Logics and Politics of Professionalism
The case of university English language teachers in Vietnam

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Abstract

Set against a changing backdrop of reforms in higher education and English language teaching (ELT), the thesis explores the notion of professionalism for university English teachers in Vietnam: What is defined as professionalism in this particular period of time? How is professionalism constructed in this context?

The research approaches professionalism as a critical concept: A list of aspired traits and features are always value-laden and concern the question of power. From this premise, the thesis discusses a “kaleidoscope” relationship between different actors in the making of professionalism. Using Freidson’s (2001) ideas on the contingencies of professionalism, the study views the notion as a process rather than a product. Professionalism has its own logic that needs to be respected, but this logic is also incidental to other logics for its establishment and development.

The study uses embedded case study to address its research questions. Defining the case as professionalism for university ELT teachers in contemporary Vietnam higher education, the thesis studies the notion as articulated at national, institutional, and individual levels. The primary data sources include five national policies, institutional policies and management practices at a university and its foreign languages department, and interviews with six academic managers and eleven ELT lecturers. The data were analysed using thematic analysis approach within constructivist, interpretive traditions.

The results show that professionalism for ELT lecturers in Vietnam can largely be characterised as a professionalism of entrepreneurship, measurability and functionality. ELT is largely considered as a tool for international integration. Each type of professionalism project involves several actors (the state, expert groups, the institution, and ELT academics) with their own logic, but they interrelate in responding to the imperatives of the knowledge-based economy and globalisation. How the meaning of professionalism is established and argued for by the different actors in this study reveals that it is not easy to conceptualise the notion in a binary system of “from above” professionalism versus “from within” professionalism; and “organisational” professionalism versus “occupational” professionalism. The complexities of the logics of professionalism – with an “s”, affect whether a professionalisation project can be perceived as being positive or negative – Is it professionalisation or is it deprofessionalisation? The relativity of “from above” and “from within” reflects the contingencies of professionalism, and also suggests authority power is plural, shifting, and fluid, rather than single, normative, and static. Meanwhile, it means human’s individual power is not of an ultimate freedom but dependent on external conditions. With these considerations, the study proposes interpreting professionalism as a “social contract”. This helps not only recognise a mutual relationship between the state, the institution, and academics, but also illuminate how each party enables, maintains, and contributes to this relationship.
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List of abbreviations

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CPD Continuing Professional Development
EFL English as a Foreign Language
ELT English Language Teaching
ETCF English Teacher Competency Framework, Vietnam
FL Foreign Languages
HE Higher Education
HEIs Higher education institutions
HERA Higher Education Reform Agenda, Vietnam
IELTS International English Language Testing System
KPIs Key Performance Indices
MOET Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam
NFL Project 2020 National Foreign Languages Project 2020, Vietnam
TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC Test of English for International Communication
Chapter 1 Introduction

The chapter outlines the design of my thesis. In what follows, I elaborate on the formulation of my research problems informed by prior research and theories and also by the researcher’s personal epistemological and ontological beliefs. A brief introduction to the methods that I used to achieve the research aims and goals are then provided. The last section presents the thesis’s organisation by describing the main themes and contents of the chapters.

1.1 Background

In many parts of the world, the attainment of quality has been stressed as one of the key items in higher education agendas at both national and international levels, for example, the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Higher Education Research Clusters 2010, Australia’s Advancing Quality in Higher Education initiative 2012, the EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education 2012, and the Quality Teaching in Higher Education Project of the OECD programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) 2012–2013. The discourse of quality management, together with pressures from the market, has been found to significantly affect states’ educational systems, norms and values, as well as teacher professional work, skills, identities and autonomy (e.g. Clegg, 2008; Ball, 2003, 2012; Hasselberg, 2013; Alexiadou, Dovemark, Erixon Arreman, Holm, Lundahl, & Lundström, 2016). Professionalism is now interpreted as a political product and a discourse – the discourse of professionalism (e.g. Ozga, 1995; Day & Sachs, 2004; Evetts, 2009, 2013; Sachs, 2013).

My research explores the notion of professionalism in higher education. Specifically, focusing on university English language teachers, the study investigates dimensions of professionalism and its making in the contemporary higher education of Vietnam. In Vietnam, as in many other countries, the government has shown a strong commitment to investing in higher education, reflected in a number of newly approved key policies, including the Vietnam Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) for 2006–2020, the Higher Education Law 2012, and various accompanying legal documents especially in the period of 2014–2015. The foremost common aims stated in these policies are to improve the quality of teaching at universities and to meet international standards.

In line with these developments, the teaching of English at tertiary level has been put in focus since English is increasingly regarded as the necessary constituent in the nation’s economic development and international competitiveness. At present, English in Southeast Asian countries, as noted by Kirkpatrick (2010), is viewed as the language of creation and dissemination, modernisation and advancement. As the (sole) working language of ASEAN, English is promoted as the communication tool
between governments, businesses, and local populations; a means to develop and make use of technical, business, and negotiation skills, to obtain successful employment, and to realise economic prospects in the region (Stroupe & Kimura, 2015). With the current Vietnam National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (NFL Project 2020) launched during 2010–2011 as an initiative by the government to improve the foreign language learning and teaching system nationally (Government of Vietnam, Decision 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008), a number of goals are set to raise the quality of English language teachers, including university English teachers. These goals relate to the introduction of a CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) compatible proficiency benchmark test for English teachers of all levels, and the English Teacher Competency Framework ETCF which identifies the knowledge and skills expected of English teachers (2012). These new developments in both the higher education sector and English language education in Vietnam, similar to the situation in other countries in the region (e.g. Malaysia, Thailand), are likely to make significant impacts on English teaching as a profession as well as on English language teachers as professionals.

Set in this context, my study explores professionalism for university English teachers in Vietnam: What is defined as professionalism in higher education in this particular period of time? How is professionalism constructed in this context? The purposes of the study can be described as “to explore, to describe, to portray, to interpret, to understand, and to raise issues” (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.538).

1.2 Why this study of “professionalism”? 

First, that the concept professionalism is contested, situated, and changing (Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009; Sachs, 2013) is itself a rationale that makes the notion well worth research inquiry. The research, as stated above, besides studying the contents of professionalism, explores its construction, and this sheds light on not only who is involved in the process but also their logic as well as the dynamic interrelation of these logics (the logics and politics of professionalism, as the thesis’s title – borrowing Freidson’s (2001) words, may suggest). Thus, an exploration of university teacher professionalism can reveal more than a list of aspired competencies and qualifications (a trait-based approach). The research, while recognising the importance of studies that address the topic of good/effective (ELT) university teaching (e.g. Andrews, 2003; Brookfield, 2006; Burden, Bond, & Hall, 2006; Murray & Christison, 2011; Richards, 2011; Bhatti, 2012), adds an additional aspect by going beyond the trait-based approach and provides a critical discussion on the relationship between university teachers and the larger discourses surrounding them – including their institution and society contexts. In the particular field of English language teaching (ELT), the topic of ELT professionalism appears to
be not yet widely researched. A review of the literature on professionalism in ELT presented in Chapter 3 indicates that the notion needs to be understood simultaneously from a trait-based perspective and a critical dimension.

Second, although studies on language teacher professionalism are expanding, most of them have focused on teachers at school level rather than in higher education (e.g. Nunan, 2001; Nagatomo, 2012; Borg, 2013). The task of teaching in higher education is indeed different from school education, as Humboldt (1809/10) long ago asserted. While university teaching shares common characteristics with teaching in general, it has aspects of a more sophisticated nature that involves more fully developed content knowledge and a “feeling for the discipline” (Entwistle & Walker, 2002, p.23). Universities have a culture that lies more in research and publication – which is distinctive from that of schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Also, being a university teacher implies a special status characterised by expertise, merit, and academic freedom (Getman, 1992). Researching teaching in higher education should thus be “broader in scope and takes into account the complexity and contextuality of the work, and the importance of virtuous dispositions and caring endeavour in teaching” (Fitzmaurice, 2010).

In the Vietnam context, research on teacher professionalism remains limited. Most of the few studies in this area deal with teacher quality development in general, and from a teaching effectiveness approach rather than a critical perspective. For example, the research by Griffin, Nguyen Thi Kim Cuc, Gillis, & Mai Thi Thanh (2006), within a project by Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training, validates a standard framework for teachers (of all subjects) of primary education. The study by Nguyen Thu Tuan (2016) proposes a model for training high-quality fine arts teachers in Vietnam. Vo Thanh Nhan, Violato, Pham Le An, & Beran (2014) investigate students’ perceptions to construct a model of medical professionalism developed from a US item-based professional instrument. Meanwhile, little literature was found on the topic of English language lecturers, and most studies tend to concentrate on ELT teachers’ professional identity (e.g. Phan Le Ha, 2008; Bright, 2012; Le Van Canh, 2013). Pham Hoa Hiep (2006) conducts a study on the work of ELT lecturers in universities in Vietnam with a particular emphasis on research culture. A more recent study by Tran Le Huu Nghia (2015) looks exclusively at university English language teachers but focuses on students’ perception of the qualities of an effective English teacher. So far it appears that no in-depth research on the concept of “professionalism” for the group of university English teachers has been conducted in Vietnam – a gap that this thesis aims to bridge.

Finally, the focus on university ELT is motivated by my personal experience and background. Having worked as an academic manager of the English language department at a university in Vietnam, I have always been interested in staff development and teacher professionalism. However, being an English teacher and
then a teacher educator myself, I was also intrigued by the impacts of a “market oriented” managerial approach on teacher work.

With this research problem built on a combination of personal, intellectual, as well as practical motivations (Maxwell, 2013), the thesis provides insights into the dimensions and principles underpinning the construction of contemporary professionalism for university English teachers in Vietnam. It, therefore, contributes to the growing literature on this area. In terms of a more practical impact, the thesis does not aim to suggest specific solutions, or advocate a particular set of actions, since the case study, as explained below and in more detail in Chapter 5 Methodology, focuses on analytical aspects (Yin, 2014). Yet university (English language) teachers may use the research findings to relate to their own reflection on the nature of their work, their professional identity and autonomy, and the interconnection with the surrounding contexts. The findings from the study may be useful for education decision-makers in supporting the work of teachers as they consider and recognise the voice, the role, and the rights of teachers as professionals, which are commonly under-represented in policy planning and implementation (Kiely, 2012).

1.3 Theoretical bases and key concepts

In this section, an introduction of Eliot Freidson’s (2001) ideas on professionalism (further elaborated in Chapter 2), which serves as my research’s theoretical framework, is provided, alongside the key concepts as they are used in this thesis.

“Profession” and “occupation”

These two terms, though sharing a common literal meaning referring to “a work” or “a job”, have different connotations. Profession represents “a distinct and generic category of occupational work” (Evetts, 2013, p.7), while occupation can be seen as having a more neutral, technical meaning. Indeed, not all occupations are called “professions” – only “privileged, high status, high-income occupational groups” (Evetts, 2009, p.13). In his study researching the history of professions, Crook (2008) notes that the concepts of “professions” and “professionals” are identifiable from the middle ages, with those working in theology, medicine, governance, and law. Other occupational groups who seek recognition as professions in this “battle for acceptance” (Crook, 2008, p.14), have been regarded as “semi-professions”, such as midwives and nurses.

In the literature on the teaching profession, teaching was historically viewed as a “semi-profession” (Etzioni, 1969). Regarding higher education, with the development of universities especially in Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries, professors and academics were considered professionals as their work rose to the status of a
“new profession” (Crook, 2008). In China, Crook (2008) also records an official recognition of the state of professors as being among the “elite professions”. In Vietnam, though generally there seems to be no word to distinguish “profession” from “occupation” (like the case of Chinese), teaching is considered “the noblest occupation of all” (Chapter 4), so it is not easy to say if “profession” or “occupation” is more suitable to describe the work involved. Given the value-embedded nature of the term “profession”, while considering its connotation in Vietnamese – both linguistically and culturally, in this thesis where the discussion is on professions as a general topic, “occupation” is used as a more neutral term, while “profession” has a tone denoting an ideal concept. Where the discussion is about teaching in Vietnam in particular, “occupation” and “profession” will be used interchangeably.

“Professionalism”

My study approaches professionalism not only as a list of qualities but also as a critical concept: Particular aspired traits and features cannot come out of a vacuum, and since they are value-laden, whether for the sake of the occupation or authority or ideology, there seems to be always a question of power involved. From this premise, the research resonates with Gewirtz et al.’s (2009, p.4) view – which follows Freidson’s (1994, 2001) ideas – seeing professionalism “both as a mode of social coordination and as shorthand for a (shifting and contested) set of occupational virtues”. These scholars view professionalism as a set of specialist knowledge and skills that are controlled by occupations, but their work is organised and protected by social forces: With professionalism perceived as a social coordination, professional groups “need a certain amount of social power and collective autonomy” yet “need to show why professionals can and ought to be trusted” (Gewirtz et al., 2009, p.4).

“Professionalisation”

The term refers to the process in which an occupation attempts to achieve the status of profession. Professionalisation can be initiated, however, by different forces. If it is implemented by the occupational group itself in manipulating either the market or the state, or both, – it is professionalisation “from within”, while if the process is by those external to the group such as the state, it is professionalisation “from above” (McClelland, 1990). Evetts (2009) notes that most contemporary public service occupations have been subject to a professionalisation “from above” by employers and managers who impose particular measures, limit the exercise of discretion, and prevent a service ethic – the important elements of professional work.
Professionalism as an ideal type and the contingencies of professionalism

Freidson took a great interest in the relationship between professions and political and economic contexts, which can be seen in his works, for example his books in 1994 (Professionalism reborn: Theory, prophecy and policy) and 2001 (Professionalism: The third logic). This thesis benefits mostly from his 2001 book since it provides an analysis of professionalism relevant to the study’s purposes.

Freidson’s conceptualisation sees the notion of professionalism as being political and emphasises the roles of the different forces engaged in the construction of the concept. Professionalism has its own logic that needs to be respected, and this logic is also incidental to other logics – the logic of bureaucracy and that of the market. He does not segregate professionalism from other parts of the society, as he reasonably identifies the critical contingencies required for the establishment and development of professionalism. Freidson, however, emphasises that the relationship between professionalism and other forces must be a bilateral one, where the logics of all actors are considered. In this way, Freidson’s model can probably be related to a more recent conceptualisation of a “democratic professionalism” which aims to demystify professional work and recognise the involvement of different stakeholders (Whitty, 2008) and where teachers have more voice in negotiating desirable outcomes (Kennedy, 2014). The model, as Freidson puts it, is a “stable framework” for investigating empirical cases of professionalism for both constituent elements (theoretical constants) and the interaction among the variables (contingencies), and a theoretical foundation for discussing social policy (Freidson, 2001, pp.180–181). The framework is thus a relevant choice for my research, which aims at the what and the how in exploring the processes which establish and maintain professionalism. With its exploratory, constructivist nature, the thesis employs Freidson’s ideas following a reflexive approach rather than as a normative frame to understand professionalism especially in today’s changing higher education contexts. The study thus uses theories as a tool, but it also hopes to “contribute to and build on” existing theoretical approaches (Phillips, 2014, p.78).

1.4 Mapping the research territory

The research covers the field of English language teaching (ELT) and studies the work of English language teachers in higher education. The term “university English language teachers” used in this thesis refers to Vietnamese academics who are teaching English as a curriculum subject at universities in Vietnam. In this way, at the core of the study lies the area where professionalism, higher education, and ELT, intersect. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this hybrid field of university ELT teacher professionalism has not been so far extensively researched.
How to understand the nature of language teaching, including English language teaching, has been the topic of a number of studies. Studies by Kiely & Davis (2009), Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011), and Ellis (2012), for example, see the field through the lens of teachers’ classroom work. Adopting a sociocultural approach to tertiary ELT (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014), my study treats this field as both a site of classroom practices (which engages the interaction of the people directly involved in it as learners, teachers, administrators, etc.) and one that is shaped by larger external factors including institutions, societies, and cultural and political forces. In other words, teacher professionalism is considered in this research against a sociocultural context rather than only classroom interactions. The study attempts to move beyond the “institutional parochialism” that isolates education systems, institutions and practices; rather, it analyses them in connection and problematises these relations (Dale, 2005, p.134).

Within the scale of the thesis, these intentions allow my study to temporarily withdraw from deconstructing ELT as subfields, for instance, English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP); or English skills & areas (e.g. speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, pronunciation); as well as other issues such as native-/non-native English teachers.

1.5 Research design and Research questions

The literature on research methodology has stressed the need for concretising the research design in a connected way (e.g. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). My research aims at exploring the notion of professionalism as it is constructed by contemporary discourses of higher education, and the purposes of the research, the nature of the questions asked, its knowledge interests, and data collection and analysis were made interrelated.

In its early development, the thesis’s overall aim had been formulated as to explore the notion of “teaching excellence” in (ELT) higher education. Preliminary research was then conducted in one university in Sweden to sharpen the research focus. Initial findings from this suggested that the notion of teaching excellence tends to convey a focus on teaching rather than other dimensions of teachers’ work. Also, my Swedish preliminary research revealed that “excellence” is more commonly perceived as a rhetoric term by the authority rather than something related to academics’ work life. Thus, while these findings mirror the literature on “teaching excellence” (e.g. Little, Locke, Parker, & Richardson, 2007; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Skelton, 2009), although “teaching excellence” might be an interesting research inquiry, making it as the key concept of my project would not have been relevant to its aim, which is to explore the work of academics and how it is conceptualised. As a result, the research’s central focus was changed to studying the notion of professionalism. A
reading of the literature showed that “professionalism” seems to have a broader range of connotations than “teaching excellence”, and can thus allow a more multi-angled approach and enable the study to adhere to its original aim, which intends to explore a particular social phenomenon as an object of thoughts and “an array of problems, questions and forms of analysis” (Loveless & Williamson, 2013, p.xiii). This at the same time is consistent with the research’s epistemological positioning. The proposition that professionalism should be understood as a socially constructed notion reflects my own beliefs which I share with constructivist scientists with naturalistic, qualitative, interpretative perspectives and approaches. Within this paradigm, the reality is viewed as being multi-layered, fluid, and complex. Placing my theoretical stance as resonating with Freidson’s conception of professionalism as an interaction between different forces is relevant to this paradigm.

With this new focus on “professionalism”, a detailed procedure for data collection, including interview protocol, was then developed and conducted in one university in the UK and two universities in Vietnam, with an initial plan for a comparative study of the two contexts. However, it was decided that only one participating university in Vietnam would be analysed in this study. Since the thesis uses the data from both the policy discourse in Vietnam and from a university site, and given the study’s emphasis on logical connections within empirical data in order to build on theories, the decision for a single case study remains valid. According to Small (2009, p.19), the most prominent recent answer to the issue of validity in case studies has been the extended case method, by which a particular social situation is analysed in relation to the broader social forces shaping it, as the ultimate purpose here is “refining or reconstructing a theory, rather than identifying an empirical fact about society” (Small, 2009, p.21). In addition, these sources of data (one country’s wider discourses with a particular site, instead of three sites in two different countries) proved to be sufficient for the scope of an in-depth qualitative doctoral thesis.

Focusing on university English language teachers, the study explores professionalism and its making in the contemporary higher education in Vietnam, and these aims are articulated as two overarching research inquiries, which I call Big Inquiries (BIs): What professionalism constitutes in higher education at this particular period of time? How is professionalism constructed in this context? Thus, the research takes an interest in both the contents of professionalism (the “what”) and its conceptualisation (the “how”). Although the results concerning the contents of professionalism can be valuable themselves regarding the area of teacher development, in the thesis they serve as the springboard to further explore the dynamics of the making of the concept. With its central interest in studying social relationships in an existing society, the thesis thus places itself closer to educational sociology rather than pedagogical classroom-based research. By exploring the construction of professionalism and to make it more visible and comprehensible, the study hopes to provide insights that, finally, may pave the way to adopting a
different view towards the relationship between different players in the process of establishing professionalism. In this way, if seen from Habermas’s (1972) construction of knowledge interests, the knowledge the thesis seeks starts from serving a technical interest (e.g. the contents of professionalism) to concentrate primarily on a practical interest (understanding the phenomenon with its socio-cultural patterns) and begins to move towards an emancipatory interest (problematising the power question).

With a constructivist ontology and epistemology, combined with my theoretical standpoint regarding the nature of professionalism as a socially-constructed concept, and informed by prior literature on the issue, I chose to use embedded case study (Yin, 2014). Thematic analysis, in connection with historical, cultural, and social contexts with relationships, values, politics, and power, was employed. In my thesis, the case is defined as professionalism for university ELT teachers in the context of Vietnamese higher education. Within its scope, the thesis does not cover the analysis of some particular stakeholders, including students, the market, and professional groups (e.g. ELT professional associations and Teachers’ Unions). Until the time of study, there exists no official nation-wide professional associations for ELT teachers in Vietnam, while the Teachers’ Unions, at least in institutional contexts, often function as part of the management system rather than occupying an independent position. Also, while the roles of the market and the voice of students are of potential interest to this project, they are discussed in connection with the research inquiries rather than taking a central emphasis.

Instead, the relationship between authority (the state/the institution) and academics is focused. Since “a case study would have to cover both the phenomenon of interest and its context” (Yin, 2014, p.59), and following my research questions and theoretical standpoint seeing professionalism from a constructivist dimension, the analysis is not confined to an institutional setting. The thesis studies professionalism as it is articulated at national level (national policies), institutional level (policies and mechanisms at one university and its foreign languages department), and individual level (ELT academics). In the early 19th century, Humboldt (1809/10) noted that in the interaction between the state, the university, and university teachers, tensions exist as each of them have different concerns: the state has its own ends; the university stands between practical life and the needs of the state; and academies are interested mainly in science and scholarship. However, the three levels (“macro structures”, “meso structures” and “personal biographies” (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006, p.611) are closely connected, since “our work and experiences within education institutions, our practices through curriculum, pedagogy and through institutional positioning in local, national or even international league tables are shaped by policy frameworks and policy designs” (Alexiadou, 2014, p.113). In this way, my case is treated as an embedded entity of interconnected components, where holistic
qualitative analysis, rather than statistical analysis, will be focused (Yin, 2014, p.40). In other words, it aims at a logical and not a statistical inference (Small, 2009).

Thus, the case has an embedded design where analysis levels are related and connected, and constituent units of analysis (policy documents, management mechanisms, and people interviews) are studied corresponding to the original inquiries (the “what” and the “how”) and also in relation to each other. The main sources of evidence building up the study’s database include policies, web archival documents, interviews, and field notes. At national level, five key policies related to professionalism currently applying to (ELT) university teachers in Vietnam were selected. At institutional level, the data include institutional policies, web archival documents, field notes, and interviews with six academic managers at a specific local site, which is a higher education institution in Vietnam where English is offered as a subject in the curriculum. As for individual level, eleven interviews were conducted with teachers working in the English department. In this way, the study sees the university as a dynamic workplace with its own politics of intra-organisational interests (Bidwell, 2012).

Policy document and interview analysis were used as research tools within constructivist, interpretive traditions. The study treats policy as “an area of contestation, struggle and negotiation” between actors, thus seeing policy as something “to be problematized rather than accepted on face-value as part of governmental and everyday life” (Gulson, Clarke, & Petersen, 2015, pp.6–7). For interviews, participants’ perspectives were sought and analysed. I am aware that there is always a gap between a life-as-lived, a life-as-experienced, and a life-as-told (Bruner, 1984). However, one the research’s aims is to explore human conceptualisation; it thus holds that language does not only describe social practices – it is also part of them. It is used as a medium by people who act as social actors and they play their roles using words; therefore social practices can be studied with words taken as “authentic” and as part of the practices (Giddens, 1979, p.252).

These methodological standpoints are in turn in line with constructivism, which holds that truth is subjective, situated, and plural (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). With all these considerations and intentions, the two overarching Big Inquiries of the thesis are reformulated into the following research questions (RQs).

RQ1: What is professionalism as it is articulated in Vietnam contemporary policy discourse on university (ELT) teachers? What are the values and priorities underpinning this articulation? How do these values and priorities reveal insights into the construction of professionalism?  
RQ2: What is professionalism as it is conceptualised through institutional policies and management mechanisms in a particular university, with its English department, in Vietnam? What are the values and priorities underpinning this conceptualisation? How do these values and priorities reveal insights into the
construction of professionalism?

RQ3: What is professionalism as it is conceptualised by ELT academics in the department? What are the values and priorities underpinning this conceptualisation? How do these values and priorities reveal insights into the construction of professionalism?

Figure 1 illustrates the research design – further details about methodology are provided in Chapter 4. Both the lined and dashed (one-way and two-way) arrows try to depict the interrelationship between the elements. Indeed, more dashed arrows could have been included, given that the study design took place as a recursive process (Maxwell, 2013) rather than a linear one. For example, the theoretical positioning informs the two Big Inquiries, and thus shapes the formulation of each RQ. The methodological decisions for data collection and analysis address the RQs, but they also relate to the researcher’s ontology and epistemology and theoretical standpoints on professionalism.

Figure 1. Study design

Since the study holds that in today’s world, educational research should go beyond the methodological nationalism, statism, and educationalism and view education as being embedded in larger socio-political and cultural discourses (e.g. Weaver-
Hightower, 2008; Pennington & Hoekji, 2014; Robertson & Dale, 2015), the case investigated, though has its own particular contexts, possesses shared features with the wider discourses it is situated in, in this case, globalisation. Universities are becoming more alike in the ways they respond to the surrounding discourses (Dale, 2005). That higher education institutions endeavour to secure a place in league tables, or the “college-rankings race”, has gone global (Hazelkorn, 2011). The relevance of the thesis is further strengthened given the rising role of English language as a lingua franca on an international scale, and particularly in ASEAN countries – which share more or less a similar foreign language history. At the same time, this in-depth study provides rich data that allow particular issues in Vietnam contexts to be discussed, which a “universal explanatory power” may not be able to cover (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

1.6 Organisation of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured into another eight chapters. Chapter 2, *The contingencies of professionalism*, discusses existing ideas on professionalism including Freidson’s (2001) theoretical concepts. Chapter 3, *The kaleidoscope of English language teacher professionalism*, using the discussion from the previous chapter, reviews the current issues in the field of ELT. Chapter 4, *Higher education and English language teaching in Vietnam: Values, priorities, and the current professionalisation*, serves as a contextual background to the analysis and facilitates the understanding of the current trends in higher education and ELT in Vietnam. Chapter 5, *Methodology*, explains the methodological choices selected to address the research aims and questions. Chapter 6, “Public employee lecturer” vs. “practising adaptive expert”? *Professionalism for university English language teachers in Vietnam contemporary policies*, addresses RQ1 and analyses professionalism as articulated in five major national-level policy documents. Chapter 7, *Stretching-the-limit: Professionalism realisation in an institutional context*, investigates how professionalism is established and operationalised in a university in Vietnam. Findings from this chapter answer RQ2. Chapter 8, *Between the two worlds: Professionalism from ELT academics’ perspectives*, is geared towards RQ3 and concentrates on the perceptions that university English teachers hold in regard to professionalism. Chapter 9, *Discussion and Conclusion: Logics and politics of professionalism*, provides a meta-level account on the dynamic construction of professionalism; proposes “social contract” as a potential concept to reimagine the relationship between different actors in that process; and discusses the thesis’s contributions.
Chapter 2 The contingencies of professionalism

This chapter outlines the theoretical background that underpins my research, which includes theories on professionalism\(^1\). Drawing on the literature review, the chapter suggests that the notion is both a set of occupational values and a critical, political concept. It argues that the discourse of professionalism is not static but has a dynamic nature where professionalisation “from within” and professionalisation “from above” interlink. With this positioning, the chapter discusses the possibility of employing Freidson’s (2001) theories to explore the construction of professionalism in the contemporary higher education.

2.1 Professionalism from a trait-based perspective and a critical approach

Professionalism is a shifting, contested concept. Acknowledging the complexities of professionalism, researchers have attempted to read this notion from different perspectives. Over the years the discussion on professionalism seems to revolve around two different interpretations: one that defines professionalism as a set of occupational values using a trait-based approach, and one that focuses more on the political aspect of the concept from a critical perspective (Evetts, 2009; Gewirtz et al., 2009; Lester, 2011). The trait-based approach tends to define professionalism in terms of main functional components that a professional needs to perform the work. Although the concept has a situated, changing nature (Freidson, 2001), the traits and qualities commonly identified often include skills (based on theoretical knowledge), education and certification, professional ethic codes, and collegiality (Hoyle, 1975; Evans, 2010). With these qualities, the professional is entitled to certain advantages such as favourable working conditions (e.g. higher income), trust, and autonomy.

Professionalism at the same time is viewed as a critical concept concerning power relations. For a particular set of occupational traits to be recognised as being of good quality and value, i.e. for an occupation to claim to be a profession, it requires the involvement of not only a professional or a professional organisation; the traits are also subject to judgement by others since in the first place the work is done at the request of those external parties, for example, an individual customer, an authority, or the society. If the priorities and perspectives of these parties are different from those that the professional or the organisation values, and if these external forces have primacy, then controversies or even conflicts are likely to happen since this infringes the key values of professionalism: trust and autonomy. This leads professionalism to acquire another aspect apart from the trait-based aspect: the

\(^1\) The following paper was developed from this chapter: Vu Mai Trang (2015). “The social contract”: On university English teacher professionalism, structure and agency. In L. Leite (Ed.), Transitions in teacher education and professional identities (pp.483–492). Braga, Portugal: Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE).
critical dimension. Indeed, it seems the question “What is professionalism?” can hardly be separated from the other political questions of “Who has the power to decide what counts as professionalism? And in whose interest?” As such, for teachers, “doing a good job” cannot be separated from a concern about autonomy and power (Gewirtz et al., 2009). In other words, the notion seems to always possess political aspects: it revolves around the questions of interest, autonomy, power, and primacy. This approach to studying professionalism concerns who has the control to construct professionalism – managers in workplaces or professional groups (Evetts, 2009); whose voices should be counted – teachers’ or other stakeholders’ (Whitty, 2008; Kennedy, 2014); and how much autonomy teachers should have in their work as professionals (Sachs 2003, 2013; Whitty, 2008).

Professionalism as a critical notion closely relates to the concept of “professionalisation” – or the process of professionalising an occupation. As briefly introduced in Chapter 1, in the current literature, “professionalisation” entails two main interpretations, which, again, is either harmful or helpful depending on whose interests they serve. Professionalisation of work refers to the process of raising the status or to validate the value of occupational groups (Weiner, 2002; Evetts, 2009). In this process, external rules are expected to be minimised to give place for trust and recognition to the professionals given their special status and recognised competencies (Freidson, 2001, p.34). However, professionalisation can be perceived as a process of occupational control (Ozga, 1995, p.21), and to legitimate “disparate neo-liberal government policies” (Weiner, 2002, p.277). Professionalisation can thus be associated with “strategy” (McClelland, 1990) or even becomes a “professionalising project” (Larson, 1977). The professionalising project is conducted to achieve particular goals.

It seems that these two readings of professionalisation are based on an interest-based principle: the work possesses particular values either to the occupation itself, the public, or the state or an elite (Freidson, 2001, p.214). What distinguishes them perhaps lies in who has the power to initiate the professionalisation process. Again, the political question of “Who can decide what counts as professionalism?” needs to be considered. Here the categorisation of professionalisation by McClelland (1990), which differentiates professionalisation “from within” and “from above”, is useful. Professionalisation “from within”, as McClelland (1990, p.107) puts it, is regarded as the attempt to successfully manipulate the market, or even the state, by the occupational group for its own benefits, while professionalism “from above” means a domination of forces external to the group. His conceptualisation hence reflects the question of how much power and autonomy occupational groups and individuals have in creating their own values and standards.
2.2 Contemporary higher education professionalism: dominated by a professionalisation “from above”?

A domination of managerialism?

Although professionalism has always been related to ideology and power, with the emergence of social trends including marketisation and especially managerialism, it appears that the concepts of professionalism and professionalisation are increasingly depicted as doing more harm than good to occupational values.

In contemporary higher education, professionalism takes up additional political dimensions that go beyond occupational elements. The knowledge economy and managerialism are said to have adjusted or repositioned the work and identities of teachers (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Whitchurch, 2008; Loveless & Williamson, 2013). In other words, the contemporary professionalism is seen as being constructed and imposed “from above”, using McClelland’s interpretation. The professionalisation “from above” creates what can be termed as the “from above” professionalism: professionalism is constructed and imposed by employers and managers and not occupational values (Evetts, 2009, p.22). The contemporary interpretation of professionalism can be said to have started in the 1970s that expanded from the more critical literature on professions prominent in Anglo-American studies of the time (Lester, 2011). This time witnessed the influence of external structure (e.g. the state or local authority) on teacher professionalism as it was more legislatively driven and controlled (Larson, 1977). This trend of professionalisation continues to the present day with a discourse of control used by managers in work organisations, which results in what is termed as “managerial professionalism”/“organisational professionalism”, which is differentiated from ”occupational professionalism” (Sachs, 2003; Whitty, 2008; Evetts, 2009; Kennedy, 2014).

Occupational professionalism and organisational professionalism

In education, within the critical view towards professionalism that poses political, power-related questions fuelled by the concerns about a domination of a professionalisation “from above”, scholars have been discussing two conceptualisations related to the notion. These two conceptualisations are given different names, for example: “teacher activist professionalism” and “managerial professionalism” (Sachs, 2001); “traditional professionalism” and “managerial professionalism” (Whitty, 2008); “occupational professionalism” and “organisational professionalism” (Evetts, 2009); “old professionalism” and “new professionalism” (Hasselberg, 2013), and “managerial professionalism” and “democratic professionalism” (Whitty, 2008; Kennedy, 2014). For example, Hasselberg (2013) emphasises professionals’ engagement in (or separation from) social discourses.
Discussing “old professionalism” and “new professionalism”, she claims for a separation of “old professionalism” from the larger society: “Professionals should not have values regarding the development of society; they should not be political, not even in the broadest sense of the word” (Hasselberg, 2013, p.139). Among these terms, “occupational professionalism” and “organisational professionalism” (Evetts, 2009) are selected to be elaborated here since they appear to cover the points that other classifications have included.

“Occupational professionalism” is defined as a discourse constructed by professional groups. Its core elements include collegial authority, discretion and occupational control of the work, and trust in practitioners by both clients and employers. The work is organised, judged, and assessed by practitioners. Qualified members are identified with lengthy specialised education and training. Occupational identities and work cultures are strongly pronounced. There exist codes of professional ethics which guide the operation of work, and these standards are monitored by professional institutes and associations.

“Organisational professionalism” refers to the professionalism resulting from a discourse of control used by managers in work organisations. Organisational professionalism holds the characteristics of a discourse that is impacted by managerialism: rational-legal forms of authority are combined with hierarchical structures, manifested through standardisation, accountability, and externalised forms of regulation.

As an ideal-type organisational professionalism is a discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organisations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of authority and hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making. It involves the increased standardisation of work procedures and practices and managerialist controls. It relies on externalised forms of regulation and accountability measures such as target-setting and performance review.

(Evetts, 2009, p.23)

These manifestations of “organisational professionalism” can be traced in what Sachs (2003, 2013) and Whitty (2008) terms as a “managerial professionalism” that controls practitioners by means of intervention including standardisation, supervision, and regulation.

With these features, “occupational professionalism” and “organisational professionalism” possess quite different, even contrasting, characteristics from one another. Occupational professionalism is controlled by professional groups, while organisational professionalism is controlled by managers, employers, and clients. As Evetts puts it, in today’s world, occupational professionalism is thwarted by organisational professionalism.
The appeal to the discourse of professionalism by managers most often includes
the substitution of organisational for professional values; bureaucratic,
hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; managerial
and organizational objectives rather than client trust based on competencies and
perhaps licensing; budgetary restrictions and financial rationalizations; the
standardization of work practices rather than discretion; and performance
targets, accountability and sometimes increased political control.

(Evetts, 2009, p.24)

In this way, the two imaginations of professionalism – “occupational
professionalism” and “organisational professionalism” – call for a disintegration of
professionalism from other parts of the society. As such, although professionalism is
perceived as being socially constructed, the current emphasis seems to be placed on
the dominant role of external forces. Professionalism is thus regarded as the outcome
of professionalisation projects which constrain academics and the profession rather
than enable them (Evetts, 2009; Lester, 2011). Organisational professionalism
regulates and replaces occupational control of the practitioner/client work
interactions (Evetts, 2009, p.23).

Humboldt (1809/10) once characterised the mission of higher education as
cultivating knowledge and scholarship. With the New Public Management
permeating into higher education institutions since the 1990s, professionalism for
academics has been concretised into quality assurance, outcomes-based, standards,
competencies, innovation, funding, public management, ranking, and accreditation.
The appearance of a managerialist “organisational professionalism” in higher
education is depicted as having challenged the traditional values of education:
students are now seen more as customers, and the purposes of education are greatly
impacted by a certain set of priorities including ranking systems for higher education
institutions. For example, universities are asked to quantify their research activities
into comparable indices, which puts lecturers under a real pressure of “publish or
perish”. This happens in the context of “league tables” that provide global, regional,
and even national rankings of universities in almost every part of the world. Another
example is the UK HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency), who on behalf of the
government, since 2013 has been collecting data on teaching qualifications held by
academics across the sector. Humes & Bryce (2003) discuss how the modern
university is criticised to have promoted the commodification of knowledge:
knowledge is now not an end itself but associated with industrial and commercial
contexts and research “output” is required. Organisational professionalism is thus
viewed as a political tool to keep individuals, and institutions, functioning
appropriately. It is a means, advocated by systems and employers, to manipulate the
employee (Days & Sachs, 2004).
Teachers in higher education seem to have more freedom in their work, in comparison with those in school education (Gustafsson, Fransson, Morberg, & Nordqvist, 2010). In addition, teaching at university seems to emphasise the integration of teachers’ selfhood into the subject: teachers partially define themselves by their academic interests or subject matter (Kreber, 2007).

However, the contemporary discourse of professionalism has been perceived to have profound effects on teacher work and identities. The present professionalism, long associated with managerialism, has been described as having transformed the conceptions of what it meant to be a professional (Apple, 2009, p.xiv). The professionalisation “from above” emphasises performance, accountability, measurement, productivity and requires one to be regulated and act “appropriately” by having “appropriate” work identities, conducts and practices (Whitchurch, 2008; Sachs, 2013; Field, 2015). Critiques describe the influences of this professionalising project as damaging: it deskills teachers, de-professionalises them, and destroys their academic soul (Ozga, 1995; Ball, 2003, 2012). In another critique, Power (2008, p.145) conceptualises the difficulty of being a contemporary professional by her depiction of “the distressed professional” (in terms of individual and/or institutional failings), and “the oppressed professional” (in terms of structural forces beyond the individual or the institution). Meanwhile, Barnett (2008) is concerned about the uncertainties of being a professional in “an age of supercomplexity”. Not only that the professional now lives with multiple identities, he or she “neither has his or her professionalism given in any real sense nor has carte blanche to shape it” (Barnett, 2008, p.196). The mission of doing research is now seen to have been turned into a “research industry”, and the focus on values such as quantity, productivity, and mechanisation is regarded as having harmed academics’ creativity (Bennich-Björkman, 2013). Higher education policy, with its technologies – “technicalisation, standardisation, managementisation, proletarisation, marketisation”, derives academics of discretionary decision-making (Hasselberg, 2013, p.142).

2.3 Relating professionalisation “from above” to professionalisation “from within”

The review of the literature on teacher professionalism presented in the earlier sections suggests that the current discussion increasingly separates, and even opposes, the involvement of the different players (e.g. occupational group and management) in coining the notion of professionalism. However, should (and can) the construction of professionalism be viewed as being segregated between a discourse “from above” and one “from within”?

While McClelland’s (1990) distinction between professionalisation “from above”
and professionalisation “from within” may be useful as a starting point for raising the question of authority over professionalism, this classification, if understood as a clear-cut division, may appear to be problematic, since it is not simple to determine whether or not a particular professionalism is the product of a “from above” or “from within” process.

To start with, the word *professionism* can be de-constructed into the noun *profession*. In his review article, Crook (2008) provides a description of how the so-called “classical professions” and “professional elites” of theology, medicine, and law emerged with the development of the modern state. The mid-nineteenth century saw the expansion of “old professions” to include university academics in Britain and across Western Europe and North America and as a result of a “professionalisation” of higher education driven by meritocracy, urbanisation, industrialisation, imperialism, modernisation and scientific rationality (Crook, 2008, p.14). These historical accounts imply that from the early day “professionalism” entails a process of practitioners and occupational groups seeking for recognition. This process was for either an “individualised professionalism” with which professionals strive to win customers trust and satisfaction and recognition, or for a political, ideological professionalism that serves the benefits of its occupational groups or of a particular ideology or power structures.

Hoyle (1975, p.15) defines professionalism as the strategies and rhetoric used by members of an occupation in seeking for better status, salary and conditions. Professionalisation in this sense happens voluntarily through the acquiring of aspirational attributes. Consequently, professionalisation is indeed not always negative and controlled. It is the desirable important characteristics that entitle professionals and professional associations to rights, power and privileges. Attempts to professionalise a particular occupation are motivated by practitioners’ wish to gain control of their field. “Successful” professionalisation is perceived as the “domination of the conditions under which professionals exercise their occupations, whether described as “autonomy” or “market monopolisation” (McClelland, 1990, p.98). Ideally, they will have market share, but the control can also provide autonomy that helps them move away from the market and bureaucratic forces to some degree (Freidson, 2001). Moreover, professionalism, and the professionalism discourse, is not always necessarily a battlefield where practitioners and their project of professionalising have to confront external discourses. In other words, “from within” professionalism can be inextricably linked with “from above” professionalism since traditionally the notion is interpreted in sociology with importance for the stability and civility of social systems (Evetts, 2009).

At the same time, if professionalisation “from within” and professionalisation “from above” is seen as a binary pair, this may pose the risk that how academics respond to their professionalism discourse might not be sufficiently attended to. With the depictions mentioned above, academic professionals emerge as those
distressed, suppressed, and regulated in their (isolated) sphere. However, alongside the critical accounts conceptualising the contemporary “from above” discourse of professionalism as having a damaging impact towards teacher professionals, there has been more empirical evidence on a responsive relationship between academics and the context. Research increasingly starts to shift the emphasis onto agency at a local, specific level and shows how teachers respond and react to externally driven change, especially educational reform and curriculum change. For example, in Sweden, Jonsson and Lundgren (2015) discuss how Swedish language teachers actively translate the goals stated in the national curriculum to develop students’ communication skills in their own classroom contexts. Lundström (2015) studies how teachers deal with the collision between professional beliefs and external pressures: teacher autonomy greatly depends on individuals’ and groups’ capacity to exercise possible degrees of discretion. In her research in a UK university, Clegg (2008) points out that despite all the pressure of performativity and managerialism, academics still manage to create spaces for principled personal autonomy and formulate their identities in terms of what they value. Similarly, Borg (2013) observes in his research that teachers have a way to compromise between striving for professional legitimacy and realising their own values and priorities. In their research conducted in the context of education reform in the US, Leander & Osborne (2008) find that teachers establish a responsive relationship between their positioning, identity and practices with their contexts. Gonzales (2014) identifies different ways academic faculty in a US institution achieve agency in “striving university contexts”: operationalizing, negotiating, and resisting.

The questions raised in this section about the roles and authority of different actors in the construction of professionalism create a need to further explore their relationship in these processes. For example, this “interrelationship” aspect can be seen in the promotion of “democratic professionalism”. Standing up for professionals and lying more along the line of “occupational professionalism”, “democratic professionalism” (Whitty, 2008; Kennedy, 2014) is built on “teacher activist professionalism” (Sachs, 2001, 2003) where teachers are agents of change. Democratic professionalism aims to open the engagement of different stakeholders, including students and teachers and not only the state, in enhancing teacher quality. Kennedy (2014, p.695) provides a framework for democratic professionalism by comparing it with managerial professionalism. The overall purpose of democratic professionalism is to promote developmental aspects of teacher quality, i.e. to enhance strengths and interests, not to fix weaknesses. The focus of professionalism is on a collective dimension rather than an individual one, and teacher learning is approached from a social constructivist perspective and not a behaviourist, instrumental perspective. Teacher knowledge is not defined as technical and role-focused, but values and beliefs are also acknowledged. Internally driven, teachers, taking the role of agents of change, actively engage in policy development and implementation and not just
comply with policy directives. Their work, meanwhile, is assessed against outcomes that are context-specific and negotiated, rather than externally prescribed standards. In a democratic professionalism, collaboration, openness, teacher autonomy, and social justice commitment are the values privileged (Whitty, 2008; Kennedy, 2014).

2.4 The contingencies of professionalism: An interpretation of Freidson’s “The third logic”

From a premise that discusses the connection between professionalisation “from above” and professionalisation “from within”, this section argues professionalism can be understood as a social coordination contingent on the forces engaged in its making, drawing on Eliot Freidson’s (2001) theoretical perspectives.

Among the scholars emphasising a critical approach to the concept of “professionalism” as always being political and value-embedded, Freidson proposes viewing the construction of the notion as resulting from an interrelated, instead of segregated, relationship between different forces (the occupation, bureaucracy, and the market). In his milestone book on the professions Professionalism: The third logic (2001), Freidson discusses the principles underlying that third logic. Drawing from other scholars’ works, he sets to “spell out” professionalism, first as the ideal type. Nevertheless, he also aims at “showing it to be a set of interconnected institutions providing the economic support and social organisation that sustains the occupational control of work” (p.2).

Freidson begins his book by depicting the logics of the market, bureaucracy (firm/organisation/public agency), and workers. The market as an ideal type is conceptualised as a world where “we are all free to buy and sell anything we choose, individually competing with each other to buy at the lowest price and sell for the highest possible price” and consumers can choose goods and services “rationally, to their own best interest” (p.1). Then, the ideal world of organisations that plan and control the production and distribution of goods and services is described as aiming to “assure consumers of reliable products at a reasonable cost”, and to achieve this they have “an elaborate set of rules” to control their employees for “predictability and efficiency” (p.1). Finally, the ideal-type world of those workers is visualised as a sphere where they, with their specialised knowledge, have the right to organise and control their work. Professionals do good work for their own satisfaction and for the benefits of others rather than to maximise their income, so “consumers and managers can count on work of high quality at reasonable costs” (p.2). As such, Freidson pictures these three different worlds as functioning based on their own principles – or as he calls it, “logics” – and all want to have optimal conditions for themselves.
Professionalism as an ideal type is understood as “a set of institutions which permit the members of an occupation to make a living while controlling their own work” (p.17). Relying on official definitions (p.152, italics in original) discussed in prior research, Freidson summarises ideal-typical professionalism as having five interdependent elements:

1. specialised work in the officially recognised economy that is believed to be grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skills and that is accordingly given special status in the labor forces;
2. exclusive jurisdiction in a particular division of labour created and controlled by occupational negotiation;
3. a sheltered position in both external and internal labor markets that is based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation;
4. a formal training program lying outside the labor market that produces the qualifying credentials, which is controlled by the occupation and associated with higher education; and
5. an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain and to the quality rather than the economic efficiency of work

(Freidson, 2001, p.127)

The elements reveal a number of technical and social assumptions underlying the logic of professionalism as the ideal type².

Professionalism can in the first place be imagined to consist of formal institutions (e.g. specialised knowledge and skills, a theoretical base, training) and these formal institutions provide the economic and social conditions (e.g. a sheltered position in the labour markets and an exclusive jurisdiction) that allow professionals to control their own work. These elements can be technically, objectively and empirically seen whether or not they exist by, for example, classifications and licensing. According to Freidson (p.34), specialisations – the essential bodies of knowledge and skills for a particular occupation, can be distinguished by the degree these types of knowledge are employed. In a mechanical specialisation, which Freidson relates to the work of pinmakers; tasks are characterised as “with a narrow, minute, or detailed range” and there is said to be little or no opportunity to vary the tasks to be performed or the way they can be performed; the tasks’ performance is “specially organised to minimise individual discretion” (p.23). Discretionary specialisation (e.g. the work of scientists), in contrast, involves tasks in which “discretion or fresh judgement must

² “Ideal type”, following Max Weber’s ideas, is an abstract, hypothetical, subjective concept, without the construction of which social science cannot be conducted.
often be exercised if they are to be performed successfully” (loc. cit.). Those practising discretionary specialisation may engage in some routines that can be quite mechanical, but they must be open to changing routine in situations that require discretionary judgement and action. A mechanical specialisation has a large proportion of everyday/tacit knowledge and skill, and a small proportion of practical and formal knowledge. A manual discretionary specialisation employs a large proportion of practical knowledge and moderate proportions of everyday knowledge, formal knowledge, and tacit knowledge. Meanwhile, in a mental discretionary specialisation, formal knowledge is higher than practical knowledge, while the proportions of everyday knowledge and tacit knowledge are small. It is this individual discretion that allows the potential for innovation and creativity.

As Freidson puts it, “the ideal-typical position of professionalism is founded on the official belief that the knowledge and skill of a particular specialisation requires a foundation in abstract concepts and formal learning and necessitates the exercise of discretion” (pp.34–35). Thus, in principle, mechanical specialisation owns fewer features to be thought as being close to ideal-type professionalism, while mental discretionary specialisation, employing a high proportion of formal knowledge, seems to be closest to professionalism as the ideal type. Manual discretionary specialisation lies somewhere between these two, with a high proportion of practical knowledge and a moderate proportion of formal knowledge.

At the root of these institutions are other elements less tangible yet important – the claims, values, and ideas, which Freidson calls ideology (p.105), that provide the rationale for these institutions of professionalism. Professionalism comprises specialised knowledge and skills brought about by formal training (desirably associated with higher education). This entails the social and economic privileges that the occupation and its practitioners enjoy: The distinct and specialised nature of the work makes it inaccessible to those who do not have the required training and experience and gives the occupation a control deciding the criteria. Indeed, in the above five elements, there is a strong sense of occupational control over the work: from what knowledge and skills are required for the training and recognition of the work (qualifying credentials), to how the work should be organised and evaluated (the criteria must be created and controlled by the occupation). Saying professionals act to the quality of the work rather than other motives also means trust and respect to take charge are required. Consequently, professionalism cannot be standardised, rationalised, or commodified (p.17) – it claims for independence. In order to persuade others, it deserves particular status and privileges.

Ideal-typical professionalism claims work is performed for its symbolic as well as its economic value, which underlies a commitment to work. The argument of professionalism is that, as Freidson records it, gaining a living is not its sole value, but work is performed more “for the pleasure of self-fulfilment” (p.107). The satisfaction of performing the work does not come primarily from serving others
(individual consumers or managers); instead, “satisfaction is intrinsic to the performance of work that is interesting and challenging because it is complex and requires the exercise of discretion” (p.108).

Professionalism claims to a discretionary specialisation – which to Freidson is its core ideology. Idea-typical professionalism argues that the work of trained and experienced specialists, who devote all their working time to a particular task and thus can cultivate their proficiency, is both superior to and more reliable that that of an amateur. A continual perfection of skills, insights, and knowledge enables people to develop creativity, flexibility, and adaptability among their tasks so that they can produce goods, services, and knowledge of high value. To specialise in one’s activity, rather than spread it, is thus claimed a duty. This valuation of specialisation (underpinned by a tension between specialised, narrowly trained knowledge and general knowledge and experience), as Freidson notes it, concerns the question of the social and political privileges specialists are allowed: “How much control should they have over the work they do, and over its application to human affairs; how much in the human affairs that lie beyond their specialty?” (p.114). The ideology of specialisation is used to legitimate the claim that only the specialists, with the capability to do the work, are able to evaluate and control it properly.

These ideal-typical ideologies of professionalism – or the claims, values, and ideas, by professionals to justify their status and prerogatives, as Freidson points out, are contrary to the ideologies of the market (Adam Smith’s model of the free market – “consumerism”) and bureaucracy (Max Weber’s model of rational-legal bureaucracy – “managerialism”). The free market is regarded as a fluid process comprising shifting demands by consumers. In a free market, workers “compete with each other for the consumer’s custom by claiming competence and leaving the consumer to evaluate their claims and consider the attractiveness of their wage demands” (p.79). Since satisfying customers’ demands is prioritised, the work that involves mechanical and discretionary specialisations is often unstable and varying. Tasks, being changing, can “develop no coherent identity” and those who perform them “are unlikely to be inclined or able to develop common occupational identity and consciousness” (p.47). The career-line of workers thus has no direction (p.65).

Meanwhile, the rational-legal bureaucracy system is based on standardised procedures and a clear chain of commands that stresses efficiency. Freidson describes this system, controlled neither by consumers nor by workers, as being characterised by clearly defined job roles, a hierarchical administrative apparatus, standardised procedures, and detailed record-keeping. The system is created by staff members of a hierarchy whose duty is to implement and advance the policies of their supervisors, whatever they may be (p.67). Workers who produce goods or services are obliged to perform duties by orderly means. Tasks are defined by written rules and arranged hierarchically/vertically as well as functionally. Job hiring, transfer, and promotion are determined by specified criteria of competence and other formal personnel
policies (p.68). The rational-legal model uses technologies and an impersonal management.

In the ideal-typical ideologies of consumerism and managerialism, work is primarily a means to gain a living or to hold a job (p.108). Thus it is assumed that workers are more motivated by a desire for increased income and to keep their jobs than by their commitment to the particular work they do. Consequently, work is the means to lead to the consumption of goods in leisure and to realise a production plan. As such, workers’ commitment to a particular work (and therefore a particular body of knowledge and skills) is “obstructive” and “undesirable” (p.109). Meanwhile, to ensure the production and distribution of goods and services of quality and at low cost, productivity, efficiency, and predictability are promoted in consumerism and managerialism, while in ideal-typical professionalism, standardised production is not preferred.

This, in turn, relates to the preference of generalism by both managerialism and consumerism over specialisation, which again contrasts with the core ideology of professionalism. A *general* kind of knowledge (p.115, italics in original) is valued by managerialism and consumerism more than specialised expertise, and this generalism is used to direct and evaluate specialised knowledge. “Populist generalism”, as Freidson calls it, is used by the ideology of consumerism – average people with ordinary human abilities, informed by everyday knowledge and skills and by learning, are capable of making economic and political choices without specialists to choose on their behalf (p.116). Meanwhile, “elite generalism”, asserted by the ideology of managerialism, claims the authority to command, organise, guide, and supervise both the choices of consumers and the productive work of specialists, because with its general knowledge it can organise, direct, and lead specialists, consumers, and citizens (p.117).

In this way, the elements, both tangibly technical and ideological, of ideal-typical professionalism, have been spelt out. Ideal-typical professionalism emphasises an ideology of service, which claims “both specialised knowledge that is authoritative in a functional or cognitive sense and commitment to a transcendent value that guides and adjudicates the way that knowledge is employed” (p.128). That transcendent value goes beyond serving others’ choices; it can be claimed to be Justice, Salvation, Beauty, Truth, Health, and Prosperity (p.122), and with this professional ideology of service, professionals can claim they are independent of judgment and free to act – they have the right to serve it [that transcendent value] independently (p.123, italics in original).

As such, possessing specialised knowledge and skills in order to perform a particular work, ideal-typical professionalism claims authority over the nature of the work and its organisation, and that the meaning and purpose of work, both in general and to those who perform it, are outside economic gain and polity. The central issue of ideal-typical professionalism, therefore, is a question of power – who
can claim authority, and this question lies in a contrasting separation of the occupation from being under the influences of the market and bureaucracy. In other words, ideal-type professionalism claims for “technical independence” (the control over what counted as the necessary qualities) and “ethical independence” (the control over the meaning of the work). Freidson highlights the contradictions between professionalism, the market and bureaucracy as “…monopoly is essential to professionalism which directly opposes it to the logic of competition in a free market. Freedom of judgement or discretion in performing work is also intrinsic to professionalism, which directly contradicts the managerial notion that efficiency is gained by minimizing discretion” (p.3).

In sum, as an ideal-type, professionalism may be said to exist when “an organised occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance” (p.12). When an occupation resembles more that ideal type of professionalism, the process of which is called professionalisation, while when that resemblance reduces, the process is called deprofessionalisation (p.128).

The contingencies of professionalism

Professionalism, as the ideal type, can thus be described as having a logic distinct from the logics of the market and bureaucracy. The elements of ideal-typical professionalism, in encouraging the ideology of service, support an independence from other forces. The core issue underpinning the claim of professionalism is, therefore, the political question of authority and power. Indeed, Freidson defines ideal professionalism as “the occupational control of work” and “one of three logically distinct methods of organizing and controlling” the circumstances surrounding the practice of knowledge and skills (p.179).

However, Freidson has also pointed out this serves only as an ideal framework to understand professionalism. Similar to the case of the ideal-typical logics of the free market and bureaucracy, ideal-typical professionalism does not (fully) exist in reality. Freidson asserts that all these three worlds are only pipe-dreams – or ideal types, for in reality “predicted virtues are always accompanied by unanticipated vices”: for example deception, fraud, inflexibility, perfunctory treatment of consumers when the original claimed motive is detoured, and economic advantage is prioritised over the good of clients (p.2). Nevertheless, the imagination of professionalism as an ideal type, as he intends, is a stable standard to analyse the situation of current occupations and to gain insights into what factors advance professionalism and what attack it.

To understand the practice of knowledge and skills, Freidson investigates its dynamics, and he points out that in practice professionalism in many ways cannot stand in separation from other forces; rather, it has an interrelationship with both the
labour market and especially the state. These factors, which he calls “the contingencies” of professionalism, are argued to be critical for its establishment and maintenance. They include the organisation and policy actions of state agencies, the organisation of occupations themselves (“the composition of professions”), and the economic, political, and social conditions surrounding the occupation.

The state and professionalism

The state’s organisation and actions play a key role in the development of professionalism. Ideal-typical professionalism is always dependent on the state:

It is the state that has the power: (1) to officially define and classify particular kinds of work in the labor force; (2) to permit and support the occupational constitution of a division of labor and adjudicate jurisdictional disputes within it; (3) to defend labor market shelters against both labor consumers and would-be competitors; (4) to legitimate the connection of vocational training with officially classified higher education and to accept and support the credentials it produces; and (5) to give credence to the professional ideology. Furthermore, the state creates and maintains the general education system which provides the foundation for professional schooling.

(Freidson, 2001, p.128)

As such, the state is seen by Freidson as the “prime contingency of professionalism” being the major force required for creating, maintaining, and enforcing ideal-typical professionalism. Freidson notes that, however, this support is done depending on the state’s “own organization and agenda, which varies in time and space”, which has critical consequences on the extent to which all the institutions of ideal-typical professionalism are realised (p.129). With its coercive and regulatory mechanisms (expressed in law and codes of procedures) and its instrumentalities (found in state ministries and agencies, and courts), the state supports, or in some extreme cases, suppresses the elements of professionalism. In other words, the state affects either the professionalisation or deprofessionalisation of occupations.

At the same time, the relationship between the state and the profession, as Freidson sees it, is two-way. The roles of the state stated above indeed indicate that ideally there is a certain degree of respect from the state for the independence of professionalism – the intervention is mainly protecting and empowering. Freidson notes that the relationship between the state and profession is a mutual one, despite that the state actions appear to be one-way coercive. This is because “when state agencies ratify arrangements established in civil society by occupations to establish professionalism, they rely by default on the competence and legitimacy of those who created those arrangements” (p.139). As such, the essential substance (p.139, italics in
original) of state policy actions is provided only by experts of a profession, regardless the administrative organisation and policy orientation of the state.

The composition of professions

Freidson notes that while the role of the state agencies as a critical contingency for the advancement of professionalism is emphasised, the organisation and representation of occupations themselves are also important, given that the substance (the specialised knowledge) for the power of the state to be translated into policies, regulations, and rules to organise the work is from those who are qualified to do the work (the specialists). Freidson counts both qualified members of a profession and formal associations as “profession” being significant actors. As such, a profession is indeed not simply a single community of interests; rather it is composed of different sub-communities (p.144). Freidson recognises this internal differentiation of the professional community as resulting from the fragmentation not only in terms of specialisation but also economic and social interests (because of, e.g. the nature of the work – employed or self-employed, and research, teaching, or service; and their target clients). There exists a moment, as Freidson notes, when interest conflicts happen, even when the sub-communities share a common occupational title. Associations thus do not necessarily represent the interests of all occupational members.

What can be understood from Freidson’s analysis of the interaction between profession and the state and on how professionalism depends on the organisation and representation of occupations themselves is that the establishment, maintaining, and advancement of professionalism involves several players, and it is difficult to declare which of them is the “right” player who should be in charge, given the struggle among pressures: to advance professional interests, to keep to the rational, bureaucratic frame, to gain (political or economic) favour, and to maintain power. In the establishment of professionalism, for example, a professional association can well act not to the interests of the occupation but simply because it wants to be part of the apparatus; likewise, an authority may grant independence to an occupation rather than suppressing it because they lack required expertise. Within the profession, segregated interests from sub-communities exist as well. Thus, there is often no single “professional orthodoxy” (p.144). In establishing professionalism, it is “the” profession (p.149, emphasis in original) that should be the essential element. “So long as legitimate professional criteria are used – and we must remember that a number of alternatives are legitimate – it is not important whether the representative of an association or some other credentialed authority advances it” (p.145).
The epistemological and social conditions for professionalism

The realisation of ideal-typical professionalism elements relies on the support from, primarily, the state, and the composition of the profession, but it also depends on the nature of the specialised knowledge and skills, as well as the support and recognition from the society. They are the third important contingency of the development of professionalism. Freidson points out the scope of authority a discipline can claim is first influenced by its epistemological status. The forms of knowledge provide different kinds of authority. Descriptive forms of knowledge (facts), with a scientific focus, provide “technical authority” for an expert in employing the discipline in performing a task (including providing understanding), while prescriptive forms with a “scholarly”/“humanistic” focus grant “moral authority” to specify behavioural and social norms, and the arts claim normative aesthetic authority (norms, values) (p.157). Experts on technical areas have limited authority, while those with normative knowledge have a larger influence in public affairs.

Nevertheless, the degree of authority, whether technical or normative, that individual professionals can exercise does not depend solely on the epistemological core of their knowledge and skills; it also depends on social conditions. This is because in the real world any form of specialised knowledge and skills exists not in isolation but in a much larger universe of work. Ideal-typical professionalism, as Freidson puts it, cannot advance without official recognition from the public and the state. Disciplines are given a special status in the labour force according to the importance in relation to the interests and felt needs of the broad public, the market, special segments of society (e.g. private organisations), or the state itself. Also, disciplines need physical, economic, and social resources to practice its bodies of knowledge; the indispensable source of economic support is their clientele. Teachers and professors need access to classes, and they rely on an institution employer to pay them and to recruit and organise students (p.165). The teaching of some particular academic disciplines, e.g. physics, requires material and technology support. The work of research also depends on resources, though this varies among disciplines.

The soul of professionalism

Spelling out the factors that have an influence on professionalism, Freidson emphasises, nevertheless, that this should not be a one-way relation. Professionalism is characterised by trust and autonomy, but in order to gain this protected status, professionals must rely on a “successful persuasion” and persuade others that the discipline is of value.

...professionalism is based on specialized bodies of knowledge and skill that have no coercive power of their own but only what may be delegated to them by the
state or capital. They gain their protected status by a project of successful, not buying it or capturing it at the point of a gun. They must persuade others that the discipline is of special value either to the public at large or to an important interest of the state or an influential elite.

(Freidson, 2001, p.214)

Because of the specialisation of knowledge and skills, professionals’ intentions and ethics must be trusted and their practice protected. In other words, the logic of professionalism must be respected and supported, since without it no disciplines, let alone occupations, exist. Freidson notes that in the past few decades professionalism has been ideologically attacked. This creates a distrust “that has weakened the credibility of professional claims to an independent moral voice in evaluating social policies”, and “strengthens the power of capital and the state to control the use to which professionalised disciplines are put” (p.198). In other words, the values and meanings of work held by professionals – their ideology of service, which underpins ideal-typical professionalism, have been challenged. The environment of distrust doubts the motives of professionals: The claim to professional authority and professional monopoly in the labour market has been questioned as being driven by economic self-interests. However, the professional ideology, as Freidson states (p.200), besides an economic interest in making “a good living”, has another primary interest, which is their commitment to the quality of work. He gives an example on the case of academic professions in the US, who are highly subjected to economic pressures. They are criticised for not engaging in the realisation of income from the work in the marketplace. In fact, as Freidson argues, when they focus on theories and research, and even when they reduce the quantity of their student consumers, they prioritise improving the quality of their work over their economic self-interest.

Freidson emphasises monopoly and social closure as being essential for professionalism as an ideal-type since they create the boundaries for a common body of formal knowledge and skills to established (by the professional group – both exclusive and inclusive). “Without closure there can be no disciplines” (p.202, italic in original), since the boundaries establish “a mutually reinforcing social shelter within which a formal body of knowledge and skill can develop, be nourished, practiced, refined, and expanded” (loc. cit.). This monopoly is important because it also protects the discipline to be distinct. If, for example, the logic of professionalism submits to the principles of the free market, where price competition is central, and work is done to consumers’ demands, and where “quality must be as low as it can be and still sell”, disciplines “would be popularised and lose some if not most of their disciplinary character and value” (p.203). However, Freidson sees an economic monopoly as a factor contributing to the development of a discipline. When all qualified professionals have some economic security, the competition between members will be less “predatory” (p.203) and they instead compete for collegial
respect, and/or acclaim, for the work quality and for their contribution advancing the discipline – or the “symbolic rewards” (p.203, citing Parsons, 1949).

With these analyses, Freidson concludes the core contents of professional ideology: monopoly and social closure are not simply “modes of exploitation or domination” – the grounds professionalism is often mainly attacked on; rather, they are also “social devices for supporting the growth and refinement of disciplines and the quality of their practice” (p.203). The principle of credentialism/licensure (mostly from training) as professionalism’s instrument to legitimate monopoly, thus, should not be negated but be considered in terms of its relevance.

2.5 Freidson’s theories and my research

In the above section, I have sketched out the main points of Freidson’s theoretical perspectives on professionalism. In summary, the model specifies the elements of professionalism as an ideal type: it comprises a specialised body of knowledge, and an idea that the practice of these knowledge and skills must be determined by the occupation. In other words, professionalism as an ideal-type is defined as a mode of work control – a professional authority and monopoly, and this privilege is legitimated by an ideology serving some transcendent value.

Nevertheless, Freidson has not only specified the (ideal) logic of professionalism as a destination to strive for, but the most significant contribution of his study to profession theories probably is his analysis and insights into the construction of professionalism. Freidson has not only clarified the constituents of professionalism but also demonstrated the dynamic relationships among different actors in shaping the concept. As an ideal type existing in a pipe dream, the logic of professionalism is different from the logics of ideal-typical consumerism and managerialism. In practice, however, professionalism is dependent on the market and bureaucracy, since they provide the support and recognition required for professionalism to be established and advanced. In this way, professionalism has particular “institutional, theoretical constants” (p.180) – a specialised body of knowledge, occupational control over the practice of the work and credentials for the work, and an ideology for service quality and some transcendent value; but at the same time it relies on a number of “variables” (loc. cit.) – the contingencies critical to realising these ideal-typical elements: the organisation and policy actions of state agencies, the organisation of occupations themselves, and the social, historical, and economic conditions. Professionals need to successfully persuade these forces to legitimise their special status and privileges; nevertheless, its soul – the professional ideology, or the moral aspect regarding controlling over the meaning, and the value of the work, must be protected.

Freidson’s model has been viewed as portraying professionalism with an “optimistic” view of professionalism (Evetts, 2009, p.21). But his theory goes beyond
that. His analysis provides insights into the logics underpinning professionalism, the market, and bureaucracy. Furthermore, acknowledging the interlink between professionalism and the other two logics (of the market and organisation/bureaucracy), he has shifted his focus onto, as he emphasises in his book many times, “the examination of their interactions” that in turn “allows making sense of the processes which establish and maintain the position of professions” (p.180). Freidson does not believe in a “utopia” where a full realisation of professionalism can be achieved, but he does believe this can be worked towards, with attention to all three logics.

I do not believe in utopias, on earth or elsewhere, now or in the future, so while I emphasize the rationale for the institutions of professionalism, I do not go on to argue for a policy that attempts to realize them in full at the expense of markets or firms. Reality is and should be a variable mix of all three logics, the policy issue being the precise composition of that mix.

(Freidson, 2002, p.181)

From this premise recognising professionalism as a social construction, Freidson calls for a bilateral relationship among the logics involved. “The issue should be whether the virtues of each are suppressed by emphasis on the others and their vices excessively stimulated” (p.181, emphasis added). In this way, he does not deny the interrelation between professionalism with other forces in reality but instead looks into the nature of this relationship. The substance composing professionalism cannot solely be the concerns of the occupations, given the inevitable interdependence between the three logics; rather, the central question is “where it is both appropriate and reliable, and where it is not” (p.206) in relation to the larger society.

Freidson’s analysis on the relationship between the three logics also yields another observation. His examination into the contingencies crucial to the establishment of professionalism – state agencies, the occupations themselves, and social circumstances, suggests that in the processes it is not easy to conclude whether these forces play a “devil” or “angel” role. This is because the composition, and motives, of each of the forces, are dynamic themselves (thus his term “variables”). For example, as Freidson has demonstrated, the intervention of state agencies in developing a profession may come from either specially trained experts employed as public employees, or formal representatives of the occupation, depending on the state’s political agenda and also physical resources. Similarly, formal professional associations may not always represent and act to the interests of their general members. Likewise, social, historical, and economic conditions depend much on existing perceived values and norms. On top of these, all these three factors vary according to time and space. With these differentiated angles of seeing the processes of establishing and maintaining professionalism, attaching to occupational values, as
fully as possible, must be achieved. By so doing, he concludes these logics must be recognised and respected, especially that of professionalism, if its soul is to be protected. The central problem then to him is not to strive to claim an independence for professionalism from the other logics; rather, given that “they [professionals] should have no right to be the proprietors of the knowledge and technique of their disciplines”, the question is shifted more towards how to “nurture and control” the specialised knowledge and skills of professionalism so that professionals can maintain their position as their (own) “moral custodians” (Freidson, 2001, p.222). In other words, Freidson proposes directing the discussion’s focal emphasis to “understand the forces which support or impede the development and maintenance of professionalism” (p.128).

Freidson’s model of the interrelation between the three logics in many ways can be related to Clark’s (1983) study on the relationship between the state authority, the market, and academia in analysing higher education systems. Clark establishes “The Triangle of Coordination” where state authority, market, and academic groups interact (Clark, 1983, p.143). Clark observes that the “open battles” are primarily between the state and professors, and even though the state gains dominance, they are not “automatic winners in this battle, easy victors in an unequal contest” (p.145). As Clark puts it, “If ever political regimes need a sense of balance, and a capacity to see the long run, in the supervision of a public good, it is in relating to the academic system” (p.8). In this way, Clark recognises the interdependence of higher education with other actors, but also emphasises the uniqueness of this sector as having not only the power to shape their work environment but also the power to affect the world (p.3). Regarding the work of academics, Clark emphasises the connection between teaching and the society: Academics cannot practise independently – there always exists a combination of power, prestige, and dependence (Clark, 1987).

With regards to my thesis, Freidson’s theoretical perspectives provide helpful grounds to addressing its inquiries of exploring professionalism, in this case for the work of English language teaching at university level, since Freidson aims to discuss ideas to be used as “a systematic method of analysis that can be applied to all forms of work” (p.180). Thus, not only can the research use his conception to support its argued positioning (that moves away from a formal segregation between “from above” professionalism and “from within” professionalism), it may also employ the ideas as a framework to investigate empirical cases for additional understandings of both the contents of the notion and the interaction among its contingencies. How will Freidson’s theories work in a particular case, at a particular time?

As mentioned earlier, recent discussions on academic professionalism sometimes tend to separate professionalism from its relationship with other parts of the work world. Indeed, studies on professionalism (e.g. Heikkilä, 2008; Evetts, 2009; Snoek, Swennen, & van der Klink, 2010) that cite Freidson appear to use his ideal-type professionalism primarily as a standard to depict the (destroying) consequences the
This indeed is what has been observed by Freidson himself: the emphasis of many recent analysts has been on the process of deprofessionalisation (Freidson, 2001, p.128). Recently, the concept of professionalism is increasingly suggested as a social coordination between occupation and social forces. For example, Lunt (2008), using Freidson’s ideas, by concentrating particularly on professional ethical codes and standards as a means both for self-regulation and professional guidance but also to persuade the public and clients, implies her recognition of the relationship between professionalism and the society. As mentioned earlier, Whitty (2008, p.44) and Kennedy (2014, p.695), on the other hand, suggest a “democratic professionalism” that involves “being sensitive to a wide range of stakeholders”, seeks to “demystify professional work”, and fosters “alliances” between teachers and other members of the wider community, as well as encourages teachers to involve more actively in policy development. Gewirtz et al. (2009, p.4), resonating with Freidson’s standpoints, hold that professionals have “a contract with the wider society” with which “professional groups need a certain amount of social power and collective autonomy” but at the same time they “need to show why professionals can and ought to be trusted”. Similarly, Leung (2013, p.22) proposes that (teacher) professionalism should be seen as “a form of temporary consensus among key stakeholders”. Recently, citing Freidson, Evetts (2013) emphasises more the logics and linkages between bureaucracy, managerialism, and professionalism, while considering the impact of internationalisation. She asserts that professionalism operationalises following “acquired regulation” – a mixture of external regulation (imposed from those outside the profession) and professional self-regulation. Evetts also implies that ideally the interrelation should be exercised with full recognition of the logics of all actors, which she refers to as “responsibilities”. The term acquired regulation “can better represent the balance of responsibilities between professions and states (state forms of authority, regulatory institutions, and even internationalisation) (Evetts, 2013, p.9).

Benefiting from Freidson’s ideas, the thesis – with its two Big Inquiries of “what” and “how” – examines the dimensions of professionalism for the particular group of university English language teachers in the contemporary higher education context of Vietnam. The research attempts to make sense of the processes in which professionalism interacts with other parts of the society, especially bureaucracy (state agencies and organisations) in the form of policy, considering this is where the open battle lies (Clark, 1983). The study also aims to explore the values and principles underpinning this construction of professionalism. In realising these goals, Freidson’s framework seems to be especially relevant, given the significant role he attaches to policy among the contingencies required for the establishment of professionalism; and as he puts it, the framework “provides a theoretical foundation for discussing social policy” (p.181).

Besides a focus on policy (state agencies and regulatory institutions level), the
study also takes an interest in how professionalism is constructed at the individual level. Although in his book it seems Freidson does not explicitly spend a major part discussing professional contingencies at this level, he does imply that, as mentioned earlier, individual members of the occupation have an important role in establishing and maintaining professionalism, which is as important as the role of formal occupational associations. Furthermore, Freidson observes that ideal-typical professionalism is more relevant for a service class (rather than a servant class), including academia, for “the very organization of academic disciplines encourages critical thought rather than acceptance of received ideas and methods and practical compromise, for that is how its practitioners make their mark” (Freidson, 2001, p.123). However, similar to other occupations, the work of teaching cannot be quarantined from the society: “Even when those called professionals are something more than average people, few can be immune to the constraints surrounding the work they do” (Freidson, 2001, p.12). Drawing from these initial remarks, besides studying policies, the thesis explores how academics perceive professionalism, how they claim for authority, and how they legitimise their privileges.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented my study’s theoretical backgrounds to understanding professionalism. By discussing the complexity of the notion as possessing an interconnected nature of “from within” and “from above” discourses, the chapter has argued professionalism is a dynamic social construction rather a product of a competing relationship where one side is suppressed and negated by the other. Yet for a successful realisation of professionalism elements to be achieved, its ideology must be recognised and supported, since without which occupations do not exist. This argument raises the need for further exploring the realities of how professionalism is established, and for this purpose, Freidson’s theories of professionalism and its contingencies are a relevant choice to make sense of this process and examine the factors that either constrain or enable the establishment and development of professionalism.
Chapter 3 The kaleidoscope of English language teacher professionalism

This chapter consists of three sections. Section 1 provides a review analysis on how the term professionalism has been approached in the field of English Language Teaching. Section 2 outlines the major areas of professional expertise currently expected of ELT teachers. Finally, section 3 provides some observations drawn from the two preceding sections.

3.1 The kaleidoscope of English language teacher professionalism: A review analysis of traits, values, and political dimensions

In the area of language teaching and English language teaching (ELT), the term “professionalism” has been regarded as “elusive in the literature” (Turner, 2006, p.56) and the concept does not appear to take on a unitary, unified definition (Wharton, 1995). Citing Mathews & Chuntian (2004), Turner (2006, p.56) acknowledges that the concept, in ELT, seems to be “a complex construct with little academic literature”. Wharton (1995) also proposes that since professionalism (in the ELT context) is itself not a unitary concept, it should not be assumed automatically to be a good thing (Wharton, 1995, p.25, italics in original).

However, it is probably this very elusiveness that has made professionalism the discussion topic by scholars in the field of ELT. This section provides an analysis of how this notion has been approached and defined in ELT, and through the analysis, purports to show a clearer mapping of different approaches in studying professionalism in the field. Drawing on its analysis, it argues that, similar to the conceptualisation of professionalism in the general literature, professionalism in ELT is always political, and the notion should be approached critically as a process which involves different social actors, rather than as a set of traits established and promoted only by a particular group. This “kaleidoscope” picture of professionalism in ELT while attempting to depict a more visible shape of the concept also reflects its dynamic nature as being co-constructed by different factors.

ELT as a profession?

Recent research on language teaching and English language teaching has been questioning whether the occupation can be regarded as a profession. Although its status as a “semi-profession” is analysed from different perspectives, the debate

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tends to encompass three main aspects: the occupation’s specialist knowledge, its status recognition, and its capability to have self-regulation (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Johnston, 1997; Nunan, 2001).

Richards & Lockhart (1994, p.40) discuss whether English language teaching is a profession: whether it has unique characteristics, requires specialised skills and training, is a lifelong and valued career choice, and offers a high level of job satisfaction. Similarly, Nunan (2001) looks at four main criteria: education and training, standards of practice and certification, a shared agreed theoretical and empirical base, and individuals’ work to advocate for the profession, in order to see if ELT satisfies these criteria. Although he concludes that English teaching meets the four requirements to be considered a profession, he also observes that a great number of ELT teachers do not have formal education in language teaching. About an agreed theoretical basis for the discipline, citing Freeman (1998), Nunan claims in fact ELT does not constitute a discipline because it “does not have unified or commonly held ‘ground rules for creating and testing knowledge’” (Freeman, 1998, p. 10, cited in Nunan, 2001). English language teaching in some contexts is seen as “marginalised and the teachers lack influence, status, and power” (Johnston, 1997, p.702) and “is not having the same recognition as other subjects such as Maths” (Leung, 2013). ELT has been perceived as having a “second-class” status within academia (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014): it lacks an agreed disciplinary affiliation and knowledge base, and its terminal degree standard is lower than that of other fields (a master’s rather than a doctoral qualification.) Recently, Stanley (2016) once again raises the question if ELT teachers belong to an “economy class” with low earning status and insecure working conditions. ELT teachers are seen as consumers rather than producers of knowledge; implementers rather than initiators; and practitioners rather than researchers (Freeman 1998, p.10, cited in Nunan, 2001; Ur, 2002).

The question of whether ELT is a profession has also been connected with the impact of social contexts. Studying teachers as professionals in Poland, Johnston (1997, p.706) finds that ELT in Poland is perceived as a “permeable” occupation – that is easy to enter and leave – and teachers’ organisations need to advocate more for improved working conditions and a better public image for English teachers. In another study on teachers of English as a Second/Additional Language (ESL/EAL) in England, Leung (2013, p.20) observes that, “EAL is not treated as a ‘proper’ subject and the EAL teacher thus may experience a sense of deficit in terms of professional worth” because of the British government policy of “equal treatment for all” that does not prioritise special support to those with language needs. In this way, it can be seen that the debate on the status of ELT is not yet resolved. Compared to other occupations such as law and medicine, ELT is relatively younger. This may explain the even more intensive efforts from ELT organisations around the world in promoting certain practices, values, and standards in this field (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014). Indeed, there is a connection between the professional knowledge of
the occupation and its recognition. The status of the field, its subject matter, the ideology surrounding it, and the participants who engage with it, are closely related (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014).

The studies selected for review in this section focus especially on the notion of professionalism in English language teaching. Research that addresses other related concepts, for example, English teacher professional identity and the discursive conditions of the occupation, but does not explicitly mention the term professionalism, is not included in this review. For this purpose, a search for the literature containing the key words “professionalism”, “English”, and “language teaching/teachers” was conducted. The scope of the search is within both academic databases and open-access sources available to the author at the time of writing, and it covers the period of approximately 20 years. Results from the search indicate that in comparison with the literature on professionalism as a general concept, and in comparison with some disciplines such as medicine, research on this notion in the field of ELT appears to be more limited. As described above, one of the key words used in the search is “language teaching”. This was done on the grounds that had these key words been “English language teaching”, the number of studies retrieved would have been even more limited. Nevertheless, the focus of this analysis review is ELT, because of two reasons: (a) most of the studies reviewed that mention professionalism “in language teaching” (including second/additional language teaching) turn out to deal mostly with English language teaching; and (b) there is only one study – that by Fleming & Walter (2004) – that deals with second language education and does not mention specifically ELT. However, this may reflect Fleming & Walter’s (2004) assumption that sees ELT as being a sub-category of language teaching – a view supported by other researchers reviewed in this chapter, and by Pennington & Hoekje (2014) for example. Following the above-mentioned steps, the search yielded eleven studies which comprise the corpus for the review. They include research by Wharton, 1995; Andrews, 2003; Fleming & Walter, 2004; MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim, 2005; Sercu, 2005; Masataka, 2006; Turner, 2006; Hardy, 2011; Richards, 2011; Leung, 2013; and Wang & Lin, 2013. A content summary of these studies is provided in Table 1. This is not a comprehensive collection of studies on the topic; however, within the scale of this review, examining these studies reveals to an extent how professionalism has been perceived in ELT.

Professionalism in ELT: A content description of the studies reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Content summary</th>
<th>The degree to which professionalism is discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wharton, 1995</td>
<td>A conceptual paper relating the changes in ELT in Mexico (“professionalisation”)</td>
<td>Professionalism is looked at from “the interactions between the individual practitioner and the wider community or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching: The development of a discourse community”</td>
<td>concept “discourse community” and how such a community should act to serve both its members’ needs and the needs of the wider society.</td>
<td>organisation” (p.24) in connection with a discussion on cultural and professional values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, 2003</td>
<td>“Teacher language awareness and the professional knowledge base of the L2 teacher”</td>
<td>A theory-based paper arguing for the importance of teacher language awareness in forming the professional knowledge base of teachers of foreign/second languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleming &amp; Walter, 2004</td>
<td>“Linking teacher professionalism and learner autonomy through experiential learning and task design”</td>
<td>A conceptual paper proposing experiential learning approach as a way to enhance SLE teacher professionalism in the context of work intensification and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacPherson, Kouritzin &amp; Kim, 2005</td>
<td>“Profits or professionalism: issues facing the professionalization of TESL in Canada”</td>
<td>A paper discussing some current challenges to the process of professionalisation of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) in Canada faced by TESL professional organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sercu, 2005</td>
<td>“Foreign language teachers and the implementation of intercultural education: a comparative investigation of the professional self-concepts and teaching practices of Belgian teachers of English, French and German”</td>
<td>An empirical study (questionnaire survey) on how Foreign language (FL) teachers in Belgium view the objectives of FL education, the values of intercultural communication in FL teaching and how teachers are willing to integrate them into their teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masataka, 2006</td>
<td>“Professionalism in English Language Education in Japan”</td>
<td>A theory-based paper discussing how the government initiated changes may have a negative impact on professionalism in English language education in Japan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author, Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turner, 2006</td>
<td>“Professionalism and high-stakes tests: teachers’ perspectives when dealing with educational change introduced through provincial exams”</td>
<td>A study on ESL secondary teachers’ perspectives as they experienced curriculum innovations introduced into the educational system in Canada via high-stakes provincial exams. From the results of the survey, the author argues that in understanding teacher professionalism, besides the requisite traits, skills, and qualities required or expected, there is a need to consider teachers’ own perspectives and stances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy, 2011</td>
<td>“Professionalism in Language Teaching?”</td>
<td>A theory-based paper that focuses on the status of English teachers in general and foreign language teaching in the USA and discusses the “damage to the field by the hiring of unqualified [native] teachers” and the “disturbing trend to replace teachers with self-study software programs” (p.246). The author does not provide a discussion on professionalism. Professionalism is implicitly defined through her asserting that language teaching is a career and professionalism is what we need in order to teach it, including a high level of proficiency, declarative knowledge about the language, and knowledge of language acquisition and methodology (p.246).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richards, 2011</td>
<td>“Competence and performance in language teaching”</td>
<td>The study presents ten core dimensions of language teaching and practice that language teachers need to know and do to be effective classroom practitioners and language teaching professionals. Professionalism is mentioned as one of the dimensions. The author cites the view by Leung (2009) seeing professionalism from two aspects: “institutionally prescribed professionalism” and “independent professionalism” (p.27) and emphasises that teachers need to engage in reflection on their own values, beliefs, and practices. Through the ten dimensions, professionalism is linked to competence and expertise (p.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leung, 2013</td>
<td>“Second/Additional Language teacher professionalism – What is it?”</td>
<td>A conceptual paper that “presents a dynamic, context-sensitive discipline-based view of teacher professionalism that has implications for teacher education and professional development” (p.11). Professionalism is “partly shaped by the roles and tasks associated with particular political and curriculum requirements, the expectations of local (regional and/or national) language minority communities, the characteristics of their students, the work practices in their institutions, and the prevailing intellectual climate” and “their personal views and values on social and moral issues.” (p.26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang &amp; Lin, 2013</td>
<td>“The representation of professionalism in native English-speaking teachers recruitment policies: A comparative study of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Taiwan”</td>
<td>An empirical study (policy analysis) on how the native English teachers recruitment policy by the governments in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan do not reflect the true professionalism and may have unintended consequences on English education and the professional identity of local non-native English teachers. The authors briefly review the concept of professionalism as a set of qualities, attributes, and values, and highlight the role of professional knowledge, pedagogical competence, and subject knowledge (English proficiency). Basing on this definition, the authors question the “native speaker norms” in the policies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An initial reading of the studies suggests that professionalism is approached in different ways, and along different dimensions. For instance, the studies by Andrews (2003) and Richards (2011) seem to concentrate on the knowledge base of language teachers, while those by Wharton (1995) and MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim (2005) appear to focus more on the relationship between teacher professionals and other actors such as authority, the market, and the society, as well as what professionalism means in these contexts. Also, while in some studies (e.g. Richards, 2011; Leung, 2013) professionalism is explicitly deconstructed into particular competencies and attributes, in other studies (e.g. Fleming & Walter, 2004; Masataka, 2006), the concept is allowed to emerge from the discussion rather than being clearly defined.

Another observation is that on the surface these studies can be placed on a continuum with “trait-based” paradigm at one end and “critical” paradigm at the other end. Nevertheless, a closer look at how the concept emerges from these studies reveals that trait-based and critical perspectives should be read as being interrelated, although the degree might differ from one study to another. This also implies the participation of social forces, rather than only the occupational group, in constructing professionalism. These two insights will be discussed in the following sections.

On the surface: The occupational trait-based paradigm and the critical paradigm in constructing “professionalism” in the field of ELT

Overall, similar to how professionalism has been defined in the general literature (Chapter 2), as seen from the studies reviewed, professionalism within the field of ELT has been interpreted following two main approaches: The first approach defines ELT teacher professionalism in terms of occupational attributes and characteristics, and the second approach tends to read the notion more critically and places it in a relationship with external social forces.

Within the corpus studied, the studies on professionalism in ELT which highlight the occupational constituent elements and values of the concept appear to follow the first approach. Andrews (2003) defines language teacher professionalism from a knowledge-based point of view. The professionalism of foreign/second language teachers to him comprises of three main interconnected elements: language proficiency, teacher language awareness and pedagogical content knowledge. Also taking an interest in teacher knowledge and competencies, Sercu (2005) interprets professionalism in foreign language teaching in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the domains of linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pedagogy, culture learning theory and intercultural competencies. Adopting a similar competence-based approach, Richards (2011) discusses the occupational dimensions of professionalism. Seeing English language teaching as “not something that anyone who can speak English can do” (p.27), he emphasises a desirable list of elements that build up ELT professionalism: a specialised knowledge base obtained from academic
education and practical experience, continuous attempts for improvement, professional standards, and membership of a professional community. In this way, professionalism in language teaching is connected to competencies and expertise: it is “the knowledge, beliefs, and skills that language teachers make use of in their practice” (Richards, 2011, p.1).

Meanwhile, taking on a more critical note, the second approach places “professionalism” in the complexities of social power relations. Among the studies in the corpus, the studies which can be regarded as adopting this perspective are those which not only identify a particular set of values currently being promoted as “norms” and “priorities”, but also question these qualities and values. These studies examine the impact of educational reforms and changes on teacher professionalism, challenge ideological norms, and discuss the relationship (in many cases the conflict) between different professional values (e.g. Fleming & Walter, 2004; Turner, 2006; Hardy, 2011; and Wang & Lin, 2013).

Fleming & Walter (2004) talk about the “process of work intensification and accountability” that threatens the professionalism of second language teachers since teacher professionalism to them is the abilities “to be inventive, flexible, adaptable, and responsive to students' needs”, and teachers' role in decision-making processes especially in classroom (Fleming & Walter, 2004, p.59). Similarly, Turner (2006, p.71) notes the possible tensions between teachers' own beliefs and “professional stances” in their classroom practices and the newly introduced high-stakes tests in Canada, and she concludes that professionalism not only consists of a set of skills and qualities but also teachers' perspectives and stances (i.e. how teachers respond to and negotiate with the tests). Masataka (2006) likewise expresses concerns about the implementation of government policies on using tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) as a tool to qualify English language teachers in Japan. He argues that these tests and the imposition of obligatory continuing professional development (CPD) training sessions will, in fact, fail to equip teachers with necessary skills and abilities and deprive them of their intrinsic motivation of self-development. Also questioning professional norms but in regard to social ideologies, Hardy (2011) examines the impact that a favourability in hiring unqualified native English teachers over qualified non-native teachers may have on teacher professionalism. She states that this leads to the fact ELT now lacks professionalism, because the work, in fact, involves a set of specialised skills, and because not anyone who can speak the language is automatically qualified to teach it. Similarly, studying ELT teacher recruitment policies in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, Wang & Lin (2013) question the adoption and the legitimisation of “native speaker norms” in the four contexts.

With a more visible criticality that emphasises social power relations, studies by Wharton (1995) and MacPherson, Kouritzin, & Kim (2005) emphasise the interaction
between ELT occupational groups and social powers. Wharton (1995) starts from the model of Hoyle’s (1975) professionality and examines professionalism in ELT in relation to the concept of “discourse of community”. By relating to Mexican English teachers (and placing the local context in the wider global ELT discourse community), she notes that the construction of discourse communities, with values that individuals are expected to conform to, is “full of dynamic forces, power struggles and pressures for change” (p.28). Although Wharton does not mention “ideology”, she considers the power questions in the relationship between individuals and community, and community and society: “To what extent will it be possible, for an individual or for a small group, to have their voices heard in the community if their way of speaking does not fit with that of the orthodoxy?” Taking up a similar focus, MacPherson, Kouritzin, & Kim (2005), describe the dilemma TESL organisations face in Canada. Arguing that the role of professional organisations is to “safeguard the profession and the professional’s activity as a public good, even beyond the interests of individual members”, they explain the tension professional organisations have between making profits in response to market demands and maintaining and raising professionalism.

Looking back at how the concept of professionalism is defined and interpreted in the field of ELT, it can be seen that the notion has been approached from both occupational and critical perspectives, which is also observed in the general literature on professionalism. The first approach tends to concentrate on inherent occupational traits and characteristics of professionalism as knowledge, skills, and competencies. As such, the notion is conceptualised around teachers’ everyday work with little connection to social contexts. Also, it can be noticed that this interpretation of professionalism is quite normative and instrumental; it reflects the aspiration to improve the performance of the practitioners and is often discussed from teacher education and teacher learning viewpoints. In this approach, professionalism is associated with notions including teacher education and pedagogical practice (Andrews, 2003); pre-service and in-service foreign language teacher training (Sercu, 2005); effective/good teaching and teachers, language teacher development, and language teacher education (Richards, 2011).

Meanwhile, by shifting the focus more onto the critical/ideological aspects of professionalism, the second approach opens up the discussion to the relationship between individual professionals/professional groups and the society. Professionalism seen in this way is connected to such concepts as teachers’ own perspectives and stances and teacher authority and autonomy (Fleming & Walter, 2004; Masataka, 2006; Turner, 2006; Leung, 2013); teacher positioning and status (Masataka, 2006; Hardy, 2011; Wang & Lin, 2013); the status of the profession; the tension amongst different forms of professionalisation and the conflict between (collective) professional values and ideologies and powers (Wharton, 1995; MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim, 2005).
At this point, an initial imagination of the studies reviewed can be created. Studies by Andrews (2003), Sercu (2005), and Richards (2011) can be placed closer to “trait-based”, “occupational professionalism”, “normative”, “knowledge base”, “teacher training, teacher education”, and “from within”. Meanwhile, the majority of the studies – those by Fleming & Walter (2004), Masataka (2006), Turner (2006), Hardy (2011), Leung (2013), and Wang & Lin (2013) – are more towards the other end of the spectrum with notions such as “critical”, “from above”, “interpretive”, “managerial professionalism”, and “status, identity, autonomy”. However, a closer look at these studies will reveal that a trait-based perspective cannot, and should not, be separated from critical dimensions. This reflects the multiple facets of “professionalism” and at the same time suggests that the construction of this notion involves more external actors, rather than only a particular group.

The dynamic interaction inside the making of professionalism in the field of ELT

In the field of ELT, even when professionalism is defined instrumentally as a set of competencies, this interpretation cannot be separated from social-political contexts.

On the one hand, among the studies that treat the concept from a trait-based approach described in this section, it can be observed that the researchers, though more subtly, link their discussions to the wider contexts surrounding teaching and ELT. For example, Andrews (2003) attributes the emphasis on teachers’ subject-matter knowledge to the development of language teacher “benchmark” tests by countries’ governments and the establishment of professional standards as part of the professionalisation of ELT by professional associations. Likewise, Sercu (2005) explains the “new professional demand” for foreign language teachers to have intercultural communicative competence as a result of policy, namely The Council of Europe 1997, The sociocultural and intercultural dimension of language learning and teaching. Meanwhile, Richards (2011, p.1) gives “a word of caution” when he elaborates on the dimensions which, according to him, bring about “effectiveness in teaching” and which conceptualise professionalism in language teaching: the conception of good teaching is itself “situated” since it depends on factors such as teachers’ own perceptions and their teaching contexts.

On the other hand, those studies in the corpus that emphasise the critical dimensions of professionalism also depart from, and combine with, viewing the notion in terms of attributes and qualities needed for the occupation. These studies begin with discussing a particular trait-based professionalism whether at a classroom performance level or in a social scope. After that, an interpretative analysis is added. In these studies, the wider context of social discourse is highlighted: a managerialism-style work intensification translated through the pressure of “a greater use of externally developed sets of behaviour objectives, assessment instruments, commercially produced classroom materials, and externally controlled
technologies” in second language education (Fleming & Walter, 2004, p.59); the newly implemented policies of government on benchmark tests for teachers, compulsory CPD courses, and the introduction of English in primary education (Masataka, 2006); curriculum innovations via provincial exams (Turner, 2006); the market demands (MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim, 2005); and the primacy of native English language teachers over non-native English language teachers (Hardy, 2011; Wang & Lin, 2013). On this landscape, the scholars critically question the current demands for teachers’ knowledge, the significance of teachers’ formal education and certification (MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim, 2005; Masataka, 2006; Hardy, 2011; Wang & Lin, 2013), the importance for teachers to exercise professional autonomy (Fleming & Walter, 2004; Turner, 2006; Masataka, 2006), and the role of teacher professional communities and associations (Wharton, 1995; MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim, 2005). On a meta-level of interpretation, it can be said that the researchers raise voices of dissent towards the establishment of the contemporary norms. They argue for an autonomy that grants the occupational group the control over their professional knowledge base, professional jurisdiction, professional autonomy, ethical guides and collegial culture. In this way, these studies go beyond merely pointing out the occupational elements of professionalism; rather, they add on an interpretive nuance by placing normative lists in relation to other social aspects and interpret them critically.

This interlocking nature of “trait-based” and “critical” dimensions of professionalism also relates to the complexities of the “from above”/“from within” categorisation. The trait-based approach originally emphasises the desirable attributes and values for both practitioners and their occupation to be recognised as professionals and a profession, and this implies the process of a voluntary, “from within” professionalisation to raise the status of the ELT occupation, as seen in the studies by Andrews (2003), Sercu (2005), and Richards (2011). However, trait-based interpretations of professionalism can as well result from a professionalisation “from above”, as seen in the arguments by Fleming & Walter (2004), MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim (2005), Masataka (2006), Turner (2006), Hardy (2011), Wang & Lin (2013), where they describe the contemporary professionalism in ELT, shaped by external forces (e.g. market demands, managerialism, globalisation, ideology, etc.). Likewise, a critical approach to reading professionalism in ELT may have either a “from within” nature (if the concept is viewed as a set of qualities initiated by either English teachers or ELT professional associations), or a “from above” nature (if the notion is regarded as being determined by a particular ideology or social power such as the state or institutional management).

Having said that, there emerges another issue: how the position and the role of different actors, or stakeholders, in the discourse of professionalism, may be perceived, which is discussed in the following section.
I have so far provided an account of how the concept of professionalism is conceived in a sample of studies in the area of ELT. While the use of concepts such as trait-based vs. critical, and “from within” vs. “from above”, may, as discussed, provide a useful analytical framework in order to better understand the complexities of professionalism, my analysis also demonstrates that the elusiveness of the notion cannot easily be understood. This is because in forming professionalism, these concepts interrelate rather than acting as contrastive paradigms. The findings from this analysis especially in the field of ELT in many ways appear to be in line with the discussions in the general literature on professionalism, in which the notion can be depicted as being multi-faceted, and its formation is characterised as an interplay and even internalisation of several dimensions (e.g. occupational/critical, “from within”/“from above”, normative/interpretive) which involves different actors (e.g. individuals/professional groups/institutions/state).

Indeed, professionalism, including professionalism in the ELT field, is not simply the product of either “from above” or “from within”; rather, it takes its shape from within the interactions – it is a kaleidoscope mixture of changing objects (or the “contingencies of professionalism” in the words of Freidson, 2001).

This following graph (Figure 2) provides an illustrative typology of the various dimensions and paradigms involved in the conceptualising of professionalism as a social construction. Presenting the different concepts related to the analysis of professionalism in the form of a spectrum allows for a visualisation of the multi-faceted dynamics in the making process of the notion.

Figure 2. The kaleidoscope of English language teacher professionalism
As demonstrated in Figure 2, the making of professionalism, seen from a critical perspective, can be related to the way a kaleidoscope works. There exist separate colour elements, (i.e. the dimensions and paradigms of “occupational professionalism”, “knowledge base”, “teacher training, teacher education”, “supportive”, “damaging”, “from within”, “from above”, “organisational/managerial professionalism”, “status”, “identity”, “autonomy”) but when these elements are moved they interact and create different patterned representations somewhere along the spectrum. In other words, if we shake the kaleidoscope, a presentation of professionalism will be accordingly formed, depending on if the viewing angle is either “from above” or “from within” – which could entail occupation groups/authority/market/globalisation/cultural norms/individual values, together with their own rationales. Seen in this way, the different images of professionalism are closely-tied, similar to the way the different kaleidoscope visions penetrate each other.

In many cases, individual practitioners and their professional organisations are presented as those who have common interests – organisations represent and promote the rights and interests of their members while striving to develop and maintain occupational values and thus the status of the profession. Ideally, an academic community should serve “both the needs of its members and the needs of the wider society of which those members are also a part” (Wharton, 1995, p.29).

Nevertheless, it is not always the case that professionalism established as collective values matches with individual beliefs and values because the professional community seems to be hardly ideological-free itself. Since in reality the ELT field can be described as an interrelation of political forces and pressures (Wharton, 1995), there may exist tensions and struggles between what professional community prioritises and the values and beliefs individual practitioners embrace. For example, in their study MacPherson, Kouritzin & Kim (2005) describe the dilemma TESL professional organisations in Canada face between commercialisation trends and their professionalisation efforts, and by doing so they seem to perceive professionalisation and professionalism either in positive way (if initiated by the professional groups and for the benefit of the profession) or negative way (driven by external forces). In other words, using the lens of “from within” and “from above”, it can be said that professionalism as collective/group values is not always “from within”: it can indeed be interpreted as a product of “from above”, and may thus be interpreted negatively or positively depending on who is the stakeholder and what perspective or argument the stakeholder holds.

It is this interrelation among these actors that leads to the dynamic formation of professionalism and offers a potential to apply a social constructivist frame in reading the concept. The interaction between different actors with different interests and values has become the condition for professionalism to be shaped. In this process, regardless whether professionalism and professionalisation are interpreted
as having positive and negative impacts, the stakeholders involved come into play with their knowledge and reasons. As Ball (2003) puts it,

The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial. One key aspect of the current educational reform movement may be seen as struggles over the control of the field of judgement and its values (...). Who is it that determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid?

Ball (2003, p.216)

At this point Freidson’s (2001) the third logic may be referred to: in making professionalism, the bureaucracy, the market, and the professionals all have shares, and they interact in acknowledging others’, and their own logics. Indeed, “professionalism is not a natural phenomenon, and what counts as […] language teacher professionalism, at any one time, is best seen as a form of temporary consensus among key stakeholders” (Leung, 2013, p.22).

Professionalism is continuously co-shaped by different actors who have different logics, and this relationship seems to contain not only tensions but also negotiation. There exists an extensive body of literature on teachers’ resilience in interacting with external forces while performing their work (e.g. Varghese et al., 2005; Priestley, Edwards, & Priestley, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). In the field of ELT, it has also been found that language teachers manage to practise their agency according to classroom and social contexts. The findings from Turner’s (2006, p.71) research reveal this: “Teachers may or may not embrace the changes, but they cope with them as part of their work and integrate them into their teaching practice”. In a similar vein, Leung (2013) emphasises not only teacher autonomy and authority, but also the role of external stakeholders, in conceptualising professionalism: language teacher professionalism is a combination of professional knowledge, expectations from external stakeholders, and teachers’ own views and values.

This section has provided a mapping of how different studies in the field of ELT approach the notion of professionalism. By using the current literature on professionalism in the field of English language teaching and referring it to the broader analytical concepts existing in the general literature on professionalism, the section has unpacked the complexity of this notion (in the ELT field) into more detailed elements while illustrating the dynamic interaction between these elements. The review demonstrates that the discussion on professionalism in ELT should stretch beyond identifying a set of particular qualities expected of ELT teachers. In one way or another, and to a different degree, each of them can be read as touching upon critical issues of teacher professional identity, academic autonomy, as well as the roles of external forces in the shaping of professionalism. With the critical complexities made visible through the review, the study suggests professionalism in
ELT can be refigured as resulting from a “kaleidoscope” of dynamic relations between the actors engaged. It can be said that, therefore, professionalism is always critical, regardless it might be defined in the first place as a set of occupational virtues. As such, professionalism is a process rather than a product, and the interplay of the shaping elements (the move of the objects in the kaleidoscope) is decided by the perspectives and logics of the stakeholders involved.

3.2 The contemporary professionalisation of the ELT occupation

Upgrading the profession

The concerns towards the work of ELT teachers as not being up to the standards have been raised not only by scholars and teacher educators, but they also come from the public. For example, analysing the current poor quality of ELT teachers in Malaysia, Aliman (2013), taking a parent’s stance, points out that the reason lies mainly in the low bar for entry into the English teaching profession in the country. He thus calls for a government’s intervention to tighten recruitment processes and raise entry standards. The ELT professionalisation in Vietnam, (demonstrated in Chapter 4), has also been part of the public’s concerns. In the following section, the efforts to professionalise the occupation from both governments and ELT teacher educators by promoting certain practices, values, and standards in this field will be discussed.

Professionalism as promoted by ELT scholars and teacher educators

In what follows, the areas of specialist knowledge and skills for ELT teachers that are contemporarily promoted by researchers and teacher educators are discussed.

Area 1 Subject content knowledge (the what and the why): knowledge about language and knowledge of language

Researchers have attempted to conceptualise the necessary content knowledge for language teachers. The knowledge contains two interrelated elements: knowledge about language (i.e. subject matter knowledge and language awareness such as grammar and the language systems, strategic competence, etc.) and knowledge of language (language proficiency) (Wright & Bolitho, 1997; Andrews, 2003; Richards, 2011). In terms of the theory ground expected of language teachers that informs their fact-based knowledge, it seems in ELT, a myriad of disciplinary fields and areas can be regarded as contributing to the formation of this landscape. Although applied linguistics (and/or Second language acquisition) has generally been identified in the literature to be the “home” discipline of ELT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), the
disciplinary status of ELT has a combined nature of different specialist sub-areas (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014, p.167). Richards & Farrell (2011) also argue that besides linguistic theory, the discipline knowledge base of ELT can also be gained from areas such as history of language teaching and critical pedagogy, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. Similarly, Leung (2013) while highlighting the role of applied linguistics, acknowledges other disciplinary fields including formal linguistics, functional linguistics, sociolinguistics, (psychological and social) theories of knowing and learning, and literary studies. The debate on ELT discipline status has another implication: it reflects the increasing role of theory in defining the occupation’s professional expertise.

Area 2 Pedagogical content knowledge: Methods as a foil for reflection

In (English) language teaching, knowledge of methods is regarded as an essential part of teacher professional work (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Leung, 2013), perhaps because this is directly articulated in classroom behaviour and activities. In the past methods has been criticised for acting as prescriptions for classroom behaviours (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). However, it has been noted that teaching methods rarely replace one another and “old” ones are not simply thrown into the “dustbin of history” (Howatt & Smith, 2014, p.92).

At the same time, language pedagogy has been viewed as being situated, and it is emphasised that there hardly exists one method that is best or superior to another (Larson-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Recent literature on ELT methods continues to acknowledge that the value of the “old” methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Oral Approach and the Situational Approach are still recognised by a number of classroom contexts as well as coursebook writing (Larson-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.xv; Howatt & Smith, 2014). It is now widely agreed that teaching is more than following a recipe, and furthermore, methods can never be decontextualised – classroom practice is shaped by teachers, students, and contexts, so teachers have to make “choices that are informed, not conditioned” (Larson-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.xi).

Area 3 The increased emphasis on the knowledge of learners

With the almost uncontested idea that language teaching is situated, the knowledge of relevant dimensions of students’ background and their dispositions has been regarded as a key component in language teachers’ professional knowledge (Farrell, 2013; Leung, 2013). An understanding of learners has been making its way to the list of the knowledge that today’s language teachers need to have. For example, Richards and Farrell (2005, pp.10–11), besides mentioning the areas that language teachers need to develop such as subject-matter knowledge (disciplinary knowledge of ELT),
pedagogical expertise, understanding of curriculum and materials, highlight teacher’s understanding of students. Discussing the ten core dimensions of language teaching expertise and practice, Richards (2011) puts learner-focused teaching as one of the prerequisites for effectiveness. In a similar vein, the inclusion of Participatory Approach in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) also reflects the emphasis on the relationship between language study and language learners’ socio-political identity. Leung (2013) illuminates knowledge of students’ needs and dispositions as one of the essential components of ELT professional expertise, alongside disciplinary knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge.

**Area 4 The increased focus on teacher self-awareness**

Another trend observed in the recent literature on ELT teacher knowledge base is an emphasis on teacher knowledge of themselves as professionals, including issues such as professional roles, identities, professionalism, career, and professional community. Teachers are encouraged to use theories to help them to be more aware of the thinking that underlies their actions, to better understand where they are, which enables them to “choose to teach differently from the way they were taught” (Larson-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp.xi–xii). A reflective understanding of the principles underpinning ”best practices” contributes to teacher learning autonomy (Vu Mai Trang, 2012). It is believed that teacher thoughts and critical reflection, teacher self-awareness and self-image are central to the assumptions, values, and practices that guide teacher actions both inside and outside the classroom (Farrell, 2013). This idea is reflected in language teacher education resource books in the form of the knowledge of self-awareness and career advancement (Richards and Farrell, 2005, pp.10–11); Thought-in-Action Links (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011); language teacher’s identity, membership of a community of practice, and professionalism (Richards, 2011); and understandings of identity and context and professionalism (Murray & Christison, 2011).

**Area 5 Linking teaching with research**

In recent years more emphasis has been put on encouraging teachers to conduct research and/or use research to inform their teaching. This can be seen through the appearance of resource books guiding teachers on this issue, for example Richards & Farrell’s (2005) book on ELT reflective teaching and professional development projects, Burns’s (2010) on action research for language teachers, and Ellis’s (2012) on research and pedagogy in language teaching. The books are written following the principle that understanding, and reviewing one’s own theories of learning and teaching is an essential part of teacher professional growth (Richards & Farrell, 2005) and this should be the overall goal in teacher education (Ellis, 2012). In his book on
language teaching expertise, Richards (2011) also mentions “theorising from practice” as among the ten core dimensions needed for teachers. Teachers should not shy away from doing research because research, especially action research, will contribute to language teachers’ professional life, helping a reflective teacher develop into a “thinking professional” (Burns, 2010, p.6).

**Area 6 ELT professional expertise: Moving beyond the classroom context**

Besides the list of language teaching knowledge bodies, more attention has been drawn to aspects including the changing landscape of ELT and the social context (e.g. new teaching competence in response to new conditions and the political aspects of the work), and the ELT teacher as an element in that context (e.g. teacher self-awareness, identity & professionalism). The teacher knowledge newly mentioned includes intercultural communicative competence and an awareness of the political dimensions of language teaching, digital technology, and extended coverage of content-based and task-based approaches (Sercu, 2005; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Liu & Xiao, 2011). Now what happens in the classroom is perceived to be affected by who the teacher is, who the students are, what they and the teacher see as appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and wider social factors (Richards, 1996). In addition, teachers should develop and practise a pedagogy of cross-culture and criticality towards dominant discourses of their sociocultural contexts (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014).

**Professionalism as promoted by governments**

In parallel with the continuous endeavours from ELT teacher educators to professionalise the occupation, attempts from governments claiming to improve the quality of English teaching have been taken.

In the mid-1990s, the Hong Kong government, with support from English-native experts, introduced a benchmark test for ELT teachers which includes a skill-based proficiency test and a standard-based class observation to assess their use of English for instruction (Coniam & Falvey, 2002). In 2004, the Hong Kong government also formalised the credentials required for ELT teachers to enter the profession. The emphasis, however, was primarily placed on the English benchmark tests demanding all teachers to be assessed, which later became a great source of pressure for them (Lin, 2007). Indeed, using a benchmark test to assess ELT teachers’ language proficiency has been a common tool employed by governments to upskill teachers, as seen in the cases of, for example, Indonesia (Chodidjah, 2015), Malaysia (Subramaniam, 2014), the Philippines (Rañosa-Madrunio, 2015), and Vietnam (Nguyen Ngoc Hung, 2015). Other measures have been taken. For instance, in Thailand, facing the shortage of qualified English teachers, the Thai government
launched a mass recruitment campaign for 10,000 native teachers, which turned out to be an unsuccessful plan because these native teachers did not necessarily have relevant qualifications (Kirkpatrick, 2010). These movements indicate governments’ prioritising teachers’ English language proficiency as the essential knowledge area for them to be qualified, even this may come at the expense of other qualities, as seen in the case of Thailand. Recently it has been observed that governments, besides measuring teachers’ language proficiency, also chose a collaboration path between ministries and universities. In Vietnam, and in Malaysia (Aliman, 2013), for example, teachers are sent to ELT methodology courses to improve their teaching skills. In Singapore, the collaboration between the government and universities is regarded as contributing to promulgation of policies, curriculum reviews and development, strong theory-practice links, evidence-based teacher preparation and professional development, and better support of student learning in schools (Goh, 2015).

3.3 Chapter discussion and conclusion

The chapter has provided a review analysis of how the notion of professionalism has been approached in the literature on ELT. Using the kaleidoscope metaphor, the analysis suggests professionalism in ELT, in the form of bodies of knowledge, skills, and virtues, is always politically framed and value-embedded, similar to professionalism in the general literature. The processes of making professionalism are perspective loaded and driven by different rationales of the actors involved (e.g. teacher training and education groups, the society, and bureaucracy).

From this stance, the chapter proceeds to present the main bodies of knowledge, skills, and qualities contemporarily promoted by ELT teacher educators as found in the literature and from the realities of governments’ professionalisation efforts. The review reveals the occupational values that teacher educators, researchers, and authority, wish to characterise the occupation. The demand for teachers to have strong subject content knowledge is now paired with a more solid background of the nature of knowledge.

Today’s ELT teachers’ knowledge base is a combination of both the domain’s facts and concepts and an understanding of the structures of the subject matter: they “not only understand that something is so; the teacher must further understand why it is so” (Shulman, 1986, p.9). Besides, educators’ connecting ELT with various disciplinary fields shows their effort to upgrade its status as an academic discipline. Also, (English) language teachers are given reasons and rationale for more power and autonomy. For example, the promotion of methods as a foil for reflection will enable language teachers to have more freedom in their classroom. They will be able to choose to teach differently from the way they were taught; they may be able to “resist, or at least argue against, the imposition of a particular method by authorities” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.xi). By encouraging teachers to have
knowledge of theory and conduct research, teacher educators are trying to change the way teachers have often been seen: from consumers of theory, now teachers become both practitioners and theory builders (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Ellis, 2012). Teachers are expected to be “users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their L2 students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts” (Johnson, 2006, p.239). Meanwhile, the knowledge areas promoted by governments seem to focus mostly on teacher language proficiency.

The analysis also indicates that the grouping of university English teachers has not been much treated as a community of practice with distinct characteristics. For example, some chapters in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) are based on their study on English teaching in university settings; however, the findings are discussed under a general framework of ELT methods. Nevertheless, teaching English at university level academics have to face the paradox being in a hybrid position of practitioner and academic. Consequently if one of the key questions for a teacher educator is whether they are a practitioner or a researcher (Townsend, 2011), a university ELT teacher may very well face that similar paradox. Being an ELT teacher in higher education thus means being associated with this “practitioner” nature, plus the research-oriented element usually expected of someone working in the academia. Pennington in 1992 (cited in Vazquez, Guzmán, & Roux, 2013, p.2) raised the question about the “second-class” status of ELT teachers in tertiary education: ELT teachers do not know where they fit in academia. Her question seems to remain valid for ELT teachers in university today when there still exists a distinction between being ELT teachers with knowledge based on “reflection on classroom experience” and being “academic experts on ELT” who are characterised by “research” (Ur, 2002). It has been observed that it has become a kind of common sense that language teachers are not supposed, and not expected, to do research because simply they are not academics, and even if they do, their research may not be recognised (Burns, 2010, p.6).
Chapter 4 Higher education and English language teaching in Vietnam: Values, priorities, and the current professionalisation

This chapter sketches the core values and traditions that the Vietnamese education has been holding over history, many of which are considered as having shaped the essence of the educational system. It also discusses the Vietnamese contemporary higher education and English language teaching to highlight the overall trends and priorities valued in today's education reforms and in the professionalisation project for (ELT) university teachers. This is because “historical understanding is essential in any plans for reform and development” (Phillips, 2014, p.81). The analysis is embedded in political and socio-economic contexts of each historical period, under influences from both “internal” and “external” forces. In this way, education is considered as an “education ensemble” – it is examined as having “shifting authoritative, allocative, ideational and feeling structures, properties and practices” that emerge from and frame increasingly globalised critical, cultural, political, economy processes (Robertson & Dale, 2015, pp.149–150).

4.1 Vietnam HE and ELT over the years: values and priorities

Education in ancient Vietnam

Since the Dong Son culture of a pre-historic Vietnam⁴, education took place both in the family and community with the seniors passing on knowledge and experiences to the younger so that they know the responsibilities in the family, how to live with nature, and learn how to produce crafts (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011). Education was thus under the responsibilities of both the community and family, and in the interest of individuals but also in the public interest since individuals were seen as living in a common society. Education was to prepare individuals to live in a world of social relationships and nature encounters, so they need both morality (one’s responsibilities towards others), and competencies (how to survive and self-support).

Education under the Chinese domination

During the over 1,000 years of the Chinese domination (started in 111 BCE), the Vietnamese education was influenced by Chinese culture and ideologies (Confucianism and Taoism). Public schools, instructed in Chinese scripts, were opened to serve the Chinese imperial court (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011). Vietnam at the start of the third century also saw the peaceful entrance of Buddhism (Luy Lau Buddhism) into the country on its way from India to China (Nguyen Lang,

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⁴ The forth and fifth millennia BCE.
The teaching by Buddhist monks to folk people – considered the first form of Vietnamese formal education, included not only Buddhist values and dogma and moral education (which prioritise reconciliation and harmony over opposition and tension), but also agriculture techniques and medical cures (Nguyen Lang, 1973/1992; Dutton, Werner & Whitmore, 2012). During this period three languages were used in trading and to spread Buddhism: the Chau Giao language (local Vietnamese language), Chinese characters, and Sanskrit (Nguyen Tai Thu et al., 2008). The Vietnamese education began to become a political tool for the elites, but there existed another “flow” of education closer to people’s life and maintained mostly by the people – a people’s education. This flow aimed to cultivate individuals with moral education and self-sufficient skills. In either flow – the elites’ or the people’s education, or both, education means knowledge and skills, not only for survival but also to gain respect and high status. Becoming an educated person means belonging to the top class in a society of Confucian doctrine of an order of sỹ-nông-công-thương (learned man-peasant-artisan-trader). Teachers were thus regarded as the masters of knowledge who guides the development of learners both morally and academically. The Confucian tradition holds the positioning of teachers even higher than that of one’s father – teachers are second only to the King (King-Teacher-Father).

Education under feudal Vietnam

The one millennium under the Chinese control no doubt had lasting impacts on Vietnam, and when the country finally gained its independence in 938 CE, its educational system still followed the Chinese model. Similar to other countries with Confucian traditions, the development of education systems in Vietnam occurred in interrelation with authority relations – proto-national, local, and familial (London, 2011). Education was to educate a person to become a “full” human of five virtues: nhân (be kind to others), nghĩa (be grateful and pay back what one has received), lễ (know how to act in the social hierarchy), trí (have knowledge and wisdom) and tín (be trustworthy). However, the “Vietnamese Confucian system”, influenced by Buddhism thus can be differentiated from the Chinese Confucian system, also educated individuals who know how to act properly in the relationship with one’s self and others (e.g. the king, the authority, and family and friends), which remains one of the typical traits of the Vietnamese people (Luong Can Liem, 2013). With the establishment of Quoc Tu Giam in 1076, considered Vietnam’s first university, competitive examinations were regularly conducted to find Tiến sĩ (doctorates). Although a Vietnamese style writing system (Chữ Nôm) was now developed, Chinese were used by elite mandarins in formal education (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011). Meanwhile, the people’s education continued to develop. Not all learnt men became functionaries in the feudal monarchy – they opened their own classes and schools to
ordinary people. Many scholars used to work for the ruling became unsatisfied with the administration and withdrew from their positions to become teachers, who were admired for their moral, knowledge, and dignity (Mai Thuc, 2014).

**Higher education under the French control**

Under the French governance from the 1860s, the Vietnamese education continued to serve the ruling authority. The French replaced the Chinese model with an education system that mirrored its own system (Pham Minh Hac, 1995; London, 2010; Tran Bich San, 2012). French was made the official language. Although at the early 20th century Romanised national Vietnamese language (Quốc ngữ) was introduced into the school system, the language of instruction at tertiary institutions was French. Vietnamese and English were taught as foreign languages (Tran Bich San, 2012). At schools, moral lessons remained, but mathematics and other natural science subjects, as well as vocational education, were included in the curriculum (Tran Thi Phuong Hoa, 2009).

Higher education was restructured to école supérieure (professional education), producing professionals as civil servants, and Université which provided general tertiary education, with a purpose to make exploitation and oppression more efficient in Vietnam and in Indochina (London, 2010; Tran Bich San, 2012). The establishment of a new education system required the colonial government to invest in teacher education, and during this period for the first time Vietnamese teacher education was formalised. Teacher education colleges (école normale) were opened and entry examinations were set up for those who wanted to be primary teachers (Tran Thi Thanh Thanh, 2014). Despite the original intentions for exploitation and colonisation, the Vietnamese higher education during the French control, with their reforms, created a new generation of Vietnamese intellectuals. Higher education also started to link to societal needs. Vocational education produced skilful manpower for diverse professions (Tran Thi Thanh Thanh, 2014). Under the blended influence of Confucian and Western traditions, education was thus targeted at creating moral individuals but with new industrial, economical, and commercial perspectives.

**Higher education and foreign language education before Doi Moi 1986**

After the French domination, the Vietnamese higher education continued to focus on specialised training and general training (Pham Minh Hac, 1995; St. George, 2010) but the system was modelled after a Soviet-inspired state-socialism as the country received more support from the Soviet Union (London, 2010; Clark, 2014). When Vietnam became independent in 1945, the Vietnamese language Quốc ngữ was made the official language. In the north of the country from 1954 although four foreign languages were taught (Russian, Chinese, French, and English), Russian was the
most important foreign language; while in the south, French and after that English took the role as the first foreign language (Nguyen Ngan, 2012). During the Vietnam War (termed in Vietnamese as “The Resistance War against America”), which ended in 1975, English was considered one communication tool to study the country’s enemy (Hoang Van Van, 2010).

From 1975 when the country reunified until Doi Moi 1986, Russian remained the most popular, while the role of English decreased (Thinh Huy Do, 1996). However, under some bilateral projects, a small number of teachers and interpreters were sent to Britain, Australia, New Zealand and India for graduate studies in English language teaching (Thinh Huy Do, 1996). Hoang Van Van (2010) notes the prevailing method of English teaching during this period was the structural method with a focus on lexicogrammar, reading and translation skills. Following the Soviet model, universities were restructured into teaching-focused institutions separated from research institutions. The management of the education system, including higher education, was highly centralised. Higher education in this period was to provide the workforce while playing ideological roles, including supporting a socialist nation, a modern, technological society, and connecting theory study with its practical application (St. George, 2010).

Higher education and English language education after Doi Moi 1986

The Doi Moi policy, initiated in 1986, is the root of the dramatic economic growth and social changes. Doi Moi (Renovation) is a policy of economic reform with an “open-door” approach. It aimed to create a market driven economy and move away from a centrally-planning management system (Party National Congress Resolution, 1986). A multi-sector economy was re-established under the government supervision. Private incentives and participation were encouraged; free markets and competitions were enabled; external trade and commercial relations were expanded through trade liberalisation and foreign investment. Vietnam joined international and regional trade organisations (e.g. ASEAN in 1995 and WTO in 2007). This reform, which led to an economy now referred to as the “socialist-oriented market economy”, has been described by analysts as a “bold” towards-market-capitalism strategy which was “unprecedented” among the Soviet Bloc nations at the time (Freeman, D. B., 1996). The reform is seen as following a “pro-market, pro-entrepreneurial” approach (Ratliff, 2008) with an “entrepreneurial spirit” (Alver & Perez, 2012). Doi Moi was a watershed in the development of Vietnam that brought about changes in not only the economy but also all social spheres. Under this effect, the Vietnamese higher education developed rapidly. The shift of the economy from one based on agriculture to industry and services, along with the arrival of foreign companies investing in the country, placed great demands on higher education expansion and
especially quality. Private (non-state) education also expanded since 1989 when school fees collection from households was permitted.

Higher education reforms have been implemented with substantial support from international organisations as both loan and expertise providers. The HE system during the early 1990s was described as being “at a crossroads” (Dang Que Anh, 2009) and “in a transition” (St. George, 2010), suffering both from the economic crisis of the 1980s which led to the cut in public expenditure spending on education (London, 2010); and from the isolation from global environment that resulted in a scarcity of materials especially those in English language (Hoang Van Van, 2010). Along with seeking domestic contributions, the state turned to external assistance – similar to other countries in the region and those in transitional stages such as Hungary and Romania (Mok & Welch, 2003; Le Thi Kieu Huong, 2014; Madden, 2014). Projects supported by for example the UNDP/UNESCO, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the US government, the Japanese government, etc. took an active part in higher education development.

At the same time, the opening up in economic and political spheres enabled the re-emergence and expansion of English as the most important foreign language in Vietnam. Since 1986, English has been the most popular foreign language taught in the education system. From 1982 to 2002, English was the compulsory subject in upper secondary education and an elective subject in lower secondary. From 2002 to 2010, English became a compulsory subject at both upper and lower secondary levels and an elective at primary level. In universities, English is introduced both as a discipline (for majors) and as a subject (for non-majors). The growth was at such a rapid pace that it was called the “English boom” (Hoang Van Van, 2010), and a “transformation” (Lam Tri Ly, 2011). As the country resumed diplomatic relations with the rest of the world, the demand for communication in English soared as an influx of foreigners arrived in Vietnam since the early 1990s for business and travel (Lam Tri Ly, 2011). The words “foreign language” automatically means “English” for many Vietnamese (Nguyen Ngan, 2012). In his study, Bright (2012, p.5) notes that English is associated with “development, modernisation, opportunity, employment, participation, competitiveness, advancement, globalisation, economic prosperity, privilege, and superiority”.

4.2 Vietnam contemporary HE and ELT: The raison d’être of our time and the current professionalisation project

The noblest profession of all

The above account of the values and priorities that the Vietnamese education has been holding over the years in many ways explains the privileged status the teaching profession enjoys. In Vietnam, education has been a political tool that authority uses
to maintain and enhance power – but it has also been a property of the people. People have managed to find ways to take advantage of education for their own benefits and for public benefits. Education, since the ancient Vietnam, has been to create a human being that can live independently and behave properly in a society that he/she is a member of. Therefore the profession of teaching, and the teacher, traditionally gained their status thanks to this educational aspect rather than the role in making the control machinery function.

With the mission of educating a “full” person of good morality and competencies, teaching and teachers have always been highly valued. The teacher is always considered to be one who is knowledgeable, educated, and of good morals. Since the early time of the country, the senior who taught the younger with their accumulated wisdom and knowledge was highly respected both in the community and in the family. This tradition – combined with the later influence from a Confucian heritage – won teachers a special status in Vietnamese society. The respect for teachers and the fondness for knowledge can be seen in Vietnamese proverbs: *Without your teacher, you would not have been able to do anything*, and *The one who teaches you one character is your teacher, but the one who teaches you half a character is also your teacher*. During the French colonisation, teachers acted as social activists and enlighteners as they used schools as frontiers for nationalism ideologies (Tran Thi Thanh Thanh, 2014).

In today’s Vietnam, although the Confucian order of King-Teacher-Father is no longer relevant, teaching and teachers still enjoy a special positioning. Studying English classrooms at tertiary level in Vietnam, Kramsch & Sullivan (1996) point out that the professional-academic culture in Vietnam reflects traditional Confucian heritage, expressed through classroom discourses with teacher-student interactions. The university ELT teacher plays the traditional mentor role guiding students not only in academic learning but also reminding them of moral values (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). The Confucian heritage in the contemporary Vietnamese education may not be as apparent as what Kramsch & Sullivan noticed twenty years ago, but it can be said that honouring learning and respecting teachers remain among the core values (Phan Le Ha, 2004). The teacher is regarded as the master of knowledge who guides students not only in academic matters but also in moral behaviour; at the same time, learners are expected to follow teachers’ guidance. Every year in November, Teacher’s Day is celebrated as a time when students, parents, and the whole society show gratitude to teachers. Being a teacher generally implies the person owns a strong ethical background and proved professional expertise, with a respectful mission of educating a child into a full human being.

*“The Higher education crisis” and the problems in English language education*

The Vietnamese higher education, with colleges offering three-year college degrees and universities offering bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees, has been
experiencing a rapid expansion. In 2001, there were just about 873 thousand students. In 2015 there were approximately 2.12 million students enrolled in 445 higher education institutions (Vietnam National Statistics, 2015).

This expansion, however, seems to excel in quantitative terms rather than qualitative (Le Thí Kieu Huong, 2014). The Vietnamese higher education, including English language education, has encountered numerous challenges. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc socialism systems in the early 1990s, the country re-engaged with the international economy and community, and English replaced Russian as the most important foreign language taught in the national school system. However, with a centrally-planning mechanism legacy, higher education has been struggling to keep up. The challenges this sector encounters have been termed as “the endless stagnation” (Hoang Tuy, 2007/8), “Vietnamese higher education problems” (World Bank, 2008), “Higher education crisis” (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008), “Higher education issues” (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011), and “Higher education challenges” (Clark, 2014).

A report by Vallely & Wilkinson (2008) from Harvard Kennedy School described the Vietnamese higher education as being “in a crisis”. The report highlights the poor publication record by Vietnamese researchers in peer-reviewed international journals that caused the country to lag behind its Southeast Asian neighbours. In the domestic arena, the report notes Vietnamese universities were failing since they cannot produce the workforce demanded by the economy and society. In another background report by researchers for the World Bank project on Vietnam higher education reform (World Bank, 2008), the sector is seen as “not yet fully equipped to respond” to the new conditions (p. xiii) – one problem it says is not unique to Vietnam. Professor Hoang Tuy, a prominent Vietnamese scientist, in his essay published in Tia Sang journal in February, 2007, described the system as having failed to meet international standards and thus cannot cooperate and compete: “Speed and the ability to respond rapidly are of central importance if one is not to miss opportunities” (Hoang Tuy, 2007/8).

Similarly, English language education at tertiary level has also been under criticism from both the public and scholars for its inefficiency. The quality of teaching and learning foreign languages at both general and tertiary levels in Vietnam remained very low. According to a survey among non-English majors in 59 universities in the country conducted in 2008 by MOET, as many as 51.7 percent of the students could not fulfil the English proficiency requirements by employers (Thanh Ha, 2008).

Several major causes leading to these issues have been identified: a centrally-planning structure of university governance, the lack of recognised quality standards, and lecturer shortage and quality. Professional qualification of university teachers is another challenge. Of the total number of academic faculty in 2007–2008, only 0.79 percent are full professors, 4.72 percent associate professors, and 14.77 percent hold doctorate degrees (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011). The lack of qualified
teaching staff proves to be more visible in non-state institutions and newly upgraded universities (Clark, 2014), and indeed in 2014 the government halted the enrollment in 207 programmes of 71 tertiary institutions due to a lack of qualified full-time teaching staff. Overloaded teaching and low salaries have discouraged university teachers from engaging in research and self-learning (Tran Ngoc Ca, 2006).

The teaching method in many universities remains “traditional” with rote learning as the common approach and teachers do most in-class talking while students passively take notes (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2011). In the field of English language teaching, the quality of ELT teachers has been highlighted by the MOET as one major issue (Nguyen Ngoc Hung, 2015). English language lecturers considered competent in both language proficiency and subject knowledge have been in shortage (Thuy Vinh, 2012). They also have limited knowledge of ELT teaching and learning realities beyond their classroom context (Vu Mai Trang & Pham Thi Thanh Thuy, 2014).

Responses to crisis: Reforms in HE and ELT


In 2005, the Vietnamese government issued Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP on the “Fundamental and comprehensive reform of higher education in Vietnam 2006–2020” (Higher Education Reform Agenda, HERA). The policy is seen as a turning point in higher education governance in Vietnam with attempts to decentralise the system and call for greater institutional autonomy (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008; Pham Thanh Nghi, 2010). The aim of the higher education system is stated in the HERA as “satisfying the requirements of our national industrialisation and modernisation, international economic integration and people’s learning demands”.

Proposed in the HERA, Vietnam’s Higher Education Law was adopted in 2012 and is the country’s first law focusing specifically on higher education. The law sets the stage for Vietnam to move towards a knowledge-based economy and covers areas not previously mentioned (Pham Hiep, 2012). For example, HEIs will be given increased institutional autonomy in financial and academic affairs. They are to be classified into three categories: research-based HEIs, applied sciences-based HEIs, and vocational HEIs (Government of Vietnam, 2015, Decree 73/2015/ND-CP). This reflects the strategy to develop university’s research capacity and provide employability skills. Meanwhile, linkages between universities and industry (university – science and technology services – business) are promoted. HEIs are required to undergo internal and external accreditation. Ranking of universities, which informs state budget allocation, will also be established. Regarding academic staff, the law sets the minimum entry qualification for lecturers is MA’s degree. HEIs
need to prioritise staff development and increase the number of academics with PhDs and professorship.

The HERA also calls for developing a system of quality assurance and accreditation for higher education. Indeed, quality assurance (QA) has long been considered a key measure to address issues in HE with the establishment of the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation under MOET in 2003. It has become even more pressing in the context of globalisation (Nguyen Kim Dung, 2002; Madden, 2014), and now that Vietnam has joined international QA networks (e.g. the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network). In 2014, more than 75 percent of universities and 50 percent of colleges had internal quality assurance units.

In English language education, the arrival of Decision 1400/QD-TTg (2008) approving a MOET-led project entitled “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008–2020”, known as the National Foreign Languages Project 2020, marked a reform regarded as “an ambitious initiative” (Parks, 2011). As stated in this document, promoting foreign languages, mainly English, is “a way to meet the new challenge of this era”. The Project sets the goal that foreign languages (mainly English) education in Vietnam should enable students to be “more confident in communication to further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multi-cultural environment with a variety of languages”. Since 2010, within the NFL Project 2020, English has become a compulsory subject in grade 3 instead of grade 6. A CEFR-compatible proficiency framework is developed for learners and teachers of all levels as well as government staff. English teacher education and re-education are set as a key factor to realise the mission. Nationwide assessment to evaluate teachers’ language proficiency has been conducted since 2011. These examinations and evaluations are claimed to serve as a needs analysis survey “in order to execute plans for the recruitment, training and supplement of language teachers at training centres, professional vocation training schools, colleges and universities” (Decision 1400/QD-TTg). Other factors such as policies, and language teaching and learning facilities and environment are also given attention.

The professionalisation project

In an effort to improve the quality of university teachers, MOET has been implementing several policies. According to a report by MOET in 2009 (No.760/BC-BGDDT), the “standardisation process for university teachers” includes the passage of the HERA 2006–2020 which specifies teacher/students ratio requirement for different disciplines and sets targets for PhD education. At present, of about 74,000 academic staff employed by state HE institutions nationwide, around 17–18 percent possess doctorate degrees, while 50 percent have postgraduate qualifications (i.e.
master’s degree) and 31 percent graduate qualifications (Vietnam Statistics Office, 2014). A government fellowship programme (Project 322 and later 911) to send university teachers abroad for doctoral studies has been established and expanded. The country aims to increase the number of PhD holders by 23,000 academics during the period 2010–2020 and has spared a significant budget for this project (Prime Minister’s Decision 911, 2010). Institutions compete to attract candidates with the doctorate (Tran Huynh & Ngoc Ha, 2014).

The professionalisation in Vietnamese higher education is also influenced by a public administration reform, which started amid the economic reform during the 1990s. One of the key tasks of the public administration reform was (and as it remains today) to improve the productivity and quality of personnel (Andersson, 2003). With support from international organisations such as the UNDP and Sida, the aim is to reorganise the country’s civil services from a traditionally career-based system – a closed system where senior and mid-level positions are filled by promoting lower-ranked civil servants, to a position-based system in which the best-suited candidate is selected based on experience and training relevant to the position – or “merit and performance schemes” for hiring and promotion (Bruynooghe et al., 2009; Poon, Nguyen Khac Hung & Do Xuan Truong, 2009; Mellander, 2013). In 2012, Public Employees Law was passed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). It for the first time provides a clear definition of “public employees” as “Vietnamese citizens who are recruited according to working positions in public non-business units with work contracts and salaried from salary funds of public non-business units in accordance with the law”. More importantly, the work of public employees is referred to as “professional activities”, which means “the performance of work or tasks that require professional qualifications, capability and skills in a public non-business unit”. The term “professional titles” (chức danh nghề nghiệp) is also included for the first time. It is defined as “the name expressing the professional qualifications and capability of public employees in each professional field”. The Law is seen as acknowledging public employees as those whose professional activities require particular professional knowledge and skills (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Accompanying professional titles are standards, criteria, and codes, which are constructed by MOHA and concerned ministries. Following Public Employees Law 2012, a number of inter-ministerial (between MOHA and other ministries) circulars were passed mostly during 2014–2015 stipulating “professional titles, codes, and standards” for public employees. Circular 36/2014/TTLT-BGDĐT-BNV by MOHA and MOET in 2014, “Regulations on professional title codes and professional standards for public employees teaching in public higher education institutions”, which is analysed in the next chapter, is among these policies on human resources management reform.

Regarding English language education, within the NFL Project 2020, Vietnamese university ELT teachers need to pass a benchmark exam of C1 in order to be
qualified. They are also required to take ELT methodology short courses provided by MOET. The *Vietnam English Teacher Competency Framework* (ETCF) (part of this thesis’s key data) was approved in December 2012 as guidance for ELT teacher education and training in the country. The ETCF was designed following a number of international language teacher frameworks. Also, by 2013, MOET has assigned flagship universities to develop 12 model ELT programmes for English teacher education and professional development at both school and tertiary education (Public document 8436/BGDDT-GDDH). One of these programmes, targeted at lecturers of English as a non-major, is selected for analysis in this thesis. At the same time, similar to their colleagues in other disciplines, academics teaching English are required to take postgraduate studies, preferably leading to a PhD, within defined periods of time.

4.3 Chapter discussion and conclusion

This chapter has traced back the values and priorities Vietnamese education, including foreign language education, embraced over time to the present days. The change in the system of educational values reflects the country’s wider historical, and socio-political conditions. The rise and fall of foreign language education in Vietnam according to colonial heritage and political alignment can be related to the case of some other countries in the region such as Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore (Sagoo, McLellan, & Wood, 2015), China (Yang, 2016), and Malaysia (Badiozaman, 2016).

Throughout the “multilingual” history of a nation under the influences of numerous “internal” and “external” political, cultural, and ideological powers – while being agriculture-based and greatly dependent on natural forces, the two key values of the Vietnamese education have been educating individuals with morality and equipping them with life skills. Education, including foreign language education, was set as a tool serving the ruling but it also aimed to enable individuals to be able to live both independently and in harmony with external forces, whether they are the nature, the authority, the society, or the family. Being educated earned people respect, high status, security and in many cases, power. This “duality” position suggests education is both a public good and a private good, which in turn is perhaps what granted learning and teachers a privileged status.

In the contemporary history, the account has shown that education – including higher education and English language education, continues to play a significant role. The system, as always, is part of a wider ruling system keeping the country on the wheel, yet the imprints of other discourses, e.g. the market-oriented economy, the knowledge-based economy, and globalisation, have become prominent. The Confucian heritages of valuing learning and teachers remain part of Vietnamese education today, but at the same time, it has acquired new missions, values, and
priorities. The values have changed throughout history, and today has seen the somewhat dominant role of a system of values underpinned by economic priorities and globalisation. Responding to the needs of the society, mainly the labour market, is placed high on HE and ELT agendas. As seen in the HERA and Decision 1400 on the NFL Project 2020, improving Vietnamese learners’ abilities for the workplace, or employability, is the key priority. Indeed, it has been widely promoted that the most important mission of universities is to produce human resources with employability skills that meet the needs of the changing society within the global knowledge economy (Marginson & Tran Ly, 2014; Nguyen Ngoc Hung, 2015).

The account provided above suggests higher education and English language education are the tools for Vietnam’s economic development and international integration, now that the “labour market” has expanded beyond the country’s geographical borders. This linking between higher education to the country’s socio-economic development is considered the key message in contemporary Vietnam higher education discourse – also discussed by for example Tran Ngoc Ca (2006) and Madden (2014). At the same time, English language education gains its important role for international integration under the impact of globalisation, as seen in other neighbouring countries (Sagoo, McLellan, & Wood, 2015). In this way, English education is not necessarily natural or neutral, but it has been made a tool to serve political and economic interests (Phillipson, 1992).

What has been depicted in this chapter also implies that education reforms, and the professionalisation project, with their particular values, must be placed and understood in a wider historical, political, cultural context. An understanding of the history of Vietnamese education values provides more insights into the nature of what is currently taking place in the reforms in HE and ELT in Vietnam and the professionalisation of academics in particular. The findings of this chapter can be related to earlier research on education reforms and modernisation where those processes are embedded in national cultural contexts (Alexiadou & Ozga, 2002). Considering education as an “ensemble” (Robertson & Dale, 2015), the analysis goes beyond methodological nationalism, statism and educationism, to the “roots” of the changes in the contemporary university that deep-seated in larger discursive contexts (Dale, 2007).

With this stance, the thesis continues with the next chapter – Methodology, which lays out the approaches and methods employed in addressing the aims of the study to understand professionalism and its construction in contemporary Vietnamese higher education and English language teaching.
Chapter 5 Methodology

In Chapter 1, I have explained how my research design and questions are informed by my theoretical framing. In this chapter, I justify how particular methodological decisions were made to address the research questions and how they fit into the study design.

5.1 A constructivist, interpretivist ontology and epistemology

How we perceive and position ourselves – our ontology, can impact how we see the epistemology of our research – the kind of knowledge we are interested in and the approaches and techniques we use to look for the answers (e.g. Hyland, 2002; Andersson & Kalman, 2010; Erixon, 2011; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). My ontological view of the world is based on constructivism, which sees the nature of reality as being “perspective-dependent, constructed and disputed” (Erixon, 2011, p.223). I thus choose to agree with researchers with an interpretivist epistemological orientation who acknowledge “multiple realities having multiple meanings” (Yin, 2014, p.17). Humans, being deliberate and creative, actively construct the reality, but events and behaviour are also “situated” – they “evolve over time and are richly affected by context” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.17). Adopting the views seeing professionalism as a socially constructed notion (Freidson, 2001) and educational analysis as an ensemble/an ecology of economic, political, and cultural discourses (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Pennington & Hoekje, 2014; Robertson & Dale, 2015) is in line with this constructivist ontology and epistemology.

5.2 Case study with an embedded design

My understandings of professionalism informed by prior profession literature and sociological education theories, together with my personal epistemology and ontology, form the “abstraction” (Yin, 2014) of the thesis. The next step is to explore the phenomenon (the contents and construction of professionalism) in the real life (empirical data). This step led me to choose case study approach since a specific, real-life “case” is “a concrete manifestation of the abstraction” (Yin, 2014, p.34). Case studies, with real people in real situations, enable complex social phenomena to be understood (Yin, 2014). A case can be an object or entity with a clear identity, an event, an activity, or a process, and it takes an interest in a holistic description (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The research is a case study of professionalism of university ELT in Vietnam. Studying professionalism in a particular higher education institution situated in a national context, the research adopts embedded design with an extended method and this informed its data collection and analysis approaches. In embedded case design,
the phenomenon being studied is examined from both global and specific perspectives (Yin, 2014, p. 54). In my study, the global unit of analysis is professionalism constructed at national level, while more specific units include professionalism as articulated in an institution, and by faculty members.

Consequently, the case is not a sampling unit. Rather, studying the case is an “opportunity to shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or principles” (Yin, 2014, p.40). The research acknowledges that a case has its identity (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) embedded in particular history and socio-cultural contexts. However, set against a global discourse of an increasing managerialism culture in “an age of measurement and accountability” (Biesta, 2009; Mausethagen, 2013) that has been turning academia into an “industry” (Bennich-Björkman, 2013), it can be said that, this case-study research and its findings, may also reflect the trends and tendencies observed in other contexts. This, in a way, is in line with the contemporary view towards educational research. In a global era, education needs to be considered within a complex, even overlapping, system that reflects the historical and socio-cultural dynamics of different levels (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Pennington & Hoekje, 2014; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014; Wahlström, 2014). The characteristics of education sectors have changed and are changing under the impact of globalising forces. Therefore, a number of methodological “rules” including the traditional binary of global/local in researching education may not prove to be longer relevant (Robertson & Dale, 2008). Rather, research into education, in the time of the knowledge economy and globalisation, moves “beyond a ‘field and context’ approach to one that recognises and seeks to explore the relationships between different scales of governance” (Dale, 2005, p.124, italics in original). The study does not rely on linear interactions but aims at a holistic approach: it acknowledges there are “emergent properties” on the progression from a lower to a higher hierarchical level – things that cannot be explained by examining the component parts themselves (Beresford, 2010).

5.3 Data collection and processing

In case studies, the types of data that are used are often eclectic (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.299). In my research, I chose (policy) documents and interviews as primary sources of data but also considered archival records, field observation, and informal conversations as secondary sources to gain a holistic picture of the case. The selection of the study’s data was guided by the research’s purposes, its epistemological positioning, and also by practicalities and logistics such as accessibility (Tuckett, 2004). Document study (including policy analysis) and interview analysis are the two main research instruments.

Document analysis has been widely employed in qualitative research and in case studies (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). Policies, at the state and institutional levels, in my
study are understood as both texts and processes, intentions and enactments (Ball, 1994; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Policy is “both institutionally and socially constructed and enacted by actors who are located within specific frameworks and, hence, regulations, histories and cultures of practice” (Alexiadou et al, 2016, pp.14–15). The study, therefore, looks at legal documents, but also regulations, public speeches, mission statements, as well as actual management mechanisms. Meanwhile, contemporary policy research also proposes using this method with interviews: research on policy usually involves a “canvass” of two types of sources: documents and people (Bardach, 2012).

Interviewing is considered one of the most frequently used tools in qualitative research and in case studies (e.g. Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2009, p.90). Interviews provide rich, thick, and personalised information that enable the researcher to see how people interpret the world around them and not solely from the perspective of the researcher (Merriam 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Through interviews not only complete answers but also responses to complex and deep issues can be obtained (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.409).

Following the research design, the thesis’s data inventory consists of three different, yet connected, sets of data, corresponding to the three research questions. To address Research Question 1, five key national policies related to professionalism currently applying to (ELT) university teachers were identified and analysed (Table 2 – Data set 1). Data sets 2 and 3 were collected in a university in Vietnam. Data set 2 (Tables 3 & 4), which is geared towards Research Question 2, includes institutional policies and mechanisms (at both university and department levels) on academic staff management, and interviews with six departmental managers (three at high-level and three at midlevel). Data set 3 (Table 5) comprises interviews with eleven academics at the department, of which eight are teachers and three are midlevel managers. These three managers already provided information in Data set 2, but they were included in Data set 3 since they also expressed their views as teachers, and indeed they have teaching responsibilities along with management tasks.

Together with these primary sources of data, secondary sources were also collected before, during, and after my field trip as useful additional substance that contributes to my sense-making of the issues being investigated. These include website data (e.g. university’s mission statement, president’s speeches, Introduction pages), field notes (e.g. meeting notes), archival data (e.g. class observation records, student feedback form, teacher portfolio), photos, campus life observation, and informal conversations. In collecting case study data, the researcher needs to be a good “listener” gathering information through multiple modalities, and stay adaptive, since although the collection process does follow a formal protocol, specific information that may
become relevant to the project is not always readily predictable (Yin, 2014, p.73). For my research, this combination of data sources contributes to the validity of the study and helps orientate and locate myself in the field, being “familiar” with the context yet in a “strange” site (Heath & Street, 2008). This approach has largely been used by researchers to investigate organisations, including higher education institutions, especially in changing circumstances (e.g. Sedgwick, 2007; Toma, 2009; Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014; Gonzales, 2014, 2015).

In this way, to explore and understand – which is the purpose of the research, the data collection process was conducted following a semi-structured approach – purposefully yet openly. The research started within a general field of study of teachers’ professionalism, their work and how it is managed. As the project progressed, key foci were identified for subsequent study and data collection. For example, as described later, the process of choosing the national policies commenced with the general area of university (English) teachers in Vietnam. However, the particular documents to be examined were selected thereafter during the process according to specific requirements of the research aims and also the nature of policy documents as data. Similarly, before visiting the university and the department, I had no pre-determined decisions about which documents to be gathered, except some broad information about the institution’s recent developments in terms of strategic organisation and staff management available as website documentation and archives – which are also “sources of evidence” in case study (Yin, 2014, p.106).

During the field study, more specific data targets were formed as more input was gathered, for example how the university expresses its aspiration to be a “university of the world”, how it plans to use a business-like model for staff appraisal (the Key Performance Indices), and why the English proficiency test and research are currently the key issues at the department. The interview questions (which will be discussed later on) resembled “guided conversations” rather than “structured queries” (Yin, 2014, p.110) and they were designed as groups of themes that allow rich and thick information to be provided. The participants were those who are believed to be “knowledgeable” and can provide rich and extensive data (Ball, 1990). Information was sought based on participants’ experience, reflection, and interpretation from both personal viewpoint and broader settings including institutional and socio-cultural contexts. This semi-structured approach enables the research to “catch the dynamics of unfolding situations” of the case (Nisbet & Watt, 1984, p.78 as cited in Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.298) and at the same time provides greater depth to the study (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.156), which fits with the nature of the research as an in-depth qualitative case study.

Data set 1 National policies related to (ELT) academics’ professionalism

The policy inventory analysed consists of five interconnected policy documents
divided into three chain parts. All documents are publicly available on Vietnam governmental websites. A number of related policies were also studied to provide a wider discursive picture the five documents are embedded in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy chain 1</th>
<th>Policy title</th>
<th>Referred in text as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-ministerial Circular No 36/2014/TTLT-BGDDT-BNV (2014). Regulations on professional title codes and professional standards for public employees teaching in public higher education institutions</td>
<td>Circular 36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy chain 2</th>
<th>Policy title</th>
<th>Referred in text as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision 72/2014/QD-TTg (2014). Regulations on the teaching and learning in foreign languages at schools and other educational institutions</td>
<td>Decision 72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy chain 3</th>
<th>Policy title</th>
<th>Referred in text as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public document 792/BGDDT-NGCQLGD on Vietnam English Teacher Competency Framework (ETCF) and Implementation guidelines (2014) and the ETCF itself</td>
<td>Document 792 and the ETCF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selection of the policies followed three principles. First, the documents need to be key legal instruments regarding the matter. The policies chosen have been identified as the major policies that currently form the legal framework affecting university teachers, including those teaching English in particular, in Vietnam. Three of the documents (Circular 36, Decision 16, and Decision 72) are circulars and decisions by ministries (Ministry of Education and Training – MOET and/or Ministry of Home Affairs – MOHA) that provide detailed policy guidance under laws and decrees. Meanwhile, the remaining two (Document 792/the English Teacher Competency Framework, and Programme 2013) are legislative guidelines issued by a ministerial body (the National Foreign Languages Project 2020 under MOET). This legal status allows the texts to have a relevant level of specificity expected to be informative for this analysis. In addition, these legal instruments can be said to directly affect the work of university teachers, including English teachers, because the first two policies concern university teachers in Vietnam, while the last three

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5 In Vietnam, relevant government ministries are responsible for drafting laws to present to the government and then the National Assembly for approval. Decrees, issued by the government, establish rules under a Law, while Decisions and Circulars, issued by both the Government and ministries, specify guidance for implementing the Law and Decree. Along with these legal instruments, policies of lower legal power including e.g. Public Document (Công văn) and Guidance (Hướng dẫn), give instructions to the implementation of higher level legislation. During the process of drafting policies, expert and public consultation is sought for revision and amendment.
policies apply to English teachers in particular. In this way, the policies selected offer a data pool for a “from above” professionalism to emerge from the analysis.

Second, the policies need to deal with the notion of professionalism and related issues as their main themes. The chosen documents all address aspects of professionalism for university academic staff, including those who are teaching English. Although the documents do not explicitly mention the particular term professionalism, they cover the legislative requirements concerning the professional knowledge and skills expected of university (English) teachers. In addition, the provision of rules and regulations regarding teacher work and professional roles in these documents can reveal insights into how the (ELT) teaching profession and university teachers are viewed.

Third, considerations of the nature of policies were also taken into account to complement and validate the selection. As put by Taylor (2004), policy documents are interrelated networks of social practices. Indeed, during the selection process, it was proved that it was not easy to identify straightforward the documents to be studied. This is because of the great number of policies available in Vietnam even within the particular field of higher education, while the Vietnam legal framework has been described as “undergoing continual revision and reform” (Australian government, 2012). Therefore, the interrelation between the policies was observed, which results in a document “chain” (Taylor, 2004) of three interlinked parts.

The first document chain part concerns professionalism applying to university teachers of all disciplines: Circular 36 on academics’ professional title criteria and standards and Decision 16 on teacher codes of ethics. Circular 36 is the most important policy document to date on the issue, while Decision 16 is referred in Circular 36 as its accompanying policy. The second part of the chain is Decision 72. This policy has a section on teachers teaching in foreign languages, which means university ELT teachers are included. Thus, although Decision 72 complements the general criteria and standards for lecturers’ professional titles (stipulated in Circular 36), because of its focus on foreign language teaching, it stays separate from the first chain part. It was not included in the third chain part either because of its legal nature – the policy is a Decision, thus has higher legal power than the third chain part policies. The third document chain part specifically covers the domain of English Language Teaching and has Document 792 concerning the Vietnam English Teacher Competency Framework ETCF, and Programme 2013 – a model professional development programme for university teachers of English as a non-major subject. Although issued by MOET (the National Foreign Languages Project 2020), these documents have a more instructive nature than those in the first two chain parts.

Therefore, the selection of policies as interlinked chain parts in my research not only helps to round up the data on which in-depth analysis could be drawn (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.159) but the method also fits with the characteristics of legal documents as a type of data. Policy documents are not often stand-alone but
built on a hierarchical network of other policies; they change and evolve. It is often possible to trace the link between policies by either looking for an explicit mentioning of this network in the policy, or by considering its relationship with others. Also, as policy is not only about text, but concerns actions, and contexts, policy processes need to be considered against a non-linear system of discourses (e.g. Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In this way, studying policies with reference to their networks and contexts mirrors the “genre chain” in policy analysis technique that views policies in a network of social practices (Taylor, 2004; Thomas, 2005).

Data set 2 Institutional policies and mechanisms related to (ELT) academics’ professionalism & Data set 3 ELT academics interviews

Data sets 2 and 3 were collected to explore how professionalism is constructed in the specific, real-life setting of a university in Vietnam.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the main interest of the research is ELT at tertiary level in Vietnam as a field, rather than a particular specialisation within the field. Therefore, the site investigated, although with its “identity” of a case (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) is among numerous HEIs in Vietnam, the majority of which provide English as a curriculum subject. To be relevant to the research aim, the university, however, should also be one that is in the process of professionalising its academic faculty, and the evidences of this process are generally available. Indeed, given the status of English and the ongoing higher education reforms in Vietnam (Chapter 4), it was not difficult to find a university that meets the above recruitment criteria. The selection of the particular institution for the research, therefore, was based on data accessibility. As described earlier, at first, two universities in Vietnam with these features were visited and equal amounts of data were collected following similar protocol. Since the thesis design was later readjusted (Chapter 1), only one university was analysed in this thesis.

The university chosen for this thesis, with the pseudonym “Dominus University”, has a long prior history of striving for quality and innovation, and in general, I was able to gain access to the data identified as being useful for the research. The time spent for fieldwork in the institution was three weeks in May 2014. I entered the field site with a specific enquiry – to investigate professionalism, and, as set out earlier, with the knowledge of the concept learnt from prior literature. Apart from the three weeks of field visit in person, I conducted a “virtual” field study by spending a significant amount of time trying to learn about the professionalism context from other sources (Yin, 2014) including documents about the university and the department accessible on their websites, as well as related local newspaper articles.

Dominus University is considered one of the largest institutions in engineering in Vietnam. Founded during the 1960s, it was among the first universities to provide technical teacher training for vocational colleges. The university has expanded its
area to training a large number of engineers for the whole country. At the time of visit (2014), the university has over 26 thousand students. There are more than fifty bachelor’s programmes (four-year study) in electrical and electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, automotive engineering, civil engineering, environmental engineering, economics, graphic arts and media, and foreign languages (mainly English). The university also offers master’s and PhD programmes, mostly in engineering. The present stated aim of Dominus University is to maintain its position among the top ten universities in Vietnam and start to excel its performance by regional and international standards. The university claims to be the first in the country to apply the quality management system ISO and is currently considering more extensive quality assurance and management systems and mechanisms. With the launch of the Vietnam National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (NFL Project 2020), the university has started to participate in various projects on English education. As such, Dominus University, as an organisation in the process of reform in general and professionalising its staff members in particular, is believed to provide the substance for understanding the phenomenon in question.

The department studied is the Department of Foreign Languages. It provides a bachelor's program in English teacher education and, for a much larger part, general communicative English and ESP (English for Special Purposes, e.g. English for engineering) to non-English majored students from other faculties in the university. The department was established in 2007, upgraded from a division specialised in English language education. At the beginning it had only 16 teaching staff; in 2014 the department has four divisions with 39 faculty members.

To understand what professionalism is currently composed of in Dominus University, policy documents (e.g. recruitment announcement and Key Performance Indices – KPIs), web archival data (e.g. mission statement, president’s speeches), were collected since they reveal the dominant aims and priorities as well as management practices of the university (Kuenssberg, 2011; O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011; Mårtensson, Roxà, & Stensaker, 2014; Gonzales, 2014). Field notes (e.g. notes made in meetings during the site visit) were also considered. At the departmental level, since departmental policies were either less available or more difficult to get access to than those at the institutional level, information was gathered from both documents and from interviewing departmental academic managers.

Basing on the information obtained before, and during, the interviews, a number of documents currently implemented at the department were identified and asked for access by the researcher. They include the department’s BA curriculum, teacher evaluation, lesson observation reports, and teaching portfolio. I also asked to attend several activities taking place at the site during the visit: one national review meeting for the first phase of the NFL Project 2020, one meeting called “Dialogue with students” between the department management board, teachers, and students, and three classroom visits. When access permissions to these events were sought, I
clarified that the purpose of attending was for contextual information and not for judgement and evaluation.

Table 3. Data set 2: Institutional policies and mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional system</td>
<td>• Mission statement &amp; structural organisation (website data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Speeches from the president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Policies: Staff recruitment policy and KPIs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes/photos: e.g. meeting notes, campus setting, English club attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmental mechanism</td>
<td>• Departmental self-introduction &amp; organisation (website data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruitment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 Student’s Evaluation form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 Teacher class observation reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 Teaching portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 interviews with The Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews with 2 Deputy Chairs and parts of interviews with 3 Heads of Divisions (on management aspects)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Data set 2: Departmental managers interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managers interviewed</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pseudonyms)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chair</td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>&gt; 30 years</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tam</td>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>10–20 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh</td>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>10–20 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phuong</td>
<td>Head of Division</td>
<td>&gt; 15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vy</td>
<td>Head of Division</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phong</td>
<td>Head of Division</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Data set 3: ELT academics interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academics interviewed</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pseudonyms)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phuong</td>
<td>Teacher (Head of Division)</td>
<td>&gt; 15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vy</td>
<td>Teacher (Head of Division)</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phong</td>
<td>Teacher (Head of Division)</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linh</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA (planning PhD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chau</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>8–15 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>MA (recently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anh</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>BA (taking MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>BA (taking MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minh</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>BA (taking MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huy</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 8 years</td>
<td>BA (taking MA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the fourteen interviewees, nine are female and five are male. Among the eleven teachers in Data set 3, three are midlevel managers (from Data set 2), and three have just finished their probation period. Only the interview parts where the managers were talking about themselves as teachers were included in Data set 3 for analysis.

The demographic information of the participants interviewed reflects a fair image of Foreign Languages Department (FL Department) in terms of work experience, gender, and academic qualifications. Regarding years of age and experience, the 39 faculty members can be divided into three “generations” of career stages: new-entrant teachers with less than 8 years of experience (59 percent), mid-career teachers with 8–15 years of experience (18 percent), and senior teachers who have more than 15 years of experience (23 percent). The Department academic staff can be characterised as being young since both new-entrant and mid-career cohorts are under 37–38 years of age. In terms of gender distribution, the department can be described as a female-dominated one with 31 female academic staff (80 percent). About qualification, there is one faculty member (3 percent) holding the PhD (the Chair), while about half of the staff (54 percent) having an MA degree in ELT/TESOL, and half (43 percent) a BA degree in ELT/TESOL. The teachers having MA degrees are those in the mid-career generation, while the majority of those newer teachers with BA degrees are taking MA courses. A small proportion (7 percent) of the qualifications were from institutions in countries outside Vietnam (one in Australia, one in Europe, and one in Asia). At the time of visit, one staff member is undertaking PhD studies in Australia, and another is taking MA studies in Europe.

These descriptions of FL Department, in turn, reflect the rather typical characteristics of the occupation of teaching and ELT in particular. Borg’s study (2009) shows that ELT teachers are quite young in their profession. Meanwhile, university teaching and ELT has been termed as a “feminised” job due to the lack of male teachers’ presence (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Mohideen, 2014). Meanwhile, the picture regarding staff’s academic qualifications at the department mirrors the general current situation in Vietnam higher education and in ELT in general. It is at present estimated that among the 74 thousand academics working in 347 public HEIs in Vietnam, 67 percent have postgraduate qualifications and only 17 percent hold PhD degrees (Vietnam National Statistics, 2014). In the field of ELT, it has been observed that ELT teachers do not often have qualifications as advanced as their colleagues in other disciplines (Nunan, 2001; Borg, 2009; Vazquez, Guzmán, & Roux, 2013).

Interview protocol

The fourteen participants interviewed, as mentioned earlier, were purposively recruited. During the first interview with the Chair, the researcher requested to invite participants of different genders, ages, tenure/labour contracts, and from different
divisions within the department. Together with the Chair as a research participant, additional thirteen faculty members, including five managers and eight teachers, then agreed to participate. The interview invitation was emailed to potential participants in the form of an information package, which comprises two brief information sheets, one for teachers and one for managers, as well as the Study consent form (Appendices 1, 2, and 3). When composing the project summary, I ensured that while the summary provides sufficient key information about the nature and purposes of the project, it should not reveal too much in order to avoid the risk of misleading the interviewees, especially given that the aim of the interviews is to explore their conceptualisation of a contested, shifting, even vague notion such as professionalism.

To build a trustful rapport with participants and to ensure the information collected is valid, I reconfirmed in the interviews that they understood the nature of the project. In the first meeting with the Chair, I emphasised the aim of the study, with the topic of professionalism, is to explore the operations of the university and the department rather than for an evaluation purpose. Before starting every interview, I also confirmed with the participants that it was not the purpose of the interview to judge any definition of professionalism. All interviews, before they were started, were described to participants as, (although they may revolve around some particular themes), “chatty” conversations about their own work (or “conversational interviews”), rather than being strictly-standardised. Approximately four hours of interviews were conducted with the three high-level managers (The Chair and two Deputy chairs); and eleven interviews, each lasted around one hour, were carried out with eight faculty members and three middle-level managers (who spoke as both teachers and managers).

The interview design was semi-structured and contained both factual and interpretation-seeking questions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.417). This created a flexible framework for the interviewee to provide not only contextual data but also perspectives. The interview questions were grouped into key common themes such as teacher self-perception, expectations for teachers, teacher work organisation and management, conceptualisation of the current changes, and the term “professionalism”. Since the interviews were of a conversational nature, the questions were tuned according to the interviewee’s experience. Thus, the questions asked to the managers (Appendix 4) involved the department’s history, its organisational structure and strategic goals, what the institution expects from teachers, and how teachers’ work is managed and supported by the department and the university. Meanwhile, the interviews for the teachers (Appendix 5) focused mainly on their daily work as faculty members, expectations from the institution, and how their work is managed and supported by the department and the university, and their opinions about how these management mechanisms function.
The inclusion of these content areas was guided by prior literature on professionalism.

In this way, professionalism, as conceived by participants, was sought both indirectly and directly. Most of the themes (and accompanying questions) aim at exploring the notion in an indirect way by inviting participants to express perspectives about their work. The word *professionalism* was mentioned only when the interviewees were asked to define the term. This interview schedule design was dependent on my research aims (studying this notion) but also informed by my earlier observations from the literature and prior field trips. As the literature indicates, professionalism is a shifting and contested concept involving different aspects. Also, during my first full-scale study in the UK, I found out that the word *professionalism* appeared rather intimidating to many participants, being such a grand, judgemental term. Thus, if the research relies on only direct questions (e.g. What do you think is “professionalism”?), the answers given may be either cautious or guarded, so even before the interviews, it had been emphasised again with participants that the purpose of the research is not to judge their views.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The study was conducted following the ethical guidelines by the Swedish Research Council’s *Good Research Practice* (2011), which is in turn informed by the Swedish legislation on research ethics (e.g. the Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans, Personal Data Act, and the Archives Act). It was decided among the author and the supervisory team that since the research project, with a focus on professionalism, does not carry an obvious risk of physical or psychological harm to the research subject, nor handles sensitive information, the project does not need to file an application for ethics review (Swedish Research Council, 2001, p.50). Meanwhile, because at the time of study, there is no national committee on research ethics in Vietnam, nor at the participating university, no application for ethics was made in Vietnam.

With these conditions, however, I made every effort to ensure that the research project adheres to ethics standards. Several measures were taken to achieve this. The project’s initial research plan, including the overall approach to data collection and data treatment, was first reviewed in my Planning Seminar at the Department of Language Studies, Umeå University. For the field trip to the UK university, more detailed data collection procedures were developed following the research ethics principles promoted in the Swedish Research Council’s 2011 guidelines. While in the UK, an application for ethics review was submitted to the participating university’s Research Ethics Committee as required and the project was granted ethics approval. The application consists of, among other requested administrative forms, an information package including Project’s summary, Project’s Information sheets for
study participants, and Study consent form (which were later used for the Vietnam field trips). The procedures later conducted in Vietnam were largely identical to the procedures that had been conducted in the UK.

With these measures, it can be said that the project has met the research ethics requirements recognised by Swedish and UK standards. During the data collection, the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were respected. Among the data for my three-levelled embedded case study in the context of Vietnam, it was national policy documents that proved to be less of a challenge for access. As mentioned earlier, all the five documents analysed, as well as other related policies, are available and accessible online. At Dominus University, the data collection and analysis started prior to the trip, when the information about the university and its Foreign Languages Department was gathered and studied; and all this information was publicised on their official websites and/or social media channels (official YouTube channels and Facebook pages). Before arriving at the site, I had sent a formal letter asking for access permission, and it was approved. In my communication with the Chair of the department before the field trip, I clarified to him that utmost efforts would be made to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the university, the department, and the teachers as the participants of the project. The package sent to both the Chair and the potential participants includes a cover letter asking for access permission – it outlines the project and a tentative schedule; Information sheets for participants; and Study consent form (which are the forms used in the UK study). The documents specify the purpose of the study, the reasons why the participant was invited, what participation involves, how data will be processed, and the voluntary nature of participation – that participants can withdraw from the project at any time as they wish. It was also mentioned that all interviews would be digitally audio recorded and interviewees’ words would be used for analysis and publication purposes, and their identity would be kept confidential.

The interview meetings with those who agreed to participate in the project then took place at a time and an on-campus location mutually convenient for participants and for the study’s purposes (e.g. low background noise). Before starting the interviews, I briefed participants again about the main contents of the project and asked if they had further questions. I also restated their rights of anonymity, confidentiality, and of withdrawal from the project. They were once more reminded that their words would be analysed and might be quoted in future publications. Again, I emphasised that their opinions and viewpoints would not be judged as “right” or “wrong”. After they had agreed to sign the Study consent form, I started the audio record. At the end of the interviews, I asked if participants felt comfortable expressing what they had wanted to say, and if there were any contents or words that they wished to recall. All participants said they were fine with the interviews.

Preserving participants’ anonymity and confidentiality was also attended to as the demographic information of the university, the department, and the teachers was
processed and analysed. Interview records were saved in a password-protected computer, while relevant policy documents and other artefacts from the field trip (e.g. teaching portfolio, classroom observations) were stored in a safe place. Interview transcriptions were coded using pseudonyms, and person’s or place names, if revealing, were modified.

5.5 Data analysis: The connections between language, meaning, context and interpretation

With the aims to explore the key features of professionalism and to understand the value systems underlying the representation of the concept, the research adopts an analytical approach that acknowledges language as being value-laden and discursively conditioned.

The study’s analysis emphasises a holistic, discursive approach and its data were thus treated beyond linguistic values. The texts in my research are viewed as being perspective-taking, and the reading of these data is “rooted in the connections of texts to engagement in and simulations of actions, activities, and interactions – to real and imagined material and social worlds” (Gee, 2001, p.716). A discursive approach to analysis also accords with the earlier-stated positioning of my thesis viewing education study, including ELT in general and professionalism in particular, as framing and being framed in economic, political, and cultural discourses (Freidson, 2001; Pennington & Hoekje, 2014; Robertson & Dale, 2015).

Seeing each policy document and interview as an entire data item, I used thematic analysis to identify the “contents” and “forms” of professionalism as they are articulated in policy documents, in managers’ interviews, and in teachers’ interviews. The data were treated as a whole, with language contents serving as the starting point for themes to emerge and interpretation to be deduced (Westum, 2014). In this case, the linguistic features used to describe and formulate components of professionalism were analysed at the levels of words, patterns of language use, and links between language and the wider context. Thus, by looking at the data at different examination levels – words, phrases, themes, and the social context and milieu in which they are set (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), I was able to analyse the texts from different angles: both semantic description and value interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2008), which are the aims of my research inquiries.

The thesis is set in Vietnam, with most of the data collected in the Vietnamese language. All policies are in Vietnamese, except the Vietnam Teacher Competency Framework, which was originally developed and disseminated in English. The data collected at Dominus University was also in Vietnamese. Likewise, the interviews with academic managers and ELT teachers were conducted in Vietnamese – their mother tongue, so that they can provide answers and opinions to the fullest (an example of the raw data is provided in Appendix 6). Being aware that my thesis is a
cross-language qualitative study, I employed a number of strategies to minimise possible consequences translation may have for the study’s validity, e.g. mistranslations either due to language differences or because translation is interpretation (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010). Thus all data were analysed in their source language – Vietnamese, and the translation was delayed until my reporting of the findings to avoid too-early interpretation risks. The decision for this late-phase translation was taken mainly because of my positioning towards the relationship between language, meaning, and context (texts as being value-laden and conditioned by discourses – including history, cultural, and political contexts) and their accompanying methodological strategies (texts treated as entire entities, texts analysed both from contents and forms). As a native user of Vietnamese, I searched to understand the data as their meanings are expressed in the language, bearing in mind that the language is in turn embedded in its discourses.

Analysis and coding stages

Policy document analysis

To address Research Question 1, Data set 1 was analysed employing policy analysis. Viewing education policy as a discursive practice among a network of social practices (Taylor, 2004; Thomas, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Gulson, Clarke, Petersen, 2015), the study deconstructs professionalism and attempts to reveal the politics behind its articulation in five major national-level policies.

Policy is viewed in my study as something to be problematised rather than accepted (Gulson, Clarke, Petersen, 2015). Since “policy is clearly a matter of the authoritative allocation of values” (Ball, 1990, p.3), in the study, linguistic features were attended not only as a way to investigate explicit meanings, but texts are treated as conveying, through signs and symbols, “a way of thinking that is culturally or institutionally conditioned” (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.574). In other words, the study aims to problematise the seemingly “technical” – e.g. “to recognise what might at first glance look like procedural or practical questions, such as how best to implement a particular policy, how to identify best practices, or how to design evaluations, are always already epistemic and political questions” (Gulson, Clarke, Petersen, 2015, p.5).

Relying on this premise, the thesis sees policy documents as conveying several layers of meaning, which can be examined through both content and form; they are also placed in connection with different social discourses beyond internal linguistic structures. The texts were treated as complete bodies of data, that is, each policy document was individually analysed but with reference to its corresponding chain parts and the discursive context it is embedded in. Attention was paid not only to what the text says (semantic analysis for contents), but also how the contents are
presented (interpretative analysis). In this way, both description and interpretation become necessary analytical strategies so that implicit and explicit meanings may be unravelled. Thus, by searching for “patterns in language in use, building on and referring back to the assumptions she or he is making about the nature of language, interaction and society and the interrelationships between them” (Taylor, 2001, p.39), I tried to “loosen the knot” (Munger, 2000) by focusing on the twists of the knot (parts of the whole) in order to get a better idea of the rope (nature of the whole).

The specific analysis stages, with accompanying analysis questions (adapted from Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp.54–56), are described in Table 6. Each analysis stage entailed reading attempts during which semantic analysis and interpretative analysis formed a recursive process, and meanings emerged as resulting from both description and reflection. The analysis tried to investigate the meanings of the policies by focusing on both contextualising and deconstructing the text (Hyatt, 2013) through social discursive levels and more explicit linguistic levels. Again, although the phrases and steps appear to be set out in a linear sequence, the coding was an iterative, recursive process.

Table 6. Analysis and coding process for policy analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Familiarise with the document, both contents and forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content: What kind of policy document is it? What is its legal status? Who issued it? To whom was it issued? What is it about? What is its main purpose? When was it adopted? What is the meaning of this? Why was it adopted now? Can this be related to wider discourses? What is its relation to other policy documents? What does this relation mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form: Is there a “storyline”? If yes, how is the storyline created? What is its structural coherence? What are possible connections in both the arguments and the presentation of sections?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2: Generate initial codes (from segments of data – extracted from the original texts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2.1 Identify the part(s) in which the concept of professionalism may be articulated (look for forms of regulations, requirements, standards, guidelines, etc. which show expectations or requirements). Also look through the whole document for other ideas embedded elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2.2 Look for phrases/statements (relevance): Does this statement say something directly or indirectly about professionalism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: What is counted as professionalism? What kinds of professional knowledge and skills are referred to in the policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form: How is professionalism is presented? What seems to be more valued and prioritised? How are these legitimised? (This step is a “sort out” of data, but seemingly at a quite specific level directly connected to the meaning of the data segment. Here both form and content were considered.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 3: Categorise coded data and search for sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review the codes applied in Phase 2 and search for patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start to look for sub-themes (a broader level beyond codes). This is another “sort out” but at the level from codes to sub-themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4: Generate themes from sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review the sub-themes applied in Phase 3 and search for patterns. Start to look for themes (a broader level beyond sub-themes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the themes against the whole data item (the whole document) and between themes; look for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possible overlapping, contradictions and coherence.
What is the logic/rationale underlying these conceptualisations of professionalism? Do any struggles, tensions, and conflicts exist? How do these reveal about the ways (ELT) HE teaching profession and professionals are viewed?

Phase 5: Connect themes with background discourses and beyond
Connect themes with immediate set of discourses (within the overall reading of the policy).
Connect themes with theories, including wider discourses.

The below example illustrates how the coding was conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data segment</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“having research projects graded at least with a ‘Pass’”</td>
<td>→ Research: specific ranking</td>
<td>→ The prevalence of indicators and measurement</td>
<td>→ The functional, productive university teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“have at least 02 (or 01) research projects, at least 02 (or 01) students, at least 02 (or 01) course books, and at least 06 (or 03) publications”</td>
<td>→ Research: measurable, outcome-based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“supervising 01 (one) student who successfully defended his/her thesis of Specialisation graded II can be equated with supervising 01 (one) student who successfully defended his/her thesis at master’s level”</td>
<td>→ Research: measurable, outcome-based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview analysis

The interviews (in Data sets 2 and 3) were transcribed into texts, which were then examined using a coding process. The coding process conducted can be described as being both theory-driven and data-driven. The information was first categorised in connection to the interview’s content areas; however, each category was then processed bottom-up to produce codes, sub-themes, and themes, i.e. all data segments that might contain relevant information were identified for further examination. In this way, equal attention was given to all information in a text, so the
analysis is open to unanticipated information, which is an important requirement of qualitative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Westum, 2014).

The interview data were treated as having a situated, plural, and interpretative nature, within the qualitative paradigm of research. The purposes of the interviews were to obtain people’s perspectives and beliefs. Thus the data were interpreted basing on what was verbalised rather than in consideration of whether the participants really meant what they were saying or whether they were just rhetorical and politically correct. Acknowledging bias is part of interviewing; however, I made efforts during the interview design, conduct, and analysis processes to minimise possible bias, for example, by using clear, open-ended questions, avoiding expressing own opinions, and reading data in holism rather than fragmentation (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011).

The following analysis and coding steps (Table 7) were adapted from the models by Alexiadou (2001), Braun & Clarke (2006), and Gläser & Laudel (2013) for analyses driven by both existing theories and the data itself. In my adaptation, both top-down and bottom-up approaches to assessing and analysing data were employed.

Table 7. Analysis and coding process for interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1. Link information to the interview content areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this step was to restructure the information, or the raw data, since, as discussed above, information that may contain potential relevance to the research questions indeed lies across the interviews. Results from this step were data segments/parts extracted from the original texts (at this stage can be as long as paragraphs) and organised into categories corresponding to the interview question areas. This step actually involved initial interpretation of the researcher (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006; Gläser &amp; Laudel, 2013); therefore, while the restructuration depended mostly on semantic contents (“what was talked about”), a starting level of latent analysis (“what was actually said”) was also used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2: Generate initial codes (from segments of data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This step is another “sort out” of data that sought the meaning(s) of the data segments in Phase 1. The codes were generated quite openly – i.e. one code may apply to several data segments, and re-coding and multi-coding were allowed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 3. Search for patterns to form sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patterns were searched amongst the codes to recognise sub-themes. The patterns were decided to come up if the codes could be related in terms of frequency of appearance, sequences, combinations, and conflicts. The overarching meaning covering a set of patterns became a “sub-theme”. Typologies, where possible, were also constructed at this step to present the found patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4. Integrate sub-themes to form themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This step involved creating themes from a map built from the sub-themes emerging from individual texts and the entire data set.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 5. Review themes within each category and conduct further analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The themes were revisited together with both the sub-themes and their excerpts of data from the original texts. The level of abstract of sub-themes and themes and the relationship between them were also reviewed, while those excerpts to be included in the analysis were selected. An overall analysis was conducted in connection with the research questions and the literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This example provides a brief account on the interview coding process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category “Teacher work”</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Data segment</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;one of the duties required by the University&quot;</td>
<td>→ Research as a duty pressure</td>
<td>Research as a mission impossible</td>
<td>The paradoxes of doing research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The University required departments to send in presentations”</td>
<td>→ Research as a duty pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I was required to present in the conference.”</td>
<td>→ Research as a duty pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The Department required every division to have at least one presentation.”</td>
<td>→ Research as a duty pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“They had no time, and they were too tired with teaching, which left them with little time to even think about research.”</td>
<td>→ No time for research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Teachers do want to do research, but they don’t have time.”</td>
<td>→ No time for research</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“I see many of my colleagues doing projects that do not relate at all to the University realities. It’s like they do this so as to get by... So that their salaries will not be deducted.”</td>
<td>→ Irrelevance and “Just a formality”</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“It’s not relevant. For example, you teach ESP and your presentation is all about ESP but I’m not interested in ESP, so I don’t want to listen to your presentation.”</td>
<td>→ Irrelevance and “Just a formality”</td>
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5.6 Chapter conclusion

The chapter has presented the methodological decisions employed in the research. Within a constructivist, interpretivist tradition, the research adopts embedded case study as its design where holistic, empirical data are collected and analysed to gain more understanding about theoretical ideas. The analysis and coding procedures for the different sets of data were also described to give insights into the processes in which observations and findings relating to the research questions were gained.
Chapter 6 “Public employee lecturer” vs. “practising adaptive expert”? Professionalism for university English language teachers in Vietnam contemporary policies

This chapter explores the main features of professionalism in contemporary ELT higher education in Vietnam articulated in policy documents. Unfolding the elements of professionalism and how they are expressed by national administration, the chapter provides insights into the construction of professionalism and the values and logic underpinning the concept. The results, generated from studying five national-level policies in three interlinked policy chain parts by both overall/intertextuality reading and close reading, are presented and discussed in three parts corresponding to the policy chains.

6.1 Policy chain part 1: Circular 36 and Decision 16

The first policy chain part consists of two documents: Circular 36/2014 on professional standards, and Decision 16/2008 on teacher professional ethics. Circular 36 is discussed in connection with its preceding policy, Decision 538/TCCP-TC (1995) “On the renaming of professional tracks and defining professional standards for civil servants teaching in higher education institutions”.

Circular 36/2014 (Circular 36)
Inter-ministerial Circular No 36/2014/TTLT-BGDDT-BNV (2014). Regulations on professional title codes and professional standards for public employees teaching in public higher education institutions

The document is a Circular – a ministerial legislative document providing implementation guidance for laws and decrees. Circular 36 was jointly issued by Vietnam Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in 2014, under the Law on Public employees 2010 and Decree No 29/2012 “On public employee recruitment, usage, and management”. Circular 36’s purposes are clearly expressed in its title and first chapter: to prescribe “professional title codes and professional standards” for “public employees teaching in public higher education institutions”. The circular is “to be used as the legal basis” for public HE institutions in staff “recruitment, usage, and management”. In the policy, academics are referred to as either “public employee” (viên chức) or “lecturer” (giảng viên).

The key contents of Circular 36 lie in Article 2 of Chapter 1, and in Chapter 2. Article 2 of Chapter 1 stipulates three categories of professional titles, their codes, and rankings.

1. High-level lecturer (Grade I) Code: V.07.01.01
2. Main lecturer (Grade II) Code: V.07.01.02
Chapter 2 “Criteria and Standards for Professional Titles” specifies the requirements for Vietnam university teachers. The chapter comprises three articles; each addresses one lecturer category. *High-level Lecturer*, the highest ranked category (*Grade I*), is placed first, followed by *Main Lecturer* (*Grade II*), and *Lecturer* (*Grade III*). The criteria and standards for each category are specified in *Tasks, Education and training requirements*, and *Professional competencies requirements*. These sections are further concretised into bullet-point lists of tasks and indicators.

The year 2014 was not the first time the categorisation, coding, ranking, and standardisation of university teachers in Vietnam appeared in higher education policies. Classification schemes for academic staff by the government can be traced back as early as in 1976 after the country’s reunification (Nguyen Tien Dat & Sloper, 1995). Since then, several legal documents addressing this issue were approved; including Decision 538/TCCP-TC. Decision 538 is important since it proceeds Circular 36. It is named as “On the renaming of professional tracks and defining professional standards for civil servants teaching in higher education institutions”, issued by the Government’s Department of Organization and Personnel (now MOHA) in 1995. In Decision 538, the professional standards are also structured into sub-sections covering the requirements presented in bullet points (though the contents of the standards differ from those in the Circular 36, which will be analysed in more details later). There is also a statement saying the policy serves as the legal basis for the recruitment and usage of civil servants teaching in higher education institutions.

Circular 36 is neither the only policy regulating the state’s requirements on professional titles and standards. The time around its issuance (2014) witnessed the arrival of other policies stipulating professional standards for a wide range of occupations, for example, health, science and technology, sports, library profession, and judiciary.

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6 Nguyen Tien Dat & Sloper (1995) describe the purpose of the 1976 scheme as to unify the appointment and promotion criteria for academic personnel in all HE institutions in Vietnam. The scheme consisted of two tracks, called “teaching staff” and “scientific researcher”, with the former mostly applying to universities and colleges while the latter to research institutes. For each track, four levels were specified: Professor, Associate professor, Lecturer/Researcher, and Assistant lecturer/Assistant researcher. The four levels share some common requirements regarding “moral character, personal attitudes, and behaviour” but have different criteria in terms of “knowledge, formal degrees, competence, and teaching or researching performance” (Nguyen Tien Dat & Sloper, 1995, p.127).

7 For example, Inter-ministerial Circular No 10/2015/TTLT-BYT-BNV by Ministry of Health and MOHA in 2015 on “Professional titles, codes, and standards for medical doctors, doctors of preventive medicine, and physicians”; Inter-ministerial Circular No 24/2014/TTLT-BKHCN-BNV by Ministry of Science and Technology and MOHA in 2014 on “Professional titles, codes, and standards of public employees working in science and technology sector”; and Circular 02/2015/TT-BNV by MOHA in 2015 on “Professional titles, codes, and standards for civil servants working in market management sector”.

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**Decision 16/2008 (Decision 16)**


The document is a decision issued in 2008 by MOET under Vietnam Education Law 2005 and is currently used as the supplementing policy to Circular 36. The policy stipulates the professional ethics for “teachers at state educational institutions in Vietnam”. Therefore it applies to university teachers. The document does not cite any preceding policy that it replaces, so it may be considered as the first and current, legal policy regarding teacher professional ethics in Vietnam.

Decision 16 is structured into three chapters of ten articles: General provisions, Specific regulations, and Implementation provisions. The second chapter is the most important part of the policy, which specifies the regulations on teacher morality. The requirements are grouped into four articles entitled: Political qualities, Professional ethics, Lifestyle and manners, and Preserving and protecting teacher moral traditions. Similar to Circular 36, the requirements are listed in numbered bullet points. The first section “Political qualities” stipulates that teachers have to “follow the Party’s and the state’s policies and guidelines, and fulfil all tasks as regulated by the law”. Teachers need to “continuously improve their political qualities and apply them in teaching and education activities and other tasks assigned”. They are expected to “act for common interests”. They have to “brightly fulfil citizenship duties and be politically and socially active”.

The second section concerns “Professional ethics”, where teachers have to be “passionate about the profession and fully aware that they need to preserve teacher dignity and conscience”. Teachers need to support and collaborate with their colleagues, “treat learners and colleagues with courtesy, tolerance and understanding”, and “be ready to stand up to protect the rights of learners, colleagues and the community”.

The third section “Lifestyle and manners” sets out the requirements concerning the lifestyle and manners expected of teachers, such as “to live with a purpose, a determination, good-willed self-promotion, and creativity”; “live in harmony with the community and consider both the country’s traditions and societal modern advancement”. They also have to “collaborate with colleagues and fight against behaviours that go against the laws and professional regulations”. They have to “build their family into ‘families of culture’ where members love and respect each other”; they need to “care for the people around” and “exercise public etiquette”.

The last section “Preserving and protecting teacher moral traditions” is the longest of the four articles. It has eleven items and all of them start with “Do not”. In other words, this section dictates the things that teachers are not allowed to do. For example, “do not use own power and authority to conduct behaviour that goes against the laws, regulations, and guidelines”, “do not cheat in their studies,
research, and teaching and education activities”, “do not favour and/or discriminate against learners”. Other commands regarding teacher specific in-class manners are also included.

Throughout the policy, the object of application is referred to as “nhà giáo” which means “teacher”. Nhà giáo is the most respectful title word used in the Vietnamese language to address a person who teaches.

6.1.1 Knowledge, skills, and morality for a well-rounded academic employee

Overall, professionalism for university teachers in Vietnam is composed of three overarching constituent areas: knowledge, skills, and morality – indicated in Circular 36 and Decision 16. A number of other expectations and norms, underpinned by specific values, were also observed.

Knowledge and skills: subject knowledge, teaching, research, interdisciplinary knowledge, foreign language, and IT

The contents of sections “Education and Training requirements” and “Professional competencies requirements” in Circular 36 suggest professionalism is defined as a set of knowledge and skills covering the areas of teaching and research. While the requirements regarding knowledge aspect are stated with phrases including having (sound) knowledge of... and having a (strong) awareness of..., expectations related to skills can be recognised with verbs. These knowledge and skills are labelled as “professional competencies”, but other knowledge that is desired can also be interpreted through the types of academic qualifications mentioned.

Within the knowledge constituent, several components can be identified. The mentioning of formal degrees and certificates reveals three main knowledge contents: subject knowledge (PhD/master’s/bachelor’s degrees), teaching knowledge (pedagogy certificates), knowledge of research (be well-informed of current and future education and research trends of the field). Subject knowledge seems to be most important since it is mentioned again in the “professional competencies” section. Besides, knowledge of interdisciplinary subjects (have knowledge of other related subjects) and knowledge of contexts (knowledge of current and future trends) are also included. Knowledge of foreign languages and information technology (newly added) are the other two contents that are emphasised since they are also mentioned in Decision 16.

Meanwhile, skills are articulated mostly as physical tasks; and the skills required for higher-level lecturers are more research-oriented while those for lecturers are more teaching-oriented. All the skills listed for Grade I and Grade II lecturers involve research: conducting research projects, supervising postgraduate students, writing course books, and having publications. For Grade III lecturers, the skills are geared
more towards classroom teaching activities: lesson preparation, materials compilation, and having suitable methods which yield satisfactory teaching performance. Research here is articulated vaguely as the ability to do research and guide students in doing research, and to apply research findings. Grade III lecturers are not required to have articles or projects, although they do need to present and participate in conferences. This difference for different lecturer levels indicates a hierarchical approach in viewing academics, and a distinction between research defined as a high-level practice – associated with publications, projects, and students’ thesis (which only higher level academics are competent to do), and research as a practical application and classroom-based practice.

Moral traits and qualities

At the same time, academics must have certain “moral qualities”, specified in Decision 16. They have to fulfil their tasks with not only professional expertise but also in a manner considered as morally good. For example, in their teaching, teachers not only simply do the work but they need to do it passionately and devotedly. Being passionate and devoted to the profession is then translated into concrete classroom behaviour such as collaborating and supporting colleagues in both work and life, being fair, being critical and self-critical, continuing to improve professional competencies, foreign language and information technology, and complying with their institution’s regulations. Professionalism is also defined as expectations in terms of work manners (e.g. being time-efficient at work, conducting courteous communication, wearing suitable work outfits, not using mobile phones while on duty, etc.). Requirements at a more abstract level are also included, such as having a purpose in life, and living a life that conforms to both traditions and new developments. Teachers are thus expected to follow and exercise a set of moral traits that dictate not only the way they do specific tasks but also their broader lifestyle virtues.

Indeed, the morality requirements prescribed in Decision 16 seem to go beyond what immediately connects to teacher work. Rather, different dimensions are mentioned: teachers have to act and behave in a particular way considered acceptable for those doing the work of teaching. The expectations also concern other relationships beyond the classroom, including those between teachers and the public, parents, the community, family, and the state. In these relationships, teachers need to adopt a number of desired attitudes and perform prescribed sets of behaviour.

As such, Decision 16 supplements Circular 36 to form an image of the well-rounded academics who have both specialised professional knowledge and skills needed for the work but also the attitudes and virtues regarded as morally correct. Being morally correct, as set out in the policy, means teachers have to live up to the expectations in almost all aspects of life.
Additional work components and higher expectations

In comparison with its preceding policy Decision 538 issued almost 20 years earlier, Circular 36 depicts the work of academics as being more demanding both in terms of workload and its complexity. The work now encompasses a quite extended range of activities covering various domains and spheres.

Regarding teaching tasks, the work has expanded significantly. In Decision 538, the teaching responsibilities required for all lecturer levels included lecturing, thesis supervision and evaluation, and materials writing. The tasks of curriculum development, teaching and assessment methods improvement, and (excellent) student tutoring only apply to high-level lecturers. Meanwhile, in Circular 36, the core workload for all lecturer levels has become heavier, and more complex. The actual instruction delivery in the classroom – lecturing, makes up only one part of the work, amongst other areas: supervision, curriculum and materials development, assessment, counselling, tutoring, management, and teacher self-learning.

Also, compared with Decision 538, Circular 36 provides a more elaborated concept of research. Decision 538 stipulates those who are “Lecturers” need to do small-scale projects to fulfil their research duties, and only High-level Lecturers and Main Lecturers are expected to “do research presentations and ideas exchanges”. In Circular 36, conducting and presenting research in conferences has been made the essential element required for academics of all three levels. Also, for the first time, it is mentioned academics need to bring their research results to practice through consultation provision and technologies transfer (providing scientific consultation and/or transferring technologies).

Most notably, Circular 36 witnesses an unprecedented appearance of several tasks: international collaboration, quality assurance, and teacher professional development. All academics need to engage in international collaboration. They also have to take part in higher education quality assurance activities. Professional development is another newly added task in Circular 36. Academics have to continue to learn to improve their professional expertise and competencies. High-level lecturers and Main lecturers need to organise and participate in staff development activities. Academics also have to play a more active role in their work. In Decision 538 there was no mentioning of teacher learning and development; instead, academics were asked to comply with their institution’s as well as MOET’s regulations on professional standards and professional procedures. Also, the requirements in Decision 538 created a focus-on-present sense: these were the criteria, and if teachers could meet them, then they were qualified. Meanwhile, in Circular 36, the need for teachers to continue self-learning and improvement is explicitly specified.

In other words, the benchmarks for today’s university teachers in Vietnam have been raised. Overall the work of university lecturers has been made more demanding and intensive. The tasks used to be exclusively reserved for higher-level categories
(Main Lecturer and High-level Lecturer) are now required for all academics, and across all three levels, new tasks and responsibilities have been added.

The rise of social responsibilities

Academics in Vietnam are now also required to spread their work beyond academia. In Decision 538 in 1995, their tasks and responsibilities concerned mainly teaching and research, the two traditional roles of the university. The actors and agencies mentioned in this document are from within the academia: university teachers interact with students (e.g. teaching activities), colleagues (e.g. staff training programmes), their institution, division and discipline (e.g. complying with the institution’s and MOET’s regulations and contributing to the development of the division and discipline). In Circular 36 in 2014, however, the scope of university teacher work extends beyond this sphere. In addition to the tasks directly connected to stakeholders in academia such as students and colleagues, academics are now asked to engage in international collaboration and quality assurance – which involves external stakeholders. Lecturers are also urged to relate their research to economic growth, societal development, and national security.

The work of university teachers in Vietnam has thus been reframed to embrace more social responsibilities. Teaching and research are still the core tasks, but one emerging trend is that university teacher work is bridged with the external society. This can be referred to as “the third mission” responsibilities. The concept “the third mission of the university” refers to the opening up of the university to external agencies and actors, interpreted in its societal roles and commitment to make social impact (Zomer & Benneworth, 2011; Benneworth, de Boer, & Jongbloed, 2015) such as knowledge transfer, communities engagement, and economic growth contributions (Laredo, 2007; Shore & Mclauchlan, 2012). In other words, the university’s third mission concerns the dialogue between society and science (Predazzi, 2012).

Formal education and training increasingly prioritised

It seems that having undertaken formal professional education and training is a quality greatly valued. Education and training, with degrees and certificates, is structured as an entire complete section separate from “Professional competencies” section. Also, if in Decision 538, education and training came after a section called “Knowledge and skill”, in Circular 36 it is placed before “professional competencies”. The “Education and training requirements” section in Circular 36 regulates that lecturers have to hold academic degrees relevant to their teaching. They must also have higher education pedagogy certificates, and for senior lecturers, a special certificate is needed.
Not only is education and training advocated as the key element of professionalism, but it also serves as the basis on which the hierarchical classification of “professional titles”, or lecturer categories, is structured. Indeed, if looking across the three levels of lecturers, it can be seen that it is education and training that decides the grading. Grade I lecturers will be given the title “High-level lecturers” if they have earned degrees and certificates at the most advanced level, and the criteria are lowered for lower graded lecturers. This favour for formal knowledge signifies the role of training in professionalism (Freidson, 2001), but it can also be explained using the Vietnamese tradition of celebrating learning, examinations, and qualifications. The promotion of formal education and training also suggests a trend to measure knowledge and make it evidence-based since academic degrees and certificates also serve as the indicators of knowledge. This trend can in a way be related to the decline of experience and the tendency to measure professionalism which will be discussed in the sections that follow.

*Experience made obsolete, research competence emphasised*

Another trend that can be seen in the “professional competencies” listed in Circular 36 is that work experience seems to lose its importance while research competence gains more emphasis. In the earlier policy – Decision 538, requirements regarding working experience were placed immediately after the requirements on formal degrees while research competence came at the end of the list. In Circular 36, experience now appears as the very last item. Meanwhile, Circular 36 sees the rise of research competence requirements. Research is now in the second placement that working experience used to have on the list. Research also takes up the majority of the professional competencies.

The increased value attached to research criteria can also be interpreted through the way research competence is required for each “professional title”, or lecturer level. In Circular 36, the complexity of research competence requirements increases along with the level of lecturers. Indeed, research is the element that distinguishes the different rankings of university teachers. As demonstrated earlier, the knowledge and skills required for Grade III lecturers are more of a practical teaching nature than those for Grade I and Grade II lecturers. In this way, research is seen as an exclusive type of competence that requires specific conditions (i.e. more advanced education and training), and this exclusivity grants research its high status. It is also a kind of “reward” that validates professional advancements. Research here is used to define professionalism: it is the aspired goal, the aim that every university professional needs to achieve.

The swap of position of “experience” in the two policies reflects its decreased role amid the rise of research. It seems that the old Vietnamese saying “Old teachers, young singers” that celebrates experience as a manifestation of professionalism no
6.1.2 The prevalence of indicators and measurement

The most prominent tendency observed in Circular 36 and also Decision 16 is the prevalence of indicators and measurements. If Decision 538 uses measurement-related expressions to an extent limited to mentioning which degrees, how many years of working experience (two times), and how many research projects (one time) are required, Circular 36 and Decision 16 appear to be dominated by indicators, numbers, and evidences.

In many ways, Circular 36 tends to concretise and codify more. The policy defines academics into three graded categories, each with its own numerical code. Knowledge and skills are translated as specific qualifications (e.g. degrees and certificates). Also, the tasks and responsibilities listed are much more elaborated. Vague phrases previously used in Decision 538 are replaced by concretised expressions. For example, one of the criteria stated in Decision 538 “having research projects recognised by (a departmental/institutional committee)” [italics emphasis added] – is now specified as “having research projects graded at least with a ‘Pass’”. The requirement for working experience is also more detailed, prescribing the ladder of years teachers need to undertake to be promoted from one level to the next.

In addition, Circular 36 measures knowledge and skills in terms of products and outcomes: research projects, doctoral/master’s students, course books, and publications. Furthermore, the outcomes are formulated into numbers: at least 02 (or 01) research projects, at least 02 (or 01) students, at least 02 (or 01) course books, and at least 06 (or 03) publications. Equation is made when work is described: “supervising 01 (one) student who successfully defended his/her thesis of Specialisation graded II can be equated with supervising 01 (one) student who successfully defended his/her thesis at master’s level”. Precise codification is emphasised through the mentioning of numbers followed by word clarification in the brackets. Also, qualifications are made benchmark-based. Apart from conventional degrees including the PhD, master’s and bachelor’s, other certifications are all measured: pedagogy certificates are categorised according to lecturer grading, while certificates of foreign languages and computer skills are scaled against “national competency frameworks” (in the case of foreign languages, this refers to the CEFR-compatible framework, which is covered in Decision 72/2014 – the Policy chain part 2 in this study).

Decision 16 also takes up a similar tone of measurement. The overall organisation of the document reveals that morality is presented as composing of three blocks: Political qualities, Professional ethics, and Lifestyle and manners. “Morality” is articulated into definite, solid attitudes and precise responsibilities and tasks; and similar to Circular 36, all items are listed in bullet points. For example, teachers need to support and collaborate with their colleagues, “treat learners and colleagues with
courtesy, tolerance and understanding”, and “be ready to stand up to protect the rights of learners, colleagues and community”. There are no benchmarks or rankings as seen in Circular 36, but the requirements in Decision 16 are expressed in clear detail, and this prescription message is reinforced in the last section where prohibitions are further elaborated. For instance, “do not use own power and authority to conduct behaviour that goes against the laws, regulations, and guidelines”, “do not cheat in their studies, research, and teaching and education activities”, “do not favour and/or discriminate against learners”. It seems that these elaborations and precisions allow an easier evaluation of teacher morality. Whether a teacher is considered morally appropriate or not can now be determined based on evidenced behaviour indicators.

6.1.3 The functional, productive public employee-university teacher

University teachers as “public employees”

Regulating teacher work into specific tasks with clearly stated indicators and benchmarks, and interpreting professionalism as containing explicit and cumulative attributes and qualities, Circular 36 and Decision 16 send a strong message that university teachers are public employees, who have duties to fulfil.

Indeed, the “public employee” dimension is given a strong emphasis. Although the object of application of the policy is university teachers, the words giáo viên (teacher) and giảng viên (lecturer) are seldom used in Circular 36. Instead, the term “public employee” (viên chức) is used: university teachers are termed as “public employees teaching in public HEIs” (viên chức giảng dạy trong các cơ sở giáo dục đại học công lập). In this way, public employee seems to be the key dimension while “teaching” is used only as a predicate/subordinate that provides additional meaning.

Circular 36 classifies teaching professionals into titles and codes. Also, with the elaboration of tasks, the standardisation and grading of professional knowledge and skills mandated for each lecturer category, the policy constructs professionalism as sets of required assignments and responsibilities. Now it appears that not only the work or the necessary skills or virtues are measured and quantified but so are those who do the work. The placement of “Tasks” before “Education and training”, and “Professional competencies” reinforces the message that teachers are, and need to be viewed, first and foremost public employees and fulfilling responsibilities and tasks should be regarded a priority. Categorisation and coding thus serve as a personnel management instrument for the state towards academics, which is also its stated purpose (for the “recruitment, usage, and management of public employees teaching in public HEIs”). It was also noticeable in the policy that university teachers who work at non-public HEIs are referred to as “lecturers” and not public employees.

Similarly, the key message of Decision 16 is oriented by administration rules,
obligations and disciplines. Meeting these moral expectations is made a compulsory responsibility, and teachers can be evaluated and determined to be moral and immoral accordingly: the policy states that teachers’ implementation of these moral requirements needs to be monitored, and teachers can be praised or rewarded if they do this well, and reprimanded or sanctioned if they fail to obey the rules. Indeed, Decision 16 has a shared intention with Circular 36: the policy is “to serve as one of the bases for evaluating, ranking, and monitoring teachers”.

The mentioning of stakeholders beyond academia in Circular 36 and Decision 16 also indicates academics have to be responsive not only to their students’, colleagues’, and institutions’ benefits but also to public interests. The opening up of university teacher work to including social tasks as well as moral requirements beyond the confines of education contexts signifies how university teachers are viewed: they need to act as academics, but first and foremost they are employed by the state and have to fulfil particular responsibilities. In Decision 16, the moral attributes related to relationships with the state (“Political qualities”) are placed as the first set of desired virtues, before “Professional ethics” and “Lifestyle and manners”. This sub-section on political qualities states that teachers must obey the state’s laws and regulations, follow their organisation’s requirements.

The functional, productive university teacher

Not only positioning university teachers as public employees, both Circular 36 and Decision 16 also advocate a university teacher who is functional and productive.

Indeed, the tasks and responsibilities for university teachers mandated in Circular 36 indicate various simultaneous roles for teachers. Within the single label “teaching tasks”, academics are to work as lecturer but at the same time supervisor, curriculum developer, materials writer, counsellor, tutor, and also innovator. In terms of research, the work is expanded beyond research projects. Long gone is the separation between university teachers and researchers; now apart from conducting research, they need to do research dissemination and apply results in practice. They are now researcher cum communicator cum research-service-provider. With the new tasks of international collaboration, quality assurance, and professional development, university teachers are given additional hats: ambassador/collaborator, quality maintainer/inspector, and learner. They are also manager and administrator when required. Academics have become superheroes (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016).

As such, while professionalism can be deconstructed in Circular 36 and Decision 16 from the professional standards and criteria stated, it can also be interpreted through the tasks and the different roles mentioned. That the work of university teachers now opens up to different social actors (higher education sector, the society, the nation) entails a requirement for teachers to be responsive and responsible. Being multi-tasked means they need to be multi-skilled in order to be multi-functional. For
example, they are now asked to do research that serves economic and social developments. The books they write also need to be usable for their own teaching. As teacher’s work is no longer confined to the classroom, or even the disciplinary, but starts to link to the public society, it becomes significant not only to their students, colleagues, or the institution, but also to “society development and national security”, and in “international arena”. Accompanying these new expectations are new responsibilities. The inclusion of “quality assurance” along with “international collaboration” suggests that quality assurance is a tool for international integration; it also sends a signal that teachers should now be aware that they hold a responsibility to the society for the quality of their work.

Added to that, the moral obligations specified Decision 16 require university teachers to behave and act in the roles of firstly a citizen who needs to fulfil all civic responsibilities. At the same time, they need to be morally accepted as a teacher, a member of the academic community, a member of the public, and a member of their families, as the obligations indicate. As such, the image of the desired university teacher is constructed from all premises of life. Expectations and obligations are demanded in almost all relationships, both professional and social, in which academics engage. In these relationships, they are asked to meet the requirements for particular roles, and they need to perform various tasks and responsibilities – in other words, they have to be functional, responsive, morally-correct, and useful.

6.2 Policy chain part 2: Decision 72

Decision 72/2014 (Decision 72)

Decision by the Prime Minister No 72/2014/QĐ-TTg (2014). Regulations on the teaching and learning in foreign languages at schools and other educational institutions

The decision is under a number of laws, including Law on Governmental organisation 2001, Education Law 2005, and Law of Higher Education 2012. Issued by Vietnam’s Prime Minister “on the proposal of the Minister of Education and Training” in 2014, the policy regulates the teaching and learning conducted in foreign languages including in tertiary education. As its title suggests, the policy deals with the organisation of the teaching and learning in foreign languages in general and not specifically teacher standards. However, there is a brief section in the second chapter of the document that specifies the expectations for this group. Perspectives towards language teaching and learning can also be interpreted from the policy.

Decision 72 is structured into four chapters: General provisions, Regulations on organizing teaching and learning activities in foreign languages, Regulations on the application and approval procedures for programmes instructed in foreign
languages, and Implementation provisions. The first chapter, “General provisions”, describes the object of application of the policy, and the principles underpinning teaching and learning activities delivered in foreign languages in educational institutions in Vietnam. The second chapter details the regulations concerning the organisation of teaching and learning activities in foreign languages: curriculum and teaching materials, teachers and learners, infrastructures and facilities, testing and assessment, quality accreditation, and tuition fee setting and management. The third chapter prescribes the requirements regarding the application and approval procedures for a programme delivered in a foreign language to be established, while the last chapter specifies how the policy is to be implemented.

The policy contains only one short section explicitly describing the requirements towards university teachers of foreign languages; however, other insights related to the question of professionalism, although they might be more implicitly expressed, can be discussed as they emerge from the document.

6.2.1 Teaching as a contractual service in a free market

Language proficiency as core component

The requirements for the academics teaching programmes delivered in foreign languages are composed of two components. Teachers have to meet the standards of professional expertise and competencies relevant for professional titles (Circular 36). They must also have achieved at least level 5 out of the 6-level CEFR compatible framework (C1), or equivalent. Teaching in foreign languages is distinguished from other teaching work: university teachers must have subject knowledge and other bodies of knowledge as prescribed in their professional title criteria, yet simultaneously they have to be capable of using a foreign language to communicate and transfer knowledge. For the case of English language teachers, this means an even more pronounced emphasis on English proficiency since in ELT, knowledge of the language is not only used for instruction, but it is the subject knowledge itself (also stated Circular 36).

Fulfilling social responsibilities

Responding to social factors and performing social responsibilities is set out in Decision 72 as the guiding principle for teaching and learning in foreign languages. Not only this is expressed in the statement that teaching has to function following societal demands and complying with learner’s choice, as will be demonstrated below, “societal demand” is clearly communicated in the policy: Priority shall be given to programmes taught in foreign languages in basic science disciplines or in disciplines and areas that are in societal demand and that contribute to international integration. Education
here is represented as being responsive to society contexts and is linked to internationalisation and globalisation discourse.

*Teaching as a contractual market service*

Decision 72 states the teaching and learning in foreign languages “has to be generated from societal demand and based on the free will of learners (*người học*)” and this is set out as the very first principle for conducting the activity.

It is notable that the statement uses the words often associated with market and business such as *nhu cầu* (demand), and indeed the content of the statements advocates free market operation laws: teaching and learning activities are to be delivered in the demand of the society. In this way, education is seen as a commodity – it is a market service under supply-demand laws, and the relationship between teachers and students is set out as one between service providers and customers who have free choice. Also, the parallel placement of “those who teach” and “those who learn” conjures up a sense towards teaching as a two-way transaction between parties often seen in contractual relationships. Teachers have to meet certain requirements, and the same is expected of learners. The perception towards teaching as an activity following free market principles also implies teachers no longer have the rights to control. How the work should be performed, and even what tasks should be conducted, now become subject to learners (customers) and the society (the market).

6.2.2 The Foreign Language Teacher: The service provider

As mentioned earlier, Decision 72 refers to teachers as “*người dạy*”, which can be literally translated as “those who teach”.

Indeed, in Vietnamese, the term *người dạy* has connotations which can be regarded as being more instrumental than other references to address teachers such as *thầy cô*, *nha giáo*, *giáo viên* (teachers in general), and *giảng viên* (lecturers). *Người dạy* does not convey a shade of meaning of respect as strong as the way *thầy cô* and *nha giáo* do. Nor the term communicates a hint that signifies teaching as a profession as *giáo viên* and *giảng viên* do. In addition, *người dạy* is created as a compound of “person + verb” of everyday ordinary language (which is not the case of *nha giáo*, *giáo viên* and *giảng viên*, which use a more formal Sino-Vietnamese⁸). The way *người dạy* is selected to refer to teachers (including university teachers) as “those who teach” in Decision 72, reveals a particular attitude towards teaching and those who are in the occupation of teaching. The policy does not seem to intend to celebrate or highlight teaching as a

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⁸ Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary is a portion of words of Chinese origin and is often used in formal contexts (Chen, Vu Kim Anh, & Mushangwe, 2015). This in a way can be compared to the use of Latin and Greek in English.
noble profession (as held by Vietnamese conventional values). Rather, teaching is viewed, or promoted to be viewed, as just an occupation among others, and teachers are simply those who practise their work and have work responsibilities. Another observation is that the requirements for teachers are placed alongside those for students, and students are referred to as người học (those who learn). The presence of the verb implies a perspective towards teaching as a practice that contains a rather mechanical relationship between “those who teach” and “those who learn”. Teachers, as defined in this policy, are those who need to have the competencies and skills necessary to perform the work, and to efficiently fulfil their responsibilities.

In Decision 72, teacher professional knowledge is measured against a standardised framework (the CEFR benchmarks). The policy does stress foreign language competencies as an important professional knowledge body, but with the use of người dạy and người học, this highlight could be seen as a functional interpretation of professionalism rather than recognising teaching as a professional specialisation. In other words, particular knowledge and expertise for teaching in foreign languages are acknowledged, but this portrayal of professionalism seems to emphasise getting the work done right and effectively (and what is right and effectively is considered within the perception seeing education as a contractual relationship).

These analyses suggest that professionalism for university teachers teaching in foreign languages, including university English teachers, is defined in an instrumental, functional approach. Professionalism is constructed as what is needed to do perform the work, and according to how that work is conceptualised in the policy. Professionalism is controlled by a standardisation of competencies and skills. In these ways, Decision 72 is constructed on a similar note of a bureaucratic logic (Freidson, 2001) as the policies in Document chain part 1: the rational-legal authority controls the organisation of work with formal, written rules governing what duties shall be performed and also the skills needed to perform these duties. There is a productive end, and professionalism is defined as what is required to achieve the end – a professionalism of functionality.

6.3 Policy chain part 3: Document 792 – The ETCF and Programme 2013

Public document 792/2014 (Document 792)

Public document 792/BGDĐT-NGCBQLGD on Vietnam English Teacher Competency Framework (ETCF) and the accompanying ETCF User’s Guide

Document 792 provides the regulations concerning the competencies required of English language teachers in Vietnam. The policy was issued by MOET in February 2014 to introduce the “Vietnam English Teacher Competency Framework” (ETCF). This policy is a “Public document” (công văn) and the text that prescribes the framework is referred to as a “Document” (văn bản). This implies that the policy,
though issued by a ministry and is compulsory, does not possess a legal power as strongly normative as “Decision” and “Circular”.

Document 792 mainly concerns the ETCF, which was designed and developed during 2010–2012 by a team of ELT professionals convened by MOET through the NFL Project 2020, including international and Vietnamese experts, university teacher educators, and English school teachers (Nguyen Ngoc Hung & Dudzik, 2013; User’s Guide, p. 4). The main partners engaging in the development of the framework are MOET’s NFL Project 2020, Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences, major local English teacher training institutions, the Resource Exchange International and US Department of State, and the British Council. Before its official approval in 2012, the document had been exposed to numerous discussions, seminars and conferences where its contents were discussed and adjusted.

The ETCF covers five domains; each domain consists of competencies and indicators. Domain is defined as “the major areas or ‘big ideas’ that answer the question, What do teachers need to know and be able to do”; competencies as “the levels of knowledge or skill at which teachers are expected to perform”, and performance indicators as “evidences of competency” (p.13). The first three domains seem to be more concrete – they are also “hard” areas of technical competencies, while those in the last two domains seem to be “softer” as they are values, attitudes, and approaches.

**Domain 1: English subject matter knowledge and Curricular content knowledge.** This domain includes teachers’ language proficiency, understanding and applying the national 6 level language proficiency framework, knowledge of the English language system, understanding how languages are learnt, knowledge of cultures of English-speaking countries, using English materials in teaching, and knowledge of locally-used English curricula.

**Domain 2: English pedagogical content knowledge.** This domain includes teaching the four skills, planning effective lessons, conducting effective lessons, creating supportive learning environments, assessing students’ progress and proficiency, and using resources and technology effectively to support student learning.

**Domain 3: Knowledge of language learners.** This domain consists of understanding students’ development, understanding stages of learner language, developing students’ potential and interest for language learning, developing students’ creativity and critical thinking.

**Domain 4: Professional attitudes and values in language teaching.** This domain includes promoting and modelling the values of language learning, practising cooperation, collaboration and teamwork, demonstrating lifelong learning, and participating in professional development activities.

**Domain 5: Practice and context of language teaching.** This domain involves teachers’
connecting their own learning with colleagues, and connecting their students' language learning with other students, classes, and schools. They also need to practise on-going reflection.

The competencies are then concretised into performance indicators. For example, the competence “understanding how languages are learnt” is interpreted as knowledge of “how instruction affects language learning” and “how individual learner variables affect language learning”. These sub-categories of knowledge are further elaborated into statements such as “use English as much as possible (to provide a model) and encourages children to do the same”, “use Vietnamese where appropriate (particularly to reduce anxiety)”, and “recognise individual learner variables (such as age, L1 literacy, personality, motivation, socioeconomic status)”.

The domains that the framework is based upon are represented as a Venn diagram composed of interlinked circles. The three central, frontline circles are Domains 1, 2, and 3, while Domain 4 spreads across the intersections of the three circles. The entire set of domains is then placed in a larger circle which is Domain 5.

![Venn diagram](image)

**Framework**

**Professional development programme on ELT for university teachers of English as a non-major 2013 (Programme 2013)**

As described earlier, developing and implementing teacher training programmes is one key task set out by the NFL Project 2020. Two priorities were established for these CPD programmes for teacher quality improvement: raising teachers’ English proficiency, and improving their English teaching methodology. Regarding language proficiency, university English teachers have to achieve level C1 on the CEFR scale. In terms of methodology, they are required to attend CPD training programmes on ELT. Within the NFL Project 2020, a number of key English teacher training institutions were assigned by MOET to design sample English teacher training
programme curriculum and syllabus which serve as “training materials or reference materials for other tertiary institutions in the country in developing their own training programmes”. Programme 2013, approved in 2013, is a CPD course focusing on ELT Methodology for non-English majored university teachers. The curriculum, syllabus, and training materials were developed by a prominent English teacher education institution in the country.

Programme 2013’s theoretical grounds are stated as including the ETCF, Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and Adaptive expertise theory (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Its design also relies on the results of a needs analysis survey of academics teaching English as a non-major conducted in 2012 by the development team (Programme 2013, p.13). The programme is described as a modular CPD course of five main interrelated contents, aiming at “enabling university English teachers to gain positive changes in terms of teaching awareness, knowledge, and skills and pedagogical competencies in general” (p.5).

Module 1: *Teaching English to university students: challenges and solutions* covers the topics of the nature of language learning process, knowledge of the CEFR, competency-based English teaching and learning, and teaching in contexts of limited resources.

Module 2: *Lexicon and reading comprehension* provides understandings of “the effects of the lexical profile in a text on its readability and then comprehensibility” and “suitable tools and techniques to create a friendly text for reading comprehension”.

Module 3: *Input selection and materials development for non-English majored students* “supports teachers in evaluating instructional materials, selecting appropriate materials and adapting them to better meet students’ needs”.

Module 4: *Classroom management* includes classroom interactions and principles of classroom management.

Module 5: *Using ICT in language teaching and learning* helps participants to “master the principles and techniques (from basic to advanced) in using technology to meet the basic needs in language teaching and learning in their universities and colleges”.

All modules state “Theory/Practice ratio” in their contents – in the first four modules this ratio is 50/50, and in Module 5 it is 30/70.

6.3.1 Teacher knowledge as a complexity of holistic fluidity

*Knowledge and skills: English proficiency, Knowledge of teaching, Knowledge of learners, Reflective teaching, and Contextual knowledge*
In the ETCF knowledge of subject content (Domain 1: English language) and pedagogical knowledge (Domain 2: Knowledge of teaching) are the two most important bodies of expertise, since they are placed above other domains, and they also have the most competencies and indicators. Knowledge of learners is also a key area that English teachers have to possess since it is made a separate, independent domain from “Knowledge of teaching”. Along with Domains 1 and 2, it is one of the key “hard” frontline domains constructing the skeleton of the framework. Learning-centredness and communicative language teaching are promoted. Also, professional attitudes and values, including teacher learning and reflection; and contextual knowledge, including cooperation, are explicitly articulated into the two domains 4 and 5, though they may be “backdrop” domains in comparison to the first three ones. This reflects a recognition of the importance of these “softer” bodies of knowledge. These trends are also in line with contemporary definitions of ELT professional expertise (Chapter 3). Similarly, Programme 2013 emphasises functional knowledge and skills of teaching to be a key component (along with English proficiency as the other pivotal area of knowledge as set out by the NFL Project 2020). The effective university English teacher constructed in the programme needs to have sound knowledge of how language learning takes place, English lexical factors, materials adaptation, classroom management, and ICT. As seen in the ETCF, knowledge in Programme 2013 is formulated as working knowledge, or skills – teachers need to understand knowledge then apply that understanding.

At the same time, however, in both Document 792 – the ETCF and Programme 2013 it can be noted that the term “research” is not emphasised. Teacher reflection and critical thinking are promoted as important qualities – as demonstrated later, but the policies do not mention teacher research engagement as an explicit competence. Also, theory knowledge appears to play a modest role. Although in Programme 2013 all modules include a “Theory/Practice ratio” in the contents, the priority is stated as “enabling experiential learning interpreted through critical thinking, reflection and discussion, rather than providing new theoretical knowledge”. As such, “research” in both policies is conceptualised as having a rather practical nature in familiar teaching contexts. Academics are encouraged to possess this version of research, and mostly they use theories to reflect on teaching rather than to create new knowledge in the form of more formal research activities.

The ETCF highlights ELT professionalism to be centred on student learning. All the domains, competencies, and indicators seem to have been developed for effective learning to happen. Subject knowledge, teaching knowledge, knowledge of learners, and teacher self-development all serve effective learning. Meanwhile, “effective” learning is conceptualised as “situative” (p.16), where all factors such as learners, curriculum, resources, and professional community are considered. The norms of this professionalism are no longer formal qualifications seen in conventional traditions of Vietnam, as might be reflected in policies such as Circular 36. What
matters most here seems to be an accomplishment of teaching, which is defined as bringing about effective student learning.

With teacher professionalism imagined as domains interlacing and containing various types of knowledge mingled with each other, the ETCF recognises the fluidity and complexity of English teaching work. The occupation is presented in the policy in a holistic way. Indeed, in its introduction, the ETCF states that the term “knowledge” is defined as being used in its broadest sense to include not only content knowledge but also to pedagogical content knowledge, skills, processes and values that comprise a domain (p.13). The framework aims to answer the question “What do teachers need to know and be able to do?” (p.16) with Domains 1, 2, and 3. These three domains are embedded in professional values and attitudes (Domain 4) and located within a larger sphere (Domain 5) that reflects a “situative” (local) perspective of effective teacher learning that takes place within the contexts and practice of teaching (p.16).

Programme 2013 also conceptualises ELT knowledge as a fluid combination of different components. The capability of performing tasks effectively is the goal, and “effective” is defined as “adaptive, flexible, and creative”.

Both policies thus strive for a holistic understanding of the occupation and of those who perform it. In order to be able to accomplish the work of teaching, various types of knowledge are required: teacher’s common sense (everyday knowledge), practical knowledge (learnt on the job), experience and intuition (tacit knowledge), and to a lesser extent, teacher’s knowledge learnt from specialised training (formal knowledge informed by theories and principles).

6.3.2 An emphasis on functionality

Another significant observation is that functionality is a prominent message promoted in the ETCF. Describing itself as a set of “can-do” statements, the framework formulates the domains, competencies and indicators as leading to a productive end – which is teachers are able to accomplish an occupational task. Although the domains are labeled as nouns that denote “knowledge” (e.g. “Knowledge of subject content”, “Knowledge of teaching”, “Professional values”), almost half of the competencies that they encompass are articulated starting with verbs (e.g. “conducting”, “showing”, “developing”, etc.), and almost all performance indicators – which make up the most elaborate picture of the framework – employ the formula “know… and be able to do….”. As such, in the ETCF, knowledge always goes with application; the competencies are identified so as to realise a productive end. In this way, it can be said that the knowledge in the policy is a skill type of knowledge, as defined by (Freidson, 2001, p.25) as “the capacity to accomplish a task”. Skill is a type of knowledge, but it can be differentiated from the substantive knowledge that is connected to the task itself (Freidson, 2001, p.25). Functionality, or working knowledge, seems to dominate over other types of knowledge. However, in constructing ELT
expertise with productive ends, little is discussed in the policy about the sources needed in order to possess this expertise. For example, whenever theory and abstract ideas are mentioned, this formal knowledge is immediately followed by how it should be used to realise a task. No formal qualification requirements such as degrees and certificates are specified, except the requirement on language proficiency. No prescription regarding experience (which can be considered as either tacit knowledge or practical knowledge) is provided. The ETCF explicitly stresses on the actual competencies and skills for English teachers to accomplish their tasks.

6.3.3 Teaching as a discretionary specialisation

The ETCF attempts to highlight the specialisation of the work of ELT. If Domains 4 and 5 can be relevant to teachers of all subjects, Domains 1, 2, and 3 distinguish teaching English from the work of other teacher groups. For example, teacher language proficiency is both what to teach – content knowledge (Competency 1.1) and how to teach – how classroom instructional language should be conducted (Competency 1.3). Competency 1.3 illuminates teachers’ knowledge of “individual learner variables” as the knowledge of “age, L1 literacy, personality, motivation, socioeconomic status”, an important factor if English teachers apply “a variety of instructional techniques to address student differences”.

In a similar vein, Programme 2013 highlights the distinction of the work of English teaching at university level. The programme sees university teaching as a complex combination of three components of knowledge, skills, and attitude (p.19). Knowledge is expressed as “understand”, “identify”, while skill is “improve skill in...” and attitude “actively”, “confidently”. As such, the components interrelate and complement each other in the work of teaching seen from a holistic perspective. Furthermore, major contextual conditions in contemporary Vietnam tertiary English education, as well as general characteristics of higher education, play a role in shaping the contents of the programme. For example, Module 1 includes a topic on the CEFR, which currently frames the outcomes of English teaching and learning in Vietnam including higher education level. Module 2 covers reading teaching, one important academic skill for college students. Module 3 provides contents on materials selection and adaptation, which is a generic teaching skill but seems to be more important especially for university teachers. Also, the modules are explicitly structured into theory and practice parts, and although theoretical knowledge is not a priority, this signifies an attempt to distinct university teachers from teachers of school education.
6.3.4 Beyond the “teaching machines”: ELT teachers as “adaptive experts”

The ETCF describes its guiding principle as follows:

The vision of the ETCF is to build the profession of English teaching beyond the level of technicians or teaching machines (giáo viên là những cái máy dạy) to practising teachers with “adaptive expertise”, considered the “gold standard” in teacher training.

(User’s Guide, p.8)

In the email communication between Dr. Diana Dudzik, one of the leading developers of the ETCF, and myself (September, 2015), she elaborates the intention of this statement:

The phrase “professional practitioners with adaptive expertise” came out of my research on teacher development (Dudzik, 2008, p.135). In this phrase, I combined Bransford, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) “vision of professional practice” (p.11) with “adaptive expertise” which has been called the “gold standard” of teacher professional development (Bransford, Deny, Berliner et al. 2005, p.76). In Vietnam, the idea of teachers as “teaching machines” came up several times. The ETCF vision was meant to counteract that idea and to elevate teaching to a profession of practising teachers.

A number of observations can be gained from the vision statement and its elaboration. First, although in the final version of the ETCF the term “professional practitioners” was replaced with “practising teachers”9, the policy’s essence, one that aims for a professionalisation project, seems to remain the same. This professionalisation project is understood as to establish and maintain teacher professional freedom. Indeed, ELT is declared it must be a profession, and this is conceptualised in the document as teachers gaining autonomy over their work (not technicians nor teaching machines but “practising teachers with adaptive expertise”). This is the very core idea of the ideal-typical professionalism, which imagines the occupation group can control over their own work (Freidson, 2001). This philosophy is articulated across the ETCF document.

Furthermore, the professionalisation project to elevate teaching to a profession of practising teachers also reveals how ELT occupation is viewed. The above observation shows that the policy is making attempts to lift ELT from a mechanical specialisation (teachers as technicians and teaching machines) by granting teachers with more

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9 On this change, Dr. Dudzik wrote, “I’m not sure why we dropped “professional practitioners”, except that it becomes somewhat cumbersome both to use and to explain the longer phrase” (email communication, September, 2015).
control. This discretion can be described as being at a moderate level, as the phase *practising teachers with “adaptive expertise”* may suggest. In other words, the policy promotes a view toward ELT as the occupation where teachers start to use their specialised expertise to actively accomplish a practical task effectively, and not just a manual craft mechanically operated. Meanwhile, the status of ELT constructed in the ETCF cannot be described as a fully mental discretionary specialisation, since, as demonstrated earlier, the policy stresses on functionality, practicality, and situatedness, and it does not prioritise one type of knowledge over the others. The policy seems to hold the view that the knowledge needed to achieve functionality can stem from everyday, practical, formal knowledge, or tacit knowledge, and not necessarily from a base of theories and abstract concepts (formal knowledge). With these considerations, it seems that the ETCF is promoting a professionalism of a manual discretionary specialisation.

Moving beyond being technicians and teaching machines, English teachers in the ETCF have a knowledge base (*domains* and *competencies*), and they understand and confidently perform work (*practising teachers*) and start to take control (*adaptive expertise*). Throughout both the ETCF and Programme 2013, informed adaptive expertise for ELT teachers is a strongly promoted feature. The “adaptive expertise” mentioned in the ETCF emerges through the use of phrases such as “where appropriate”, “wherever possible”, “a variety of (techniques)”, “a varied sequence of (activities)”, “use... as much as possible”, “(plan) accordingly”, “differences”, “select”, “evaluate”, “appropriate”, “relevant”, etc., throughout the policy where performance indicators are described. For example, Competency 2.6 Technology for Language Teaching is elaborated into this indicator, “Select and use available ICT materials and activities in the classroom appropriate for students including presentation tools, educational websites, blogs, social networks to assist learning (where applicable)”. Adaptive expertise is also made explicitly in the contents of indicators. For example, Competency 1.6 Language curriculum are elaborated as, “Understand that curriculum is more than following a textbook”, and Competency 2.2 Lesson Planning as, “Set objectives which help students to reach their full potential, taking into account their needs, abilities, and interests”. In this way, the policy attempts to create some free space for English teachers, since adaptive expertise, as manifested in the framework, implies (informed) *choices*.

Programme 2013 also prioritises “adaptive expertise”, using Hatano & Inagaki’s (1986) ideas for an image of university English teachers as “adaptive experts”, which is differentiated from “routine experts”. The programme aims at equipping lecturers with problem-solving competence: *Upon completing the course, teachers’ pedagogical competence will be improved so that they will be able to identify and solve problems arising from their own teaching context (p.18)*. Throughout its modules’ particular goals, words such as “understand”, “analyse”, “apply”, “evaluate”, “design”, “use”, etc. are used extensively. For example, Module 2 clearly describes its goals as improving
university English teachers’ capability to “understand the effects of the lexical profile in a text”, “identify lexical factors”, and “use tools of lexical treatment”.

The highlighted role of reflection can also be seen in the way the programme is to be conducted. Peer interaction, critical thinking, group discussion, experience sharing, and reflection are used as training methods to deliver modules’ contents to university English teachers. For example, in Module 1, when the content of CEFR is introduced, the Module places “context” and “CEFR” together. It explicitly provokes teachers’ thinking by stating, “We should never speak of ‘applying the CEFR to a context’. Rather, of relating or referring a context to the CEFR’. In this way, the focus of a problem-solving capacity discussed earlier has been elevated into including problematising.

The construction of teacher knowledge into interweaving domains also creates an idea of solid continuity and career; while the domain “Professional attitudes and values” provides an impression that teachers take pride and have joy with their work – two important characteristics of professionalism (Freidson, 2001). In line with this perspective, Programme 2013 views ELT teachers as having specialised competencies and thus should have certain academic autonomy. The adaptive experts are those who can “flexibly and creatively” employ and adapt their theoretical knowledge in practical situations, while the routine experts “repetitively” use their expertise in dealing with practicalities, with a minor adjustment (p.8). Its aim is thus articulated as improving teacher’s “adaptive expertise” through a training method based on “Situated learning theory and experiential learning model characterised by a reflective approach”. Academics are described in Programme 2013 as: They have received training either in foreign languages specialising tertiary institutions with an EFL teaching certificate or in foreign languages pedagogic institutions. They, therefore, have certain background knowledge of teaching and learning theories and/or FL teaching and learning theories. They have a certain amount of experience working in HEIs where English is taught as a non-major, and their teaching goal is to help students achieve an English proficiency level equal to level B1 on the CEFR scale. In this way, the image of university English teachers in Vietnam emerges as those who have formal specialised training, possessing formal knowledge, practical knowledge and working experience, and are assigned with a particular task. From this premise, the document promotes that they should strive to become “adaptive experts” and not “routine experts”.

6.4 Discussion of the three policy chain parts

6.4.1 The paradox of measurement versus discretion

The results generated from the analysis of the three policy chains indicate there exist several facets of professionalism for ELT academics as represented in the current
policy landscape in Vietnam. These images possess contrastive, even competing, features, yet they also complement each other in many ways. One representation of professionalism can be characterised as being of occupational expertise and discretion, while the other depicts a professionalism of functionality, productivity and measurability.

Overall the polices can be conceived as belonging to two main “flows” with different orientations: the authority legislation flow of policies (which are issued directly by ministries – Circular 36, Decision 16, and Decision 72) has a more administrative nature, while the flow of policies developed with a more visible participation of ELT expert groups (the ETCF and Programme 2013) has a more occupational nature.

The conception of professionalism, on the one hand, articulated in the “expert” policies (the ETCF through Document 792, and Programme 2013), can be depicted as one striving for an ideal-typical professionalism (Freidson, 2001). The contents of the documents, their claimed purposes, and how they are presented, imply an attempt to professionalise the work of English teaching with a priority set towards teacher development and support. The policies are to be used by teachers and administrators as “a self-assessment tool for individual English teacher”, the results of which are for “their self-learning and participating in CPD courses in order to improve their competencies” (Document 792). The standards are stated to be employed “flexibly” and “not for the purposes of teacher performance annual assessment as well as teacher recruitment and promotion”. Indeed, the ETCF specifies it follows a “First do no harm” principle: “The purpose of the ETCF is additive – to help teacher educators, administrators, and teachers to move toward a new vision of language teaching and learning – not punitive (to punish teachers)” (User’s Guide, p.9). The document interprets professionalism departing from occupational knowledge and skills, and not vice versa as in the case of Circular 36, where teacher tasks and responsibilities are defined first (by the state), and competencies are regulated accordingly. Throughout the ETCF and Programme 2013, that teachers should be able to exercise discretion in their own work is clearly articulated, through which the status of the occupation is hoped to rise. The adaptive experts do not only perform their task but also adjust and creatively improve its quality, which implies they should be able to evaluate the task themselves (Programme 2013). The idea of “professional community” also seems to be enhanced, through a repeated emphasis on words such as “teaching community”, “learning community”, “professional community”, and “community of practice” (The ETCF).

On the other hand, there is a strong sense of managerialism especially in the ”authority” policies (Circular 36, Decision 16, and Decision 72). Indeed, managerialism can be said to dominate this professionalism. In Circular 36, which can be seen as the key legal document framing the remaining “authority” policies, the message viewing university teachers as “public employees” is sent straight away.
The term is placed right in the title of the document and without any hedging. Indeed, with professionalism articulated as lists of tasks, knowledge, skills, and competencies, all starting with verbs in imperative form, the message seems to come across as “this is a professionalism of obligations”. The policy does not seem to make much effort in persuading the public – it does not use promotional language or include a rationale. By using a legal, directive language and structure such as bullet points and numeric conversion, as well as the straightforward reference of university teachers as public employees, the document gives an impression that it is a natural fact that academics need, and have to, view themselves, and to be viewed as public employees. Likewise, Decision 16 and Decision 72 manifest themselves as management tools. Concretising morality, both professionally and personally, into Dos and Don’ts bullet points, Decision 16 does not seem to be a helpful guidance and a source of professional ethics support. Rather, it is used for the evaluation, ranking, and monitoring of teacher behaviours. Managerialism as the raison d’être seems to be most pronounced in Decision 72 where it is made explicit that teaching is a contractual service in a free market, where teachers, as the service provider, have to accommodate the needs of student-customers and the demands from the society.

Despite the co-existence of these two orientations towards professionalism, in all five policies studied, whether they are “authority” or “expert” flows, benchmarks, ratings, and indicators are employed to verbalise professionalism. The discretion element, as mentioned earlier, only takes up a medium proportion, whereas efficiency, productivity, and accountability principles are promoted. The state has defined almost all constituents of professionalism – the tasks needed to be accomplished, the desired knowledge and skills, training programmes, professional credentials, and even morality and professional ethics. Professionalism is concretised so that it is measurable thus manageable. In the ETCF, functionality, as demonstrated earlier, is also found to be present. Teacher English proficiency – one that makes up the core part of subject content knowledge and knowledge of teaching, is measured against benchmarks. Meanwhile, competencies are concretised into either observable behaviours or deliverables (with the use of verbs such as “conduct”, “plan”, “integrate”, “identify”, “use”, etc.). In the ETCF, the five domains are elaborated as 23 competencies, which are further codified into more than 130 performance indicators. This approach to defining bodies of skill and knowledge, and therefore defining the work of teachers, seems to be competing with the professional autonomy the policy claims it aims at.

The key tone of professionalism in Vietnam’s contemporary policy terrain can thus be characterised as being informed by a managerialism principle. In all the policies studied, the stress is put on the productivity, functionality, and usability of academics, rather than the knowledge and skills that they need to develop. This markedly functional, instrumental perspective towards professionalism is also expressed through the quantifying, coding, ranking, and measuring knowledge into
outcomes, deliverables, and observables. As demonstrated, the policies are to be used as an evaluating, ranking, and monitoring guide in the recruitment, usage, and management of teachers. Professionalism is thus conceptualised with a managerialism ethos that values and priorities productivity and performativities (Ball, 2000).

6.4.2 The discursive logic of the “from above” professionalism

As depicted, the two conceptualisations of professionalism observed earlier result from professionalisation projects by different actors “from above” (ministries, and professional groups through social organisations and university teacher educators) with quite different interests.

Public administration reforms vs. Professional specialisation legitimisation

The conceptualisation of university teacher professionalism in a managerialism approach of categorisation, quantification, and standardisation articulated in the policies is in fact informed by a wider discourse of reforms in public administration and education in Vietnam.

Circular 36, and other similar personnel legislations stipulating professional standards and codes, specifies the Law on Public Employees 2012. The Law on Public Employees 2012, together with the Law on Public Officials and Civil Servants 2010, is part of the current public administration reform in Vietnam that aims at continuing to improve the quality of personnel and civil services, and with new strategic approaches. The managerial professionalism expressed can thus be seen as belonging to a system of similar phenomena in a number of sectors that deliver professional civil services, which is in turn embedded in an on-going public administration reform discourse in Vietnam. Also, the managerialism philosophy informing the conceptualisation of professionalism in the policies can be linked with the current reform in higher education in Vietnam (Chapter 4).

Within Circular 36 a tension can be observed between the two discourses of public administration control and the claim for an increased professional specialisation acknowledgement. As described earlier, Circular 36, together with other policies in other sectors, has been issued within a renewed effort of the Vietnam government on improving public services and personnel. With a greater focus on merit and performance-based schemes, the current reform claims to acknowledge more professional recognition to professionals. One of the most significant manifestations of this claim is the distinction between the different terms used to refer to those who deliver public services. New terms including “public employees” and “professional titles” (chức danh nghề nghiệp) are introduced, which is regarded as one effort to acknowledge professional skills and knowledge, thus status. The position-based
standardisation, articulated through the coding, criteria defining, and ranking, is noted as aiming at “optimising the use of intellectual potentials, talents, and professional competencies of public employees in responding to civil services reform requirements for the purpose of development and international integration” (Ministry of Justice, 2014). The Law claims it establishes an open system of personnel management that recognises public employees as professionals with their expertise, rather than seeing them mainly as employees who must fulfil rigidly-set tasks (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

As a legal document beneath the Law on Public Employees 2012, Circular 36 is meant to reflect the reform principles that this Law aims (or claims) to achieve: to provide a better acknowledgement to the “professional” aspect of university teachers rather than the "civil servant" as in the past. Regarding linguistic terms at least, in Circular 36, university teachers are referred to as “public employees” (in the place of “civil servants” as in its preceding policy Decision 538). Circular 36 uses “professional titles” instead of “professional tracks”.

With these observations, it can be said that in Circular 36 two competing discourses can be identified. Within the discourse of public administration reform, university academics are represented as “public employees” who have obligations and function under the supervision of the government to deliver civil services to the interest of the public. However, with the contemporary revised version of the reform which aims, and claims, to acknowledge their professional specialisation (intellectual potentials, talents, and professional competencies), a call for recognising the “lecturers” aspect of university teachers is increasingly emphasised. It can also be noted that in Circular 36 the requirements become increasingly demanding as the ranking moves up (from Grade I lecturers, to Grade II, and Grade III), but at the same time more academic freedom seems to be granted. In order to be promoted as Grade III lecturers (High-Level), university teachers have to meet particular criteria in education and training (e.g. PhD degrees), have more extensive working experience, and be able to show that they are productive, but this also means that they will be able to take part in a wider range of professional activities, and take more control over their work. For example, if Grade II and Grade I lecturers tend to be expected to participate in planning activities, Grade III lecturers can lead these activities. Words such as supervise, manage, lead, organise, and actively are used most for Grade III lecturers.

Teacher standardisation vs. Teacher development

As the findings suggest, in the “expert” group of policies, besides their core purpose of teacher development, a presence of managerialism is also detected. The operation of these two co-existing dimensions can be seen most clearly in the ETCF and to an extent in Programme 2013.
Although the ETCF is a professional development support tool, it is, on the other hand, a set of standards that teachers need to comply with. The construction of teacher knowledge, skills, and attitude as definite tasks, behaviour, and responsibilities, the presentation of these requirements in bullet point items, and then in blocks and categories, and the classification of professional expertise and competencies into rankings, all show that professionalism is viewed as being able to be added, measured, and exemplified. The ETCF is also under pressures from the society. As described earlier, the Vietnam National Foreign Languages Project 2020 is initiated on the rationale that English education needs to produce human resources with English competencies in response to the country’s new conditions. This rationale also forms the grounds from which the ETCF departs from, being part of the NFL Project 2020. The mission that English teachers have to fulfil is phrased in the policy as “helping students gain the language competencies and soft skills called for in the 21st Century”, which is “the job that they are being called on by society to do” (User’s Guide, p.8).

However, although being embedded in these possibly competing discourses, the policy can still be viewed as aiming at an ideal-type occupationally controlled professionalism that wants to see ELT elevating to a higher status and English teachers exercising a higher level of discretion. It seems that the paradox is well perceived in the policy. It acknowledges the dilemma and shows the intention to compromise these competing discourses. When the ETCF claims it is underpinned by the “First do no harm” principle, it seems it has already acknowledged an existence of the “harm”. This is further revealed when the framework describes itself as “standardised, yet able to be customised and flexible”:

The ETCF is a standardised, customisable, and flexible tool to bring focus and vision to teacher development in Vietnam. It is NOT a prescriptive list that a teacher is expected to attain at one time. It is a vision of flexible and effective teaching practice, and a guide for ongoing professional development over a teacher’s career. It is a tool for teachers and trainers to identify specific areas for training and self-study and to acquire expertise over time. The ETCF is a standardised tool that can be customised for local use, and is flexible in the sense that performance indicators are able-to-be revised, added to, or made clearer for use by local trainers.

(User’s Guide, p.17)

These statements clearly signify the intention of the policy claiming its nature as striving for an ideal type of professionalism of discretion, specialisation, commitment, career, and autonomy. In this way, the policy is declaring that standardisations will provide teachers with “occupational shelters” (Freidson, 2001) rather something to control them. Indeed, with the observations gained earlier
through analysing the contents and their representation of the policy, it can be said that overall the framework has constructed an ELT professionalism that reaches beyond a mechanical specialisation type of teachers as technicians and teaching machines.

However, considering the paradox of measurability versus discretion discussed above, and considering the permeation of managerialism, the question whether the policy is a really a support or a management tool, especially when used by administrators (one of the intended audience of the policy, who, interestingly, is not mentioned in the “standardised, yet able to be customized and flexible” message above), still remains. In fact, the issue of whether the framework is viewed as a prescriptive manual or supportive guidelines has been raised (e.g. Vu Mai Trang & O’Rourke, 2013). Similarly, although striving for discretion is the most prominent message of Programme 2013, professionalism in this document is also under the pressure of other contexts. The contents of its modules are mapped towards the ETCF domains and competencies. Although this dependency does not go as far as following to the level of discrete individual performance indicators, this still shows a presence of bureaucracy logic. Also, that the programme considers teaching students English to meet the required CEFR level as the most important purpose of the job and as the key role of teachers also reveals that it sees professionalism in a myriad of different interests and powers. Although it tries to promote occupational values, the policy still seems not yet to be able to stay unconnected to its surrounding discourses.

**Managerialism vs. Traditional values**

Another pair of values found to co-exist in the contemporary teacher professionalism can be identified most explicitly in Circular 36 and Decision 16: managerial ethos and traditional values.

As discussed above, what Circular 36 appears to communicate can be summarised into two main messages. The first message is university teachers are salaried public employees, and they need to fulfil the responsibilities to the state who provides the economic conditions for them to deliver the service. The second message is university teaching is a job among others, and like any other.

Decision 16 shares the managerialism philosophy observed in Circular 36 in that directive bullet points are used for regulating morality requirements. Similar to Circular 36, the bullet points are presented in imperative forms, and this normative voice seems to be strengthened by the fact that morality is explicitly interpreted into what teachers have to do and also what they are prohibited from doing.

However, Decision 16 has several features different from Circular 36, which may signify the competition between an image of university teachers under managerialism pressure and one that still conforms to traditional perspectives.
Decision 16 refers to those who do the work of teaching as nhà giáo which means “teacher” but with a most respectful connotation\(^\text{10}\). Also, the policy seems to utilise more legitimation techniques. In its first chapter, an article that states the rationale of the policy is provided, which is not the case of Circular 36. This article is written in a quite eloquent language:

The regulations on teacher ethics is the basis for teachers in their making self-discipline efforts relevant to the teaching profession which is celebrated by the society; it is also one of the bases for teacher evaluation, ranking, and monitoring in order to build a teacher workforce who have sound political judgement, strong professional competencies and ethics, high interest in learning and who continuously improve their expertise and pedagogic methods. They also have a lifestyle and behavioural manner that is up to social norms, so that they become truly good role models for their students.

(Article 2, Chapter 1, Decision 16/2008)

Compared with Circular 36, although at the heart of Decision 16 also lies a managerialism ethos, it seems the policy employs a “softer”, more rhetorical approach. Only after the promotion for a teacher centre is mentioned is the management purpose of the policy (“teacher evaluation, ranking, and monitoring”) stated. Not only teachers are referred to with the more respectful-sounding term nhà giáo, but they are also emphasised as the most important beneficiary of the policy. In the article stating the policy’s purposes, the phrase “the policy is the basis for teachers in their making self-discipline efforts” gives an impression that not only the policy works to the interests and benefits of teachers, but they also “own” it.

With this “softer” language, Decision 16 makes a reference to what considered as “good” and “desirable”. Teaching is depicted as “the profession which is celebrated by the society”. Added to that, this management purpose is legitimised by a vivid-pictured rationale with many glittery adjectives to describe teachers as those who possess great qualifications (“sound political judgement, strong professional competencies and ethics, high interest in learning”, etc.). This message rounds up with a perfect ending when it puts forward “learners” as the ultimate cause that the policy is geared towards (“so that they become truly good role models for their students”), which makes the persuasion more powerful: the teachers are made convinced that the policy is for good. The policy also mentions “reward” along with “sanction” which creates a sense of fairness and democracy.

Decision 16 hence uses a number of techniques to achieve its intention. The nature

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\(^{10}\) In fact, it is difficult to find a precise English equivalent to the term “nhà giáo” since it possesses a connotation more respectful than the neutral-sounding “giáo viên” (teacher). “Nhà giáo” conveys an image of teachers who have knowledge, morality, and dignity, while “giáo viên” has a more administrative connotation simply referring to those who do the work of teaching.
of the policy is indeed similar to that of Circular 36 – it is a management tool, but the way the policy communicates to teachers, and to the public, is intentionally promotional and rhetorical. As mentioned earlier, the key part of the document lists teacher morality requirements, but this part is “cushioned” by the glossy opening. This introduction helps soften the directive tone of the requirements so that they will be read (and implemented) with more positive feelings.

The way Decision 16 uses different legitimation modes and glossed language reflects the attempts to compromise between management goals to control teachers and a depiction of them with all good images, values and respect. It is possible that the policy has to sound more persuasive because it addresses morality matters – which can be perceived as being more contested thus more difficult to gain support from the public, while the professionalism in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies mandated in Circular 36 can be more concrete and solid thus easier to be naturalised without much justification. But it is more evident that how Decision 16 depicts the image of university academics signifies a competing relationship between the two discourses: a contemporary managerialism discourse and a tradition that values and celebrates teachers.

6.5 Chapter conclusion

The analysis and discussion above suggest that the conceptualisation of professionalism for Vietnamese university (ELT) teachers articulated in key policies is shaped in a network of discursive contexts. Under the pressures of these contexts, new expertise and responsibilities are expected of academics, and they are positioned according to different interests.

As demonstrated, the “authority” flow of policies (first and second chain parts), promoting mainly practical knowledge and formal knowledge but within an approach of productivity, functionality and measurability, can be described as deriving from a managerial rationale. Teaching, including ELT teaching, is construed as a service to be delivered to student-customers. This philosophy of managerialism dictates that for university teachers in Vietnam, fulfilling obligations must be most prioritised. Indeed this is used to define academics – their first and foremost role is to act as “public employees”, or civil servants. Added to that, in the particular case of ELT teachers, their role is increasingly viewed as a service provider. Professional knowledge, skills, and competencies are made accumulated and functional, while a seemingly intangible concept such as professional morality is articulated in bullet points of tasks, attitudes, and behaviour. Research is seen as a service that contributes to societal development. Performance evaluation serves as the core purpose of the policies. Lectures are graded into categories and need to prove they are useful, productive, and responsive. The surveillance and management of university teachers happen (e.g. the regulations on morality) in almost all aspects of
life, within and beyond academia. As demonstrated, there is a strong sense the policies – being used as tools of assessment/disciplines, aim to create compliance and loyalty, and regulate academics both in terms of their professional and personal selves.

The professionalism as articulated in the “expert” flow of policies (third chain part), with a more visible focus on teachers’ tacit knowledge and critical reflection, however, appears to align more with ideal-typical occupational properties. Establishing the image of university English teachers as having specialised knowledge and experience, who are assigned to a specialised job, the policies attempt to legitimise the occupation and those who practise it as a profession of a higher status. ELT academics are portrayed as “practising adaptive experts”, with more agency, who are active and take more control of how the work is to be done, thus defining the work itself. Hence, professionalism in these policies seems to be mainly driven by ideal typical values. Designed and developed by ELT educational experts, teacher educators, and teachers, both policies support teacher efficiency, and what is defined as “efficiency”, as emerged from the analysis, is oriented more towards learning, learners, and teacher development than work control and/or a market-driven principle. The bodies of knowledge and skills described in the policies also align with contemporary trends in ELT professionalism being valued by teacher educators and occupational groups (Chapter 3).

Although two main conceptualisations of professionalism can be identified (from a managerialism and from an occupational perspective), they co-exist and are the results of a professionalisation project involving different actors. The dominant ethos framing this professionalism is managerialism, promoting a concretised, cumulative and measurable view of the notion, and this ethos is legitimised in all policies using different rationales – some of which, as discussed above, can be seen either as teacher deskilling or empowering. University-teachers-as-public-employees can be considered as the story line of the “authority” policies, articulated through both contents and forms. The “expert” policies, although attempting to focus more on teacher development, with its predetermined standards, reveal an instrumental interpretation of knowledge, which may have a significant impact on learning (Wahlström, 2016). Furthermore, the interpretation of the expectations of university teachers into numbers and indicators suggests they need to prove their functionality and responsiveness with solid evidence – they need to be usable, creditable, and productive. Academics have to be multi-tasked and take up multiple roles in responding to the changing conditions. In this way, professionalism is constructed firstly to the interests of the state and the authority – which is, a professionalism to be functional and manageable. In the field of English language teaching, the occupation is regarded as a tool to realising economic interests and internationalisation goals – similar to what has been found in the policy landscape of other countries (Badiozaman, 2016). With this professionalism, university teachers are required to
realise a professionalism of rules, regulations, and obligations mandated by the state. At the same time, the analysis shows the role of the state in professionalising the occupation.

The analysis also suggests that this “from above” professionalism has a discursive rationale. The professionalism expected of university teachers articulated in contemporary policies in Vietnam is embedded in a number of discourses: cultural, social, economic, and political discourses. The national discourses of a Confucian heritage history and of economic development and competition demands can be seen as being blended with pressures from globalisation and the knowledge economy, for example, the linkage between teacher work with international competition and quality assurance, as well as with social responsibilities. Policies are developed under these imperatives and pressures, but they were also internalised and domesticated (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). This professionalism, judged by a set of intellectual, professional, and political and ideological standards, results from processes of interaction, competition, and negotiation, between these discourses.
Chapter 7 “Stretching-the-limit”: Professionalism realisation in an institutional context

This chapter investigates how professionalism is established and operationalised in a university in Vietnam (with its pseudonym “Dominus University”). By looking at both “regulations and instrumentalities” (Freidson, 2001, p.136), the research provides an empirical analysis that showcases the different political forces involved in establishing and realising professionalism. The chapter is structured into two parts, 7.1 and 7.2. The first part looks at Dominus University’s policies on staff recruitment and performance appraisal, and relates this professionalism to the university’s aims, priorities, and values, expressed through its mission statement, the president’s speeches, and management practices. The second part examines the expectations from Foreign Languages Department for its academic staff manifested through its management practices and as expressed in the interviews with six departmental managers. In this way, the chapter unravels the constituent elements of professionalism and analyses the logic behind its construction at the meso level of institutional setting.

7.1 The professionalisation in Dominus University

This section studies the orientation of Dominus University’s institutional policies and management practices towards faculty management. It looks into the way the university chooses to present its self-image through rhetorical documents including its mission statement and public addresses by the president, through which the values and priorities currently promoted by the university are revealed. How professionalism is constructed and maintained at Dominus University is then investigated through its staff management mechanisms.

7.1.1 “University of the World”

How universities wish to present themselves is often most explicitly verbalised in their rhetoric, such as mission statements and president’s public speeches. Since mission statements express the essence of the whole organisation, they have been used as sources of information to investigate HE institutions’ orientation, their aims and priorities, particularly in changing conditions (Davies & Glaister, 1996; Kuenssberg, 2011). Similarly, to understand a university, the president’s speeches can also be drawn on since they usually include important contents such as the institution’s aspirations, plans, and strategic approaches.

In what follows, the image of Dominus University is analysed as it is presented in the institution’s mission statement and two public speeches by the president, retrieved from the university’s website. The mission statement is part of the
A world-class, “premier league” member

The analysis results signify Dominus University wants to be recognised as a member of the “premier league” of top universities in Vietnam. The university also shows a strong aspiration and ambition to excel at a global level.

In Vietnam, with a great number of HE institutions (more than 400 in 63 provinces, most located in big cities), universities often recruit students from neighbouring provinces. Nevertheless, with an energetic, “dynamic language” (Kuenssberg, 2011), Dominus University wants to spread out its reputation across the country. A national positioning is conveyed as what the university has already achieved, and now to be maintained. The university provides a workforce for the nation’s development, making an active and positive contribution to Vietnam’s education reforms, and acting as the driving force for the nation’s vocational education (Year address). This “leading” and “prestigious” position needs to be maintained (Year address) so the institution will be among “Vietnam’s top ten universities” (Vision). The KPIs (Key Performance Indices) also states all activities conducted by staff members and units must serve the purpose of gaining more reputation for the University.

Towards these goals, Dominus University has implemented a number of prestige-seeking strategies. The recent increase of student selectivity can be regarded as one. In 2014, following the MOET decision of granting HEIs more autonomy in student recruitment, Dominus University issued its new admission procedure (“Undergraduate admissions 2014”, university web archive). Apart from applicants’ scores from the national entrance exams, academic records and certifications, for example IELTS scores, are now an alternative for admittance. In certain disciplines, an interview is required. By tightening admissions process while providing alternatives, the university can both raise the “quality” of incoming students and maintain admissions rates. This also makes the university more desirable, thus more attractive, and promises a better prospect of students achieving learning outcomes.

Dominus University also strives beyond the national scope: it aims to be one of the prestigious universities in the region and globally. The university endeavours to be on the same level with recognised universities in the region and in the world (Year address). There is a strong sense favouring internalisation in its strategic approach. An extensive
usage of “internalisation”, “regional and international”, and “international integration” is noticed throughout its mission, vision, core values, goals, and public speeches. The university has adopted policies borrowed from foreign contexts. A great number of international collaborative projects are highlighted in the Year address as either on-going or incoming activities. On the university’s Introduction webpage, these projects and international partners, including universities and corporates, occupy a focal place. That it has participated in international accreditation systems is also repeatedly mentioned. The recent recognition of international English test scores such as IELTS is another indication showing the university’s attempts in reaching international standards, which is described as being in line with the University’s participation in accreditation programmes including AUN and ABET (“Undergraduate admissions 2014”). As stated in the Year plan, internalisation continues to be the strategic goal for the university’s future development.

Research promoted

Dominus University presents itself as an institution in engineering with a research orientation rather than one concentrating on providing labour force.

Conventional, the university’s activities cover engineering and technical education: its responsibilities are to provide engineers and technical workers, and train teachers for vocational schools. With this focus on training and job preparation, the university has a professional and vocational nature. However, the formulation of its mission statement indicates its wish to move beyond this vocational-applied scope. Technology and vocational education and training are still mentioned as the track the university pursues, but in the statement this aspect is paired with a more scientific-scholarly research aspect: technology now goes with science (“khoa học công nghệ”), vocational education is formulated as vocational educational science (“khoa học giáo dục nghề nghiệp”). Research and technology transfer are stressed as the key operational areas of the university alongside training. Also, the institution is to provide “workforce” together with “research products”. In his speech, the president reiterated that the university endeavours to maintain its top position in applied vocational training, but it will also strive to be “a prestigious research centre” in the country and internationally. The university is to “provide learners with the best environments for studying and doing research” (emphasis added). It also wants to participate in “important research projects” that yield “practical applications”.

Further investment in post-graduate education also indicates the ambition of

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11 As presented, these include ISO (International Organization for Standardization), AUN (ASEAN University Network), ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, a US-initiated now international scheme), HEEAP (Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program, also initiated by US organisations), and CDIO (Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate, an international outcome-based design framework for engineer education).
Dominus University to achieve a more research-oriented status. The university will provide three more PhD programmes and four more MA programmes (Year address). Its international joint programmes, especially those at postgraduate level will also be expanded.

The above observations suggest that Dominus University wants to move away from its traditional image of an institution that only produces skilled labour force. Focusing on “science and research”, the institution wishes to affirm its image as belonging to Tier 2 – university of applied sciences, and even with an orientation towards the top Tier 1 – research university, rather than Tier 3 – professional and vocational university. The research that the university embraces, however, can be noted to associate with practical applications with tangible products.

Responsibilities to stakeholders

Dominus University seems to concern the needs of every group of stakeholders and strives to establish a connection with them. For students, it is committed to providing a highly flexible and adaptive higher education so that students will have qualifications widely recognised, including in regional and international contexts, and be able to find employment. This goal is connected to public purposes: so that they [graduates] will contribute to the society’s advancement and international integration. The vision states that the university is to bring a positive impact on the social and economic life of the nation. It aspires to take a role in Vietnam’s education reforms, and in the country’s development of technical and vocational education field.

Dominus University’s commitment to “social responsibilities” is also articulated as providing community services, with an explicit mentioning of “businesses”. “Community” is repeated twice in the mission statement, appearing both as a core value and a strategic goal: the university has the mission to “serve the community” and “recognise the community’s interests”. It is noticeable that among public and community groups, only businesses is exclusively mentioned, and as strategic partners rather than a cause: “comprehensive cooperation with businesses” is one of the university’s long-term priorities. The archival data available on the university’s website show that the university frequently receives support from companies and enterprises for training and research such as laboratory and training facilities procurement, research collaboration, conferences, internships, and scholarships.

Business-driven

Dominus University can be described as being strongly business-driven following an entrepreneurial principle.

In the documents, the word thương hiệu (brand name) is repeated to refer to Dominus University’s reputation: the university has successfully built a strong brand
name, and in the coming years it endeavours to promote its brand name in the science and technology market. Also, the university is implementing a project called “Dominus University’s 1001 video clips” with the aim, among others, to PR the university to the public and to create a good impression and establish a brand name. Similar to the English translation “brand name”, thương hiệu in Vietnamese belongs to the business glossary, meaning the name of either a product or the company that produces or sells the product. The word also conveys a broader context of the market, strategies, and competition. In the above texts, it can be noticed that “brand name” is used in association with other words including “promote” (quảng bá), “market” (thị trường), and PR (i.e. public relation activities). This business language in the presentation suggests an entrepreneurial mindset that Dominus University adopts: Not only the university constructs itself as having a business-like identity with a “brand name” to be promoted and identified (from competitors) in order to PR the university to the public, but it also views science and technology as a market.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the university is also expressed through the highlight of quality, measurement, and indicators. The presentation of the strategies section in the Year speech can also be described as being dominated by an enterprise, managerialism principle with words such as standards, criteria, quality assurance, quality management accreditation, review and revise, systemise and standardise. “Quality” is declared as both an aspiration and a core value that Dominus University seeks. The vision set by the university is visualised into milestones (by the year xxxx and xxxx). At the same time, the aims in the vision are quantified into indicators: targeted number of enrolled students, targeted number of staff (which is specified into employment tracks), targeted percentage of faculty’s qualifications, the university’s planned ground coverage in square meters, etc.

The mission statement asserts Dominus University is to apply progressive higher education management and governance technologies. Indeed, an entrepreneurial management approach has already been implemented in the university since 2007, as proudly indicated in a certificate of ISO 9001:2000 quality management systems placed on the university’s Introduction webpage. In the tasks set out for the incoming academic year, Dominus University continues to implement administration reforms, by “redefining all management positions as task- and competency-based” (emphasis added). All existing centres of the university will be strengthened, and several new are to be established in areas such as renewable energy, student services, short courses, and workforce development. It is also stated that a project on “generating income from short-term training activities” (emphasis added) will be developed. Increased spending will be on infrastructure and administration support including applying IT in management and improving student facilities and administration buildings. As such, one of the priorities is to develop “service delivery units” (Thomson, 1998, in Ball, 2000, p.17). Efficiency is emphasised: resources such as workspace and equipment, energy, electricity and water will be reorganised, reallocated, and saved for
efficiency purposes. Also, Dominus University invests in increasing transparency: the university plans to have a “rigorous application of IT in training and management activities”; management will be communicated through an IT portal; online and mobile learning management will be supported; and all training materials will be digitalised and made open-access.

At the same time, intensive monitoring and management measures are to be promoted. The Department of Quality Assurance will be appointed with new responsibilities of “auditing training programmes” (emphasis added). All training programmes are to be reviewed, revised, systematised, and standardised to meet quality management and accreditation criteria. Teaching will need to be enhanced with more professional activities at departments, and teachers are expected to innovate teaching and learning methods and improve their competencies to be able to teach short courses. Also, the university will revisit regulations to maintain and enhance work routine and work discipline. Indeed, as noted from the field trip, in Dominus University most classrooms already have a “Regulations” noticeboard prescribing the Dos and Don’ts required of students’ behaviour. The most significant evidence illustrating the university’s culture of monitoring, surveillance, and measurement is its recent development of KPIs (Key Performance Indices), discussed later. KPIs measures the performance of staff members in terms of indicators. It claims to be a compensation policy, but also acts as a sanction mechanism.

As such, through the use of a “language of business” (Deem & Brehony, 2005) and through an emphasis on quality practices and measurement stated as the institution’s values and priorities (Coates, 2007; Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014), Dominus University’s business-driven identity in a “managerialism” ethos is revealed – the university is shaped and operationalised almost like a corporate entity.

Students as customers-partners-stakeholders

The relation between Dominus University and its students – a traditional, and important, relationship for any HE institutions, also takes on an entrepreneurial tone.

In the Year address, “Student relations” are placed with “Business relations” and “Brand-name promotion” in the same section as one operational area priority. This suggests a close association between “students” and “customers”, and “education” and “commodity”. Student-customers need to be attracted, for example, via the university’s plan to “make use of the social media”. Further analysis indeed indicates that the value the university claims to bring to its students is also practical and customers-oriented. Dominus University prioritises employability as a value it has to offer. Providing skilled workforce is identified as the university’s key mission: it is committed to enabling students to get suitable employment with which they are able to achieve fullest self-realisation and to contribute to the society (Mission). The university “needs to set up connections with businesses for students’ sponsorships, internship,
and employment opportunities” (Year address). Dominus University campus life at the time of visit can be described as being energetic and lively with many catchy banners hanging along the main campus avenue. These banners are from different departments but they mostly contain information on student employability. For example, one banner announces a university-supported recruitment opening for a big foreign company; one is about a scholarship from an association of businesses and enterprises; one is about a Job Fair; and another is about the next session of an English club that helps everyone “be ready for big changes”.

Being “customers” in this case also means having more power. Students are viewed by Dominus University as a partner or a stakeholder with whom the relationship needs to be prioritised and cherished. Recognising student rights and interests is mentioned as one core value of the university. Student support is to be maximised through expanding academic playfields and research environments for students.

To innovate learning methods, students are “mobilised” (as opposed to being “requested” or “required”). Resources will be allocated for infrastructure for students (also noted by Toma, 2009) including new student housing, a new laboratory, an information centre, and another convenience store (Year address). The university’s initiative “Dialogues with students”, implemented for several years now, is another example of the university’s acknowledging a more powerful position of students. The title of the meeting (Dialogues – Dọị ọhịa) implies a degree of equality between the parties involved. The meeting is organised annually between the management and students at departmental and finally at the university level. A document (“Responses from the president to students”) posted on the university’s website is about this year’s university-level meeting: the president made a number of decisions regarding the issues the students had raised – from curriculum, learning facilities and teaching materials, research, student societies, employment, regulations, to feedback about particular courses, teachers, and teaching methods. During my field trip, I attended such a meeting organised by Foreign Languages Department. The meeting can be described as an open dialogue between the management board and also teachers, and students. The students raised questions and opinions which were either answered, explained, or forwarded to relevant units. The Chair after that spoke of the meeting, “it is for the management to get students’ feedback, and often the feedback is complaints”.

7.1.2 The status of English language education in Dominus University

A secondary status

At the time of study, Dominus University has 14 departments. The majority (9/14) of them are in the fields of engineering and technology, ranging from automotive engineering, mechanical technology, electrical and electronic engineering to garment
technology, graphics, and information technology, and most were established during the 1960s–1980s. The remaining departments are in the areas of basic sciences (Maths and Physics), political sciences, economics, technical teacher education, and foreign languages (now only containing English), which were founded during the 2000s. The university also has 12 centres and schools providing services in terms of research and technology transfer and short courses, among which is the Centre of Foreign Languages for paying learners. The academic departments, schools, and service centres are governed by a central administration system comprising 14 offices. Foreign Languages Department (FL Department) was established in 2007 upgrading from a small division of another department, and is one of the two youngest departments of the university.

Against this structural and historical backdrop, FL Department does not occupy a central place, considering the university’s long concentration on engineering and technology. Although its positioning may be different from that of the Centre of Foreign Languages – one kind of English language services in a commercial context (Walker, 2011), in this case it still seems to be difficult to characterise FL Department as an academic unit like other departments. First, with its mission stated only as providing English language education to students from all disciplines across the university, without any mentioning of, for example, research or theories, the department seems to have a service-oriented nature. Second, working with students’ English skills means the department is equipping them (who have other majors) with a “side” subject. Its contribution, therefore, is more supplementary rather than valuable in its own right.

The department is indeed conceived by its management as having a more secondary status to the others. During the interviews, two managers made comments on the department’s somewhat marginal position in Dominus University.

The existence of a foreign languages department in an engineering university is kind of funny… Because most of the university leaders have backgrounds in engineering, they think everyone, even teachers from private language centres, can teach English here… The department does not have much voice as the engineering and technology departments. Our proposals to the university are often left on the shelf. (Manager Tam)

The University does not favour social sciences as much as engineering and technology. This is because they [engineering and technology departments] have a longer tradition and have built a stronger capacity. Some even have existed for dozens of years now so they have better personnel. And they have more products and articles than us… Also, our research does not yield a machine or anything… (Manager Binh)
As seen from the comments, the two managers were attributing the department’s status to its academic nature, contents, and impact. Both of them assumed a somehow inferior positioning of ELT compared to engineering and technology: Manager Tam reflected on the view from the university level management seeing the work of tertiary ELT may not comprise more specialised knowledge than the work of ELT at private language centres, while Manager Binh showed concerns about the department’s lower research productivity and applicability, which makes it fail to be on a par with other academic departments in the university. The department’s young history is also viewed as a disadvantage since this has consequences on personnel capacity. In the interview with the Chair, he spoke of the foundation of the department in 2007 as simply “one of the institution’s strategies to legitimise itself as a more genuine university with the presence of social sciences disciplines, as opposed to a Soviet-influenced technical specialist institution”.

**Position rising?**

In an informal chat with the Chair of FL Department, however, it was learnt that in recent years the university has shown a greater interest in English language education. Indeed, as evidenced in Dominus University’s documents, English language education has made its way into the university’s plans, both short-term and long-term; it has even become one of the key tasks for future development. Improving English skills for both students and staff members is particularly stressed: the demand for English competencies in the coming years is higher than ever – a real challenge for our university’s teachers and students. Solutions need to be proposed to enhance English skills for our staff and students... A survey will be conducted to investigate our graduates’ English proficiency level... An English benchmark will be set for students as a condition for graduation (Year address and Teachers’ Day address).

In practice, English does flourish in Dominus University. The university has been demanding its students to achieve a TOEIC score target before they could be granted graduation degrees. Observations on the site show that the presence of English has extended beyond the confines of Foreign Languages Department to all parts of the university. As described earlier, notices and banners advertising English workshops and English clubs, either from FL Department or other departments, were visible in most central places on campus. I came to one of these events – a regular discussion session of an English club organised by students from Economics Department, and noted that those who joined the discussion are students from all over the university and not just those with majors in economics and business.

At the same time, it was noted from the field data that English language education in Dominus University is seen as a means to achieve its purposes. I had a chance to attend an important event hosted by Dominus University which can illustrate the
increased attention the university is paying to English language education. The event was an inter-sessional review meeting of MOET’s National Foreign Languages Project 2020 with the participation of MOET leaders and university managers from across the country. In the welcome speech, the president emphasised the role of English to Dominus University as “essential because the slogan of the university is international integration”. He mentioned the university will need to use English as the language of instruction in part of its curriculum. The president also stressed the need for students to have a good command of English because “otherwise when we join the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) in 2015 they will face fierce competition from students from other universities in the region who are fluent English users”. The president spoke of today’s engineers as “global engineers” who, if lacking English skills, become “illiterate” in a way. He also compared low-paid graduates with no English skills with those who earn much more from working for foreign companies, and emphasised that this is the drive that boosts student learning motivation. Meanwhile, the English club session I attended was dominated by a similar spirit of “good, well-paid employment”. The topic of that day turned out to be “Orientation” – how students should prepare themselves for a future job, and having English skills emerged from the discussion as a prerequisite for this. All the members in my discussion group when asked expressed a wish to better their English so they can work for foreign invested companies.

With these considerations, English teaching and learning seems to take an increasingly important role in Dominus University, which is indicated both in the university’s recent policies and through its practices. However, a closer look at the status of English language education in the university, which in this case seems to reveal only through in-depth on-site data, suggests that it is still perceived as having a service-oriented function rather than an academic discipline. Dominus University needs English language education in order to realise its international integration commitment, and to increase students’ “good” employability, defined by how much they earn. To students, they have a strong will to have good jobs, understood as “working for foreign invested companies”, and as they see it English will help them to realise that ambition. Actually, it can be said that the “secondary status” of English language education in Dominus University has not changed in nature; only its role is now attached to more emphasis. As reported by managers, the establishment of FL Department was from the beginning a tool of the university to maximise its operation and meet the goal of a “comprehensive” institution. Toma (2009) refers to this as “diversification and expansion” strategies of universities striving for increased prestige. Facing new conditions of globalisation and the knowledge economy, ELT has become an even more essential tool. The “second-class” status of FL Department of Dominus University can also be related to the phenomenon of ELT in higher education institutions being regarded as a service rather than an academic department (Borg, 2013; Pennington & Hoekje, 2014). At Dominus University, there
is a clear sense that FL Department is not the university’s central focus. Providing English skills education as a minor subject, the department is seen as being *supplementary* rather than *core*, and this “secondary” status of the FL Department was (quite widely) accepted as a reality – an explicable reality, whether it was agreed with or not.

**7.1.3 Striving academic staff for a striving institution**

The expectations Dominus University has for its teachers can be traced in several key documents of the institution. The various components of this professionalism are most clearly articulated in the university’s policies on staff recruitment and work appraisal.

The webpage of the Academic Affairs Department of Dominus University provides a policy document concerning professional responsibilities of university academics (Ministry of Education and Training, Decision 64, 2008). This regulation requires university lecturers to fulfil responsibilities in four areas of work: *Teaching* (e.g. teaching, syllabus/materials development, student assessment, student support, etc.); *Research* (e.g. project participation, conference attendance, publications, technology transfer, etc.); *Learning and teaching activities management* (student recruitment, student counselling, teaching quality evaluation and assurance, academic management, etc.); and *Continuous professional development* (e.g. CPD to achieve professional standards). The document also specifies the required number of in-class teaching hours of 280 hours for lecturers per annum. In this policy, introduced in 2008, social responsibilities are incorporated into Research activities through the mentioning that research needs to support economic and societal development, and university teachers need to engage in popular science knowledge dissemination.

At Dominus University, besides teaching loads, academic staff are required to fulfil research responsibilities, translated into additional 90 hours. If faculty do not fulfil research responsibilities (e.g. do not have a research project at departmental level as the minimum requirement), they will not receive the payment for these hours. Also, faculty need to participate in “extra-curriculum” activities such as teachers’ essay contests and music festivals organised by the university. During the field trip, I noted that FL Department sent a staff team to compete in an institutional music festival, for which the teachers had spent several days rehearsing.

During the last two years Dominus University has applied CDIO (Conceive – Design – Implement – Operate) standards in all their programmes, aiming to be included as a CDIO participating member institution. CDIO is an international learning outcome-based framework for engineer education, which emphasises students’ practical skills upon graduation to meet real-world demands. With this aim, faculties and departments at Dominus University have undergone rigorous re-planning and revision of their curricula and syllabi. One of the outcomes targeted is
graduates must have achieved a level of English proficiency equal to a TOEIC score of 450. This leads ELT teachers to work towards this benchmark goal. Foreign Languages Department has also readjusted their programmes towards CDIO criteria, which was, according to the managers interviewed, “a difficult task” since they had to fit a discipline of humanities into an engineering-oriented framework (Manager Binh, Manager Phong, Manager Phuong).

At the same time, as required by the MOET’s National Foreign Languages Project 2020, ELT teachers at FL Department also need to have at least the C1 level of CEFR in terms of English proficiency (mostly converted to 7.0 IELTS scores).

Formal qualifications and a rounded whole

That the teaching staff must have formal qualifications seems to be the most important requirement. Teachers in Dominus University are desired to have PhD degrees in most cases and at least MA degrees in some particular disciplines. In the Year address, the president highlighted the increased number of Dominus University teachers having the titles of professors, associate professors, and PhD during the last years as a key achievement of the institution. Formal qualifications have become so essential that they are regarded as the indicator showing the university’s attempts in human resources development: the mission statement says that by the year 2020, 40 percent of the faculty should have the PhD while 60 percent have a master’s degree. Academic degrees, diploma, certificates, and professional titles are identified as the core criteria for staff recruitment. In a Dominus University’s vacancy announcement publicised online, formal qualifications are specified for each position advertised. For the position of English lecturers, applicants need to have at least a master’s degree in either TESOL or Applied Linguistics, and an IELTS test score of 7.5.

Besides the requirement for subject knowledge set as the prerequisite, the job announcement also specifies various desired supplementary skills and competencies. Applicants must have earned certificates of computer skills, English proficiency, and pedagogy. They also have to submit a reflection on their own moral virtues and professional qualities. Once their applications have been through the first round of screening, candidates will have to sit for an IQ test, a computer skills test, and an English test. Candidates for the teaching track will also have to prepare a lesson plan and teach it before a panel. All candidates, except those with professoriate titles and a PhD degree, have to take a qualifying interview.

Dominus University’s recruitment procedures indicate the university’s requirements for its staff to have a “rounded whole” evidenced by formal qualifications. Academics must have a range of professional knowledge and skills, from subject matter, and technical skills such as computer and English competencies, to more soft skills including analysis and problem-solving, teaching skills, and communication skills.


Striving to be the best

In the Year speech, the university’s expectations of staff are disclosed through its strategic plans. The long-term aims of the university are described by the president as maintaining our top position as a leading institution in vocational and professional training, and at the same time a prestigious research centre at national and international levels... We endeavour to provide learners with the best, professional environments of higher education and research that enable them on graduation to have sufficient competitive advantages and be adaptive. To realise these goals, the university needs “the consensus and collaboration from all staff members and students”. Setting these ambitious aims, Dominus University appears to expect its staff members to also be ambitious. They need to show their efforts in teaching, research and to become the best, professional, competitive, and adaptive. For example, the university especially mentions that teaching staff have to innovate teaching and learning methods, vary evaluation and assessment methods, improve English proficiency, have strong subject knowledge and teaching skills for short-term courses, participate in professional development, and conduct research.

Also, regarding the relationship with students, the university has certain perspectives that it expects teachers to support: teachers should no longer be the master who offers knowledge, but instead they should be the facilitator. In the Teachers’ Day speech, the president commented on how the role of teachers needs to be changed, We teachers need to take the courage and to be determined to eliminate the old-fashioned teaching and learning methods. We need to be aware of our role as learning facilitators and promoters and no longer as knowledge and information providers. The vertical hierarchical relationship between teachers and learners must be changed into a horizontal student-centred relationship. This change in the teacher-student classroom relationship can be related to today’s higher education (Chapter 4).

The five pillars of performance areas

What Dominus University looks for, or rather, requires from, its faculty members is perhaps most articulated in the Key Performance Indices (KPIs). KPIs is placed first in the list of projects to be implemented during the incoming academic year. At the time of visit, KPIs was in its pilot phase: performance appraisal was on trial to collect feedback, and the results of the appraisal have not been officially used. The document I had access to is the policy’s 178-page draft version.

The contents of KPIs suggest that professionalism being constructed in Dominus University is framed around five pillars. Teaching, Research, and Service are put first and can be seen as the focal areas the university expects its teaching staff to perform satisfactorily, which is also the trend observed in today’s higher education institutions around the world. On top of that, Dominus University’s faculty members
also need to show their efforts in complying with regulations as well as self-learning.

The KPIs is guided by Management by Objectives (MBO) model, which has been implemented in the university along with the ISO system. The KPIs is "an effective tool to evaluate the performance of individual staff members and affiliated units [i.e. departments and centres] so that a fair and reasonable reward system can be put in place... to motivate staff members". The implementation of the KPIs is "within the University’s strategy of employing the ‘hybrid’ model of university-corporate management" and is generated in response to "both external pressures and the University’s internal ambitions of self-innovation” and “globalisation”. Information from the KPIs will be the basis for managing the schemes of “bonus, reward, appointment, reallocation, and sanctions”.

The policy applies to both Dominus University’s staff members (including leaders and department managers) and units. Regarding individual teachers, their performance will be periodically assessed according to the job description developed by their intermediate supervisors and the Human Resources Office. Results from the KPIs are graded into six ratings from F-A: "Punished – Not eligible for appraisal", "Failed to accomplish tasks", "Completed tasks but with flaws", "Completed tasks", "Successfully completed tasks", and "Completed tasks with distinction". The different ratings are measured on a 0–100 point scale. The rating one teacher receives will decide the amount of money either added to or subtracted from his or her salary. The ratings, when accumulated, also affect whether he or she will be rewarded, promoted, reallocated, or even dismissed.

### 7.2 The professionalisation at Foreign Languages Department

This section analyses the concept of professionalism in the context of Foreign Languages Department of Dominus University. The chapter first looks at the department’s self-presentation, since, similar to the first section, it reveals particular goals and values that can be employed to inform how the interpretation of professionalism is established in the department. An analysis of the department’s management practices, accompanied by interviews with managers, is then presented to further understand the qualities and attributes currently expected for faculty members, how their work is managed, as well as the role of managers in these professionalisation processes.

#### 7.2.1 A proactive, on-the-move academic body

The department was originally the “English division” under “Basic Sciences” Department, together with Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry divisions. In 2007, the English division was upgraded to department status and became “Foreign Languages Department”. Dominus University’s initial plan was to establish the
department to comprise several divisions of foreign languages, at least one of which is a South East Asian language, given that many of the industrial zones located in the region are developed by, for example, Japanese or Korean investors. However, due to the shortage of university teachers trained in these languages, English is the only language taught in the department so far.

Within the Dominus University system, similar to the way most universities in Vietnam govern, faculties and departments are not independent and self-governing. Recently, as stated in its strategic plans, the university claims to increase the “autonomy and self-accountability” for its faculties and departments. As for Foreign Languages Department (FL Department), a small amount of funding is allocated annually to cover logistics expenses for the department’s administration, research, and student affairs’ activities. Decision-making and planning, especially regarding academic issues, are also devolved to the department, subject to the university’s regulations.

The teaching in FL Department is structured into four academic units – known as “divisions”, according to groups of subjects. Heads of division are responsible for the divisions and they report to the department board, consisting of the Chair and two Deputy chairpersons. According to the managers interviewed, the department practises a collegial mechanism of discussions and decision-making (for example, the Recruitment panel and the Departmental Research Committee).

A proactive, on-the-move academic body

The data indicate that FL Department presents itself as a striving body that keeps moving forward to respond to changing conditions. Being affiliated with a technical university entails a “technical” nature of FL Department, and this is highlighted as a “comparative advantage” that helps distinguish it from the English department in other universities (The Chair; The department’s Introduction video on YouTube.com, 2014). As such, constructing its identity of “technical English” is not only the way the department asserts its main discipline but also an attempt to gain more prestige by emphasising its distinctive features (from its competitors) (O’Meara, 2007).

Meanwhile, in the department’s introduction on its website, the reference to the department’s early days and its current expansion creates a sense of a growing entity: When the Department was established it had only 16 teaching staff. By now the faculty has significantly increased to 39 academic staff, of which one holds a PhD degree, one is taking PhD studies, 19 having master’s degrees, and 12 are working towards the MA (Introduction webpage). Its commitments are articulated in verb phrases that denote development (continuously revise, update, actively seek, encourage, create opportunities, seek ways), providing an image of a department having always tried to improve itself – it is “on the move” (O’Meara, 2007; Toma, 2009).

Another image the department shapes through its self-presentation is a responsive
entity that interacts with external spheres, both academia and the society. Mentioning the role of globalisation, the department formulates it aims as providing a labour force “with a good command of technical English” who are able to work in a wide range of contexts (“industrial parks, manufacturing zones, companies, and factories where English is used, and in representative offices, international organisations and non-governmental organisations”). The commitments the department endeavours to realise are geared towards meeting different needs from different players (students, the university, the society, and globalisation). For instance, the department develops updated and relevant teaching materials for the purposes of keeping up with students’ current training situations, and satisfying the requirements of the University and employers, meet the needs of the society. The Introduction also mentions the department has collaboration with universities in Vietnam and in English-speaking countries.

Staff development put high on agenda

Staff development currently appears to be an important concern of the department. A detailed description of its academic staff is placed at the beginning of the Introduction – they are portrayed as “a combination of experienced lecturers with strong professional knowledge and skills, and young lecturers who have a good professional background and high enthusiasm”. Also, the success of the department is defined in terms of staff development, with the mentioning of how staff number, with their qualifications, has increased over the years. Against this background, staff development is stressed as a key priority – the department aims at encouraging and creating opportunities for self-learning and professional development for our young lecturers so that 100 percent of them obtain the MA degree in either universities in Vietnam or abroad. The department also seeks ways to increase the number of PhD holders to meet the University’s requirement for staff standardisation.

This self-presentation of the department reveals initial insights into what is perceived as professionalism by the management: Faculty are expected to have strong professional knowledge evidenced by formal qualifications in their content subject – technical English, and preferably from foreign universities. They also need to have good pedagogical skills and high enthusiasm. At the same time, academic staff are expected to be aware of and able to accommodate various expectations and requirements from different stakeholders. If the department wants to be evolving and improving, then its staff also need to embark on continuous learning: by first obtaining the MA degree and then the PhD, and by responding to the changing contexts of globalisation and new conditions (e.g. students’ needs, the university’s standardisation).

These observations are further examined in the next part where the department’s management practices are analysed.
7.2.2 Management practices: Connecting chain rings

7.2.2.1 Staff entry requirements: striving beyond oneself

Foreign Languages Department’s recruitment procedures follow the general regulations of Dominus University. As stated in a job openings announcement (described in section 7.1 of this chapter), applicants are required to have formal qualifications (PhD/Master’s degree). Candidates, except those with PhD degrees and/or professoriate titles, take part in other general qualifying rounds including an English test, a computer skills test and an IQ test. If successful, they then conduct a teaching demonstration and are interviewed by the departmental management.

At FL Department, a panel consisting of the Chair, one Deputy chair, and one senior faculty member (e.g. Head of division) are responsible for departmental-level recruitment decision-making. The process includes a second round of degree scanning, an interview, a teaching demonstration, and a reflective essay. When asked about what is expected of teacher candidates through their interviewing, the Chair said he prioritised those who can “show their determination to further their studies”.

I interviewed the candidates myself to evaluate how they converse in English. But the main purpose is to see how determined they are to continue their studies. I told them, “I’ll hire you on the condition that you continue studying. I will always support your studies [abroad] even if you may not come back.” (The Chair)

The last statement in this excerpt may come as a surprising comment to be said by an employer to his or her potential employee, but the Chair further explained this as,

Maybe not all of them will then come back to work here. But what matters most is they first leave [for further studies abroad]. If they have that plan they will feel they must try every way to learn. They will read more to be able to write an outstanding proposal and they will improve their English skills to sit for an IELTS… An immediate benefit of this is a positive backwash on their teaching. (The Chair)

The recruitment process reveals a set of values and assumptions prioritised at FL Department. Subject knowledge (e.g. through academic record scanning, and interviewing and essay writing conducted in English) and teaching skills (e.g. through teaching demonstrations) are regarded as essential entry qualities. “Language proficiency is crucial but how you communicate this knowledge to

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12 The IELTS is one popular English language proficiency qualification required by many international universities.
students is equally important” (Manager Phuong).

Nevertheless, these two knowledge bodies do not only act as an administrative gatekeeper that can be evidenced by degrees and certificates. The goal of the department is to have more staff members with MA and PhD degrees, but these formal qualifications are also perceived as the means to boost teachers’ commitment to continuing professional learning. This expectation, worded as “determination” (The Chair) and “passion” (Manager Phuong), is most articulated through the job interview and seen as the key factor that decides whether the candidate will be selected or not. The preference for degrees from abroad is also connected to teacher self-learning, and thus, to genuine knowledge and competencies (The Chair).

Meanwhile, the department expects teachers to strive beyond their current capability, seen from its requirements for teaching demonstration and the reflection essay. After being interviewed, teacher candidates conduct a teaching demonstration before the panel following specific requests. However, the Chair sometimes changed the questions at the last minute.

I asked them to tell me which subjects they are most confident with – “Did you say it’s Listening and Speaking? Ok, now can you teach a Writing lesson for us? And give us a 45-minute lesson plan.” (The Chair)

For the essay, the candidates are given higher marks if they can “give an original idea and not just follow others’ thoughts”. The Chair provided an example of this,

The essay question may be “Why do you think Communicative Language Teaching may not work in Vietnam?” If you say because of large classes, it’s ok, everybody says that. It’s like you are a doctor and you can diagnose the illness, which is large classes. But you can’t refuse to teach large classes. It’s about how you are going to teach large classes. You must have your own ideas. (The Chair)

Requesting candidates to teach one subject that is not their perceived strength, and encouraging them to have critical, “original”, “own ideas”, the department is asking teachers not to stop at the threshold level (being a doctor and diagnoses the illness) but to step out of their comfort zone (teaching a different subject, formulating own ideas). This expectation can be viewed as being closely related to the requirement of teachers’ continuous learning, since it seems to thrive beyond one’s limits.

7.2.2.2 Work organisation: Expectations and dilemmas

“Internal” higher standards

As mentioned earlier, the MOET’s National Foreign Languages Project 2020 requires
English language lecturers to achieve at least the CEFR C1 level of English proficiency. Conforming to this policy, Dominus University sets IELTS 7.0 (equal to C1 level) as the benchmark for FL Department teachers. All faculty thus have to submit a formal certificate (e.g. either from the NFL Project 2020 test, or an IELTS/TOEFL score).

Foreign Languages Department in fact expects a higher “internal” benchmark of an IELTS score of 7.5 (CEFR C2). When asked about this internal benchmark, the Chair explained:

Of course they [teachers] need to increase their own standard. Requirements for quality will only become higher, never lower. Meanwhile the older we grow the bigger our idleness becomes. So we must all try hard. If we can’t keep up then one day we will be rejected. (The Chair)

He also mentioned how the actual teaching would be if teachers only have a C1 level.

When the year 2020 comes (which happens in just a few years now), C1 is also the level of students on graduation. If you teach students who know more than you, you feel nervous don’t you? (The Chair)

Here the Chair drew on both external pressures and occupational aspects to legitimise this policy. Complying with quality requirements is referred to as an obvious fact that teachers need to accept. What he said implies that teachers, (including himself – with the use of “we”), working in a system, whether it is a department, a university, or the higher education sector, are part of the system. Thus they are influenced by the system, and need to respond to the system. Taking a similar standpoint, manager Vy compares individual teachers as “rings” that are connected to make a chain – which is the organisation. They thus need to accomplish the work so as not to cause consequences that may negatively affect others.

At the same time, however, the Chair associated this response with teachers’ own teaching: self-confidence (thanks to one’s own strong professional expertise) is vital to performing the work well (which makes one enjoy the work). Teachers are promoted as those who can decide how they, and their work, are perceived, rather than as a passive element who adjusts to the system. Now the external pressure of quality assurance is referred to as a motive that forms teachers work (keep up or be rejected) and even characterises their professional identity (a teacher must know more than his/her students).

Multiple-tasked teaching organisation

Teaching activities, and teaching staff, of FL Department are organised into four
divisions based on subject grouping: Division of Language Skills (e.g. Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Pronunciation, etc.), Division of ELT Methodology, Division of English Language and Linguistics (e.g. Pragmatics, Lexicology, Literature, Translation, etc.), and Division of General English for non-English majors and ESP (e.g. Business English, English for Fashion and Textile industry, English for Engineering, etc.). Because of the large number of non-English majored students, the amount of work within this area takes the biggest share.

It was found that the teachers in the department are required to teach in several of these content areas, which may raise the question of specialisation. After one year of teaching apprenticeship, teachers must be able to teach – besides General English to the non-majors – a subject to English majors and an ESP subject. All participants, including managers, teach at least two content areas, and in many cases this means quite different subjects. For example, many belong to English Skills Division but they have ESP classes. Likewise, those from Methodology, Linguistics, and ESP divisions also give lessons in Speaking, Listening, Writing, or General English. Consequently, teachers work with both English majors and non-majors with different proficiency level and learning motivation.

This “cross-division” teaching mechanism is explained by managers as a strategy to cope with their particular staffing conditions. Teacher recruited to work in the department are described at their entry point as “young” and having “so so expertise” compared with those selected to the English department in other (Tier 1) universities (The Chair, Manager Binh, Manager Phuong). New teachers are thus perceived as being not yet competent to teach specialised subjects, especially to English majors. In this way, multiple-subject teaching is seen as a temporary solution to the current conditions of understaffing. Managers commented that when the department has “stronger and stable personnel” then “specialised areas” are expected to be more distinct.

However, although mentioning a future when teachers work in specialised divisions, managers justified this policy of “cross-division teaching” with several reasonings. The Chair emphasised this is an obvious requirement.

I myself teach an ESP subject. All teachers recruited to work here must have prepared for this, because the core of this job is Technical English, so obviously they must have known how to do it. Teaching General English skills is just your way to win bread, but you must teach ESP well and not just for fun. (The Chair)

Here the Chair was asserting that teaching ESP, or Technical English, is at the heart of English language teachers’ work in Dominus University, being a university in engineering. It is something that defines who they are (as it does for the Chair himself), and something that they need to do well and not only for economic interests. The Chair portrayed the policy as enabling staff to construct and maintain a
professional identity (working in a technical education institution, teachers must be good at technical English.)

The policy is also claimed by managers to be a way by which the department ensures fairness. Teaching in different areas does not only provide some staff members with opportunities to thrive but also opens the way for others to maintain their expertise. “If we let them teach the non-majors for a long time then for sure their profession will be damaged” (The Chair). For those who already have strong expertise and experience to teach in a theory-based division such as ESP or Linguistics, assigning them to teach English skills is talked of as being beneficial as well.

If you devote all your life to teaching only, for example, ESP, first, your professional expertise will become obsolete. Second, your chance to earn a living outside will be limited. (The Chair)

As such, the idea of fairness and equality has reached beyond a professional development discourse to a discourse of economic opportunities, showing the department’ concerns, however rhetorical they may be, about teachers’ needs and interests.

Above all, the mechanism is most significantly described by managers as creating learning opportunities. It “enables teachers to master their knowledge more thoroughly” and is a challenge that “makes teachers train themselves for the better” (The Chair); it is “an opportunity to test their own ability” (Manager Binh). Managers also drew their argument on their own experience. They described the policy as a process that has enriched their knowledge and skills, from both teaching and management aspects (Manager Phuong, Manager Binh, Manager Phong).

Organising research activities: Continuous promotion efforts

Until recently at Dominus University, conducting research was encouraged but not compulsory. Faculty can choose to do research, while departments and faculties are expected to play a supportive role. In FL Department, teachers submit research proposals to a departmental panel for reviewing before being forwarded to the university for funding. With this funding, teachers will then realise their projects and conduct full reports or presentations.

The department has attempted several management measures to encourage research. Compared to other ambitions, promoting research is articulated in a more modest manner. “Simple”, “minimum”, and “beginner” are the words used by managers when they were asked about what types of research are expected:

The research can be as simple as a reflective observation. They [teachers] then
synthesize their findings following research formats. (The Chair)

The Department targeted “University level” research as the main goal for their staff, which is the minimum level to encourage beginner researchers. (Manager Binh)

The Chair’s comment implies he has a particular view of what can be called authentic, advanced research, but he is also willing to accept simple research. Expressing her opinion more straightforward, Manager Binh acknowledged her faculty members as “beginner researchers”. The research standard desired by the department has been lowered. The department chose to apply a quite generous policy towards the proposals submitted. Because the number was low, it often accepted all proposals, although one manager described this as “The proposals give an impression as if they were prepared in haste” (Manager Binh).

The department’s targeting at a simpler type of research and somewhat lowering their requirements can be understood as strategic measures to satisfy administration requirements from the university, since research is mentioned as the way FL Department can rely on to better their positioning and status in the eyes of the university. “It’s often the case that a department’s number of research projects and PhDs decide how it is positioned in the university. But our Department lacks both of these” (Manager Binh).

However, there is a strong sense emerging from managers’ comments indicating their concerns to boost the somehow withering picture of research at the department and not just to meet the “quota” set by the university. Several years ago, the department organised an “Annual Conference” where teachers presented their research. To increase participation, the conference adopted a “laid back, informal” manner and welcomed “even book reviews” as presentations (The Chair). Teachers would read books, then summarise and review them; they would then be challenged in the conference with questions from the audience, which is “similar to seminars and conferences in universities abroad” (The Chair). The conference was hence designed with an intention to create a learning opportunity for their academic staff, starting from self-reflection. Also, to encourage teachers to travel and participate in outside conferences, (for which they have to cover part of the expenses), these events are promoted as “working holidays” (and not work) where teachers pay “tuition fees” to “learn about where you are standing; you also learn about how others formulate research problems, and even how they ask questions” (The Chair). Manager Binh distilled research as “Research begins with reflective practices, then develops to action research”.

Indeed, doing research is perceived by all managers themselves as an essential part of university teachers’ work; it is a learning experience (Manager Phong, Manager Vy), and even characterises who they are and keeps them engaged with the career.
As a university lecturer you must do research. (Manager Phuong)

You feel your identity [as a lecturer] most strongly when you are recognised by your [research/academic] community. (The Chair)

The findings show the department’s strategies to provide faculty with research opportunities. How they are implemented also reflects managers’ beliefs about the nature of teacher research in ELT and in general: Reflective practice is promoted but teachers’ own willingness is identified as taking a decisive role in doing research.

Failure, disappointment, and regrets

With these measures did the picture of research at FL Department become any brighter? The interviews show that research is still identified as a weak operation area. At the time of visit, there were few research activities happening. It was also noted that research was not highlighted, even mentioned, on the department’s Introduction webpage.

The Annual Conference in fact ceased to take place after only two years following teachers’ feedback that it was “too overloaded and irrelevant”. Speaking of this, the Chair explained, not without some bitterness,

The Conference had several sessions. You are not required to attend all of them. Instead, you would read the abstracts, you could choose from the options offered... something that you are interested in, something that you may be curious about. You could then do a quick research on the Internet about these sessions, you think of the questions you would ask the presenters... You would definitely learn something, even if the presentation is not in your discipline... But they [teachers] didn’t realise this. (The Chair)

With regards to research projects, even though the department had to compromise quality for giving faculty opportunities, the results were not as expected. The department often approved all proposals given they were so few. Yet even fewer among those proposals were actually fully developed. In the previous year, for example, the department forwarded all eight proposals it received to the university (which means they were all granted funding), but only two proposals eventually became projects, while the other six were withdrawn by faculty themselves because “they could not manage their time to realise them” (Manager Binh).

Commenting on these failures, the Chair said the department was not firm enough with these measures (e.g. the Annual Conference). He regretted handling teachers’ negative complaints too hastily and easily by simply discontinuing this mechanism because he was “too disappointed”. Manager Binh, who is on the Department’s
Research Committee, had a different view that focuses more on organisational support structures. She attributed the lack of motivation and high rate of research drop-outs to poor guidance from the department. She said the department’s accepting all proposals without follow-up was not efficient, and faculty were left alone in conducting their research.

After the failure of the Annual Conference, FL Department’s Youth Union (for teachers) organised another activity called the “EFL Forum” as a half-a-day staff research event which included one or two presentations. However the event took place only twice and then also stopped due to a lack of organisation personnel. During the interviews, very little was talked about this event.

**Policy changes**

During the last two years, Dominus University has had new policies regarding research responsibilities of academic staff. Research now can affect their incomes, and a sanction mechanism has been put in place to realise this policy. If teachers fail to conduct research activities (either university-level projects as the minimum, or more valued research including external conference papers, journal articles, and State-funded projects), an amount of payment equal to 90 hours will be deducted from their salaries. With the KPIs piloted this year, faculty’s research will be counted and given points, which will affect their income and even employment.

Meanwhile, the university has also decided to double the amount of funding a university-level project is granted. Faculty who have journal publications (preferably in international journals, but Vietnamese ones are also counted) are rewarded an amount equal to a senior teacher’s monthly salary at Dominus University. This stick-and-carrot policy is perceived differently by managers. It is viewed as creating a necessary positive pressure that forces faculty to initiate research, because “now they just simply don’t do research” (Manager Tam). Increasing incentives also has a positive psychology impact in raising teachers’ motivation because “they feel what they are doing is recognised” (Manager Binh).

However, the overall reaction of the managers interviewed is doubts: they showed little certainty that this imposition would enhance research. The lack of teachers’ motivation in doing research is identified as continuing to be the biggest obstacle, even now when research has become obligatory with the university’s “income-deduction” policy. Since teachers in FL Department are forced to conduct research, they will do it “just to get by” and “to cope with the situation” (Manager Tam, Manager Binh, Manager Phuong).

Managers thought the main actor that can bring about changes in research is faculty themselves, while the sanction and rewarding systems only play a side role: “If teachers are aware of the importance of doing research they will do it” (Manager Phuong). Research is conceived as a learning opportunity that requires teachers’
active involvement guided by genuine interests and motivation. To self-study and “be exposed to, even clashed with, different things” creates the best learning conditions that will save teachers from “performing teaching as a monotonous routine” and will maintain the “fire”, the “passion” that no one but themselves must pass on to their students (The Chair).

7.2.2.3 Appraising teachers’ work: Evaluation vs. development

Faculties and departments in Dominus University are responsible for evaluating their staff’s work performance, within the regulation framework applied across the university. The work of teachers at FL Department is appraised through several formal channels: Class observation, Student feedback, Teaching portfolio, “Performance reward titles”, and the coming KPIs.

Class observation: Checklist vs. teacher learning

Class observation was identified by all managers as the main staff evaluation tool. It is conducted periodically following a “zigzag” principle – no teachers are to be observed all the time but they can choose to observe other teachers’ classes; likewise, no managers play the role of observers all the time but teachers can request to observe managers’ teaching. Also, faculty members can attend lessons both within their division and across divisions.

Class observation as part of quality assurance has been implemented at Dominus University since 2007. A common evaluation form was designed by the university. The form also acts as a report recording the outcomes of the observation and all participating teachers, one of whom is a Head of division, have to sign the form. After the observation, a quick follow-up discussion among the participants is organised. The university states the purpose of class observation as “to promote teaching innovations” and the development of the protocol is for “standardising the University’s quality assurance procedures”.

During my field trip I was able to collect the evaluation records from two class observations (randomly selected) documented in one division’s archive. The form consists of four sections with the following headings: “Lesson preparation”, “Teaching skills”, “Subject knowledge”, and “Other feedback and recommendations”. The first three sections are further specified in 12 criteria, each of which is then evaluated (with ticks) against three grades: Good, Pass, and Fail. The contents of the criteria reveal to an extent what good teaching is defined. Subject knowledge, teaching skills, and professional manner are identified as being indispensable in composing the work. Much weight is placed on teachers’ preparation for the lesson: teachers must be organised and creative. When it comes to content presentation, clarity and relevance, including the use of teaching tools, are
expected. At the same time, teacher professional manner is also mentioned. “Good teaching” is associated with teachers’ “reasonably” following the set targets, while little emphasis was put on learners and learning process, except the ambiguously-articulated statement, “The teaching process took place positively”, and even in this statement it was “teaching” and not “learning”.

The form is designed mostly as a checklist of core criteria. At the same time, the extensive use of opinion-driven words such as “hoop lý” (reasonably), “phù hop” (suitably), “tích cực” (positively) throughout the form implies an attempt of the University to include a quality-based element in the assessment. These words also reflect the university’s intention to delegate the evaluation authority to department level, given that the form applies across different disciplines. The open-ended section that comes at the end of the form indicates a plan to turn the evaluation to be formative rather than summative. Also, it is stated on the form that faculties and departments can add other criteria which apply especially to the discipline.

Indeed, the two observation records I had from FL Department did not tell much about how teaching actually happened in the two classes, with one teacher receiving nine Goods, and two Passes, and the other teacher two Goods and nine Passes, while the open comment sections were left blank. Despite its vagueness, class observation was identified by all managers as one main teacher evaluation channel, together with other channels. On the other hand, it was also described as an effective professional development method. As found out from the interviews, all divisions have modified the observation evaluation in order to highlight professional exchange and learning. They add in criteria that are more relevant to their own subjects, and focus more on the post-observation discussion. One manager explained why her division elaborates the criteria into smaller details.

It’s difficult to evaluate teachers with too general criteria. Also, the teacher who is being assessed also wants to know how others evaluate her or him. If the feedback is too vague how can she see her strengths and weaknesses and how can she improve herself? (Manager Phuong)

Meanwhile, the Chair commented on how he was not happy with the “quality” aspect of the evaluation.

The form is a checklist with objectives, but it is based on subjective opinions. I wish the observation will create a pressure for teachers to develop, but often the Heads of Divisions and teachers just give positive comments in order to maintain their relationship. But on the other hand, I must trust them, do I? (The Chair)

Both comments suggest tensions in using class observation as a tool. It is a tension between a management aspect (categorising teachers), and a professional dimension
(how teachers learn from this categorising). It is also a tension between evaluating teachers and maintaining a collegial atmosphere in the department, including showing trust and respects.

It can also be noted that managers viewed the evaluation as a positive factor for teacher learning. The Chair later reiterated,

Class observation is a wonderful professional development opportunity, more wonderful than any other ways. It is a pressure that makes you grow. If you are not observed sometimes, you may still teach well, but for sure you don’t feel the need to prepare carefully for your teaching. (The Chair)

Being well-prepared will help teachers respond effectively to different classroom situations, an ability that distinguishes a good teacher from a “so-so” teacher, the Chair added. This view is shared by other managers saying class observation is a professional development opportunity. They talked about how observation is useful not only for the teacher who is observed but for all involved.

We all contribute to improve the lesson, so we also take ideas from each other. (Manager Vy)

For me, observation is not exactly an evaluation tool. It is more a chance when we support each other to develop. It benefits all of us. (Manager Phong)

Hence, the department wants a formal form of evaluation to become a teacher professional development tool. If the evaluation is a managerial checklist that is both rigid and ambiguous, the ways the department interprets it into more details, gearing it more towards their particular specialisations, and includes a discussion among teachers, have opened up the opportunity for teachers to take part in forming their own “teaching norms” and standards.

The evaluation is perceived by managers as being ineffective not because they oppose the idea of evaluating and assessment. Staff evaluation is argued by managers as a useful positive pressure that promotes teacher learning and teaching quality, and in this way detailed criteria and objective checklists help with improvement, rather than being identified as obstacles to teacher work and development. Again, what emerged from the way class observation is implemented at FL Department indicates teachers are expected by managers to take an active role in their work and be self-responsible for the quality of their work. Teachers’ well-preparedness, flexibility, and responsiveness, are promoted as necessary skills and qualities, while observation is claimed to be a professional development event rather than an evaluation tool.
Student feedback: a teachers’ learning opportunity

Student evaluation, often in the form of questionnaires and surveys both online and paper-based, has been widely employed as a quality monitoring tool in HEIs. That students give rating, feedback, and comments on their teachers and courses has become a routine for education programmes (Rieties, 2014; Tucker, 2014). It is perceived as “normal” and “expected” since students are the “direct receivers of the teaching” – one of the main missions of the university (Nikolaidis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Results collected from this channel are considered in the first place as a source for improving learning and teaching (Tucker, 2014), but increasingly student evaluations are used to evaluate “teacher effectiveness” for retention, promotion and tenure decisions (Titus, 2008; Rieties, 2014). Although student evaluation has become a common practice among universities, the tool has also received criticism in terms of reliability, validity and appropriateness (Rieties, 2014; Tucker, 2014).

In Vietnam, with its Confucian heritage highly valuing learning and teachers, the idea of students evaluating teachers and their performance was gradually introduced into higher education and was not without controversy. Since 2009–2010, universities in Vietnam have been required by MOET to carry out course evaluation as a regular institutional activity. When the policy was first introduced, concerns were raised owing to its “sensitivity” (Tuoitre, 2009). One of the main issues is the policy should be implemented in a “tactful” way so as not to offend “a noble profession respected by the whole society” and damage the tradition of “Tôn sư trọng đạo” (Revering teachers and valuing learning). It was even suggested that the word “feedback” should be used in the place of “evaluate” to avoid the image of “students evaluating teachers”. Meanwhile, managers promoted the use of “evaluate” because “the nature of the activity is actually to evaluate, so gradually the word should be accepted to be part of university quality culture” (Tuoitre, 2009). However, four years later, in 2013, the Ministry issued a legal document (Public Document 7324/BGDĐT-NGCBQLGD) stipulating seven contents required in student evaluation in higher education institutions. The document states it is aimed at lecturer development, while noting the evaluation implementation “must at the same time respect our tradition of valuing learning and teachers”. According to this regulation, students evaluate their lecturer’s lesson preparation and teaching methods and approaches, including professional attitudes and manners. Thus, it can be seen that student evaluation in Vietnam focuses mostly on teachers rather other contents such as the course or student participation – those commonly included in student evaluation (Nikolaidis & Dimitriadis, 2014). In 2013 the Ministry estimated that 89.17 percent of students and 72.5 percent of university academic staff agreed with this policy enabling “customers” to evaluate teachers (Cong Chuong, 2013). The survey also showed teachers' opinions: students should not mix evaluating teaching with evaluating their teacher’s personal character.
Dominus University was among those universities in Vietnam that implemented student feedback mechanism early. By 2014 student feedback data are administered by the university’s Quality Assurance Office, and are collected formally at the end of courses through an online system. In the instructions for students, the purposes of the evaluation are stated as, “to help improve teaching and learning at the University” and that students are requested to “give responsible and constructive feedback to their lecturer’s teaching”. The administration of student feedback at Dominus University is claimed to follow a transparency principle.

The student feedback form I had access to was put into effect in 2014. The form is designed as a questionnaire structured into five categories: Instructor’s preparation, Teaching methods, Content, Testing and assessment, and Professional manner. Each category is further specified into four smaller indicators. For each of these 20 indicators, students give their feedback using a five-level Likert scale. Each level is then converted into points accordingly, for example, “Strongly disagree” is 1 point, while “Strongly agree” is 5 points, so that the 20 indicators are assessed against a maximum total of 100 points. The checklist is followed by some open-ended questions asking for students’ further comments and recommendations.

As written in the instructions, if teachers receive a score of 73 (73 percent) their department has the responsibility to “promote and spread their successful experiences”, while those who have 72 percent and less will need to meet with the department management to analyse the reasons and work out a plan to improve their teaching. Nevertheless, teachers have the right to discuss the results with their managers if they do not agree with student feedback, on the condition that they are able to support their opinions with evidence.

Student feedback is listed by managers as the second channel to evaluate teachers’ work in FL Department. All viewed this channel as being necessary but not completely accurate in terms of evaluation. The Chair commented on this,

The University wants to treat students as customers. But sometimes it’s the case that students themselves haven’t understood what it is like to be customers. They must have a good intention otherwise they will just slam their strict teachers with low scores. But the fact is strict teachers are often excellent teachers – they have high requirements. (The Chair)

Similarly, Manager Phong showed his concerns about how students may give irresponsible feedback, and how an understanding of “behind-the-scene stories” may help mitigate the consequences.

The evaluation results are just data – they just report what we did in the classroom. But there’re lots of behind-the-scene stories. For example, some students said they didn’t receive the syllabus at the beginning of the course, but in fact they were absent from class that day. Or they may give a teacher low
scores just because he is a bit stricter. (Manager Phong)

We’re not running after students to satisfy them. But we also need to listen. If what they say is right we may even change our beliefs. We may change if what they require makes us better than who we currently are, although now I feel I am still able to persuade them to follow me. (Manager Phong)

These comments reveal managers’ compromising in their dealing with a policy imposed by the university. Although they acknowledged student evaluation to teachers as a management task and accepted the fact of “students as customers”, they held critical opinions about the fairness of the evaluation: they believed students sometimes do not have a sufficient capability to provide valid assessment, or in the Chair’s words, students have “limited visions”. Speaking from a management stance, managers also chose not to depend totally on the mechanism but they also use other evaluation channels (The Chair, Manager Phuong), and they should “look behind the data, into behind-the-scene stories” (Manager Phong).

In this way, managers’ attitudes towards student feedback as an evaluation channel reflect their struggle to resolve the tension between implementing policies and following their own beliefs while trying to maintain a degree of fairness for teachers. In this struggle, they chose to let professional authority take over, but they also acknowledged external forces (i.e. students as customers, the institution) as the pressures that they have to respond to. This struggle can also be considered as a struggle between themselves as managers and as teachers. Meanwhile, what managers said also reveals their beliefs towards the work of teaching and being a teacher: what guides them cannot be anything but their students and the quality of the work. Also, as seen in the case of class observation, student feedback is promoted to be used as a learning opportunity for teachers.

Teaching portfolio: just paperwork?

Teaching portfolio is the third channel for teachers’ work appraisal at the department, as identified by managers. Similar to the other two channels, the portfolio must be compiled following the template set by the university, described in a policy document dated 2013. This guidance states that completing teaching portfolio is a compulsory task of individual faculty members. The portfolio consists of at least seven items (syllabus, book, CD, report, lesson plan, etc.). Included in the portfolio are the course syllabus which must be connected to CDIO standards and all related materials for teaching and learning. Another important component of the portfolio is a self-report by the teacher. The teacher is also expected to propose any adjustments needed for the course revision.

When at the site, I was able to study a teaching portfolio by a teacher teaching
General English, level 2. My overall impression of the portfolio is that it was completed with high precision. The course syllabus is well-designed and all contents are aligned with CDIO standards. The CDIO objectives for this course are developed with great specificity: they are designed as a set of can-do statements over three areas – Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes. The teaching plans in terms of contents, teaching methods, and testing and assessment, all CDIO based, are structured into weekly units. In the self-evaluation, the teacher described in detail how the teaching was actually conducted during the course and about students’ attitudes and their learning. She also provided a reflective account based on the student feedback gathered, with some comments to revise the syllabus. The teacher later in the interview told me she had spent quite a lot of time completing this portfolio (towards a deadline).

As reflected through the portfolio, the approach to teaching English currently promoted at the department is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Learners are expected to gain various types of knowledge, including not only language knowledge and skills but also socio-cultural knowledge. In addition, they need to develop a set of soft skills such as critical thinking, self-learning, collaboration, and being able to relate what they learn with future employment. Students also need to have a certain score of TOEIC by the end of the course. To achieve these objectives, the teacher used diverse teaching methods, including presentations, role-play, and pair/group-work. She also introduced grammar contents and familiarised students with TOEIC format.

Although it is only one sample, the teaching portfolio collected provides useful insights into the qualities expected of FL Department’s faculty members. That they have to complete such a complex, time-consuming portfolio indicates the university’s requirement for its teachers to perform as staff members of the organisation. Administration duties help the functioning of the organisation, and the portfolio is a management instrument since it acts as a documentation tool for teachers’ work. The teaching and learning materials of the course are stored in the portfolio so that the materials can be circulated and reused among teachers and students. The portfolio also records the teaching activities an academic staff member has performed, together with student feedback and teacher self-evaluation; it is hence used for staff performance appraisal. With the portfolio, teachers provide a recorded evidence of their performance – a responsibility which entails being under the employer’s monitoring and supervision. Furthermore, how the portfolio template is designed (e.g. its required components and the degree of specificity) indicates the type of employees desired by the institution: they must be organised, attentive to detail, target-oriented, and adherent to regulations.

Also, the university requires faculty to fulfil their responsibilities as academic professionals. They have to take responsibilities being employees, but they have to satisfy students as well, as the inclusion of student feedback and teachers’ response
in the portfolio indicates. Furthermore, the portfolio is not only meant for teacher evaluation; that teachers are requested to offer reflections and suggestions to revise the syllabus signifies the university’s expectation for faculty to improve their own teaching. However, at Dominus University, teaching must at the same time be conducted within a frame, which can be seen through the fact that teachers need to specify how their syllabus and teaching plans align with set targets. In the case of the FL Department’s portfolio, the teaching method favoured is CLT with an emphasis on learners and the learning process; these goals however have to be in line with other goals such as the CDIO standards and the desired TOEIC scores.

Performance reward titles

In Vietnam, the mechanism of granting “Performance reward titles” (Danh hiệu thi đua khen thưởng) has roots in the wartime almost 70 years ago as a national campaign launched to call for individuals’ and agencies’ performance competition to enhance their contribution in defending and reconstructing the country. In the field of human resource management, “performance rewards” has since been implemented as a support mechanism to encourage individual workers, especially in state-owned organisations, to increase performance productivity and quality.

In reality, however, this rewarding system, especially at the institutional level, does not prove to be effective as its intention. “Staff with good performance” (Lao động tiên tiến) is not a competitive reward title. If a staff member completes all the tasks assigned with an acceptable quality, and as long as she or he did not make frequent errors that do harm to the organisation’s operations, then she/he will definitely receive this title. In other words, the title is not something that staff need to strive for – it is the minimum level that almost every staff member will eventually be granted, unless they were planning to leave their employment. Another issue with the institutional rewarding system is that it is conventionally implemented using voting but the voting is not required to be blind. This may lead to a situation where arrangement is made among the voters so they take turns to be nominated for more prestigious titles (at institutional level and beyond). In this case, the evaluation is based on human relationships and not necessarily their performance. Recent research on human resources management in universities in Vietnam reports that the ambiguity of the rewarding criteria was noted by university managers and lecturers as one issue in recognising academic staff’s contribution (Nguyen Thi Lan Huong, 2013).

As specified in the Law on Labour Competition and Rewards 2003 (Vietnam National Assembly, 2003), rewards titles granted to individual labourers are categorised into four levels: “Staff with outstanding performance – national level”, “Staff with outstanding performance – sector level”, “Staff with outstanding performance – institutional level”, and “Staff with good performance”. Of these four titles, the last two titles can be determined by the organisation following their internal criteria. Staff members who are granted the titles receive a recognition certificate and an additional year-end bonus.
In the interviews with managers, indeed little was mentioned about “Performance award titles” as the channel the department uses for their faculty’s work evaluation. When asked about this appraisal mechanism, the Chair commented,

You know, it’s so easy to get a “Lao động tiên tiến”. But you will always remain a mediocre teacher. (The Chair)

What he was saying is that the system of “Performance award titles” fails to act as a support to boost teachers’ motivation. It is because the criteria are set too low that it becomes too easy to have the title: teachers do not need to try to be recognised – they will be given the reward anyway. By talking about the consequence (always remain mediocre) he also implied that the only motive that drives teachers devotion to work is their own awareness and willingness, and not a superficial reward title.

The coming KPIs: The rules of the game

In this context of struggles, tensions, failures and negotiations, the arrival of the Key Performance Indices KPIs at Dominus University can be understood as yet another triumph of managerialism in higher education. How is this mechanism – which replaces the “Performance award titles” system to be the overarching frame in evaluating faculty’s work – perceived by the department management?

All managers perceived the KPIs as bringing about positive results. The KPIs as they saw it would produce a necessary pressure for teachers to change and move forward. Managers foresaw “Teachers’ behaviour will change” (The Chair), they will do more research because “together with the sanction the bonus is increased” (Manager Binh), and all operation areas of the Department will be improved (Manager Tam).

The measurability and specificity of the KPIs illustrate its managerial nature, yet it is the very factor that, according to the managers, creates the motivation for staff members.

I am not totally happy with the KPIs – it acts better in a business environment. But to an extent, having it here does have advantages. It provides people with a motive to make an effort, otherwise everyone will be the same. Our oriental culture is intuition-based, not reasoning-based. We always round up our evaluation. If we give easy, messy evaluations, all standards will become easy and messy, and qualities will become easy and messy. (The Chair)

The KPIs will be a more accurate tool than the previous “Performance reward titles” mechanism with all intuitive comments such as “Yes, it looks good” or
“Yes, it seems to be good”. (Manager Tam)

In addition, the KPIs is regarded by managers as a way individual staff contribute to the advancement of the institution as a whole.

If the University wants to move forward, you need to move forward as well. (The Chair)

Meanwhile, the Chair also spoke of why it is a responsibility for each teacher to comply with the employer’s regulations. It might be difficult, but it is hardly a teacher’s choice.

On the other hand, if you accept to be part of the system, it means you accept the game. And every game has its rules. (The Chair)

Managers’ seeing the KPIs as a catalyst for change may appear to be a paradox, given the earlier findings about the department’s philosophy of academic autonomy. However, what emerges from these comments indicates that the KPIs is appreciated not because it is a management tool but because it generates an accurate, thus, fair and transparent system of reward and recognition, something that the earlier system lacks. This accuracy, fairness and transparency is perceived as being able to motivate people in their performance, especially given the rather sluggish picture of staff development, research and self-learning, despite rigorous attempts from the management. Managers implied an ambiguous rewarding system will be as demotivating as no rewarding system.

7.3 Discussion

7.3.1 The shape of professionalism: “Stretching the limits”

The findings from the analyses provide a portrayal of the professionalism contemporarily established in Dominus University and Foreign Languages Department. Professionalism is framed around five pillars: Teaching, Research, Service, Regulations compliance, and Professional development, and is expressed in a wide range of responsibilities and tasks, which entail various knowledge and skills. The data suggest an increasing emphasis from the university on an entrepreneurial approach towards staff management. The adoption of multi-skilling, task-based approach in formulating this professionalism can be said to reflect the culture of performativities and fabrications in the education economy (Ball, 2000). Faculty are expected to be productive and prolific, a requirement increasingly set up by universities today (Hazelkorn, 2011).
Dominus University’s articulation of professionalism can be described as having a high note of measurability and quantifiability. The fact that the university’s entry requirements for its future staff are made evidence-based and test-based may support this finding. The professionalism emerging from the KPIs also appears to be built on a numeric structure. First it is the separation regarding the five performance areas, (although the division may not yet be distinctive), then it is the translation of performance area into specific indicators of “work components”. There also seems to be a clear, statistical precision about the way positions are classified according to tracks and work orientations. The specified indicators are measured with countable points, while a number of points are accurately allocated according to either numbers, ratings, or Yes/No options. For example, how many points given to research performance is decided based on the relevant number of publications, teaching performance is evaluated by the number of teaching hours, teaching quality is defined through students’ ratings, etc. The operationalisation of the KPIs as a whole also reflects a managerialism principle. In a way the KPIs can be compared to a Fordism assembly line management system. It is managed by a central administration board and supported by all offices, each assigned with particular tasks and together they make the KPIs smoothly function both across levels (from the university level to department and unit level, down to individual staff members), and through designated steps (setting objectives, conducting and monitoring the appraisal process, collecting results, and applying results in either reward or sanction decision-making). In this way, Dominus University takes up the logics of a “managerialist university” (Aspromourgos, 2012) following the New Public Management approach, characterised by an idealised notion of market forces (e.g. students as customers, education as service), enhanced surveillance and measurement for outputs, and “efficacy” (Field, 2015).

At FL Department, efforts to improve staff quality were also strongly demonstrated. The department follows the University’s policy orientation, prioritises professional expertise (including subject knowledge – English proficiency, and teaching skills), research, teacher learning, and professional manner. However, different from the professionalism formulated by the University – which stresses more on evidence and outcomes, the professionalism expected by the department management is not a static compilation of bodies of knowledge. Rather, it can be called an “evolving” professionalism. Professionalism as desired by the department has different layers, with these qualities only placed at the core: they are the threshold and in fact teachers are desired to go beyond this core to reach higher levels. The requirement that teachers have to be able to teach across divisions, and the internal benchmark of IELTS 7.5 instead of IELTS 7.0 are two examples of such additional layers. In the words of the Chair, “teachers should not only hit the target but also stretch the limits” (The Chair). Teachers are expected to get expansive and strive beyond capacity.
Meanwhile, this stretching-the-limit ethos seems to be comprehensible in the wider context of Dominus University. As discussed, Dominus University wants to identify itself as an avant-garde, energetic, ambitious, and responsive university. The essence of the university and its articulated professionalism can be encapsulated in two adjectives: striving and entrepreneurial. Striving universities have been conceptualised as those that consistently strive to pursue prestige, that is, to better their ranking in the higher education academic hierarchy, or “moving to the next level” (Toma, 2009; O’Meara, 2007; O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011). Striving universities often employ strategies in their positioning for increased prestige. In her review study of research on colleges and universities identified as “striving”, O’Meara (2007) characterises their pursuit of prestige in five areas of institutional operations: student recruitment and admissions; faculty recruitment, roles and reward systems; curriculum and programmes; external relations and shaping of institutional identity; and resource allocation. Integration, diversification, and expansion are also found among the strategic measures used to seek prestige (Toma, 2009). In Dominus University, all these measures become associated with an entrepreneurial mindset and managerialism ethos. This reflects the trend of HE institutions prioritising market values and employing business-like organisational management behaviour in an education economy – where the academic works along with the market and the society at large (Kuensssberg, 2011; Rider, Hasselberg & Waluszewski, 2013).

7.3.2 Institutional politics in the making of professionalism

The results from the analyses of policy orientation and management practices at Dominus University and Foreign Languages Department also suggest that the construction of professionalism is underpinned by institutional politics and ideology – its own logic. This institutional logic is, in turn, influenced by both internal and external pressures, and has brought changes to the relationship between the university and its faculty members. In addition, the institutional logic is dynamic in itself, with the university and the department adopting a slightly different approach in establishing and maintaining professionalism.

Indeed, the contents of this professionalism mirror its institutional philosophy. As a striving institution that wants to move to the next level (O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011), Dominus University’s core values are stated as “quality, efficiency, and renovation”. Also, the university calls on almost all available contemporary values of our time, such as sustainability, employability, creativity, research, and international integration, while does not forget to emphasise its motto of “preserving Vietnamese traditional humanistic values” in its mission statement as a way to persuade others. In realising its ambitious goals of becoming a “university of national, regional and global level” – similar to the goals of many other universities around the world (e.g.
Hazelkorn, 2011; Zgaga, Klemenčič, Komljenović, Miklavič, Repac, & Jakačić, 2013), the university promotes “international integration” as its strategic ace. One of the key measures is to borrow management policies from international contexts. The strategy also leads the university to prioritise market values and quality assurance as its most important principles. In this way, it seems expectations and values all become the means or tools to achieve the target goals, as how English language education is perceived by Dominus University may have shown – its status is “raised” but as a service-oriented domain rather than a scholarly academic discipline.

This striving university with its globalised entrepreneurial rationale can in turn be interpreted against a backdrop of larger socio-cultural contexts of today’s Vietnam with the country’s increased participation in international collaborations, especially in economic integration. These aspects can be traced in all Dominus University’s striving efforts, articulated through its stated aspirations and organisational behaviour, or its “rhetoric and operational strategies” (Toma, 2009). The analysis results show that the university puts forward an image of itself as belonging to a national premier league in a globalised context. What is Dominus University striving for? Indeed it can be said that the university, with its efforts, is actively responding to not only internal audiences (staff, students) but also external stakeholders (government, the public, the globalisation). The university’s concerns do not attach to particular ranking table criteria (perhaps because there has been no an official ranking table in Vietnam), but they are connected to larger forces. These forces include both wider pressures (e.g. “globalisation”, the “ASEAN Economic Community”, and the “new conditions of today’s higher education”) and local realities (students’ employability, the university’s commitment to its international collaboration). It is noticeable, however, that the role of the state is not so stressed here, or has become more obsolete. The power of the state may be implicitly revealed through the university’s efforts to promote research – to become a “Tier 1 university”, one reason for which might be to compete for state funding. Another presence of the state can be traced in the increased recognition from Dominus University towards English language education in the university’s agenda – although globalisation is emphasised more than the pressure from the National Foreign Languages Project 2020.

At FL Department, the stretching-the-limit professionalism desired by the department management appears to be geared towards more staff development and improvement. From an organisational governance perspective, FL Department is an administration unit mediating between the university and academic staff. Indeed, the department walks the line between these two groups, and between the tensions of development versus management. It attempts to connect these “chain rings” – the words one teacher used to refer to the relationship between the institution, the department, and faculty members.

As the findings of the department’s management practices show, the tools
supposed to be used to manage teacher recruitment, work organisation, research, and performance evaluation are also employed as measures to create teachers’ motivation. Managers all said the best motive that determines what teachers do, and how well they do it, is teachers’ own willingness. They recognise teachers’ autonomy as an essential condition in performing work: the way the “evolving” professionalism is created instead of a rigid, imposing one indicates this recognition. This is because, as managers themselves put forward, they also found this true to themselves when they act as teachers. For example, with the internal benchmark policy, staff’s own interests (e.g. their career future and their everyday teaching) are called up. The Chair talked about the policy using both larger external discourse (quality requirements) and professional discourse (teaching and students). He was talking from the stance of both a policy-maker and a teacher himself: there might be a political note involved as he was trying to gain staff’s empathy and support, but at the same time, this suggests his acknowledgement of the significance of mobilising teachers’ agency in policy implementation. That professional autonomy is perceived as being crucial to the occupation can be seen in how managers refused to let the student feedback mechanism of “customer’s evaluation” take a complete control of their evaluating teachers’ work.

Also, teacher continuous learning is desired at FL Department and this is not meant to be a forced learning but it is the learning initiated by staff members themselves. Many policies were implemented at the department with “soft” tactics rather than direct imposing. This is revealed through the expectation for teachers to take a more active role in their work and the request that teachers need to undertake further education. Teachers are not to “follow others’ thoughts” but to act on their own reflections. Meanwhile, the policy that binds teacher candidates with further study commitment can be understood as a measure to improve the department’s teaching quality and to meet the university’s requirement for faculty’s formal qualifications. However, it is implemented on the basis of teachers’ self-learning rather than an imposition. In other words, this professionalisation move is carried out with the hope it departs from teachers’ motivation. The “positive backwash on teaching” that the Chair mentioned reflects the belief that teaching quality will be automatically improved once teachers’ have own reasons and needs to do so. Later in the interview, the Chair also emphasised the importance of teachers’ voices to the department. When asked why the department prefers recruiting staff from diverse backgrounds, the Chair commented,

It’s because we try to avoid “blood relative marriages”. If all teachers in this Department graduate from one university, their opinions will become assimilated. Over these later years, we appreciate all the countries that the teachers have studied in. If it cannot be Australia, the UK, or the US, then for example Japan or Taiwan will suffice. This diversity will allow critical ideas to
come up. (The Chair)

The data also suggest the department’s encouragement for teacher involvement in decision making and planning. During the first year after being recruited, new teachers can attend to observe colleagues’ teaching and explore different subjects to either confirm or change the subjects they have registered to teach. Accepted reasons for the change can be a shift of teachers’ focus of interests, or because teachers find out they are more capable or less capable for the teaching of particular subjects. In terms of work organisation and management, collegial decision-making is found to be the principle employed at the department, which can be seen through the establishment of committees, such as the recruitment panel or the research committee. Collegiality is also practised in planning issues concerning professional contents, including curriculum and syllabus development. For example, Manager Phong described how his division is further structured into sub-divisions who propose ideas about syllabus contents, teaching plans, and student testing and assessment. The recent adaptation of the university’s common CDIO standards framework to the department’s curriculum and syllabus was also based on teachers’ consultation and discussion. Divisions are at the heart of the department’s organisation and operations, and they have the authority when it comes to “professional domains” while the departmental management simply has administrative roles, as explained by Manager Phong. Regarding work evaluation, the department also shows their intention to engage teachers. The three main tools of evaluation – class observation, student feedback, and teaching portfolio, are claimed by managers to function not only as tools to control but also as opportunities for teachers to offer opinions, feedback, and recommendations. With the department’s inviting and supporting teacher participation in its operations regarding their work organisation, management, and even evaluation, the department shows its endeavours in granting teachers a role in the shaping of professionalism which is in principle supposed to be resulting from managerial intentions.

The department’s efforts in professionalising its faculty did not happen without struggles and tensions. These tensions were rooted in its role mediating between the university and its staff, and accommodating different interests. This also means mediating between the department’s own management values and those coming from external spheres, such as cultural norms and contemporary social priorities. Some struggles resulted in failures and disappointment but in most cases the findings suggest that the department employs negotiations to deal with the tensions.

As revealed from the department’s self-introduction, its management practices, and managers’ interview accounts, the image the department chooses for itself is a striving and responsive academic body which prioritises employees as the decisive factor that drives its development. In many ways, this philosophy carries a strong personal imprint of the Chair, who can be considered as the main architect of the
department, being the one who set the foundation of the department and has seen it through over a long period of time. In what he said about his management approaches and strategies, there is a strong sense of expectations for individual autonomy and agency. This mindset, on the one hand, can be explained as being influenced by his years of studying in Australia, since during the interviews he kept mentioning these autonomous learning experiences he had there. On the other hand, it reflects his values towards teaching, and being an academic.

This appreciation, and aspiration, for individual autonomy and independence, including academic autonomy, is expressed through, for example, his wish for teachers’ self-improvement driven by a thirst for learning. The Chair held that only by self-improvement could one have autonomy, choices, and freedom (“If you are at an average level, you can just get by. But if you have a strong expertise, you’ll have more choices. You can even argue for your choice”, The Chair). Yet learning to him must be guided by genuine interests. Genuine interests, to him, define the identity of oneself as an academic professional. Academic autonomy and teachers’ self-worth have the ultimate power that binds a teacher with her profession and the willingness to self-improve. Speaking of the department’s recruitment policy that requires teachers to promise to further their studies, the Chair commented that it is to make them committed to their work, rather than “a black-and-white legal contract.” What he said can be interpreted as professionals must have their own professionalisation project; no other professionalisation projects equally matter.

At the same time, the Chair realised this belief and aspiration might not totally fit into a Confucian heritage culture where self-learning and autonomy are not encouraged. This would have a negative impact on teacher learning as they do not feel the need for bettering themselves. The story of the short-lived Annual Conference illustrates the Chair’s endeavours to change the situation. He wanted to enhance faculty members’ research, and chose an approach that can compromise the passive Confucian-styled culture that resulted in learning idleness and the western-styled autonomous learning: he did not choose to impose research as a policy, but turned it into a learning experience generated from authentic curiosity for further inquiry – which is the true spirit of research. However, in this struggle, the Chair was defeated. He had high expectations for teacher autonomy, which turned out to be a disillusion. He expected teachers to understand the purposes of the mechanism and take an active role; he desired to implement a model of “seminars and conferences abroad” guided by teachers’ willingness and enthusiasm for research and learning; but the plan backfired.

Cultural clash is not the only obstacle to realising the department’s professionalisation project basing on teacher autonomy. The “management identity” that values teacher self-learning and autonomy, at the same time, is challenged by another type of culture – the culture of performativities, measurement, and surveillance. The meeting of these two has created a tension in which the department
is faced with different forces, this time not only its teaching staff but also the university and even beyond, such as “students as customers”, and globalisation pressures. The results suggest that the department is aware of current demands coming from the society (e.g. “students as customers”), the knowledge-economy, and globalisation, and tries to be responsive. The expectations from these forces are driven by the interests and rationales different from, sometimes even competing with, the values the department embraces. For example, the imposition of student feedback articulated in points and percentage to assess teachers, while serving categorising and ranking purposes, was perceived as being little helpful to teachers, and for the department themselves in understanding and evaluating their staff in a fair way.

7.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has given an analysis of how professionalism is established, organised, and managed in the actual setting of Dominus University and its Foreign Languages Department. The analysis of the professionalisation practices taking place in the university and the department presents further understandings of the making of professionalism. In line with the “international integration” in a “hybrid model of university-corporate management”, professionalism as defined by the university follows a managerial logic in connection with “international codes of conducts and regulations”. The constituent elements of this professionalism are shaped with the managerialism principle of marketisation, outcome-based management, measurability, and monitoring. It appears that the professional knowledge and skills (including English language competencies) desired by Dominus University from its faculty members are intended to support the realisation of its goals and philosophy. With this managerial professionalism, it can be assumed that teachers are seen as employees regulated to help the functioning of the entire machinery with its cobweb of politics. The expectations of the department for its teachers to continuously strive can be interpreted as being in line with the logic of bureaucracy, but at the same time, it follows the logic of professionalism. At FL Department, teachers are encouraged to stretch the limits and aim for occupational values such as continuous learning and constructing professional esteem and identity. The department therefore appears to aim at a professionalism that is to the profession and not to a particular workplace, which is the principle of ideal-type professionalism (Freidson, 2001). In this way, the analysis provides additional insights into the factors that support professionalism. The study of FL Department suggests that even in the making of a professionalism supposedly to be an “organisational professionalism”, the role of teachers must be present. In fact, it is the crucial factor for professionalism to be established and maintained. However, the management must understand professional values in order to support them.
Chapter 8 Between the two worlds: Professionalism from ELT academics’ perspectives

This chapter explores the notion of professionalism and its making from a faculty perspective. Through data from in-depth interviews with eleven ELT faculty members at Dominus University’s Foreign Languages Department (FL Department), the chapter examines their perceptions of professionalism with attention to how they conceive the notion, their professional work, and themselves as members of the occupation.

8.1 Unbundling ELT academics’ work life

This section looks into the work life of university ELT teachers with their professional responsibilities and obligations. Faculty perspectives towards working in tertiary education, signified from their thoughts about job titles, are also included. The insights gained reveal ELT academics’ conceptualisation of professionalism.

8.1.1 The practitioner-academics

The questions of teachers’ self-positioning, and being positioned are of interest here because they form teachers’ beliefs, values and practices that guide their actions within and outside the classroom (Walkington, 2005). Answering these questions informs the understanding of the relationship between teachers and professionalism discourse. Working at tertiary level, Dominus University’s academic staff have their official job title as “lecturers”. Nevertheless, when asked if they would choose teacher (giáo viên) or lecturer (giảng viên) to refer to themselves, not all participants chose the term “lecturer”, and even those who did were not without uncertainty.

Half of the interviewed declined the title lecturer and described themselves instead as “facilitator” and “instructor”. This was attributed to the fact that they are teaching practical skills and what they do in the classroom are “just activities” (as compared to lecturing). Participants explained they are in a position “higher than a teacher’s but not as high as a lecturer’s” (Phong), and asserted that they were “on the way to be a lecturer” and that they have not yet reached that level. Meanwhile, among those who described themselves as “lecturer”, there was a sense of uncertainty and discomfort about using the word. Some chose “lecturer” because “lecturer means both teacher and instructor” (Vy), while some accepted the term simply because it is their official job title but they felt they did not yet deserve it (Chau; Long).

I think I’m a lecturer because that’s what they call us. But I’m not so sure if I’m up to that title... A lecturer must inspire students to go further into the subject – much more than the set requirement. (Chau)
There were only several participants who appeared to be quite certain about their title and positioning. Phuong and Kim said they are lecturers because they guide and support students’ self-learning and implied that “teachers” are those working at schools who only transmit knowledge to students. Linh also differentiated her being a teacher when teaching General English (“which involves skills and activities”) from her being a lecturer when she taught other subjects (“which requires more knowledge and preparation”).

These results indicate that ELT academics strongly see themselves associated with teaching, even though their teaching was distinguished from teaching at school level. Those who identified themselves as instructors and facilitators mostly drew on the nature of their teaching work (practical language skills and classroom activities). For those who called themselves lecturers, the title to them also primarily concerns students. Few participants related this title to scholarly competencies such as research (only two teachers mentioned “research” when asked to imagine being a lecturer).

The professional identity that university ELT teachers embrace can thus be described as possessing a hybrid nature between a practitioner and an academic. In other words, despite their official job title of “lecturer”, a sense of practitioner-academic seems to overwhelm this term. For some, adopting “lecturer” is one way they differentiate themselves from school teachers, but this distinction is drawn from their classroom practices rather than scholarly activities such as research – one of the key responsibilities that being university academics often entails. For most participants, “lecturer” is interpreted as a goal that they not yet deserve, and it is associated with more theoretical knowledge at a higher level and research work.

8.1.2 Teaching, learning, and research: Pressures, dilemmas, and aspirations

When asked what currently composes their work, all teachers mentioned teaching as the key component. With the department’s cross-division teaching policy, except from the three new teachers who teach only non-English majors, all participants are teaching both English majored and non-majored students and across different subjects. At the same time, the most challenging aspect of teaching is viewed as coming from the preparation efforts teachers put into face-to-face teaching hours. All teachers reported preparing for lessons takes a similar amount of time as the teaching itself. Within teaching, other work responsibilities were mentioned, including student assignment feedback, exam marking, syllabus planning and revision, student studies counselling, exam questions design and student teacher practicum supervision.

Some senior teachers also involved in the MOET’s National Foreign Languages Project 2020 regarding teacher training. Five teachers – most in the senior/middle-staged groups, have or used to have management responsibilities in the department.
Among the younger group of teachers, “extra-curriculum” activities, such as participating in the university’s music festivals, were mentioned as part of their work. For teachers in probation stage, a significant amount of time is allocated to administrative work and class observation. All teachers included private English tutoring in their work descriptions, although this was done in their own time. At the time of study, half of them (mostly those in senior/middle-staged groups) have halted their private tutoring because of lack of time, while half still have “extra-teaching”.

There was largely an absence of “research” as a component in participants’ work descriptions. Throughout the interviews, although they mentioned “research”, the word was vested with a variety of meanings and perspectives (which will be discussed later). Only three teachers (Linh; Phong; Vy) overtly used this word to refer to the activities they were engaged in: conducting institutional research projects and giving presentations at conferences. The majority of the participants did not count, or even mention, research as a work share until they were reminded or asked by the researcher. Linh, who appeared to be more active in research, laughed when she realised she had forgotten this component, despite being asked several times if anything was missed about her work. Most participants admitted they did not do any research at present. Contrary to the case of research, what is termed as “self-study” was referred to as a significant activity. Most participants specified their self-study as working towards the master’s degree (for those who have not yet earned this), and preparing for the coming IELTS test.

In what follows, insights into faculty’s three work components – teaching responsibilities, studying to earn credentials, and research engagement, are provided. Of these three components, teaching and obtaining credentials were identified by participants as taking up biggest time allotments and which attract most of their current concerns. The third component – research, is included because it proves to be a problematic issue. Although research was not reported as a principal academic activity, it emerged from the interview analysis as the topic discussed and contemplated by participants as much as teaching and obtaining credentials.

8.1.2.1 Teaching responsibilities

The teaching at FL Department can be described as a myriad of practices. Teaching does not simply mean delivering teaching hours but is intensified by many factors – a phenomenon called by Galton & Macbeath (2002, p.13) as “to do more in less time” with teachers’ taking more complex responsibilities and undergoing more stress.
As required by the department’s cross-division teaching policy, faculty have to teach a wide range of subjects to different groups of students. All the participants interviewed reported they were teaching several subjects; the majority of them were teaching both English majors and non-majors; even the new teachers who taught only non-majors have students of mixed language aptitudes. The source of pressures came from the wide range of subjects they were simultaneously teaching: from General English (communication skills) to Advanced English skills, English for Specific Purposes, Literature, Syntax, Methodology, etc. It can be seen that these are not simply different subjects but different distinct sub-disciplines within ELT. At the same time, student diversification was identified as an important factor putting on a strain on teaching: teaching across divisions entails working with students with different goals, motivations, and English proficiency.

The university’s recent introduction of TOEIC as the end-point requirement for the non-English majors, who take up the majority of FL Department’s students, was also brought up by participants as a pressure that causes tension in their teaching. In most cases, the TOEIC and its teaching-to-the-test implication are seen as clashing with teachers’ beliefs and values. Long mentioned a “gap” between the two goals, seeing the combination of “teaching communicative English with a TOEIC orientation” hardly possible. Thu described the dilemma between following her beliefs about language teaching and meeting demands (“If I focus on communication then it’s likely that we don’t have enough time for practising TOEIC skills”). Chau gave a stronger comment when asked what she thought if students are requested to concentrate on TOEIC only. She expressed her own teaching values and argued for an education which enhances students’ knowledge and understanding, rather than aiming for a particular test.

I don’t think [my] class is a TOEIC preparation class. If students want they can go to language centres to drill their TOEIC strategies. Here it’s to provide them with knowledge. (Chau)

These findings show that ELT academics’ have heavy teaching workloads, but the amount of work is in many ways intensified by various pressures caused by the expansion of the nature of the work itself with more diverged subject contents and teaching contexts (students, teaching goals, syllabus, etc.) In performing these tasks, teachers struggle between institutional policies, student needs and their own beliefs and values about ELT. Facing these pressures – some of which have become quite a tension as shown in Chau’s firm view stated above – how do teachers choose to respond?
Taking control: How faculty respond to teaching demands

There is a strong sense of taking control as participants spoke about how they conducted teaching practices. “Taking control” is manifested through teachers’ active adaptation to external demands.

Speaking of their complex teaching obligations and the work intensification, participants simply mentioned them as either “a requirement from the University” (Thu; Vy) or a reality: “Technical and engineering students characterise our university” (Huy); “The Department is short of staff” (Phuong). Kim said she found at this moment her teaching amount “manageable”. As such, teachers acknowledged their intensified workloads as a duty arising from realities’ demands – they indicated they understood the sources of the intensification. However, faculty do not simply accept these external demands but act upon them. Phuong and Anh described how they adjusted their teaching according to students’ learning differences by choosing suitable methods and techniques such as switching the language of instruction between English and Vietnamese. Long talked about how he managed to accommodate students’ needs within his teaching conditions, including timing and syllabus requirements.

The lesson lasts only more than two hours so I can’t include too much ESP contents. But if most students in that class are from the Automobiles programme, for example, I will give them an introductory list of technical terms to inspire them. Those who are interested will dig further into these themselves. (Long)

Regarding the TOEIC teaching-to-the-test dilemma, all participants asserted they managed to find ways to incorporate this goal into their lessons. The common approach adopted by teachers is keeping developing students’ language competencies at the heart of their teaching while giving the TOEIC target a subordinate role. Even Chau, who took a stance on TOEIC as seen earlier, chose a solution that balances her teaching values and fulfilling requirements by including TOEIC preparation as a supplementary content.

Apart from developing students’ English skills, I give them practical TOEIC tips. So both the University’s requirements and their own wishes are satisfied. (Chau)

These considerations show ELT academics are aware of and respond to factors that may affect teaching and learning processes: course syllabus requirements, student differences, teaching situations, and the department’s and the university’s policies. The processes encompass pressure and tension, but teachers address them by adjusting their practices accordingly.
This compliance to external contexts, however, is done not simply because teachers are forced to. All participants emphasised they chose to act because of their willingness, informed by their teaching values and professional responsibility. Speaking about working with students of various disciplines, many participants commented they adapted lesson contents to make them more relevant because they felt they should consider the context of students’ future lives. Minh described how he adjusted his teaching and how this was guided by his professional beliefs.

I try to find every possible chance to bring in technical contents into my lessons, especially when it comes to IT since it’s my favourite field. I think all teachers should do that as ESP is quite difficult so students need to be introduced to it the earlier the better. (Minh)

Even the demand that stirred most discussion in terms of teaching – the TOEIC exam, does not seem to strongly cast its shadow on teachers’ work. In the interviews, faculty did not appear to refer to the test as a polar opposite that totally changed their existing traditional teaching values, which are to develop students’ English and inspire their learning. They seek ways to integrate the exam into their work, mitigating possible negative washback but endeavouring to maintain what is perceived as best for students’ learning. This is because they acknowledge passing the TOEIC exam a legitimate need of students and it is their responsibility to help students to achieve this goal (Chau – quoted above; Huy; Long). Huy expressed his self-awareness of this professional responsibility – he felt the pressure even though the university had not required teachers to assure a certain percentage of students successfully passing the TOEIC benchmark.

The pressure comes first from myself. If my teaching turns out to be ineffective I will feel unsatisfied with myself. (Huy)

Another example indicating faculty’s agentic awareness of the rationale behind their teaching practices is how they turn duties into something meaningful for themselves. As emerged from the interviews, all participants considered the expanding range and nature of their teaching a learning opportunity rather than a burden to complain about. Kim and Phuong asserted positive views on their diverged teaching obligations, seeing them as chances to round up their teaching knowledge and skills.

Teaching is also perceived as a way to satisfy one’s professional self. Chau explained why she invested time and efforts in preparing classes, but with a highlight on her emotional urge being a teacher.

I’m teaching Reading 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. But I can’t repeat the same lesson plans from last year for this year – it’ll be quite boring I think. I must improve them
otherwise I’ll be bored with myself. I need some small innovations even though I will have to work harder, but I think it’s better that way. (Chau)

Preparation in this way comes as an integral part of the work. Indeed, the time for class preparation is not measured to be counted as their work hours; it is not formally monitored either. Nevertheless, the teachers were aware of the challenges and committed to good preparation, even when it means more workload. Yet they do this not only because of job demands; they feel the urge to invest efforts in order to satisfy their own professional needs and their own feelings, as the excerpt from Chau has indicated.

The data provide a clearer reconfiguration of university ELT as a changing and responsive occupation with responsibilities and obligations beyond teaching and research. Besides keeping up with teaching demands, today’s ELT academics have to respond to pressures from a number of forces. As reported by participants, they must fulfil a range of responsibilities required by the “system” – the department, the university, the Ministry. Among those work components, some can be considered more conventional tasks (e.g. completing probation stage and undertaking postgraduate studies). Today these conventional obligations become even more intensified; for example, it is now explicitly required in many universities (ELT) staff must start PhD studies within a certain period from joining the institution. At the same time new tasks and obligations are introduced, such as the English proficiency benchmarks.

8.1.2.2 Earning teaching credentials

The second work component that FL Department faculty reported they were currently most engaged in is self-study for teaching credentials. Faculty self-study was directed towards two goals: to obtain academic qualifications (MA and PhD degrees) and to achieve the required proficiency benchmark of IELTS 7.0. Both goals result from national policies to raise the quality of university academics by standardising teaching credentials. At Dominus University, pursuing further studies has been made a compulsory requirement since 2009 – faculty must earn the master’s degree within four years and the PhD within nine years after joining the university. In FL Department, apart from the Chair who has a PhD, the midcareer cohort all have master’s degrees and the majority of the junior faculty (drawing on the younger group) were completing their MA course. Teachers are encouraged to apply for PhD studies preferably abroad, either with the financial supports from MOET or external sources. One participant interviewed said she was applying for PhD studies.
The comfort zone of MA

Participants described their pursuing MA studies as a natural decision in response to policies. Faculty asserted with certainty that they knew well about this policy. For example, Huy stated the exact timeframe of the policy (having the MA within four years), emphasising it is a “prerequisite” required by the university, while Minh wanted to signal his understanding of “the system” and the policy’s importance.

It’s the requirement from the Ministry and the University that if you’re in the position of university lecturer you must take further studies. (Minh)

At the same time, faculty’s agreement to adopting master’s degree as the norm for being university teachers, including ELT academics, does not only result from the expectation to fulfil duties. Other personal motives were specified as participants spoke about what fuelled them to start the MA. Teachers commented that the course helps improve their knowledge (Vy; Huy).

I think the policy requiring us to have master’s degree is reasonable, since BA holders cannot teach BA candidates. I personally gained theoretical knowledge through my MA with lots of reading. That enables me to look back at my teaching and reflect on it. (Vy)

In this way, a master’s degree in ELT is seen as providing teachers with the theory base to inform and support their everyday teaching.

For some others, the qualification is an “inner urge” and an example illustrating professionalism. Minh explained how the MA course is an obvious professional need, forming part of his self-study journey.

Apart from the external requirement, there is this inner urge from myself. I know in my heart that I must study further. Otherwise there will come a day when I have nothing left to tell my students. I shouldn’t repeat old things again and again, should I? (Minh)

Meanwhile, Huy described his MA studying as an opportunity to widen what he called a “working network” meeting colleagues he learnt much from. He further commented that the degree is a recognition of his abilities, because “it, to some extent, shows what I can do” (Huy). For Anh, meanwhile, the MA degree opened new opportunities in terms of income (“The MA enables me to find more (extra) teaching jobs. The pay has also become a little higher.”)

As emerged from the data, the qualification is identified as a learning opportunity that contributes directly to improving the work (theory knowledge); it is also viewed
as a way to legitimise their professional identity (being a university lecturer means continuous learning) and status (an evidence of professional competencies and better pay). The extracts suggest that in pursuing this goal, participants have various rationales – called by “inner urges”, apart from simply performing their responsibilities to satisfy authoritative imperatives. The rationales are constructed around personal needs and commitments to improve knowledge, enhance learning, and raise professional prestige. The Master’s degree is teachers’ “comfort zone”.

PhD – A luxury?

While studying to earn a master’s degree was seen as an obvious element because it is not only part of participants’ obligations but also pivotal to their career development, working towards a PhD degree did not appear to be a significant issue. Many participants, however, expressed their wishes to undertake PhD studies in the future when they are able to do so.

When the question of the necessity of the doctorate was asked by the researcher to the midcareer teachers – who already have master’s degrees, there was a feeling that the doctorate is a desirable, but distant, goal. Most stated that the degree is necessary for their professional selves, but their views of the value of the doctorate appeared to be rather vague. Vy emphasised studying for a PhD would “greatly improve teachers’ research competencies”. Similarly, Phuong saw the PhD as an indispensable element because “Being university lecturers means doing in-depth research” (Phuong). Even Linh, who was scheduling to start her doctoral studies soon and was thus seemingly closer among the interviewees to the doctorate, expressed her uncertainty when commenting on the degree’s value.

If one only teaches general English skills I don’t think the doctorate is necessary. It’ll be a waste because teaching General English does not require in-depth research. Meanwhile, you can be a good teacher without a PhD. In our Department there is such a teacher. He does not have the doctorate but everyone can consult him about almost every field, from Methodology to Linguistics. (Linh)

In this way, participants were associating the PhD degree with a general expression of “in-depth research”, without a clear clarification of what it may mean. Although with differing perspectives, they regarded the PhD as an ideal but not yet a catalyst that has a direct impact on their current work, which is somehow opposite to the case of the MA degree which they think is more useful and applicable. This finding resonates with Borg’s (2013, p.131) observation from one of his studies where ELT teachers have uncertain, even negative, perspectives towards the relation between “research credentials” (i.e. higher-level academic qualifications) and good quality
teaching. As the excerpt above from Linh suggests, she held a more practical view of the role of the doctorate in ELT. Despite her earlier stating that “ELT academics should study the higher the better” (Linh), she did not express a preference towards this degree, implying it can well be just a piece of paper of little relevance to being “a good teacher”. The statement also suggests her conception of teacher learning: it can be done in informal ways for the sake of learning and knowledge. The PhD for her is simply a condition for teacher learning to happen. She further explained her decision to embark on her PhD because it provides an enabling environment for her to be more focused on research and learning. Phuong gave a similar view, “Reading a book particularly for your PhD studies is more motivating and orienting than reading a book in general” (Phuong).

Participants also stated the reasons why the PhD can be a distant goal for them. Vy and Phuong advocated the degree as being important for ELT academics but they do not plan to start the PhD due to family commitments. Meanwhile, Phong expressed his uncertainty in terms of research competencies:

The policy that requires us to earn the doctorate is good for all because without a pressure we can’t develop much. However currently more emphasis seems to be on the end goal than on helping us to reach that goal. For example, the University may create a transition path of support. The support is not something grandiose but may just be as simple as reducing teaching hours for us. (Phong)

There might have existed other motives for these arguments, for example as the ways to justify why faculty cannot pursue this highest degree. However teachers’ preference for the master’s degree and the interpretations of the doctorate reveal a somewhat simplistic view of the nature of research and of teacher learning as a direct link between research and teaching (Borg, 2013, p.133). Compared to pursuing doctoral studies, working toward a master’s degree is argued to be relevant for ELT academics as they deliberately look for various benefits from the qualification, which they enjoy. Also, taking MA studies is seen as an appropriate training for ELT academics, rather than as a research practice, since most participants mentioned obtaining (theoretical) knowledge as the primary value of their MA course. The PhD, identified vaguely as “in-depth” research, is desirable, but it is an ideal, and unknown land, rather than a reality.

Language proficiency benchmark: The two sides of the story

As required by the NFL Project 2020, FL Department faculty members participated in the national English proficiency screening for university ELT teachers in 2013. The benchmark test was developed, administered, and marked by designated local universities, following the CEFR framework. Teachers are tested on speaking,
listening, reading, and writing. The minimum proficiency ELT academics have to achieve is level C1, and can be converted to IELTS 7.0 or other similar international standard exams such as TOEFL, TOEIC and Cambridge exams. At FL Department, as mentioned in the previous chapter, faculty are required to have an IELTS of 7.5 on top of the Ministry’s requirement. The benchmark test, therefore, is both an attempt to raise teacher quality, and to standardise teaching credentials.

The results coming out from the NFL Project 2020 benchmark test were rather disappointing for FL Department. Of the 22 teachers assessed (some members already have international certificates and were thus exempted), only one passed the target level. Those staff who did not meet the benchmark were required by the university to do so within one year from taking the test, otherwise they will be evaluated as being unsuitable for teaching and their contract may be terminated. The majority of FL Department faculty chose to sit for the international IELTS test and submit the score within this one year. My field trip to FL Department took place during this “IELTS year”, following the previous NFL Project 2020 screening, with many teachers at the department either just completed their re-exam or were busy preparing for it.

Commenting on the proficiency test, participants expressed their views in both positive and negative terms. What follows presents how they made sense of this policy. As Vy put it, “Every story has two sides”, interviewees’ perception can be described as including accounts both against and for the test.

To meet the standard: heavier workload, loss of control, and doubts

The pressure to pass the benchmark test was exclaimed by most participants as a pressing concern they had at the time. It was described as “a headache for all teachers”, “a big pressure”, and something that “has been making teachers’ lives hard”.

The reasons leading to this headache were depicted as heavier workload and the fear for losing their work contract, and the comments mostly came from the younger group of teachers who were simultaneously completing their MA studies. Preparing for the test was said to be yet another “burden” intensifying their workload. The pressure for passing the test was multiplied even more by the fact its outcome result would decide their employment.

I’m quite stressed because now it’s not only my teaching that I think about, I also have such a heavy burden which is my MA course. And on top of it is this passing the benchmark. (Minh)

Anh talked about the benchmark, especially when it is set at IELTS 7.5, as being an “impossible demand”. Preparing for the IELTS thus to her is “inhibiting” making her
so stressed, having to study for the MA and teaching at the same time. Both Minh and Anh had imagined the worst situation where they might one more time fail to meet the standard and their work contract is not extended. (“I don’t know if this time next year I’m still here”, Anh).

For more experienced faculty, the feeling of losing academic control was mentioned to explain why they were unhappy with the policy. Linh said about the discomfort “being put under surveillance” – being assessed and evaluated. Similarly, Kim complained about the tight timeframe within which the benchmark must be met. She felt uncomfortable with the idea she was “being forced” and wished to be in charge of her professional development.

The University requires us to meet the standard within one year. Putting the requirement as deadlines makes it so stressful, so I feel quite negative about this... I’d prefer to take the test at my own will and submit the score, or develop a plan to meet the standard, without being forced. (Kim)

The result reflects ELT teachers’ reaction to benchmark policies depicted in other studies. For example, in her research on the impact of the English benchmark test on ELT teachers in Hong Kong, Lin (2007) reported a widespread stress induced by the test. This, combined with teachers’ already heavy workload, generated high, even unbearable, pressures for them. The above statements from the teachers in FL Department suggest further understanding about ELT academics’ frustration: the comments are not simply complaints about work intensification and testing pressure, they also reveal a feeling of uncertainty about their career – the fragility and insecurity as we perceive and act in the changing complex world (Barnett, 2000). It is also a frustration from the interviewees being pushed and drifted by the system, which Henkel (2007) refers to as lecturers’ loss of control of academic agendas.

*The other side of the story: The pressure to move forward*

Although identifying this standardisation policy as a source of stress, tension, and frustration, all participants also depicted it as having certain positive impacts to move them forward. As emerged from the data, the benchmark, especially in the form of the IELTS exam score, is viewed as providing a learning opportunity and an evidence of competencies. Indeed, while describing the policy as requiring intense efforts which for some can become an “unimaginable demand” (Anh), most interviewees interpreted the pressure at the same time as “positive”, “necessary”, “motivating”, and “reasonable”. Vy and Huy emphasised that teachers’ failure to provide students with correct knowledge will negatively affect a generation. Faculty stressed that teachers’ subject knowledge, or their English language competencies, should meet not only the minimum standard but also ideally reach the level of
expertise. Being an English teacher means the teacher needs to be excellent in English (Huy).

As such, taking the benchmark test is interpreted by many as a professional development opportunity, since this provides information about their current level of language proficiency. Participants talked about the test as “a reasonable policy” which makes them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses for self-improvement, letting them know where they are. It has even become a “necessary pressure” that motivates and encourages them to make more efforts and do better.

Also, faculty viewed the test’s outcomes serving as an evidence for their professional competencies, “a measurement tool that gives you a certificate to boost self-confidence” (Phuong). Huy saw language proficiency as the core element of being an ELT teacher, “This core element must be explicitly expressed as much as possible”. It is also a “ticket” opening the door to the professional community and also future career opportunities.

It’s a ticket letting us stand in the same line with our colleagues in the country. And if we have an opportunity it’ll be the ticket to seize that opportunity. (Thu)

The proficiency benchmark, according to faculty, has a direct positive influence on their teaching. It provides the necessary subject knowledge base for teachers to have creative and effective teaching. Language proficiency enables teachers to experiment with teaching innovations and expanding students’ knowledge (Phuong). In this way, participants saw the link between subject knowledge and pedagogic knowledge (Banks, Leach, & Moon, 2005). Following a standard and reaching a standard, furthermore, are viewed as an almost indisputable part of the profession. Participants referred to the teacher benchmark test as a “necessary” policy that they agree with, because “If we’re university teachers, we need a standard” (Thu), “It’s normal being English teachers and undergoing tests” (Long), and “If one does not meet the standard he shouldn’t be teaching” (Minh). At the same time, participants perceived the policy beyond its immediate, pragmatic benefits.

We need to use all means to meet the common standard that the society has set for university teachers... We live in a society and we must respect its standard. (Minh)

Papers are the first thing we can see when working with someone. You can’t just claim you are competent. If you’re really competent, you have to be able to prove that. (Huy)
Thus, the test is viewed in a broader societal sphere, where it is not simply a requirement from their institution and even the Ministry, but a responsibility they hold towards the whole society.

A reliable and valid measurement tool?

The proficiency benchmarking is thus perceived as a source of stress and tension but at the same time a positive pressure. However, participants also questioned the necessary conditions for this. A number of issues were raised with regard to the procedures of the locally administered national screening test (Phong; Long; Huy). The quality of the test’s facilities, procedures, and examiners were claimed by participants as being unsatisfactory and affecting its reliability. The administration of the test was described as being “lousy” and unprofessional.

It’s kind of obvious that our competencies must be certified by a test, but it must be a reliable test…. But the local testing procedures are so lousy. What I am complaining about is not why we should have the test, but how it is conducted… The test procedures should have been more professional. (Long)

The excerpt suggests that teachers understood, agreed with, and accepted the assessment as a responsibility from their side, yet they were concerned about the role of the other side in deciding the shape of the assessment. They are committed to taking efforts to meet the standard and become more professional, but they also request similar things in return.

Qualified or unqualified?

At the same time, participants showed their doubts about the validity of the test purposes. They argued the benchmark test should not be used as a determinant to assess teachers. Anh emphasised the significance of other knowledge involved in teaching. Although she thought having an IELTS score is better, she did not see it as a must, because “not everyone with an IELTS 7.5 can teach. What matters most is teaching skills” (Anh).

Meanwhile, Vy pointed out the contradiction between the test and other teacher qualifications, if it is made a deciding factor regarding the question of being qualified or unqualified: “We have the knowledge but we need to know how to transfer it to students… The test in this way happens to deny my other degrees” (Vy). Adopting a similar view, Thu and Chau commented that what is required for ELT teaching is more than teachers’ language proficiency. They mentioned the role of pedagogic knowledge in composing higher education teaching – lecturers’ specific skills and approaches in delivering the subject (Banks, Leach, & Moon, 1999).
I think everyone wants to meet the standard but not all can do it in a short period of time. If people are fired because they failed the test there’ll be many consequences: Teachers will be seen as unqualified, and teaching will depend totally on whether the teacher passes the test. But there’re a lot more involved in teaching: the art of teaching, which approaches and methods you choose, which books you select and adapt from, etc. (Thu)

People with an IELTS score as high as 7 or 8 but lacking pedagogical competencies will fail. (Chau)

In this way, since the test covers only part of the competencies and skills used by teachers, it is perceived as an invalid assessment tool to evaluate a teacher’s full capacity. The data also suggest that ELT academics relate realities to their own conception of the types of knowledge valued in teaching.

8.1.2.3 The paradoxes of doing research

As findings from the earlier examining of ELT teacher work life indicate, research engagement was not reported as a principal activity for faculty at FL Department. Of the eleven participants interviewed, only four teachers reported they were “doing research”. Three of them, Linh, Vy, and Phong, have recently completed a university level project. Vy and Phong had presented their research in some international conferences taking place in the country. The fourth teacher, Minh, counted completing his MA course as doing research. The level of faculty’s participation in institutional research-related activities is also low, given that the department’s Annual Conference and the “EFL Forum” seminar series were no longer organised. A small number of teachers, however, said they attended some seminars and conferences outside the university.

Although research was not described as taking a primary time allotment in the FL faculty work life, it reoccurred now and then throughout participants’ talks. However, as the data suggest, participants hold different conceptions about research.

Research as a mission impossible

As described earlier, most participants did not explicitly mention the word “research” when talking about their work. As emerged from the interviews, this is because “research” is imagined as a concrete end-product required by the university. The teachers who reported they have no research activities record seemed to have become used to its absence in their work life. They spoke of the income deduction punishment policy as a fact to be accepted since they failed to accomplish the task. For example, Long said, “I accept that my salary is reduced... Once I have accepted
this I have no complaints”. Although Long might sound he chose not to do research on purpose, he did explain this was because he had to allot his time to other priorities more pressing at the moment: completing his teaching duties and achieving the required IELTS benchmark. Indeed, during the interviews participants offered various reasons for not doing research, which are presented below. With these reasons, research was depicted as a duty, a “mission impossible” that faculty were not able to accomplish, rather than something they chose not to do.

A work pressure

When asked about “research”, teachers quickly related the term to the university’s “90-hour research” policy. So, to them, whether they are research active or not is defined by whether they have had an institution-level project approved and completed. With this interpretation of the word, only two participants asserted they conducted research while the rest reported they performed no research because they did not engage in such a project recently. Doing research is “one of the duties required by the University” that faculty need to fulfil (Kim).

At the same time, when invited to talk about their engagement in the university’s and department’s research activities, participants mentioned attending conferences such as the university’s biannual conference and the department’s previous (short-lived) annual conference. However this in many ways is interpreted as research required or imposed by the management – a type of research “from above”, since they described these activities using words that denote obligation, for instance, “The University required departments to send in presentations”, “I was required to present in the conference”, “The Department required every division to have at least one presentation” (Linh; Anh; Huy). Within the last two years when the departmental conference ceased to be organised, faculty research practices in terms of participating in conferences and seminars were low.

No time for research

The reason commonly shared by all participants as restraining them from doing research is time restriction. Faculty reported that heavy teaching demands did not allow them the needed time either to perform the required research task and to engage in research activities despite their interest.

The conference could have been more effective. But teachers were under so much work pressure – they had to teach in different domains, so they couldn’t be more engaged. They had no time and they were too tired with teaching, which left them with little time to even think about research. (Thu)
Teachers do want to do research but they don’t have time. For example, one of my colleagues teaches from Monday to Saturday. Then she goes home. How can she find time for research? ... In Vietnam teacher salaries are low; besides teaching and researching they have to moonlight to earn a better living. (Long)

As seen from the above excerpts, research was not seen as a top priority for faculty members. It has to be placed secondary to meeting immediate everyday work demands such as students’ learning needs. Many of them have to strain themselves between completing MA courses (which was not counted as doing research) and finding ways to stabilise their own economic situation. The image of the ELT academic constructed from these comments is one of a rather burnt-out teacher, lacking both time and energy. Research has now become a rather luxurious work element.

Irrelevance, “Too distant”, and “Just a formality”

Another most recurring theme coming up from the data is that participants did not perceive the research they are required to conduct and engage in as being relevant and useful. For some participants, “research” means something unfeasible and unconnected to their realities. Anh used the word “distant” when expressing her conception of research; to her, research involves extensive reading and writing reports and articles, while she preferred “more practical things such as how to improve teaching, how to use this teaching technique effectively, etc.”. Thu defined “real” research as “reviving disappearing languages” and “inspiring and guiding students to do research”, which she saw is beyond her ability. For Huy, research for him has no relation to his everyday work and doing it can become an “extra burden”.

The institutional projects conducted to submit to the university were regarded as being of little relevance to realities, and they are mostly seen as a strategic solution to cope with policies.

I see many of my colleagues doing projects that do not relate at all to the realities at the University. It’s like they do this so as to get by. So that their salaries will not be reduced. (Long)

Anh talked about how she was requested to give a presentation in one of the departmental conferences in the past. She described this as an unhelpful experience, comparing it to an administrative event.

It happened so hastily that I didn’t receive any questions for my presentation. You presented then you sat back immediately. There was not enough time for
questions. Too many presentations. It was like you were sitting in a meeting and listened and then you went home. No questions or discussions at all. (Anh)

Meanwhile, Linh commented on why she thought the departmental conference failed. One of the main reasons to her was that the conference contents did not fit with teacher professional interests.

It’s not relevant. For example you teach ESP and your presentation is all about ESP but I’m not interested in ESP so I don’t want to listen to your presentation. But because there were such few people there so we can’t just stand up and leave. It’s about being tactful. Then we stay but we don’t listen, we don’t care, we aren’t interested. If a study on methodology is presented within the Methodology division it will be more effective, but if it is presented to the whole department there will be so many things irrelevant. (Linh)

Like Anh, Linh also had concerns about the poor organisation of the conference that allowed little time for interaction between the presenters and the audience. The conference was packed with contents – almost ten presentations within an afternoon. All presentations were delivered back-to-back and to a small audience.

It was like listening without digestion. The presenters were not happy because the audience was not interested despite their efforts... There were only a few in the audience – not enough to engage... The listeners were not happy either but they didn’t know how to dig deeper into the presentation... (Linh)

These comments illustrate faculty’s views about research activities at the institution as having a superficial value. This type of research is perceived as being of little relevance and meaning. As Linh later summarised it, research as they see it is “just a formality”. It is understood as a strategy for some to “get by” – a trade-off rather than a real commitment. Those who have real interests in research and learning were disappointed since they found this imposition focuses more on quantity than quality. This type of research is viewed as being too shallow to contribute any benefits to their work or professional development, while fails to accommodate faculty’s needs and interests. The excerpts above also indicate faculty’s aspiration to be recognised for their research efforts, here not in terms of financial reward but a career satisfaction when their work is perceived and received as a scholarly activity. This aspiration, together with faculty’s other perspectives of a “desirable” type of research, once again emerged when participants talked about the research they do, or wish to do, which will be discussed later in the section.
Limited ideas, a lack of competencies & cumbersome administration

Together with the above, three other factors were mentioned by some participants as discouraging faculty from being research engaged. They include limited ideas, the self-doubts about one’s skills, and administrative procedures judged as hindering research.

The feeling that they do not have interesting and original ideas was described as what deterred ELT faculty from starting a research project. Anh said she could not think of a research topic and could not find an idea meriting research. Thu called this a “psychological barrier” – it often proves to be difficult for academics teaching communicative English to find a research topic because they often frame their inquiries within application-based rather than theory-based research. Huy also mentioned teachers’ inability to find an original and innovative topic. He attributed the cause of this to the imposing nature of the university’s policies requiring teachers to do research, which to him has blunted their creativity and enthusiasm.

Faculty are required to do research every year – so you should be able to have various topics, but this was not the case. Consequently, the projects done often followed one beaten path; they were quite familiar and old-fashioned. (Huy)

However, lacking ideas alone is not the deciding factor that discourages teachers. Thu spoke about how she felt unconfident about her research competencies. To her, having ideas is not enough but the research must be conducted systematically using appropriate methods.

I’d like to do research but my research methods are not good yet… I would feel ashamed if I give a presentation that only has ideas but is weak in methods. That contributes nothing and makes the presentation clumsy, and it will be a waste of time for my colleagues reading it… (Thu)

In terms of administration, indeed paperwork and procedures did not emerge from the data as the main barrier to research. There are only two comments from Phong and Vy, two of the three teachers who conducted research projects, about what they were not satisfied with.

Vy described her process of getting the funding for her project as “time-consuming” and made her feel “miserable” since she had to go back and forth to the University’s Research Office dozens of times to resubmit the forms she filled in incorrectly. However, the paperwork was less a nuisance after the first project when she became more familiar with the procedure. Phong had a different concern about how “unreasonable” administration can affect the quality of research. Institutional research projects at Dominus University are required to be in Vietnamese and not
English. As the regulations go, he had to submit a report article in Vietnamese and present it to a committee, because not every member of the committee speaks English. So he questioned the fact why ELT faculty have to conduct research in Vietnamese.

I studied the effectiveness of using Wiki in teaching writing and most of my references are in English. How can I translate all the citations into Vietnamese and make sure people understand them? So that’s where I think the regulation is unreasonable. I still completed the project to fulfil my duty but really felt a bit unsatisfactory about its quality... Also, it was too time-consuming to write first in English and then turn it into Vietnamese. What an effort! Yet the Vietnamese version still could not express what is meant to be like the English version. (Phong)

What can be seen in Phong’s comment is a disappointment for administration introducing regulations but did not consider faculty’s actual professional needs. Phong drew on the specialised characteristics of his field (ELT) for this argument. There is also a sense of discontent as his efforts and enthusiasm put into the work turned out to be only an act of “fulfilling duty”. Again, a tension exists between ELT academics’ wishes to do research and be recognised and their frustration that their efforts are considered as “just a formality” only.

So is doing research necessary, after all?

Despite all the explanations and arguments, regarding the role of doing “research” (without the word being elaborated), most participants agreed it is important. Linh, after her somehow unfavourable comments on the department’s Annual Conference, was one among the very few who mentioned the EFL Forum, and she described it as “working” because many teachers showed up even it was organised on a Sunday morning. Some teachers saw doing research as part of their professional identity being a lecturer. Vy said she would feel more as a lecturer if she conducts research. She also asserted that working in a university requires research skills.

I feel if we lecturers do not genuinely do research it’s like we haven’t fulfilled the role of a lecturer. If we just teach and stop at that then we’re just school teachers. (Vy)

Similarly, Phuong emphasises research as an essential element of university teachers’ work, referring to “in-depth research” in the form of PhD studies, “Being a lecturer you have to do in-depth research” (Phuong).
Meanwhile, other participants linked research with wider impacts. When asked what they thought about the university’s strategy to become more research-oriented, participants acknowledged this is beneficial. Long asserted research is good for the general development of the university, while Huy acknowledged research’s role in exploring new teaching methods and new approaches that serve teaching in general. Is this finding contradictory to the earlier observations that teachers found research irrelevant and meaningless? The next section discusses a different conceptualisation of research by ELT academics, which can explain these seemingly contradictory observations.

Research as it can be

As demonstrated above, participants defined “research” as having an end product to submit and report to the university, and they gave explanations why they were not doing so. On the other hand, as emerged from the data, faculty also expressed their aspirations about another type of research which they wish to pursue, or, for some, are already pursuing. This type of research can be characterised as generating from practical teaching contexts and involving reflective practices. To faculty this research should also be driven by their own interests and enthusiasm.

Research for teaching

Reading and using research to inform pedagogical decisions were mentioned by most participants when describing their work, though only one of them (Phong) identified this as a research activity.

Faculty referred to reading as a useful input for their classroom teaching which they often do as part of lesson preparation, especially when they teach groups at a more advanced level. While it was not specified in every interview what sources of information they read, most of them said they read for ideas to improve their teaching. Two participants, however, named what they read and emphasised what they gained from them.

I’m reading the English Teaching Forum because their articles are so practical and can be used right away. (Phong)

I read journals about TESOL, for example the TESOL Quarterly. I read and think back about what I’m using in my teaching to see if they really work or not. I also want to learn new things that can be used. The articles I read are set in Asian contexts, which is close to Vietnam conditions. For example, using video… (Chau)
As such, the way FL Department faculty read and use research indicates a practical orientation (Williams & Coles, 2007). They read especially for ideas to be tried in their own classes. This practical orientation can also be observed as participants talked about the research they were conducting or desired to conduct. Linh, and Phong, the two teachers who have completed research projects, studied student motivation and using technology in teaching writing. Other participants’ proposed research topics and questions include: CALL and ICT in language teaching (online assessment platform, multimedia application, etc.), students’ speaking improvement, student learning attitudes, syllabus revision, TOEIC integration in teaching, assessment, and student self-study support. The reasons for faculty taking interests in these topics were all generated from their classroom realities and the desire to use research to improve their own practice. As Minh put it, he wished to look into the dilemma between the pressures the TOEIC test caused for learning and teaching and its being increasingly preferred by universities because he wanted to “find out some solutions for my own to improve the current situation”.

Research as a reflective, practical inquiry

The observation that faculty embraced a practical orientation regarding research engagement is consolidated as participants explained their viewpoints towards the nature of research. The words and phrases frequently mentioned include “practical needs”, “teaching-related”, “work-related”, “useful”, “my actual teaching contexts”, “small innovations”, “specific questions”, “solve the current problem”, “help my students”, “think back”, “try out”, “reflect”, and “apply”. The data show that the research interests of FL Department academic staff revolve mostly around classroom practical inquiries and in the form of problem-solving action research. Very few participants mentioned their wishes to conduct projects to seek to understand about a phenomenon. Instead, faculty prefer research to be a reflective practice that leads to outcomes envisaged immediately at the outset. For example, Phong referred to his research explicitly as “action research” since “It was about what I actually tried out in my class”. Thu defined research as starting from practical teaching incidents, although this was not necessarily what she was currently able to do.

I think research could also mean noticing ordinary incidents in our everyday teaching; we investigate them to understand them better; we apply our reflections in our teaching… Or I turn the simple things every day I read about to discussion questions for my students, or develop them into research through observation. (Thu)
Other participants expressed a stronger disposition about the form of research they aspire to do. For example, Long expressed his disapproving of the contemporary research which he saw as too “theoretical”. He refused to do it because to him this research is “in the air” and has little connection with classroom realities. The research he wanted to do must bring about some practical benefits.

I’ve decided that my research will not reach too far but it will relate to our immediate environment: for example, how to make TOEIC learning more effective and how to develop students’ communicative English. These are the things I want and not those in the air. I don’t like too theoretical things … I will not do things that are not useful to our students in this university. (Long)

Similarly, Anh disliked the idea of “carrying out some grandiose project” that requires time and writing reports. She would rather do “specific things” that serve her teaching.

There is only Huy who had a slightly different view. To him, research should be innovative, original and should bring about not only immediate changes but also contribute to the general knowledge of teaching. He also saw doing research (when he was able to do so) as a preparation if one wants pursue further education (i.e. PhD studies).

Research as being self-driven

When asked what led them to do the research they were doing, or wanted to do when they have time in the future, all participants highlighted “own interest”, “own wish”, “own passion” as the main motive. Some participants acknowledged they did, or would do, research as their fulfilment of the university’s required task (Minh; Phong), but at the same time they emphasised it is only part of the reason.

It’s a task from the University so I think I need to fulfil what is required. But equally I am urged by my teaching realities. (Minh)

Indeed, as suggested by faculty’s accounts on their research ideas and visions, the intentions for research are indeed primarily triggered by a genuine personal wish to either understand something, to try out something new, or to find a solution to a problem. For some who already had conference experience, especially outside the university, conducting research and presenting it also means a learning opportunity.

Satisfying one’s self is perceived to be essential and even one of the deciding factors in teacher research engagement. Chau looked for “small innovations” to reflect on and try out in her classes when she felt “dissatisfied” with her own teaching. Similarly, Anh said she could not find a research question because simply she was
not motivated. Kim and Phuong gave a more straightforward viewpoint when they concluded research could only be done if, and when, faculty are self-aware of its importance and have a passion for it.

These accounts, politically correct as they may sound, in many ways accord with the earlier findings when participants spoke about their conceptions of desired research, which in turn are in line with their proposed research projects and questions. Their research interests indicate that faculty are inspired and driven primarily by a genuine interest to understand and improve their teaching.

Research as a collaborative practice

The research that faculty aspired to do was also characterised as a collaborative practice where they can exchange ideas and learn from each other. Their expectations about the real meanings of research were revealed as participants spoke of different research activities they had experienced.

Sharing ideas with colleagues was what Vy enjoyed about her first conference experience, which was an international one.

I felt anxious at first. But the atmosphere turned out to be quite friendly and sharing. No criticism. Rather, we discussed ideas. Some professors also engagingly shared with the audience about their research. I found it a good opportunity to discuss with colleagues about professional issues and share some of our common language interests. (Vy)

Also emphasising the collegial nature of research, Phong described how his views were widened after attending a conference.

It’s one thing to read and research by oneself, but in conferences we can see how an issue can be looked at from various perspectives. After a conference I always felt I need to learn more and try things out more in my teaching. (Phong)

As indicated from these excerpts, teachers longed for research as a collegial scholarly activity of sharing and learning. Research is not simply an individual activity but faculty feel the need to be in a professional community who share common interests and concerns, and where they become more inspired and motivated.

8.2 Faculty’s standpoints of management mechanisms

In Chapter 7, the personnel management policies and mechanisms at Dominus University and Foreign Languages Department were studied. The following section of this chapter explores ELT faculty’s views of these policy practices.
8.2.1 Recruitment policies towards a holistic self

The question about the entry requirements was asked to the group of younger faculty members (five participants) who have recently undergone the university’s recruitment process.

When asked which qualities they think the employer (the university and the department) was looking for through recruitment procedures, participants identified a set of expectations. Besides explicit requirements such as teaching qualifications, English competency, teaching skills, computer skills (tested through standardised benchmarks), more implicit knowledge and competencies were elaborated by participants especially when they spoke of the IQ test, the teaching statement essay, and the interview. These implicit competencies, which some teachers called “soft skills”, are understood as teachers’ flexibility and self-criticality, and work commitment.

Teachers’ flexibility and self-criticality in processing information and dealing with classroom situations were asserted by participants as one important quality desired by the university and the department. Long commented on the way the department’s teaching demonstration was administered.

I think the committee preferred the Communicative Approach, and they also want to see how teachers react to teaching situations. Because I’ve noticed the email stating the requirements for the demonstration was only sent out just the day before. This means they want to test teachers’ adaptation and flexibility to be able to prepare a good lesson at short notice. They want to test how teachers react to situations. I think this requirement is a good thing for teachers since classroom incidents are always unexpected. (Long)

Teacher work commitment is the second quality identified by participants as a prominent expectation from the university and the department of candidates. According to faculty, this expectation is most articulated through the job interviews, and they can realise it through the employer’s questions about professional development planning, career development, and teacher contribution: “I was asked what career path I want to follow” (Thu); “The Department asked about my attitude towards the teaching career, while the University committee asked in what field I want to prove myself in the future” (Minh); “I was asked why I choose teaching as my career, and what I think I can contribute to the work” (Huy).

In addition to these two key expectations, other qualities were mentioned. One teacher, Kim, spoke about what she thought was expected out of the interview and the essay writing.
I think they look for a teacher who can also do non-teaching work such as extra-curriculum activities and research – a multi-tasked teacher. [...] The essay asks about our teaching beliefs and also some theoretical knowledge. (Kim)

Overall, teachers expressed their agreement towards the University’s requirements articulated in recruitment policies, especially the expectations for academic staff to be flexible and self-critical. For instance, most teachers stated the purposes of the IQ test are to evaluate candidates’ “logical mind” and “problem solving” (Huy); “quick reaction and flexibility” (Kim; Minh), “information processing ability” (Thu; Minh), which they agreed is helpful for teachers (and all other professions, as Minh put it). These sets of attributes are viewed as necessary competencies for teachers since in their work they have to process (and instruct students to process) a great amount of “scientific information” (Thu; Minh). It also serves as a useful basis for faculty to deal with classroom incidents and develop their lessons (Kim; Huy; Minh). In this case, a low IQ will become a pressure for faculty (Thu). Participants appeared to trust the reliability and validity of the IQ test, stating it was conducted by a professional company.

8.2.2 Performance management mechanisms: the soft power

As discussed in Chapter 7, the mechanisms for staff performance appraisal at FL Department were described by managers as including class observation, student evaluation, teaching portfolio, and performance reward titles. When invited to talk about how their work is currently monitored and evaluated, most teacher participants, however, mentioned only student evaluation and class observation. Meanwhile, teaching portfolio and performance reward titles system (which is the official appraisal mechanism), did not seem to play a visibly significant role since they hardly came up during participants’ talks. Very few teachers mentioned performance reward titles, and one who did comment that it is “just a formality, since when the academic year ends, everybody gets Lao động tiên tiến” (Linh). Similarly, teaching portfolio was referred to by only two participants as a quality assurance mechanism.

_class observation: a learning experience rather a work appraisal instrument_

Although class observation was identified by participants as a management tool, it was also perceived as an approach used by the department to facilitate staff development.

Class observation is a means to monitor work to see how we teach and whether the knowledge required in the syllabus has been sufficiently covered. But it’s
more than a management tool: it provides lots of support, since after the observation we always have discussions with constructive feedback. (Linh)

From faculty’s viewpoints, class observation is instead an opportunity when interactive discussions take place between the observed and observers about the lesson so that “we share insights with each other” (Kim) to help improve teaching competence (Long; Minh; Phuong; Anh; Phong). Moreover, class observation is seen as a professional exchange that both sides – the observed and observers, mutually benefit from. For both senior and novice teachers, class observation is a learning experience. Linh, an experienced teacher, said if she wanted to improve herself, then an obvious choice to her would be to observe her colleagues’ lessons to be inspired with new ideas. From an observee’s perspective, Huy described the event as being supportive and helpful as younger staff members like him can work on possible weaknesses. Participants valued the informal, friendly, interactive aspect of the activity. Describing their experience, they used verbs such as “share”, “facilitate”, “support”, “converse”, “constructive feedback”, and “improve each other”.

When it comes to class observation as a management instrument to evaluate work performance, participants seem to give less enthusiastic comments. The activity is perceived as being inaccurate when its results are used to evaluate teacher work. Phong expressed his concerns about the observation checklist and when the results from the checklist are converted into points.

I think this fails to work as an evaluation. People only look at the numbers and not what these numbers really mean… The numbers themselves show nothing… I would like to know what is behind the point 6 or point 7… what the teacher really did… You can’t just look at point 7 and say he or she is incompetent… (Phong)

Some even regarded the evaluation as a kind of administrative formality (Long; Phuong).

They may do the observation at random. They also match my teaching against some criteria, and if I add something new to the lesson they do see it as being creative. But really I think they observe classes because they have to write reports. (Phuong)

The data thus reveal at present faculty at FL Department largely perceive, and enjoy, class observation mainly as a teaching improvement mechanism. The activity brings about insights into their own work and enables reflection. As the findings suggest, participants showed their appreciation towards the activity mostly through what happens in the post-observation session with interactive discussions, rather than its
appraisal aspect conducted with checklists and reports. There is a strong sense from teacher accounts that class observation does not generate much pressure and stress for them seeing the activity as a chance for self-reflection and self-directed learning (Yürekli, 2013), in this case for both the observers and observees. The relaxing atmosphere and the supportive approach by the management described by participants regarding the observation may attribute to why they see it more as a collegial activity than a hierarchical appraisal tool.

Participants also recognised the fact class observation is a means employed by the department to monitor their performance, even though they do not see it as playing a key role. Because this monitoring currently is conducted “moderately and friendly”, in an “informal” way (Long), faculty showed their compliance towards it. However, they questioned its value and validity if the tool becomes an official performance appraisal. Their comments indicate an aspiration for a monitoring and evaluation process conducted towards staff development. In this sense, class observation seems to be an instrument that has effectively fulfilled its assumed aims and purposes of providing support for novice teachers and offering help to those who experience problems (Randall & Thornton, 2001). If done merely by tickling the list for the purpose of reporting, then teacher observation, as participants pointed out, is only a meaningless formality of little help to teaching. Also, if quantified, the activity’s supportive nature will be lost and it becomes an inaccurate appraisal tool.

**Student evaluation**

When invited to talk about student evaluation, participants were generally positive about the practice, acknowledging it as a normal, necessary tool. Faculty showed no resistance towards the idea they are evaluated by students, even though this, as commented by one younger teacher, “might not be a quite pleasant experience to some of us, especially the seniors, with strong beliefs in our traditions” (Thu).

On the one hand, participants saw student feedback as a source providing insights into learning so that they can adjust their teaching. “It’s a channel, among others, to collect feedback so we can reflect on and correct our weaknesses” (Thu; Kim; Huy) and to find out about students’ needs (Phong). For some, student evaluation, especially as it has now been conducted online and anonymously in Dominus University, has become even a work reward, bringing them joy and satisfaction when being highly rated and praised, since “the feedback is objective” and “this means students acknowledge my efforts” (Huy; Linh). However, all participants stressed this is only one source of feedback. For the purpose of fine-tuning teaching, teachers processed the evaluations in combination with the aims and requirements of the syllabus, with classroom conditions and contexts, and with their own beliefs about language learning and teaching. One participant (Linh) said she often consulted with colleagues about this information before taking actions about her
teaching (e.g. adjustment, correction, redesigning).

On the other hand, all teachers accepted student evaluation as an obvious part of their work. Being evaluated by students is perceived as part of teacher professional responsibility to provide the best teaching possible, while students, as faculty asserted, have the right to evaluate those who provide them with teaching.

I don’t see it [student evaluation] as a heavy pressure. It’s just part of the work. It comes naturally, just like after every course I design my own feedback form and distribute it to my students to evaluate my own teaching. Now it’s my students who evaluate, and that’s fine. (Linh)

Sometimes I do feel uneasy, but really teaching is our job, and evaluating is their [the University’s, students’] job. As long as we do our job well so that there are no complaints, that’s all right. (Phuong)

Students pay so that we can teach in the classroom, so they have the right to give comments about us; they have the right to speak out in case they think we failed to meet their needs. (Minh)

Here it can be seen that faculty had a clear vision of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and students in the teaching and learning process. They seem to have left behind the Confucian-heritage mindset that promotes a somewhat hierarchical relationship between teachers and students. Student evaluation is now perceived as an opportunity for students to express their views, and as the comments above reveal, this is recognised because students are regarded by faculty as both learners and consumers (Titus, 2008). However, since there were only two participants who explicitly mentioned student right to evaluate as being resulted from their paying (Vy; Minh), it seems the concept student-as-learner is more prominent than student-as-consumer.

Indeed, as the interviews went on, it was clearer that although teachers welcomed student evaluation, they would only do this if the results are used to inform the improvement of teaching and learning. Participants recognised the right of students to voice their views, but considered this as an additional feedback channel rather than a factor that decides their pedagogical practices. Thu called what happened in her classroom a “negotiation” where the teacher discusses and negotiates learning goals and approaches with students, rather than letting students’ preferences take over her pedagogy. For Phong, student evaluation is necessary but he believed the teacher should still take charge in a way.

I will not just follow what my students demand but will look into their feedback and comments to find out what they really need. I may change or be persistent
accordingly, but mostly I believe I’m able to convince them [of what is good for their learning]. (Phong)

Also, participants showed resistance if the practice becomes an instrument to evaluate their effectiveness and competency. The reason most cited explaining these views concerns the reliability and validity of the implementation of the evaluation, since the results are quantified into percentage (with lecturers considered “satisfactory” if receiving a score of at least 70 percent). There were concerns about potential bias responses, as well as about the design and framing of the questionnaires. For instance, Phong spoke about why student evaluation may not be an effective tool that provides a true picture of realities.

Students may feedback the teacher didn’t use ICT, but the fact is there were no ICT facilities in that particular classroom… So instead of reprimanding teachers, management should find out the reasons and support them. Also, if I’m more easy-going than teacher X so I get a higher student rate it doesn’t mean I’m teaching better than him… (Phong)

The findings in this part reflect the results of the study by Rienties (2014) about academics being positive to student evaluation only when it is employed to improve teaching and learning and not to serve promotion/demotion decisions. At the same time, the findings reveal that at the moment academics at FL department, although accepting the practice, refused to take the information as being normative. The comments from Phong above mirror faculty’s scepticism about the validity of student feedback as a mechanism to appraise teacher performance and competencies. It also reveals an aspiration from teachers to be fairly treated and timely supported, and these can only be achieved with accurate and fair interpretations of information – which, according to them, a quantified tool may fail to serve.

This section has presented and discussed FL Department academics’ viewpoints towards management mechanisms. Overall, faculty currently conceived their work as being monitored and managed by a kind of “soft power”, and they all showed a quite relaxing attitude towards this. When class observation and student evaluation were talked of, the two practices were referred to with a positive note. They are regarded as a support rather than a source of discontent and pressure. At present, it seems faculty members enjoyed the space they have for their work. Indeed, when asked how their work is currently monitored, most participants could not identify right away a certain management tool. Some even said they felt their work is hardly controlled by management. The work environment is still perceived by most as being collegial and supportive. However, academics did note their concerns about the ways these supportive mechanisms can be misconstrued and thus negatively affect their work, within the increasing influence of monitoring and surveillance systems.
8.3 Discussion

8.3.1 University ELT: an academics’ or a practitioners’ profession?

With the dominance of teaching and the modest presence of activities termed as “research”, ELT academics’ work life can be described as being teaching-oriented. On the one hand, the results suggest how teaching workloads may cut into the time for research, similar to findings from other studies (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2009). Most teachers in the department teach far beyond their contractual hours, plus the private tutoring which often takes place out of hours, even in the evening. One teacher who has 10 classes a term (30 hours/week), together with her several private language classes, called herself in the interview a “teaching machine”. On the other hand, the findings illustrate the fact language teachers’ involvement in research “remains limited”. As the data show, research remains a foreign concept and is viewed as an unfeasible activity – one result which has been found common among ELT teachers (Borg, 2013). In several earlier studies on ELT academics, both in English-speaking and in Vietnamese universities, faculty members’ low motivation and engagement in research and CPD has been noted (Pham Hoa Hiep, 2006; Allison & Carey, 2007; Vu Mai Trang, 2011).

ELT academics’ favour of the MA degree as a fitter coat than the PhD, at the same time, reminds us of the factor argued as contributing to the “second-class” status of ELT if compared to other occupations. In the literature, the level of formal qualifications of ELT teachers has been viewed to be lower than those in other disciplines. Fifteen years ago, Nunan (2001) observed that the majority of ELT teachers did not often own advanced qualifications. Today, it seems ELT teachers have been better credentialed, with more possessing master’s degrees in TEFL/TESOL. In his research conducted among 496 ELT teachers (of all education levels) in 13 countries, Borg (2009) reports that 31 percent have postgraduate qualifications. The number of teachers holding the doctorate remains limited at only 3.4 percent. For ELT in higher education, Vazquez, Guzmán, & Roux (2013) report a proportion of 56 percent of the Mexican ELT staff of the department they studied holding master’s degrees and 8 percent doctoral degrees.

The “Master’s threshold” as promoted by participants indeed can be insufficient and brings back the issue Nunan (2001) questioned about the status of ELT as a semi-profession, especially in the contemporary HE in Vietnam when the qualification bar for university lecturers in general has been raised. In fact, in Dominus University’s recruitment announcement, it can be noted that half of the disciplines expect applicants to have a PhD degree, while the other half require a master’s degree as the minimum standard. English language teaching falls into the latter half, which an MA, rather than a PhD, in TEFL/TESOL/Applied Linguistics is the entry qualification requirement. For individual academics, meanwhile, this ignites the concern about
their self-perception of career. As seen in the interviews, ELT academics held that the master’s degree is the qualification that qualifies them for the work, thus they appear to see their professional learning and development as being more practice-based than research-oriented. The connection between a sound theoretical knowledge base with strong research skills and everyday practices (Freidson, 2001) is vague, while the PhD still remains even a luxury when considering teaching realities. As the interviews reveal, the biggest value participants pointed out they got out of the master’s course is “professional knowledge”, while research is a rather distant target.

At the same time, the interviews indicate that participants have a quite low awareness of career advancement. With their main concerns revolving around teaching work while viewing research as an unfeasible activity, most of them did not appear interested in acquiring formal accreditations as career milestones: possessing an MA’s degree is seen as “good enough” while a PhD is held as a vision.

The results also show academics’ “double life” having a second job alongside their university position. Although private tutoring is not part of teachers’ formal teaching duties, that they spend a significant amount of time for this work has implications not only for the quality of their work at the university but also for the meaning of their career. Indeed, academic pay has been reported to be lagged behind that of many other professionals, and that academics moonlighting from a second job has been found to be increasing in countries across the world (Welch, 2011; Altbach et al., 2012). Within academic institutions, ELT teachers earn less than teachers in other disciplines (e.g. Stanley, 2016 on Australian universities). In Vietnam, the rise of English language position in the society led to an increase in demand for private tutoring at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary, and adult education), which is also observed in countries where English is a foreign language, for example Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Korea (Hamid, Sussex, & Khan, 2009), and in Slovakia (Kubanyiova, 2012). That university English language teachers are either on part-time contracts for language centres or provide private tutoring is a common situation (e.g. Pham Hoa Hiep, 2006). Also, it is often the case teachers establish and run their own private centres alongside their full-time work in a state school or university. Most teachers at FL Department have taught, or are teaching, in language centres, and two of them have their own small teaching businesses. In this way, private English tutoring has become a force that competes with teachers’ main university work in terms of the time and efforts invested. Regarding this issue, scholars have raised questions about how work components may clash as academics split focus and interests, for example this may have an impact on the quality of faculty main work (Welch, 2011; Altbach et al., 2012). In this way, it seems difficult for ELT academics to be able to consider their work, one that fails to provide enough to live on and which they cannot devote all time and efforts into doing, as a career (Freidson, 2001). In terms of the profession’s status in the labour market, its low earning has also ignited the question of whether ELT is a “second-class”/“economy-class” profession (Stanley, 2016).
8.3.2 Teaching-oriented professionalism vs. Research-oriented professionalism

Considering that ELT academics perceive their work as a teaching-oriented occupation, the existence of a dilemma in their conceptualising professionalism as having a teaching nature and a research nature seems to be comprehensible.

On the one hand, as emerged from the interviews, the concept is primarily conceived by participants as a set of qualities of subject knowledge and pedagogical competence. Most of the interviewed agreed teacher solid subject knowledge, or in this case, English language proficiency, is pivotal, especially for the benefits of students. The professional teacher must be “excelling in his/her subject” (Chau) and the pool of knowledge should exceed immediate expectations (“It’s not we know one and we teach one; rather, we teach one but we have to know ten”, Linh). These accounts also imply a desire for teacher continuous learning and self-improvement. Meanwhile, pedagogical competence is highlighted as an integral, if not the most important, constituent part of professionalism. Pedagogical competence is expressed as teacher’s ability to create the best learning environment. Most participants held that the professional teacher uses different methods and techniques to engage students, making them understand and enjoy the lesson; the teacher should have “a charm for teaching” and is friendly, patient, enthusiastic, and approachable. Several participants mentioned the purpose of teaching: the professional teacher must help his/her students achieve the required standard/end point (Long; Vy), but she/he also has the mission of inspiring students to be independent (“We not only transfer knowledge but the ultimate goal is to give them a fishing rod so they can catch the fish themselves”, Chau). The importance ELT academics attach to pedagogical competence is also revealed through their argument on how the English language proficiency test should not be the only tool to assess a teacher’s capability.

On the other hand, the data suggest an aspiration of ELT academics for a professionalism defined by research competencies. Although research activities are currently not, as reported by participants, taking up the central place in their work life, the issue of research engagement emerged from their discussions as a necessary professional element. When asked to define professionalism, half of the participants mentioned research as an almost obvious part of the notion. As mentioned earlier, research was formulated by teachers as self-reflecting on teaching, reading journals and books, and exchanging ideas with colleagues. The link between research and teaching was emphasised. Thus doing research is for knowledge development and primarily for teaching improvement. In other words, research competence as an element of professionalism is seen as being closely connected to both subject content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.

Within ELT academics’ perception of professionalism as being defined by research, there was more than one conceptualisation constructed out of “research” itself. In the literature, the word research as an academic practice has been found to have a wide
set of associations. In different disciplines the on-going discussions on the definition of research and its nature have revolved around various issues. For instance, in law, the questions raised include whether academic legal research should have a vocational orientation that serves the needs of practising lawyers, or whether it should be of an academic orientation drawing on other disciplines (Cownie, 2012). In creative disciplines such as art and design, the subject of the debate is the form of research: whether it should be kept unconscious and creative, or if it should be “formalised” to be similar to science research that is verbal and goal-oriented (Trowler, 2012b).

Research in the field of ELT has commonly been understood as teacher research – research inspired by classroom situations and conducted by teachers themselves. This dates back to the 1980s when the primary focus of language teaching was mostly on specific techniques to enhance learning (Borg, 2013). The promotion of teacher research also reflects the aspiration to bridge the gap between teacher-researcher nexus and between practical and theoretical knowledge (Freeman, D., 1996). Terms such as “local, classroom-based research”, “practitioner research”, “practical inquiry”, “practical knowledge”, “action research”, “reflective practice”, “exploratory practice” have been employed to characterise ELT (e.g. Freeman, D., 1996; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Burns, 2010; Borg, 2013). However, regarding the purposes of research in ELT, it has been argued that teacher research should go beyond being action research that aims at addressing a problem to improve classrooms and schools (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Burns, 2010) and move one step further to be exploratory practice that focuses on understanding rather than just problem solving (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2015).

In terms of research practices, Borg’s (2013) empirical data indicate that language teachers’ “engagement with research” (teachers acting as consumers who read and use research) is more popular than their “engagement in research” when they actually do it. A related concept pair is “formal” and “informal” research activities (e.g. Pham Hoa Hiep, 2006; Borg, 2013). Formal research is described as academic inquiries realised as projects with reported results. In the Vietnam context, a formal project is funded either by institutions or the ministry, and staff undergo procedures such as submitting a proposal, getting approved by a committee, and presenting results in oral and written forms. Meanwhile, informal research involves informal practices such as collaborative oral reflections, observations, investigating and trying some ideas to one’s interests and without a tangible product at the end to be judged. It has been found that ELT teachers are more engaged with research with informal activities rather than being active in formal research (e.g. Pham Hoa Hiep, 2006; Borg, 2013).

With these features, research in ELT can be characterised, using Cownie’s (2012) ideas, as serving primary vocational purposes rather than having an academic orientation. Employing these conceptualisations of research to read my data, the
research culture at present at FL Department has a practical, practitioner nature of teacher research. As the data have shown, the research activities the majority of the participants reported they engaged in are mostly reading and using research rather than creating new knowledge. In other words, they are more active in engagement with research than engagement in research (Borg, 2013). The research embraced is an informal one – it primarily involves reflective practices without a tangible end-product. Interestingly, most participants did not acknowledge this as research – they neither included these activities as their research work nor explicitly defined them as research. Instead, participants referred to another (ideal) image of research with more formal activities such as pursuing PhD studies, attending conferences, and writing and presenting research reports. It is this formal research that is counted by participants as real “research”, without doing which means there is no research taking place at all. These results resonate with Borg’s (2013) study which finds out most language teachers explained their lack of engagement in research by saying they did do research but not of the formal kind.

As such, ELT academics hold a dual interpretation of research. On the one hand, research to them means formal activities that involve, for example, proper methodology and dissemination, which are, as they expressed, at the moment unfamiliar and inaccessible thus irrelevant to ELT teachers. On the other hand, they embraced a kind of research that is more teacher-friendly – one that associates with teacher everyday work. ELT teachers’ two conceptualisations of research hence have quite separate, even contrasting features. However, despite their hesitation towards doing formal research, participants also articulated this research is necessary and even forms part of their identity as university lecturers. In other words, they desire for this ideal type of research.

The results also shed lights on ELT academics’ beliefs about what fosters research. As emerged from the data, teachers’ genuine passion and interests for research are highlighted as the key factor that motivates their research engagement, whether it is engagement with research or in research. This factor seems to create a sense of ownership for teachers with their research. During the interviews, participants identified reasons that hinder them from conducting research, including lack of time due to heavy teaching workload, lack of research skills, and low level of interests and motivation. These findings, on the one hand, support earlier studies on research engagement among ELT academics in Vietnam and in other countries (e.g. Pham Hoa Hiep, 2006; Allison & Carey, 2007; Barkhuizen, 2009; Bai & Hudson, 2011; Vu Mai Trang, 2011; Borg, 2013). On the other hand, the findings provide further insights into what seems to be the main reason that discourages faculty from research: “Research” to many of them remains something irrelevant to their work life – it is either a “formality” or a “too distant” practice. This perspective appears to be formulated mostly from their actual experience of the research culture in Dominus University. This conceptualisation of research is also influenced by the fact that many
of them have hardly actually conducted research, which explained their vague view seeing research as something beyond their abilities and even intimidating. This comment from teacher Vy about how her attending a conference changed her view of research illustrates this.

After my first conference presentation I felt more confident about doing research. Before, I was quite diffident – I thought research means something very grand. But the conference’s atmosphere was quite open. So I think actually research means we are intrigued by an issue. Then we read and explore more about that issue, and we bring it out and discuss it with others. (Vy)

The thought expressed by Vy also reflects what others perceived: along with their conception of research as a too distant element that mostly comes “from above” and of little connection to their work, they also have a different view – or their own vision, of research as being relevant and teacher-friendly. Both forms of teacher research engagement – engagement with research and in research, as participants saw it, should be triggered by a genuine desire to understand and improve one’s teaching practices (Borg, 2013). Also, teachers showed their expectations for research as a learning opportunity, especially in their professional community, that they can own. Throughout the interviews, there was a strong assertion from participants promoting this ownership and being an active player in their research – which to them is the motivation fuelling their research engagement.

8.3.3 Responding and internalising

The results have provided insights into the increased diversification and complexities of university English teaching and revealed the pressures ELT academics have as they are pulled towards different forces and interests, and split their concentrations and efforts satisfying these demands. Facing these pressures, teachers find their ways to respond and even internalise what are required of them.

Professionalism, as constructed by ELT academics, besides being underpinned by research, is characterised by a spirit of professional responsibilities. Professional responsibilities are identified by participants as work manners, work commitment, and to a lesser extent, community responsibilities.

Work manners appear to be a significant component building up the notion of professionalism. Professional manners, according to most interviewees, are expressed as faculty completing administrative paperwork (e.g. preparing teaching portfolio, syllabus, and teaching plans) and understanding and complying with institutional regulations. Also, professional manners are articulated as the way teachers respect students (“He/she shouldn’t break his/her promises to students”, Linh). In other words, a professional teacher must be a teacher of discipline and
principles who hold responsibilities to others, whether they are employers, students or themselves (Kim).

However, the issue of teacher responsibilities to one’s community – either professional or social – was discussed by only one teacher (Minh), who also commented this aspect of professionalism seems to be rarely observed in teachers.

It’s the responsibility to the work, to the community, to the department. As it goes now teachers sometimes concentrate too much on their individual needs and work and fail to contribute wholeheartedly to the common cause, or even completely ignore it. [...] If we’re good at something then why don’t we share it with our division or department so others can become better? Also, if we’re good in one domain, that doesn’t guarantee we’re good at other domains. When we share with others, they will share back with us. Developing a sense of responsibility helps us feel more attached to our work and our workplace. Although it is not a pivotal element it is a necessary one making up our professionalism. (Minh)

The professional responsibility Minh was describing covers one’s contributions to the common cause both as an academic and a member of an institution, which to him is what teachers generally lack. Teachers should spread out their expertise to benefit others in their professional community. Also, the professional should act for the organisation’s common goals besides their individual goals.

That professionalism is associated with responsibilities shows how academics respond to their contexts. Further than that, in interacting with external discourses, they even make use of them. Overall teachers have a quite positive attitude towards the management mechanisms put in place for the organisation and evaluation of their own work. For example, their opinions seeing increased work intensifying as being beneficial in terms of learning new knowledge and skills indicate this. Likewise, faculty’s views acknowledging the “two sides of the story” regarding the English proficiency benchmark test express how they respond to policies. Participants’ accounts have revealed the struggles where faculty faced the fact they had fallen short of the required standards, the resentment of being at the point where they have no choice but to meet the benchmark, the fear for a poor future security, and the obligation to maintain the quality of other workload. Nevertheless, the data indicate that while policies caused stress and pressure, they were also perceived by participants as having certain benefits to offer.

For example, participants talked about having to follow the standards.

It’s obvious that we need some kind of proof we can show to the society. So if is a request in general I’d try to meet it. Also, I personally think once we’re teaching
in a university our competencies need to be at a particular level so we can teach our students. (Kim)

In this way, Kim was internalising the standardisation with her own values and priorities, which is also evident in the following accounts from Chau and Huy about how teachers’ own standards should meet the externally required standards.

If there’s no such standardisation, teachers must have already set a standard themselves. (Chau)

First the standard must be at a level that the teacher him/herself is happy with. Then it should be the one accepted by who directly work with us, who are students. Next, it is accepted by other stakeholders who use our competencies and skills. (Huy)

In this implementation of policy, thus, faculty, though not without discomfort, are aware of their being under the watch of different players: students, employers, and the society. They come to terms with policies, but at the same time they emphasise that this acceptance is also generated from an inner professional need.

The findings offer yet another illustration of how ELT teachers sustain themselves and identify priorities while being in a broader context of change. There have always been competing stories/tension for teachers between working to meet the needs of students and helping students making “enough” progress to mandated standards, and reaching authorised goals set for teachers themselves (Boone, Cutri, & Pinnegar, 2016). The results also add to prior research on how EFL teachers see changes not only as challenges but also advantages. For example, in a narrative study, Ingvarsdóttir (2016) asserts that the new requirements for EFL teachers in Iceland are demanding but as she has to take on an upper level, they also fuelled her own ambition and delight in teaching. It can be noted from her reflective account that the more competencies and skills she acquires, the greater autonomy she has – from just covering the textbook to having research projects initiated, or “owned”, by herself. She has turned from an “outsider” to “becoming a professional” with contentment, confidence, freedom with “new horizon”. In this way, it can be said that ELT academics, perhaps having no choice, make use of policies and mandated change as opportunities for self-actualisation.

8.3.4 Academic autonomy and professional responsibility

Throughout the interviews, a reoccurring theme is that teachers showed a strong belief in professional autonomy. All participants asserted what guides them in their work is their own values and a sense of responsibility rather than acting under an
authority pressure – something which is termed by Craig (2013) as “teacher’s best-loved self” referring to how teachers, while abiding by regulations and policies, manage to have discretionary spaces to enact their professional values and beliefs.

With this light guiding their way, it appears somehow comprehensible that being under monitoring and evaluation is viewed by teachers as part of their work. For example, participants commented on how they did not regard classroom observation and student evaluation as sources of stress and pressure.

Actually for me being observed doesn’t matter much… The division or the department can just come to my class whenever they want. I don’t need to be informed in advance. So they can see our teaching as it is – what advantages and what difficulties we have. (Phuong)

Student evaluation is just another kind of feedback – now in the form of scores and rates. So it’s not a big deal for me. (Linh)

These comments indicate teachers’ confidence in self-efficiency and competencies, and perhaps in the rightness of what they are doing in the classroom (making efforts in bringing the best learning experience to students). This is the principle guiding their work, as reported by all participants. These may be what give them the strength to state their views on the conditions for being managed and evaluated: the management and evaluation must be fairly conducted, with sufficient attention to staff development.

This perspective and attitude continued to be expressed as participants were invited to talk about future management mechanisms such as the KPIs (Key Performance Indices). Although most of them admitted they did not know much about this tool and its implementation, the majority regarded it as a necessary mechanism for staff development and quality assurance. Similar to their views about other management instruments, faculty commented they would not mind being assessed, as long as the assessment is valid and fair. Most recognised their compliance with this policy as part of their professional responsibility towards the university and even the society at large. Participants were worried, however, about the quantified nature of the tool, since this would, according to them, promote quantity rather than quality, especially in areas such as research and teaching.

These findings in this section resonate with earlier empirical studies showing that facing introduced changes, teachers’ responses are not simply a reaction of embracing or rejecting; rather, the reaction takes place as a process where they integrate and mediate to fit with existing practice and contextual factors (e.g. Sikes, 2006; Turner, 2006; Clifford, 2012; Lea & Callaghan, 2012; Gonzales, 2014). As emerged from the interviews, participants revealed their perspectives towards university ELT teaching as a complex, dynamic process informed by various vectors:
the subjects, the students/contexts, and themselves. The data also suggest that despite increasing external controls, this process is driven by students’ needs. It is a process the success of which, as faculty saw it, depends on learners’ language proficiency and motivation more heavily than the teaching of other disciplines. In this process, teachers attend more to students’ needs and to be flexible to classroom situations, or in other words, to be more student-centred. In the words of Clifford’s (2012, p.203), ELT academics are practising an “interactive pedagogy” when they attend to students’ needs and differences.

The process can thus be re-termed as a responsive pedagogy when teachers not only attempt to meet students’ needs but also show a strong sense of understanding and ownership of their practices – they actively respond to others and to themselves. The results show with their adjusting and negotiating in teaching practices, ELT academics on the one hand attempt to push students through the system of policies, benchmarks, and requirements. They also accommodate what they perceive as students’ needs and demands. On the other hand, they manage to push themselves through the system as well, fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as the employees of the organisation.

8.4 Chapter conclusion

The chapter has provided a portrayal of professionalism from a faculty perspective. Overall, ELT academics’ definition of professionalism can be imagined as having a teaching orientation as it is primarily cast on three domains of knowledge and skills, competencies, and qualities: subject content knowledge – which is English proficiency, pedagogical competencies, and professional responsibilities. Research also forms part of the concept, but teachers argued for a teaching-oriented, practical, informal kind of research, drawing on several rationales such as this kind of research is more relevant and accessible to them. However, teachers also aspire for the formal form of research, claiming they do not do it only because the current conditions do not allow them to, and not because they deny this kind of research.

The chapter has also revealed that ELT teachers’ conceptualisation of professionalism concerns mostly their immediate environment. This is demonstrated through their definition of research as classroom-based problem-solving. The data suggest teachers valued work commitment, but this commitment primarily involves their relationship with students – their key priority is to meet student needs. Some of them considered their role in the relationship with employers, which is seen through their mentioning of professional responsibilities (compliance with rules and regulations), but the level of engagement with the wider discourses, including the professional community and social causes, remains limited.

Throughout the results of this chapter, dual conceptions of teacher professionalism as realities and ideals exist, for example, between teacher earning credentials as a
pressure and a professional development opportunity, between a teaching-oriented professionalism and research-oriented professionalism, and between research as a formal and as an informal kind. These dual conceptions of professionalism on the one hand provide insights into how ELT academics bring forward their arguments and rationales for their definition of professionalism, and on the other hand reveal their aspirations for the ideal professionalism.

In this way, it can be said that for ELT academics, their construction of professionalism is characterised by a dilemma between two worlds: practitioners and academics, external pressures and internal values, visions and realities. On the one hand, ELT teachers argued for a professionalism of a rather practical, practitioner nature that they can afford. On the other hand, they aspire for a professionalism of a better status and recognition defined by research and formal qualifications and accreditations, which at the moment is described to be distant. All participants showed an awareness of their professional responsibilities to their students and the institution. However, professionalism, as perceived by teachers, must be one that is not framed in mandated boundaries of imposition. Abiding by rules and regulations, they at the same time claim that they refuse to act as passive players; rather, they keep integrity with external imperatives while maintaining their discretionary spaces. Through participants’ accounts, it can be seen that professional values and teacher’s best-loved self are those that embraced by teachers as the guiding principles for their work. At the same time, nevertheless, teachers show a high level of awareness towards a sense of professional responsibility, which encompasses responding (though without being submissive) and fulfilling their roles to different stakeholders. Thus, the construction of professionalism is not simply a “from above” or “from within” process but resulted from a dynamic interdependence among teachers and their wider discourses. The analysis results add in the literature on teachers’ agentic reactions to contextual factors. For example, Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller (2012) discuss teacher agency in curriculum-making as they use iterational (previous history), projective (aspirations for education) and practical-evaluative (present conditions) elements to form and exercise agency in teaching. This analysis provides further insights into how academics not only fit external demands and ideologies with their own beliefs and professional selves but actually construct, and even reconstruct, a meaningful framework around their beliefs and practices. Yet by attaching meaning to their work obligations, they try to avoid betraying their teaching values and beliefs while still satisfying professional needs, both mentally (how-I-feel-about-the-work) and practically (what-I-can-learn-from-the-work). In this way, the analysis is another empirical example illustrating Saunders’s (2012, p.233) observation that academics’ behaviours, in the form of practice, are derived from an ontology of both outside one’s self but also of one’s self.
Chapter 9 Discussion and Conclusion: Logics and politics of professionalism

In each earlier findings chapter (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), discussions have been provided on how professionalism is defined and constructed within different levels. Connecting these observations and findings, this chapter discusses the dynamic, interrelated professionalisation processes of the ELT occupation across the levels and looks into how Freidson’s ideas take up new insights in understanding the notion in contemporary conditions. The chapter also suggests new directions for further research, bringing up the concept of “social contract” as a possible alternative to conceptualise the relationship between different actors in the construction of professionalism. The chapter closes the thesis by discussing the contributions it makes to the areas of education professionalism, including professionalism in ELT, and international education research.

9.1 The amalgam of professionalism: Practical, formal, and tacit knowledge

This section looks at the constituents of professionalism as emerged from Chapters 6, 7 and 8 and analyses the nature of these constituents by employing Freidson’s (2001) categorisation of professional knowledge and specialisations.

In Chapter 6, professionalism as emerging from the analysis of the five Vietnamese national policy documents, which can be dubbed “professionalism (and professionalisation) by the state”, comprises several key areas: subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and skills, research, social responsibility, international collaboration, teacher development, and morality. Subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge – in this case, teacher’s English proficiency and teaching competence – are stressed across the policies as the two knowledge bodies framing the core of professionalism. Related to these two domains, formal education and training, evidenced by academic qualifications and professional credentials are universally emphasised in all policies as professional standards for (ELT) university teachers. However, these areas of professional knowledge are construed differently in the policies, as articulated in the two “flows” of policies: the “authority” policies and the “expert” policies.

By prioritising (English) subject knowledge and teaching competencies articulated as tasks, as well as formal training and research (which implies a theoretical base), professionalism in the “authority” policies is constructed as containing mainly working/practical knowledge – the knowledge needed to accomplishing work, and, to an extent, formal knowledge – the bodies of information and ideas based on theories and abstract concepts (Freidson, 2001). The fact that experience is not prioritised indicates a decreased focus on tacit knowledge. Meanwhile, the proportion of tacit knowledge appears to be larger in the professionalism articulated in the “expert”
policies since they promote teachers’ flexible adaption and critical reflection. However, there exists a prevalence of measurement and functionality in both “authority” and “expert” policy flows that conceptualise teacher knowledge as a hierarchical structure of rankings, codes, domains, competencies, and indicators, and with a preference for teacher work management and standardisation. In this way, university teaching (including ELT teaching) in Vietnam is constructed in policies as being close to a *manual discretionary specialisation* (Freidson, 2001, p.34), which is defined to a large extent as working and practical knowledge. In this type of specialisation, there is space for formal and tacit knowledge – the knowledge more likely to necessitate the exercise of discretion, but still these types of knowledge are regarded secondary to practical knowledge.

With data from a particular university, with its foreign languages department, in Vietnam, Chapter 7 explores “professionalism by the institution”. As manifested through institutional policies and management mechanisms, professionalism presents itself surrounding five pillar areas, and they appear to be construed more profoundly as areas of performance rather than bodies of knowledge and skills. The five areas of professionalism stressed are Teaching, Research, Service, Regulations compliance, and Professional development, and they are formulated mostly into tasks and outcomes that can be monitored, measured, and evaluated. Academic staff, including ELT faculty, are increasingly expected to fulfil professional responsibilities not only in the sphere of their institution but also at a wider scale of the community and society so that the university can achieve its aspiration to be a prestigious institution nationally and internationally.

Through the lens of Freidson’s ideas of types of knowledge, it can be seen that professionalism by the institution also presents itself principally as a set of *working/practical knowledge*. A wide range of qualities are demanded of academic staff, but all these competencies are evidence-based either through official records or referenced testing and evaluation. Professionalism is mostly concretised as a mechanical accumulation of skills and must be functional so that it can be used to serve the organisation’s achieving of their goals and targets. The emphasis that academic staff must obtain the PhD can be regarded as a measure to realise several objectives: it is used as a strategy to increase the institution’s prestige; but it also helps “raise the bar” for the occupation, as can be more prominently seen through the department’s attempts to foster teacher research and professional learning. The professionalism by the institution thus also consists of a proportion of *formal knowledge* expecting academics to base their work on theoretical and abstract backgrounds. Alongside this vision, *tacit knowledge* – or teacher reflection, plays a significant role in defining ELT teacher professionalism at present, as the case of the Foreign Languages Department has shown with their efforts to enhance teacher research engagement. Hence, *manual discretionary specialisation* can also be used to characterise the professionalism by the institution.
Chapter 8 has examined the professionalism by academics as perceived by ELT teachers. The results have shown that ELT academics construe professionalism as comprising two main areas of teaching and research, and to a lesser extent, professional manner (complying with regulations), and service (fulfilling responsibilities that serve institutional interests). Subject knowledge (i.e. English language proficiency) and pedagogical competence are stressed by teachers as the essential elements of professionalism. These bodies of knowledge are argued as helping teachers accomplish their everyday teaching, while forming their identity as university lecturers. The ability to take control of their work while harmonising this with external demands and pressures is depicted as what keeps ELT academics motivated and attached to their work.

Professionalism, as defined by ELT teachers, can, therefore, be described as having practical knowledge and a desire for academics to exercise their tacit knowledge (following one’s own values and beliefs). It can be noted that the presence of formal knowledge does not seem to be pronounced, as revealed when academics offer their arguments for the sufficiency of the MA degree (rather than the PhD) or for the relevance of practical problem-solving research (rather than research that creates new knowledge). In this way, professionalism, as construed by ELT academics, does not fall easily into Freidson’s categorisations. With large proportions of practical knowledge and tacit knowledge yet rather a low emphasis on formal knowledge, this professionalism, on the one hand, can be interpreted as forming the base of an occupation lying somewhere between a mechanical specialisation and a manual discretionary specialisation. On the other hand, the strong sense of self-resilience expressed when teachers respond to external conditions and at the same time trying to adhere to their own professional principles suggests an aspiration for discretion. In other words, ”professionalism by ELT academics” draws on working/practical knowledge and tacit knowledge, rather than formal knowledge, to claim the occupation as a discretionary specialisation.

This section has unravelled the different components making up the anatomy of the three kinds of professionalism construed by the state, the institution, and ELT academics using Freidson’s conceptions of knowledge. While in fact it is not a black and white matter to deconstruct a particular type of professionalism and put its constituents into boxes, applying a systematic framework to understand the nature of its bodies of knowledge has allowed the essential feature of the notion to emerge, and provides the ”substance” for examining the principles – or the ideologies, that underpin these technical elements, which will be discussed in the next section.

9.2 Logics of professionalism, with an “s”

The previous section indicates that with different types of knowledge, professionalism, as formulated by the state authority, can be distinguished from the
one conceptualised by the institution, and in turn, they both differ from professionalism as perceived by academics. Nevertheless, underneath each construction of professionalism lies a dynamic interaction between these actors, although with their own principles.

The results from Chapter 6 on a professionalism that is supposed to be "from above" (constructed by the state) has shown that the making of the notion involves at least two players: the state authority and ELT occupational experts. These two players choose to define professionalism as containing differing types of knowledge and skills, and these approaches reveal a number of tensions: between public administration reforms and professional specialisation acknowledgement; between teacher standardisation and teacher development; and between managerialism and traditional values. Thus, professionalism in Vietnam national HE (ELT) policies consists of several dimensions, promoted by different groups of actors.

Similar to the multi-dimensions found in the professionalism by the state, the plural constituents of professionalism by the institution are conceptualised slightly differently at the institutional level and departmental level, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. At the institutional level, professionalism is expressed as tasks rather than explicit professional knowledge and skills. A minute, detailed approach of management is used towards the control of faculty’s working/practical knowledge and to an extent formal and abstract knowledge, rather than tacit knowledge.

Meanwhile, at the departmental level, teaching and research are identified as the core components of professionalism, but the two areas appear to be conceptualised more in the light of staff development. Staying committed to continuous professional learning is perhaps the most desirable quality the department expects from their academic staff. Teachers are expected to further their formal education and take opportunities for self-learning in all dimensions of their work: in teaching, in-class observation, from student feedback, from self-evaluation, and in doing research. This quality is connected to "learning abroad" and contrasted unfavourably to a Confucian heritage of a subordinate, passive role of learners. The concept of "research" has been redefined at the department as a more teacher-friendly practice closely tied with teachers’ genuine interests for exploration and learning. Research is also seen as the means to gain more prestige for teachers and help them construct their professional identity as university lecturers.

As shown in the analysis in Chapter 8, professionalism by academics can be characterised by their negotiating the dilemmas between realities and aspirations. In almost all areas and dimensions of professional competencies, plural perspectives were offered by academics. For instance, the English proficiency test is construed as a work stress source, but it is at the same time a motivation to move forward. The negotiation also manifests itself through teachers’ arguments towards the tension between practical and tacit knowledge and formal knowledge, as seen in how they view the PhD as a luxury while agreeing it is a career aspiration that sets them
distinct as an academic working in higher education. The dynamics of professionalism anatomy also comes across as the tension between the realities and ideals of professionalism: ELT academics define and argue for one type of professionalism that they can actually afford, while expressing aspirations for another type of professionalism of more formal training, theoretical knowledge bases, and professional collegiality.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the central question in the construction of professionalism has been viewed as the question of power: Who should have the power to decide what counts as professionalism? The conceptualisation of the notion into pairs of “managerial professionalism”/“organisational professionalism” and “occupational professionalism”; and professionalisation “from above” and professionalisation “from within” (McClelland, 1990; Sachs, 2001; Whitty, 2008; Evetts, 2009; Bennich-Björkman, 2013; Hasselberg, 2013) suggests an image of professionalism as a product of either one force or the other – these forces are segregated from each other.

Nevertheless, findings from Chapters 6, 7, and 8, and to an extent, Chapter 4, have provided a picture in which professionalism results from an interaction of different forces, or the contingencies of professionalism (Freidson, 2001). In terms of who actually participate in the process, the data have shown that even within each type of professionalism project – whether it is “from above” or “from within”, several actors are involved rather than a single force. In the construction of the professionalism by the state in the study – which is in principle the product of a professionalisation “from above”, the state is not the only actor engaged in the process. Within each conceptualisation of professionalism at the different levels, the notion proves to be a dynamic composition of constituents with different nuances rather than taking up a static, single meaning. As analysed, the construction of professionalism in the policies is decided by the state, but the policies making also involves ELT experts with their leaning towards occupational values. This illustrates the interactive relationship between the state and profession where the powers to establish and maintain professionalism are delegated by the state to occupational groups (Freidson, 2001, p.139). In the study, the state legitimises its particular construction of professionalism by a managerialism ethos of “efficiency” in connection with the globalisation discourse, but it has also depended on the expertise of those who actually have the specialised knowledge of the profession in shaping its power. At the same time, the findings of a penetration of managerialism into the supposedly “occupational” professionalism promoted by the “expert” policies reveal the politics of ELT expert groups as well. Freidson (2001, p.148) observes that “when professional associations are active in the process of establishing professionalism most cannot be literally representative of ‘the’ profession”, since they may have various interests and cognitive viewpoints. Indeed, Wharton (1995) discusses the concerns of ELT professional groups in Mexico in meeting the needs of members and
those from the society, while Fraser (2011) notes the differences in mottoes and values of two ELT professional associations in Japan where one appears to align with government’s policy orientations than the other.

Regarding the making of professionalism by the institution, as suggested from the analysis, Dominus University and Foreign Languages Department each has their own rationales. The results illustrate organisation is a process constructed of social relations rather than a unitary actor (Sedgwick, 2007; Bidwell, 2012). Within the contexts of the institution standing between practical life and the needs of the state (Humboldt, 1809/10), professionalism is constructed by different groups with possible “intraorganisational interests” which creates a “politics” (Bidwell, 2012, p.1624). Constructed by management, this “from above” discourse of professionalism can be described as following an overarching managerialist logic of bureaucracy. However, this professionalisation “from above” involves more than one single player with a single rationale. While the keynote residing in Dominus University’s expectations for its academic staff is more profoundly entrepreneurial and relates to various external imperatives such as globalisation, marketisation, and managerialism, the department’s aspirations for its faculty members, are underpinned by teacher development. The professionalisation process is not simply a top-down policy implementation, rather, it results from an interaction of different forces. The university makes policies and regulations in accordance with the wider social, economic, and political conditions, while trying to accomplish its own interests. Likewise, functioning as the middle-levelled unit mediating between the university and the teachers, the department management, in fact, has to deal with different demands and pressures from different forces, each with their own interests and logic dimensions: the bureaucracy, the market, the society, cultural norms, and its academic staff. The construction of professionalism, therefore, involves tensions, struggles, and negotiations. Even in the current context of policy changes, although the department has to perform its management responsibilities, by prioritising teachers’ interests, it struggles to find ways so that the occupational values will not perish.

With these considerations, the question of whether a particular conceptualisation can be understood as being principled merely by a “managerial/organisational” logic or an “occupational” logic proves to be complicated. The making of professionalism can hence be construed as being underpinned by several logics – in plural form.

9.3 Politics of professionalism: A blessing or a curse?

The previous section has indicated the involvement of different actors in constructing professionalism. Even each conceptualisation of the notion – whether it is professionalism by the state, professionalism by the institution, or professionalism by academics, is driven by several forces with their own values and principles. Yet the
pluralism of logics of professionalism is not a technical accumulation of individual, independent logics. Rather, the logics interact with, even merge into, one another – they “interpenetrate” (Freidson, 2001, p.134), which causes professionalism to be interpreted in different ways (a blessing or a curse) depending on who is making the claim. These insights on how the meaning of professionalism is established and argued for by different actors suggest that it is not easy to conceptualise the notion in a binary system of “from above” professionalism versus “from within” professionalism; and “organisational” professionalism versus “occupational” professionalism. In other words, the complexities of the logics of professionalism – with an "s", affect whether a professionalisation project can be perceived as being positive or negative – Is it professionalisation or is it deprofessionalisation? This kaleidoscope of professionalism (Chapter 3), or the politics of professionalism, is discussed in this section.

9.3.1 The arguments of bureaucracy

The ethos of standardisation, rules, regulations, which dominates the nation’s policy landscape and the institutional context, controls the work and university (ELT) teachers. With this ethos, university (ELT) teaching is defined as a set of mechanical and manual bodies of knowledge more than discretion. The ideology of bureaucracy and managerialism – an efficient way of work organisation (Freidson, 2001), can be detected in this construction of professionalism.

However, within the logic of bureaucracy driving the professionalisation project by the state and the institution, several observations can be made.

The contemporary higher education of Vietnam, including English language education, as mentioned, has adopted new priorities as goals of reforms – followed by strategies, as mentioned earlier: institutional autonomy, quality assurance, personnel development, social responsibilities, international cooperation, research and collaboration in science and technology, and university ranking and accreditation. The goals can be characterised as being in line with managerialism with economic interests taking a central place, and globalisation. In these reforms, teachers are expected to have the qualities relevant to these priorities. The professionalisation can also be seen as an effort to respond, and to settle, the perceived weaknesses and problems of the country’s higher education and English language education, both as public service sectors and academic bodies (Chapter 4). Meanwhile, flexibility as a value currently promoted in Vietnamese higher education (Marginson & Tran Ly, 2014), can be regarded as a prompt response to help academics be more prepared in the context of globalisation. While the value is part of the state’s plan to produce human resources relevant and useful in order to reach their goal (global competitiveness), flexibility can be viewed as benefiting academics and it, in fact, resonates with Vietnamese traditional education values which
encourage individual preparedness, independence, and interdependence (Chapter 4). In a broader perspective regarding the sector and the discipline, being associated with socio-economic development (Chapter 4, Chapter 6), the status of higher education and English language education can be seen as being raised and legitimised by the state as having a “public good” nature. The sector and the discipline are granted such a status because they are made to become a value to the political economy, and, to an extent, the public (Freidson, 2001). In her study in the context of Thailand, Kiatkheeree (2016) also notes internalisation and globalisation have helped raise the status of (university) English language teaching.

The analysis suggests the roles of the state and the institution in establishing and maintaining professionalism, which has been observed by Freidson: Teaching is not a core discipline but the states, “are likely to be concerned with establishing a special status for them” (Freidson, 2001, p.163). Attempts to raise the requirements for the ELT occupation can be seen as a means to provide it with a “market shelter” while legitimising the credentials it produces. At the institutional level, the management technologies employed bring about the conditions for professionalism (e.g. transparency, increased incomes). Similarly, the establishment of organisational units can be argued to play a support role to academics’ work which enables management to engage more with academic matters. However, this shared governance, on the other hand, can be perceived as “diluting faculty power” (Cummings, Fisher, & Locke, 2011).

9.3.2 The arguments of ELT professionals

The complexities surrounding the politics of professionalism from ELT faculty’s perspectives are revealed in their arguments.

How ELT lecturers justify their views following the line of “every story has two sides”, can be understood, on the one hand, as a comprehensive, panorama conceptualisation approach; yet on the other hand as a way to legitimise their embracing of an affordable professionalism against striving for a more “luxury” professionalism required “from above”. Academics wish to negotiate the boundaries that define what matters most for task accomplishment: the type of knowledge and skills, the attributes, the role of academic qualifications, and how their work is evaluated. Arguing for a high proportion of practical and working knowledge yet a large amount of tacit knowledge, faculty struggle for a discretionary determination over the contents of professionalism – the qualifications required to perform the work, and the criteria for credentialing procedures enforced by the state and the institution. In this sense, this professionalism by academics has features of the ideal-type that involves “direct control by specialised workers themselves of the terms, conditions, goals, and content of their particular work” (Freidson, 2001, p.60) and where the focus is placed on specialised knowledge and skills rather than attaining
administratively established productive goals – which characterises “occupational professionalism” (Evetts, 2009).

Although the knowledge bodies promoted by ELT occupational groups and university ELT teachers align with general occupational values as well as the universal tendencies currently observed in English language teacher development (Chapter 3), it is that reliance on tacit knowledge rather than formal knowledge that can be problematic for those who work in tertiary setting in general and in the ELT field in particular. Given the distinct features of university lecturers from school teachers and the contested discussion on whether ELT is a profession or a semi-profession, acquiring advanced academic qualifications and engaging in scholarly research, rather than practitioners’ research, can be considered as values to be promoted, since formal knowledge, as emphasised throughout, is one of the core element of occupational professionalism (Whitty, 2008; Evetts, 2009) and is the very type of knowledge that allows discretion (Freidson, 2001).

9.3.3 New parameters: Managerialism, globalisation and social responsiveness

The previous section has shown the complexities underlying the construction of professionalism. It is difficult to imagine professionalism as a result of a binary opposition of either bureaucracy logic or occupational logic, (and/or the logic of the market). It does not have a static form underpinning by stable rationales neither. Rather, professionalism takes shape along a dynamic process where different forces and actors, with their own values, principles, and arguments, encounter. Despite this political dynamics underneath the making of professionalism, two trends, however, can be identified as the dominating discourses: managerialism and globalisation.

As the data have shown, the professionalism by the state can largely be characterised as a professionalism of measurability and functionality, and in many ways, this reflects a principle of the New Public Management. The policies on professional title codes and standards, and professional ethics and morality, can be seen as most clearly reflecting the “narrow, minute, or detailed range” that Freidson (2001, p.23) uses to describe the contents of a mechanical specialisation. Similarly, the key tone of the professionalism by the institution as a whole, as analysed, can be described as being driven by a managerial ethos. Responsibilities and competencies are made quantifiable and measurable. With a “Fordism assembly line” management system that monitors, measures, and evaluates staff performance – which reminds us somehow of the pinmaking process – the dominant message from the university is that “outcome-based” productivity matters. Task achievement is made the priority, and it becomes the guiding principle for staff assessment, management, and development. Being responsive to demands from the department, the institution and the society at large, is valued. Multi-tasking entails multi-skilled personnel, which in turn means a flexible and efficient labour force prepared for the performance of even
more tasks. As a unit governed by the university, the department has to “play by the rules of the game” despite its attempts to promote staff capacity as the central principle. Managing and controlling teacher work to meet the organisation’s goals are the assigned responsibilities of the department. Thus it expects ELT academics to stretch their limits to satisfy the requirements of a professionalism of managerialism and entrepreneurship constructed by the university.

The high degree of control and monitoring over the organisation of the work mirrors the “hierarchical authority to formulate, distribute, and supervise specialised tasks” – which is the key principle of the bureaucratic model (Freidson, 2001, p.50). The requirement for academics to achieve a “multi-” dimension – being multi-attributed morally and technically, and multi-skilled to perform multi-tasks, which have been observed in both types of professionalism from the state and the institution, can be related to “flexible skills” and “multi-skilled tasks” expected by rational-legal authority – a reconstitution of specialisation that indeed aims at functionality rather than creating room for variation (Freidson, 2001, p.51). Even for the requirements towards academic qualifications and research – the area that involves most formal knowledge, focus is put on how they can be concretised and quantified. More importance is attached to the role of (ELT) faculty, and more emphasis is given to increasing their quality, but the dominance of a “managerial control and the deliberate creation and supervision” to pursue productive goals (Freidson, 2001, p.51) reflects the essential principles of the bureaucracy and managerial logic (Evetts, 2009).

The logics, of which the logic of managerialism dominates, that drive the making of professionalism for university ELT teachers in Vietnam are embedded in another larger discourse: the globalised knowledge economy. Although the logic of the market is not the focus of this research, it can be seen present in the way professionalism is constructed, most visibly when it is the professionalism as defined by authority. Higher education is increasingly regarded as a service and the relationship between lecturers and students changes into one between service providers and customers, under the control of market supply-and-demand principles. University teachers start to be aware of this influence of the logic of the market, to an extent, as they negotiate for the contents and organisation of their work (e.g. negotiating between students’ and society’s demands with their values; acknowledging teaching credentials as an evidence of competence subjected to public surveillance). At the same time, globalisation and its accompanying imperatives including competitiveness as well as integration, and technology development, as discussed, have become an important principle in both national policymaking and especially the operation of the institution, being actually “out there” functioning in a growing global context. Globalisation and higher education have increasingly become a fact rather a choice – globalisation, just as it has “shaken up almost every sector of the economy”, has “intensified competition and mobility in
higher education” (Wildavsky, 2014, p.46). The Vietnamese state increasingly emphasises university lecturers’ contribution to international collaboration and international research engagement. At an institutional level, as shown in the case of Dominus University, the discourse of globalisation urges the university to prioritise internationalisation and pay more attention to English education as the strategies to realise its university-of-the-world motto.

Within the parameters of managerialism and globalisation discourses, the contemporary professionalism of ELT lecturers in Vietnam has acquired another dimension: social responsiveness. That universities and faculties have increasingly recognised this dimension has been recorded in other studies. For example, Alexiadou & Findlow (2014) note the changing roles of universities in European countries and England to focus more on students’ employability. In their research on the higher education in eight countries in Western Balkans, Zgaga et al. (2013) report that responding to the labour market but also to “broader societal roles” such as promoting free thinking and educating active citizenship, are supported as the priorities in teaching and designing curriculum. They also note that in these contexts accreditation and external quality assurance is viewed as a necessary accountability tool and is not regarded as contradicting with academic autonomy. In this Vietnam study, against a context of growing competitiveness both nationally and internationally, this dimension is manifested not only through the needs to meet societal demands (e.g. national growth, international competitiveness, students’ employability), but also to satisfy standardisation and accreditation requirements. Social responsiveness, on the one hand, can be understood as an obvious answer to external imperatives. On the other hand, it can be related to what Freidson discusses about how professionalism, in order to be maintained, needs to bring about values that must be recognised by others.

The results show that, however, it is the actors at meta-level (the state, the institution), rather than academics, that appear to be more aware of a need for this dimension. The data suggest “professionalism by the state” and “professionalism by the institution” place the work and those who do it in a wider social discourse. The attempts to standardise and monitor reveal the importance that the state grants to the ELT occupation. Claiming this is for the public good, the state reaches out their power and sets the status of university (ELT) teaching as a composing unit that keeps the system wheel moving. The occupation is treated not only as an administrative part of the higher education sector and thus of the government apparatus – but it is also a service needed to respond to market demands while at the same time a tool for international integration. By opening the sphere that professionalism is grounded in beyond classroom settings, the state views ELT professionalism as a special segment of society and to the state itself (Freidson, 2001, p.162). Including social responsibilities as one aspired technical area of professionalism thus signifies a changing relationship between the state, the higher education sector, and university
lecturers. The research suggests an increasingly visible image of higher education as a public responsibility. However, as Zgaga (2007, p.100) puts it, this is a mutual relationship: public responsibility for higher education (from society in terms of access, financing, legal framework, respecting autonomy, etc.) if results are expected, and public responsibility of higher education to maintain a good quality of performance (e.g. accountability and ethical dimension). In these new conditions, university lecturers as public employees and academic staff are expected to achieve a professionalism that is opened up to other spheres beyond the higher education sector. Strong emphasis is placed on viewing education, including ELT education, as being within the interaction between these external spheres, including societal needs and international pressures, and education has the role of serving these interests.

This increased social responsiveness of professionalism with its contingencies in today’s circumstances, in turn, leads to a reimagining of “academic freedom”. Academic freedom seems to no longer mean a bubble that separates academia and society. It now has to be understood in relation to “the kind of activities that a faculty member is free to perform”, and those activities have norms that “agree with the way knowledge is pursued now” (Butler, 2009, p.111), just as Freidson (2001) emphasises on considering professionalism elements in terms of relevance. As showcased in this thesis, for ELT academics in Vietnam, staying unresponsive to external discourses is hardly feasible. However, how can academic norms harmonise with public (i.e. economic/political) norms? This will be discussed in the next section.

9.4 Supporting professionalism

9.4.1 Mutually acknowledged: Bureaucracy and the soul of professionalism

The logics of professionalism by the state and the institution have been explored, and besides the attempts to control the work of ELT academics, efforts to professionalise the occupation and improve the quality of teachers have also been identified. However, with the authority’s tendency to construct professionalism towards measurability, functionality, and productivity under the pressures from managerialism and globalisation, and when universities are becoming more of “productive enterprises”, ELT academics in Vietnam face the risk of being turned to technicians who have practical and working knowledge rather than formal knowledge (Freidson, 2001, p.55). Therefore, to save the soul of professionalism, it is necessary for the authority side to be aware of the logic of professionalism. For this to be done, as analysed in Chapter 2, the ultimate questions to ask, therefore, concern primarily meanings, values, and ideologies – for all sides: “Are the monopoly, credentialism, and elitism that are intrinsic to professionalism inimical to the public welfare? Should all vestiges of professionalism in present-day political economies be
replaced by the free market or rational bureaucracy? Or should professionalism be reinforced?” (Freidson, 2001, p.181).

The results from the thesis provide a vivid illustration of how professionals relate themselves to external discourses and imperatives, rather than resist them. Symbolic rewards, such as students’ recognition and appreciation, and opportunities for fulfilment and self-actualisation in the workplace are sources of motivation (Freidson, 2001). University teachers are mainly satisfied by the intellectual challenge of research, the joys of teaching and the emotional dimension of the communities of practice they work in (Knight, 2003, p.11). University ELT teachers’ construction of professionalism can be described as a process of negotiation and self-regulation, rather than a complete social closure that aims only for monopoly. The findings show academics’ active participation in the making of what is termed as “standards” and “norms” in their professional life. Academics are committed to their professional duties and obligations, whether relating to students (e.g. balancing teaching values with students’ needs for high test scoring and employability), the department and the institution (fulfilling assigned tasks and complying with regulations), and to an extent, the society (earning teaching credentials as an evidence of competence), and the discipline (participating in conferences).

At the same time, while ELT academics perceive standardisation as a responsibility they need to fulfil, they try to correspond this external demand with their own defined standards. Caught in between realities and visions, they show a strong sense of their wish to adhere to their own professional beliefs and values. Although ELT academics ground their argument in ELT as a specialisation that consists of largely practical knowledge and tacit knowledge, they nevertheless call for a discretion potential in performing their work. The story of ELT academics’ adoption and enactment of policies – whether they are the demand for teaching-to-the-test, or meeting publication target number – involves various dimensions. Again, they respond to “from above” requirements and demands. Faculty pointed out the negative side of the policy, arguing on the grounds of more intensified workload, stress, and increased career insecurity; yet the story is not simply a battle of resistance since most of the participants perceived the required standardisation as being necessary. But it is not a story of total submissiveness, either. The response can be described as possessing much “softer” aspects as faculty show their active understanding and internalise values and priorities. The data indicate teacher willingness to enact the policy because they see it as a need for their own professional development that provides benefits not only for the present but also a compass for their future. The soul of professionalism, in this way, is expressed as the ability to be self-disciplined, self-governed individuals. Also, ELT academics claim their professional authority in the construction of standards, but in acknowledging the roles of other stakeholders while attempting to align values and priorities with their own beliefs. In this way, they choose to live in harmony with discourses, but at
the same time, they strive to go beyond the boundaries by considering their own values and principles. In other words, academics are not “cultural dopes” who simply enact social roles, but they do this in a knowing, intentional way (Trowler, 2012a, p.35), acknowledging the roles and responsibilities of the players involved.

However, since it is the issue of occupational moral, rather than the issue of the right to be the “proprietors of the knowledge and techniques their disciplines” (Freidson, 2001, p.222), that nurtures the soul of professionalism, questioning the validity of the values that the contemporary professionalism embraces seems to be necessary. On the one hand, those expectations for (ELT) university teachers, for example, to be more flexible and responsive to societal needs including those demands from globalisation, to conduct more scholarly research with more publications, and to obtain better academic qualifications and professional credentials, may appear to be relevant in the current context of Vietnam with the country’s higher education reforms, public sector reforms, university teacher professionalisation, and ELT education improvement. On the other hand, if these are conducted with a managerialism ethos that prioritises performativities, which entails minute, detail control, this in many goes against the values and purposes of higher education (Nussbaum, 2006; Biesta, 2009; Zgaga, 2009; Roth, 2014) and prevents teacher learning and development as an autonomous, reflective but situated and collaborative process (Boyd, Hymer, & Lockney, 2015) from happening. Likewise, in contemporary conditions, if education and knowledge need to be reconfigured, promoting a “valid”, “value for money” type of research – the distinguished mission of universities, this may lead to a narrow approach to studying central educational problems (Lundahl, 2012). Indeed, the making of professionalism should not be a situation when different forces oppose, compete with, and deny each other; rather they should correlate and presuppose each other.

9.4.2 Professionalism as a “social contract”

The analyses of the thesis have so far suggested professionalism is a process that involves plural interaction, tension, and negotiation between different actors and forces. In other words, the making of professionalism encompasses a realisation of contingencies where different logics interact and presuppose each other (Freidson, 2001). To support the establishment and development of professionalism, it is thus necessary to focus on this interdependence nature rather than viewing the notion as being constructed by segregated forces with conflicting principles. From this premise which is backed up by both theory (Freidson, 2001) and empirical results, the thesis proposes “social contract” as a potential framework to understand, and support professionalism.

“Social contract”, as a sociological concept, is characterised “by an agreement between two or more parties, underpinned by informed consent, where there is
reasonable trust that the expectations of a future outcome will be met” (Rawolle, 2013, pp.233–234). In a social contract, the parties can be individuals, groups, institutions or nations, and their transactions are embedded in social networks (Rubin, 2012; Rawolle, 2013). The underpinnings of social contract include trust, commitments, mutual expectations and obligations, and reciprocal social bargains (Yeatman, 1996, 2000). These principles of social contract that acknowledges the mutual dependency and interaction of the parties may be used to explain its essence: it focuses on the participation of those in the contract. As Yeatman (1996) explains, “it is not so much a question of choice as a question of whether the person concerned is effective and appropriately participating in these relationships” (Yeatman, 1996, p.42, italics in original). The concept does not centre on the conditions of entry and exit into a relationship, rather, it centres on the conduct of ongoing relationships (Yeatman, 2002, p.72).

The concept of social contract has been used as a theoretical approach in a wide range of disciplines including politics, economics, psychology, education, as well as in different social institutional contexts, for example, professional obligation, marriage, parenting, and religion (Rubin, 2012). In higher education sector, social contract has been employed to read the shifting of particular social phenomena and relationships. At a macro level, social contract is applied in understanding the relationships between universities and the society now that the production of knowledge has shifted from “reliable” to “socially robust”, which requires a new contract that specifies new expectations and obligations from both sides (Gibbons, 1998, 1999). Social contract is used to interpret equity in education: the questions of power and access (Rubin, 2012; Rawolle, 2013). At a more micro level (yet still connected to the macro level), social contract has been used to interpret the relationships in the work of university faculty. For example, how research funding application (contract) by academics to research review authority in Australia and the US has failed to acknowledge the participation and voice of all individuals (Rawolle & Vadeboncoeur, 2003). Another example is how the increased marketisation has changed the way university academics see peer review as one of their professional obligations (in the contract with the community) (Rubin, 2012).

In many ways, social contract can be associated with teacher professionalism in higher education. First, as the thesis has suggested, the making of professionalism is not solely determined by one particular actor, but several of them. In constructing professionalism, these different actors strive for, or claim they strive for, some common values, such as improving the credentials of lecturers, raising professional standards, and serving the public. This feature of professionalism fits with the definition of social contract as a relationship where actors work towards a future outcome. Second, given that the interpretation of professionalism involves the political questions of power, it can be said that research employing social contract has a goal that is close to that of professionalism studies, which is “…to understand
relations between people and groups and the way that they shape dispositions towards process and practice, inequalities and exclusions” (Rawolle, 2013, p.236). Third, viewing professionalism as a social contract, therefore, will highlight even more explicitly the interplay between different actors, especially the relationship between authority and academics. As demonstrated throughout this research, the construction of professionalism involves the interdependency between actors who are situated in discourses and driven by their different logic. In the contemporary social contract relationship, individuals do not have a liberal choice: bound by the interests yet also the interdependency of those partying it, the contract is on a consent basis rather than choice (Yeatman, 2000, 2002). Meanwhile, the "democratic” teacher professionalism that acknowledges the roles and voices of different stakeholders contemporarily advocated in education, including the ELT field (Leung, 2013; Kennedy, 2014) provides grounds for "social contract”. Emphasising mutual responsibilities and conditions for development for the involved parties, especially the individuality of persons, social contract helps level to an extent the power hierarchy. This, in fact, implies an empowerment to those in a disadvantageous position.

9.5 Contributions of the thesis

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the dimensions of professionalism for university ELT teachers and its construction in contemporary Vietnam higher education. Approaching professionalism from a critical perspective, the thesis has presented and discussed how the notion is construed in an embedded case of different levels: national, institutional, and individual. Findings from Chapters 6, 7, and 8, together with the meta-discussion in Chapter 9 on the contingencies of professionalism from a broader lens, have addressed the thesis’s three research questions and its overall aims. Through the analysis, not only the contents of professionalism were identified, but the logics underlying its conceptualisation have also been unpacked. With its findings, the thesis has achieved its overall aim of unravelling the contents and logics of professionalism and thus enabled the principles either embraced or legitimised by the two sides – bureaucracy and the ELT occupation, to emerge and be mutually acknowledged.

Being among a few studies that have devoted especially to examining the concept of professionalism in higher education ELT, and arguably the first in-depth research that looks at the notion in the contemporary context of Vietnam, the thesis provides useful and original insights into professionalism in connection with the field of ELT, higher education, and international education research. The findings shed light not only on the domains of knowledge, skills, and competencies currently expected of university English teachers in Vietnam, but also on how their work in a discourse of measurability and performativity is intensified and monitored. Adopting a
sociocultural approach towards the ELT field (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014), the study reveals how the status of English has gained importance in today’s Vietnam, but as a service rather than an academic discipline. Already in a position “between the two worlds” being teachers in a university culture defined by scholarly research (Ur, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), university English teachers now face being regarded as service providers rather than teachers and/or lecturers. Findings from this exploration of the making of professionalism also reflect a changing relationship between university teachers, the authority and the society. University teachers are expected to hold responsibilities to the state as public employees, so they need to fulfil their duties. The opening up of university teacher work and their responsibilities to wider social actors and players – “the third mission” (Laredo, 2007), means teaching is not perceived within the confines of educational contexts anymore. In other words, professionalism is no longer conceptualised as an educational matter but rather a social concern – it is put in the relationships with not only the state but also the public. This, in turn, implies that university teacher work and performance would be, (and this is made naturalised), under the supervision and surveillance of these actors. The thesis, at the same time, provides further understanding about how education policies, including management practices, operate. With the results showing that in establishing, organising, and maintaining professionalism in a real site, each actor (the university, the department, the academics) has its own politics and they interact with each other, the thesis provides an example of policy as “an arena of contestation, struggle and negotiation between actors” (Gulson, Clarke, & Petersen, 2015, p.7).

Regarding its contribution in the field of international education, set in the context of Vietnam, the study has showcased how country-specific research is interpreted against, and along with, an international perspective. This contribution mirrors the current trends in international education research that advocate viewing educational analysis as an ensemble embedded in sociocultural discourses at different levels, e.g. global and local (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014; Robertson & Dale, 2015). As demonstrated, professionalism in the particular context of Vietnam possesses nuances that greatly dependent on its particular social, historical, cultural conditions. For instance, the professionalism project towards university lecturers that highlights ranking, titles, and criteria should be understood in the country’s larger context of administrative reforms aiming at a developing a more efficient public service and changing to a fairer a position-based system from a career-based system (Poon, Nguyen Khac Hung & Do Xuan Truong, 2009). Likewise, the emphasis on internationalisation, the striving to be a “university of the world”, or the enthusiasm for English language education, can also be interpreted as “blessings” since it reflects an aspiration for integration and collaboration after the country’s years of being “kept outside” the international community due to its particular history. From a frame larger than nationalism, shared features can be observed, which can serve as a
common, rather than contrast, system of reference for analysis. For example, although the study employs a western theory of professionalism as its analytical lens, this western standpoint has many features regarded as being similar to a Confucianism’s (considered one of the core ideologies of the Vietnamese education, as discussed earlier) conceptualisation of the notion. For instance, professionalism seen from this ideology comprises general, organised, abstract knowledge that could be acquired only through formal education and is largely dependent on the state (Dardess, 1983). Also, the results indicate the construction of professionalism in Vietnam is also under the pressure from global imperatives, which is seen through its tendency towards functionality, measurability, ranking, and internalisation.

Another significant contribution of the thesis lies in the research area of professionalism in education. With its focal inquiries geared towards this concept, the thesis helps advance existing knowledge on professionalism by offering a re-imagination regarding the nature of its construction. The research uses Freidson’s ideas as a tool to examine the notion, but, as stated at the beginning of the thesis, it also aims to offer new insights to contribute to theories (Phillips, 2014, p.78). The study’s empirical findings provide an illustration of Freidson’s ideas of the contingencies of the notion, where different actors interact rather than segregate. Since professionalism is not only guided by different logics but within the logics interact with each other and can be understood from different angles – the kaleidoscope of professionalism (Vu Mai Trang, 2016), the notion can be conceptualised beyond a (conventional) binary opposition of “from above” versus “from within”, or “organisational/managerial” versus “occupational”. The study reflects Freidson’s idea that “there is often no single professional orthodoxy” (Freidson, 2001, p.144), given the politics inside the making of professionalism.

At the same time, the findings provide new aspects to interpreting Freidson’s conceptualisations. The politics of teacher professionalism in today’s higher education, as the thesis has shown, has acquired a new discursive dimension. If in 2001 Freidson discussed the interactive relationship between the state and the profession mostly drawing on the fact that the state’s powers often depend on experts who have the specialised knowledge, in the present time, this interaction has become more complex – it seems now even more difficult to separate “from within” from “from above”. The data suggest professionalism is cast in a network of larger discourses, most notably of which are managerialism and globalisation. These new conditions require actors to demonstrate greater commitment to social responsiveness. Every actor engaged in the process – the state, the university, and ELT academics, construe professionalism driven by this discursive network in a particular place at particular point of time, and they act as part of this eclectic system, so to decide who is “from above” (the state? the university? the department? ELT professional groups?) and who is “from within” (the state? the institution? the department? ELT professional groups? ELT academics?) may prove difficult to
answer. This, in turn, complicates the contemporary conceptualisation of professionalism as “occupational” or “managerial”. Since even within each force’s logic and principle exist plural ideologies, and they interpenetrate, in a professionalism supposed to be termed as “from above”, there exist not only organisational and managerial principles but also occupational values; and the same can be said about a professionalism supposed to be “from within”. Similarly, the notion hardly possesses characteristics that belong only to the “organisational” side or only to the “occupational” side, which leads to the fact it is not easy to be categorised as organisational/managerial professionalism, or occupational professionalism.

This finding – the relativity identified in conceptualising professionalism as “from above” or “from within”, “occupational” or “organisational/managerial”, has enabled the research to push the boundary that frames the making of professionalism even further: it proposes employing a new concept to understand the notion – Professionalism as a social contract. The relativity of “from above” and “from within”, on the one hand, reflects the contingencies of professionalism, and on the other hand suggests that authority power is plural, shifting, and fluid, rather than single, normative, and static. At the same time, it means human’s individual power – the capability to act according to one’s will, is not of an ultimate freedom but dependent on external conditions. While these observations in many ways can be related to a post-structuralism theories on relationship between structure and agency, for example Giddens’ (1979, 1991) ideas of structuration and human self-monitoring (Vu Mai Trang, 2015), they provide a discussion springboard for employing the notion of “social concept” to study professionalism. As discussed, the central question of contractualism is, “What kind of institutional design is necessary to develop the individuality of persons?” (Yeatman, 2002, p.72). Applying social contract to interpreting professionalism, therefore, allows not only a recognition of a mutual relationship between the state, the institution, and the academics, but also illuminates how each party enables, maintains, and contributes to this relationship. Ideally, both the “from above” side and “from within” side, by definition, when approaching professionalism as a contractual relationship, are expected to clarify their expectations and rationales – or logic – as well as responsibilities, rights, and commitments in supporting each other in achieving their set common goal. In this way, social contract, with its reciprocity and transparency nature, benefits both sides. For those in power, treating professionalism as a social contract provides a clear action plan and a better possibility of reaching targeted goals. More significantly, the professionalism social contract enables those in a less advantageous position (who most of the cases turn out to be teachers, but can also be those at departmental, and even institutional and sectoral level – given the relative meaning of “from above”/“from within”) to have their voices heard, to ensure their needs for support fulfilled, to be empowered.
Summary in Swedish – Sammanfattning

I stora delar av världen diskuteras kvalitet och kvalitetssäkering i offentlig förvaltning och statliga utbildningssystem, ofta med sidoblickar mot marknadens krav. Det tänkande som emanerar ur denna diskurs påverkar naturligtvis akademiska lärares yrkesverksamhet, exempelvis genom de krav som ställs på kompetenser och yrkesskicklighet. I förlängningen påverkas även deras identiteter och grad av självständighet.

Kontext och forskningsfrågor

Den här avhandlingen undersöker konstruktionen av professionalism inom högre utbildning vid ett vietnamesiskt universitet, hädanefter kallat Dominus University, och fokus ligger på lärare i engelska. I Vietnam, som i många andra länder, är regering och myndigheter mycket engagerade i frågor om utbildningskvalitet, inte minst vad gäller att förbättra det egna landets resultat i internationell jämförelse. Därför har engelskundervisningen vid landets universitet ägnats stor uppmärksamhet, eftersom goda engelskkunskaper ses som en förutsättning för ekonomisk tillväxt och internationell konkurrenckraft. Det regeringsinitierade projektet Vietnam National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (NFL Project 2020) syftar till att förbättra undervisning och inlärning av främmande språk inom det nationella skolväsendet, och man har satt upp en rad olika mål för att höja nivån på landets engelsklärare, något som även inkluderar engelsklärarna vid universiteten.

Syftet med denna explorativa studie är tvådelat: Vad definieras som professionalism under den aktuella undersökningsperioden? Hur konstrueras professionalism i den aktuella kontexten? Undersökningens målsättning kan beskrivas som att utforska, beskriva, porträttera, tolka, förstå och ifrågasätta (Cohen, Manon, & Morrison, 2011, p.538). Avhandlingens två syften fördelar sig över följande forskningsfrågor:

Vad innebär professionalism för engelsklärare i högre utbildning enligt nutida nationella vietnamesiska policyer? Vilka värderingar är det som prioriteras? På vilket sätt ger dessa värderingar och förhållningssätt insikter i konstruktionen av professionalism?

Hur gestaltas professionalism genom dels institutionella policyer, dels institutionella styrmekanismer vid Dominus University och dess avdelning för engelska? Vilka värderingar är det som prioriteras? På vilket sätt ger dessa värderingar och förhållningssätt insikter i konstruktionen av professionalism?

Vilka uppfattningar om professionalism har lärarna vid avdelningen för engelska? Vilka värderingar är det som prioriteras? På vilket sätt ger dessa värderingar och förhållningssätt insikter i konstruktionen av professionalism?

Teori

I denna avhandling studeras professionalism som kritiskt begrepp. Kriterier för professionalism inom ett visst område uppstår inte i ett vacuum. Snarare är dessa alltid beroende av rådande värderingar, varför begreppet professionalism också är
relaterat till makt och maktförhållanden. Här diskuterar förhållandet mellan de olika aktörer som var och en bidrar till konstruktionen av professionalism i engelskläraryrket vid Dominus University. Trots att professionalism inom ett visst område kan definieras utifrån en uppsättning yrkesrelaterade kriterier, har det alltid en politisk dimension. Därav följer att begreppet snarare bör ses som en process, snarare än en produkt, eftersom de element som samspelet i konstruktionen av begreppet påverkas av de olika aktörernas perspektiv och logiker.


Metod


Materialet har undersöks med hjälp av tematisk analys med utgångspunkt i ett tolkande konstruktionistiskt perspektiv. Språkbruket behandlades i stort sett utifrån ett helhetsperspektiv. De språkliga drag som användes för att beskriva professionalismens olika element analyserades dock på ordnivå, och med avseende på vissa språkliga mönster samt kopplingen mellan språkbruk och kontext.

Resultat och diskussion

Resultaten presenteras och diskuteras i fyra kapitel som motsvarar avhandlingens syfte och forskningsfrågor.


Kapitel 8 studerar den akademiska personalens konstruktion av professionalism. Resultaten visar att de ser professionalism som en kombination av främst undervisning och forskning. De lägger också viss vikt vid följsamhet mot regler och förordningar samt service. Dessutom antyder de att det är viktigt att vara flexibel och att ha förmåga att anpassa sig efter de olika krav och förväntningar som kan komma från studenterna, institutionen, universitetet och det omgivande samhället. Förmågan att ha kontroll över det egna arbetet och samtidigt få detta att harmoniera med yttre krav och förväntningar är en motiverande faktor för de akademiska engelsklärarna. Engelsklärarnas konstruktion av professionalism omfattar därför också den tysta kunskap som består i att vara trogen sina egna värderingar och uppfattningar. Det är således denna tysta kunskap tillsammans med praktisk
yrkeskunskap som bildar basen för lärarnas konstruktion av professionalism, snarare är formella meriter.

Resultaten visar att professionalism uppstår i interaktion mellan olika aktörer och intressenter (Freidson, 2001). Eftersom aktörer är så många och så olika, och har olika förstållningar om begreppets innehåll är det inte möjligt att förstå professionalism hjälp av binära relationer som uppifrån eller inifrån, eller som organisatorisk eller yrkesmässig professionalism. Därmed kan man säga att divergerande och överlappande logiker inverkar även på begreppets värdeladdning, dvs. om det är positivt eller negativt i en viss professionaliseringsprocess.

Avhandlingens resultat belyser inte bara vilka kunskaper, färdigheter och kompetenser som förväntas av vietnamesiska universitetslärare i engelska idag, utan också hur deras dagliga arbete intensifieras och övervakas med stöd av krav på mätbarhet och prestation. Därutöver ger avhandlingen insikter i hur utbildningspolicyer styrmekanismer fungerar i detta sammanhang. Varje aktör, dvs. universitetet, institutionen och den enskilda läraren, har sin egen policy. Dessa policyer interagerar med varandra i processen att etablera, organisera och upprätthålla professionalism, varför det är rimligt att betrakta situationen som en arena för strid och förhandling mellan de aktuella aktörerna (Gulson, Clarke, & Petersen, 2015, p.7).


References


Nguyen Ngan (2012). How English has displaced Russian and other foreign languages in Vietnam since “Doi Moi”. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(23), 259–266.


Vu Mai Trang (2012). Being trained as a trainer of primary teachers.


Appendices

Appendix 1 Information sheet for study participants (Teachers)

Umeå University

Project
(Working title)
Understanding University English Language Teacher Professionalism

Vu Mai Trang
PhD Student
Department of Language Studies

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS
Teachers

I would like to invite you to contribute to the study of my PhD research project, as a staff member of the Department of Foreign Languages, University__. Your contribution will be used as a valuable source for the above project.

What is the purpose of the study?
My study investigates what professionalism constitutes in the contemporary higher education. By examining the notion of professionalism in university English language teaching, the research expects to shed light on the relationship between teachers and the discourses surrounding their work.

Why have you been invited?
As a teacher of English at a large university, you are in a good position to offer insight into this topic. Together with you there are several participants from your Department who are invited to participate in this study.

What will participation involve?
The interview will include questions around themes such as professional identity, professionalism management, and professionalism support. The interview will take approximately 45–50 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded.

How will data be processed?
The interview will later be transcribed into text form. A transcription will be made and the interview’s recording will be deleted. A copy of the final report will be sent to you upon request.

Your own words may be used in text form as presentation of results in future publications related to this project. Your name and any personal information will be removed so that you cannot be identified from what you said.

Voluntariness
Your participation in this study is voluntary but your contribution is of great value and importance to this project.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact:

Vu Mai Trang
Department of Language Studies, Umeå University, 901 87 Umeå, Sweden
Email: trang.vu@sprak.umu.se
Phone: +46 (0) 90 786 6760

Supervisor’s contact details

Thank you very much for your kind assistance
Appendix 2 Information sheet for study participants (Managers)

Understanding University English Language Teacher Professionalism

Vu Mai Trang
PhD Student
Department of Language Studies

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS
Managers

I would like to invite you to contribute to the study of my PhD research project, as an academic manager of the Department of Foreign Languages, University__. Your contribution will be used as a valuable source for the above project.

What is the purpose of the study?
My study investigates what professionalism constitutes in the contemporary higher education. By examining the notion of professionalism in university English language teaching, the research expects to shed light on the relationship between teachers and the discourses surrounding their work.

Why have you been invited?
Your experience as a manager in a large university is likely to provide valuable insights relevant to my research. In addition, several other participants in management positions from your institution will also be invited to participate in this study.

What will participation involve?
The interview will include questions around themes such as professional identity, professionalism management, and professionalism support. You will also be asked to kindly share your experience in developing and implementing effective procedures.

The interview will take approximately 45–50 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded.

How will data be processed?
The interview will later be transcribed into text form. A transcription will be made and the interview’s recording will be deleted. A copy of the final report will be sent to you upon request.

Your own words may be used in text form as presentation of results in future publications related to this project. Your name and any personal information will be removed so that you cannot be identified from what you said.

Voluntariness
Your participation in this study is voluntary but your contribution is of great value and importance to this project.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact:

Vu Mai Trang
Department of Language Studies, Umeå University, 901 87 Umeå, Sweden
Email: trang.vu@sprak.umu.se
Phone: +46 (0) 90 786 6760

Thank you very much for your kind assistance.
Appendix 3 Study consent form

STUDY CONSENT FORM

Project
(Working title)
Understanding University English Language Teacher Professionalism

Vu Mai Trang
PhD Student
Department of Language Studies
Umeå University, 901 87 UMEÅ, Sweden
Email: trang.vu@sprak.umu.se

Please tick

1. I am willing to take part in the above project.  ☐

2. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.  ☐

3. I have read and understand the project's information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.  ☐

4. I understand that I will participate in one interview of approximately 45/50 minutes.  ☐

5. I agree to have this interview audio recorded.  ☐

6. I understand that my confidentiality will be respected and my identity and involvement in the study will not be revealed in any way.  ☐

________________________________________  ____________________________________  ____________________________________
Name of Participant          Date          Signature
Appendix 4 Interview guide, Managers, Vietnam 2014  
(NB. This is an English version of the questions which were asked in Vietnamese.)

- Remind the interviewee of the Project information sheet  
- Ask if he/she has any question  
- Remind he/she that her/his words are power-filled and will be captured in a transcript and used in future publications  
- Say that his/her confidentiality and anonymity will be protected  
- Hand out the consent form for participant’s signature  
- Explain the interview follows key themes but questions will be asked in a flexible manner as the interview goes on. Compare the interview to a “chatty” conversation about the work of ELT academics.  
- Confirm the interview purpose is not to judge any definition of “professionalism”  
- Ask to start the recording

Questions about the interviewee  
Management experience, main roles and responsibilities at present.  
Teaching experience, main roles and responsibilities at present.

Questions about the (wider) discourses and impacts on university ELT  
Current issues in English language teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam and if and how they think these have affected the teaching at the institution.

Questions about professional identity  
How they see themselves as a teacher/manager working at the Department/University. Their views on the most important thing(s) being an English language university teacher and what guides their work.

Questions about professionalism management  
Expectations as articulated in new teachers recruitment and staff work management. Their thoughts about the relevance of these expectations.

Questions about professionalism support  
The support for the work of teachers at the Department/University. Their views on these forms of support.

Questions about the notion of “professionalism”  
Definition of professionalism

- Ask if the interviewee if she/he has any other comments.  
- Ask if the interviewee is happy with what she/he just said in the interview or if she/he wants to withdraw anything.  
- Thank the interviewee.
Appendix 5 Interview guide, Teachers, Vietnam 2014
(NB. This is an English version of the questions which were asked in Vietnamese.)

- Remind the interviewee of the Project information sheet
- Ask if he/she has any question
- Remind he/she that her/his words are power-filled and will be captured in a transcript and used in future publications
- Say that his/her confidentiality and anonymity will be protected
- Hand out the consent form for participant’s signature
- Explain the interview follows key themes but questions will be asked in a flexible manner as the interview goes on. Compare the interview to a “chatty” conversation about the work of ELT academics.
- Confirm the interview purpose is not to judge any definition of professionalism
- Ask to start the recording

Questions about the interviewee
Teaching experience, main roles and responsibilities at present: students, workload proportion, other activities. For new teachers, ask about the recruitment process.

Questions about the (wider) discourses and impacts on university ELT
Current issues in English language teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam and if and how they think these have affected the teaching at the institution.

Questions about professional identity
How they see themselves as a teacher working at the Department/University. Their views on the most important thing(s) being an English language university teacher and what guides their work.

Questions about professionalism management
Expectations as articulated in new teachers recruitment and/or staff work management. Their thoughts about the relevance of these expectations.

Questions about professionalism support
The support for the work of teachers at the Department/University. Their views on these forms of support.

Questions about the notion of “professionalism”
Definition of professionalism

- Ask if the interviewee if she/he has any other comments.
- Ask if the interviewee is happy with what she/he just said in the interview or if she/he wants to withdraw anything.
- Thank the interviewee.
Appendix 6 Interview excerpts

Excerpt 1

Thế Khoa mình có Hỏi nghi Khoa học của Khoa không?


Em nói lý do khách quan chưa quan là gì, có thể chia sẻ với mình không?


Tức là nó chỉ đúng ở trên bể mất thời á?

Bể mất thời. Chỉ có giả trị bể mất thời, hình thức thôi.

Tức là em là người nghề thì em sẽ cảm thấy nó không relevant với công việc của em, hay như thế nào, hay nó quá cao siêu nó quá lý thuyết hay là nó như thế nào?


Does our Department have a departmental research conference?

We used to have one two years ago. It lasted for four years. Then due to many reasons – both objective and subjective ones – it stopped. Then there was another thing called the “EFL Forum” which focuses on only one or two specific topics and people presented and the audience asked questions. But this year this event wasn’t organised.

You mentioned objective reasons and subjective reasons. Can you possibly elaborate on these?

First, it was because teachers have heavy workload so they can’t prepare a proper presentation. Second, it’s an obligatory event and the Department required all divisions to have presentations. Two or three people can co-present. Then the result was we got a dozen of presentations. And at that time the Department only had around 30 teachers. So it was like listening without digestion. The presenters were not happy because the audience was not interested despite their efforts… There were only a few in the audience – not enough to engage… Those big conferences often have parallel sessions. Here we only have a couple of people in the room. The listeners were not happy either but they didn’t know how to dig deeper into the presentation…

So you mean it is quite superficial?

It’s superficial. It is only a formality.

So does it mean you are in the audience and you feel the conference is not relevant to your work, or what do you mean? Or do you mean it’s too theoretical or how do you feel?

It’s not relevant. For example you teach ESP and your presentation is all about ESP but I’m not interested in ESP so I don’t want to listen to your presentation. But because there were such few people there so we can’t just not stand up and leave. It’s about being tactful. Then we stay but we don’t listen, we don’t care, we aren’t interested. If a study on methodology is presented within the Methodology division it will be more effective, but if it is presented to the whole department there will be so many things irrelevant.
Thế mình có Hỏi nghị nghiệm của khoa học của Khoa không à?


Thế họ đưa lý do làm sao à?

Bây giờ chúng han minh đi học PhD bên kia mình tôi PhD kinh tế để mình xem họ trình bày biểu bảng họ lập luận như thế nào chứ nhiều khi có dân hiểu họ nói cái gì đâu. Thì chúng han cái mang của bạn nó là Lý thuyết Tiếng, cái mang của tôi là Thực hành Việt có thể nó tương thích trong mức đó nào đó thì bây giờ mình phải coi, có thể là mình không thích nhưng mà tại sao thấy người ta trình bày vậy vay vậy mình tổ mô mình phải học những cái đó. Nhưng họ không nhận thức được điều đó.

Excerpt 2

Does our Department have a departmental research conference?

Yes. Several years ago I initiated something called “The Annual Faculty Conference”. But it can be as simple as a “Book Review for You”. You would read a book, summarise and review it, then you are challenged by an audience. So it’s already a way. But after a while there was objection. In fact there were not that many people presenting. There were six people presenting in one conference, ten people in the next. Then they said how could they manage to digest all the presentations in just one day. But it was not meant to be like that. I didn’t force them to... I set the table with ten dishes, you can pick the dishes you like. So you look at the ten dishes and you choose three. And at home you should have read the abstracts quickly to get the gist so that you can question and discuss. It’s one of the ways to teach yourself. But the conference was stopped.

And what did they say were the reasons for that?

For example when we do our PhD abroad we go to a PhD seminar in economics to learn how they present tables and graphs and how they put across arguments, and most of the time we don’t even need to understand what they are talking about. Or if your specialisation is linguistics, my specialisation is Teaching Writing, then they may complement each other to some degrees and we will need to explore that. Perhaps we aren’t interested in what they say but we’re curious about why they present their work so convincingly and we want to learn from them... But they [the teachers] don’t realise this.
27. Hanna Outakoski, Multilingual Literacy Among Young Learners of North Sámi: Contexts, Complexity and Writing in Sápmi. Diss. 2015.


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