on teaching students how to succeed as he believed that, to be successful, students must know their long-term goals as then they are more likely to attempt to achieve them. He encouraged students to have a large goal, beyond becoming a school teacher. Students described how Tung encouraged them in the first lecture:

> Tung: "What are your goals to study at this university?"
> Students: "To become history teachers at high school".
> Tung: "No, you could be trained to be historians or professors, not only a teacher".
>
> (FG, post L1)

Tung enabled his students to recognise that their education could give them access to a range of careers and provide them with a positive framework for success. He spent one hour talking with students about living skills such as time management, communication, goal-setting and pursuing dreams. Students in the focus group valued the advice since they had not learnt these skills previously.

TUNG SHARED HIS OWN EXPERIENCE WITH STUDENTS

Tung contended that his success first came from clear awareness of his goals. Every year, on New Year's Eve, Tung wrote ten things he would like to achieve in that year. He put this paper in a drawer and waited for the next New Year's Eve to check how much he had achieved. He believed that when goals were set we must aspire to attain them.

Tung proposed that his success also came from passion and great effort. Tung believed that diligent study and frequent self-questioning were necessary. As a student he had wanted to play more; however, he always tried to finish learning tasks before going out. Tung told students that he achieved comparatively low results in his first year at university. When the second year started, he looked at his score and questioned: "Is this result suitable to a person, who used to gain second place in a national history competition like me?" He became committed to study and finally achieved outstanding results.

Students in the focus group appreciated Tung's sharing of such experiences which they claimed actually motivated them to learn. Lien said: "I learnt that I should not take my family background as an excuse, but to try more" (Lien, FG, post L5). Moreover, Tung's experiences contained useful advice for students' learning such as being passionate, confident, positive and active. This helped them to "reconsider their learning and plan for the future" (Lien, Hue, FG, post L5); "rethink [their] goals and develop a new lifestyle which is more positive and passionate" (Hoai, FG, post L5); "make attempts to study and not waste time" (Hong, FG, post L5); and "encourage [them] to study English and pursue [their] dreams" (An, FG, post L5).

It appears that Tung's experiences provided an insight into success which highly valued the respect for effort in Vietnamese culture. Students were persuaded because of Tung's experiences. Lan claimed: "I was aware of the idea of setting goals on New Year's Eve, but I had not believed in its benefit. I was convinced by my teacher because he was a shining example who has done this and stood in front of us" (Lan FG post L5). One student commented on how Tung inspired them to learn by saying:

It was very important because knowledge could be forgotten but the methodology, inspiration and skills still existed. I learnt not only from his teaching approach but also from the way **he pursued his dream**. I noticed carefully what he did and applied this in my life and career (Lan, FG, post L5).

Inspiration plays an important role in effective learning for it is not only cognitive processes that contribute to learning but "the whole person" including positive emotions (Gipps, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Inspiration to learn is also essential to nurture future learning (Black, et al., 2006; Boud, 2010). Tung appears to be successful in using his own experiences to inspire student learning.

7.5 SUPPORTING AND INHIBITING FACTORS

7.5.1 Supporting factors

Enabling factors for Tung's uptake of assessment strategies for learning comprised class size and type, the lecturer's passion and his training experiences in both Vietnam and overseas.

7.5.1.1 Class size and type

Tung's class, with only 18 students, was comparatively small and this appeared to be an important supporting factor for him to implement active teaching methods and assessment strategies. Tung said: "As this class was small, it was easy to organise classroom activities. Every student had a chance to participate in these activities" (NVT, post L5). Observation and interview data indicated that students in Tung's class actively engaged in group work with each given specific task and peer assessment practice.

In addition, this class included advanced students who were high achievers in history at high school. They were also active students who liked to assert themselves and tried their best to gain high marks to stay in the advanced class, which would significantly benefit them after graduation. This gave Tung several advantages. Interview and observation data supported the finding that students in Tung's class actively engaged in classroom discussions and questioning. They stated their expectations in that they wanted to present in groups in order to improve their knowledge and skills and they wanted a midterm score. Tung accepted these requests and in this way the values of a democratic approach and a more equitable teaching style became evident.

7.5.1.2 Lecturer' personal factors

Tung is a young lecturer who is passionate about exploring new methods to provide his students with the best learning opportunities. Tung expressed a strong wish to contribute to successful reform at EU and to create a wave of change in the Vietnamese educational system. He normally reflected on his own teaching experience as one of his professional practices.

Additionally, Tung analysed lessons from the observation of outstanding lecturers' classes in his faculty and high quality lectures on YouTube to improve his pedagogical practices. He stated: "Through observing outstanding lecturers' classes, I often pondered why they could teach so well. I realised that most lecturers created problems to challenge students' thinking. I tried to incorporate this technique into my teaching" (NVT, post L4).

Tung's new teaching approaches to support student learning appears to be inspired by his training experiences in both Vietnam and overseas. First, Tung recognised the limitations in teaching and learning in the Vietnamese educational system, including the existence of the transmission and acquisition model with an overemphasis on testing and the summative function of assessment. This motivated him to change his teaching practice. Second, studying overseas provided Tung with a more comprehensive understanding of history and alternative teaching approaches. He was attracted by the value of Western teaching approaches such as stimulating students' autonomy, equity, democracy in the classroom and independent thinking. Moreover, studying overseas helped to improve his English capability. Tung believed that English was a powerful tool to enable him to access diverse sources of information, to practise independent study, and to improve his expertise in teaching history.

Tung was determined to apply these new techniques and gain student feedback on their usefulness. He encouraged students to question and to provide critiques of his lectures in a variety of ways, either in class or via email and social networks. Tung often made himself available, even staying late to answer students' questions. He felt he learnt much from his students. For example, when students asked him about the 'commercial era' in South East Asia, this led him to explain fully in the next lesson.

Students in the focus groups valued Tung's attempts to listen to and learn from their feedback. They compared Tung's teaching with that of the previous lecturer who adopted a traditional teaching approach. They indicated that although they explained their expectations to the previous lecturer, no changes resulted, because that lecturer contended that students had to change their learning approach to suit his teaching style. In contrast, when Tung recognised that his teaching approach was too challenging, he adjusted and reduced his requirements and strove to scaffold students' learning through specific guidance and materials. To illustrate, after the first classes, Tung's students claimed that they did not understand much of his lectures. Tung reduced "some concepts proposed by Western scholars" (NVT, post L4), as his students considered these too complex. Rather, he focused more on primary knowledge. He still referred to new concepts but not deeply. Tung introduced some documents that could be of interest to some students. Tung's adjustment in teaching practice was appreciated by his students and developed an active learning habit among students, as they said: "The lecturer's manner of teaching was more understandable and focused on fundamental knowledge. Therefore, we studied more diligently and actively in class" (all students, post L2).

Although Tung described this change as hard, since it took at least "five lessons" for students to familiarise themselves with his teaching style, he recognised students required a new learning approach.

> **Students stopped relying on the lecturer**. They started to read books and if they felt unclear about anything, they came to class and asked their friends and the lecturer. Students also **started to discuss, give and defend their own ideas in the class**. (NVT, prior L1).

There were positive changes in students' attitudes about the unit as a result of changes in both the lecturer and themselves. Students realised "their lecturer's passion" (all students, post L2, 5) and became "interested in the unit" (Hoai, Lan, Hong, post L2). In the last interview, all students acknowledged their preference for Tung's teaching approach. They reported that the History subject was difficult but were nevertheless motivated to learn by Tung's passion for teaching, creativity, wide ranging knowledge and enthusiasm in scaffolding student learning. One student claimed: "He inspired us to learn. Learning about history is important, but not as important as inspiration" (Huyen, FG, post L4). Many researchers have argued that

instilling in students a love of learning is important in creating a foundation for lifelong learning (Boud, 2010; Stiggins, 2007; Wells & Claxton, 2002). When assessment is used in a formative way, it can be helpful for lifelong learning (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2014).

In summary, the implementation of AfL in Tung's class appears to be motivated by the lecturer's passion and training experiences. A small and advanced class also helped to facilitate Tung's assessment practices for learning. However, a great deal of research has found that the implementation of AfL in different cultural contexts reveals many sociocultural tensions (Berry & Adamson, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2005; Carless, 2011; Klenowski, 2011a; Torrance, 2012). The following section identifies factors that impeded Tung's assessment practices.

7.5.2 Inhibiting factors

Numerous challenges constraining Tung from integrating AfL into his classroom practice were identified. These included students' passivity, Tung's teaching experience, facilities for teaching and learning, EU policies and aspects of the Vietnamese culture.

7.5.2.1 Students' passivity

Passive learning created significant difficulties for Tung to implement an active teaching approach and AfL, especially in his initial teaching sessions. Students claimed:

> At first, I did not like his teaching approach because I was **unfamiliar** with it.
> While Vietnamese students were usually waiting to be fed, the teacher did not
> feed us. He **required us to "choose and make dishes" by ourselves**. He put
> too much pressure on us (Lan, FG post L2).
> He required us to **read a variety of books both in Vietnamese and English**.
> We **could not consume** this enormous amount of knowledge (Hong, Lien,
> Hue, FG, post L2).

Students understood that the teaching approach was innovative and required them to be agents in their own learning. However, they also saw themselves as new students who were only at the initial stages at university and who were more used to a passive approach to learning. Tung acknowledged his students' passive learning habits as follows:

My students came to class and mainly **focused on listening**. They also considered **the lecturer as the only source of knowledge**. What the lecturer stated was considered as the truth, students **tried to take notes and memorise** without any critical thinking. They were also **reluctant to talk** in front of the class. They did not question the lecturer. They tried to absorb what the lecturer transmitted to them. They were **lazy in regard to additional reading materials** and tended to only **rely upon dated views of topics** (NVT, prior L1).

Tung considered passive learning as a "legacy" and this created "great challenges" for his teaching because he realised that changing ingrained learning habits developed in a Vietnamese culture takes considerable time and effort. It was evident from Tung's class that students were initially not comfortable with active learning until three weeks into his teaching. Students' passivity was also evident in the last teaching session. Students positioned themselves as peripheral participants who did not conduct their own revision. They came to the class with the expectation that their lecturer would conduct revision for the subject and help them prepare for the final exam.

7.5.2.2 Teaching experience

Lack of teaching experience was recognised as a barrier in Tung's pedagogic practice. As a young lecturer trained overseas, Tung appeared to be very enthusiastic and ambitious in his teaching objectives when applying Western teaching approaches to a Vietnamese context. Tung's approach and high expectations seemed to put the students under great pressure as they initially displayed their resistance and felt overwhelmed by his approach.

Assessment of students' learning needs

Tung acknowledged in the last interview that he inaccurately perceived his students' expectations and consequently taught complex concepts and expected self-direction in students, but two students claimed:

I believed that what he taught **was too difficult for us**. The teacher asked us questions which provided us with advanced knowledge. Such knowledge only enriched our understanding about the unit. It was **not fundamental knowledge** that I could **use for the final exam** or for **teaching in future** (Lan, post L1).

I wanted to tell him that I studied in order **to take the exam**, and for **scores** and **qualifications**. Vietnamese context **required us to have good qualifications** and that was what I focused on (Hoai, post L2).

Students' statements reveal a mismatch between the lecturer's expectations and students' levels of understanding. While the teacher aimed to develop higher order thinking skills for his class, students were actually focused on preparing for the final exam. Students' perceptions highlight the influence of Vietnamese historic and cultural contexts on learning, and the necessity to accurately assess students' current cognitive level and learning needs (Murphy, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978).

Management in discussion

Tung's lack of teaching experience was also illustrated when he guided and managed group discussions. He seemed not to explain explicit assessment criteria with students at the outset. Students were not taught the necessary skills for peer assessment and discussions. Tung assumed that students should have known all the "rules", while his students were inexperienced in this novel pedagogical approach. This resulted in dissatisfaction among some students. Although Tung always attempted to self-reflect and adjust his teaching practices, his involvement in the process of co-construction was considered by the interviewed students as either "too late or too early". Tung attempted to act as a facilitator rather than a traditional lecturer but sometimes failed due to his limited experience.

Varying expectations to students

Tung's lack of teaching experience was exposed when he was not explicit, consistent and decisive in his expectations. This created difficulties for himself and students in assessment practices. Although Tung had high expectations of his students at the beginning of the course, he tended to be easy-going and accept all students' proposals when they negotiated. This appeared to limit his power as a facilitator in the class, as the following excerpt shows.

As my lecturer was young, he might have had **limited influence on students**....For experienced lecturers, I **felt afraid due to their teaching experience and reputation** and therefore I had to learn diligently (Lan).

Since he was so easy-going, we **tended to dominate** him [smiling] (Hong).

When we negotiated, he **always accepted our demands** (Lien).

> The lecturer had to **create a power structure**, so students **would be afraid** and study more diligently (Hoai).
>
> The lecturer **should put pressure** on students so that we will learn more seriously (Huyen). (FG, post L4).

Students' responses indicate that they perceived Tung as a young and inexperienced lecturer and therefore he had less 'power' than experienced lecturers. In a hierarchical education system like Vietnam, it may be considered that experienced, 'high-power' lecturers can motivate students to learn more, even though their motivation is extrinsic. For example, students respect and fear older staff more, and therefore work harder. The quotes above show the existence of an inherent perception in Vietnamese students of a hierarchical relationship between teacher and students, which limits students from achieving agency in their learning.

Tung was inconsistent with the time limits for students' presentations. Initially, he required students to present for 30 minutes. In fact, the time for presentation varied for each group: 45 minutes, one hour, 20 minutes, and one and a half hours respectively. If there was time, Tung let students present what they prepared and ignored the criteria set for the assessment task. Tung's purpose in setting criteria was to create an opportunity for students to practise, rather than using the criteria for marking and providing comments. However, this created difficulties for students in learning how to present in a fixed time limit.

Further, Tung promised to give an additional mark for those who actively participated in questioning and discussion. However, he failed to do this because he needed to adjust to the classroom culture. Some students were unsatisfied with Tung's marking practice of midterm scores and indicated the unsuitability of his polices as follows.

> Groups who presented later than us would have more time to prepare. It was **unfair to use the same criteria** to mark our performance (Lan).
>
> He should let **all groups present at the same teaching session (Lien and Hoai)**. (FG, post L5).

Students seemed to prefer a norm-referenced assessment approach, which emphasises comparison and ranking of all groups' performances.

7.5.2.3 Facilities for teaching and learning

Tung believed that facilities impacted on his students' learning. For example, when students present, they need to have a computer and projector. They also need space to work in groups. Desks should be designed in a way that facilitates active learning activities such as discussion. However, Tung taught in a classroom where there was neither a projector nor a computer; he had to register and borrow a projector from a management office at the beginning of semester. Tung claimed this process was complicated and time-consuming. The projector was sometimes incompatible with the computer and this slowed down the progress of his lectures.

Students in the focus group also reported that they had inadequate conditions for learning and this led to difficulties in acting on feedback. Tung advised students to read more books and to watch historical movies. However, the interviewed students commented:

> The University's library had **a limited number of textbooks and references**.
> I sometimes could not find all of them (Lien).
> I was living in a dormitory. There was **no television in the dormitory**. My
> room had eight students, but only **one student had a computer** (Hong).
> I had a computer, but there was **no internet connection** (Hoai).

Limited resources for learning in EU were a barrier to the effective implementation of AfL in Tung's class.

7.5.2.4 EU policies for lecturers

EU policies for lecturers were identified as one factor that impeded lecturers' momentum for changing pedagogic practices. Tung believes that "there are many kinds of policies in EU. However, these policies do not place any pressure or influence on my teaching practice. In other words, policies do not have a direct influence or pressure on teaching" (NVT, post L5).

EU has encouraged lecturers to reform their teaching practice to enhance student learning. However, EU has not paid attention to practical solutions to motivate lecturers to continuously innovate. Tung questioned the EU policies that "When someone innovates teaching, s/he has to spend much time, effort and intellect to organise classroom activities. However, some of my colleagues do nothing and they get the same salary as other innovative lecturers. Why should they reform their

teaching?" Tung realised that a lack of supportive policies had led to a change in teaching which was occurring only at an individual level. It was superficially acceptable if some teachers practised traditional didactic teaching methods. The accountability of staff in respect of teaching improvement was not a feature of EU culture. Further, while EU rhetoric supports innovation, a lack of professional development provides no incentive for the transformation of teaching practices.

Tung indicated that the role of the Centre for Education Quality Assurance and Assessment in EU was unclear. Tung indicated he did not know how the evaluation results were used, so student evaluations did not create any momentum for teachers to change their teaching practices. Tung's views revealed that there are many regulations and policies on innovation in teaching and learning in EU. However, the effects of these policies, as well as the results of student evaluation are not clear to either lecturers or students. A formal accountability measure that impacts on the tenure of staff was not apparent.

Tung also indicated limitations in EU's curriculum, which appeared to hinder student learning skills. He said: "My students do not have learning skills such as how to search for information, write an essay or present. Why? They are not taught these skills in university" (NVT, post L1). Tung indicated that lack of generic learning skills has led to students being unable to access new information. Teachers' feedback could not be acted on because students did not have the learning skills to use such feedback. According to Boud (2010) feedback is an essential component of assessment yet if students are unable to act on it then improvement will not be evident.

7.5.2.5 EU's assessment policies and practices

Checking attendance

Although attendance contributes to ten percent of the total subject's assessment, Tung never checked his students' attendance. He considered class attendance was "each student's decision. Attendance should not be compulsory, as long as students fulfilled their learning tasks" (NVT, prior L1). Students valued Tung's view on attendance: Lien believed that there was "no need to check attendance if students had a good attitude towards learning", while Lan and Hoai claimed that "learning should stem from students' needs" and "self-study should be encouraged in higher education"

(FG, post L4). In fact, most students attended Tung's classes because of interest, not because he checked attendance.

Midterm assessment

Cultural factors support the authoritative role of the teacher in assessment processes in Vietnamese classes. Tung decided students' marks for midterm would be based on the quality of both presentation and written work. Tung recognised some Vietnamese cultural values made peer and self-assessment inaccurate and only used these forms of assessment for formative feedback purposes.

One technique used by Tung to encourage students to engage actively in their learning was to award extra marks for the midterm exam when students were proactive in discussions. Tung's intention was "to encourage students in their learning" (NVT, prior L1). His decision resulted in the active participation of some students. Hoai claimed that:

> I gave Lan's group many questions because of many reasons. First, I would like to understand more clearly about the topic. Second, the lecturer said he would **give extra marks** to any student who asked challenging questions. Third, my group would be the next presenters, but we have not done much work. I had to ask more questions to **expand the time of Group One's discussion** (Hoai, FG, post L2).

Hoai's statement shows that the award of extra marks was one of the contributing factors to her active involvement in class. Tung's strategy could be described as an application of behaviourism, which values the use of rewards to motivate learning. It also seemed to fit with Vietnamese culture where mark-oriented learning is common (Harman & Nguyen, 2010). However, the extra mark decision was not followed completely for many reasons. Tung found it difficult to follow or quantify the level of active participation of every student. He intended to give an extra mark for the presenters of each group as he realised that they significantly contributed to their groups and class discussions. However, this intention was challenged since every student in Group One presented their work while other groups nominated the best speakers to represent their group. Since Tung appeared to be aware of the need to be fair to every student, he decided to give every student in a group the same mark to avoid unexpected conflict. Tung felt disappointed as he could not differentiate in his marking. This created tensions according to some students in the focus group. Tung's

marking practice illustrates a lack of awareness of how shared criteria in assessment at the outset could prevent dilemmas.

7.5.2.6 Vietnamese sociocultural factors

Tung's assessment practices are culturally situated. For example, peer assessment practices have been strongly influenced by the culture of face saving and respect for harmony. Tung had to alter his plan to implement peer-marking as he recognised that these results may not be accurate and could create discomfort in students' relationships. The teacher's power was considered superior to that of students' classmates and therefore students tended to devalue peers' comments and contributions.

Examination-oriented learning was displayed in Tung's class. This culture of testing created tensions in balancing formative and summative assessment (Berry, 2011a, 2011b; Klenowski, 2011a; OECD, 2005). Some students in the focus groups agreed that Tung used oral presentations to create learning opportunities but also to mark their performance for midterm scores. For these reasons, students tried their best in presentations. They made comparisons with other lecturers in the Faculty who used oral presentations only for practice with no grade attached. Tung's students stated that they were disparaging about practice presentations which were not graded by other lecturers, indicating their instrumentalist motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Further, students' learning seemed to be driven by examinations. Although students preferred Tung's teaching approach they were concerned about the benefits to their final exam results. One student commented: "His lectures were very funny, comfortable, interesting and advanced. However, the knowledge that we gained to prepare for the final exam was very little" (Hue, FG, post L4).

Tung's assessment practices reveal some of the challenges associated with following a Western approach in the Vietnamese context. It highlights the many sociocultural barriers that emerge. Both the lecturer and students preferred an interactive teaching and learning approach. However, in reality, students had always operated in a Vietnamese context and their summative assessment and need for qualifications remained, as their future objectives involved success at a Vietnamese university. The teaching approach must accommodate students' existing needs and learning habits and need to be adapted to suit the context (Hayden & Lam, 2007; Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham, 2011c).

7.6   CONCLUSION

Tung is a young and passionate lecturer who has been strongly influenced by Western educational principles. He attempted to implement a variety of assessment strategies for learning such as questioning, peer and self-assessment, feedback, observation and modelling. In Tung's class, students were given considerable power to participate in the co-construction of knowledge. Tung faced more inhibiting than supportive factors. However, he was prepared to constantly adapt and modify his approach, given his students' responses to this new way of learning.

Tung was ambitious about implementing a Western teaching style, which includes aspects of developing learner autonomy, democracy and independence at the very outset without sufficient consideration of the prevailing Vietnamese sociocultural values. Tung's lack of teaching experience, plus having to face considerable sociocultural challenges in a Vietnamese context, constrained his AfL practices. Although students eventually preferred the active learning style, they felt overwhelmed initially when first introduced to his way of teaching and showed dissatisfaction with Tung's teaching approach. Both lecturer and students had to adjust their teaching and learning to gradually fit within the classroom culture that Tung wanted to create. This case study suggests that there is no "shortcut" to implementing AfL in a particular context (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Hayward & Spencer, 2010). There is a need for a transition period with appropriate and gradual changes in the form of AfL in the teaching and learning process in the Vietnamese context. Tung's assessment practices may suggest that to make assessment a powerful tool for learning, lecturers, especially young ones, should be equipped with assessment knowledge and skills so that they "know how to translate the AfL concepts into classroom actions" (Berry, 2011a, p. 103). Importantly, the effective implementation of AfL requires cooperation, desire and an effort for change from both the lecturer and students.

Chapter 8: Tensions: Assessment for Learning within Sociocultural Context of Vietnam

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 described how each lecturer enacted AfL strategies in their classroom teaching and learning practices. Although the AfL practice of each lecturer differs, there were a number of similarities in their selection of AfL strategies and their enactment. This chapter analyses each lecturer's practice through the lens of sociocultural theories of learning and AfL, and compares and contrasts key emergent themes. Tensions and issues in each case, and across the cases, are identified, not only to gain deeper insight into each particular case, but also to lay foundations for conclusions and recommendations of this study.

8.1 ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING PRACTICES ACROSS THE THREE CASES

8.1.1 The adoption of AfL strategies and students' experiences

Ly, Hoa and Tung were at different stages of their careers, but all were considered credible and reputable experts who constantly trialled new teaching and assessment approaches to enhance student learning.

Despite teaching different types of classes and different subjects, the three lecturers used similar assessment strategies. For example, they attempted to make learning transparent to their students by explaining success criteria in their particular subjects. Similarly, aspects of questioning, observation, oral feedback, and peer assessment were also used by each teacher to identify where the students were situated regarding their knowledge and skills, and to scaffold their learning. Students reported that they valued these strategies, and considered them to be novel. They expressed in the focus group interview how such pedagogic strategies supported them and encouraged them to be more active in their construction of knowledge. Students' experiences of assessment strategies adopted by each lecturer varied according to how they were applied in the classroom context. An analysis of the three lecturers' enactment of assessment strategies to facilitate students' understanding of themselves as learners and students' experiences of these strategies follows.

8.1.1.1 Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Research has found that explaining learning intentions is an effective strategy in the support of learning. This practice helps students realise their common goals and clarify expectations in order to focus their learning (Clarke, 2001; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2014). Ly and Hoa attempted to make learning intentions clear to students using several techniques which encouraged students' active participation in their own learning. For example, Ly, the most experienced lecturer, involved her students in negotiation of a learning contract which consisted of learning objectives, content of the subject, teaching and assessment methods, and responsibilities of the teacher and students. Similarly, Hoa developed her teaching plan and delivered this to students via EU's website. She also invited her students to negotiate teaching and assessment methods when she began the Research Methodology unit. In addition, Ly and Hoa frequently shared learning objectives, the schedule, and class tasks at both the beginning and end of lectures. In contrast, Tung, an early-career lecturer, explained his teaching philosophy at the beginning of semester, but did not directly share learning intentions with his students in every class. As reported by Tung's students, this created difficulties for students in terms of their ability to follow and understand the objectives of the unit.

As Clarke (2001) reminds us, there is a difference between task instructions and learning intentions. A learning intention is about what teachers want students to learn, not what teachers want them to do (Clarke, 2011). There were differences in the practices of explaining learning intentions in the classes of Ly and Hoa. Hoa attempted to explain learning intentions to her students, however, what she did was give task instructions. In contrast, Ly clearly shared both learning intentions and task instructions with her students at the beginning of every class. Moreover, through using role play, underpinned by a philosophy of 'learning by doing', Ly connected students' existing understanding and communication skills to new knowledge and skills to achieve communication effectiveness. In this way, as stated by the students, she captured their attention and motivated them to aim higher.

Explaining assessment criteria and standards with students is important to inform students of what they are expected to learn as well as the expected quality of performance (Hawe, 2002; Tan, 2011a; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2014). Using rubrics and providing exemplars are considered useful techniques to explain expected

quality (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). However, these strategies were adopted only by Hoa, with limited effectiveness on her students' learning. In particular, she designed the rubric to explain criteria in the practice of peer assessment. However, the rubric was new for both lecturer and students and Hoa did not carefully explain items in the rubric to her students. Her students commented that the criteria in this rubric were 'complex' and 'ambiguous'; resulting in difficulties in understanding and assessing their peers' work. Hoa also used exemplars, as she required her students to read her doctoral thesis and that of her colleagues to understand how educational research is conducted. The effectiveness of this strategy was limited. Hoa's students were only in the second year at undergraduate level. They therefore found it difficult and complex to read a doctoral thesis and this strategy reduced their interest in learning the subject. The students' responses reinforce the notion that an exemplar is only helpful for learning if it falls within students' ZPD. Sociocultural theories of learning remind us that when scaffolding student learning, it is important to accurately assess the student's current understanding and make an appropriate level of intervention (Murphy, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978).

Sharing assessment criteria and standards occurred through the lecturers' explanation of their expectations in the final exams. Ly, Hoa and Tung described how final exams are conducted in terms of the number of questions and the major criteria to determine an appropriate response. They also suggested strategies to approach and answer questions, in order to help students gain high marks in the exams. The lecturers understood that they could not adopt new strategies without considering their context: their students were in the first and second years of university, and high scores were critical for their future. The interviewed students valued their lecturers' explanation about the final exams because it was not common practice across the University. More importantly, their explanations were useful for student exam preparation. The lecturers' sharing of success criteria for examinations appeared to connect student learning to the students' real world, which could be considered an effective technique to support learning in the Vietnamese classes, where marks and summative assessment results are driving factors for student learning (Harman & Nguyen, 2010).

Standards are understood to be a description of "the expected features or characteristics of quality at various levels of performance" (Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2014, p. 209). However, the lecturers did not explicitly explain the various

levels of performance and the qualities or expected features for each level. Consequently, students remained uncertain about what they were aiming for in terms of a high standard or 'good' performance. Knowledge of assessment criteria and expected standards were not co-constructed with students in either midterm or final assessments. The lecturers did not develop explicit criteria sheets to share with students; rather, the information they provided was at an axiological level of criteria (Klenowski, 2002), that is, the lecturers' criteria were considered by their students as too broad. It appeared that their approach did not support students' understanding about standards. Previous research has shown that assessment criteria which are too broad for students to interpret can lead to difficulties in learning, as well as the teachers' marking process (Black et al., 2005). This issue occurred in the classes of Hoa and Tung. As they did not explicitly explain to students how they marked their midterm assessment, Tung's students did not know how to adequately respond and were dissatisfied with their results. Similarly, some students questioned Hoa's marking. These findings suggest that Vietnamese higher education students need explicit explanations and a shared understanding of standards to support their learning, especially in an examinations-driven assessment system.

8.1.1.2 Questioning

Questioning is not only a way to create an interactive learning environment between student-student and student-lecturer, but is a powerful tool in the practice of AfL (Black et al., 2005). Research conducted by Heritage and Heritage (2013) has found that "open and respectful pedagogical questioning is a key resource in eliciting students' current learning status and for making decisions about the next steps in student learning" (Heritage & Heritage, 2013, p. 176). That is, when questioning is used skilfully, it can support student learning.

Questioning was a common technique used by the three teachers to gauge students' understanding and to stimulate participation, contribution, and critical thinking. Students reported that they enjoyed the questioning practice and indicated that it had a positive influence on their learning. Students commented that the questioning stimulated their thinking, encouraged deep learning and self-assessment. Specifically, students in Ly's class enjoyed the brainstorming technique as it was novel, and students stated that they felt as if they were developing their knowledge and ownership of the learning. Both Ly and Tung used several types of questions such as

problem-based and open-ended questions, which helped to create an interactive learning environment that encouraged students to participate and engage in co-construction of their learning with peers and with the lecturer.

The lecturers were aware of the complexities operating within their own culture. Therefore, to encourage students' participation in questioning practice, they showed respect for students' responses through encouragement of peer interactions and avoidance of direct criticism. These techniques maximised questioning to align within the Vietnamese learning culture, which is often characterised by students' passivity and fear of losing face (McCornac & Phan, 2005; Pham, 2010, 2011b, 2014). Their experiences reinforce the importance of understanding the learning environment. This is, a central point within sociocultural theories of learning that closely link learning to its context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2003).

Despite the lecturers' efforts, Vietnamese cultural values, such as respect for the teacher and the hierarchical relationship characteristic of Confucian culture, still underpinned the questioning practice, leading to students' restricted participation in their learning. In particular, students in Hoa's class were hesitant in responding to her questions, although they felt more confident in giving and answering questions from their peers. This example indicates that cultural values have a powerful impact on students' established learning beliefs and style, and that to develop an active and autonomous learning style in Vietnamese classes, pedagogic changes from individual lecturers appeared to be insufficient.

8.1.1.3 Observation

The three lecturers frequently utilised observation and considered it an effective strategy to gain feedback about their teaching. Data from their observations were used to adjust teaching to cater for students' learning needs. Further, Hoa used the data as a good source of evidence about students' participation for summative purposes. Close observation of individual students' reactions, an essential part of teaching, assisted the lecturers to constantly review their students' learning needs to make adjustments in a timely manner to improve learning. This was evident when both Ly and Hoa asked direct and purposeful questions of the students who were inattentive. Similarly, Tung asked students questions to engage their attention when he realised that students were bored with a long presentation from their peers. Observation used by the three lecturers is considered a useful assessment technique to adjust teaching.

8.1.1.4 Feedback

Feedback is considered central to AfL, as when skilfully used, it can move learning forward (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Brookhart, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Receiving oral feedback from lecturers was always the most anticipated factor, because students believed that it would be the most accurate source of information about their learning. This again reflects the respect for the teacher in Vietnamese cultural values and reinforces the traditional hierarchical relationship in Vietnamese classes. It is understandable in many cultures that lecturers are experts in their field and consequently their feedback is valued. However, if students rely too heavily on a lecturer's feedback, the authoritative role of the lecturer is maintained and students' independence in thinking, autonomy and self-assessment are limited (Brew, 1999).

As Tung, Ly and Hoa were aware of the importance of feedback to student learning, they frequently provided oral feedback on students' work. The effectiveness of feedback was evident through students' attempts to act on lecturers' suggestions to improve their learning. This finding is consistent with previous research (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie, 2009; Sadler, 1998) that has suggested the central role of feedback is to enhance student learning. Students indicated that they had benefited from their teachers' methods of giving feedback.

Ly, Hoa and Tung provided students with detailed, descriptive and accurate feedback that involved focusing on what had been done well, what area required more work, advice, and validation of students' effort. They also adopted the role of facilitator to provide comments on peer feedback. This was considered as essential to students in order to validate peer feedback. The model that Ly, Hoa, and Tung used to give feedback to their students reinforces that effective feedback should include three necessary aspects: information about what students have achieved, where they need to go, and advice for their further progress (Brookhart, 2008; Sadler, 1998). In addition, content of effective feedback should also highlight students' effort to acknowledge and motivate their active involvement in future learning. Feedback of the three lecturers appeared to focus on 'the task' and student learning (Hattie, 2009), rather than the student per se, and this helped the students to progress, as evidenced in Ly's feedback: "Compared with last time, your cases today were all real and diverse…." (TTL, snapshot L2). The lecturer realised certain improvements in students' subsequent work as a consequence of students' use of feedback.

All three lecturers were aware of the social ramifications involved in giving feedback in a Vietnamese classroom. Hence their careful selection of language, which reflected not only weaknesses in students' work, but was also encouraging. Careful phrasing in feedback was evident in Ly and Tung's classes. For instance, Ly tried to choose 'softer words' to describe the communication method that one female student used ineffectively to persuade her friend in role play. Likewise, Tung related to the dictatorship, a regime which has existed in human history, in a humorous way to remind one student about her authoritarian style in presenting. Ly and Tung's careful selection of language and approaches seemed to support learning, and appeared to help students to recognise their limitations. At the same time, the feedback was framed in such a way that hurting students' feelings was avoided. The lecturers appeared to consider their students' feelings in response to feedback. They used a 'soft' approach to avoid negative effects on students' emotions (Boud, 1995a). They were all aware that they were operating within a Vietnamese culture, where criticism is taken personally.

Giving feedback within any sociocultural environment is complex. Its effectiveness also depends on a student's own identity and preferences (Shute, 2008). For example, this research showed that non-directive feedback does not always bring about benefits for learning. This happened in Ly's class, as Ly used her body language to remind one student about the limitations in his responses. Although the student valued the way Ly behaved, he still wished to receive more direct and explicit feedback so that he would know his weaknesses to focus on for future learning. Further, the student's experience suggests that feedback can be shown in a 'soft' manner, but its message about students' learning must be expressed explicitly to support learning.

Tung's feedback illustrates how one word such as "correct" or "good" could have a positive effect on a Vietnamese students' motivation as it validated and rewarded their successful responses, and seemed to encourage them to engage further. However, while this kind of feedback supports further engagement, it does not specifically progress learning, because of the lack of explanation and advice about what to do next. In Vietnamese culture, this finding suggests that praise is an effective, but insufficient form of feedback.

The assessment practices of the three lecturers revealed that comparative feedback can be effective when given to a group. Due to the influence of 'face saving',

such group feedback allowed students to learn while keeping 'face'. This appeared to be effective, as lecturers were able to see that within the sociocultural context of Vietnam, comparing results between groups capitalised on students' sociocultural awareness of face saving. This was shown in Ly and Tung's classes. For example, Tung compared students in the advanced and non-advanced classes and emphasised that he expected more of the advanced class, which actually motivated his students to increase their efforts. However, the motive for learning in this case resulted from extrinsic cultural factors rather than from the intrinsic value of learning for itself.

Despite valuing and wishing to receive feedback from teachers, students were not always satisfied with their teachers' feedback, as they considered feedback useful if it was detailed, explicit, genuine, positive and fair. These expectations were evidenced at times in the three classes, to varying degrees. Due to many factors, the lecturers did not consistently provide students with such detailed feedback. For example, Tung deliberately focused more on the limited aspects in students' work to encourage competition and develop critical thinking in advanced students. However, at first this created discomfort for his students. Tung used feedback to encourage competition, which is considered contradictory to sociocultural theories of learning, given the expectation that students cooperate in collaborative learning tasks. Ly and Hoa's students also wanted to receive more detailed feedback from their lecturers, as due to the lack of time, their feedback tended to be brief and general. Time restrictions affected the length and quality of lecturers' feedback on students' work.

The assessment practice in Hoa's class revealed that feedback may not be useful when given "too late" (Carless et al., 2006; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Hoa recognised that her students did not have skills for peer assessment during semester. However, she waited until the last lesson to give her comments and suggestions to students on how to give useful peer feedback, for example, taking notes during peer presentations and comparing this information with the rubric. Students considered this advice important, but it would have been more useful if it had been provided earlier.

Students expected to receive feedback based on prescribed criteria to support their learning. Ly provided students with criteria at the beginning of each learning task and focused her feedback on these criteria. Students were easily able to follow and understand the learning task requirements. In contrast, Tung did not inform his students of the criteria, nor did he base his feedback on criteria. Although his feedback

was detailed, it initially focused more on negative aspects of students' work. Some of Tung's students thought that Tung was too harsh on their group. Similarly, although Hoa provided students with criteria, she did not use them to give feedback; rather, she focused on the emergent issues from students' presentations. Her students commented that such feedback was "brief", and they expected to receive more "comprehensive feedback", reflecting positive and negative aspects regarding both content and delivery of their work. Tung and Hoa's practices reveal that feedback practice, which was not based on and aligned with established criteria and standards, caused confusion in student learning (Mumm, Karm, & Remmik, 2015; Weaver, 2006).

Students did not act on feedback for a number of reasons. In Tung and Hoa's classes, students appeared to lack generic learning skills and were therefore limited in acting on the feedback given. Further, EU's resources for learning, such as textbooks, references and internet connections were reported as inadequate to meet the students' learning needs. The implication is that helping students develop generic learning skills and improved resources could enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

8.1.1.5 Peer assessment

The three lecturers valued social interactions as a basis for learning and adopted different techniques to conduct peer assessment. Ly used role play, fishbowl and group discussions, while Tung and Hoa used oral presentations. These techniques were considered effective to encourage peer assessment in the three classes. Students acknowledged that these techniques were novel and benefitted their learning, as they could learn from each other, which they enjoyed.

Students in three classes appeared to get involved actively in the practices of peer assessment. It was possibly because the three lecturers organised giving and receiving peer feedback in groups rather than individually. Students first worked in their own groups to prepare presentations or role plays. They then discussed peers' work and gave group feedback to other groups. In this way, it seemed that the collective spirit of the group was strengthened, while the face saving was maintained. This appeared to be an effective technique in peer assessment as it promoted students to learn with and from peers in the classes. This technique was also found effective in the reseach of Pham and Gillies (2010) who experimented in the South of Vietnam.

Despite the lecturers' efforts, peer assessment yielded mixed results in the three classes. Some common problems that emerged in classroom practice are now described.

The first problem arose from the lecturers' development and use of criteria in peer assessment practices. Tung did not specifically explain assessment criteria to the students, and initially directed students to focus only on the *weaknesses in their classmates' work* in order to encourage competition. Hoa shared criteria with her students by sending a 'rudimentary rubric' via email, but she did not explicitly explain the criteria on which the assessment sheet was based. This caused confusion about the items for her students, but they did not ask for further explanation. In contrast, Ly always spoke about criteria prior to each lecture and guided students carefully on how to assess peers. However, her students considered these criteria to be too general and this created difficulties for peer assessment. The findings suggest that explaining criteria with students may support student learning, and that when introducing a new practice such as peer assessment to Vietnamese students, it is very important that both lecturer and students have a shared understanding of criteria, with careful explanation provided regarding how to apply the criteria. The practice of peer assessment in Tung's class reveals that to support learning, peer feedback should focus on both positive and negative aspects of the work. Otherwise, it may constitute a threat to the validity of the assessment and have a negative impact on students' motivation (Harlen, 2012).

Second, neither lecturers nor students considered peer assessment as a valid form of assessment of learning. There are two possible reasons for this view. First, Vietnamese students are not familiar with peer assessment, as the teacher has the authoritative role and makes decisions on assessment methods and results. Second, while students enjoyed this practice, they did not have enough knowledge and skills to participate effectively. This was evident in Ly's class, when students defended their ideas rather than listened to the feedback from their peers. Similarly, some students in Tung's class tried to dominate in class by asking many questions of their peers, while some students in Hoa's class felt hurt when receiving their friends' comments. These reactions indicate that students were neither well prepared nor fully understood the goals of peer assessment.

As mentioned, respect for harmony and 'face saving' are critical to Vietnamese people. These values influenced peer assessment practices in the classes of Ly, Hoa

and Tung. To maintain a harmonious climate, students in the three classes avoided giving critical feedback to their peers and tended to provide peers with high marks without reference to the criteria. This is referred to as 'friendship marking'. Concerns about the reliability of peer assessment and the quality of peer feedback for learning have consequently emerged. Similar concerns have emerged in other countries such as in Hong Kong (Carless, 2011) and Australia (Hanrahan & Issac, 2001), because of the interpersonal features of peer assessment.

Research has found that students' lack of knowledge and skills in peer assessment can be overcome when they are taught about the benefits of peer learning and taught how to assess and provide effective feedback (Sadler, 2013; Tillema, 2014). In addition, students require opportunities to practise peer assessment. Ly's practice demonstrated the benefits of explicitly teaching peer assessment. Ly explained how to give peer feedback to her students. Changes in students' attitudes and discussion skills were seen in the next classes. Ly's explanation seemed to inform students of how to discuss and listen to others. Therefore, it appears that explicit instruction about peer assessment enabled students to overcome ingrained social habits related to face saving. Clearly, to master peer assessment, students in the first year at university need to be explicitly taught and to practise peer assessment.

Tensions related to peer assessment practice occurred in Ly, Hoa and Tung's classes when Ly used role play, and Hoa and Tung used oral presentation for both formative and summative purposes. The lecturers wanted to create learning opportunities for students to practise the skills of communication, teamwork, discussion and to learn from each other. However, they also used the results from these learning activities to calculate the midterm assessment grade. Students therefore considered the learning opportunity to be a form of summative assessment, so they tried to nominate the best students to present. Students indicated that they wanted all groups to present at the same session so that they could compare and assess groups more accurately. Students appeared to prefer a norm-referenced approach, where the standard was based on comparison with each other. This constituted a mismatch between lecturers' intentions and students' expectations in the use of peer assessment.

8.1.1.6 Self-assessment

Self-assessment is considered a core aspect of AfL that assists students to develop lifelong learning skills. The lecturers used different techniques to encourage

self-assessment. For example, Ly required her students to write a diary that reflected what they understood well, what they were still struggling with and their expectations for future classes. Hoa shared her own research experience with students, while Tung focused on teaching his students goal-setting and life skills for success. Students were initially excited by these techniques as they were encouraged to reconsider their learning goals in the short and long term.

However, the effectiveness of self-assessment was limited, particularly in Ly's class. Writing learning diaries can be considered as a part of portfolio assessment, requiring students to reflect upon and understand their own learning (Klenowski et al., 2006). This has important implications for development of learners' autonomy (Burner, 2014). However, many students in Ly's class wrote their learning diaries because of the lecturer's requirement rather than to develop their own learning plans.

Other factors also led to restricted success for self-assessment. First, the Vietnamese learning culture is more oriented towards student passivity and is examination-driven. Ly did not clearly explain the purpose of writing the learning diary and how it would be used. The learning diary did not contribute to the students' final grade and therefore the students did not consider it was worth doing. Research suggests that if a portfolio is used for learning, lecturers should explain or discuss explicitly the purpose of the results of this learning activity to their students (Klenowski et al., 2006). This instance shows a mis-alignment between the teachers' informed intentions and the students socially constructed understanding of what is valuable in the higher education context.

A conflict between the teacher's beliefs about self-assessment and their students' capability was another inhibiting factor. Although the three lecturers valued the importance of self-assessment in effective learning, none of them were confident of their students' ability to self-assess accurately. For example, Ly stated: "it is hard for students to self-assess accurately because they are young and lack experiences". Therefore, self-assessment should be "done based on teacher's assessment in class" (TTL, post L5). This statement suggests that while Ly valued self-assessment in principle, she did not believe that her students had adequate skills to self-assess. This behaviour was observed in all classes, as the lecturers continued to function as the 'deciders' and 'controllers' of assessment results. This issue was identified by Carless and colleagues as the issue of distrust in assessment, where lecturers tend to not trust

students' capacity to self-assess their learning (Carless et al., 2006). These authors believe that this distrust can act as a constraint to assessment for learning, as it reinforces the lecturers' power in assessment. It is understandable that students may lack skills to self-assess, but it does not mean that they are not able to do this learning activity. More importantly, students need to be instructed and provided with opportunities to practise these skills.

8.1.2 Comparative analysis summary

Ly, Hoa and Tung attempted to alter their pedagogic practices by using teaching principles rooted in Western societies to enhance student learning. They adopted a variety of AfL strategies to differing degrees: explaining learning intentions and success criteria, questioning, observation, feedback, peer and self-assessment. Students ultimately became interested in learning and enjoyed the new teaching and assessment strategies. They acknowledged that questioning, and giving and receiving feedback from the lecturer and peers motivated them to self-assess their work and develop their own learning. However, due to historic and sociocultural barriers, and despite the best efforts of the lecturers, AfL practices in the three classes were limited in terms of effectiveness. Changes to formative assessment practices that incorporate the principles of assessment for learning will take more time and modification to be effective in Vietnamese classrooms.

Examination of the three cases reveals two key points. First, the potential of assessment to support student learning is evident. Second, the implementing AfL in the Vietnamese context, given the variety of contextual and sociocultural factors that act to enable or impede the potential effectiveness of AfL strategies, makes it complex. Examination of the three cases revealed a number of important issues. The next section reviews each case under the lens of sociocultural theories of learning.

8.2 TENSIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practice of AfL in higher education in Vietnam. Despite the complexities within the Vietnamese culture of embedded passivity and hierarchy, Ly, Hoa and Tung adopted a learner-centred approach to teaching. They managed to share power and establish a trusting

relationship with students in an interactive learning environment in which assessment was the key factor to engage students in their learning.

This section provides an insight into the AfL practices in the Communication Skills, History, and Research Methodology classes. This section reflects on the positive aspects of AfL brought to the classrooms by lecturers and reported by students. It also discusses and analyses the complexities that emerged as lecturers attempted to implement AfL practices within an Asian context. Ultimately this section comments on how lecturers created a version of AfL within their culturally situated position as an EU lecturer. From a sociocultural perspective, the classes are considered as learning communities in which students are 'apprentices', and participating in classes through relationships with their teacher and their peers to gain knowledge and skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1999, 2008).

8.2.1 Learning was mediated through participants' beliefs

The assessment practice in the classes of Ly, Hoa, and Tung were mediated through beliefs of the lecturers and students about learning and assessment. There were conflicts between the beliefs of lecturers and students about the role of the teacher as well as learning and assessment. These conflicts significantly hampered the AfL practices in the three classes.

8.2.1.1 Conflicts between lecturers and students' perspectives

The lecturers appeared to adopt a constructivist approach in teaching where the lecturer works as facilitator while students are active learners. Each attempted to act as a facilitator organising a variety of interactive learning activities or "cultural activities" (Rogoff, 2008), such as discussions, questioning, role play, oral presentations, case studies, and giving and receiving feedback for students. They acknowledged the importance of assessment in the support of student learning and tried to make assessment a transparent process where students had opportunities to participate in making decisions on assessment methods and results. Students were encouraged to construct their own knowledge and skills. These efforts were intended to enhance student learning.

Not all lecturers' intentions were successful, as their students maintained traditional beliefs about learning and assessment, as well as their passive learning habits. Students believed that assessment was the responsibility of lecturers and only

lecturers could make valid judgments about their learning. Consequently, they tended to rely heavily on the lecturers for feedback. It appears that as culturally situated beings themselves, existing beliefs and habits inhibited the value they gave to the judgements of their peers. In addition, students considered grading and ranking as the most important function of assessment. Students' existing beliefs and habits meant that extrinsic factors such as good grades remained dominant over deep and meaningful learning.

8.2.1.2 Varying student and lecturer perspectives on practice

Conflicts between new and existing beliefs about learning for both the lecturers and the students occurred. While the lecturers believed that students could learn best by being active participants, they still maintained ultimate control of the learning as 'expert' lecturers. In terms of AfL, this limited the engagement and confidence of students in classroom activities. Moreover, the lecturers' assessment practices, such as using rewards of bonus marks for proactive students, was reflective of behaviourist principles of learning rather than a constructivist approach. This strategy was intended to incorporate formative feedback with summative assessment, and to take advantage of examination-oriented learning to motivate student learning. However, while the adoption did encourage some students to learn more actively, it created a competitive rather than a cooperative learning culture and failed to promote student learning as a valid outcome in itself.

On a broad level, students expressed a preference for being active in their learning. They valued interactive and cooperative teaching strategies, and wanted to participate and take control of their own learning. However, when it came to their own behaviour they continued to adopt a passive learning style and preferred a hierarchical relationship with their lecturer. For this reason, the lecturers' AfL implementation was not fully successful. Tung's teaching practices revealed that students, to some extent, have gradually changed their learning habits as a result of students' and lecturers' efforts to resolve their differences. However, it is important to note that changing established beliefs and habits about learning and assessment requires the input of new ideas as well as adequate time (Pham, 2011c; Berry, 2011b).

8.2.2 Learning was mediated through 'others''

Assessment practices of Ly, Hoa, and Tung revealed the importance of providing appropriate guidance within the students' ZPD, as inappropriate intervention failed to support learning. While Ly skillfully designed learning tasks stemming from her students' existing level, Hoa and Tung appeared to overestimate their students' capacity. Tung's teaching practice clearly showed a gap between the teacher's expectations and the students' needs. While the teacher considered students as autonomous learners and capable of advanced knowledge, the students, who were new to university, were in need of core knowledge first. Further, while the lecturer required students to accomplish a number of complex learning tasks, students were not yet equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful in these tasks. Tung had to change his teaching methods to fit within his students' understanding level and cultural expectations. Sociocultural theories of learning remind us that to support learning, any intervention should fall within students' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Ly, Hoa and Tung's assessment practices were culturally situated in institutional and Vietnamese sociocultural contexts. Assessment is complex because of its sociocultural nature (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, Gipps, 2002). The next section analyses how institutional and sociocultural factors in Vietnam impacted on the practices of AfL.

8.2.3 Learning was mediated through the EU context

Internal institutional factors can act as a catalyst or hindrance for the use of assessment for learning (Carless, 2011; Tiemey, 2006). The timing of this research has been situated in the transition period from annual to credit-based training for EU. As analysed in Chapter Four, this transition has represented significant challenges to assessment practices, including conflicts between established and new beliefs, new policy and actual practices.

The lag between intended policy changes and enacted practice is evident. While innovation in teaching and assessment is a priority with MoET and EU's policies, a number of practices that impede innovative teaching were seen. Ly's assessment practice revealed that written tests are still used as the common assessment method for final exams in elective subjects. A lack of professional courses related to assessment, cooperation between departments, and incentives for innovative teachers were found

to hinder assessment reform on a large scale in EU. These issues emerged in the assessment practices of Tung and Hoa, which affected the teachers' motivation and capability in their teaching innovation. Physical conditions for teaching and learning also affected productive learning in the classes. The next sections analyse three common hindrances seen in the assessment practices of all lecturers: EU's assessment policy, teacher preparation, and logistics and facilities for teaching and learning.

8.2.3.1 EU's assessment policy

The lecturers and students were required to follow the assessment policy although they considered it had many limitations. First, the lecturers and students considered incorporating attendance as part of the assessment of a subject inappropriate in higher education. Although there is evidence that class attendance has a positive relationship to students' learning outcomes (Ledman & Kamuche, 2002), grading student learning which includes non-achievement factors such as effort, attitudes, and attendance has received much criticism. Sadler (2009) considers the inclusion of students' attendance in assessing work "contaminates" grades, and therefore impacts on the reliability and validity of assessment. Further, this inclusion may not be suitable for students in higher education, where independent learning is considered essential (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Torrance, 2012).

Further, over-emphasis on summative assessment in EU's assessment policy presented challenges for the assessment practices for learning. EU has been following MoET's regulations to reform its assessment policy since 2007 in order to enhance student learning. However, this policy incorporates midterm tests as 'process marks', contributing to the total mark in a unit. This does not align with the definition of AfL, which helps learners to understand and progress in their own learning (Kahl, 2010; Klenowski, 2009; Stobart, 2008; Swaffield, 2011). Compared to previous assessment policies, the new policy encouraged students to learn during the semester rather than at the end; however, it also reinforced the culture of examination-oriented learning.

Although Ly, Hoa, and Tung tried to create opportunities for every student to participate and develop, the assessment policy orients the learning process to summative purposes. High achieving students who demonstrate better performance tended to dominate classroom discussions and presentations which were considered to be beneficial to the whole group. This finding suggests when the formative purpose of

assessment is addressed insufficiently at policy level, it is difficult to support and implement assessment designed to improve learning.

8.2.3.2 Teacher preparation

Interviews with lecturers and observations of their practices revealed that there is a lack of continuing professional development for lecturers related to assessment practices. As described in the introduction of the lecturers, none of them had received specific training in assessment. Tung, the youngest lecturer, explained that he had to self-study in terms of pedagogy and assessment, and expressed a wish to receive more training. Lecturers and students acknowledged that assessment principles and strategies designed to enhance learning are new. Lack of continuous training on assessment caused difficulties for lecturers and students, resulting in limited effectiveness of using AfL strategies in classes. For example, even the most experienced lecturer, Ly, had problems with assessment criteria, as her students commented they were too broad. Similarly, Hoa, with over 10 years of teaching experience, overestimated students' capacity, by using exemplars which were far above students' current level. Tung gave students excessive requirements through providing complex concepts. These examples demonstrated that the lecturers need continuing training courses, specifically in assessment.

8.2.3.3 Logistics and facilities for teaching and learning

The lack of necessary resources for innovative processes of teaching and learning limited many learning activities. Ly, Hoa and Tung's intended teaching plans, with integration of technological tools to enhance students' interests and thinking, were not implemented. Large classrooms with limited ventilation and limited access to internet and projectors decreased the amenity of the classroom and demotivated students. For instance, students in Ly's class felt tired, sleepy and found it hard to concentrate on learning activities such as group discussion because of the lack of fresh air and light in their classroom, especially in summer. Students in Tung's class found it hard to research and borrow recommended documents due to limited internet connection or insufficient library resources. It is important to note that the practices of AfL may not always need complicated technology (Black et al., 2003) to be effective; however, equipment and conductive physical conditions would support any productive learning.

8.2.4 Learning was mediated through Vietnamese sociocultural context

Pham (2011c) noted that failures in learning reforms at Asian universities occur when Western-developed approaches are imported without careful consideration of their appropriateness to the local sociocultural context. This is because "Western-developed practices are often supported by structural conditions and cultural values that are not always found in Asia" (p. 519). In this study, although Ly, Hoa, and Tung were well aware of cultural difference and appeared to understand Vietnamese students' learning culture, they still faced a number of difficulties. Conflicts between the philosophy of AfL and Vietnamese culture created barriers for the use of assessment strategies for learning in Vietnamese classes. The following table illustrates some of the conflict between Afl philosophy and Vietnamese culture.

Table 8.1

Conflicts between AfL Philosophy and Vietnamese Culture

Major principles of AfL	Vietnamese teaching and learning culture
Transparency in assessment. Make learning clear to students in terms of learning objectives, expected standards, criteria, process and methods	Tradition of teachers as central, who control learning. Transparency would undermine the teacher's role, because the transparency encourages students to become involved in making decisions on the assessment process and results.
Students are central to the learning and assessment process. They are considered active and autonomous learners	Due to the impact of Confucian culture, Vietnamese students are more inclined to adopt a passive learning style. They tend to rely on their teachers and are accustomed to being spoon-fed. The immediate shift from a passive to an active learner has proven difficult.
Value cooperative learning from participants in classes	Vietnamese students respect for teachers. Knowledge transmitted from teachers is considered the most accurate and persuasive.
Require honesty from both lecturers and students for the sake of learning and for development of lifelong learning skills.	Face saving and respect for effort may distort assessment results or feedback quality.
Prioritise formative purpose of assessment.	Under pressure of accountability, certification and selection function of assessment, both lecturers and students are strongly directed to summative rather than formative assessment.

Vietnamese cultural values are embedded in assessment practices in Ly, Hoa and Tung's classes, which created tensions for the implementation of AfL. Major tensions are identified and analysed specifically as follows.

8.2.4.1 Power relationships and students' agency

Ly, Hoa and Tung's assessment practices were mediated through the relationship of lecturer-students and student-student. Socioculturalists believe that effective learning occurs when an equal and trusting relationship is established among members in a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The lecturers attempted to build this kind of relationship to support learning. They maintained a democratic learning environment where students were given many opportunities to participate in learning activities. Consequently, there was evidence that interrelated relationships and influences existed between participants, reflecting that "development occurs in all planes" (Rogoff, 2008, p. 59). That means that students not only learnt from the teacher but also from their peers, while they also had an influence on their teacher. Ly, Hoa, and Tung learnt from their students to adjust teaching, as Ly said: "When students mentioned content or situations that I had not updated, I learnt from them to add in my lectures" (TTL, post L2).

Power relationships

Due to the impact of the hierarchical traditions and the culture of respect for teachers, students considered the lecturer as the most influential person in their learning and did not acknowledge any expertise on the part of their peers. This led to the clear existence of the 'expert-novice' relationship (teacher-student) (Rogoff, 2008). These relationships are shown in the following figure.
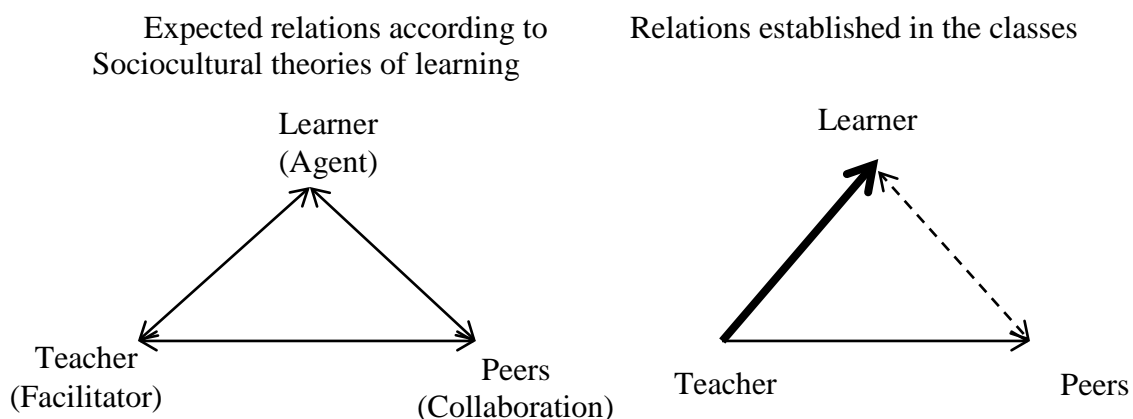
Figure 8.1. Relationships Established in the Three Classes.

Figure 8.1 illustrates the differences between expected relations by sociocultural theorists and established relations in the classes. Sociocultural perspectives expect learners to recognise and value learning from the teacher and peers. As Rogoff (2008) explains, apprenticeship "focuses on a system of interpersonal involvement" in which peers "serve as resources and challenges for each other in exploring an activity, along with experts" (p. 61). In contrast, the lecturers' assessment practices revealed that the dyadic relation between the teachers and students was fundamental, and students' trust in peers appeared lacking. As the lecturer is considered the most authoritative source of knowledge in Vietnamese culture, students in the classes wanted their lecturers to participate more in the co-construction of knowledge. Students' over-emphasis on learning from the teacher shows the powerful impact of respect for the teacher in Vietnamese culture.

Power issues created great tension for the use of AfL in the classes. Assessment practices of the three lecturers, despite involving students in peer and self-assessment, still positioned them as the person who decides on the assessment form, criteria and results, while students follow their directions. This hierarchical relationship between teacher/student limited students' possibilities as agents in their own learning.

Learners' agency

Learners' autonomy was encouraged in the three classes. Wenger (2008; 2009) argues that negotiation between participants is important as a way to create meaning, form individual identity and become a full member of a community of practice. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is enhanced when students are engaged in making decisions during teaching and learning. This process teaches students to own their learning. Once students contribute their ideas, they are more likely to become more responsible and active learners (Willis, 2010).

Students' involvement in learning activities varied from student to student, in alignment with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many tended to observe and accept the teachers' ideas, rather than engage in discussing and negotiating and "hands-on involvement in an activity" (Rogoff, 2008, p. 60). Lave and Wenger (1991) consider legitimate peripheral participation as an important form of learning for novices, which may be appropriate for students in this study who were early year or novice students. However, sociocultural theorists also

believe that to be effective learners, observation is not enough; rather, students must immerse themselves in activities with a range of interactions with others.

Students' passivity appeared to be evident in the classes and limited their deep learning. Students preferred to be 'spoon-fed' in terms of their learning, which is closely linked to 'surface learning' (Marton & Saljo, 1976). Such passivity is a 'legacy' of a Confucian teaching culture, which has influenced Vietnam for over ten centuries of ancient Chinese colonisation. To change this learning culture needs considerable time (Pham, 2011c; Harman & Nguyen, 2010).

Further, students' distrust of peer assessment led to minimal impact of an important learning activity, which can help to develop both cognitive and cooperative skills. This finding corresponded with other findings from Confucian-influenced settings such as Hong Kong (Carless, 2011; Ng & Tsui, 2002). The finding also suggests that it is difficult to move to sustainable feedback practices where students act as assessors for themselves in the Vietnamese classes. Given the circumstances, along with introducing new assessment strategies gradually to classes, it is important to teach students skills of effective learning. More importantly, these learning skills must be institution-wide, not at individual subject level, as this provides students opportunities to practise and master learning skills through consistency of formative approaches to assessment.

8.2.4.2 Face saving, respect for harmony and effort and the quality of feedback

The Vietnamese value of face saving and respect for effort created tensions in the implementation of peer and self-assessment. Honesty in assessment is a crucial factor for the effectiveness of peer and self-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, Boud, 1995b); however, the fear of causing peers to lose face led to a tendency of grade inflation or the award of high marks. Actual achievement levels were not reflected which might prevent students from further progress in their learning. To keep a harmonious climate in the class and to avoid causing peers to 'lose face', students did not give direct feedback to their peers, consequently impacting on the quality of feedback to move learning forward.

Respect for effort combined with the pressure of accountability may also have distorted assessment results in the three classes. Ly, Hoa and Tung all gave high marks to students because they recognised their students' effort and the importance of

assessment results to students' future. This assessment practice is associated with the issue of 'grade inflation' which may impact negatively on the learning motivation of students (Sadler, 2009). Highlighting students' effort is considered important to encourage student learning (Dweck, 2006). However, incorporating students' effort, a non-academic factor, in learning achievement is considered a threat to the validity and reliability of assessment results (Sadler, 2009).

8.2.4.3 Examination oriented learning and formative purpose of assessment

Over-emphasis on the summative purpose of assessment has been identified in many education systems. However, this is particularly evident in Asian countries, due to the Confucian teaching influence. An examination-oriented learning culture (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Pham, 2010b) is considered a hindrance for AfL practices. The three lecturers attempted to balance formative and summative assessment in their midterm exams and included an extra mark as incentive to motivate student learning. Students studied more actively, but this occurred mainly because of the high-stakes examinations, the goal of achieving high marks and the ranking system. Students understood these factors to be what the Vietnamese labour market valued and expected. Summative assessment is still a significant challenge for the implementation of assessment for learning.

In the Vietnamese context, summative assessment appeared to conflict with formative assessment. Rogoff (2008) reminds us that "to understand the personal and interpersonal aspects, it is essential to understand the historical and institutional contexts of this activity which defines the practices" (p. 61). Regarding the contextual impact, Carless and Lam (2014) warn, "2000 years history of competitive examinations needs to be accounted for in any discussion of contemporary assessment practices in Confucian-influenced societies" (p. 167). In an examination-oriented learning culture like Vietnam, it is hard to shift established beliefs and learning habits. Summative assessment not only has a long history, but it is even more emphasised now under an era of 'accountability' where it is considered that final exams will provide objective data on student learning (Broadfoot et al., 2014). The question of how to balance summative and formative assessment is still a conundrum for educators around the world, and many researchers believe that changes will occur only if learning improvement is given first priority in both assessment policy and practices (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2014).

8.3   CONCLUSION

The three lecturers implemented a range of AfL strategies within their teaching environments, and change in students' engagement with learning was apparent, even within the current system. The injection of a few AfL techniques has begun to shift and change the deeply embedded culture of teaching and learning within these classes. However, the benefits of AfL were not fully achieved in the case studies examined here. It is clear that AfL strategies need to be adapted to the Vietnamese teaching and learning cultural context. To be effective, practitioners need to understand the broad principles of AfL, and have the confidence, skills and institutional support to innovatively adapt AfL strategies to work within their cultural context. The next chapter will summarise the major findings of this research, and consider the implications for policy and innovation in Vietnamese higher education.

Chapter 9: The Way Forward for Assessment for Learning in Vietnamese Higher Education

As a practising lecturer in a Vietnamese university, I was motivated to improve my students' participation in deep rather than rote learning. At the time, the Vietnamese government demands for enhancing the quality of higher education were prominent. However, the most important trigger for my research was the obvious research gap. Significant research based around AfL had been conducted in Western settings, but very little existed in my own country. Effective implementation of AfL practices involve a range of historical, social, cultural, political and contextual factors and I was interested in exploring how the practices of AfL could be enacted and researched in my own Vietnamese university.

This chapter provides an overview of the study. It highlights the most significant findings and discusses implications and opportunities for academic staff to improve student learning through assessment and pedagogic practice. The limitations of this study are outlined, and areas for further research are identified and recommended.

9.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Assessment is a key factor in student learning because of its integral interrelationship with teaching and learning (Bigss & Tang, 2007; Trigwell, 2010). The potential of assessment *for* learning has been recognised in Western assessment literature and practice, for over 40 years as formative assessment or Assessment for Learning (AfL). A critical review of the AfL literature revealed that students' learning outcomes and pedagogic practices can be enhanced when AfL is integrated into pedagogic practice. However, the term itself and the value of AfL are still contested, given the tensions identified when applying AfL in different contexts. This study was conducted to explore how Vietnamese lecturers currently use assessment to support learning and what sociocultural factors influence assessment practices in this context.

The core question of this study therefore was: *What are the practices of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?* Four sub-questions were developed:

- What assessment for learning strategies do Vietnamese lecturers currently use in higher education?
- How do Vietnamese lecturers enact the assessment strategies for learning?
- What are Vietnamese students' experiences of assessment for learning?
- What are the sociocultural factors that support or hinder the implementation of assessment for learning in higher education in Vietnam?

To answer these questions, sociocultural theories of learning, which included Vygotsky's theory of ZPD (1978), Rogoff's apprenticeship model (1990, 2008) and Lave and Wenger's situated learning (1991), were adopted. These were used as a lens though which data on the practice of AfL in Vietnamese higher education were collected, analysed and interpreted. A qualitative research design within a constructivist paradigm and a case study approach were developed. Interpretations were based on data collected from various sources and through four main research methods: semi-structured interviews with lecturers, focus group interviews with students, classroom observations, and document analysis. Constant comparative analysis (Ary et al., 2010; Glaser, 1965; Simons, 2009) was utilised to analyse the data in investigating the assessment practices of the three lecturers who came from different faculties in EU.

As discussed in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, Ly, Hoa, and Tung, who were at different stages of their teaching careers, were all considered enthusiastic and competent teachers and were well respected by their peers and students within the University. In particular, they were all passionate about implementing student-centred teaching and assessment strategies to promote learning. Due to institutional and sociocultural factors, their assessment practices were both supported and hindered in their implementation. Supporting factors enabled them to successfully integrate AfL strategies in their classes, while constraining factors inhibited their ability to optimise their adoption of AfL strategies. The next section will outline how and why these lecturers effectively introduced AfL practices into their teaching.

9.1.1 Lecturers' effective practices of AfL and supportive factors

9.1.1.1 Establishing interactive and trusting relationships

Ly, Hoa and Tung built an interactive learning environment through encouraging co-construction of knowledge and learners' agency. They acted as experts and at the same time created opportunities for students to become experts within the class to co-create knowledge. For example, the lecturers shared with students their expectations and criteria, and encouraged them to provide and receive feedback from peers, and themselves, so that they could learn not only from 'doing', but also from each other. Ly, with over 20 years of teaching, was willing to take a risk with her identity by deliberately playing a character in a conversation to collectively build knowledge with her students. After each presentation, Ly and Tung always asked the presenters and audience about their experiences, encouraging them to self-reflect and learn lessons for themselves. Further, both Hoa and Tung encouraged students to discuss, question and critique views of their lecturer and classmates. Using oral presentations, Hoa and Tung let students take on the role of teacher in given topics to teach their classmates. Students also had an opportunity to practise authentically as teachers.

Ly, Hoa and Tung succeeded in establishing trusting relationships with students which helped to encourage their learning. This was evident in Tung's class when students did not hesitate to show their confusion and asked the teacher to adjust his teaching approach. Tung's students negotiated teaching and assessment methods with him during the semester.

9.1.1.2 Successful adaptation of some aspects of AfL strategies

The lecturers were effective in their practice of using observation, questioning, and oral feedback. Ly, Hoa, and Tung's close observation strategies helped them to identify their students' learning needs. The lecturers adjusted their teaching according to their observations and identified specific student learning needs. Their effective adoption of questioning and oral feedback encouraged students' involvement in discussions, and helped them become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and to ultimately progress in their own learning. Ly, Hoa and Tung appeared to be aware of students' fear of losing face before classes, so they all used social networks and digital technologies to scaffold student learning which encouraged students to communicate their thinking with the teachers without the fear of being judged in a face-to-face environment. Further, the teachers avoided criticising their students' responses.

Instead, their feedback focused on 'the learning task', not on the personal attributes of the student. They carefully chose their language and used peer interactions to help students realise their weaknesses. They also used comparison in feedback by reference to presentations and the work of student *groups* rather than that of individuals. These practices were valued by their students because they allowed students to learn without losing face. Third, the lecturers understood that exams are driving forces for their students. They seemed to combine two purposes of assessment to promote learning. The three lecturers effectively implemented strategies which demonstrated the formative use of summative tests, such as test preparation (Black et al., 2005; Carless & Lam, 2014) and incorporated formative processes in summative midterm assessment (Carless et al., 2006), which appeared to suit the examination-oriented learning culture of Vietnam. Students, to some extent, still focused on gaining high marks and ranking. However, they seemed to invest more time and effort in the learning tasks and also had opportunities to participate in deep learning, practising several generic skills such as cooperation, reflection and discussion.

9.1.1.3 Summary of supportive factors

Several factors supported the lecturers' enactment of AfL strategies in their classrooms. Small class size and advanced classes were enabling factors for the integration of AfL in Tung and Hoa's classes. Practical values of the subject were identified as the supporting factor in Ly's class, since this motivated students to attend classes and engage in classroom activities more actively.

First, in all cases, the lecturers' passion was paramount to reform teaching and enhance student learning. As reflective lecturers, Ly, Hoa and Tung were aware that students seemed to be increasingly unhappy with the traditional teaching approach. They also realised the limitations in current Vietnamese teaching and assessment practices, and therefore had a strong desire to alter their teaching practices to promote deep and active learning while adhering to MoET's policies. At the same time, they were aware that using new approaches always demands more time and intellectual effort. Both Ly and Tung announced when they first taught their classes that they would not use a transmission model, while Hoa argued that she would be bored if she had adopted the traditional approach suggested by her faculty. These lecturers each made attempts to innovate and align their teaching with the aims of the new Vietnamese assessment policy. Ly, Hoa and Tung encouraged students to give

feedback during or after lectures via social networks such as Facebook or email and changed their practices as a result of this feedback. All were willing to adjust their teaching accordingly to enhance learning. In a Vietnamese context, where a traditional hierarchical relationship has been inherent in the system, these lecturers' changes were highly valued by their students, who were becoming dissatisfied with traditional teaching approaches.

Second, the lecturers' knowledge about teaching innovation is critical. Ly, Hoa and Tung had taken opportunities to access contemporary Western teaching and learning principles. Ly and Hoa felt privileged to have had excellent training with foreign professors, while Tung not only received training experiences overseas, but also attended many international conferences and watched teaching videos on social networks. They acknowledged the importance of training courses they attended, as these opportunities fuelled their commitment and confidence to innovate. This finding may suggest that nurturing lecturers' passion in innovation and continuous professional development appears to be necessary to change practice.

It is important to note that sociocultural factors were not always a negative to the introduction of AfL. Deeply ingrained sociocultural characteristics, such as respect for teachers' also served to 'enhance' the adoption of AfL. For instance, the three lecturers' passion and innovative teaching skills appeared to be significantly stimulated by the Vietnamese culture of respect for teacher. Ly, Hoa and Tung were aware of their roles as role models for their students and this motivated them to constantly learn new teaching approaches and become credible reputable lecturers. This consequently led to a trusting relationship between them and students, which enhanced the positive aspects of AfL in Vietnamese classes.

Third, Ly, Hoa and Tung had a deep understanding of Vietnamese learning culture. They understood the world their students operated within and therefore skilfully adapted some strategies aligned with AfL principles to fit within this learning context. For example, the lecturers all thought about how to give feedback in a culturally sensitive way. Therefore they put the students into teams to receive feedback. The lecturers drew on their students' desire to perform well to explain 'how' to achieve a good grade.

The Vietnamese value of harmony and value of effort also supported the lecturers' implementation of AfL in some ways. Lecturers knew that students would

prefer to maintain harmony. They were therefore able to take risks. In other words, the lecturers knew that students would fairly consider their new approaches to assessment even if they were unfamiliar. The lecturers also knew that students understood the value of 'effort' and would attempt to engage in the new assessment processes. They were engaged in a complex balancing act of implementing new assessment strategies while still creating a learning environment that felt safe and productive to their students.

As discussed, the cultural setting created a number of barriers for these lecturers when implementing AfL strategies. As a result, not all changes were successful.

9.1.2 Challenges to the lecturers' practices of AfL and inhibiting factors

Ly, Hoa, and Tung's adoption of AfL strategies were challenged in terms of the following aspects.

9.1.2.1 Problems with transparency in assessment criteria

Sociocultural theorists argue that effective learning occurs when all participants have a shared understanding of goals, criteria and methods in their practices (Rogoff, 2003, 2008). In other words, the assessment process should be made transparent to both lecturers and students to enhance students' performance. In this study, despite the lecturers' attempts to explain the assessment process to students, their success criteria, standards, and how they marked their students' work were not clearly articulated. Assessment remained a 'black box' (Black & Wiliam, 1998a), causing confusion and difficulties for both students and teachers. Further, the confusion tended to reinforce the teacher's authoritative power in the classroom, and restricted the development of students' agency. To enhance transparency of assessment, lecturers are required to shift their thinking on students' roles in their learning. More importantly, they will need to develop tools such as rubrics or exemplars to make assessment transparent. This could be achieved through continuing professional development.

9.1.2.2 Persistence of cultural hierarchies

Students' active involvement in the assessment process was generally limited, especially in practices of self-assessment. In Ly's class, not all students were involved in group work or writing a learning diary. Similarly, students in Hoa's class did not question their lecturer even when they were confused about assessment criteria and had many questions. Although proactive students in Tung's class showed their

autonomy in negotiating with him about teaching and assessment methods, they initially felt overwhelmed at Tung's new teaching approach. Students' passivity was the most significant obstacle in the three lecturers' assessment practices, given that AfL encourages students to be active learners (James, 2006; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2014). A cultural shift is required to move Vietnamese students' approach to active learning. Further, lecturers would require organising more peer and self-assessment in their classes so that their students have opportunities to practise responsibility and skills in their own learning.

9.1.2.3 Continuing dominance of summative purposes of assessment

Carless and colleagues (2006) argue that we need to accept that summative assessment is powerful and inherent in assessment practices, and that this will create difficulties for formative assessment. These authors identified and developed some practices to synergise formative and summative assessment in Hong Kong higher education. These include: incorporating formative processes within a summative assignment and the development of effective summative assignments which require students to use deep learning. As this study found, the teachers attempted to combine formative and summative purposes of assessment in midterm assessment. However, these were not fully achieved, as students continued to focus on gaining high marks in exams. This issue has been pointed to by Brookhart (2010) as one of the key limitations when teachers develop positive synergy between formative and summative assessment. This challenge reveals that it is not simple to implement AfL in an examination-oriented learning culture like Vietnam. More research is needed to develop appropriate strategies of AfL which are culturally aligned with Confucian-influenced societies (Carless & Lam, 2014).

9.1.2.4 Concerns about reliability and quality of peer feedback for learning

The lecturers found it challenging to give direct feedback to their students due to their understanding of face saving in Vietnamese culture. Despite knowing the importance of fair and useful feedback, the lecturers were still operating within their own cultural system. For this reason, face saving impacted on the quality of peer feedback. Reliability of peer feedback has been considered a problem facing lecturers in other educational systems. For example, the issue of "friendship marking" was pointed out in the review of Dochy et al. (1999) and it also occurred in this study. To facilitate peer assessment, research has found that students will need to change their

perception on the nature of peer feedback for learning, and to learn skills in order to give critical and constructive feedback to their peers (Sluijsmans, 2002; Tillema, 2014). Further, transparency in assessment is considered important (Carless et al., 2006; Jonsson, 2014). Developing objective tools such as rubrics which may 'distance' students from personal subjective judgements is strongly recommended (Jonsson, 2014). All of the challenges mentioned cumulatively affected the lecturers' implementation of AfL strategies.

9.1.2.5 Summary of inhibiting factors

Despite the lecturers' efforts, their assessment practices faced several challenges due to contextual and sociocultural factors. There were hindrances to AfL, according to the type of class or the lecturers' teaching experiences. Ly, because she taught in a large class, found it difficult to give detailed feedback to every student or to engage students in group discussions. This challenge was combined with a lack of time which also hindered Ly's AfL practices. Research has found that lack of time means students do not have time to act on feedback, reducing its effectiveness on student learning. The problems of time and teacher workload could be overcome partly by the use of group assessment (Carless et al., 2006). However, this study found that the technique presented another problem, which is fairness and accuracy of assessment for individual students in the group. In contrast, limited teaching experience was a barrier for Tung because he applied a Western approach to his class without considering sufficiently his students' learning habits and needs. In Hoa's class, students' lack of interest in the subject was considered a great barrier, as they did not invest time and effort to study. The main learning purpose of almost all students was only to pass the exam.

As the three lecturers were working in institutional and Vietnamese sociocultural contexts, there were common barriers that emerged. As analysed in section 8.2.2, these barriers were found as conflicts between changed policy and actual conditions and practices; and conflict between AfL principles and Vietnamese learning culture.

9.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Examination of three case studies revealed that the three lecturers engaged in AfL principles and practices. However, the sociocultural tensions in AfL implementation in different contexts are evident in the findings of this study, which reinforce those of previous studies in terms of the effect of Asian social, cultural and

educational practices (Carless, 2011; Carless & Lam, 2014; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2014). The findings of this study support the claim that there is no "quick fix" to assessment reform, especially in Confucian-influenced societies such as Vietnam. This section summarises the most important findings of this study in relation to the research questions.

RQ1, 2: What assessment for learning strategies do Vietnamese lecturers currently use in higher education? How do Vietnamese lecturers enact the assessment strategies for learning?

The three lecturers attempted to implement some strategies aligned with AfL principles and practices. They attempted to explain learning intentions and success criteria to their students. They also used observation and questioning as common strategies to gauge students' current knowledge and feedback on their teaching. Students were also involved in practices of providing and receiving feedback from teachers, peers and themselves to recognise their current cognitive levels and set up new goals for their own learning. The three lecturers' assessment practices demonstrated that they understood Vietnamese learning culture and tried to adapt innovative teaching and assessment strategies to their context. The lecturers' assessment practices aligned with the Vietnamese government's innovative assessment policy, requiring a wide range of assessment methods with the purpose of enhancing students' ongoing learning (MoET, 2005, 2007, 2012b).

RQ3: What are Vietnamese students' experiences of AfL?

Students indicated that AfL strategies used by the three lecturers were novel and allowed them to be active learners. Students also indicated that they became interested in learning and ultimately enjoyed the new teaching and assessment strategies. They reported that these strategies encouraged them to self-assess and aim higher in their own learning. Students' experiences with AfL strategies illustrate that making learning intentions clear to students, ensuring learning tasks fall within students' ZPD, and lecturer feedback which is detailed, constructive, fair and based on prescribed criteria, were important to support learning. Peer and self-assessment practices at first showed little positive effect until students were given opportunities to discuss and experience these practices frequently. These findings are consistent with previous research without being bounded by context (Orsmond et al., 2002), in that students who are at initial stages need opportunities to learn new practices in a community.

RQ4: What are the sociocultural factors that support or hinder the implementation of AfL in higher education in Vietnam?

This study found that the lecturers' passion and knowledge about innovation were paramount in the reform of teaching and assessment. However, as assessment is socially and culturally complex (Berry, 2011c; Carless & Lam, 2014; Willis et al., 2013), practices of the three lecturers were significantly hindered by a number of institutional and sociocultural factors.

First, institutional factors were significant. As discussed in Chapter 8, tensions emerged for three main reasons: EU's assessment policies still focus on summative assessment; there is a lack of continuing professional development for lecturers about assessment practice and policy; and there are inadequate facilities for teaching and learning. Such institutional barriers have also been found in previous research conducted in other Vietnamese universities (Nguyen & Walker, 2014; Pham & Renshaw, 2015a; Tran, 2015) and in other Confucian heritage cultures such as China (Chen et al., 2013). This finding suggests that providing institutional support for teaching and learning is imperative to enhancing the uptake of AfL in Asian universities.

Secondly, sociocultural factors were also critical. The differences in cultural values between Vietnamese education and the philosophical principles of AfL presented a number of challenges for the lecturers' assessment practices. This finding is supported by research of Nguyen (2008); Pham (2010a, 2011c); Pham and Renshaw (2015b) which all found mismatchs between Western principles and practices and values in Asian countries. These obstacles impeded successful reform of innovative teaching and learning approaches. In the present study, Vietnamese students' passivity, considered a legacy of a Confucian teaching culture, was found to be the biggest challenge for the use of AfL in the three classes. This learning style is contradictory to the main principle of AfL that highlights the central and active role of students in their learning. Further, the Vietnamese tradition of respect for authority limited students from maximising cooperative learning with their peers. Further, respect for harmony presented difficulty for the practice of giving direct and honest feedback to help students progress. These sociocultural hindrances call for culturally appropriate forms of AfL in Asian educational countries (Carless, 2011; Chen et al., 2013; Pham & Renshaw, 2015b).

In summary, the three lecturers attempted to adopt and adapt some AfL strategies which seemed to benefit students' learning. However, students' responsibility and autonomy in their learning were restricted due to their historically passive learning habits. AfL practices in the three classes in this study were mainly controlled and directed by the lecturers, and tensions between formative and summative assessment were not resolved, as the examination-oriented learning still dominated. Despite the lecturers' significant efforts, the effectiveness of AfL has been shown to be limited. The next section explains how AfL strategies could be better incorporated into the Vietnamese higher education context.

9.3 IMPLICATIONS

The three lecturers' assessment practices faced a number of sociocultural challenges. This has demonstrated that effort to reform teaching and assessment from an individual lecturer's efforts alone is insufficient. Findings suggest that there needs to be further assessment development, provision of supportive resources for innovation, and conceptual and practical shifts in both teaching and learning. This section will include implications and recommendations for improved incorporation of AfL strategies into the Vietnamese university context.

9.3.1 National and institutional assessment policy

To adopt AfL effectively on a larger scale, priority for improvement of learning should occur specifically at policy level. This study found that although innovation in teaching and assessment is evident at the policy level in Vietnam, the summative purpose of assessment is emphasised, which directs lecturers and students to focus on marks and certification. This finding is supported by previous research which found that in an accountability era, there is limited space for AfL because teaching and learning are directed by test results and grades rather than by enhancing learning (Berry, 2011a; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black & Wiliam, 2005; Broadfoot et al., 2014; Klenowski, 2011a; Hayward & Spencer, 2010). Therefore, to make assessment for learning effective, this study recommends that the formative function of assessment should be prioritised, explicitly stated in policy and promoted in practice. Further, teacher preparation and involvement of faculties in the changes are important in the effective enactment of policy.

9.3.2 Support for teaching and learning

Research has found that successful assessment reform requires a conceptual shift of learning and assessment, and cooperation from managers, lecturers, students, and stakeholders (Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Tiemey, 2006). This study provides an example of the limitations of the use and effectiveness of AfL in higher education classrooms in Vietnam as a consequence of individual lecturer effort. Teaching quality impacts on learning, and teachers need support from professional development, available and functioning facilities for teaching and learning, and acknowledgment for their efforts to employ innovation to effectively apply AfL strategies.

9.3.2.1 Professional Development

Research has consistently found that poor teacher preparation for AfL impacts on its use and value in classes from West to East (Berry, 2011c; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Lee & Wiliam, 2005; Tan, 2011a; Tiemey, 2006). This issue emerged in this study, as the three lecturers had limited opportunities to participate in training courses that focused on assessment. The tensions arose from the fact that AfL theory and practice is new to the lecturers and their students, and consequently both staff and students lacked specific skills to implement AfL effectively. For example, Hoa used a rubric which is considered one effective way to provide expected standards to students. However, her students described this rubric as 'too complex', which caused confusion in their peer assessment. To address this finding and emergent issues, it is recommended that teachers' knowledge and skills need to be enhanced to implement the principles of AfL into their classes. In particular, it would be beneficial for Hoa and other lecturers if the FMI organised a training course, specifically focusing on rubrics and how to create and use rubrics effectively in teaching and assessment to support learning.

As James (2006) argues, AfL is not a set of techniques that can be simply implemented in classrooms. Rather, it involves values and philosophy, requiring teachers to have a deep understanding about AfL theory and also the capacity to translate these principles into their specific classes. To support this process, EU and faculties could organise professional development courses that provide knowledge and skills to apply AfL in their particular contexts to take advantage of the characteristics of Vietnamese learning culture and use them when implementing. For example, professional development should include topics such as assessment transparency using

rubrics and exemplars; principles and strategies for peer and self-assessment; and providing useful feedback.

As lecturers have adopted some AfL strategies in their teaching practice, a collaborative approach to training is strongly recommended. Teachers can act as active learners who bring with them a wealth of teaching experience and knowledge to share with others. Each faculty in EU can also invite innovative lecturers to share their teaching experiences with others. Effective adaptation and challenges could be collected and discussed in professional training courses to enhance teachers' pedagogic knowledge and skills. Cooperation between faculties in training courses are important and the role of the Education faculty in EU should be emphasised in the professional development. The cooperative model between instructional leaders, assessment experts and teachers has been found to be effective in teacher professional development (Torrance & Prior, 2001).

9.3.2.2 Facilities for teaching and learning

This study found that facilities for teaching and learning are important for creating a conducive environment for learning. As analysed, inadequate facilities exist within EU. The classes are overpopulated, the rooms have poor sound, lack air-conditioning, technology is limited and of poor quality and the internet connection is slow. These conditions hindered the effectiveness of teaching and learning. At times, lecturers had to move students from a designated room to another room due to a failure of technology. Students were often taught in rooms that became very hot and noisy. Lecturers had to book equipment in advance. As reported by lecturers and students, these learning conditions limited the lecturers' use of interactive teaching strategies to involve more students in active learning, and restricted students' feedback. To meet demands for teaching innovation in a credit-based training assessment system with a focus on the development of students' independent learning, EU will need to upgrade facilities to allow students to interact and to work collaboratively.

This research showed that implementing any type of productive learning was hampered by logistical issues. In particular, class size, lack of ventilation, inadequate access to the internet and lack of technological equipment were apparent. Perhaps these issues are related to Vietnamese culture seeing learning as teacher-centred. In other words, teachers may be expected to pass on valuable information to students without the need for special equipment or tailored space. This issue highlights the

complexity of introducing Western teaching strategies into a non-Western culture. However, findings related to student and teacher behaviour also show that simply providing adequate teaching space and technology is not the answer. This research has shown that change needs to occur on multiple levels.

9.3.2.3 Acknowledgement of lecturers' efforts to innovate

This research has shown that a lecturer's passion to innovate is important to reform their pedagogic practices (Berry, 2011a; Tiemey, 2006). All three lecturers in this study reflected on their teaching, their students' learning and explored new ways to improve. To nurture their passion, constant recognition and reward of lecturers who are creative and who successfully apply new teaching approaches is necessary. Such recognition could include opportunities for further professional development or promotion. Further, results of teacher evaluation by students should be given back to each lecturer so that they can identify their students' learning needs and areas that they need to focus on in future teaching. Based on the results of students' evaluation, innovative teachers may be recognised and rewarded in the form of 'best lecturer award' to motivate them to frequently innovate their teaching practices.

9.3.3 Teaching and assessment practice

Teacher knowledge and skills for the use of AfL were found to be fundamental, as AfL involves interactions between the teacher and students and peers. This process requires teachers to shift their pedagogic belief from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach, and also to develop their capacity to adopt and adapt strategies and techniques of AfL to their particular context. In addition, teachers need to understand the learning theory and philosophy that underpin AfL. Lecturers should design learning and assessment tasks which require learners to be active in co-constructing knowledge. As evidenced in the findings of this study, changes in the lecturers' teaching approaches led to some positive changes in students' selection of learning strategies. Additionally, teachers need to have the capacity to understand students' learning needs and the local context to adapt AfL strategies. In the Vietnamese higher education context, as students' passive learning style is common, the gradual introduction of new assessment strategies is necessary for students. Lecturers should explain the purpose, process and outcomes of new assessment strategies. Lecturers would also need to observe and follow up how students perceive and conduct these strategies for timely intervention.

Further, establishing a trusting relationship between the teacher and students is important to enhance student learning. Ly, Hoa, and Tung are inspiring teachers who constantly learn and apply student-centred teaching approaches to their classes. They proved themselves credible experts and excellent role models and therefore gained trust from their students. This requires teachers to constantly renew new teaching knowledge and skills to become trusted influential co-participants in classrooms.

9.3.4 Student learning

AfL requires students to be aware of their role as active learners, as well as to take opportunities to further develop learning skills. This research showed that students' traditional beliefs about learning and their passivity in classroom practice were a significant barrier to the use of AfL. This study recommends that in order to increase students' awareness of their own learning processes, generic skills such as critical and creative thinking, as well as skills in group discussion and peer feedback should be developed through orientation programs when first enrolling in university. In addition, students' learning skills need to be further developed through specific instruction in each subject over a program. This particular study revealed that students benefitted from being more aware of how assessment was conducted. Even though the students were confused by Hoa's rubric, they still stated that they were more engaged in their learning as they were involved in the process.

9.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While the benefits of AfL have been documented in Western schooling, little research related to the practice of AfL has been conducted in higher education in general and specifically in the Vietnamese context. Thus, this study is significant for its practical contribution to the field of teacher education and implications for assessment policy development in higher education in Vietnam. This study has the potential to contribute to the development of AfL theory in higher education in non-Western contexts.

9.4.1 Practical contributions

Research findings and implications of this study may enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Vietnamese teacher-training universities. This study was conducted in part to respond to the MoET's strong commitment to reform teaching and assessment approaches in higher education in order to enhance quality, catering

for the nation's overall aim to become an industrialised and modernised society by 2020. To transform successfully, it is important to investigate existing pedagogic practices in Vietnamese universities, and to identify supports and hindrances for any innovation. This exploratory qualitative study was an attempt to provide such a basis. It informs Vietnamese lecturers, students and policy makers of the potential of AfL to enhance lifelong learning skills for students and to identify barriers for the effective use of AfL in the Vietnamese higher education context. Further, this study not only finds evidence of challenges to AfL, but also factors that support and could potentially enhance the application of AfL in the Vietnamese higher education context.

This study found that the use of AfL strategies by three lecturers engaged students in their learning process and helped them to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their own learning. However, findings of this study revealed that if the changes occur only at policy level, without a conducive environment for teaching and learning, teacher preparation, and the participation of all faculties in the changes, it is difficult to reform the teaching and learning system. Based on findings of this study, MoET and EU may need to develop solutions to deal with challenges to support lecturers in their effective innovation.

Findings from this study also reinforce that any imported teaching and assessment approaches need be adapted to be effective in the Vietnamese higher education context (Nguyen, Oliver, et al., 2009; Pham, 2011c). This insight is important for further changes that may enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam. For AfL, practising lecturers have to consider Vietnamese cultural values such as hierarchy and respect for harmony, face saving and examination-oriented learning to adopt and adapt successfully AfL strategies into their classes. For instance, in response to the culture of face saving, lecturers will need to find sensitive ways of giving feedback so that they can assist students to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses to then progress their learning. Practising lecturers may be interested in some aspects of AfL strategies which were adapted successfully by the lecturers in this study, such as the use of indirect feedback, and test preparation to enhance their teaching quality.

9.4.2 Theoretical contributions

Findings from this study contribute to the debate on the effectiveness of AfL. Researchers (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Torrance, 2012) have reported limited

effectiveness of AfL in some classes in Western schooling. This study found that despite sociocultural challenges, some AfL strategies, such as involving students in discussion of teaching plans, questioning, use of teacher feedback and peer assessment, have positively impacted on students' learning in Vietnamese higher education. This has demonstrated that when learning intentions are clearly articulated, and when assessment practices engage students in providing and receiving feedback from teachers, peers and self, assessment can support their learning (Pham, 2014; Rogoff, 2008; Tillema, 2014; Willis, 2010).

More importantly, as Carless (2011) points out, there is a lack of evidence on the use of AfL in non-Western countries. Outcomes of this study, therefore, have the potential to provide theoretical insights and empirical evidence of how assessment might be used to support learning in Vietnamese higher education. These understandings are significant to the field of educational assessment in Vietnam and to develop the theorisation of AfL in higher education in Asian contexts. This study has demonstrated the persistence of cultural education norms and values in one Confucian-influenced context, Vietnam. It therefore also demonstrated the need to adapt Western theoretical approaches and practical strategies to local contexts, as Carless (2011) has argued: "formative assessment needs to take different forms in different contexts" (Carless, 2011, p. 2). As we have seen, the three lecturers in this study, to some degree, adopted and adapted some aspects of AfL, including: test preparation, developmentally appropriate expectations for first year students, giving indirect feedback using peer learning, social networking, respect for students' responses, careful phrasing in feedback, and establishing trusting relationships with students through sharing their own experiences. Such adaptation was effective because it appeared to fit within the Vietnamese sociocultural context, in which students value harmony and authority, and adopt an examination-oriented learning style. These findings illustrate that when AfL is adapted to the local context, it is an effective practice to promote learning (Pham & Renshaw, 2015a). Although the adaptations need further research to verify their universal effectiveness, findings of this study provide crucial insights into how AfL can be adapted successfully in Vietnamese higher education. The following table summarises such adaptations found from the present study.

Table 9.1

Successful adaptations of AfL in Vietnamese Higher Education

AfL principles	Facilitative and inhibitive aspects of Vietnamese culture	Possible Lessons and Adaptations
Student's central role in assessment process.	**Tradition of respect for hierarchy and authority, respect for teachers, and face saving** Vietnamese tradition considers teachers as central, and as controllers of learning. This leads to hierarchy between students and teachers. Further, students' passivity is maintained. This learning culture contradicts the philosophical principles of AfL. The tradition of face saving might prevent students from active engagement in learning: hesitant to voice their views or challenge the teachers and peers The tradition of respect for teachers may limit students' participation in learning. However, it may demand or stimulate the teacher to constantly learn new things to be good role models for students. It is suggested from the current study that inspiration for teaching reform and major changes from the teacher's current pedagogic beliefs and habits are crucial. The teacher should adopt a constructivist view of learning and share their power with students through organising a range of learning activities; inviting as well as encouraging students to involve in these activities; building a democratic learning environment where students are willing to show their ideas and take risks.	**Lesson: Reduction of power distance and keeping students' face** Involve students in discussing teaching and assessment methods at the beginning of subjects (e.g. learning contract). Use social network and digital technology such as Facebook and email to scaffold student learning. Use brainstorming and peer interaction Maintain democratic and psychologically safe learning environments: Encourage students to critique views from teachers and peers; avoid criticising students' responses Organise peer-self assessment
Help students to be aware of their current level and know how to progress	**Collectivist spirit and respect for harmony, face savings** It appears hard to give critical feedback to students as respect for harmony and saving face are important to Vietnamese people. Due to their wish to maintain a good image in other people's minds, Vietnamese people would accept feedback, reflecting their weaknesses if it is transferred in a subtle way. The sensitive way of giving feedback is also expected and benefited for the feedback giver as they will avoid creating conflicts within the group. However, collective spirit and face savings may also have facilitative aspects for AfL in that due to group benefits or reputation, students would try their best to work cooperatively with other friends to produce the best results.	**Lesson: Improvement of learning is important, but perhaps not the only goal. Vietnamese students are also concerned about other feelings and harmonious climate within their group.** Provide teacher feedback and peer feedback in groups rather than individually. This would strengthen the collective spirit, while maintaining face for students. Use comparative feedback among groups to capitalise on the social awareness of face saving to promote learning. Carefully phrase the language of feedback (e.g the use of softer words or body language), so it reflects not only weaknesses in students' work, but is also encouraging Focus on learning tasks and student's effort in giving feedback. Use of rubric to distance students from subjective judgements.
Priority of formative purpose of assessment	**Examination-oriented learning culture** An overemphasis on summative assessment has hindered the use of AfL. This was found to be a universal matter. However, the dominance of examination-oriented learning strongly undermines the use of AfL. It is	**Lesson: Never undermine impact of summative assessment on Vietnamese student learning. Formative assessment might be taken when it is incorporated into summative assessment.** Test preparation: teachers discussed with students, exam questions, their expectations and strategies to improve

AfL principles	Facilitative and inhibitive aspects of Vietnamese culture	Possible Lessons and Adaptations
	suggested from the current study and other similar studies that the effectiveness of AfL can be maximised in Vietnamese classes if it is incorporated with summative assessment to improve students' examinations' results.	their examination results. They observed and used limitations detected in the past exams as feedback to maximise students' revision plans. Incorporate formative aspects into summative assessment: the teachers organise midterm assessment for both formative and summative results. On the one hand, they created learning opportunities for students by organising learning activities such as oral presentations, case study, and group discussions. Students had opportunities to practise learning skills such as researching documents, presenting, and team-work and to receiving feedback from teachers and peers. Results of these activities were later calculated for final scores of the subjects. The use of bonus marks for students who participate proactively in the learning: Although its effectiveness needs more research, this strategy encouraged more students to engage in deep learning.

Apart from contribtuions to AfL theory in higher education in Asian settings, this study has also created significant methodological gains. As Simons (2009) argues, the purpose of a case study approach is not to generalise knowledge because findings are embedded within a particular and unique context. Findings of this study therefore cannot be generalisable to other contexts. However, this study explored the adaptation of AfL in non-Western higher education. Researchers or lecturers in similar settings could relate the findings to their contexts or conduct further research on AfL practices.

Social learning theories have received criticism, as they have not sufficiently addressed issues of power. Findings from this study provide an example of the role of power by demonstrating the impact of vertical hierarchies on learning in Vietnamese higher education classrooms. A teacher's power is demonstrated through their feedback, which strongly impacts on students' learning and the possibilities for the development of their agency. Further, while peers are considered by sociocultural theorists as a resource for learning, the equal status of peers seemed to reduce their impact on individual learning. Influence of power on learning was also found in research conducted by Miao et al. (2006) in the Chinese higher education setting where students highly appreciated teacher feedback and had a tendency to adopt this kind of feedback to improve their learning in comparison with peer feedback. Issues of power must be considered when discussing the possibilities for learning in Confucian-influenced settings.

Typically, in higher education in Vietnam, the teacher ultimately maintains the power in the classroom. When introducing AfL, the three lecturers involved were able to share power with students at certain times. For example, Tung's students were actively involved in discussing assessment methods and negotiated teaching adjustment with their teacher, which led to many subsequent learning opportunities. However, this study found that the influence of power on learning is complex due to historical hierarchy in Vietnamese sociocultural traditions. Tung's students indicated that they enjoyed learning in his class because their autonomy was encouraged. However, they preferred late-career teachers who have 'more' power and consequently motivate them to learn, though this motivation was not intrinsic. Analysis of this example suggests that discussing power issues and its impact on learning in classrooms in Confucian-influenced settings such as Vietnam should include sociocultural traditions.

9.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was an exploratory investigation into the assessment practices of three lecturers in one teacher-training university. Although it has potential to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam, and to the development of AfL theory in non-Western settings, this study has a number of limitations. Further research is needed to gain a comprehensive insight into the practices of AfL in Vietnamese higher education and to recommend effective assessment strategies for learning within the Vietnamese context.

First, the time restriction in the data collection phase was one limitation. This study was intended to be conducted over a semester of three months because this period allowed the researcher to observe the totality of teaching and learning of a unit. This would enable the collection of comprehensive sets of information about assessment practices and the experiences of both lecturers and students in the three units. In fact, data collection began one and a half months into the semester, given constraints of the researcher's scholarship and ethics approval. Consequently, assessment practices were not observed over the entire unit. The researcher obtained information through the use of interviews with the lecturers and students as well as through the collection of lecturers' lesson plans and students' work. Although credibility can be achieved by triangulation between data sources, time constraints prevented the researcher from a truly comprehensive observation of the lecturers' assessment practices.

Another limitation related to the restricted number of participants. This study intended to explore the practice of AfL of lecturers teaching in both social and natural sciences. Although Ly, Hoa and Tung came from different faculties, they taught subjects which related to the social sciences. Therefore, there were similarities in their approaches and application of AfL strategies. Findings and implications of this study are therefore limited to those social science subjects. Hence, a further qualitative research could focus on purposeful selection of lecturers who represent different disciplines or other institutions to understand how AfL can be used across discipline areas in EU, and to provide a comprehensive picture of AfL practices across universities in the Vietnamese higher education system. Based on the findings from this study, a survey may be designed and delivered to lecturers across universities in Vietnam in order to gather views of lecturers' understandings of AfL, what strategies of AfL they are using, and what they consider to be the supports and hindrances of their assessment practices. This survey could collect data relating to lecturers' expectations of further changes in policy, and recommendations for enhancing teaching and learning in their context. A quantitative study would help to gather a holistic picture of the practice of AfL in Vietnamese higher education.

Finally, as an exploratory study, this study reveals some initial insights into AfL practices and factors that support or hinder the practices of AfL in Vietnamese higher education. There are several issues that need further research to illuminate our understanding of the AfL practices in non-Western higher education settings. For example, the three lecturers in this study gave feedback to groups rather than to individuals. This was considered to save time and to fit within Vietnamese students' fear of losing face. This technique is also suggested by Carless and colleagues (2006) as a solution for large classes. However, there are some problems including issues with the need to provide specific feedback at the individual rather than the group level. The effectiveness of feedback at the group level requires future research. Further, issues of how feedback impacts on students with different identity and learning styles and how the use of AfL strategies makes a difference in students' learning results are unclear in this study. Effectiveness of AfL may need further analysis of students' evaluation sheets on a subject to explore whether or not there is correlation between their positive feedback and the teachers' AfL practices. More research is needed to provide deep understanding of AfL practices including why the lecturers did not use some suggested

AfL strategies in their classes. This study found the impact of power is an issue for learning in higher education. This may inspire further research on the development of theoretical and practical models and strategies of AfL that are more appropriate to the Vietnamese context and recommendations for AfL theory and models in Asian higher education contexts.

9.6 CONCLUSION

Assessment for learning, a concept originally developed in Western societies, is based on values which are not apparent in Vietnamese culture. Despite this, the three lecturers in this study attempted to introduce several innovative assessment strategies such as peer and self-assessment in their classes, and students identified that such strategies had a positive influence on their learning. However, the historical tradition of hierarchy, students' passivity and examination-oriented learning in Vietnam stymied the lecturers' efforts to fully achieve their intentions with respect to AfL principles and values. The ideal forms of AfL were not realised and the full power of AfL was not shown in Vietnamese classrooms. Although culture is not considered "a static entity" (Cole, 2005, p. 3), it is hard to change directly and immediately a learning culture which has existed for generations. AfL requires adaptation for it to be effective in the Vietnamese tertiary context.

Personal Reflection

Lifelong learning skills such as critical and creative thinking, as well as teamwork are critical students living in a world that is dominated by rapid changing technology and globalisation. As a lecturer, I wanted to enhance my students' learning. In particular, I wanted their learning engagement to be deep and long lasting, rather than superficial and soon forgotten. Despite knowing little about AfL theoretically or practically, I was interested in using assessment as a key element to enhance student learning. However, not all my efforts were successful.

I realised through a critical review of the research literature pertaining to AfL that although this practice has been considered important for the enhancement of learning, a number of issues impede effective implementation in Vietnamese higher education. The theory of AfL and evidence of the effectiveness of these practices has been established in Western educational contexts. I have learnt that to implement AfL strategies successfully, the lecturer has to truly change their concept of learning and

assessment and the role of the teacher and students, as well as, develop the competence to apply AfL strategies into the local context. I have also learnt many valuable lessons through working with Ly, Hoa and Tung, and their students in this study.

I was surprised that the students in the three classes still adopted the same learning approach as my generation of over 15 years ago, despite changes and reforms initiated by the University and the MoET. I have learnt that changes require considerable time and cooperation, continuing professional development, and adaptation of new models.

I have learnt that successful transformation in teaching is challenging, but it is worth doing as it will support generations of students who will have to respond to the demands of a knowledge-based economy. I also realised that my colleagues who participated in this study made considerable attempts to apply novel teaching and assessment approaches and their changes enhanced effective learning in their classes. However, they did not fully achieve their initial intentions due to sociocultural contextual barriers. Successful reform, involving new approaches, needs appropriate modification of the practices to the local context. I believe that changes in the individual lecturer are occurring, but the involvement of other actors and time will tell whether assessment for learning is used universally and effectively in the Vietnamese higher education context.

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Appendices

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APPENDIX A

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

</div>

1. **General information (Thông tin chung)**

   Full name:
   Qualification: Teaching experience:
   Class: Subject:
   Lesson:
   Time:
   Location:

2. **Observation aspects (Nội dung quan sát)**

Time (Thời gian)	Teaching and Assessment strategies (Các phương pháp giảng dạy và đánh giá)	Teacher's activities (Hoạt động của giảng viên)	Students' responses (Hoạt động của sinh viên)	Comments (Nhận xét)

3. **General comments (Nhận xét chung)**

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APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 1

(For the first teaching session)

1. **General information**

   Full name:

   Qualification: Teaching experience:

   Class: Number of students:

   Subject:

2. **Lecturer's beliefs about teaching and learning and their teaching routines**

- Can you describe the typical learning style of your students? Thầy/Cô có thể mô tả cách học điển hình ở sinh viên lớp mình?

  - Do you think this type of learning is a suitable and effective learning style at higher education? Theo thầy/cô, cách học này có phù hợp và hiệu quả ở đại học không?

  - What are characteristics of an effective learning style in higher education? Theo thầy/cô, cách học hiệu quả ở đại học là cách học như thế nào?

  - What factors affect effective learning at higher education? Theo thầy/cô, những yếu tố nào ảnh hưởng tới tính hiệu quả của việc học ở đại học?

  - What do you do to support effective learning in your class? Thầy/Cô thường làm như thế nào để thúc đẩy cách học hiệu quả ở lớp mình dạy?

- Can you tell me what assessment methods are currently used in your university? Do you think these assessment methods support student learning or not? Why? Theo thầy/cô, những phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá kết quả học tập nào đang được sử dụng ở trường [tên]? Những phương pháp này có thúc đẩy, cải thiện việc học của sinh viên không? Tại sao?

- What kinds of assessment strategies do you usually use in your unit? Thầy/Cô thường sử dụng những phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá nào trong môn học của mình?

  - What type of learning is encouraged by the assessment methods used in your unit? Các phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá này đã khuyến khích cách học nào của sinh viên?

- What factors support you to practise these assessment strategies? Lý do nào khiến thầy/cô sử dụng các phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá đó?

- What factors prevent you from using other assessment strategies in your practice? Lý do nào khiến thầy/cô không sử dụng các phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá khác?

- Do you often give feedback to your students? Thầy/cô có thường xuyên cung cấp những nhận xét, đánh giá về hoạt động học của sinh viên không?

    - When do you give feedback to your students? Thầy/cô thường cung cấp các nhận xét, đánh giá này khi nào?

    - How do you give feedback to your students? Thầy/Cô thường cung cấp các nhận xét này như thế nào?

    - How do your students respond to your feedback? Sinh viên thường có phản ứng như thế nào khi nhận được các nhận xét của thầy/cô?

    - How does the feedback affect your teaching decisions? Những nhận xét, đánh giá này có ảnh hưởng như thế nào tới các hoạt động giảng dạy của thầy/cô?

- Do you often encourage your students to give and receive peer feedback? Why? In what ways do you organise peer assessment? Thầy/cô có thường khuyến khích sinh viên trao đổi nhận xét, đánh giá lẫn nhau (đánh giá đồng đẳng) trong quá trình học tập không? Tại sao? Thầy cô thường tổ chức hoạt động đánh giá đồng đẳng như thế nào?

- Do you often encourage your students to self-assess their own learning? Why? In what ways do you organise self-assessment? Thầy/ cô có thường xuyên khuyến khích sinh viên tự đánh giá hoạt động học tập của chính họ không? Tại sao? Thầy/cô tổ chức hoạt động tự đánh giá của sinh viên như thế nào?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2

(For each teaching session)

Prior the lectures

- What are the learning intentions of this lecture? Xin thầy/cô cho biết, mục tiêu của bài học hôm nay là gì?

- In what ways will you help your students to achieve the expectations of the lecture? Nhằm đạt những mục tiêu này, thầy/cô sẽ tiến hành bài học như thế nào?

- What teaching strategies do you intend to use in today's lecture to encourage student learning? Thầy/cô sẽ sử dụng phương pháp nào để khuyến khích sinh viên tích cực học tập?

- Why do you think these teaching strategies will promote student learning in the lecture? Lý do nào khiến thầy/cô lựa chọn các phương pháp này?

- Do you anticipate any issues that might arise in your lecture as a result of using these strategies? And how could you overcome these challenges? Thầy/cô có tiên lượng được những vấn đề nào nảy sinh khi sử dụng các phương pháp này không? Thầy/cô dự định giải quyết các vấn đề đó ra sao?

After the lectures

- Do you think you have achieved the goals of the lecture as intended in your lesson plan? Why or why not? Theo thầy/cô, bài giảng có đạt được các mục tiêu như dự định không? Tại sao có/ hoặc không?

- Are you satisfied with how the learning intentions were achieved in the class? Why or Why not? Thầy cô có hài lòng với phương thức mục tiêu bài học đã đạt được không? Tại sao có/ hoặc không?

- What do you think you would do differently if you were to conduct this lesson again? Why would you make this change/s? Nếu thực hiện lại bài giảng hôm nay, thầy cô có dự định thay đổi, làm khác đi điều gì không? Lý do nào khiến thầy/cô muốn thay đổi điều đó?

- How would you evaluate the involvement of your students in the lecture? What evidence do you have to support this view? Thầy/cô đánh giá như thế nào về sự

tham gia của sinh viên vào bài học hôm nay? Những biểu hiện nào của sinh viên chứng minh sự tham gia của họ?

- What intended teaching strategies do you think were effective? Why? Theo thầy/cô, phương pháp dự kiến nào đã thể hiện hiệu quả trong bài giảng? Tại sao?

- What is the key learning for you from how the students responded to the lecture today? Từ sự phản ứng của sinh viên trong bài giảng hôm nay, thầy/cô rút ra được kinh nghiệm gì cho hoạt động giảng dạy?

- What are the implications of your reflections about this lesson for the next lecture? Thầy/cô dự định áp dụng những kinh nghiệm này vào buổi học tiếp theo như thế nào?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 1

(After the first teaching session)

1. **General information**

Facts	Gender	Hometown	Faculty	Learning results
Student A				
Student B				
Student C				
Student D				
Student E				
Student F				

2. **Students' beliefs about learning and assessment and their learning experiences**

- Describe how assessment is practised in your university? Bạn hãy cho biết, việc kiểm tra, đánh giá kết quả học tập của sinh viên được thực hiện như thế nào ở trường của bạn?

- How do you learn for the current assessment tasks? Bạn thường học như thế nào để đáp ứng lại các yêu cầu kiểm tra đánh giá như vậy?

- How satisfied are you with the current assessment methods? Mức độ hài lòng của bạn với các phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá hiện đang được sử dụng tại trường [tên] như thế nào?

- To improve your learning, what are your expectations for future assessment methods? Để cải thiện việc học của mình, bạn có mong đợi gì với các phương pháp kiểm tra, đánh giá trong tương lai?

- Do you often receive feedback on your learning? Who gives you the most feedback about your learning? Bạn có thường xuyên nhận được các nhận xét, đánh giá về việc học của mình không? Ai là người thường xuyên đưa ra những nhận xét về việc học của bạn?

- Describe the feedback that you received from your lecturer. How useful was this feedback to guide you to improve your learning? Bạn hãy mô tả lại một nhận xét hay đánh giá mà bạn đã nhận được từ giảng viên của mình. Những nhận xét đó có ích như thế nào đối với hoạt động học của bạn?

- Describe a situation when you were involved in providing or receiving peer-feedback? Bạn hãy mô tả một tình huống khi bạn tham gia vào việc nhận xét và đánh giá cùng với những người bạn của mình (đánh giá đồng đẳng)?

  - What was your view of this assessment practice? Bạn nghĩ thế nào về việc cung cấp nhận xét và đánh giá đồng đẳng?
  - Did this peer feedback help you to learn? Những nhận xét, đánh giá của các bạn có ích cho việc học của bạn không?

- Describe a situation when you were involved in self-assessment? Bạn hãy kể lại một tình huống khi bạn tham gia vào hoạt động tự đánh giá, nhận xét về hoạt động học của bản thân?

  - What criteria did you use to self-assess? Khi đó, bạn đã dựa vào những tiêu chí nào để tự đánh giá?
  - Did this help you to improve your learning? Why or why not? Hoạt động này có giúp cải thiện việc học của bạn không? Tại sao có/hoặc không?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2

(After each teaching session)

Students' experience with assessment strategies in each teaching session

- What is your view of the lecture? Bạn có cảm nhận gì về buổi học hôm nay?

- What have you gained in this lecture in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes? Bạn đã lĩnh hội được kiến thức, kỹ năng, và thái độ gì từ buổi học hôm nay?

- What was your involvement in the lecture? Bạn đã tham gia vào buổi học hôm nay như thế nào?

- What did you like and dislike most about the lecture? Điều gì làm bạn thích nhất, hoặc không thích nhất về buổi học hôm nay?

- Did you feel encouraged to learn in the lecture? Bạn có cảm thấy mình được khuyến khích tham gia vào bài giảng không?

- Describe your experiences when you took part in the group discussions? Hãy kể lại những trải nghiệm của bạn khi bạn tham gia vào hoạt động thảo luận nhóm?

- How do you respond to the lecturer's feedback and peer feedback? Why? Bạn đã phản ứng như thế nào khi nhận được những nhận xét, đánh giá của giảng viên và của các bạn trong lớp? Tại sao?

- How could the lecturer change the lecture to enhance your learning? Theo bạn, giảng viên có thể thay đổi điều gì trong bài học để cải thiện việc học của bạn?

- What would you like the lecturer to do to support your learning in the next lecture? Bạn mong muốn giảng viên sẽ làm gì để kích thích việc học của bạn trong bài giảng tiếp theo?

- What are the implications for your learning from this lecture? Bạn rút ra được những kinh nghiệm gì cho hoạt động học của mình từ buổi học hôm nay?

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH AUDIT TRAIL

Designing research

Multiple Case Study Approach	Research methods	Trustworthiness of data
Three case studies design, guided by a constructivist paradigm and sociocultural theories of learning Investigated assessment practices of three lecturers, coming from three different faculties in EU (pseudonym) - one Vietnamese teacher-training university.	Classroom observation of five teaching sessions of each lecturer. Semi-structured interview with the lecturers prior and post each of five observed teaching session. Focus group with students after each of five observed teaching sessions to gain their views of their experiences with AfL strategies that were used by their lecturer. Analysis of documents: the Government and institutional policy, reports, teachers' lesson plans and students' work.	Triangulation of data collected from different sources and methods Reflectivity strategy during data collection and analysis Rich description of the EU context Audit trail Back-translation of data

Gathering data

Stages	Purpose	Tasks
Pilot period (January and early April 2013)	Trialled and adjusted data collection methods	Conducted interview with one lecturer and one fourth year student in EU via Skype Conducted focus group interviews and observations with one lecturer in another Vietnamese teacher-training university Refined interview questions and aspects of observation
Data Collection (Between April and May 2013)	Collected data as in the research design	Obtained ethics approval Gained access to the research site Sent invitation letters to Deans and lecturers of the three faculties Selected the participant lecturers and students and obtained their Consent Form Discussed the research plan with participant lecturers and students Conducted interviews, observations, and researched documents Data were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office in V building, Vietnam. Electronic data which included video and audio recordings were stored in a hard drive that is password protected.

Analysing data

Stages	Purpose	Tasks
Organising and Familiarising (From June to September, 2013)	Gained initial understanding of the cases	Organised field notes, audio and video recordings, documents according to cases in both electronic and paper files, which were stored in the office of the researcher with her own password and key to access. Transcribed data in Vietnamese using pseudonyms Conducted member-checking by sending transcripts back to three lecturers for their verification and further addition. Read and re-read transcripts, fieldnotes.
Coding and Reducing (From October to January, 2014)	Found emergent themes	Coded data in Vietnamese, using steps of initial, axial and selective coding. Research questions, sociocultural theories of learning and literature of AfL were used in data coding and recognising emergent themes. Translated Vietnamese quotations and concepts into English Used back-translation to ensure accuracy of data Identified emergent themes
Interpreting and Presenting (From February 2014 to May 2015)	Found and discussed findings Drew implications	One case analysis Reported and analysed emergent themes in each case. Cross case analysis Compare and contrast emergent themes among three cases to understand similarities and differences Found research findings and discussed research findings Drew conclusions and implications

APPENDIX G

LEARNING CONTRACT

Communication Skills Unit

Two credits, 15 teaching sessions

Lecturer: Tran Thi Ly, Cell phone: Email:

Content
- Two first lectures: Communication principles

- Twelve following sessions: Six core communication skills
  Each skill is learnt in two teaching sessions which include one theoretical and one practical.
  Make first impression,
  Listening skills,
  Controlling emotions,
  Adjustment of the communication process,
  Persuasion skills,
  Language and body language skills
- One last session: Revision
  Teaching methods   **NO Transmission and Acquisition**
  Role play, questioning, discussions, case study, lecturing, problem-based learning

Assessment
Attendance (10%),
Midterm scores (30%), marked through participation during the teaching and learning process of the unit
Final exam (60%) – do a written test

Readings
Nguyen, T. T. B. (2004). *Communicational psychology*. Hanoi: HNUE publisher.
Hoang, A., & Vu, K. T. (1995). *Communication skills in the pedagogic field*. Hanoi: Education Publisher
Ly, T. T. (2013). *Communication skills*. EU. Hanoi. (sent via email as attachment)

Teacher's responsibility
- Providing documents related to the unit
- Teaching how to learn
- Sharing her own experiences and stories
- Address developing communication skills
- Enthusiasm
- Consultation
  Student's responsibility
- Working diligently
- Being active and confident
- Addressing and applying knowledge to practice
- Attending class on time
- Interacting with the lecturer and other students
- Establishing a class email and structuring groups

CO-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN LY AND STUDENTS

CÙNG XÂY DỰNG KIẾN THỨC GIỮA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ SINH VIÊN

Bài giảng số 3: Kĩ năng điều chỉnh quá trình giao tiếp

Giảng viên bước vào lớp và nói với sinh viên: "Chúng ta đã có một kì nghỉ dài 5 ngày. Hãy cùng chia sẻ trải nghiệm của các bạn về kì nghỉ vừa qua. Nào, kì nghỉ của các bạn thế nào?

Sinh viên trả lời hết sức hào hứng: Rất vui ạ.

Cô giáo Ly cười và nói: Tốt. Thế các bạn đã làm gì trong những ngày nghỉ?

Sinh viên: Chúng em đã làm tình nguyện, đi làm thêm, đi du lịch, gặp gỡ bạn bè hồi phổ thông, ngủ và ở nhà.

Cô giáo Ly: Thế các bạn có nghĩ tất cả các hoạt động trên đều có ý nghĩa không?

Sinh viên: Có ạ

Cô giáo Ly: Trang thì sao? Em đã ở trong phòng suốt kì nghỉ. Em có thể chia sẻ thêm được không?

Trang: Em giam mình trong phòng và chẳng làm gì cả. Em thấy buồn vì bạn trai đi du học. Mặc dù anh ấy đã gọi điện báo là anh ấy đã đến nơi an toàn nhưng những câu hỏi kiểu như; Anh ấy đang làm gì? Anh ấy đang nghĩ gì về em? vẫn luôn đeo bám đầu óc em.

Cô giáo Ly: Em có nghĩ sự chia sẻ này có ý nghĩa với mình không?

Trang: Em cảm thấy thoải mái hơn. Nếu em cứ giữ chúng ở trong lòng, em lại thấy càng buồn hơn.

Cô giáo Ly: Cảm ơn Trang vì những chia sẻ rất thật. Bạn ấy đã có một kì nghỉ thật buồn. Thế các bạn có biết tôi làm gì trong kỉ nghỉ vừa rồi không? Các bạn sẽ đặt câu hỏi và tôi sẽ chia sẻ về bản thân?

Sinh viên rất hứng thú hỏi cô giáo

Sinh viên: Cô đã đi đâu ạ?

Cô giáo Ly: Về quê (nhìn về phía cửa sổ)

Sinh viên: Cô làm gì hả cô?

Cô giáo Ly: Nấu ăn

Sinh viên: Cô nấu cho ai ạ?

Cô giáo Ly: Cho gia đình.

Sinh viên: Thế cô nấu món gì ạ?

Cô giáo Ly: Những món cô thích

Sinh viên: Thế cô thích món gì ạ?

Cô giáo Ly: Món gì cũng thích.

Lúc này sinh viên có vẻ như thất vọng với câu trả lời của cô giáo. Mặc dù cô giáo đã khuyến khích sinh viên đặt câu hỏi nhưng chỉ một vài học sinh muốn tiếp tục cuộc nói chuyện. Chỉ 2 học sinh hỏi câu hỏi một cách không thoải mái:

Sinh viên: Thế kì nghỉ của cô thế nào?

Cô giáo Ly: Rất vui.

Sinh viên: Cô có thích kì nghỉ của cô không?

Cô giáo Ly: Ai mà chả thích nghỉ.

Cô giáo Ly cảm ơn sinh viên đã tham gia vào việc đóng vai. Cô hỏi: *"Những chia sẻ của các bạn có gì khác với những chia sẻ của cô"*. Một vài học sinh tự nguyện đứng lên phát biểu:

Anh: Trong khi bọn em rất chân thật và rất muốn chia sẻ thì cô lại có vẻ như không muốn nói chuyện với chúng em. Vì thế, chúng em không hỏi nữa.

Thảo: Cách trả lời của cô khiến chúng em nghĩ rằng cô không muốn chia sẻ. Những câu trả lời của cô khiến bọn em cụt cả hứng.

Thái: Em thấy cô không muốn nói chuyện tiếp.

Cô giáo Ly: Các em cảm thấy như thế nào khi giao tiếp với cô trong trường hợp vừa rồi?

Sinh viên: Chúng em không muốn nói chuyện tiếp. Thấy thất vọng.

Cô giáo Ly: Thế các em có đạt được mục tiêu giao tiếp trong tình huống vừa rồi không?

Sinh viên: Không ạ

Cô giáo Ly: Các em thấy đấy, trong khi các em đang cố gắng trong giao tiếp nhưng đối tượng giao tiếp với các em không muốn chia sẻ, không muốn giao tiếp. Vậy các em làm thế nào để điều chỉnh bản thân cũng như điều chỉnh đối tượng giao tiếp để đạt được mục tiêu giao tiếp? Để đạt được điều này chúng ta cần học về kĩ năng giao tiếp thứ tư: Kĩ năng điều chỉnh quá trình giao tiếp.

APPENDIX I

PATICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR LECTURER INTERVIEW

QUT Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT** **Lecturer Interview**

An Exploratory Investigation of the Practice of Assessment for Learning in Vietnamese Higher Education: Three Case Studies of Lecturers' Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number: 1300000200

RESEARCH TEAM		
Principal Researcher:	**Thi Nhat Ho, PhD student, QUT** Phone: (+84) 986007738 (+61) 449675689	**Supervisor: Professor Valentina Klenowski** Phone: (+61)731383415
	Email: thi.ho@student.qut.edu.au	Email: val.klenowski@qut.edu.au

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD study for Thi Nhat Ho.

The purpose of this project is to investigate the practice of assessment for learning in Vietnamese higher education. The study is designed to explore how assessment for learning is currently understood and used by Vietnamese lecturers and students. This also aims to identify sociocultural factors that may influence the assessment practices in the context of one Vietnamese university.

As a lecturer who is using assessment strategies to promote your students' learning, you are invited to participate in this project. Information gained through observation of your teaching practices will help the researcher to understand and identify factors that may support or hinder assessment practices in Vietnamese universities. Research findings and implications from this study may contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation will involve ten audio recorded interviews that will be conducted before and after your five teaching sessions. The location of the interviews can be at your campus or other agreed location and will take approximately thirty to forty minutes of your time. Questions will include 6 to 10 indicative questions which are involved in your teaching and assessment practices. Before your lecture, you may be asked questions related to your beliefs of learning and assessment, such as:

- How do you think assessment affects student learning?
- What teaching strategies do you intend to use in today's lecture to encourage student learning?

Questions at interviews after your lecture will focus on the assessment strategies you have used in the lecture. For example:

- How would you evaluate the involvement of your students in the lecture?
- What evidence do you have to support this view?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project at any time without comment or penalty. If you withdraw, on request any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with Hanoi National University of Education, your reputation at your university, or any future involvement with Queensland University of Technology.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is not expected that the study will directly benefit you. However, the study will contribute to the improvement of assessment practices in Vietnamese Higher Education, and so will indirectly benefit you as a lecturer in this system. You may benefit through your involvement in the interviews and classroom observations, as you reflect on your teaching practices to support student learning. The outcomes of this study will be reported to you so that you may recognize your strengths in teaching and some areas for improvement to enhance your own quality of teaching.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project except for the inconvenience of your time, and the risk of coercion, discomfort and reputation when providing your responses. The researcher will negotiate a suitable time to conduct the interviews with you. The focus of the interviews is on assessment methods that support student learning, rather than your individual practices. You will not suffer any negative consequences for your decision regarding participation or withdrawal from the research. Your reputation will be protected by ensuring your privacy and confidentiality as stated in the following section.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. Your name will be coded using a pseudonym in any of the responses.

The study will also involve audio recording. Please note that you will have the opportunity to verify your comments and responses prior to final inclusion and the audio records will be destroyed at the end of the project. Moreover, these records will be stored securely and only the PhD student and her Supervisors will have access to them.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Please sign the enclosed consent form to confirm your agreement to participate.

QUESTIONS/FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below.

Thi Nhat Ho	**Professor Valentina Klenowski**
PhD student	**Supervisor**
School of Cultural and Professional Learning	School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Faculty of Education, QUT	Faculty of Education, QUT
Phone: (+84) 986007738	
(+61) 449675689	Phone: (+61) 731383415
Email: thi.ho@student.qut.edu.au	Email: val.klenowski@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on [+61 7] 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

QUT Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT** **Student Focus Group**
An Exploratory Investigation of the Practice of Assessment for Learning in Vietnamese Higher Education: Three Case Studies of Lecturers' Practice **QUT Ethics Approval Number: 1300000200**	

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

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Faculty of Education, QUT

 Phone: (+61) 731383415
 Email: val.klenowski@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on [+61 7] 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the interview will be audio recorded.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………….
Signiture:……………………………………………………………………………….
Date:……………………………………………………………………………………

MEDIA RELEASE PROMOTIONS

From time to time, we may like to promote our research to the general public through, for example, newspaper articles. Would you be willing to be contacted by QUT Media and Communications for possible inclusion in such stories? By ticking this box, it only means you are choosing to be contacted – you can still decide at the time not to be involved in any promotions.

☐ Yes, you may contact me about inclusion in promotions.

☐ No, I do not wish to be contacted about inclusion in promotions.

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

APPENDIX J

PATICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

QUT Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT** **Student Focus Group**
An Exploratory Investigation of the Practice of Assessment for Learning in Vietnamese Higher Education: Three Case Studies of Lecturers' Practice **QUT Ethics Approval Number: 1300000200**	

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher:	**Thi Nhat Ho, PhD student, QUT**	**Supervisor: Professor Valentina Klenowski**
	Phone: (+84) 986007738 (+61) 449675689	Phone: (+61)731383415
	Email: thi.ho@student.qut.edu.au	Email: val.klenowski@qut.edu.au

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD study for Thi Nhat Ho. The purpose of this project is to investigate the practice of assessment for learning in Vietnamese higher education. The research will be an in-depth analysis of how assessment strategies for learning are used and what sociocultural factors may support or hinder the use of assessment for learning in Vietnamese universities.

You are invited to participate in this project because you are one of the students of the lecturer [name] who has agreed to participate in the study. This study is looking at how assessment strategies are used to promote student learning in Vietnamese higher education. Your learning experiences in the unit of the lecturer [name] are very important for the researcher to understand the practice of assessment for learning in Vietnamese universities. Research findings and implications from this study may enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation will involve five audio recorded focus group interviews at your campus or other agreed location that will take approximately thirty to forty minutes of your time. Questions will include ten to twelve indicative questions related to your learning experiences in the unit such as:

* Describe your experiences when you took part in the group discussions
* How do you respond to the lecturer's feedback and peer feedback? Why?

Please note that if you arrive late it may not be possible for you to participate.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. If you withdraw, no further data from you will be collected and your previous statements will not be used in the focus group interviews. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with Hanoi National University of Education, your grades in the unit, or any possible future involvement with the Queensland University of Technology.

It is not expected that this project will directly benefit you however the study will contribute to the improvement of assessment practices in Vietnamese Higher Education. You may benefit from the focus group discussions as you discuss your participation in the class with other students in the group.

| RISKS |

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project except for the inconvenience of your time, and the risk of discomfort as you contribute your opinions to the group discussion. The researcher will negotiate a suitable time to conduct the focus group interviews with you. The focus of the interviews is on the assessment methods that support your learning, rather than the individual teaching practices of your lecturers. You will not suffer any negative consequences for your decision regarding participation or withdrawal from the research. Your reputation will be protected by ensuring your privacy and confidentiality as stated in the following section.

| PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY |

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. For example, your name will be coded using a pseudonym in any of your responses. The study will use audio to record information. The audio records will be used only for the research purposes, particularly to avoid missing information during interviews. Only the PhD student and her Supervisors will have access to the audio records before they are destroyed at the end of the study.

| CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE |

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

| QUESTIONS/FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT |

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below.

Thi Nhat Ho
PhD student
School of Cultural and Professional Learning
Faculty of Education, QUT
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      (+61) 449675689
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Professor Valentina Klenowski
 Supervisor
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Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

QUT Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	**CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT Student Focus Group**
An Exploratory Investigation of the Practice of Assessment for Learning in Vietnamese Higher Education: Three Case Studies of Lecturers' Practice QUT Ethics Approval Number: 1300000200	

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Thi Nhat Ho **PhD student** School of Cultural and Professional Learning Faculty of Education, QUT Phone: (+84) 986007738 　　　　(+61) 449675689 Email:　　thi.ho@student.qut.edu.au	**Professor Valentina Klenowski** **Supervisor** School of Cultural and Professional Learning Faculty of Education, QUT Phone: (+61) 731383415 Email: val.klenowski@qut.edu.au

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- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on [+61 7] 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the focus group interviews will be audio recorded.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name: ………………………………………………………………………………….
Signiture:………………………………………………………………………………….
Date:………………………………………………………………………………………

MEDIA RELEASE PROMOTIONS

From time to time, we may like to promote our research to the general public through, for example, newspaper articles. Would you be willing to be contacted by QUT Media and Communications for possible inclusion in such stories? By ticking this box, it only means you are choosing to be contacted – you can still decide at the time not to be involved in any promotions.

☐ Yes, you may contact me about inclusion in promotions.

☐ No, I do not wish to be contacted about inclusion in promotions.

Please return this sheet to the investigator