

ON BECOMING A TEACHER –  
A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
KONTUM SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’  
PERSPECTIVE

Submitted by

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# Abbreviations

TTC: Teacher Training College

TTI: Teacher Training Institution

TTP: Teacher Training Program

MOET: Ministry of Education and Training

HA: High Adaptation

MA: Medium Adaptation

LA: Low Adaptation

# Abstract

This study used an hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analyze and interpret the meaning of the teaching experiences of nine beginning secondary school teachers in Kontum City, Central Vietnam. The beginning teachers in this study reported that their main issues were mastering subject content, developing expected pedagogical skills, applying effective classroom management strategies, and catering for student diversity.

Some beginning teachers adapted more effectively than others. The school context and colleagues played a crucial role in influencing their levels of adaptation, particularly through the accessibility of positive support, the pressure of accountability for student achievement and classroom discipline, responsibility, the nature of formal and informal evaluation and the effectiveness of professional networks in the school. At the personal level, crucial characteristics influencing adaptation were the amount of effort and preparation put into teaching and classroom management, the capacity for reflection on learning by experience, and the establishment of an outside school network for professional and emotional assistance.

Two issues seemed to transcend individual variations in adaptation. One was the difficulty of integrating personal beliefs about the teacher's role and actual behavior. The other was the dilemma of reconciling ideals of what teaching should be like with the reality of teaching in schools of high cultural diversity that often were characterized by low student performance and motivation, inadequate resources, and a gap between ideal and actual behavior amongst other teachers.

This research suggests several practical strategies for improving initial teacher training and developing effective school support. The most important, improvement for training institutions, school personnel and individual teachers include guidance in establishing professional networks, developing techniques of personal and professional reflection, decisiveness and practical wisdom, and openly addressing the tension between ideal and reality, between belief and behavior.

# Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures undertaken and reported in this thesis was approved by La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee. (R053/10)

Signed:.....

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husband and treasured little daughter who have been always by my side with ongoing support and love. I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents who are always proud of me and being a constant source of inspiration and love for my growth.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The topic

The topic of the early career of teaching has attracted the attention of scholars for decades. Feiman-nemser (2003) called this experience of being a new teacher a “special time” as everything about real teaching is new for the teachers who tend to face unending questions while they have the same responsibilities as their experienced colleagues. A large number of studies, most of them are from Western countries, have been conducted to gain insights into the topic in the attempt to uncover the nature of the phenomenon of being a neophyte teacher (Flores, 2006).

The first years of teaching are characterized in the research literature as very difficult for novices. The problems firstly come from the mismatch of teachers’ unrealistic expectations and teaching reality (Flores, 2006) which usually leads to the experience of being shocked (Adam, 1982; Betts, 2006; Coles, 1985; Friedman, 2000; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Veenman, 1984). The most challenges are reported to consist of issues relating to students, such as motivation, individual differences, disciplinary problems, work assessment and classroom management (Flores, 2006).

Other problems are related to subject-matter and workload which lead to the teachers’ emotional and physical exhaustion (Adam, 1982; Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Friedman, 2000; Luft, Roehrig, & Patterson, 2003; M. Schmidt & Knowles, 1995; Toren & Iliyan, 2008; Vonk, 1983).

It is also widely stated that emotional and practical supports are crucial for beginning teachers (Brock & Grady, 1998; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Feiman-nemser (2003) has argued that beginning years of teaching need to be considered as new teachers’ learning time, not as the time for refining existing skills. This is because teaching skills can only be grasped in the real teaching contexts where the process of learning to be a teacher occurs. The lack of support and guidance in this learning time may lead the teachers to negative adaptation (Flores, 2006); or more seriously, cause stress

and burnout in the beginners (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Friedman, 2000; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Mearns & Cain, 2003).

## **1.2 My pathway to the study**

Before coming to the role as a researcher of this study, I was a teacher in my sixth year of teaching. Six years was not enough to make me an excellent skillful teacher, but enough for me to no longer be new to the surroundings as I was in the very first years. I was a good student in school and graduated with high marks from an illustrious university of pedagogy in Vietnam. I entered my career in Kontum Teacher Training College with excitement, confidence and pride. I believed I could bring to my students the most advanced knowledge through innovative teaching approaches.

Then, not very long after, I was shocked when my experience did not match my expectations, when I started to fall into difficult teaching situations which I had not prepared for and did not know how to deal with. I found my passion for teaching decreased. Although I also had other difficulties (dealing with low salary, getting familiar with the school regulations, and creating good relationships with colleagues as well as students' parents), my first years, from a very excited beginning, became more and more difficult because of the problems with teaching matters. There were many situations that happened that led me to become aware of issues facing novice teachers.

### **1.2.1 Recognition one: lack of teaching experience**

One of the situations that made me recognize my lack of teaching experience was a class that I had to teach under the observation of other colleagues (in Vietnam, it is normal that teachers attend and observe other teachers' class, in order to exchange teaching skills or to judge others' performance. The latter reason is applicable for my case as I was a beginning teacher). At that time, the college called for the implementation of innovative teaching methods; particularly group work and multimedia were encouraged, sometimes they were compulsory, to use. I was very confident designing a lecture using Powerpoint, the software that only few teachers in the college, at that time, could use. However, with a lot of motion effects and too much extended content, I talked a lot to convey the content to students, and could only stand still next to the computer mouse

to click for the next effect. My lecture became, as a colleague commented later, “a TV game show”, and I was like “a MC (Master of Ceremonies) of that show”.

Carefully reviewing the issue, I recognized that the root of my failure was the lack of experience. I realized that I was too ambitious when I wanted to transfer too much of content in a limited time and show off the skills of using technology, while providing little chance for the students’ involvement in comprehending the content. I had the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm; but I lacked teaching experience so that I could not conceive how the real lecture would go with the lesson plan I designed.

### **1.2.2 Recognition two: lack of knowledge about teaching context**

Although the college where I started my teaching career is an institution where they train teachers for local secondary schools, there were some international students who came from Laos, the country on the border with Kontum province. Also, the ethnic minority people are one of the features of the population in the provincial area; hence, students in the college are a mix of many ethnic groups, even though the Kinh group was still the majority of students.

However, I was not aware of this fact. The teacher training program did not tell me that my students would consist of people from other countries, or other groups of languages and cultures. After a few months teaching without an awareness of the diversity of students, I realized my performances were not relevant to non-Kinh students. I remembered that in the teacher training program, they taught me that teachers need to adjust methods to suit the students. However, this theory seemed to be too general, and even trite and hollow to me as I still did not know how to teach Laos students and ethnic students.

I realized that I was not prepared for this real context.

### **1.2.3 Recognition three: the role of school context on my failure and success**

My enthusiasm for applying innovative teaching methods was also challenged by the school context, in that it lacked facilities. My excitement for enhancing students’ learning autonomy did not work due to the poor amount of books in the college library and

the difficulty of accessing the Internet. The idea of teaching with multimedia aids did not always work due to limited access to the function room. I found that my expectations of teaching with innovative approaches were hard to fulfill, even, sometimes I felt, unrealistic. I realized that the school context could not be discounted in one's teaching experience.

However, I was very lucky as my colleagues were very supportive of me. In my first year of teaching, I had an official mentor who was an experienced teacher in the same Department. She was willing to contribute ideas to my lesson plans and share her teaching experiences every time I asked. She and other teachers were very friendly and outgoing in the way they talked to me, explained the requirements of the college, shared how to achieve those requirements, and concerned themselves with my emotional issues in teaching. That was a great encouragement to me and helped me quickly adapt to the teaching context. I could say the mentor and other colleagues played a crucial role in my teaching socialization.

#### **1.2.4 My overall preoccupation**

Although I could gradually learn to deal with the unexpected problems and the situation was getting better, the notion that the first years of teaching are full of challenges has intrigued me, especially when I found that some of my friends had the same experiences as I did in their early teaching time.

I have a conviction that there is a need to improve teaching professional induction for the pre-service teachers and support for the teachers in their first years of teaching. I believe that the first years of teaching will be easier if new teachers are better prepared for their profession before they officially become teachers. The preparation obviously occurs within the teacher training courses including induction programs under either the assistance of the teacher educators or the practice of pre-service teachers themselves. Also, it would be easier for beginning teachers if they received support from the schools and administrators where they are working.

The preparation and support could be improved in the sense of focusing more on the most common classroom challenges facing beginning teachers, including flexibility in using teaching methods, familiarity with textbook structure and skills in classroom man-

agement. However, due to the lack of documents concerning the classroom challenges facing beginning teachers in Vietnam, no improvement of teacher preparations and supports can be based on convincing evidence until I know what the issues of the early career teachers are.

I questioned myself whether the first years of teaching are challenges for all teachers or not. I was not sure that all beginning teachers have classroom difficulties in the first teaching years or whether some of them find it easy. Western literature indicates that early career teachers face a great number of issues (Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005; Vonk, 1983). However, some cases of teachers who were successful at the beginning of their teaching are also recorded (E. Hebert & Worthy, 2001). Again, I have to repeat that there are a lack of documents about the topic in Vietnam, so I do not know if these findings are applicable in that country.

As a result of all these considerations, I decided to conduct a study to seek the answers to my questions. Before I could know if there is a need for improvement, and if so, what improvements can be made, in the teacher training programs and beginning teachers' support in schools, I need to understand what is going on with early career teachers in their classrooms. This study is a chance for beginning teachers to raise their voice so that their belief, expectations, performance and concerns could be understood from their personal insights. In addition, because of the lack of local material on beginning teachers' experiences in Kontum (and in other parts of Vietnam) I will in the final chapter of this thesis discuss the implications of my research for policy and practice in teacher training and mentoring beginning teachers in their schools.

### **1.3 Introduction to the thesis**

This study is to seek an understanding of the phenomenon of being an early career teacher in the Kontum City area of Vietnam. The aim of this study is to explore, through a phenomenological method the beginning teachers' classroom experiences, including their stories about their situations, perspectives, feelings and attitudes toward those experiences. My aim is to uncover the meanings underlying the experiences.

The research question is: What meanings do beginning teachers bring to their teaching

experience in secondary schools in Kontum City?

The phenomenon of investigation is from the constructivist standpoint in which the researcher plays the role of the analytic and interpretive instrument. As I was born, grew up, and went to schools in Kontum City, I have some understanding of the context of the study. In addition, I am a teacher in Kontum Teacher Training College. In Vietnam, a teacher training college usually prepares teachers for local area, at the level of kindergarten, primary (grades 1 to 5) and secondary schools (grades 6 to 9). Teachers who teach in high school, from grade 10 to 12, are trained in Universities. Although at the time of doing the study, I was not working in the teacher training facility; I still have a better chance to access the secondary schools than to other schools in Kontum City and schools in other cities. Therefore, I chose to conduct this study in Kontum City, with participants in secondary schools.

I consider that hermeneutic phenomenology is the appropriate framework employed to seek the answer to the research question. It not only reflects the philosophy of the study but also the methodology that could bring both descriptive and interpretive levels of findings. It is phenomenological because it is descriptive in order to provide pure descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. It is hermeneutic because it leads to interpretive expressions of those experiences which involve the influence of historical and cultural contexts. Through my process of reflection, writing and rewriting, the teachers' experience is described and interpreted.

With semi-structured interview method and opened-ended questions, the experiences of nine teachers who were in their first three years of teaching at the time of the interviews were collected.

The resultant issues and findings show some characteristics of the phenomenon that are consistent with what is described in the literature; and some reveal diversity due to the context of the study. The study is a contribution to knowledge of the topic, as well as a suggestion for local practice of educational improvements.

## **1.4 Organization of the thesis**

In this chapter, I have introduced the thesis topic, an enquiry about some beginning teachers' experiences; outlined the reasons that urged me to conduct this study and provided an overview of the inquiry. In chapter 2, I present a review of some of the literature in the area of the experiences of beginning teachers and locate my study in the Vietnamese context of beliefs about teaching and learning. In chapter 3, I state the philosophical standpoint where I situate myself in the investigation of the research problem, and announce the methodology of this study. In the following chapter, chapter 4, I report the methodical considerations and process of carrying out and accomplishing the study, from data collection to analysis, interpretation and writing. Chapter 5 describes the participants and the data in the form of verbatim stories which are typical and representative of common topics mentioned through interviews. In chapter 6, I report the results of the analytic stage; and discuss the findings. The final chapter presents the synthesis of the findings which explore the research question; summarizes the variations contributing to the beginning teachers' experiences; and gives suggestions for practical improvement and further research. Also included in this chapter is my evaluation of the contributions and limitations of the study; as well as my reflection on the role of the researcher of this study, my worldview, and my role as a teacher trainer.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Most of what has been written in the research literature on the experiences of beginning teachers is based on Western experiences, particularly in the USA and Europe. The problem for me, as a Vietnamese investigating the experiences of beginning teachers in Kontum, is to know the extent to which the findings in the Western literature will provide a good guide to the experiences of the Kontum teachers. My approach in this chapter is to look for commonalities and variations in the experiences reported in the Western literature and to summarize what we know about the influences of different kinds of factors on beginning teachers' experiences.

To provide a context for my research I describe the cultural characteristics of Kontum province and the traditional characteristics of Vietnamese education with its strong reliance on Confucian values and assumptions about society. I analyze the achievements and the problems of education in the "đổi mới" (renovation) period (from the 1990s) to highlight the issues that beginning teachers in Vietnam are confronted with.

My argument in this chapter is that many of these issues are similar to those faced by neophyte teachers everywhere, but have a different form and possibly manner of being experienced for the Kontum group due to particular national and local contexts.

### **2.2 Research findings about beginning teachers**

The first years of teaching consist of unexpected and intense experiences characterized by the discrepancy "between unrealistic expectations and school reality" (Flores, 2006, p. 2021). The following writing provides an overview of other researchers' findings around the phenomenon of "On being a teacher".

### **2.2.1 Unrealistic expectations**

Studies focused on beginning teachers have generally found that they have unrealistic expectations/ perspectives about their role, their teaching performances and the workplace environment.

In terms of the role as a teacher, the pre-service and beginning teachers in the first time entering the career were reported to be naive when expecting they would be the leader and have the most authority in the class. Friedman (2004) in his study found that the teachers viewed teaching “as a means of establishing self-esteem and power” (p. 458). The expectations also included gratitude, affection, power, and respect. For example, one of the participants expressed her expectations, which the researcher evaluated as “idealism”, that “...students to treat her as a leader and show respect, affection and responsiveness” (p. 458).

In terms of the teaching, the beginning teachers usually idealized their prospects. The pre-service teachers in Weinstein’s study (1988) showed a high confidence about their success in their future teaching. Interestingly, they strongly believed that they would have less trouble than their peers including completing tasks that they perceived as most problematic for beginners such as dealing with students, establishing and keeping the rules, dealing with student differences and maintaining discipline. Novice teachers in studies of Friedman (2004), conducted in Israel using questionnaire, and of Hong (2010)’s, conducted in the U.S using 84 participant surveys and 27 interviews, were also found to be over optimistic about the daily struggle with serious problems in their future teaching.

In terms of workplace environment, beginning teachers also expected to have an ideal working condition with supportive colleagues. In Friedman (2004)’s study, his participants expressed a hope of a workplace that can “engender a collegial, conflict- free organizational culture, in which the partners in the educational process, namely, teachers, parents, the community and the public, provide recognition, support, cooperation, and respect for the efforts the teacher invests in her work” (p. 458). Other studies (Chubbuck et al., 2001; Rust, 1994) had similar findings about the beginners’ expectations of a working environment with supportive colleagues and principal.

The teachers' idealistic point of view is related to their lack of classroom experiences in the role of a teacher. Hong (2010) measured the score of the emotions of two groups with different levels of experience of classroom teaching and found that the teachers who had some experience with student teaching "held less idealistic views" than the others who had not (p. 1540). This researcher suggested the teacher training programs should provide the pre-service teachers with realistic perceptions of classroom experience.

### **2.2.2 Experiences of 'successful' beginning teachers**

Although most research about early years of teaching found that this is a problematic time, there are cases of successful beginning teachers. The participant in the case study by Hebert (2001) is a positive example of a teacher reflecting herself as a successful beginner. By observations and interviews during the year, the study brought out the descriptions and interpretations of one new physical teacher's experience of her teaching at a public school in the U.S. This teacher said that managing student behavior and adopting the social and political culture of the school were two of the most difficult challenges and she saw herself successfully overcoming them. The factors related to that beginning teacher's success were also identified. They were the teacher preparation, school context, and personality and behavior.

Firstly, in terms of the teacher preparation, the chances to challenge teacher's idealistic beliefs and to practice in school context were important. According to E. Hebert and Worthy (2001), the teacher in their study described a critical incident in which she recognized the difficulty and importance of the student behavior management. The incident brought her a failure so that she then rethought about her ability to manage the classroom, causing her to take an active role in pedagogical learning, and hence change her expectations to be more realistic. This point also supported the review above that unrealistic expectations and beliefs are one of the causes of the beginner's failure.

The teacher preparation also counted in the beginning teacher's practice. The study showed that the successful beginner had chances to practice teaching in many schools, and this enhanced the development of the teacher's realistic expectations. Also, the successful teacher had eventually chance to practice teaching in the school in which she would be hired later. Hence, she was more familiar with the specific context of school

where she would work.

Secondly, the school context was found not to contribute to the beginning teacher's success, but the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the school characteristics was counted. This contrasts with what unsuccessful beginners usually claim, i.e., that characteristics of the new school environment are the causes of their failure. Another set of factors that contributed to the beginning teacher's success was personality and behavior. The successful teacher in E. Hebert and Worthy's study had a particular situation of family and responsibilities that allowed her to devote completely to her job. Besides that, she was an energetic person so that she could match to fast pace of teaching. Also, she possessed the characteristics that contributed to the student behavior management such as being confident, outgoing and assertive. In addition, she was willing to seek support when problems arose. Moreover, she had a so strong commitment to teaching that she devoted a great amount of time for it. This differentiates this teacher from the others who failed in the first years of teaching, who lacked confidence, were shy and not assertive.

Behaviorally, a successful beginner was found to distinguish herself from others. She could provide reasons for her decisions, was never confused and showed a sense of control and powerfulness.

This comparison of the teacher who showed a more successful adaptation with those who had more difficulty suggests that personality and personal attributes as well as contextual factors could mediate the reported experiences of the beginning teachers in the Kontum group. Some pertinent questions are: Do the characteristics of good preparation, confidence, willingness to seek advice, flexibility, perseverance and reflexivity relate the perceptions of the Vietnamese teachers of their experiences and the meaning of beginning teaching? Do those who adapt less well to the challenges of teaching tend to attribute their difficulties more to a difficult environment and lack of assistance from colleagues than to their own inexperience or inadequacies?

### **2.2.3 Issues**

Based on the main issues discussed in the research, I will focus on two problems identified as particularly important to beginning teachers. These are: dealing with students

and familiarizing oneself with the subject matter.

### **2.2.3.1 Dealing with students**

Student-related issues such as classroom management, students' motivation, students' individual differences and assessing students' work have been found as one of the problems faced by teachers in their first career years (Veenman, 1984). Classroom discipline is an aspect that has been focused on in a number of studies about beginning teachers. In the finding that classroom management is a challenge to early career teachers, student control, discipline and rules are the central of concern. This is the most common and serious problem perceived by beginning teachers in Veenman (1984)'s synthesis of 83 studies from 9 countries in America and Europe. However, classroom discipline is only registered in those studies as a beginning teachers' problem, while there was no further clarification or definition of how it was a problem. At the same time, it is noted to be an unclear term because a situation is called order or discipline by a teacher but maybe seen as disorder by another teacher (Veenman, 1984).

Applegate et al. (1977, cited in S. B. Hebert (2002)) reported students' disrespect of the teacher's authority when they provided more detail about the beginners' concern of the relationship with students. Fogarty, Wang, and Creek (1982) stressed that novice teachers were not able to deal with pupils' responses as well as experienced teachers. Instead, they were easily disrupted by pupils' behaviors when they were presented. Moskowitz and Hayman Jr. (1974) found that beginning teachers had more difficulties with disorder control and less able to involve students in the classroom. Marso and Pigge (1987), in their study of the relationship between 24 working conditions and teachers' reality shock, found that although the factor "rapport with students" did not significantly contribute to the neophytes' shock, the condition of "behavior of students" appeared to be a relatively high contribution. Bullough (1989) reported that the teacher he interviewed in his study admitted her little knowledge of students led her to experience many difficulties with classroom management.

More recently, further studies about beginning teachers also led to the same finding of the problem with students and discipline. In Brock and Grady (1998)'s quantitative survey 49 teachers and 56 principals had the same feeling that "classroom management and

discipline” was the most serious problem for beginning teachers. Qualitatively, Goddard and Foster (2001) studied nine beginning teachers and found that the teachers entered the career with their own perception of teaching but they then became concerned about classroom management and student discipline after they perceived the complexity of the real teaching.

While some educators show their agreement with the notion that teachers can control and punish students in some ways if they are not following the rules and to react to the commotion in the classes (Macmillan, Forness, & Trumbull, 1973), other educators strongly disagree with that (Straus & Donnelly, 2001). Although “punishment” and “control” are the controversial terms in education, some beginning teachers in Vonk’s study (1983) reported that they had to punish students so much to keep the discipline that they could say “punish children” was one of their jobs (p. 141). Also, while a majority of teachers agreed that punishment is inevitable to keep the discipline in some situations, they expressed that they felt unsure about how to put students on a right punishment approach (Vonk, 1983). Neophyte teachers would experience ambiguity and confusion surrounding their beliefs about appropriate strategies for classroom management and student discipline.

In addition to the discipline problem, dealing with individual differences among students is another noticeable issue for beginning teacher. Vonk (1983) counted this issue as one of the problems with subject matter, but it actually can be considered as the trouble of neophytes in trying to organize activities for groups with students of different ability. For example, when a task is given to a group with those students, better students may finish quicker and get bored or make noise while the lesser ability students are still thinking.

Also, the lack of familiarity with the differences in academic level of students leads beginners to difficulties with giving tasks (for example too difficult or too simple questions) and evaluation (Vonk, 1983). Adam (1982) also found that teaching students of different socioeconomic levels is one of the top five problems of beginning teachers. Goddard and Foster (2001) from their finding affirmed that not meeting the special needs of students is one of the causes of the neophytes’ feeling of being overwhelmed. More recent studies have confirmed the beginning teachers’ difficulties in dealing with

students' difference (Brock & Grady, 1998; Toren & Iliyan, 2008).

In spite of not being ranked at the same priority in the research studies, other problems related to students have also been repeatedly reported. Accordingly, beginning teachers have been found to have similar difficulties with students' motivation and expectation, evaluating student work, and handling student conflicts (Adam, 1982; Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Brock & Grady, 1998; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Veenman, 1984; Vonk, 1983; Wilson, Ireton, & Wood, 1997).

#### **2.2.3.2 Subject matter**

Subject content has been reported to be another major problem for beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are unfamiliar with the textbooks and curriculum as they just focus on what they have to teach next. They do not understand the whole picture of the curriculum so that they do not know what is important and should be emphasized (Vonk, 1983).

Research has also documented problems related to the organization of class-teaching. In Vonk (1983)'s study, teachers raised their concern about how to gain attention when they start to give instruction or lecture and how to make the time for homework correction become less boring and avoid commotion. Beginning teachers had difficulty with adjusting teaching methods and constructing a suitable learning environment in which the discipline was maintained and the creativity was allowed (Vonk, 1995).

Chubbuck et al. (2001) examined the beginners' practical problems, including the highlighted teaching methods and instructions in classroom. Participants in Adam (1982); Chubbuck et al. (2001); Toren and Iliyan (2008); M. Schmidt and Knowles (1995) echoed their concern of the instructional approaches. Principals in Brock and Grady (1998)'s study reflected on their beginning teachers' lack of instructional skills. They gave positive evaluations on these beginners' knowledge of the subject content, but reported the teachers' inadequate skills to adjust the material to pupils. Ensor (2001) stressed these challenges prevented the neophytes from trying new teaching methods.

In addition, researchers identified the existence of a gap between the beginning teachers' belief of effective teaching approaches and their practice. Beginning teachers were

found to hold an idealistic belief when they started teaching but could not apply their beliefs into teaching practice. The beginning teachers in Simmons et al. (1999)'s study strongly believed in the student-centered approach and described their classroom practice as student-centered. However, when observed, they displayed more teacher-centered performance in their first year of teaching and this approach continued to be dominant in the next two years of the study even when the teachers attempted to employ more student-centered approaches.

Although the relation between the belief and practice was confirmed in a study by Luft et al. (2003), this relation was found to be able to be reinforced through an induction program for the beginning teachers. More recently, a study of Choi and Tang (2008) also found that the beginners studied had belief on the innovative teaching approaches that were considered to be odd and rejected by the school where advocated for traditional strategies. This study also highlighted a shift of strategic compliance of these teachers in order to adopt the school culture.

## **2.2.4 Emotional experiences**

Beginning teachers also have to cope with new experiences at the emotional level. Among the most common reported in the research literature are the experiences of being shocked and disillusioned, of being under heavy stress that sometimes results in burnout, and other issues such as feelings of loneliness, isolation, vulnerability, anxiety as being evaluated by peers and managers, and uncertainty about how and when to ask for help.

### **2.2.4.1 Shock and disillusionment**

Reality-shock (or Praxis shock (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002)) is a term widely used in the literature by researchers who have tried to characterize beginning teachers' experiences in one word. According to Veenman (1984), reality shock is "the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life" (p. 143). Betts (2006); Marso and Pigge (1987) defined reality shock as essentially the reaction when teachers realize the reality of teaching is far from what they expected. Goddard and Foster (2001, p. 359) described this as a "feeling of being overwhelmed" when "the gloss wears off". Friedman (2000, p. 595) called this

“shattered dreams of idealistic performance”.

In sum, the reality shock appears to be largely defined in the relation with teachers' expectations and the real teaching conditions (Adam, 1982; Betts, 2006; Coles, 1985; Friedman, 2000; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Veenman, 1984).

Beginning teachers' reality shock relates to the issues that have been presented in the previous section on its causes. The synthesis of 83 studies of Veenman (1984) shows that student-related issues, such as classroom discipline, motivation of students, dealing with individual differences among students, assessing students' work and relations with parents were the most frequently mentioned problems that led to the teachers' shock.

Reality shock was found in Marso and Pigge (1987)'s study of four groups of beginning teachers in three types of schools (rural, urban, and suburban). Among 24 working conditions examined, only the help from other teachers and observations by administrators did not statistically contribute to the teachers' shock. The causes of reality shock mostly were work load, equipment for teaching, in-service help, class scheduling problems, and, especially, behavior of students (which was the most common factor in causing teachers' shock).

Goddard and Foster (2001) in their qualitative study with nine beginning teachers found that the teachers entered the career with their own perception of teaching but after they perceived the complexity of the real teaching, they then became concerned about classroom management, student discipline, special needs of students, expectations of administrators and dealing with parents. Some of them felt shocked when perceiving the “lack of balance between personal and professional life and feelings of being unprepared to undertake the tasks associated with classroom teaching” (p. 353).

While the teaching reality is largely found to be problematic for beginning teachers, studies also show that beginning teachers usually have unrealistic perspectives about their role, their students, and the teaching performances, all of which may lead them to experience reality shock. The unrealistic perspective was found in teachers during their pre-service time to the first few months of in service teaching until they have reality shock (Friedman, 2004; Weinstein, 1988).

#### **2.2.4.2 Stress and burnout**

Beginning teachers' stress is a topic that has gained the attention of many researchers in recent decades. From the studies conducted in a variety of countries, factors causing beginning teachers' stress have been identified. Many researchers found that beginning teachers' stress has a strong relationship with the problems that teachers experienced in their early career.

These stressors are rooted in contextual and environmental elements including disruptive student (Burke et al., 1996; Pithers, 1995); lack of supervisor support (Burke et al., 1996; Hong, 2010); technical and material support (Carlson & Thompson, 1995); workload and responsibilities (Chan, 1998; Carlson & Thompson, 1995; Hong, 2010).

Researchers have been exploring the consequences of stress on beginning teachers. Mearns and Cain (2003) ) found that stress is closely associated with "maladaptive coping" and the experiences of burnout and distress. Indeed, numerous research studies have been reporting the connection between teachers' stress and teachers' burnout. Accordingly, burnout is a psychological syndrome resulted from long-lasting stress, comprising the symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (personality changes), and accomplishment (reduced feelings of competence and successful achievement)(Mearns & Cain, 2003; Burke et al., 1996; Friedman, 2000; Maslach et al., 2001).

However, as suggested by some studies, not all the individuals suffering stress would experience burnout. Actually, some teachers could be affected by the work stress but could overcome it and succeed (Pithers, 1995). Hence, Mearns and Cain (2003), among others, focused on the relationship between personal characteristics and teachers' stress and burnout. These researchers advised that teachers with stronger belief about their ability to control the negative emotions could adapt to teaching circumstances with more active strategies and had lower levels of stress and burnout.

#### **2.2.4.3 Others issues**

Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) suggested vulnerability is another characteristic describing the phenomenon of beginning teachers' school life. These authors believed the feeling of vulnerability consists of the teacher's experience of their incompetence because the teachers in their study echoed the feeling of not knowing how to deal with

teaching reality. In addition to the experience of their own failure, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) stressed that the criticism from other people could also be a cause of beginning teachers' vulnerability. Hence, these researchers noticed the importance of the relationships in the school which could be a good source of recognition but also a potential threat to the teachers' self-esteem.

Beginning teachers also have the experience of being supervised and judged by others. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) called this experience "visibility" which is that teachers were aware the fact that their actions were under observation and evaluation by supervisors, school administrators, other teachers, parents, and even students. The beginning teachers believed that students' learning results and the students' respect for the teacher's authority could determine the other people's evaluation about them. For example, the students' bad test results "often lead to self-doubts and external criticism" (p. 112). Also, the participants in Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002)'s study recounted their uncomfortable feeling of being observed by other teachers who were present in their classrooms.

By contrast, beginners in Brock and Grady (1998)'s study reported that they welcomed other teachers to observe and give them feedback about their teaching, but they also admitted that they were not willing to expose their difficulties to the mentor who had the power to evaluate and give recommendations of the contract renewal.

In addition, beginning teachers reported their experience of being isolated and loneliness. The teachers in Rust (1994)' study echoed their surprise at the lack of the collegiality in their school and the feeling of loneliness due to the lack of support from the principal and other teachers. Each teacher in Ensor (2001)'s study and half from Friedman (2000)'s also reported the feeling of isolation and loneliness. The teachers claimed that they were hesitant in going to ask for help from other colleagues (Friedman, 2000).

### **2.2.5 The needs of beginning teachers**

From this review of the research literature it seems clear that, faced with these challenges arising from the demands of the job and their emotional consequences, most beginning teachers would be expected to have a need for practical and emotional supports.

Participants in the study by Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) emphasized the importance of good relationships with other colleagues with whom the teachers believed that they could share opinions and explore answers to their didactic questions. Beginning teachers in the study by Brock and Grady (1998) also confirmed that they needed principals and mentors as good sources of support. These researchers pointed out the issues that beginners needed support, including writing lesson plans, establishing and implementing consistent discipline rules, grading, modifying lessons, finding resources for students of different levels, determining expectations for mainstreamed students, coordinating with special education teachers, and so on (p. 182).

Feiman-nemser (2003) has made a really important point by stating that beginning years of teaching need to be considered as new teachers' learning time, not as the time for refining existing skills. It is because teaching skills can only be grasped in the real teaching contexts where the process of learning to be a teacher occurs. Hence, when the teachers' needs are seen as the indications of a deficiency of teacher preparation, the process of teachers' learning is misinterpreted and may lead to some negative consequences for the individual teachers.

Lack of support and guidance in this learning time may lead the teachers to negative adaptation (Flores, 2006); or more seriously, cause stress and burnout in the beginners (Burke et al., 1996; Friedman, 2000; Maslach et al., 2001; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Fimian (1984, 1986b, 1986a) in her series of studies about teachers' stress found confirmation of the positive relationship between the support in workplace and teachers' emotional health. So it seems important to conceptualize the process of meeting beginning teachers' needs at least as much in terms of providing professional and personal support and guidance as in re-mediating deficiencies in poor training or personality.

### **2.2.6 Contributions of the experiences**

Parallel with the attempt to find the issues that beginning teachers usually raise, researchers have also explored the causes of the problems. The research includes both perspectives mentioned above: the need for supportive professional and personal assistance, and the task of overcoming poor professional training.

A handy summary of the issues can be found in some early research conducted by

Muller-Fohrbrodt et al. (cited in Veenman (1984)) who grouped the reasons for those problems into personal and situational causes. According to the authors, personal reasons that cause difficulties for beginning teachers include the wrong attitudes, wrong choice of the teaching profession and unsuitable personal characteristics. Situational reasons could be an inadequate teachers' training program and the problematic real schooling situation.

From the results of other studies, E. Hebert and Worthy (2001) presented five factors contributing to the problems. They are:

- Beginning teachers' unrealistic expectations and beliefs
- A gap between the teacher training programs and the teaching reality
- The lack of teaching experience
- The poor characteristics of the school environment
- Beginning teachers' personal characteristics

The first contribution comes from the unrealistic expectations and beliefs of beginning teachers about real career of teaching. According to E. Hebert and Worthy (2001), during their years in the role of students, the beginning teachers formed their initial expectations and belief about teaching careers which did not match the job realities. A large number of studies, which I presented in the previous section about beginning teachers' expectations have confirmed this statement.

The second cause comes from the limitations of the teacher training programs. E. Hebert and Worthy (2001, p. 899) characterized these programs as "liberal arts curriculum", and "limited field experiences" which fail to prepare teacher students with knowledge and skills to deal with everyday duties of teaching and the familiarity of school context. This is considered the reason for the existence of a gap between the teacher training programs and the teaching reality. Teachers in Friedman (2000)'s study blamed the teacher training programs for not equipping them with practical skills of successful teaching.

Related to the second cause, the lack of teaching experience is suggested to be the third reason. This reason refers to the “glimpse of teaching” that many teachers in training only receive (E. Hebert & Worthy, 2001, p. 899) and their limited awareness of school organization, administration and interpersonal forces.

While theory is defined as what teacher candidates “will do in their future class-rooms” (Smith, 2007, p. 31), practice is not only an “apprenticeship” but also making theory become real and vital, and students need practice as a picture of what to do in their future teaching and for a better understanding about theory (Dewey, 1964).

For decades, educational researchers have been interested in the gap between teacher training and teacher practice, or the so-called theory-practice gap by some other educators. This topic is not a new issue because the “proper relationship of theory and practice” was defined by Dewey (1964, p. 313) over a century ago.

According to Dewey (1964), teacher training programs must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience both theory and practice, not just one or the other. Decade after decade, more and more research has been conducted in an attempt to explore this relationship and narrow the gap between theory and practice in teaching.

However, in many recent research studies, the term “reality shock” is used to describe the result of the difference between student teachers’ expectation and real schooling (Jesus & Paixao, 1996). Several researchers focused on the initial training programs and found that there is a mismatch with the working demands so that in the actual teaching beginning teachers find they are not as well prepared as they thought (Gaede, 1978; Ryan, 1979).

Another author, Ryan (1979), provided three main reasons that caused the beginning experience of teaching to become a “shock”: the teachers had not been trained for the demands of work; teacher training did not provide clear selection criteria; and teachers were not trained for specific jobs in schools. About the fourth contribution, school environment, some other authors such as (Adam, 1982; Vonk, 1983; Veenman, 1984) have looked at factors such as the lack of effective mentoring, little time for reflection or socialization and lack of other support. E. Hebert and Worthy (2001) stated that this

may be due to the incapacity or unwillingness of the school.

Extended from the concern with the variables influencing the experience of first teaching years, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) found that micro-politics play a crucial role in defining the way teachers view their first years of teaching. These researchers argued that the teachers' actions are guided by professional interests. They defined five categories were found to consist of: "Material interests (Availability and access to teaching materials, funds, infrastructure, and structural time facilities); Organizational interests (Issues concerning roles, positions or formal tasks in the school as an organization); Cultural-ideological interests (Normative values and ideals about good teaching in the school); Social professional interests (Issues on the quality of interpersonal relations within the school)" (p. 110).

Finally, teachers' personal characteristics are also counted as influences on the problems they may experience in early career teaching. Beginning teachers in the study of M. Schmidt and Knowles (1995) thought that their failures in first years of teaching might be rooted from their characteristics such as unassertiveness, shyness and compliance, which could be a barrier for teachers at the beginning time. In terms of experience of stress, Mearns and Cain (2003) concluded that teachers with stronger belief about their ability to overcome challenges had less stress and burnout.

## **2.3 The Vietnamese context**

In this section, I describe the cultural diversity of the research site, Kontum City, and set out some relevant generalizations about characteristics attributed to Vietnamese people. Vietnam is a small developing country with approximately 90 million people in 2013. After the conclusion of the war with the USA and its allies in 1975 it was faced with the enormous task of rebuilding its education system. Kontum is a mountainous province in the central highlands of Vietnam. It is a poor province experiencing many difficult conditions in education. Kontum City is its political, economic and educational center.

### **2.3.1 Kontum: some cultural characteristics**

Kontum is a small highlands province, about 1237 km from the capital Hanoi. Its total population, according to the demographic report in 1999, is more than 300,000 people

(Ethnic Committee, 2009).

Characteristic of the central highlands, this is the area that has been long populated by many groups of ethnic minority people. While 54 ethnic groups inhabit the whole country, there are 25 ethnic groups in Kontum province (Ethnic Committee, 2009). Compared to other provinces in the central highlands, Kontum contains a majority of ethnic minorities in the area (Writenet, 2006).

However, when looking at the province by itself, the Kinh still occupies the biggest proportion, nearly 50 percent. The rest of the population includes groups of Xo Dang, Ba Na, Gie Trieng, Jarai, and others (Ethnic Committee, 2009). Each group of the ethnic minorities has specific socioeconomic characteristics, including language, history, farming habits, and shelter.

However, there are some general points shared among these groups that seem to prevent them from integrating smoothly into the mainstream socioeconomic activities, for example: schooling, agricultural production and speaking the national language (Kinh). Each ethnic group has its own language, for example: While Jarai people speak the language in the Austronesian family (Ethnic Committee, 2006b), Xo Dang language, similar to Ba Na and Gie Trieng, belongs to the Mon-Khmer system (Ethnic Committee, 2006c, 2007, 2006a). Kinh language is used in all the national socioeconomic activities. Therefore, the ethnic minorities are required to know Kinh language for successful participation and integration to the national accomplishments, for example schooling.

Language as a difficulty for the ethnic minorities' integration in schooling is documented and asserted in many research findings. Due to the diversity of groups with different languages, the limits of each group's literacy materials, and parents concern of the lack of chance for their children in career and movement, minority students have to use national (Kinh) language in school. However, these students are not proficient at Kinh language while the Kinh teachers rarely speak minority languages (Rambo, 2003; Wells-Dang, 2012).

Aikman and Pridmore (2001) from their study with H'Mong group in Northern mountainous area, and Truong (2011) from her investigation on M'Nong group in a central

highlands province, have the same finding that language is a big challenge for students from these groups. Both studies conducted interviews with Kinh teachers who teach in minority groups. One of them complained that her ethnic students did not understand simple command such as “open your book” (Truong, 2011, p. 184).

In terms of the farming habits, it is considered to be another barrier for the ethnic minorities’ schooling. The minority groups’ families earn their living mostly by cultivation (N. Hoang, 2004). The typical farming habit of the ethnic groups in the central highlands (and also in Kontum) is rotational shifting cultivation (Rambo, 2003). They use rudimentary instruments such as hammer, hoe and machete for cultivating; and hands for plucking rice off the ears in harvesting (Ethnic Committee, 2006b). Hence, they need a large labor force. Meanwhile, the rate of poverty of total minorities in the country is high (29 percent in 1998 while they account for 14 percent of national population) (Rambo, 2003). Poor families need labor to do farming and cannot pay school fees; so the children are usually absent from school to help parents with the work on the fields (Rambo, 2003).

In addition to the challenges from the intrinsic characteristics of minorities that are claimed to be barriers of these people’s integration, empirical studies suggested some other factors. One of the most important of these is prejudice. Ethnic minority people experience high levels of discrimination. Some documents, for example T. X. Nguyen (2007) and Vu (2005), have documented the common use of the word “backward” to describe members of these ethnic groups and their children (Swinkels & Turk, 2006; Wells-Dang, 2012).

### **2.3.2 Vietnamese teachers: unique experiences?**

Much of the research literature cited in the previous sections refers to the experiences of beginning teachers in Western educational contexts. There is very little research in the Vietnamese context. It would seem likely that many of the experiences that are based on common structural and procedural factors would also occur in Vietnam, such as the reality shock accompanying the transition from the role of student to the role of teacher, the problems associated with mastering the content to be taught, the difficulty of coping with a large workload, the emotional experiences of frustration, anxiety, isolation and

uncertainty, and the ambivalence associated with needing collegial approval but at the same time wanting assistance and guidance from fellow teachers and department heads.

But there are other aspects of beginning teachers' experiences that are probably strongly influenced by the Vietnamese context. These could include the nature of the organization of educational institutions in Vietnam, from MOET at the top of the hierarchy down to the individual school and classroom; the resources available with which to teach; the content of the curriculum and the expectations about standards of student performance; the normative expectations among teachers, students and parents about what is a good teacher and what is good teaching; the gap between the official rules about classroom management and student punishments and teachers' covert daily practices in the classroom, and how teachers deal with the inescapable tensions between lofty educational ideals of catering for individual students and the realities of teaching large classes to achieve desired standards in State mandated centralized examinations.

The extent to which the Kontum teachers will report particularly Vietnamese, compared with more 'universal', aspects of the beginning teachers' experience can only be learned from my phenomenographic analysis of their experiences. However, it is useful before this analysis to provide a context of the beliefs and normative frameworks they bring to their experiences. It is not necessary to argue that these teachers base their beginning educational behavior and emotional responses on a well thought out set of educational beliefs. All that I am arguing is that these teachers experience the early years of teaching holding some beliefs. These will be more developed or less developed into articulated philosophies or theories of education, depending on the individual. These beliefs will be based on their own experiences, their preparation in a teacher training college and their awareness of the beliefs held by their fellow teachers in their school.

The educational beliefs and philosophies prevalent in Vietnam are therefore important in setting the context for the beliefs about teaching and learning that these beginning teachers experience and must somehow relate to their own frameworks for teaching.

In the sections below I set out a brief background of some of the main characteristics of Vietnamese educational theory and practice to provide the context in which beginning teachers have to develop their own framework for learning to become a teacher in

Kontum.

### **2.3.3 Vietnamese education: the Confucian heritage**

Being under Chinese dominance for more than one thousand years (Pham, 2010; Tran, 2009), Vietnam, among other Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, is claimed to be a country under penetration of Confucianism, a philosophy imported from China (Biggs, 1998; Jamieson, 1993; London, 2011; Shi, 2006).

Confucianism is a complex system of social and political ethics which focuses on interpersonal relationships based on hierarchy and authority. People in Confucian society should rigidly follow five basic virtues (ruler-subject, parent-child, husband- wife, elder brother-younger brother and friendship). As Confucianism pays a reverence to education, Vietnamese' conceptions of education are also claimed to be affected by the Confucian point of view.

#### **2.3.3.1 Teacher-student relationships**

Traditionally, teachers have high social status and reverence from people in society. The interpersonal relationship between teacher and student is also one of the basic virtues which is considered as the relationship of parent- child (D. Y. F. Ho & Ho, 2008). Students' obligation, like children's obligation to their parents, is to show respect, obedience and gratitude to teachers (Tran, 2009).

Students are expected to be afraid of teachers and show their humility and reaffirm the teachers' authority. Teachers do not allow their students to challenge their authority, for example: students provoking teachers are considered to be disrespectful and rude (D. Y. F. Ho & Ho, 2008; Hu, 2002; Garner, 1989)

In Confucianism, although punishment is originally not preferred to be used, this strategy is believed to be necessary to maintain the order and harmony. According to Liu (2007)'s explanation of the Analects of Confucius, when order and harmony are disrupted (for example: disputes or crimes), even though the moral code is encouraged to be applied first, punishment can be used subsequently when the moral code (through education) could not bring the situation back to order and harmony. The ultimate purpose of Confucian morality is to maintain/ restore social order and harmony; and punishment

is a tool to do that.

In Vietnam, punishment is, in some sense, common LaBorde (1996), in her description of Vietnam Culture, claimed that “In Vietnam, corporal punishment was the norm”. From their empirical studies, Papps, Walker, Trimboli, and Trimboli (1995); Kolar and Soriano (2000) found that Vietnamese parents not only use inductive methods, e.g. reasoning and explanation; but also frequently apply power-assertive methods including yelling, threatened use of force, and even physical punishment to their children.

However, from the Vietnamese perspectives, which is affected by Confucian philosophy, punishment is necessary and with positive purpose. Vietnamese has a proverb “Thương cho roi cho vọt, ghét cho ngọt cho bùi” with the meaning is when you strike one, that means you love one; and when you give one sweet that means you hate one. This proverb is equivalent to the sentence “spare the rod, spoil the child”. There is also another sentence “Thượng bất nghiêm, hạ tắc loạn” with the meaning is that if the superior is not strict, the lower-class will be disordered.

One Vietnamese mother in the study by Kolar and Soriano (2000)’s confirmed that “We [physically] discipline our children. Means we love them, care for them. They are our children, we know where to stop, how to control our anger and not to become an abuser.” Vietnamese parents, indeed, are found to expect compliance from their children (Wise & da Silva, 2007); they trust in the effectiveness of physical punishment in the sense that this strategy could help to avoid their children being spoilt and out of control (Kolar & Soriano, 2000). As teacher-student relationship, in Confucianism, is modeled from parent-child relationship (D. Y. F. Ho & Ho, 2008), for Vietnamese teachers, like parents, punishment is believed to be for a good purpose, coming from the hope that their students would be “better” (in the sense that they are “more disciplined”).

Few studies have been conducted in the attempt to figure out the possible consequences of the strict discipline and punishment in Asian countries where, for generations, hierarchy and authority in social relationships have been the ideal. Chen (1995, cited in D. Y. F. Ho and Ho (2008)) reported that nearly half of the number of students went to counseling in Beijing because of school phobia; and about 90 percent of them suffered inappropriate punishment from teachers.

From observations of Chinese students, D. Y. F. Ho and Ho (2008) claimed that strict discipline could create some negative results on students, such as fear, affected respect, resistance and even aggression to teachers. These researcher suggested that these negative reactions could make increased hostility in a more democratic environment when the teacher applies innovative education and gives students more freedom and equality (D. Y. F. Ho & Ho, 2008, p. 74).

#### **2.3.3.2 Teaching and learning strategies**

In Confucian education, the learning and teaching process is teacher-centered. Teachers are gurus who represent the only source of truth (knowledge). Accordingly, teachers in their classroom should always know everything, and always know better than students (Hu, 2002; Pham, 2010). The situation in which teachers are found, possibly, unable to answer something or know less than students may lead to the notion of losing face (Hu, 2002; Pham, 2010).

In addition, in the teacher-centeredness, transmission is the typical teaching approach where the teacher transfers knowledge to students who are encouraged to receive knowledge rather to think independently (Pham, 2010; Tran, 2009). According to Tran (2009), the Vietnamese traditional way of learning and teaching adapts the Confucian practice that teacher reads aloud the sentences in a book, gives interpretation that sometimes teacher does not really understand, and students repeat.

This conception of learning and teaching is involved in the controversy about Asian people's learning style. Some researchers (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hu, 2002) stated that Asian learners possess a rote (or surface) learning style which does not encourage critical thinking; and Confucianism is claimed to be the cause. Some others (Biggs, 1998; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Kember, 2000) argued that Asian learners were found to perform well and succeed in Western universities, where the learning conditions are believed not appropriate for surface learning; hence, it is hard to conclude that Asian students are rote learners.

Regardless of the controversy about the Asian, Vietnamese included, people's learning style, the consistent view among these documents is that Asian students are passive in learning. They tend to limit their comprehension within the text or the information

provided without making connection with other subjects, personal experience and real life. To the extent that this characterization is accurate, it suggests there is a problem of dualism in mainstream Vietnamese school education. On the one hand this is a widely accepted understanding among school teachers of what teaching and learning are, and on the other hand and this is considered by Vietnamese governments and academic commentators a barrier to the development of the country in today's global economy (Pham, 2010).

### **2.3.3.3 Vietnamese education: "đổi mới" (recent renovation)**

For various reasons, the Confucian framework has been supplanted to various degrees in modern Vietnamese education. It was no longer the official educational framework in Vietnam when the French invaded and colonized in the nineteenth century. However, in order to protect the French superiority, only a small number of schools were offered and hence the rate of illiteracy was very high, about 95 per cent in 1945. In the twentieth century various strands of thought have contributed to educational development: in addition to the Confucian foundation, European liberalism, Communism, and American pragmatism and various religious belief systems including Buddhism, Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

Possibly the most important impetus for change has been official awareness of the need to balance national unity, nation building and the production of a highly skilled workforce that meets the developmental and global competition needs of the country. Since 1991, Vietnamese educational authorities have implemented a reform of the education system which is described as a process of "đổi mới" (usually termed "renovation" in English) (Duggan, 2001). In recent decades, this renovation or *đổi mới* has been recurrently legislated and, to varying degrees, implemented all over the country.

The renovation process has clearly resulted in a massive expansion of educational provision and skilling of the Vietnamese population. But for many observers, including MOET officials writing periodic reports on progress and problems in the education, some aspects still seem to be problematic.

The curriculum contents and teaching methods are in the process of innovation but still contain some disadvantages. They do not meet the aims of the education needed for

national development and the production of skilled, reflective, well-rounded citizens (MOET, 2008; Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). The curriculum covers too much theory while practice is paid little attention. This leads to a mismatch between what students learn in school and what is required of them when they leave school (MOET, 2008; Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). Little attention is paid to the holistic development of different students. Traditional teaching methods are still popular so that one-way lectures are mostly used and rote learning, rather than critical thinking, creativity and autonomy, is encouraged (MOET, 2008).

Professor T. Hoang (2008) showed a strong agreement that the disadvantage of the curriculum is one of the challenges which cause the crisis of Vietnam education. As the contents and teaching methods in curriculum are backward, the unreasonable time allocation in the school timetables lead to the overloaded time for the out-of-date theories. The content lacks a focus on the development of basic characteristics of humanity such as personality, consciousness and sensation. Also, the curriculum provides little chance to develop skills in labor, life, communication, creativity and imagination. This is considered to be the reason of the big gap between theory and practice which makes the training not able to meet the demands of society (T. H. Nguyen, 2006; Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008).

Teachers and administrators cannot yet satisfy the requirements for the full development of the positive outcomes of education. T. Hoang (1996) stated that teachers and educators are the most decisive factors affecting the quality of Vietnamese education. However, this professor raised a concern that in Vietnam, most outstanding teachers are currently at the age of retirement while the young teacher-force is not yet qualified to replace their older colleagues' positions.

As the teacher training programs and teaching methods in the colleges and universities of education are not thoroughly updated, the quality of teacher training is inadequate. Hence, teachers' knowledge of their major subject and professional competence are inadequate to help improve the quality of education at the school level (secondary schools) (MOET, 2008).

Although the qualified standard teachers at all levels of education in 2000 occupied

73.6 percent of all teachers, there is still a proportion of teachers under standard who do not meet the requirements of qualification. According to some critics, these teachers are more likely to have poor self-awareness, lack subject knowledge and are not able to work in the context of multi-culture and multi-religion. They also lack managerial skill, have poor pedagogical competence and lack the reflection and ability to be self-critical at the standard of teacher professionalism. In addition, it has also been reported that there is a surplus of well-trained teachers in the developed areas such as urban and delta areas while there is a shortage of teachers in the under-developed areas such as remote, mountainous and isolated areas like Kontum (T. H. Nguyen, 2006)

Last but not least, there is a lack in the quantity and backwardness in the quality of the facilities and equipment in the school system. Although there has been a slight improvement in recent years, there were still 11 percent of classrooms in temporary conditions in 2007, especially in the mountainous, rural, remote and isolated areas (MOET, 2008). Also, there are not enough libraries, laboratories, specific classrooms and teaching equipment. Many of these are too old and in the out-of-date conditions (MOET, 2004, 2006, 2008; T. H. Nguyen, 2006).

The national government report about Vietnamese education in the period 1998-2004 submitted to the National Assembly, MOET (2004) stated that many of the conditions for the development of an education are missing in Vietnam. One is the lack of a teacher force qualified in the subject knowledge and professional competence. Many of the teachers lack the enthusiasm in innovating teaching methods. Likewise, is the existence of the facility deprivation, for example the lack of laboratories and classrooms, especially in the mountainous and rural areas.

About the students in lower and higher schools, the report emphasizes that they lack social knowledge, practical skills, ability to apply theories into reality, flexibility, independence and creativity. There is also a disparity between students in urban areas and big cities in terms of their learning ability and skills. The curriculum is evaluated to cover a wider range of knowledge than previously, especially in maths, physics, chemistry, computer science and foreign languages.

The use of new textbooks for lower secondary schools is another concern. Some knowl-

edge in the new textbooks is too difficult for the teachers and students. Some parts contain inexact knowledge while some others cover too much information. The school conditions are not ready to apply the new textbooks in general, because of poor facilities, lack of teaching equipment and further training for teachers.

The pre-service education and in-service professional development of teachers and school leaders have also changed in the last two decades. Teacher training colleges have expanded in number and location from the large cities into provincial areas, and many are in the process of being upgraded to university status. Young, capable lecturers have been provided with government sponsored scholarships for postgraduate study in an attempt to upgrade qualifications and acquire relevant knowledge and skills essential for educational renovation for national development. The philosophies of education and their translation into the theory and practice of education have also diversified.

Teacher-centered approaches in training colleges are not overtly based on Confucian social theory but on more modern educational theories such as behaviorism and cognitivism. For beginning teachers, behaviorism provides a potential guide on how to use rewards to enhance students' motivation and enjoyment of learning, and punishments to reduce or eliminate undesirable behaviors (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013). Cognitive approaches provide teachers with understanding of the mental processes underlying students' learning and behavior. They sometimes employ the computer metaphor of information processing, storage and retrieval which, for the beginning teacher, offers guidelines for systematic preparation of learning stages and prepared strategies for catching students' attention by using visual aids, prompting motivation with relevant questions, establishing connections with already known material, and establishing personal connections with students (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Eggen & Kauchak, 2013; Driscoll, 2000).

It also addresses one of the main problems facing classroom teachers – how to deal with the range of student abilities in a classroom – by focusing on the importance of helping individual students turn 'objective' teacher presented information into 'subjective' personal knowledge through adapting the material to each student's existing experiences, prior learning, current interests, personal abilities and aspirations.

It also attends to the issue of memorization and the reproduction of material in test situations (a dominant concern of Vietnamese teachers for their students) by providing strategies for the encoding, retention and reproduction of information via imagery, mnemonics, relational and thematic organization.

Although both these approaches to the teacher's role are common in teacher training programs (V. G. Nguyen, 2012), the problem for beginning teachers is how to apply them in specific situations. This problem seems to be common in the research literature, and is often described as a perception by neophyte teachers that they have been 'poorly' prepared by the teacher training colleges.

Teacher training colleges in Vietnam, including one in Kontum, have also introduced approaches that are less teacher-centered (Le, Nguyen, & Pham, 2005; T. T. Nguyen, 2011; T. M. L. Ho, 2011). This greater inclusivity in the past few decades has resulted in the influence of outside educational ideas, particularly from the USA and Europe, from the curriculum and resources that accompany aid packages from the World Bank and other global development agencies, and the interchange of educators (also students and their families) between Vietnam and foreign countries. Many of these approaches could be grouped under the general category of constructivism, in the sense that they focus on helping learners develop problem solving, reasoning, critical thinking in interactive, reflective and socially constructions of knowledge, behavior and emotion.

Innovation teaching methods in Kontum Teacher Training College (TTC) seem to have been looking for the most effective implementation. The innovative approaches including the student-center and the integration of information technology into teaching have been applied widely in recent years in Kontum TTC. However, the application has only been in the trial stage where all the lecturers are required to use new teaching approaches; and regular discussions have been organized to exchange experience and lessons for more effective implementation. These strategies are emphasized in a number of reviews and reports in workshops and seminars in the college (Le et al., 2005; T. T. Nguyen, 2011; V. G. Nguyen, 2012; T. M. L. Ho, 2011).

In Driscoll (2000)'s summary (2000, pp. 382 - 391) this approach provides beginning teachers with a comprehensive set of principles on which to base their teaching. These

are set out in his exposition in the form of five conditions for learning. The first condition is about learning environments which need to be complex, realistic and relevant in order to help learners get familiar with dealing with complex problems in real life.

Secondly, constructivists highlight the importance of social interaction in developing cognition; hence, collaboration is believed to be a critical learning means that creates chances for individuals to work together in reaching comprehension of learning materials.

In addition, in the constructivist learning environment, different styles of learning are supported and multiple perspectives are accepted so that learners are encouraged to make their own interpretations of the same information. Constructivists also advocates the condition in which learners get ownership of learning, e.g. they are required to actively navigate and manage their own learning by deciding what to learn and how to do. Lastly, in the constructivist environment, learners need to be supported to have more awareness of their thinking processes and how their knowledge is constructed.

There are many variations in particular approaches to the general constructivist approach to education developed overseas (e.g., Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardiner) and adapted by Vietnamese educators (Pham, 2010). Of course, these principles for teaching would be set out differently in different teacher training colleges, but the main elements of this active, more learner-centered approach to pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation would be generally similar if the constructivist approach was adhered to.

The problem for the beginning teacher with these more learner-centered approaches is the difficulty of applying them in their early years of teaching. They require great skill, knowledge of and sensitivity to students' abilities and needs, excellent rapport with the diversity of students, and the experience to know what to do and when to do it in constantly changing classroom situations. If the school culture only nominally espouses these approaches but does not practice them in reality, it is extremely difficult for the beginning teacher to apply these approaches even if philosophically they are committed to them. This problem seems to be reported often in the research literature, with several different manifestations. One aspect of it is the beginning teachers' reality shock at the

contrast between their expectations and the reality of the classroom.

Another can be seen in beginning teachers expressing frustration at the difficulties of teaching to individuals in large classrooms with students of diverse abilities who seem reluctant to take responsibility for their learning. Another is the issue of how beginning teachers evaluate their performance. Is it to be judged in terms of adaptation to the prevailing school norms of good teaching, or is it to be evaluated in terms of satisfying individual criteria of teaching as near to a personal ideal as is possible in the practical circumstances of the school?

The in-service professional development of teachers and school principals has also been renovated and expanded in the last two decades. In theory, every school Principal is eligible for professional development training. But in practice there is often a waiting list and principals are not provided with preparatory training before they assume this leadership role. The courses, spread over three months, are centralized, follow a similar curriculum without change for years on end, and are focused as much on informing the Principals about new regulations and financial procedures as on developing skills in communication, problem solving and responding to local community needs.

B. M. Nguyen (2010) who has taught hundreds of high school principals in training courses commented on the lack of relevance and practical help in these professional development programs:

It is time for us to help principals in a more practical way. In my opinion, they need to be provided with more understandable applicable knowledge. They also need the help not only from theoretical lecturers, but also from local Department of Education and Training (DOET) and their more experienced peers who work in the similar school contexts. (p. 26)

The professional development programs offered to school teachers are also mostly top down cascade models, to which junior teachers have little access because they lack seniority and influence with their school Principal and because the provision of substitute teachers is beyond the budgets of most schools, particularly in economically depressed provinces such as Kontum.

Most of the evidence or opinion on the effectiveness of the national professional development programs is critical. Participants mainly complain about teaching methodology,

time demands because of far travel, cost of traveling, and training course management. For example, one experienced educator in Quang Nam, the middle region in Vietnam, Binh Thanh (Pen name) (2010) argued that professional development was of little real benefit to teachers. He wrote:

There are three main reasons leading to ineffective professional development in Vietnam. First, some of learners have been satisfied with their knowledge, so they think professional development is not important. Secondly, the learning materials are overlapped, boring, and irrelevant. Many teachers and leaders have participated uncountable professional development courses, but they have not had learned what they needed and wanted, so there is a big gap between what they learnt and what they do at their schools. Thirdly, the professional development delivery models remain unchanged, the teaching and learning method is out of date, and training courses management is not serious. (p. 1)

There is little systematic research on professional development effectiveness for Vietnamese teachers, but even in official reports there is a continuing emphasis on the need for improvement in this area. The implications for the beginning teachers in Kontum are that they are more likely to have to rely for help on colleagues in their own school (or another school to which they have access) rather than on official in-service training or professional subject associations. Because of this, their relationships with colleagues, the willingness of their colleagues to assist and the school's attitude to mentoring new teachers will all be factors likely to influence their experiences in their first years of teaching.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this review of the literature, I have identified several commonly noted aspects of the experience of beginning teachers. They include a combination of aspects associated with commencing a new role, aspects related to the knowledge, skill, interpersonal issues relating to class management and relations with colleagues and students, and institutional factors such as working conditions, resources and support provided by the school and the community. Most of the literature is based on research in Western countries. Many of the findings are most likely to be relevant to the participants in this study. However, some of the findings from the Western literature might not provide me with an adequate framework for understanding the experiences of the Kontum group.

To illustrate the particular context for teachers who commence their teaching careers in Vietnam, I have referred to the traditional Confucian basis of culture and education in Vietnam and to the changes in practice and belief during the last three decades of the "đổi mới" (renovation) period. I have suggested that although great progress has been made recently in provision of staff, buildings, resources and coverage of the student population, there is still a tension between ideals and reality. Of particular relevance to beginning teachers is the gap between the ideal of a student centered, constructivist approach to teaching for active problem solving and reflection, and the reality of a teacher centered transmission approach constrained by inadequate resources and a centralized, memory focused assessment regime.

I have suggested that because this tension also can be seen in initial pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs for teachers and Principals, the beginning teacher is quite vulnerable to ambiguity about how to teach appropriately and effectively. This ambiguity can be related not only to the gap between ideal and reality at a personal level, but also at the level of the whole school.

Having provided this framework of what we know and how it might apply or not to the Kontum group of new teachers, I move in the next chapter to describe the epistemological bases on which my study of these teachers has been based.

## **Chapter 3    Philosophic background of the study**

### **3.1    Introduction**

The question of how to go about this study and what methodology to use occupied my mind for a great deal of time. In this section, I describe my journey of searching for a philosophical orientation and framework of this study.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have noted, the paradigm within which the researcher is working will affect the study itself and the methods used. However, I prefer the term world view to paradigm because the term paradigm, which originally appeared with and accompanied the traditional positivism, brings me to the feeling about a hypothetical and formulary model. Instead, the term world view is more appropriate for a flexible and non-foundational set of belief guiding researcher's actions in a study of lived experiences which is the focus of this study.

In this study, constructivism is the world view I have chosen to produce the study framework. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 22), a world view is constituted from a net of three philosophical components: ontology, epistemology and methodology. For the constructivist world view, Guba and Lincoln (2005) claimed that it is constituted by a relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology and hermeneutic methodology. Therefore, in the following writing, I discuss my ontological, epistemological and methodological positions to highlight the constructivist point of view that I adopt to take place this study. Then in the alignment with the characteristics of constructivism pointed out in the literature, I affirm my constructivist standpoint in the accomplishment of this study.

### **3.2    Ontology and epistemology**

#### **3.2.1    Some perspectives and issues**

Ontology is about the nature of being. According to Willig (2001, p. 13), there are two main streams of ontology: "realist" and "relativist". The realist ontology, or realism, emphasizes the belief that structures and objects, which have cause-effect relationships

with each other, objectively exist in the world and make up the world (Willig, 2001). Realists believe that the truth is absolute and fixed in the outside world no matter what it looks like by the human being because reality exists independently of the observers and is separated from the observers' consciousness. Relativist ontology refers to a contrasting philosophical position. It maintains that the world is not fixed, ordered and law-bounded; it instead refers to the belief that the world is diverse and contains multiple meanings depending on the subjective interpretations of the observers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Willig, 2001).

Objectivist epistemology provides the answer to the realist question about "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). It is because objectivism closely relates to the realist belief that reality (or meaning, or knowledge) exists independently to the individuals' consciousness and individuals can only discover the reality through consciousness (Pratt, 1998).

The objectivism is based on the logic of the discovery of reality. Reality exists there in the world, waiting for individuals to discover through observations and experiences. The individual's mind is seen to be "empty" until it is filled with the knowledge about the reality. "The more that one knows about a topic, the closer the representation of knowledge in that person's mind is to the reality of the world". That is why some objectivists believe that the "reality constructs the person" (Evans, 2000, p. 739).

As reality, according to the objectivists, exists independently to the subjective individuals, the reality can be separated from the individuals' feeling and emotion. In addition, no matter who the observer is, "scientist, journalist, teacher, or a citizen testifying at a trial", the reality could be observed neutrally, without any effects from the observer's interests or purposes (Pratt, 1998, p. 23).

Subjectivist (also known as transactional) epistemology, on the contrary, provides the relativists with the answer to the same philosophic question. It is because subjectivism closely relates to the relativist belief that the reality (or meaning, or knowledge) is what the subjective individual views about it. The subjectivists negate the notion that reality exists separately from the human's mind, instead, they believe that the meaning of a reality depends on the interpretation of the individuals. Hence, instead of being fixed in

the world, reality, under the view of the subjectivists, “is relative rather than absolute; it depends upon time and place, purpose and interests (Pratt, 1998, p. 23).

Therefore, the crucial principle of subjectivism is about the subjective interpretation, or as written by Huglin (2003) “Whereas objectivism is based on the logic of discovery, subjectivism is based on the logic of interpretation” (p. 13).

From the subjectivists’ point of view, reality cannot be separated from the individual’s feeling and emotion. The individual’s interpretation about reality is affected by subjective backgrounds, experiences and values. According to Pratt (1998), “we cannot detach our experience from the purposes and values that bring us to that experience. Believing determines what is seen. The separation of mind and world, observer and observed, subject and object, or learner and content must be rejected” (p. 24). Hence, some subjectivists believe that “the person constructs reality”, contrary to the objectivists who believe that “reality constructs the person” (Evans, 2000, p. 739).

### **3.2.2 Determining ontology and epistemology of the study**

This study focuses on lived experience of early career teachers and the findings may not simply exist in a linear but a mutual causality, within a specific context and relative, dependent on the subjects’ consciousness. As Dilthey, Makkreel, and Rodi (1996, p. 226) wrote:

Lived experience is determined by presence and by qualitatively determinate reality. The qualitative aspect of lived experience is something totally different from that of a natural object. In the latter, the quality is apprehended in relation to that whose quality it is. In lived experience there is only this qualitatively determinate reality and nothing exists for us behind it. That is indeed the whole reality of the lived experience.

Although I do not deny the existence and necessity of realism and objectivism in some cases, the relativist and subjectivist perspectives are my premises of this study. The relativity and subjectivity of the study reveal in the dependence of the findings on the diversity of the participants’ consciousness, the researcher’s interpretation and the characters of the selected context. My reasons for this approach are as follows.

Firstly, I think that the reality to be found in this study is diverse and has multiple meanings, dependent on the participants’ subjective consciousness. I assume that beginning

teachers' experiences of classroom-matters are not unitive but relative. Different teachers have different personal backgrounds, interests, purposes and values. Therefore, different teachers have their own subjective feelings, emotions and reactions in the same situation and hence, their experiences are diverse. For example, in the same situation of a classroom in commotion, one teacher could be very angry while another could be embarrassed and others just see it as a lovely capricious moment of the teenagers. Thus, the findings of the study are unpredictable, diverse and multiple because they are not separated from participants' subjective consciousness.

Secondly, findings of this study are dependent on the researcher's interpretation. I, as a researcher of the study, see myself as an instrument to interpret the data. As introduced, I was born, grew up and went to schools in Kontum City, hence, I thoroughly understand the context. I am a teacher in Kontum Teacher Training College where prepares teachers for local secondary schools. I have a better chance to access the secondary schools than other schools in Kontum City or schools in other cities.

In addition, before I became a researcher, I have been a teacher, so I had my personal experiences as a beginning teacher with all their feelings, emotions, expectations and values. All of these make favorable conditions for me to do the research better, at least differently, than other researchers who might conduct the same study. All my subjective characteristics and conditions especially make the data interpretation different from what other researchers would do. Hence, my role as a researcher of the study contributes to the relativity and subjectivity of the study.

Thirdly, the reality to be found in this study is the truth in the particular context of selected secondary schools in Kontum City and may not applicable to other contexts. I considered originally to select a wide range of participants, in order to generalize the findings, but eventually I decided to recruit those who are information rich and can provide with useful manifestations of the phenomenon. However, the sample cannot represent any other population and hence, the findings may not be valid in other contexts. In addition, at the same place but done at another time or by other researchers, the findings may be different. Similarly, the context of secondary schools in Kontum City has its own characteristics that are different from those in other cities. Consequently, the context plays a crucial role in the data interpretation and contributes to the subjectivity

of the study.

### **3.3 Methodology**

The journey to identify my methodology led me to a number of theories such as grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, phenomenology, narratives, hermeneutics and heuristics (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Among the various ways of doing a qualitative research, the theories of phenomenology and hermeneutics were most attractive to me. They provided me with an appropriate way to answer the research questions and also satisfy my position as a constructivist.

This section begins with a review of the origin, definition and characteristics of phenomenology. This approach satisfied my early criteria for a relevant methodological model. However, the model had limitations that troubled me and then I found hermeneutics, a methodology that compensated those limitations. Finally, my methodological journey stopped at the destination of hermeneutic phenomenology as this brought the two approaches together in a way that matched my needs.

#### **3.3.1 Phenomenology**

The term phenomenology was used by Kant in his early philosophical writings and then was more specifically defined by Hegel. Phenomenology under Hegel's definition is the knowledge that appears to the human consciousness, described as sensing, knowing and perceiving in one's awareness and experience (Kockelmans, 1967). In the modern world, phenomenology has its origin in Husserl's philosophy but then is developed into multiple standpoints by later philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Cerbone, 2006).

I identified myself earlier as a positivist until I read Husserl's phenomenology. Previously, I believed that the world exists separately from the human's consciousness and is governed by the natural laws only. I held the view that the goal of science was simply to discover what is going on in the natural world and publish this in a system.

After reading Husserl's phenomenology (Moran, 2008), I was convinced that naturalism contains a self-contradiction as it strongly rejects the laws that are required for its

own expression and explanation, and is against the spirit of philosophy. In addition, naturalism interprets consciousness by seeing it as a part of the world, and I disagree with this notion. Another reason that Husserl discounted naturalism was that naturalism did not distinguish between a “natural attitude” and a “naturalistic one” that treated the world as obvious and taken for granted. Husserl (1970) stated that only transcendental idealism can fix the flaws of naturalism and become an advanced approach and replace naturalism in human research.

I accepted the idea that a phenomenon is transcendental because it refers to the object of an experience which is not separated from the subjects’ thought and can be discovered through reflection on the subjective acts (Kant, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl understood phenomenon as an appropriate starting point for an investigation into the meanings and essences of knowledge. Husserl contrasted facts and essences and also emphasizes the crucial role of the discovery of meanings inside individual experiences (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 80).

In my study, the phenomenon of investigation is the beginning teachers’ classroom life which is dependent on the teachers’ subjective consciousness. While the “fact” in my study may be some common situations that happened inside the beginning teachers’ classrooms, my study focus is more on the meanings beyond that are reflected by the participants who own the experiences; and this matches what Husserl called “essences”.

Phenomenology, while it is usually referred to as both a philosophy and a methodology, concentrates on the essences of lived experience or life-world (Crotty, 1998; Van Manen, 1997). Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology emphasizes the role of experience in making knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). The relationship between perception and its objects is not passive, but rather “human consciousness actively constitutes objects of experience” (p. 484). At the same time, consciousness always exists under the notion of “consciousness-of-something”, not separated from, but being a part of, the experience of objects and events.

In my study, the beginning teachers’ classroom life is experienced by the participants and reflected in their consciousness. To study the beginning teachers’ classroom life means to study their meanings about the lived classroom experiences which are subjec-

tive as they exist inside the participants' consciousness. Therefore, I chose to investigate what the participants said about their own beginning teachers' classroom life, from their perspective, rather than observing what happened and making my own interpretation.

Another element of this approach that I appreciated was Husserl' acceptance of subjectivity. Although Husserl initially accepted both objectivity and subjectivity in his phenomenology, subjectivity, (especially a focus on inter-subjectivity, i.e. many subjects sharing the same object of experience), later became dominant (Cohen, 1987). For Husserl, there is no sharp distinction between mind and body, therefore the subjects are able to grasp consciousness and the essences of consciousness can be exposed in the intentionality and bracketing (Polkinghorne, 1983).

As noted in the previous section of this paper, I valued subjectivity and held the subjectivist standpoint to look at the topic of beginning teachers' teaching experiences. Hence, due to the dominant position of subjectivity in Husserl's phenomenology, this theory satisfied my criteria of an approach to help me gain insight into the subjective consciousness of the participants.

As my aim was to get both description and interpretation of the participants' classroom experiences, Husserl's phenomenology partly satisfied me as it is descriptive and focuses on the exploration of the structure and essences of the experience without considering the historical meanings of that experience and the pre-assumptions of its interpreters. Indeed, intentionality and essences are prominent in Husserl's phenomenology and are seen as the key to our understanding of the phenomenon (Laverty, 2003).

My study begins with a description of the beginning teachers' classroom experiences without any effects of the historical and cultural context. In the attempt to do this, I organized open-ended interviews with each teacher. In the interview, I set my assumptions aside and played the role of a person who did not know anything about the topic and looked for the teacher's own stories without biasing them. The data from interviews would provide me with a collection of descriptions about what was going on with the beginning teachers in their first years of teaching.

To sum up, my study seemed to fit with a phenomenological research at the starting

point. As noted before, the aim of my study was to understand the classroom life of beginning teachers through the teachers' experiences of their work. Classroom life, like the world we are living in, cannot be studied separately but must come through the participants' consciousness of their experiences. The subjects of study in this case are the beginning teachers. Hence, in the sense that phenomenological research is a study investigating a phenomenon through lived experience and appreciating subjectivity, I feel satisfied to call this study a phenomenological research. Crotty (1998)'s comment is consistent with this feeling:

“For a start, researchers claiming to be phenomenological talk of studying experience from the ‘point of view’ or ‘perspective’ of the subject. What these researchers are interested in is ‘everyday’ experience, experience as people understand it in everyday terms” (1998, p. 83).

However, there are some limitations of phenomenology that troubled me in using it as my research methodology. Firstly, as the relativism which highlights the multiple realities or the variation of truth was not noticed at the time of Husserl, his phenomenology focused on seeking for an “ultimate truth” (McLeod, 2001). Indeed, some of Husserl interpreters affirmed that his phenomenology concentrates more on the epistemological matter, which is of the subjective relationship between the knower and the object of study, than on the “ontological question of the nature of reality and “Being” in the world” (Lavery, 2003, p. 14). While relativism is only accepted as a characteristic of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy in the more recent critique of his work (Soffer, 1991), Husserl was originally interested in the universal truth instead of focusing on the versions of truth and the role of context in making meanings. Husserl's phenomenology idealism contradicts relativism, and hence, I hesitated in choosing this model to be my final methodology.

Secondly, while epistemology was a dominant focus for Husserl, it still contained a flaw which was the decisive reason that made me hesitate in accepting this model as a final research methodology. Husserl stated that in the first phase of his phenomenological methodology, epoché, the researchers need to set aside, or “bracket out”, their prior experiences, assumptions and suppositions about the phenomenon in order to avoid biases and prejudgments (Kockelmans, 1967; Van Manen, 1997). For Husserl, this phase is important in enhancing the revelation of the pure essential structure of the phenomenon.

Husserl held the view that the researchers need to suspend their assumptions about, and intentionally shift attention to, the phenomenon so that a pure nature of the phenomenon can be perfectly disclosed as it is (LeVasseur, 2003).

However, it seems to me that it is impossible to forget or ignore everything one knows about a certain phenomenon because, as Van Manen (1997) said: "... we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections" (p. 47). Beside that, it is, according to Heidegger, unnecessary to isolate the pre-understandings from investigating the phenomenon because the world and our existence are manifest in the phenomenon and, hence, any such isolation can distort or elide the phenomenon and prevent us from understanding the implicit structures informing everyday activities (Cerbone, 2006). As a result of the "bracketing", the phenomenological research is descriptive and aims to expose the essences of the structure of experience without examining the historical formation of the experience (Lavery, 2003). Therefore, Husserl's phenomenology no longer satisfied me in choosing a model that can help me to grasp a deep understanding about the beginning teachers' lived experiences.

Apart from those limitations, phenomenology appeared to be a strategy that can help me to get an initial description about the nature of the phenomenon of beginning teachers' experiences in the study. The next section is about hermeneutics, another approach that appeared as I continued to look for an appropriate approach for this study I needed something which could compensate for the limitations of Husserl's phenomenology, especially when I wanted to gain more than a description of universal and absolute essences of beginning teachers' teaching experiences.

### **3.3.2 Hermeneutics**

"Hermeneutics as a methodology of the philological-historical method"

(Seebom, 2004, p. 55)

"Hermeneutics" is derived from a Greek word with the common meaning in English of "interpretation" and it involves the concerns about theories to correctly interpret texts (L. K. Schmidt, 2006, p. 1).

Interpretations are considered to exist since human beings could speak, and became

more necessary in writing. There were theories about interpretation since ancient times such as legal hermeneutics in order to correctly interpret law and its codification, biblical hermeneutics to interpret the Bible correctly, and hermeneutics in the Renaissance to interpret the Classics. Then, Friedrich Schleiermacher saw himself to be the first person to unite those theories into one universal hermeneutics. For him, “hermeneutics is the art of understanding spoken and written language” (L. K. Schmidt, 2006, p. 6).

However, after Friedrich Schleiermacher, there was still an existence of different meanings of hermeneutics but prominently standing out of which were two competing positions:

“... The first follows Dilthey and sees interpretation or *Verstehen* as a method for the historical and human sciences, the second follows Heidegger and sees it as an ‘ontological event’, an interaction between interpreter and text that is part of the history of what is understood.”

(Audi, 1999, p. 323)

The first position was concerned with epistemology which focused on the method of understanding while the second was concerned with ontology which focused on the being. Dilthey’s hermeneutics came from a project of formulating a methodology for the human sciences as he believed that methods for natural sciences were not appropriate for the human sciences which were about inner mental and emotional life. For Dilthey, the inner mental and emotional life could not be observed but be accessed through “its empirical manifestations” especially via the most complete expression, language (L. K. Schmidt, 2006, p. 7). Hence, Dilthey’s hermeneutics, like Schleiermacher’s, is a methodological understanding of linguistic expressions, a methodological theory for human sciences. However, Dilthey added to Schleiermacher that in order to better understand human’s experiences, historical perspective of the experiences is necessary (Moustakas, 1994; L. K. Schmidt, 2006).

The second position came from the Heidegger’s belief that one needs to understand the meaning of being in the world before gaining any further access to the knowledge of entities. Hence, Heidegger’s hermeneutics is a combination of Husserl’s phenomenology which can provide a careful description about how to be a human being, and Dilthey’s hermeneutic theory of understanding life (L. K. Schmidt, 2006). Therefore, Heideg-

ger's theory is usually described as hermeneutic phenomenology, which will be further discussed in a later section.

In addition to Heidegger's hermeneutics, Gadamer added that the interpreter and the text could not exist separately but belong to each other (Heywood, 2003). This differs from fore-structures of interpretation which focused on the reconstruction of an author's intended meanings in the text. Instead, Gadamer appreciated the interpreter's prejudices which could also be positive and, hence, led to the correct interpretation (L. K. Schmidt, 2006).

The hermeneutic process involves a reflective circle. First of all, we bring our pre-judgments into reading the text. Then, in the view of the text, our understanding of the text will lead to new pre-judgments. These steps ceaselessly repeat so that the pre-judgments, and hence pre-understandings, are always at stake. The new pre-understandings are, therefore, continuously being formed (Moustakas, 1994).

The notion of pre-judgments is a prominent characteristic of Heidegger's (and then the modern) hermeneutics and considered to be an advanced feature over the limitations of Husserl's phenomenology. Whereas Husserl's phenomenological process requires researchers to bracket out their pre-judgments about the phenomenon before entering epoché, the phenomenologist aims to go beyond a descriptive framework in order to uncover the underlying essences of the investigating phenomenon.

By contrast, hermeneutics highlights the preconceptions that historically contribute to the understanding and it requires researchers to go beyond an interpretive framework to understand the phenomenon in its context and through language (Elliott, 2005, p. 85). This comes from the belief of the foregoing classification that the researcher, who is a culturally contextualized user of language, can never be separated from his/her preconceptions of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1997). What the researchers can do is to fuse their horizon with others through the text being studied so that the meaning of the investigating phenomenon could be expressed (McLeod, 2001, p. 56).

In the next section, I discuss why Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate methodology of this study.

### **3.3.3 Hermeneutic phenomenology as research methodology**

From the philosopher's point of view, hermeneutic phenomenology centers on the ontological concern of the "mode of being human" or what makes human a human being (Lavery, 2003). The concern of hermeneutic phenomenology fits my ontological concern in this study. My concern of the participants' experiences highlights my wish to understand the nature of being a beginning teacher inside classroom. Hence, in terms of the ontological aspect, hermeneutic phenomenology appears to be an appropriate methodology for this study.

As in the foregoing brief, hermeneutic phenomenology is Heidegger's combination of phenomenology which provides with a careful description about "the mode of being human" (Lavery, 2003, p. 7) and a hermeneutic theory of understanding life. For Heidegger, "consciousness is not separate from the world" but "is a formation of historically lived experience" (Lavery, 2003, p. 8).

Hence, hermeneutic phenomenology goes beyond a structure engaging both descriptive and interpretive frameworks (Van Manen, 1997). It is descriptive because it seeks for understanding about essential features of a "thing itself". It is interpretive because meanings of an object are never separated from the context with social and historical movement, and understanding is "always from a perspective" (McLeod, 2001, p. 56). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the appreciation of the historical and cultural context that appears to be avoided in Husserl's phenomenology, upgrades the data description into data interpretation which involves not only the universal and absolute essences, but also the historical and relative meanings.

Accordingly, this methodology satisfies my search for an appropriate model of methodology to help me in disclosing the underlying meanings of the beginning teachers' teaching life. For example, if one of the results shows that beginning teachers in this study were under-prepared; this would prompt me to connect it with the possible experiences of other early career teachers. This is likely to be true universally for beginners of all careers as it is unlikely for any organization or individual to be fully well prepared at the beginning. Hence, "under-prepared" is an essential characteristic of the phenomenon "beginning teachers' experiences"; and up to this description of characteristic, is the

manifestation of Husserl's phenomenology.

In my further interpretation of this result, it might be found that variations in such factors as teachers' personal issues, teachers training programs and school context, were exposed as contributions of the teachers' "under-prepared". If this were to be the case, these variations would show the historical, cultural and educational characteristics of Kontum City where I conducted the study. These would be the relative meanings of the phenomenon and indicate the manifestation of hermeneutics.

The position of historical and cultural context in my study can be illustrated in more detail when I discuss the concept of "fusion of horizons". I have accepted Gadamer's idea of a "fusion of horizons" which indicates that hermeneutic phenomenology is a study of both language and the user of language (Annells, 1996, p. 707)

Firstly, language is one way individuals employ to express themselves, as Gadamer (1989, p. 463) said "It is literally more correct to say that language speaks us rather than we speak it". Hermeneutic phenomenology is usually referred to as an approach engaging study of texts, a term to include written, spoken and symbolic language (Cohen, 2000). This special position of language in hermeneutic phenomenology suggests to me an approach to collect data for this study.

As the study aims to understand the experiences, including information, perspectives, feelings and beliefs existing inside the participants' consciousness which is invisible and cannot be observed, a relevant way to expose those is making chances for my participants to speak them out. This is the reason I used an interview method to collect data for this study. The data I collected from the participants forms a horizon toward the phenomenon of beginning teachers' teaching experiences which contribute to interpretation of my results.

The second horizon which crucially contributes to my interpretive findings is the historical and cultural context that the participants, the users of language, lived in. According to Laverly (2003), in a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the language is examined within its historical and cultural origins so that not only what can be seen but what is hidden beyond can also be uncovered.

Applying this to my study, after interviewing participants to obtain their stories and experiences and then conducting a content analysis of the interviews, I obtained the themes which were then situated in the context of the schools where the participants were working so that the actual meanings of those experiences could be disclosed. As the historical and cultural context where my participants were living in is an important horizon contributing the study findings, I focused on a study of the school context by extracting related information from interviews, from literature about educational and cultural contexts of Vietnam and Kontum, and from my own experiences as a teacher in Kontum Teacher Training College.

While I did not accept the notion of bracketing the researcher' pre-assumptions which is intrinsic in phenomenology, I appreciated the hermeneutists' idea that the researcher is a crucial tool to interpret findings. In the interviews, I tried to set aside my pre-assumptions about the beginning teachers' classroom experiences in order not to orient and bias the interviewees' answers. This increased the objectivity of the study because I pretended to have no ideas about the topic and looked at the phenomenon from outside.

However, I found that my experiences of early career classroom life and of Kontum historical, cultural and educational context were valuable in interpreting the data. In addition, Vietnamese has a culture of high context communication, which means that the meanings that the speakers want to convey are not always explicit in the text they speak, but implicit, underlying the unspoken context and gestures. Therefore in the data analysis, there is a combination of the text, the data from my observation in the interviews, and the context so that the phenomenon is looked at from inside and meanings are extracted. Accordingly, my role as a researcher may contribute significantly to the findings of this study which could be different if the study was conducted by another researcher who came from another context and had a different background.

The Hermeneutic circle is a crucial metaphor of understanding and interpretation in this study. As Van Manen (1997) emphasized, this is the art of understanding lived experience. In the hermeneutic circle, the relationship among experience, interpretation and revision is not linear, but circular, with no clear starting point and end point. In this study, the hermeneutic circle helps to check and balance the "parts", which refer to each participant's individual experiences, and the "whole", which refers to the whole lot of

data from all nine participants.

### **3.4 Constructivist worldview**

First of all, when looking from the perspective that a paradigm is a net constructed by three components: ontology, epistemology and methodology, the study is conducted standing on the constructivist worldview. For some authors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the conclusion of which worldview a researcher stands on to conduct a study comes from the examination of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that the researcher holds. The constructivist worldview is specifically a basic set of relativism, subjectivism and hermeneutics. This completely matches my philosophic assumptions previously presented for this study. Hence, it would be reasonable to infer that the study is designed within a constructivist worldview.

Then, in the alignment with other characteristics of constructivism collected in the literature, the study is still concluded to stand on the constructivist worldview. These characteristics include:

- The aim to seek understanding of the world in which we live and work, rather than causal explanation.
- A high focus on the subjective interpretation of individuals who experience the situation being studied.
- A high focus on the interaction among individuals within a specific historical and cultural context.
- The recognition of the role of researcher's background in shaping the interpretation.

(Creswell, 2009, p. 8)

Firstly, constructivism highlights the aim to seek understanding of the world in which individuals live and work. As constructivism and traditional interpretivism are sometimes not distinguished (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), constructivism is claimed to help

understand human action (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). This is distinguished from positivism which aims to provide with causal explanations and predictions to human and social reality. From the beginning, this study clarifies the aim to understand the participants' experiences which exist in a mutual social interaction. It does not include the expectation of searching for the linear causality of those experiences like positivists usually do.

Secondly, constructivism focuses on the subjective interpretation of individuals who experience the situation being studied. According to Creswell (2009), individuals make their own subjective meanings of the objective situation they experienced. Again, this point distinguishes constructivism from positivism. While in positivism, the meaning is discovered, it is created and constructed in constructivism (Crotty, 1998).

The subjective meaning in constructivism can also be explained using Hart's *knowledge* and *understanding* layers of knowing. For Hart (2001), the first layer of knowing is *information*. *Information* is objective and exists itself. However, *knowledge* is slightly different because it includes the subjective interpretation of the information given. Individuals can be provided with *information* but they have to make *knowledge* and then develop *understanding* by themselves, under their own reflection of the information.

Hence, understanding, the aim of constructivist, is the subjective interpretation of individuals toward what they experience. This characteristic completely fits that of this study because the participants' experiences, the object of the study, are dependent to the beginning teachers' perspectives, backgrounds and emotions, and hence subjective.

Thirdly, constructivism highly focuses on the interaction among individuals within a specific context. For Creswell (2009), the subjective meaning of the situation being studied is formed through the interaction of individuals with others in their cultural and historical situation. Hence, in a constructivism research, the researcher usually examines the process of that interaction in order to understand the setting of the participants' situation.

This fits what I am doing in this study because when I examined one participant's experiences, I could not separate that participant from other individuals who interacted with

the participant in the context. At the same time, I could not separate the individuals existing in the situation that the participant experienced. In my study, the interaction was between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers, teachers and administrators, teachers and supporters and so on.

Finally, the role of researcher in constructivism is important in terms of making sense of, or interpreting, the meanings that the participants make of the world. The researcher recognizes that their backgrounds and pre-understandings on the topic being studied shape their interpretation. In the section above, I have disagreed with the view that researcher can “bracket out” or set aside their preassumptions about the topic, as a limitation of Husserl’s phenomenology. Instead, I accept the notion of hermeneutists and hermeneutic phenomenologists that the researcher’s pre-understandings or preassumptions of the topic are a necessary and crucial part of the study.

This is a key reason why some scholars (Annells, 1996; Cohen, 2000) affirmed that hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodology of constructivists and vice versa, “when research is performed using hermeneutical phenomenology, the inquiry is ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically within the constructivist paradigm of inquiry” (Annells, 1996, p. 708). Therefore, in a brief inference, it can be said that as hermeneutic phenomenological methodology is used in this study, then the study is performed within a constructivist framework.

To sum up, from those convincing reasons it can be concluded that this study is designed and conducted within the constructivist world view.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have located my philosophical standpoint on the constructivist world view. I have argued that this world view is appropriate to look at the phenomenon of beginning teachers’ experiences because it could help me to look at the phenomenon in a mutual interaction with the context and involve my background to seek in-depth understanding of the teachers’ experiences. I have also developed my understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology which is chosen as an appropriate methodology for this study.

In the next chapter, I will present the design, based on the chosen methodology, that was used to select participants, collect data and analyze data.

# Chapter 4 Research design

## 4.1 Introduction

Although the study is underpinned by the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I chose Van Manen (1997)'s six steps as a useful phenomenologically based methodological guide to investigate this particular phenomenon of beginning teachers' experiences. These six steps are:

- Turning to the nature of lived experience
- Investigating experience as we live it
- Reflecting the characteristics of the phenomena through the essential themes.
- Writing and rewriting to describe the phenomena.
- Maintaining a strong and oriented relation.
- Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

In implementing these steps in my study, the first step shows my early concern and interest in the topic of beginning teachers' teaching experiences. This also involves how I devised the research questions, and how I described my personal experiences related to the topic and how I defined my position of conducting the investigation. Van Manen listed things to consider in this step: orienting to the phenomenon, formulating the phenomenological question, and explicating assumptions and pre-understandings. Chapter 1 of the thesis is the embodiment of this step.

In the second step, investigating experience as we live it, I chose semi-structured interviews to collect data. In the interviews, open-ended questions were used to exploit the emerging in-depth meanings. More details of this step are described in the following section of Data collection in this chapter.

The third step is about reflecting the characteristics of the phenomenon through thematic statements. Van Manen (1997) stated that themes are intransitive and it is essential to capture the phenomenon of interest as themes are made in a concise form that can imply the focus, meanings, or points of the experience (1990, p. 87). Van Manen (1997) provided a guide with three approaches to isolate themes; but due to some personal concerns and interest of how to make the analyzing process of this particular study clearer, I also applied Giorgi's notion of meaning units and apply Moustakas' instructions in some stages. More details of this step are described in the section on Data analysis later in this chapter.

Although Van Manen (1997) stated that any fixed models of method are imperatively avoided when conducting such a flexible research of phenomenology, he also suggested some guiding mechanisms to undertake each step. In the fourth step of *Writing and rewriting to describe the phenomena*, Van Manen (1997) stressed the importance of writing in transferring the invisible experiences into visible stories, thinking, feelings and belief. I applied the structuring approach that Van Manen (1997) called *Analytically* in presenting this thesis. Chapter 5 is the place where I present participants' individual reconstructed stories in a concise summary. Also in this chapter, the second part is the presentation of anecdotes collected from typical conversations to form raw evidence necessary to illustrate and highlight the themes. Chapter 6 is for further interpretation and discussion where the variations are examined and underlying meanings of beginning teachers' experiences are uncovered.

Van Manen (1997) suggested it is crucial that researchers of phenomenological study *maintain a strong and oriented relation* (the fifth step). He explained "to be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities" (1990, p. 33). During the time committed to the study, I always kept my mind on the defined target and position. The research question is always the reminder to make sure what (and how) I was doing in each step to reach this target. The researcher's philosophical position of undertaking the study, possession of methodology and vision of the whole process also helped the orientation. My personal experiences on the topic, ideas and reflections of the methods, discussion and lessons for myself were written

down in a diary and reviewed frequently to see the change in my consciousness and the affirmation of the topic and method during the research process.

Finally, Van Manen (1997) suggested that the researcher needs to balance the research context by considering parts and whole. The author warned that if the researcher gets too embedded into the writing, the writing will easily be rambling; then the researcher may run away from the initial aim and not know where to go next (1990, p. 33). Hence, while undertaking each step, the researcher needs to make sure the part being done contributes to the aim of the whole study. In this study, after the topic and direction were chosen, an early plan for the whole process of conducting the study was discussed and designed with my supervisors; then presented under the form of research proposal and contributed by the faculty research committee. Also, the questions of Why am I doing this? and How does the thing I am doing contribute to my study? were always recalled to remind me to keep on track of the methodology and the phenomenon of interest

All these steps do not take place in a linear and ordered process, but followed the rule of the hermeneutic circle. Although the process is circular, the study is presented in a linear and ordered sequence for clarity of explanation and understanding.

## **4.2 Data gathering**

### **4.2.1 Sampling**

I selected purposive sampling to identify participants for this study. Purposive sampling is an appropriate strategy for a hermeneutic phenomenological model (Laverty, 2003); and supports the aim of getting an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon because it focuses on selecting cases which are rich sources of comprehensive information rather than on the number of participants which is for the purpose of testing hypothesis (Patton, 2002; Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003; Wilmot, 2005).

For the study, I selected nine secondary school teachers working full-time in one of the public secondary schools within Kontum City. They were between the ages of 22-60 and were in their first three years of teaching. Their ages from 22 to 60 were emphasized

because this is the official range of working ages in Vietnam. I chose teachers with up to three years teaching experience because as Adam (1982) found, the greatest change occurred in the first three years of teaching. Ayers (1980) also found that teachers' cognitive dimensions and affective dimensions changed a lot in their first five years of their career but the biggest change was in the first three years and became more stable in the fourth and fifth year. Hence, I chose to research teachers in their first, second and third year of teaching.

To select participants, I used opportunistic and snowball sampling, two techniques of purposive strategy (Kemper et al., 2003, p. 283). I started the process of participant recruitment by asking some of my colleagues to provide me with information about previous students who were currently working in one of the selected schools in Kontum City. One colleague provided the names of two students and I called and asked if they would be willing to participate in my research. One refused because of some private issues. The other teacher agreed to help me. I started the sampling with that one teacher. After giving her the *Participant Information Statement* and *Consent form* (Appendix E and F), I asked her to introduce her friends or people she knew who fitted my criteria of selection. Through this process of snowballing I enlarged the sample until I had nine people willing to take part in the research.

My early target was to recruit ten beginning secondary teachers and I had expected to choose these teachers by balancing the number of female and male teachers, the number of teachers teaching in the central part and in the border of Kontum City, and the number of teachers teaching in the core subjects and auxiliary subjects. The aim of balancing the sample was to get a qualitative comparison between variables to see whether any possible findings would come up from that. However, in the situation of Kontum, a small central highland city, there were few beginning teachers and it was difficult to recruit ten teachers in their first three years of teaching to obtain a balance of gender, position of school and teaching subjects.

As a result of using the opportunistic technique, I got nine beginning teachers from five schools but they did not perfectly match my early sampling criteria. In terms of the teachers' major subjects, four were teaching core subjects (three in literature and one in maths) and five were teachers of auxiliary subjects (one in computer science, three in

daily technologies and one in biology).

There are not many secondary schools in Kontum City and not many beginning teachers recently allocated to these schools each year. Hence, it is likely that the participants might be recognized if the information of their subject, year of starting teaching, and gender are described in detail. As the gender did not come up as an issue in this study, I do not clarify it in the thesis presentation. This means even though there were both male and female genders in nine participants, I do not identify the gender of each teacher. Instead, I mention all the participants as female teachers (using she and her for all nine participants) in order to reduce the chance that their privacy would be exposed. Similarly, the variable of position of school did not come up as an issue in this study; hence, I do not clarify the position of the school each participant worked in the thesis presentation. However, with the participants finally selected and all agreeable to taking part in the research, I was ready to undertake the investigation.

#### **4.2.2 Data collection**

Semi-structured interview is the method I chose to gather data for this study. Although Patton (2002) identified many other forms of data collection such as observations, journal keeping and documents, insight into teachers' experiences was most likely to be gained through conversation. My aim was to set up conversations in which I would create opportunities for the beginning teachers to speak about their experiences. It is often easier for people to talk than to write as talking helps people to stay closer to the experience as they lived, rather than as they reflected, as suggested by Van Manen (1997).

Besides that, semi-structured interview provided me with the chance to ask the respondents immediate follow-up questions so that the conversations could be open to any emergent issues. It was consistent with what Koch (1996) and Kvale (1996) said that in a semi-structured interview I could raise open-ended questions and then ask more questions to encourage the participant to tell stories, describe experiences and then allow them to reflect on and interpret their experiences. An advantage of the semi-structured interview over other appropriate methods, was that I could immediately seek more information from the participants to deepen my understanding about their meaning of

the phenomena of investigation. This function was highlighted for the specific case of hermeneutic phenomenological method (Van Manen, 1997).

In setting up for the interviews I gave careful consideration to the environment and ensured they were carried out in a comfortable and familiar setting. Hence, I gave the choice of the place to the participants. To help participants feel at ease I made a relax and friendly atmosphere so that the participants could be comfortable and willing to share their experiences and their thinking about those experiences. Eight of the interviews were in cafés and one was in the participant's home.

All the conversations were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, once they were satisfied about issues of confidentiality and they signed the permission forms. In addition, during the interviews, I observed the participants' gestures such as nodding, shaking head, waving hand, smiling, sighing and so on. I tried to note down and remember the gestures and my impression when I listened to the stories in order to ensure my understanding of the experiences were correct.

There were two parts to the interviews. The first part was to confirm and record the participants' demographic information. I started each conversation with questions about the participant's age, major subject, qualification, their roles at school and number of years teaching.

Then, I focused on encouraging participants to tell their stories and explain the meanings behind their stories. I followed Van Manen's suggestion that the researcher needs to keep the question open and oriented to the phenomenon (p. 98). Hence, I started with an open question that I prepared for the interview: Can you tell me about your teaching experiences in your first years of career, please? or What happened in your classrooms over the time since you started teaching?

It is noticeable that for the first case, when I raised those questions, the participant seemed to be a little confused. She said the term "teaching experience" was general to her; and asked me on what topic I would like to specifically focus. From my experience as a teacher, I was aware that there were many possible issues about teaching life but I wanted the participants to tell me about the experiences that they counted as important

for them. Hence, I tried not to suggest any topic so that I would not unintentionally bias them. So I asked: Do you have fun with teaching? Why/ why not? What happened? This way of starting the conversation helped me to bring the interviewee to their stories more naturally; hence I applied this approach for all the following interviews.

Whenever the teachers mentioned an issue, I encouraged them to talk more about it by asking questions such as: What do you mean by that?, Can you say more about it?, You've just mentioned that you felt difficult in classroom management (for example), can you explain more and give example about it?, What reason do you think made the situations happened that way? How did this make you feel? What happened next? and so on. The further questions were to help me draw a clearer picture about the phenomenon, get insight to the meanings of it, and encourage the participants to reflect what they meant about the stories. This is what Van Manen (1997) advised in terms of creating collaboration between interviewer and interviewee in interpreting what was raised in the interview. Hence, during the conversations with interviewees, the interpretation was actually undertaken.

### 4.3 Data analysis and interpretation

Patton (2002) defined phenomenological analysis as a process of seeking to capture the meaning, structure and essence of a lived experience and presenting them in clear findings. While using Van Manen (1997)'s guidance as my main process, I also referred to the instructions of Moustakas (1994) and Giorgi (1985) where appropriate while I was processing the data and I always kept in mind that these two instructions were within the implications of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, not the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology that I have been adopting.

First of all, I made transcripts of all the interviews with exact words and sentences in Vietnamese. I changed the name of each participant in order to protect their privacy. I used these artificial names to enter the coding and analyzing process. These names are also used when I described the participants' biographies and commonalities in chapter 5.

After analysis, I have divided nine participants into three groups, named High Adaptation, Medium Adaptation and Low Adaptation (chapter 6 gives more details about the groups). It is important to note that at this stage I added a letter and a number to each name to easily recognize what group the teacher belongs to. This change was for a clearer presentation of the study outcomes. Table 4.1 gives some examples of the way I made the participants' artificial names through stages.

Despite the difference of the ontological and epistemological standpoint between Van Manen (1997) and the other two authors, all suggested to begin the analysis process with reading the collected data and clarifying the important phrases or sentences. Moustakas (1994) described this step as *horizontalization*, where the researcher listened to the record and read the interview transcript many times to have a sense of what the participant said before listing the participant's statements relevant to the phenomenon. This step was also referred to as *immersion* by Van Manen (1997). Giorgi (1985) called the statements "meaning units".

In a transcript, not all the sentences the interviewees said revealed the phenomenon, so I highlighted the essential statements. When what the participants said ran away from

Table 4.1: Examples of the ways participants' artificial names were made through stages.

Participants' name in the earlier process of data analysis (Also used in chapter 5)	Participants' name in the later process of data analysis (Also used in chapter 6)	What do the names indicate?
Nha	Nha-H1	The first teacher in the group of High Adaptation
Luyen	Luyen-M5	The fifth teacher in the Medium Adaptation
Hao	Hao-L2	The second teacher in the group of Low Adaptation

the topic so removing the inappropriate sentences was necessary. Moustakas (1994) stressed this is a separate step, called delimitation, where the researcher determined whether each statement was a horizon of the phenomenon or not. The statements that could be abstracted and labeled were invariant horizons (constituents) and remained while the others were eliminated.

In addition to the processes mentioned above, I followed Creswell (2007)'s advice of how to avoid forming inappropriate statements. Accordingly, while carefully listening to the records and reading the transcripts many times to extract the participants' important statements that related to the studied phenomenon, I kept in mind the question that "Does this statement support my concern of the phenomenon?"

At this stage, I had the transcripts with mostly the participants' descriptions and statements that were relevant to the phenomenon being investigated. In the following steps, I started to involve more interpretation into the data analysis.

The important analytic process was about isolating thematic statements and finding commonalities and variations embedded in data. Van Manen (1997) suggested three approaches to isolate thematic statements (p. 93):

- The wholistic or sententious approach: We attend to the text as the whole and try to capture the meaning of the whole text in a concise sentence or phrase.

- The selective or highlighting approach: We attend to the text and then highlight the statements or phrases that are essential about the phenomenon
- The detailed or line-by-line approach: We attend to every single sentence and try to figure out what does it help to make known of the phenomenon.

I applied all three approaches in the analysis one after the other. The choice of each approach depended on the richness of the appropriate information in the text. The wholistic approach was used when the fundamental meaning of the whole text had to be interpreted over more than one sentence. I really appreciated the detailed approach when I wished to make a profound analysis of a text that typically revealed the phenomenon. Similar statements provided by other participants were then also be analyzed using the wholistic approach.

As presented previously, together with the field notes, I tried to remember the physical expressions the participant made and my impression when the participant raised the statement to ensure my understanding of the participants' statement. I carried out all these steps using tables that could help me to bring the participants' stories, my field notes, and my understanding of the participants' statements together in a well-organized way. Table 2 illustrates the way I made the tables used in this stage but due to the length limit of this thesis, I do not involve these tables in the thesis content.

Table 4.2: Example of the way data is organized and analyzed in one early stage.

Story that the teacher told	My experience of listening	My understanding of the participants' statements

I realized that from this stage, Moustakas (1994)'s instructions had the most influence on my process due to its understandability and detail. For each transcription of each interview, I carried out the steps above until the whole text was analyzed. Then, I clustered invariant constituents into core themes and labeled them (the step of *thematizing* (Moustakas, 1994)). Finally, I made a description of the individual experiences, includ-

ing verbatim examples, and marked each as an *individual textural-structural description* (Moustakas, 1994).

It is important to note that the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and the original transcriptions were in the same language. This is consistent with the scholar's advice (Kvale, 1996) of keeping the original version of spoken language for the validation of analysis. Up to the step of constructing the *individual textural-structural description*, I still kept the data in the Vietnamese language to make sure my impression and understanding of the participants' statements were consistent; and to avoid the danger that it might lose sense once the data was translated into English. I started over with the next participant using the same steps until I got all *individual textural-structural descriptions* before I constructed a composite textural-structure description of all participants.

Each of the nine individual textural-structural descriptions was sent back to the participants via emails to check the authenticity of the data. I requested the participants to read through the description and feedback to me about whether they agreed or wanted me to correct any information from the description. Six of the nine replied me with their satisfaction of the description I made. Three others did not reply.

All the *individual textural-structural descriptions* were then translated into an English version. In this step, I had the assistance of my fellow students who were studying at Doctorate degree in the La Trobe University, Faculty of Education at the same time with my candidature. They supported me in seeking appropriate terms in English for my concerns of translation of the *individual textural-structural descriptions* and the summaries. I also asked some of them to translate the terms from the English version back to Vietnamese so that the translation was double checked for its validity. Finally, I asked one PhD student who was a senior lecturer of Translation and Interpreting in Hanoi University to read through all full versions of the *individual textural-structural descriptions* and summaries in both English and Vietnamese to check the correction. His verification of my correction of translation is provided in Appendix A.

However, due to the limited length of the thesis, I do not present these descriptions in this thesis. To present in this thesis, out from the *individual textural-structural descriptions*, I have selected one story per participant with my understanding of the partici-

pant' statements in that story to represent the participant's biography. The stories were selected in a careful consideration of how to ensure each story can represent all voices at the same time it can portrait out a characteristic of the phenomenon. This way of the presentation is consistent with the principle of the phenomenological methodology.

All the quotations of what a participant said that I used in this thesis (mostly in chapters 5 and 6) were extracted from the individual textural-structural descriptions in English version. Nine individual textural-structural descriptions were saved in a Microsoft Word file with the page number marked. For each quotation, I gave the page number of where the quotation is in the file next to the name of the participant. For example: They didn't even understand Vietnamese very much, hard to teach (Thuong-M4; P. 39). This is for the advantages of data managing and tracing back to the data when needed.

To construct the *composite textural-structure description* (Moustakas, 1994), I focused on the similarity and difference between one case and the others and highlighted the convergences and divergences in the data. In this way, the patterns which were recurring in meanings were identified to make themes and the divergent patterns were catalogued to identify emergent themes.

With the composite textural-structural description, I then developed a synthesis of textural-structural meanings of the phenomenon for the whole group of participants. The convergent and divergent patterns were considered to be important in the later process of interpretation the data, when moving between the "parts" and "whole" (as termed by Van Manen (1997)), following the hermeneutic circle.

Defined as the art of understanding lived experience (Van Manen, 1997), the hermeneutic circle was also applied in the process of data analysis of this study, in order to uncover the hidden meanings of lived experiences. The process was not linear but circular, moving forward and backward between parts (individual experiences) and the whole (composite experiences of all nine participants). In each individual interview transcription, I also found myself moving from each particular story to the whole interview, from the speciality of each participant to the commonality existing among all nine participants. As a result, the outcome of the analysis brought to me a synthesis of essential descriptions of the beginning teachers' experiences with a richness of meanings con-

tributed from the consideration of each teacher's personal characteristics, cultural and educational context, plus working conditions. Moreover, I also balanced the study by constantly maintaining the orientation of the research to the targeted aim and design to ensure the correspondence of the parts to the overall study structure.

Chapter 6 is the place I present this composite description with my interpretation. My involvement in this stage is consistent with the hermeneutic process that van Manen called "Composing Linguistic Transformations" which aims to capture the meanings in more "phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs" (1997, p. 95). At this stage of composite description, the underlying meanings of the experiences sometimes do not overtly reveal much in the way of the meanings participants attach to the phenomenon. As Van Manen (1997) stated "...the meaning of lived experience is usually hidden or veiled" (1997, p. 27). There was needed a stage or process where I fused my personal background and knowledge of the topic with the text; and extracted the "hidden" meanings of the phenomenon. This process is well known as the "fusion of horizons" and advocated by Gadamer (1989). Then, the uncovered meanings are synthesized and discussed further in chapter 7. The composite experience of all nine participants with arising commonalities and variations is described again in a reframed organization to highlight my arguments which elucidate my suggestions about the implementations of the study.

However, I need to note that although the process took place circularly, again and again many times until the essential meanings of the phenomenon were uncovered and the meanings were produced, I present this study in a linear form, with some repeated steps cut down and the remaining steps rewritten to make sure the thesis would not be boring but still make sure the essential information was not missing.

This way of presenting is in line with one crucial fundamental of hermeneutic phenomenology that deals with the issue of writing and rewriting. According to Van Manen (1997), writing and rewriting are crucial in hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as these processes include "re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing" and "revising or editing" (p.131). The process "to write and to rewrite" reflects not only my concern of the "parts" and the "whole" but also my thoughtfulness in cultivating multiple layers of meaning of the phenomenon, the two instrumental approaches of hermeneutic phenomenological methodology advocated by Van Manen (1997).

## 4.4 Important considerations

### 4.4.1 Ethical considerations

Before starting the participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, I made some significant considerations of the ethical issues. It included my ethical obligations to the participants, my conduct of the research, the ethics application and its obligations.

Firstly, all the participants were fully informed about the study and their voluntariness of participation was emphasized. I contacted the participants by phone or emails to ask them whether they would like to participate in my study. I explained to them clearly the topic in terms of purpose, methods and possible contribution of the research. I also explained to them what they would do if they agreed to join and my assurance that their privacy would be kept confidentially. When meeting face to face in the individual interviews, I reminded them again of their role and rights. All the information was also provided to the participants in a *Participant Information Statement and Consent form* (Appendix E and F) before the interviews started. The *Consent form* was signed by each participant. Also, I notified them that they could leave any time if they felt uncomfortable with the participation. The *Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form* (Appendix D) was also prepared, but no one withdrew from the study.

Secondly, the participants' privacy was kept confidential. This process aimed to respect the participants' anonymity and avoid harm to participants (Silverman, 2010). All the files that might contain the information about participants were saved and stored safely to ensure that no one could harm their privacy. I changed their names into artificial names and labels to use in the process of analysis and presentation. As presented previously, the limited number of beginning teachers in Kontum secondary schools might cause the likeliness that participants would be recognized if their other information such as gender and school location was described. Hence, I did not mention the school they worked at and I identified all nine participants as female teachers in the attempt to reduce the chance of their identity being predicted.

My proposal of the sampling, methods used to collect data and the data collection was planned and submitted to the Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee. The study

plan was approved and the approval letter is attached in the Appendix H.

#### **4.4.2 Trustworthiness**

While the positivist advocates who maintain a belief in scientific objectivity use validity and reliability to defend the value of the research they undertake, constructivist researchers apply trustworthiness and rigor instead (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1986) identified these new notions as more appropriate for a paradigm, based on different assumptions about reality and different world view, where researchers are authorized to be an analytic instrument using their own knowledge and background. Indeed, the new terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are used in referent to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

Firstly, the credibility concerns how much the findings are authentic with what are actually intended in reality (Shenton, 2004). In this study, regardless of my relevant background, qualification and experience that I brought to the study as a researcher which can be seen as a crucial factor to enhance the credibility (Shenton, 2004), I also applied some techniques. In order to check and increase the credibility of the data, before I constructed the composite textural-structure description, I sent a copy of the interview transcript and individual textural-structural description to each participant. I requested them to carefully read the description and make comments, additions and corrections. Base on the feedback from the participants, I reexamined the codes and placer-enacted the steps of analysis outlined above. This technique is called “member check” (Janesick, 2000, p. 393).

In addition, to address credibility, I involved both the scrutiny of both superiors and peers in the research project. This involvement was taken place by the regular meetings and discussions, every fortnight on average, with my study supervisors. The supervisors’ experiences and perceptions helped me to widen my view, recognize and avoid the possible flaws or bias, and guided me to deepen understanding the phenomenon of beginning teachers that I investigated. During four years of my candidature in Faculty of Education at La Trobe University, beside the uncountable amount of unofficial discussions with other PhD students about my topic, I made two official presentations about

the study. The first one was the research proposal presented before I started with data collection; and the second one was the progress report presented nine months before the thesis submission. Both presentations provided me with the chance to expose my study to fresh perspectives from the academic staffs and peers in the faculty, challenge my assumptions and get advice for the improvement of the study.

Secondly, the concept of transferability concerns whether or not the study findings can be applicable for other situations. Although the notion of generalization that advocates by positivists is not appropriate to apply in the constructivist studies, Bassey (1981) suggested that when the practitioners find that the situations in the study are similar to theirs, they can applied the findings and recommendations for themselves. Hence, a thick detail description is necessary to ensure the transferability of a study (Shenton, 2004). In this study, I provide details of participants with personal and situational context, and layers of meanings.

Thirdly, the dependability has the same concern with reliability in positivism which is about whether another study conducted in the same context, participants and methods will get the same results (Shenton, 2004). Hence, I provide a thick description with a protocol of methods to address this concern of trustworthiness.

Lastly, the confirmability is the comparable concern that qualitative researchers give to the objectivity of the study. This focus is to avoid the possible bias that the researchers may bring to the study. Hence, techniques such as triangulation and audit trail are usually employed to ensure the study findings really come from the participants' experiences and ideas rather than researcher's (Shenton, 2004). In this study, regardless the technique of member check that I have presented previously, as a way of triangulation, I provide some diagrams and tables which allow readers to trace the steps that I employed from the research question to study findings and from the data to recommendations.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described in detail the protocol of research design from the methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Also, the attention of the ethical issues together with considerations of the trustworthiness and rigor of the study and how

I addressed them during the project have also presented. The outcomes of all these steps and considerations are provided in the following chapters.

# Chapter 5 Participants' biographies and commonalities

## 5.1 Introduction

The data was somewhat complex as the neophyte teachers explored many issues. For clarity in this data section I have grouped them around some of the commonalities of experience they had, using two or three teachers' voice per theme. This way the story holds the integrity and all voices are represented.

## 5.2 Experience of lack of subject knowledge

One of the commonalities I found when exploring the teachers' experiences was that the teachers experienced feelings of confusion when asked to teach a content that was unusual for them.

### 5.2.1 Nha experienced such an event

When I first met Nha she was in her second year of teaching, in a secondary school in the central part of the city. She had graduated from the local teacher training college, majoring in industrial and agricultural technology. Here we hear her voice about her experience of teaching a subject content in which she felt uncomfortable.

*The subject content is simple and not strange for me, because when I was studying in the teacher training college, one lecturer usually required students to solve problems in the secondary school textbooks as regular assignments; I was really involved in getting with the context then, hence most of the content in textbooks was not strange for me. However, one day, when I was preparing a lesson for the subject of electricity in application, I found that I could not distinguish two definitions "electric wire" and "electric cable".*

*At first I was very confident with my knowledge. I thought "it's just a piece of information for secondary school kids, it could not be so difficult"; and all the prior lessons were very easy as the content was so simple and familiar to me so I was very confident. However, when I started to write down*

*about that into my lesson plan, I could not do so. Yes, sometimes in your life, you think you know something very well but when you had to vocally talk or write in a clear expression about it, you could not; and then you find that you don't really know about it at all. I tried to remember and check the notebooks of what I learnt in the teacher training college in a hope that maybe I could find anything related to the definitions. I could not find any memory and notes about that. I did not want to ask my colleagues, even the mentor, as no one was officially majored in this subject, and when I saw the notebooks of other teachers' students I found that those teachers did not understand the contents properly so I was assured they would not give me a correct answer.*

*I felt hopeless and wanted to give up; I was thinking about skipping those definitions in the lecture. The first time since I went to teaching I lost confidence about my knowledge. I used to think that I had learnt enough in teacher training program but then I discovered that what I learnt was so general, theoretical and sublime while I had to teach many practical things.*

*Luckily, I had a part-time job about electric and appliance; hence I went to ask the workers in some workshops and luckily they helped me to distinguish the definitions thoroughly.*

As is evident in this story, Nha was initially very confident about her knowledge as a teacher. She found that the definitions of 'electric wire' and 'electronic cable' looked simple but she did not actually understand them. She was frustrated about this event and lost the initial confidence of her knowledge and blamed the training institution for her issue. Nha tried some ways to work out the issue through asking peers but could not. She eventually found the answer with people outside the school environment. The matter of not knowing the piece of knowledge was really a concern for her.

### **5.2.2 Luyen and Hao's stories show other coping strategies**

Luyen, a teacher in her second year of teaching biology after she was trained in the local teacher training college, experienced the same concern but she had different strategies to succeed in dealing.

*The subject content in secondary school is not difficult in general but sometimes, I found some points in textbook strange, or maybe I forgot... These strange points made me uncomfortable and worried. For example, in one lesson about Pigeons I found difficult to answer a question in the textbook. Even though it was a small question but when I could not answer it, I felt less confident... like I did not have sufficient subject knowledge.*

*My mentor was the Dean of the subjects Biology and Chemistry, but she majored in Chemistry while I teach Biology. So she did not give me relevant advice straight to the subject content. Also, she seemed not enthusiastic towards me. Every time I came to ask her, she just answered me for form's sake, like "ok, ok, just do it like what you think"... So I was annoyed and confused. I was very happy with other colleagues, especially one teacher who seemed to have rich experiences of teaching and was very willing to support me. I wished she had been my mentor, not the actual one.*

Luyen had an irrelevant mentor who could not help her to deal with challenges of subject-content; and was not willing to help her. However, instead of remaining upset with the feeling of unsupported, she sought for help from other people who were more supportive to her and she was happy with the help available in the school for her issue of the subject content.

Another teacher, Hao, was in her second year of teaching in a small secondary school in Kontum City. Before coming to teaching, she had studied in a university of pedagogy which prepared teachers for high schools. We can hear her voice in the below story:

*I teach Vietnamese linguistics and literature. Not everything easy for me, Vietnamese linguistics and Grammars (môn tiếng Việt) were easy but Literature Work (văn học) was challenging for me. Because in literature work, I had to teach with some kind of poems with ancient Vietnamese language.*

*Other parts of content were easy. But that kind of poems, one of the main parts I had to teach, was too hard to memorize, and difficult to understand the meaning. I talked to other teachers and they confirmed that only some good students could understand. Even me, I felt very ambiguous with those kinds of poems and I hated them since I had to learn them in school.*

*I was not trained with that content because I graduated from a pedagogical university which trains teachers for high schools. But then I could not find a job in a high school so... had to teach in a secondary school; plus, literature work (văn học) is of the part I did not like and did not understand when I was in school; this part was not involved in training program of the university as well.*

*After a class, students told me that the poems were too difficult and they didn't understand. I promised to review it before the exams. For the following poems in the later classes, I asked them to read the poems before the classes, look up the meanings of the words so that they could be easier to understand when I explained. But that kind of poems were very hard, and students were lazy... so the situation was not improved much...*

*... Because the students need to pass the exams. I provide students with the main ideas of the poems before the exams... If teachers could not make*

*students get good enough scores, the school would reprimand the teachers and I would die of it (at least 70 of students should get at least average score 5/10). So for the classes with too many students of bad learning capacity like they are in my school, I had to make some kinds of magic to rationalize (hợp lý hóa) the scores to make the students meet the required scores.*

Hao found a part of the subject content she had to teach difficult to understand and memorize. She blamed that she was not trained to teach the content that she found problematic in her teaching. She tried some ways to improve the situation such as requiring the students to prepare the content before coming to class. When she could not help the students learn this part better, and under the pressure of the students' testing scores and the judgment of the colleagues, she did the unethical strategies such as adjudging the students' final scores to deal with the school requirement.

### **5.3 Experience of unfamiliarity of the innovative teaching approaches**

The unfamiliarity of the innovative teaching approaches was another commonality that I found in the teachers' experiences. The teachers raised the concerns of teaching with the innovative teaching approaches that the school required them to do because they found they were not prepared to use the approaches.

#### **5.3.1 Nguyen experienced such an event**

When I first met Nguyen, she was in her second year teaching maths and physics in a secondary school after she had completed a teacher training course in the local college. The story below brings her voice about her experience of teaching with the teaching methods she felt uncomfortable.

*One day, I had to give a lecture under the observation of the Dean of subject and other colleagues. That was the class I used PowerPoint to present the lecture as a school's requirement of innovating the teaching approach.*

*I spent a long time preparing for that lecture as I did not know how to use the software before; so I was worried at the first time.*

*Anyway, I then learnt how to use this software and then designed the lecture. I didn't focus on effect and color, just focused on the content and treated*

*the slides as auxiliary boards so that instead of writing the content on the boards, I typed them on the slides. I went to the class with pride, excitement and little flutter.*

*However, after the class, the observers criticized that the way I used PowerPoint to give the lecture was not effective, too simple and that they were not satisfied with my competence of using PowerPoint in teaching.*

*I was upset and not satisfied with the comments. If I made beautiful effect and color, the students would be excited and shift their focus away from the content. I was confused about what is right, what is expected and after that I even always felt scared of being reprimanded.*

*To deal with the observation of the school, I usually searched the lectures designed with PowerPoint in the Internet to teach in the class with observation. In my daily teaching, I preferred traditional methods. In traditional approach, students could be able to take notes for the exams.*

Nguyen's school called for using PowerPoint software for a more active learning and teaching approach; and the staff wanted to observe and see how the new teacher use this approach. Nguyen was not prepared with skills of using PowerPoint in teaching before she entered the school. But she accepted the call so she learnt how to use this software. She was proud of her work even though what she had done was using the software to replace the blackboard of traditional method, not using the software to enhance more active learning. This did not satisfy the observers so her teaching that day was not highly evaluated. She was not happy with the evaluation but Nguyen did not understand that she focused the value on one aspect while the school put their expectation on another.

### **5.3.2 Thoa's experience shows different coping strategies**

Thoa, a teacher in her second year of teaching literature in a standard secondary school after she had finished a teacher training course in the local college, also experienced such an event. However, she seemed to be luckier than Nguyen as she had a good Dean who was supportive to her. Her voice about this experience is vibrant in the story below.

*The Dean told me that I need to use PowerPoint to teach effectively and he together with some other colleagues will observe to see how my teaching goes with that. Now, I can use PowerPoint well and apply it efficiently to teaching but at the time the Dean told me about that I had no ideas about using the software.*

*In the teacher training college, I saw some lecturers give presentations with*

*PowerPoint. I have never been taught how to use the software and have no ideas about what an electrical lecture looks like.*

*So when the Dean told me to teach with PowerPoint, I was very, very worried. Why didn't they teach me the skills that I would need for my teaching?*

*After that, I asked the Dean to allow me to delay the performance of the duty and have one semester to observe and learn that approach. Luckily, he accepted my request.*

*However, It was not easy at all because using PowerPoint in teaching requires not only the knowledge of the software but also the skill of manipulating and applying it into lessons needed to teach. Other teachers accepted to let me visit their classes and learn from their teaching but refused to give me further support as they said they were always busy. Their apathetic attitude made me flinch to ask for help.*

*I'm lucky to have a very good Dean who is always willing to support me when I need him. He helped me to have the basic skills of using PowerPoint and some principal ideas of using it effectively in a lecture. On his advice, I went to Internet, searched for good lectures using PowerPoint and downloaded them. I read them carefully to see how people use it in teaching a lesson. The Dean helped me to analyze the principles of the approach behind the techniques.*

*Gradually after months, I could design a lecture using PowerPoint and the Dean was pleased with that. I feel confident using PowerPoint in teaching now and the Dean deserved all the credit for that.*

A task with the use of the software PowerPoint needed to be done but Thoa found she was not prepared with appropriate skill to complete it. Thoa blamed the teacher training college for not preparing her with the skills that the job requires her to have. Thoa was actively having some strategies for herself to complete the task and the Dean instead of pushing her to complete the task immediately, he gave her a preparation time. Thoa found that the task was not easy to complete by herself while other teachers were not enthusiastic to help. Up to here, she painted a gray color picture about the situation but the picture became brighter because the Dean was available there for her. His skills and experience brought to Thoa useful and practical support. The task was solved. Thoa was happy with the improvement the Dean helped her to get and appreciated the Dean.

## **5.4 Experience of difficulty in dealing with students and keeping discipline**

I found the difficulty in dealing with students and keeping discipline was one of the commonalities when exploring the beginning teachers' teaching experiences. Each teacher entered the classroom with expectations of student behavior that were not met. Most teachers felt physically and emotionally shocked when the students acted in ways not consistent with their expectations. None of these teachers felt comfortable with their own actions and responses to the students and they tried to improve their situations.

### **5.4.1 Hue experienced such an event**

Hue was a teacher in a small secondary school located at the boundary of the city. She had graduated from a local teacher training college, majoring in teaching literature and citizen education. In the first year of being a teacher, she taught literature. At the time of the interview, she was in the second year and teaching citizen education. Hue possessed such an experience with discipline which is presented in her story below.

*One day in my first year of teaching, when I was giving lecture in a class, some students kept laughing at me ironically. I was at first surprised and gently asked them if there was something wrong. The students still laughed; I felt one breath stuck in my chest, then I tried to be serious when I asked them "what's funny here?" but I could hear my voice higher than normal. The students still laughed. I was so angry. In anyway, I am their teacher. How dare they do that to me? So I yelled to them that "stop laughing immediately and focus on learning". The students even laughed louder.*

*They made me feel I was ridiculous standing there, small, and powerless. I was so angry and upset. I couldn't imagine that students nowadays were so ill-disciplined... I didn't know what to do but still tried to complete the lesson while my mind was blank and my thinking was on the state of waiting for the bell noticing the time-out.*

*I felt my steps heavier than normal when I left the classroom heading to the teacher common room. There, I met the master teacher of that class. I reported the situation to him in hope that he would share my feeling, give me some advice of how to do in such a circumstance and punish the students so that they would never do that again.*

*However, that teacher coldly told me "you are a teacher and it was your class. It's your business" before he turned his back to me and went away.*

*You know... how could he behave like that to me? He was the master teacher, he got the responsibility. He did that... Like dashing ice-water to my face.*

*I could not sleep that night, was really frustrated about that colleague and thought that it's a mistake to be a teacher. I may never be able to forget that day.*

*TTC did not emphasize all the possible common situations so as to avoid shocking with unforeseen problems. We were only introduced with some typical situations.*

*After that I preferred self-help. I tried many ways to treat students and found that be nice with students is a good strategy to make them obey. For example: there was a male student with long hair which was not allowed in the school. His master teacher ordered him to have it cut but he did not obey. I talked to him friendly and sweetly and then he followed.*

*The school forbade teachers to use physical punishment. I don't slap... but sometime when they made me so distressed, pinching the ear is ok... or I made the student stand in a corner of classroom so that he felt ashamed and dare not to repeat the unruly behaviors.*

Hue believed that students should not confront the teacher. She was really depressed by their behavior and her experience. She blamed the teacher training. She hoped the master teacher who is usually the one who have the most prestige to students would understand her feeling, identify with her situation and would awe the students so that they would never do that to her again. Hue was very disappointed and psychologically traumatized because of the rejection of the colleague. The experience of being coldly and rudely refused support from a colleague become a life shock for her. This also discouraged her in her role as teacher. After this event, she preferred self-help and found some strategies that she found effective to make the students disciplined, including both friendly treatments and punishment.

#### **5.4.2 Nam raised her voice about this experience**

Nam had completed a computer science teacher training course in a university before teaching that subject in a secondary school in Kontum city. At the time I interviewed her, she was in her second year of teaching. She was another participant who experienced the event that she felt uncomfortable with students and keeping discipline. Here is her voice about her experience about dealing with the disciplinary issues:

*In a class, when I was giving lecture and the students were listening, one student kept making noise, teasing and even hitting the friends nearby. I was focusing on the lecture so I just asked the student to stop and then I quickly went back to show the class how to save and open a doc file in a folder.*

*The student continued with his commotion behaviors until no one could concentrate on the lesson I was so angry that he just wanted to yell to that student and even slap to his face strongly.*

*Previously, as learnt from my old secondary school teachers, I usually used a long ruler to hit the disobeying students... but now the school administrators talk a lot to forbid that, and many cases were reported in the newspapers, some went to courts... So I don't hit the students anymore. Just require the offensive students to stand in the corner and raise up their hands a long time, it's very wearying and they will be scared.*

*... In another class, there was a student who was always destructive but on that day he was surprisingly staying quiet while the class was noisy. I thought "what's happening here" but I tried to keep a placid face so that no one could recognize how surprised I was at the student's change of behavior. At that time, the class commotion status was not as so serious when a thought came running quickly inside my head that it was a good chance to give the destructive student a compliment. Therefore, I took a high happy voice and said to all the students that "if all of you were as good as this student, it would be great and I would be very happy".*

*You know, it's very important to give a difficult student good compliments as it would encourage him more than anything.*

Nam was a teacher who believed in the effectiveness of physical punishment in keeping students disciplined. By experience, she found compliments, rather than oppression, would be effective and educational in terms of elevating the students' belief of themselves making them feel being appreciated, and reducing the commotion behaviors. Besides, although she stopped using treatments such as hitting students using ruler due to the school rules, she kept using other kinds of physical punishment such as requiring students to raising their hands until they felt weary and scared.

## **5.5 Experience of difficulty in teaching ethnic minority students**

I found the difficulty in teaching ethnic minority students is another commonality when looking at the beginning teachers' experiences. The beginning teachers had a great concern about the ethnic minority students who they considered to be a special group of

students. They felt uncomfortable taking the responsibility for teaching these students as most did not know how to teach students who were not in the main stream.

### **5.5.1 Minh experienced such an event**

Minh, a literature teacher graduating from Kontum Teacher Training College and was in her third year of teaching at the time I interviewed her, had this experience. Here is her voice rising about her difficulty in teaching ethnic minority students

*The ethnic minority students were not enthusiastic and motivated in learning. At the beginning, I did not know how to make them learn.*

*I tried different teaching methods. I combined traditional and new methods; I also give explicit explanations to them. The Dean read my lesson plan and observed my teaching sometimes, then he gave me comments on the ways I treat the students. . . then it was ok. . .*

*Also, they were usually absent from the school. My friend who was teaching in a school where all students are minorities shared with me many useful experiences. I learnt from her that: we must combine with local government in the precinct where students live to recruit and encourage students go to school. That makes parents care about the situation and put in effort to their children to go to school. They are all good strategies for me.*

Teaching ethnic minority was a challenge for Minh at the beginning. She tried by herself to deal with the challenge under the supervision and support of the Dean. She consulted people with more experience in the area and recruited support from many sources. She was successfully dealing with the challenge

### **5.5.2 Thuong also raised her voice about this experience**

Thuong was in her second year of teaching the subject *Family and Economic Management* in a small school located quite far away from city center. She experienced working with minority students but she did not feel as if she was successfully dealing with her problem. This is shown in the story below:

*I had 30 students but after the New Year holiday only 10 of them came to class. I had to take a long way to the house to inspire them to go to school. Next year when I must be the master teacher, who takes main responsibility for all this, I would possibly... "die". When being a student in the teacher*

*training college, I never thought that being a teacher I would be involved in such challenging responsibility.*

*They didn't even understand Vietnamese very much... hard to teach. I taught with the same methods but when I wanted a student to read out loud something, I requested an ethnic student. I had some of these students who usually made noises and did not engage in learning, they didn't focus and take notes.*

*2/3 of students are minorities but I have to make at least 50 percent get from average score. I'm scared of not being able to get that target... I gave them a chance to do test again... but don't know, if I have a chance, I would like to move to a school in the center of city where there are less minorities, less pressure.*

Thuong was anxious about the ethnic minority students' poor attendance and the language barrier that made her teaching difficult. She was not prepared to undertake the tasks required of a teacher in a school where students who were not of the mainstream. She tried to improved her situation by adjusting the ways to treat them with more encouragement than oppression, and adjusting teaching methods that could involve them in learning activities. However, the unusual tasks such as student recruitment and the pressure of the students' learning outcomes still made her uncomfortable teaching minority students. At the end of the story, she revealed her wish to avoid teaching these students by moving to another school when she had the chance.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the beginning teachers' teaching experiences through four commonalities I identified from the data. With each commonality, I provided two or three illustrating stories which were carefully selected and presented in the way that each participant' biography can be introduced and the voices of all nine participants can be represented.

One of the elements that emerged from the stories was the sense that all teachers identified problems they had within the school. They fell into four categories, subject content, teaching methods, discipline, and ethnic minorities.

Table 5.1 shows those that had the issues and the distribution of the stories I selected to present in this chapter. The ticks in boxes ☒ show the stories of the corresponding

teachers were chosen to be represented under the corresponding theme.

Table 5.1: The distribution of the stories selected to present commonalities.

Beginning teachers	Experience of lack of subject knowledge	Experience of unfamiliarity with innovative teaching approaches	Experience of difficulty in dealing with students and keeping discipline	Experience of difficulty in teaching ethnic minority students
Nha	✓	✓	✓	
Minh	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nam		✓	✓	✓
Thoa	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hue	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thuong	✓	✓	✓	✓
Luyen	✓	✓	✓	
Nguyen	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hao	✓	✓	✓	✓

The beginning teachers had to solve their problems and explore different strategies and techniques such as,

- asking their mentor in the school,
- asking other teachers in the school,
- asking friends outside the school skilled or otherwise,
- exploring notes and memories of the teacher training or
- relying on their own creativity.

Not all teachers explored all of these strategies but as they explored these they had positive or negative responses to each one. Table 5.2 shows the strategies each teacher applied to deal with their issues.

In the next chapter, I will examine these apparent commonalities in meaning to address the complexity of the detail, using the methodology I identified in the methodology chapter.

Table 5.2: The use of the coping strategies that each beginning teachers applied. (*Table is continued in the next page ....*)

		The use of the strategies that each beginning teacher applied							
Coping Strategies		Nha	Minh	Nam	Thoa	Hue	Thuong	Luyen	Nguyen Hao
Subject Content	Asking their mentor in the school	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
	Asking other teachers in the school	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
	Asking friends outside the school skilled or otherwise	✓							✓
	Researching by exploring notes from teacher training, or searching in others materials	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
	Relying on their own creativity						✓		✓
Teaching Methods	Asking their mentor in the school		✓		✓		✓		
	Asking other teachers in the school	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
	Asking friends outside the school skilled or otherwise								✓
	Researching by exploring notes from teacher training, or searching in others materials			✓			✓		
	Relying on their own creativity	✓		✓					

Table is continued from the previous page ....

Coping Strategies		The use of the strategies that each beginning teacher applied							
		Nha	Minh	Nam	Thoa	Hue	Thuong	Luyen	Nguyen Hao
Discipline	Asking their mentor in the school								
	Asking other teachers in the school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Asking friends outside the school skilled or otherwise								
	Researching by exploring notes from teacher training, or searching in others' materials								
	Relying on their own creativity	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ethnic Minority Students	Asking their mentor in the school		✓						
	Asking other teachers in the school		✓		✓				
	Asking friends outside the school skilled or otherwise		✓						
	Researching by exploring notes from teacher training, or searching in others materials								
	Relying on their own creativity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

# **Chapter 6 The essence of being an early career teacher**

## **6.1 Some preliminary conventions of the chapter presentation**

From the data, I identified four common topics which concerned beginning teachers: Subject content, Teaching methods, Discipline and Ethnic minority students. The new teachers described the challenges they experienced; they reflected on their thinking and feeling about the situation; reported the methods they used to deal with their perceived difficulties; and exposed their beliefs/ perspectives that guided their actions and reflections.

The process and method of my analysis of the teachers' perceptions was consistent with the phenomenological stages described by van Manen. It followed a circular procedure where the participants' stories were read, analyzed, written and re-written; that involved me in "re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing" and "revising or editing" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 131) the data. It encouraged me to capture both the "parts" and the "whole" by cultivating multiple layers of meaning of the phenomenon. Hence, I chose to present this chapter in the way that can reveal both the commonalities and the differences among the nine teachers studied. The aim of the study is to look at the teachers' experience and identify the factors affecting their experience to gain understanding of what supported them to adapt. To assist the reader to follow the results of my analysis more easily, I set out the criteria I use to categorize levels of adaptation, and then identify the composition of the three groups based on adaptation to the teaching experience.

My approach to describing the teachers adaptation is based on their perceptions of two components: (1) their personal sense of success in dealing with their issues; and (2) the extent to which their coping strategies were consistent with the school expectations or regulations. A positive adaptation includes both components; and a negative adaptation means one or both elements were missing. This adaptation is at the school level, distin-

guished from the adaptation at the personal level where the element of teachers' belief is involved in the discussion of the integration between teachers' belief and behaviors.

At the school level based on the above criteria, I have identified the positive and negative adaptation of each teacher in each topic of experiences which is shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Summary of two kinds of adaptation.

Adaptions	Definition	
Adaptation at school level	Positive adaptation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. teacher's personal sense of success in dealing with the issues</li> <li>2. the extent to which their coping strategies were consistent with the school expectations or regulations.</li> </ol>
	Negative adaptation	One or both of the elements above missing
Adaptation at personal level	The integration between teachers' belief and behaviors	

Table 6.2 shows that two teachers reported positive adaptation in all four topics of experiences, two others reported negative adaptation in all four topics; and other five adapted positively in some topics and negatively in other topics. Therefore, I have divided the teachers into three groups describing their different levels of adaptation which are visualized in figure 6.1. From this part of this thesis, I added a letter and a number to the name of each participant to easily recognize what group the teacher belongs to. This change of the participants' artificial names is explained more clearly in section 4.4.

- High Adaptation group (HA): includes teachers who positively adapted in all four topics (Nha-H1 and Minh-H2).
- Medium Adaptation group (MA): includes teachers who positively adapted in some of the four topics (Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Thuong-M4, and Luyen-M5).

- Group Low Adaptation (LA): includes teachers who did not adapt positively in any of the topics (Hao-L2 and Nguyen-L1).

Table 6.2: The adaptation at the school level of each of the nine teachers in each topic of experiences. The tick symbol (✓) shows that the teacher had positive adaptation in the topic. The cross symbol (✗) shows the negative adaptation.

Issues	Nha	Minh	Nam	Thoa	Hue	Thuong	Luyen	Nguyen	Hao
Subject content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Teaching methods	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Discipline	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Ethnic students	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗

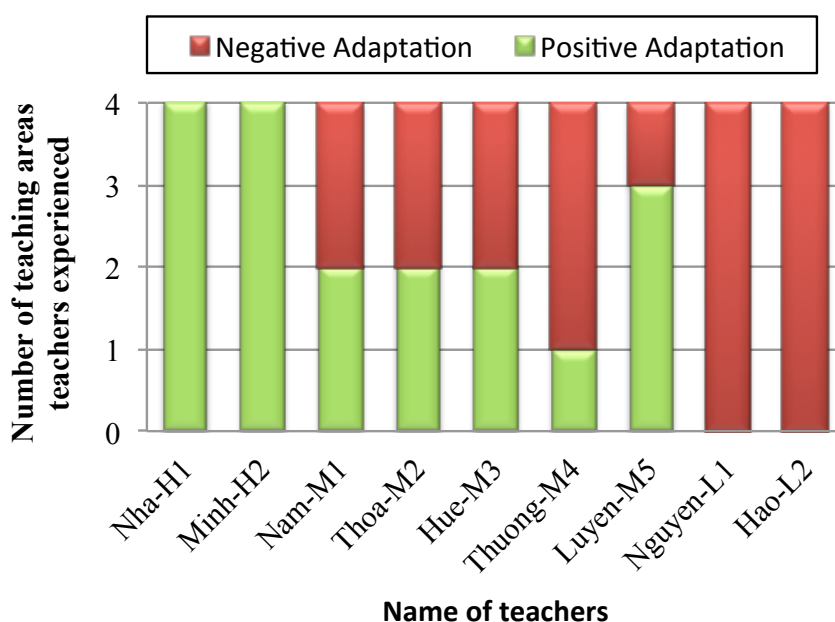


Figure 6.1: The beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level.

Under each topic of experiences, I examined the teachers' adaptation at the school level with the focus on the influence of two elements that I call *Self* and *School*. Besides

presenting the results in the textual descriptions, I provide some diagrams to visualize these descriptions. Each diagram provides a graphic depiction of the adaptation at the school level of the teachers on each topic using the two elements of *Self* and *School*.

*Self* is the term I use to include the elements that emerge from the teachers at a personal level, such as their capacity for reflection in learning by experience, the activeness of seeking solutions for their issues, the network outside school where beginning teachers worked, self-researching, their wisdom, and decisiveness. The teachers' pedagogical belief also emerges from the data and this element is involved in the adaptation at a personal level.

*School* is the term used to include teachers' perceptions of whether elements in their environment were positive or negative influences on their adaptation. These school based elements that indicate the accessibility of support in school are, school regulations, fellow teachers' sense of responsibility to help, and collegial evaluations of the beginning teachers' performance.

The terms I used to name these elements are based on the meanings of what the participants described to me in their stories. One or two terms are produced with my personal understanding of the connection between the daily behaviors teachers described and some educational and psychological concepts used in the research literature (for example: the term the capacity of reflection in learning by experience). Some of the elements are mentioned frequently in the research literature.

These general categorizations *Positive Self*, or *Self(+)*; *Negative Self*, or *Self(-)*; *Positive School*, or *School(+)*; and *Negative School*, or *School(-)* are based on my qualitative interpretations of the relationship between the elements of *Self* and *School* in the same topic. There are not necessarily any correlations between the specific bases for categorizing *Self* (+ or -) in one topic with *Self* (+ or -) in another. For example, self-researching is an element of *Self* from the teachers' perspectives that involved in their experiences of Subject content and Teaching methods. However, this elements do not appear in the teachers' experiences of Discipline and Ethnic minorities.

It is important to distinguish the two elements (*Self* and *School*) and the two kinds

of adaptation (at personal level and at school level) that I have clarified earlier in this section. Accordingly, *Self* and *School* are the names of the elements influencing the teachers' adaptation at the school level. In the later sections, from 6.2 to 6.5, it can be seen that negative adaptation at the school level could be made up by either negative or positive *Self*; or positive adaptation could be made up by either negative or positive *School*, and so on.

It is also important to note that the groups of High Adaptation, Medium Adaptation, and Low Adaptation show the number of the areas of experience that the beginning teachers successfully adapted. They are distinguished from the positiveness and negativeness of *Self* and *School*. A teacher in group HA is the person who reflected the positive adaptation at all four teaching areas but she might reflect herself in negative *School* or negative *Self*. For example, Nha- H1 reflected her success in dealing with the issues of the subject knowledge (positive adaptation) even though she could not find appropriate support from her school (*School(-)*).

Or, a teacher in group LA is the person who reflected the negative adaptation at all four teaching areas but she might reflect herself in positive *School* or positive *Self*. For example, Nguyen-L1 felt she was not successful (reflected negative adaptation) at all the teaching areas she experienced even though she revealed some positive personal efforts (*Self (+)*); e.g. in the story about teaching methods, she accepted the call to use the innovative process of PowerPoint in teaching and she was dynamic in learning and using the new approach but she felt she was not successful in meeting the school expectations.

In the sections below I provide descriptions and interpretations of the perceptions of the beginning teachers of their experiences in the four topic areas, focusing on their perceptions of adaptation defined by them as their own behavioral, cognitive and attitudinal responses (*Self* factors) and their perceptions of their environment (*School*).

## 6.2 Subject content

### 6.2.1 Issues

Subject content was a high challenge for Group LA (Low Adaptation) only, not for Groups HA (High Adaptation) and MA (Medium Adaptation). Even though other teachers chose to share stories that did not appear to be highly challenging to experienced teachers, they were examples of stories that challenged the beliefs they had about their capacity as teachers.

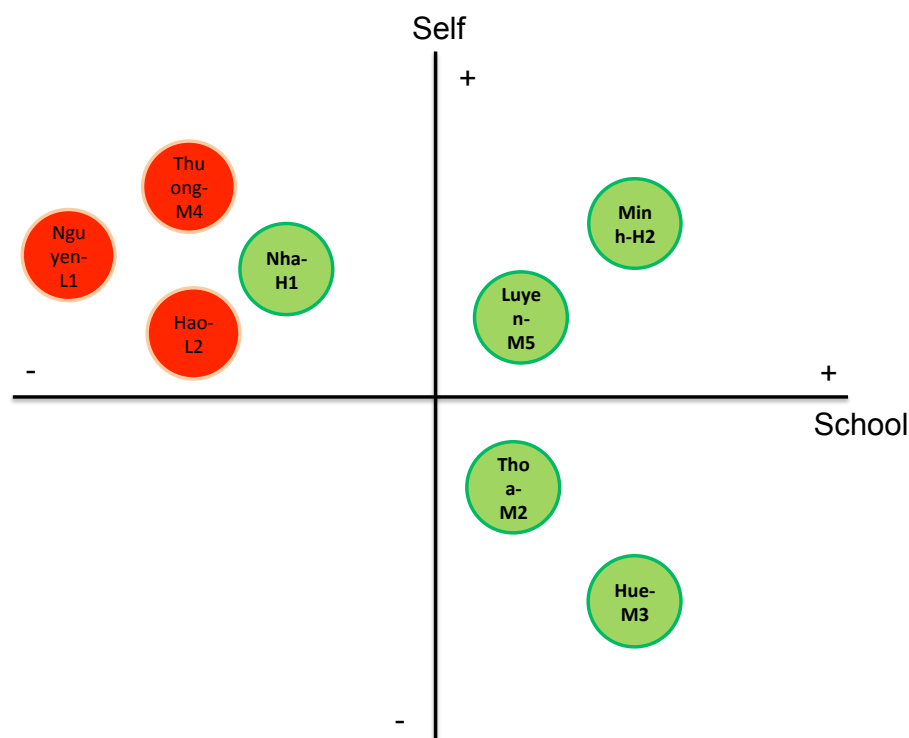


Figure 6.2: The beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level in the area of subject content. It is noted that green circles represent participants with positive adaptation; red circles represent participants with negative adaptation.

#### 6.2.1.1 Subject content as a challenge for group LA

Only two teachers who are both in the Group LA (Nguyen-L1 and Hao-L2) said subject content was difficult for them.

*Maths and Physics were easy at grade 6 but more and more difficult in the higher grades 7, 8 and 9. A lot of the content was so unfamiliar and difficult.* (Nguyen-L1; P. 14)

*I teach Vietnamese linguistics and literature. Not everything easy for me, Vietnamese linguistics and Grammars (môn tiếng Việt) were easy but Literature Work (văn học) was challenging for me. Because in literature work, I had to teach some kind of poems with ancient Vietnamese language. (Hao-L2; P.10)*

These two teachers also reflected upon the causes of the challenges they had with subject content. The causes seem to be related to the teachers' personality at an individual level and from their context and structural influences.

Firstly, at the individual level, teachers reflected upon their lack of interest with the subject or the career of teaching as a cause of their incompetence, hence their difficulties, with the subject content.

*When studying in TTC, as teaching was not the job of my choice, I just studied to cope with the exams, did not care how the things I learnt would be used in future teaching... so many contents in real teaching that I found unfamiliar and difficult. (Nguyen-L1; P.14)*

*... I was not trained with that content because I graduated from a pedagogical university which trains teachers for high schools. But then I could not find a job in a high school so... had to teach in a secondary school.; plus, literature work (văn học) is of the part I did not like and did not understand when I was in school; this part was not involved in training program of the university as well. (Hao-L2; P. 10)*

Secondly, at the structural level of influences, these teachers blamed the teacher training programs and the inappropriate school curriculum for their challenges. Accordingly, Nguyen-L1 reflected that TTI provided her with inappropriate, general knowledge in most theories while she had to teach a lot of practice with experiments:

*Studying in TTC is not enough. I say "not enough" because they taught me very high scholar level of subject content, too sublime (cao siêu quá)... not appropriate to my teaching, I had to learn many things that were very hard but I didn't think I would need them in my teaching. I learnt a lot of theories but I had to teach a lot of practice (experiments). (Nguyen-L1; P. 14)*

Hao-L2 also blamed the teaching curriculum for her difficulties, saying that she believed the content was too difficult yet inappropriate for her teaching:

*Other parts of content were easy. But that kind of poems, one of the main parts I had to teach, was too hard to memorize, and difficult to understand the meaning. I talked to other teachers and they confirmed that only some good students could understand. Even me, I felt very ambiguous with those kinds of poems and I hated them since I had to learn them in school.*

To summarize, teachers in group LA reported that they had to teach content that they felt unfamiliar with and that was difficult for them. From the teachers' reflection, their difficulties with the subject content came from personal influences: low competence, their low interest in the content and their poor learning attitude in the teacher training institution. For them, the contextual influences consisted of the inappropriate training program that provided them with general knowledge of content and did not match the school curriculum, and the excessive difficulty of the content in the school curriculum.

#### **6.2.1.2 Most teachers were concerned with inconsequential aspects of subject content**

In general, the subject content to be taught in the secondary schools was simple and considered to be easy by most teachers in Groups HA and MA. ["Very easy" (Nam-M1); "not difficult" (Luyen-M5); "simple and not strange for me" (Nha-H1); "nothing too difficult " (Thoa-M2); "not so scholarly (simple)" (Hue-M3); "most of them easy" (Thuong-M4)]

These teachers also provided explanations of why they saw the subject content as easy. Firstly, they considered that studying in teacher training institutions (TTI) covered the basic content necessary for teaching in the secondary schools (Luyen-M5, Nha-H1 and Thoa-M2). Secondly, they thought that the subject content in secondary school was simple and of a low academic level (Nha-H1, Minh-H2, Thoa-M2, Thuong-M4, Hue-M3, Nam-M1, Luyen-M5).

*Not difficult... what studied in the teacher training is generally enough to teach in secondary school. (Hue-M3; P. 23)*

*It was not as scholarly; students were mainly required to know and understand general principles and apply them in some simple situations. (Nam-M1. P. 28)*

Particularly for Nha-H1, the reason the content she had to teach was not problematic for her in general was because she had had experience in problem solving at the TTI which helped her to access and get familiar with the school curriculum.

*The subject content is simple and not strange for me, because when I was studying in the teacher training college, one lecturer usually required students to solve problems in the secondary school textbooks as regular assignments; I was really involved in getting with the context then, hence most*

*of the content in textbooks was not strange for me. (Nha-H1; P. 2)*

Only Group LA admitted that subject content was really a concern. Most interviewees (in all three Groups, except for Nam-M1) expressed their concern only with inconsequential aspects about which they felt unfamiliar and uncertain.

For example, they did not know some little points in the textbooks. Five teachers (Nha-H1, Luyen-M5, Thuong-M4, Hao-L2, and Nguyen-L1) reported that they had good basic knowledge about what they needed to teach but there were some points that were strange for them, "first time I saw that information" or "maybe I forgot", "I'm not sure about it". An example is Nha-H1, with the story of preparation of an electrical lesson and concern about two little definitions that made her lose self-confidence, (see the story in section 5.2).

The concern was also raised when teachers (Luyen-M5, Minh-H2, Thoa-M2) were in the situation when students raised a question that they could not answer properly and lost confidence and exhibited self-doubt. Minh-H2's stories is an example:

*In a lesson about idiom, after I finished the lecture about definition, characteristics of idiom and gave some examples about common Vietnamese idioms and their meanings; I asked "Are there any questions?" After a moment, one hand from the back of the classroom rose up; and the student asked me the meaning of an idiom he knew. That was the first time I heard that idiom, but I could guess its general meaning and explained it to him. However, that student revealed dissatisfaction; he said that my explanation was not the same as what he had read on the Internet. I was actually not so sure whether I understood that idiom because that was the first time I knew it. I thought the information in the Internet must be correct. I was so embarrassed because I was the teacher, but I could not give the right answer to the student. (Minh-H2; P. 32)*

Teachers often also blamed the teacher training program for the concern they faced with inconsequential aspects of subject content. They were sharing the statement that although they were taught a lot in the teacher training universities or colleges, the subject content they learnt was too general, scholarly, theoretical and not linked to the secondary schools. Hence, when the beginning teachers met a piece of information that was harder than their basic knowledge, it became "strange" and they felt "uncertain". As a result, these teachers lost their confidence about their knowledge and lost confidence in their teaching. The beginners who claimed that they met some little pieces of unfa-

miliar information described themselves as "ill-prepared", having "weak knowledge", and "unsure about my knowledge".

*I felt hopeless and wanted to give up; I was thinking about skipping those definitions in the lecture. The first time since I went to teaching I lost confidence about my knowledge. I used to think that I had learnt enough in teacher training program but then I discovered that what I learnt so general, theoretical and sublime while I had to teach many practical things. (Nha-H1; P. 2)*

*I used to be confident that the content in the secondary school is easy, simple and I could manage all based on what I learnt from the teacher training program; but after that day I thought learnt in that college, my knowledge is not enough to teach because I was not familiarized with school curriculum, and then I felt less confident... I doubted myself. (Minh-H2; P. 32)*

## **6.2.2 Dealing with the issues**

From the issues raised, this section presents how teachers in group LA (Low Adaptation) dealt with subject content as a challenge; and how teachers in the groups dealt with their concern of being unfamiliar with inconsequential aspects about their teaching.

### **6.2.2.1 Group LA - negative adaptation**

Self-help and gaining support from others were the two ways teachers in group LA (Low Adaptation) dealt with problems related to subject content.

Both Hao-L2 and Nguyen-L1 reported that they did not have a mentor but they were willing to ask other colleagues for help. This was revealed more clearly in Nguyen-L1's comment about her attitude toward asking people for help: "I think I'm a young teacher with not much experience, the first years are mainly for learning so I don't hesitate to ask for help."

However, the poor availability and willingness of other teachers was clearly stated as a barrier to Nguyen-L1's access to support from school. She reported the poor availability and unwillingness to give support from other teachers that took Nguyen-L1 more energy and effort to seek the answer for her concerns.

*But it was not easy to get help from others. I did not have a mentor because I was short-term contracted... teachers in the same school were not willing to help me because I'm a short-term contracted teacher so they think I*

*would leave soon. When I was in the induction in another school, I got acquainted with an experienced teacher who later on was very supportive to me, I could ask her but she lived far from my place. . .*

*I was so disappointed because there was no one available to ask about subject content. There were two teachers of this subject to teach from grade 6 to 9 but the other one was on maternity leave so there was only me to do that job. That was so terrible to do that alone. I had to disturb the leave of that colleague and ask for her experience on the field many times. This made me feel “fatigued”. (Nguyen-L1; P. 14)*

But she realized that her problem solving changed when her own context changed as well.

*But in the second year I had a baby, too busy so I just borrowed lesson plans from others and taught within the plans. It was very stressful because I was a new teacher; they observed and judged my teaching all the time. If I did not do well, they would reprimand me. Sometimes I had to find solutions for maths problems in the solutions books. (Nguyen-L1; P.14)*

Therefore, in the second year when Nguyen-L1 had a baby, and she was too busy she preferred self-help. To deal with the school requirements, Nguyen-L1 just borrowed lesson plans from others and taught within the plans; she tried to find solutions (for maths problems) by copying materials in the solution book. This did not always meet her standards she had previously held for herself.

Self-help was also a dominant choice of Hao-L2. She tried to apply some creative strategies to deal with difficulty in subject-content but she felt she was not always successful:

*After a class, students told me that the poems were too difficult and they didn't understand. I promised to review it before the exams. For the following poems in the later classes, I asked them to read the poems before the classes, look up the meanings of the words so that they could be easier to understand when I explained. But those kind of poems were very hard, and students were lazy. . . so the situation was not improved much. . . (Hao-L2; P. 10)*

Hao-L2 understood that her attempt to get the student to take more responsibility for their learning did not always work for them or her. Similar to Nguyen-L1, when the attempt to improve the situation did not bring her a good result, Hao-L2 turned her concern to the possible consequences that might eventuate if she did not meet the school requirement about the number of students passing exams. The coping strategies that Hao-L2 applied to deal with the situation was based on the target of making students'

meet the required score, even by using unethical ways.

*Because the students need to pass the exams, I provide students with the main ideas of the poems before the exams... If teachers could not make students get good enough scores, the school would reprimand the teachers and I would die of it (at least 70 of students should get at least average score 5/10). So for the classes with too many students of bad learning capacity like they are in my school, I had to make some kind of magic to rationalize (hợp lý hóa) the scores to make the students meet the required scores. (Hao-L2; P. 10)*

Hao L-2 ended up adjusting the proportion of good scores so that the students appeared better than they were and she appeared to be a better teacher than she was capable of being at the time.

In summary, the two teachers of group LA reported a lack of accessibility to mentoring staff (Nguyen-L1) and unclear policies about (Hao-L2) who in the school would support staff who were experiencing difficulties. The beginning teachers found they needed to deal with their issues by seeking help from other people who were not in the school (Nguyen-L1) and trying in some ways to solve the problems by themselves (Hao-L2). They also stated their negative adaptation to the topic of subject content. Hence, the cases of these two teachers are illustrated in the chart as red circles, being located in the zone of *Positive Self* and *Negative School*.

#### **6.2.2.2 Group HA and MA - positive adaptation**

Most teachers in groups High Adaptation (HA) and Medium Adaptation (MA) reported their success in dealing with their issues of subject content and had positive adaptation in this area. The stories about dealing with the issue highlighted two common elements that contributed to their adaptation, which are categorized as *Self* and *School*. However, the contribution of each element to the teachers' adaptation is different among the various people.

Nha-H1 overcame the disadvantages of the unavailability of support in the school for subject content issues by resorting to other sources. She seemed to have had a supportive network as she mentioned a variety of sources that she could find when needing help: self-researching, contacting ex-teachers in TTC, friends, having a part-time job which was related to the concepts in the subject she taught and where she could ask the workers

in this profession for help when she had hard questions to answer. Nha-H1 reported the success of dealing with her issues of subject content as basically due to support from her network. Hence, in 6.2, her case is illustrated as a green circle in the zone of *Positive Self* and *Negative School*.

*There was only me who was officially trained to teach that subject, so there was no one to judge me but also no one to help me when I had something difficult about subject-content. Then, I searched the answer on the Internet, and reviewed notes from the teacher training program. There was a situation that I could not distinguish two concepts in the textbook and I could not find the answer by myself. However, I had a part-time job related to that subject, so I went to ask the workers that I knew from that part-time job. Well, they helped me to distinguish them, easily and very quick. (Nha-H1; P.2)*

Also in this zone is Thuong-M4 who reported her inaccessibility to school support but she felt comfortable with self-researching for the issues of subject content. However, she still had difficulties and her adaptation was not satisfactory.

*No one in the school was trained in the same major to me; teachers who teach my subject just hold the task concurrently. Even my mentor had not majored in this subject so I could not ask for help for the subject content as they could not explain thoroughly. I don't want to ask others, I prefer self-learning. So mainly I search in the Internet, read books and find the answer for myself. When I could not find the solution, I avoided giving difficult information because I didn't want the students to question back to me about something that I might not know. (Thuong-M4. P. 36)*

Minh-H2, Luyen-M5, Thoa-M2, and Hue-M3 all reported the role of supportive colleagues in their adaptation. However, the adaptation of Thoa-M2 and Hue-M3 did not describe clearly the element of Self. For example, Thoa-M2 felt she was lucky as she had a supportive mentor, also the Dean, who was always willing to help her. The role of this teacher herself is unclear in this situation. Hue-M3 did not have a mentor and hesitated to ask for help, but then some of her colleagues initiated efforts to help her; and she reported her satisfaction with this support. These two teachers are illustrated as green circles in the zone of *Positive School* and *Negative Self* in 6.2.

*I could ask the Dean anything. I'm lucky to have a very good Dean who is always willing to support me when I need him. (Thoa-M2; P. 18)*

*... Some young teachers were friendly and initiated to ask me whether they could help me... they were very willing to help and I got useful advice from them. (Hue-M3; P. 23)*

Minh-H2 and Luyen-M5 go to the zone of *Positive Self* and *Positive School* as their success was related to either self-researching or support from school. Minh-H2 revealed satisfaction after she overcame her personal issue and no longer hesitated to ask for and found support from people available in the school.

*...I was scared that other teachers might think I was a bad teachers who even did not know a simple thing that I had to ask them then... but then I found that teachers in my subject are very friendly and open so I asked them without feeling of being disregarded... they helped me to deal with the issues. (Minh-H2)*

Luyen-M5 had an official mentor but she seemed not to benefit from the mentor who majored in a different subject and seemed not to be willing to support her; however, she sought for help from others and appreciated other colleagues, especially one teacher who was enthusiastic to help and more helpful in subject content for her.

*My mentor was the Dean of the subjects Biology and Chemistry, but she majored in Chemistry while I teach Biology. So she did not give me relevant advice straight to the subject content. Also, she seemed not enthusiastic towards me. Every time I came to ask her, she just answered me for form's sake, like "ok, ok, just do it like what you think"... So I was annoyed and confused. I was very happy with other colleagues, especially one teacher who seemed to have rich experiences of teaching and was very willing to support me. I wished she had been my mentor, not the actual one. (Luyen-M5; P. 6)*

### **6.2.2.3 Teachers' belief revealed**

An important result that arose from the stories of how teachers dealt with the issue of being unfamiliar with inconsequential aspects, was how the stories exposed the teachers' belief about their role. Accordingly, teachers reported one or more of three methods of response as following.

Firstly, all teachers said that in the situations where they were not able to answer students' questions they delayed responding so that they would have time to seek for the answer by reading books, searching the Internet, or asking someone.

*Maybe it's like this or maybe it's like that. Let's go home and think more and next time present what do you think". Then I have time and seek the answer (Thoa-M2; P. 18)*

So, the teachers did not admit to students that they did not know, but roamed around the topic to delay answering their questions, in order to have time to seek the answer.

Secondly, all teachers tried to be well-prepared by self-researching and seeking help from others. Self-researching included searching information on the Internet, reading teachers' guidebooks, reading related books, and reviewing textbooks and notes maintained from the teacher training courses. These teachers also sought help from other people such as old teachers in TTC (Nha-H1); other teachers in school (Minh-H2, Luyen-M5, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Hao-L2); friends (Nha-H1, Minh-H2, Nguyen-L1, Thoa-M2); and workshops (Nha-H1).

However, they initially did not want to reveal to colleagues that they did not know something about subject content:

*At first I flinched to ask my colleagues about problem solving because I was afraid of being judged and felt ashamed but then I reviewed myself and found that other teachers' experiences would be important and I would be not alright by myself so then I asked for help. (Minh-H2; P. 32)*

*I never hesitate to ask other colleagues because I don't want to be embarrassed in front of students and they may think their teacher doesn't know [the content]. It's losing face (mất mặt) as anyway I am a teacher who, in students' eyes, should know everything. (Hue-M3; P. 23)*

Thirdly, some avoided giving difficult information to the students so that would not pay close attention to it and ask questions about content that teachers were unsure of:

*I gave barely enough information; sometime I wanted to give some examples to relate the theory to reality but I felt not sure about it then I dared not to do that. (Hue-M3; P.23)*

*I avoided giving difficult information because I didn't want the students to question back to me about something that I might not know. (Thuong-M4; P. 36)*

These teachers avoided putting themselves in situations where there was more chance of revealing their lack of knowledge.

All these methods that teachers reported of how they dealt with the situations of being unfamiliar with some inconsequential aspects of knowledge suggest that they did not accept that teachers may not know something but believed they should know everything. This shows not only how they behaved but also the teachers' belief about their role (which will be presented in more detail in the next section).

### 6.2.3 Interpretation

#### 6.2.3.1 The experience of three groups with issues of subject content

Data about subject content brings out the issues all the beginning teachers experienced in their first years of teaching. Groups HA (except for Nam-M1) and MA were only concerned with inconsequential aspects of content with which they felt unfamiliar. But for group LA subject content was reported to be not only the concern with inconsequential aspects but more challenging aspects.

The teachers' unfamiliarity with inconsequential aspects made teachers worried, led to self-doubting and loss of confidence. However, groups HA and MA reported their success in coping with the problems. The common reasons for their success appear to be related to elements of *Self* and *School*.

In figure 6.2, *Self*(+) includes teachers' capacity of self-researching (Thuong-M4, Nguyen-L1, Hao-L2, Minh-H2, Luyen-M5) and network (Nha-H1). *Self*(-) in this chart refers to the unclear role of personal characteristic in dealing with the issues (Thoa-M2) and hesitation in seeking help (Hue-M3). *School* (+) includes accessibility to support in school (Minh-H2, Luyen-M5, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3). *School*(-) includes inaccessibility of support in the school (Nha-H1, Thuong-M4, Nguyen-L1, Hao-L2), the pressure of students' testing scores and teacher evaluation (Nguyen-L1, Hao-L2)

In figure 6.2, all the circles on the right of the axis *Self* are green. This means that all the cases reporting their reception of positive influence from schools had positive adaptation to their teaching. The role of school that made positive inputs to beginning teachers is the accessibility of support in the school, in the form of mentors or colleagues who were available and willing to provide support.

The cases of Thoa-M2 and Hue-M3 seem to highlight the importance of the school role. While the element of *Self* in the case of Thoa-M2 was not clear, Hue-M3 revealed her hesitation about seeking help from school for her concerns about subject content. This teacher did not want her colleagues to know that she did not know something as they might have under-evaluated her. While no other positive strategies were reported for her case, this hesitation I have considered to be a negative characteristic. However, her

colleagues took the initiative in giving care to her and providing her with support and this seems to be the main element that led to her successful adaptation in the area of subject content.

The challenge with subject content was reported to be more serious for group LA. The experience of this group relates to the personal (*Self*) and contextual influences (*School*) in both stages of preparation and first years of teaching.

Both teachers in groups LA reported that their current difficulties with subject content were related closely to their poor preparation of the content. They explained that this poor preparation was the consequence of the inappropriate training program and their poor interest in the content and their teaching career. Nguyen-L1 blamed the teacher training institution (TTI) for not providing her with the practical knowledge necessary for teaching within a real curriculum. She also admitted that her attitude to learning when she was in TTI, which was solely to deal with exams instead of to gain knowledge, contributed to her difficulties. Hao-L2 was personally not interested in understanding the content; plus, she was not trained with the content due to the fact that she qualified for her degree in another content area.

This contrasts with what groups HA and MA reported about the reasons they thought the subject content was easy for them. Teachers in these groups thought the teacher training program covered basic subject contents sufficiently well for teachers to teach in secondary school. In addition, Nha-H1 emphasized that her personal activeness of learning in TTI was the most important reason of her familiarity with what she needed to teach in school. This difference between group LA and the two others suggests the individual's learning interest and attitude affect teachers' preparation, and hence their competence, and hence their teaching experience, of the subject content they need to teach in future.

In the first years of teaching, with lower competence of subject content, the problems of teachers in group LA seemed to be made more dramatic by the school context where there was a lack of support but heavy requirements placed on teachers. Nguyen-L1 acknowledged her personal weaknesses, and was aware of the importance of support from others, and made efforts to seek assistance.

However, teachers in her school seemed not willing to help her as she was short-term contracted and might leave the school ; plus, the teacher who was more experienced on the subject that Nguyen-L1 taught was not available in school so that it took her more energy and effort to seek the answer for her concerns. In addition, the personal issue (having a baby) took much of Nguyen-L1's time and concern in the second year.

Consequently, to survive and to avoid being reprimanded for not completing tasks, Nguyen-L1 applied "tricks" such as borrowing lesson plans and copying answers in solution book instead of trying to get known and get done with truly comprehension of the content.

Hao-L2, thought the subject content was too difficult for the teachers and students; and her opinion was confirmed by her colleagues. However, she reported that there was no positive strategy to support or assist Hao-L2 in dealing with the challenge. Hao-L2 focused her concern on the possible consequences for difficult content impeding the process of her students and therefore leading to a number of her students not passing the exams, passing being a school requirement.

The coping strategies that Hao-L2 applied to deal with the situation were a based on the target of making students' scores meet the school requirement, even by adjusting the proportion of good scores. This is another form of adaptation, but not a positive adaptation.

The poor preparation of beginning teachers and hence low competence concerning knowledge of subject content together with the lack of availability and willingness to support in school led to the consequence for teachers in group LA that they adapted in negative ways in order to survive. This may help to understand the different adaptation of four teachers in the zone of *Positive Self* and *Negative School*.

While Nha-H1 could adapted positively by self-help, Nguyen-L1 and Hao-L2 adapted negatively. The latter teachers with lower competence in subject content had more challenges to deal with, while they had difficulties with access to support from *School*. By contrast, the former had little concerns and a supportive network, hence, it seemed to be easier to adapt successfully.

However, when contrasting Thuong-M4 and Nha-H1, both highlighted positive *Self* in their dealing with inconsequential aspects but Thuong-M4 reflected her negative adaptation in relation to the influence of *School*. Although they both reported positive *Self* elements, Thuong-M4 valued her self-learning (reading books and searching Internet) while Nha-H1 based on her experienced network. This may suggest the importance of support from other people to the beginning teachers in contributing to their positive adaptation.

The cases of four other teachers who had positive adaptation enhance the above consideration. Indeed, two of them reported positive *Self* and two others reported negative *Self*. However, they all had positive support from school and positive adaptation. It makes a worthy remark on the positive influence of the support from the school to the positive adaptation of beginning teachers.

#### **6.2.3.2 The concern about the unfamiliarity of inconsequential aspects shows teachers' belief**

The stories of dealing with inconsequential aspects of subject content interestingly exposed the teachers' belief of their role as a teacher. Firstly, although acknowledging that the subject content that they had to teach was generally simple and easy, all three groups echoed the experience of being worried and losing self-confidence when they did not know something, even a little point, about content.

Secondly, to deal with the situations these teachers applied the strategies in which teachers hesitated to admit to their colleagues and students that they did not know the content. Even Nam-M1, the only teacher who affirmed that she had no problems with subject content, said that "I am the teacher, if I don't know something or feel difficult, how can the students learn?".

All these data suggest that they did not accept that teachers may not know something but should know everything; or show that the teachers did not accept that they may not know something; and were not comfortable to show up this fact.

This finding also suggests that teachers' belief that relates to Vietnamese traditional perspective about the role of a teacher is affected by Confucianism. In Confucianism,

teachers are the guru of knowledge that represent the source of truth (or knowledge). From this perspective, teachers in their classroom should always know everything, and always know better than students. Teachers may be under the threat of face losing if they do not know something (Hu, 2002; Pham, 2010).

This belief of the teacher's role as a guru of knowledge seems to be inappropriate for the demands of teaching in the modern time. Firstly, the rapidly changing world makes human knowledge continuously updated especially in the development of sciences and technology. The perception that teachers should be the guru of knowledge seems to be unrealistic. It is unlikely for a practitioner to be fully prepared for the profession in this changing reality; hence, it will be a disadvantage for teachers if they keep this perception.

The case of Nha-H1, among others, is an example as this teacher had a good preparation in TTI for the content she would teach and she herself also admitted that the content was generally simple and easy for her. However, she was unfamiliar with two little definitions which dropped her down to negative feeling of losing confidence and she turned to blame the TTI for not providing her with sufficient knowledge. It shows that the traditional perception of their role brought negative influences on the beginning teachers' feelings and response to their experience.

Secondly, learners in the current time can access other sources such as the Internet and other materials. The role of teachers in the current time has changed, they can no longer be the only source of truth. For example, in Minh-H2's story about the strange idiom that a student asked her about, while the student found a more correct answer that he learnt from the Internet, she could not give the student an satisfactory answer to retain her default position.

Despite the possibility that the student might want to challenge the teacher by asking her about a strange content that he already knew the answer, the perception that teacher should know and give the students immediately the correct answer to any question made this teacher embarrassed in front of the student and then self-doubting.

In summary, with the expansion of information and sources of information in the mod-

ern time, teachers are hardly to be fully prepared with the knowledge of the subject they teach and they are no longer the only source of knowledge that students can access. Therefore, the belief that teachers should be the guru of knowledge can cause pressure to the teachers; for example in this study, the experience of being embarrassed, self-doubting and losing confidence were reported.

## 6.3 Teaching methods

### 6.3.1 Issues - All three groups felt under-prepared for the use of innovative approaches

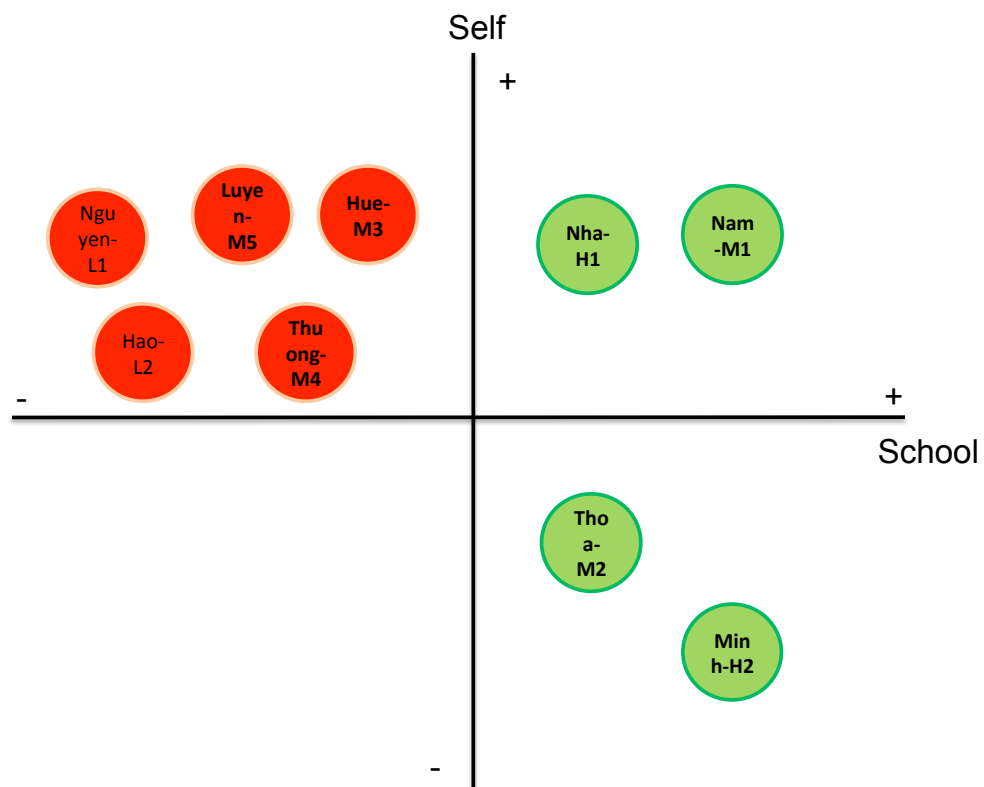


Figure 6.3: The beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level in the area of teaching method. It is noted that green circles represent participants with positive adaptation; red circles represent participants with negative adaptation.

Using innovative teaching approaches were reported to be a challenge by all three groups of teachers. All participants noticed that they were required to use innovative teaching approaches which are basically student-centered (Dạy học lấy học sinh làm trung tâm). The strategies/ techniques that were thought to enhance students' active

learning, as explained by participants, were group work and using multimedia (PowerPoint) in lectures. They reported that the new teaching approaches were encouraged as much as possible but compulsory in at least one lecture a week (Luyen-M5, Nam-M1, Nguyen-L1 and Nha-H1) or a month (Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Thuong-M4, Hao-L2).

The result shows that all three groups felt under-prepared for using the new approaches. They said they did not know how to use either group work or PowerPoint at the beginning time at schools.

*I had some ideas about new teaching methods from the observation of my teachers' performances in TTC, but I was not skillful on them because I never practiced with them (Nha-H1; P. 3).*

*Now, I can use PowerPoint well and apply it efficiently to teaching but at the time the Dean told me about that I had no ideas about using the software. (Thoa-M2; P. 19).*

*I spent a long time preparing for that lecture as I did not know how to use the software before; so I was worried at the first time (Hao-L2; P. 11)*

Most blamed TTI for not providing them with the skills.

*In the teacher training college, I saw some lecturers give presentations with PowerPoint. I have never been taught how to use the software and have no ideas about what an electrical lecture looks like. So when the Dean told me to teach with PowerPoint, I was very, very worried. Why didn't they teach me the skills that I would need for my teaching? (Thoa-M2; P.19).*

*In TTC, they provided us with a small workshop where we watched in TV how people use multimedia in teaching, no further guides, no practices, so I don't know how to do (Hue-M3; P. 24).*

*I didn't know PowerPoint... I got to know group work in TTC but did not practice this approach much so could not imagine how to apply and still not skillful (Luyen-M5; P. 6).*

*...I was good at using group work but I don't know how to use PowerPoint in TTC, just learnt to use recently (Hao-L2; P. 11).*

In the issues with teaching methods, teachers in all three groups reported their concern with new teaching approaches that enhance students' active learning. Some had ideas about the new approaches but did not have the skills for practicing the methods because they were not guided thoroughly through the approaches and did not have chances to practice using them in training programs.

### 6.3.2 Dealing with the issues

All teachers said that somehow they did learn and apply new methods in teaching very quickly to adapt to the school requirement. However, not all the adaptations were positive, based on my convention about two components to examine the beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level.

#### 6.3.2.1 Group HA and two from MA - positive adaptation

Both teachers in group HA (Nha-H1 and Minh-H2) and two from group MA (Nam-M1 and Thoa-M2) reported positive adaptations (illustrated by green circles in figure 6.3) with requirements about new teaching approaches. Self-help and support from school were stressed by these teachers to be the contributions to their success.

The cases of Minh-H2 and Thoa-M2 are illustrated in the zone of *School* (+) and *Self* (-) as they reported the dominance of support from school and the unclear personal role. They had emphasized the role of the Dean (also their mentor) and other colleagues in helping them to know the approach, by giving criteria of what a good performance looks like, showing them basic skills to practice and giving comments to improve.

The mentor and other teachers in the same subject helped Minh-H2 to use group work. "The Dean helped me to recognize the criteria of good teaching with the method, and pointed out my mistakes as well as suggested me how to improve". Minh-H2 showed a strong interest and competence when talking about group work that she grew to really appreciate the method.

In a similar case, Thoa-M2's success in overcoming the challenge with the new approach to teaching was in a story with a high appreciation of the Dean (see more in section 5.3.2).

Nha-H1 and Nam-M1's dealing strategies highlighted both the role of teachers' self-learning and their activeness of taking the advice of others in school; hence, the illustration of their cases are the green circles in the zone of *Self* (+) and *School* (+). Accordingly, Nha-H1 highly appreciated self-learning by observing, trying, reviewing, judging self-action then creating lessons for herself. Nam-M1 preferred to read books and search the Internet.

In order to ensure that the strategies being used helped them to meet the school requirement and would not be criticized by others, these teachers consulted and checked with colleagues and they were successful with this method.

*In TTC I learnt theories of methods and I usually volunteered to practice teaching under the observation of teachers so I had some ideas with various of teaching methods. In school, I observed the groups and tried ways to enhance students working together, and took notes and compare... after a few weeks I knew how to run this approach. I also usually checked what I learnt with others' experience... Other teachers said my skill of teaching is good (Nha-H1; P. 3).*

*I don't have a mentor but I don't mind, I highly value self-researching... I read books, search internet... but no one complained about my teaching methods. And I had a trick that... I usually asked someone with high authority like the Dean or someone with ages of teaching experience in the school about the things I was going to apply, not just teaching methods but discipline as well, to make sure they would not criticize me later (Nam-M1; P. 29).*

In summary, for group HA and for two from group MA, these teachers dealt successfully with the requirement of innovative teaching methods by self-help which enhanced teachers to learn and obtain skills required; and, especially, the interaction with supportive colleagues who helped to confirm and guarantee the adaptation of these teachers to meet the school criteria.

#### **6.3.2.2 Group LA and the rest from MA - negative adaptation**

The teachers who showed negative adaptation to the requirement of new teaching approaches include both teachers in group LA (Nguyen-L1 and Hao-L2) and three others of group MA (Luyen-M5, Hue-M3 and Thuong-M4).

These teachers reported an initiative to seek help, from teachers in the same school or in other schools; and they thought they learnt the skills required for teaching methods.

*I learnt to use new teaching approaches from young teachers in school (Luyen-M5; P. 7).*

*Younger teachers in the school know PowerPoint better than the older ones, I asked them (Hue-M3; P. 24).*

*Although the Dean of subject was very good, he never helped me unless I asked him. So when I had concerns, I had to initiate the conversation. Usually I ask him for help about lesson plan, teaching methods... (Thuong-*

M4; P. 37).

*I learnt from teachers in the same subject, I asked them to teach me to use PowerPoint (Hao-L2).*

However, these teachers mainly perceived the disadvantages of the new methods they were asked to learn and implement. Teachers felt group work and using multimedia in class bring chance for students to make noise and not focus on the lesson. They also thought that these methods reduce the students' time for listening to teachers and taking notes.

*Group work was the chance for uncooperative students to chat about personal topics (Hue-M3; P. 24).*

*When students were put in group work, they took chance to make noise, did not focus on the learning tasks (Thuong-M4; P. 37).*

*If I made beautiful effect and color, the students would be excited and shift their focus away from the content. (Nguyen-L1; P. 15)*

*Group work and applying multimedia, students could not take enough important notes and they had to work more instead of listening to the teachers' explanations; the more teachers say, the more students can understand the content. (Hao-L2; P. 11)*

In the rare appreciation of the new methods that they learnt and used, they seemed not to involve their concern of the effectiveness of the methods on students' learning, but just focused on the benefits that the approaches bring to teachers. Luyen-M5 and Hue-M3 shared the same opinion that PowerPoint and electronic lectures assisted teachers to memorize subject content and lesson order; and for Hao-L2, PowerPoint was useful for teacher in the reviewing lessons as it was easy to put all the information together in a system.

In addition, these teachers expressed the pressure they felt about ensuring the quality of students' learning outcomes and were not always sure that the new methods would contribute to improved test results:

*I was confused about what is right, what is expected and after that I even always felt scared of being reprimanded. (Nguyen-L1; P. 15)*

*I would die if less than 70 percent of my students got at least 5/10 marks. I was scared of not meeting that requirement. (Hao-L2; P. 11)*

*I got a high pressure of how to make at least 50 percent of students got 5/10 marks or more, because it was a common requirement for all teachers in my school...I was scared of not meeting that requirement.*(Thuong-M4; P. 37)

*Students need to pass exams.* (Hue-M3; P. 24)

*I'm afraid of being reprimanded of not using them [new approach] and of that students not understanding lessons.* (Luyen-M5; P. 7)

These teachers showed explicitly their preference of using traditional teaching methods.

*In the new teaching methods, teachers need to lecture little and students have to work more to obtain the knowledge. It's not effective at all because the students cannot understand by themselves. But it's the new methods, if I don't do that, they criticize me. I chose to talk more. I am labeled 'a not renovated' teacher and criticized but my students could understand the lesson.* (Hao-L2; P. 11)

*I usually used traditional methods as my students are at low level of academic, so traditional approach helped to give students time to take notes.* (Thuong-M4; P. 37)

*Students need to takes important notes to learn and pass exams so I used teacher read- students write (Đọc chép) and teacher write- students write (chép chép) methods very frequently because 80 percent of students in the class were from an ethnic minority who were at a low level of academic ability... whatever the teachers and students did during the class, the students had to write all the contents or have important things in the notebook to learn at home... the new methods do not allow the chance to do that.* (Hue-M3; P. 24)

*"The teacher read- students write" approach (Phương pháp đọc chép) is forbidden in the school; but if I write on black board for students copying to notebook, it's ok because it helped them have important notes to learn for exams.* (Luyen-M5; P. 7)

Consequently, in order to deal with school requirement at the same time with trying to balance the personal view, these teachers adapted negatively. Luyen-M5 and Nguyen-L1, who were more concerned with PowerPoint than with group work, copied lectures designed with PowerPoint from internet and used them.

*To deal with the observation of the school, I usually searched the lectures designed with PowerPoint in the Internet to teach in the class with observation. In my daily teaching, I preferred traditional methods. In traditional approach, students could be able to take notes for the exams.* (Nguyen-L1; P. 15)

*So most of the time I used traditional methods, I only use new methods in*

*the classes that someone came to observe.* (Hao-L2; P. 11)

The negative adaptation of teachers in group LA and three from MA are illustrated by the red circles in the zone of *Self* (+) and *School* (-). The unclear role of support from school, plus the pressure of students' learning outcome and colleagues' evaluation of their teaching performance indicate the negative influence of school. Despite these individuals' attempts to deal with the requirement of new approaches, their failures in using them contributed to these teachers' negative adaptation.

### **6.3.3 Interpretation**

#### **6.3.3.1 The common issues with teaching methods**

From the result about teaching methods analyzed, teachers in all three groups reported their concern with new teaching approaches that enhance students' active learning. Accordingly, all three groups reported that they did not have skills for using innovative teaching approaches as required by the school. Some had ideas about the new approaches but did not have skills of practicing the methods because they were not guided thoroughly about the approaches and did not have chances to practice using them in training programs. Overall, this result shows that these beginning teachers did not have the skills that meet the teaching requirement in schools in the very first time when they started teaching.

These teachers blamed teacher training institutions (TTI) for their lack of skill at using new techniques in teaching; this suggests that beginning teachers felt under-prepared for using the teaching methods that meet the working demands of the school.

#### **6.3.3.2 Group HA and two from MA - positive adaptation**

Group HA and two teachers from group MA felt they dealt successfully with the requirement of innovative teaching methods by self-help to learn the skills required; and, especially, by interaction with supportive colleagues who helped to confirm and guarantee the adaptation of these teachers to meet the school criteria.

The clear and common contributor of these teachers' success in gaining competence of the required teaching methods is supportive colleagues. The colleagues may play a direct role as in the cases of Minh-H2 and Thoa-M2 when they provided the teachers with

basic skills of the methods, advised them the criteria and giving them the comments for practical improvement. The enthusiasm and support of the colleagues are considered to be important factors in the competence of these teachers in the classroom and hence in their positive adaptation.

Colleagues might also play an indirect role as in the cases of Nha-H1 and Nam-M1. These teachers did not have a mentor but they highly valued self-help. The way Nha-H1 helped herself to obtain the required teaching skills (observing others, trying, reviewing, judging self-action then drawing out lessons for herself) showed her capacity of reflection in learning by experience. Meanwhile, Nam-M1 did researching and also felt satisfied with her strategy.

Although these teachers did not intend to mention their colleagues as an acknowledgment of their success, the role of these colleagues manifested as the consultants who helped to confirm and ensure the beginning teachers' actions met the school criteria. In this way, the accessibility of support from colleagues contributed indirectly to the teachers' adaptation. Linking back to the case of Thuong-M4 in her report of how she dealt with the issues of subject content, she did not value asking the other teachers and she preferred self-researching but she did not succeed. This is another piece of evidence of the important role of the school in supporting beginning teachers to adapt. At least in these cases, teachers had a chance to reflect what they had learnt by self-research to their colleagues and get a confirmation to make sure they were in line.

I believed the strategy that Nha-H1 and Nam-M1 applied, and were successful with in the adaptation to the required teaching approach, can be considered as one typical ideal method for beginning teachers who are in the same situation. In reality, not all beginning teachers would be lucky to have enthusiastic and supportive colleagues, like Minh-H2 and Thoa-M2 had. In this case, then self-help is crucial.

However, self-learning is not enough for an adaptation that meets the school expectations because individuals usually tend to think and act in the way they prefer based on their existing knowledge; this may not be the same as the school expects them to do (Zeichner, 1994). In addition, in the context of schools that are hierarchical, committed to a traditional model exemplifying the culture centered on age and expertise

in which younger members are not mentored but forced to learn by themselves and then being evaluated and judged, self-help by itself seems not to bring a satisfactory strategy. Hence, modeling other colleagues who are more experienced and authorized, and/or discussing and consulting them before an implementation of new strategies, like Nam-M1 did, can be considered as wise approaches to solve these concerns.

#### **6.3.3.3 Group LA and the rest from MA - negative adaptation**

Teachers in group LA and three from MA reported the same problems with innovative teaching strategies that they did not have skills to implement. These teachers reported their effort and initiation in the attempt to obtain skills for the approach required. They also learnt, from teachers in the same school or in other schools, the skills required for teaching methods. They believed that they knew how to use the approach required.

These teachers appreciated some aspects of the new methods and did not appreciate some others. However, the way they evaluated the new teaching strategies appeared to reveal their misunderstanding of the essence of the implementation of these strategies. The teachers' focused on the disadvantages of the methods suggesting that they were not successful in applying new approaches.

In this study, beginning teachers said they were required to apply student-centered approaches in teaching and using PowerPoint and group work were the two particular strategies they listed. However, it is likely that only the group work is potentially the appropriate strategy of the student-centered approach. In most of the reflection, they only focused on their experience of teaching using PowerPoint. Beyond the criticism that group work is a chance for students to make noise in the classroom, teachers did not provide further discussion on group work in terms of how they learned and how successful they used this teaching strategy. This may suggest group work was not much in their concern in relating to the student-centered approach.

In addition, their appreciation of teaching strategies does not relate to the student-centered approach, just to the benefits for teachers in transmitting more effectively the content of the lesson. Nguyen-L1's story is an example, among others, showing that she believed she was using an innovative approach as required but she was actually performing a traditional approach with the multimedia device. In the below story, while

technically using PowerPoint, she was only using it as another form of a chalkboard:

*Anyway, I then learnt how to use this software and then designed the lecture. I didn't focus on effect and color, just focused the content and treated the slides as auxiliary boards so that instead of writing the content on the boards, I typed them on the slides. (Nguyen-L1; P. 15)*

So, although these teachers believed that they learnt and had skills to use new teaching methods, they did not actually understand the essence of the strategies underlying the student-centered approach, and hence, did not apply them effectively.

The failure of using new approaches might lead these teachers to the perception that the approach itself was not sufficient. Therefore, under the pressure of the requirement of the number of students passing exams, they preserved traditional teaching methods that they believed to be more effective than the new approaches to meet the requirement of the students' learning outcome.

In addition, under the colleagues' observation of their teaching performance, to avoid being reprimanded and being under-valued by not meeting the requirement, these teachers applied coping strategies such as using new methods only when their teaching was observed, borrowing lesson plans and copying electronically-designed lectures from the Internet. All of these strategies suggest a picture of negative adaptation in which the teachers were not comfortable and did not actually meet the school requirement of innovative approach.

Overall, teachers in the group of negative adaptation for the teaching methods reported their personal effort in seeking assistance from school to meet the requirement of using the new approach. However, they were not successful in the adaptation as after all the attempt, they still showed the lack of understanding of the essence of the strategies, and the lack of skills that would have helped them to effectively use the approach. This finding seems to relate to another comment drawn from data, namely that the roles of collegial support for these teachers are blurred.

While the support for the beginning teachers was based mainly on the teachers' initiation, the roles of school in supporting new teachers and guaranteeing their understanding and performance in the right direction were not clear. At the same time, the work

pressure of students' learning quality and the judgments and evaluation in the workplace were real and created pressure on teachers. Therefore the negative adaptation by which beginning teachers preserved traditional teaching methods that they believed to be effective over the new approaches, and applied negative coping strategies to deal with school requirements as well as to avoid being reprimanded, is unlikely to be a surprising consequence.

For a more comprehensive understanding, the comment of the role of others' support for the low adaptation group is contrasted with the group of positive adaptation (green circles in figure 6.3). The role of external support from colleagues is shown to be an essential contributor of the success in gaining competence of the required teaching methods, but whether or not it actually produces positive adaptation depends on the responses of the individual beginning teachers.

The perceptions in this area of teaching competence affirms the suggestion made previously that self-help is not enough for an adaptation that meets the school expectations because individuals usually tend to think and act in the way they prefer or are capable of, based on their existing knowledge and their attitudes and frames of reference. Their adaptation might not be the same what the school expects them to do. Therefore, guidance and consultation from school are essential in orienting teachers' adaptation to the expected direction.

## **6.4 Discipline**

### **6.4.1 Issues**

#### **6.4.1.1 Three groups - challenges reported and teachers' assumption revealed**

All participants in three groups experienced the situations in which students behaved critically, including unruly behaviors and lack of respect for teachers' authority, as not cooperating during classroom activities and behaving negatively to the teacher and other students. The behaviors included making noise after being asked to stop (Minh-H2, Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Thuong-M4, and Luyen-M5), sleeping, using mobile phones during the class (Nha-H1), hitting and teasing other students (Nam-M1 and

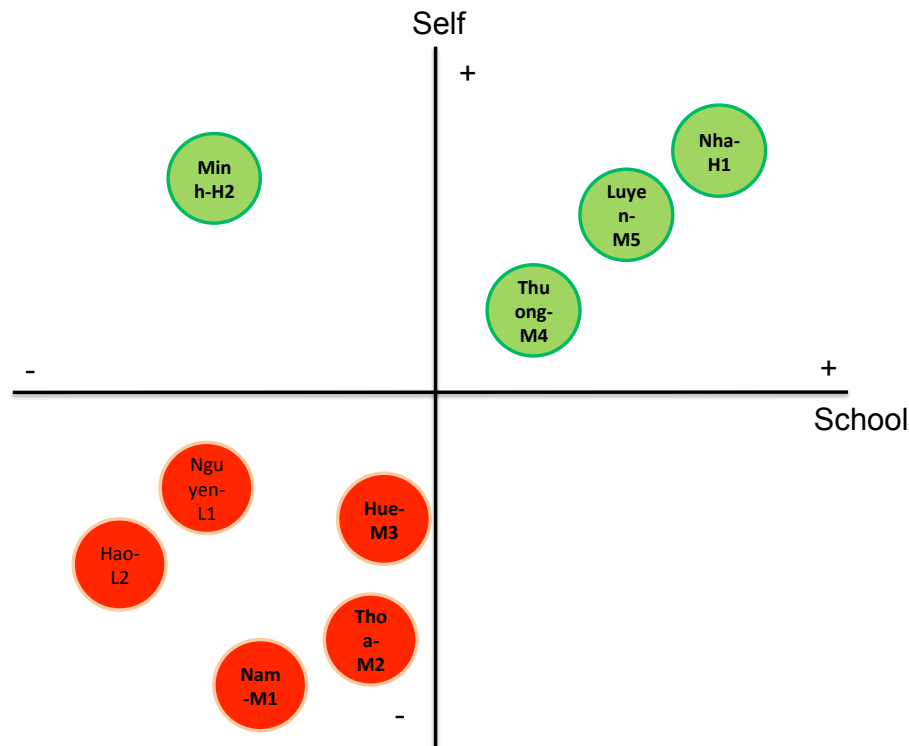


Figure 6.4: The beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level in the area of Discipline. It is noted that green circles represent participants with positive adaptation; red circles represent participants with negative adaptation.

Thuong-M4), insulting and swearing to the teacher (Hao-L2 and Nguyen-L1), and parodying the teacher (Luyen-M5).

In the situations they experienced students' misbehavior, six of the nine beginning teachers from three groups (Minh-H2, Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Nguyen-L1, and Hao-L2) studied reported strong feelings of being very disappointed and upset. They repeated the term "sốc" in Vietnamese to describe the strong negative feelings, and I use the term "shocked" in English to describe this meaning.

*...When a student was so rude and disrespectful to me, I was so shocked and angry ... (Minh-H2; P. 34)*

*I was so angry. In anyway, I am their teacher. How dare they do that to me? ... I was so angry and upset. (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

*I felt really shocked and my mind went blank. (Nguyen-L1; P. 16)*

*I was so shocked that could not say anything for a moment. I was then upset for a long time and felt disappointed of the students nowadays. (Hao-L2; P. 12)*

In their stories about the experience with discipline, these teachers exposed their assumption about the proper role and behavior of students. They showed their expectation that all students highly respect teachers, pay full attention to teachers and obey without questioning.

*I thought they would be different, like... highly respected the teachers. Like me, when I was a school girl, I completely respected the teachers and even perceived teacher "as an idol". (Hao-L2; P. 12)*

These teachers also revealed that they were not aware, and did not accept, that some students would misbehave in their real teaching.

*I couldn't imagine that students nowadays were so ill-disciplined... I didn't know what to do but still tried to complete the lesson while my mind was blank and my thinking was on the state of waiting for the bell noticing the time-out. (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

*I could not imagine why a student could do that to the teacher. Students nowadays... so unacceptable. In my school time, we were never impertinent like that (Nguyen-L1; P. 16)*

In three other cases, Nha-H1, Thuong-M4 and Luyen-M5, the teachers reported their difficulties dealing with students but did not reflect the experience of strong negative feeling. These teachers were aware and accept the fact that some students might misbehave.

*I didn't want to make the situation become more serious as I knew students in the secondary school are in the difficult ages and some of them usually make rebelling behaviors to gain the attraction. Then, I told him to sit down and promise not to repeat the disruption. He followed my request but then he started talking again but quietly so I pretended not knowing. However, after that I thought a lot about how to do in the situation that students would not pay full attention to me. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

So, these teachers recognized that the students' unruly behavior was an indicator of the characteristics of their age which need the teachers' understanding and skills to deal with. However, although the students' unruly behaviors did not upset them, these teachers also had the assumption that students should follow the rules and give full attention to the teacher.

#### 6.4.1.2 Three groups - feeling of being under-prepared revealed

All participants in three groups shared the experience of having difficulties of keeping students disciplined and dealing with the situations where students misbehaved. In almost the cases teachers admitted that they did not know what to do in the situations.

*I didn't know what to do... (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

*I pretended not knowing the offensive behavior that the student was making as I didn't know what to do then. However, after that I thought a lot about what to do in such a situation. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

These teachers criticized their teacher training programs for not providing a realistic preparation (too many theories but lack of practice) about the career of future teachers.

*What I learnt in TTC was very general about classroom management, not specific situations in reality. (Minh-H2; P. 34)*

*The TTC taught me generally about pedagogical situations and some strategies with classroom management, but the reality is "multicolored and multiform" (muôn hình muôn vẻ) so the theories in TTC is not enough to do well; the induction time was not long enough for them to get familiar to the role of a teacher. (Thoa-M2; P. 20)*

*TTC did not emphasize all the possible common situations so as to avoid shocking with unforeseen problems. We were only introduced with some typical situations... (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

*I learnt something about situations solving but the real situations were so different. I was so disappointed that the teacher training program did not notify and give me chance to practice with the situations that could frequently appear in real teaching. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

*TTC did not create chances for me to practice dealing with classroom problems in the role of a real teacher. (Luyen-M5; P. 8)*

*TTI did not create chances for us to get familiar with the role of a real teacher. (Nguyen-L1; P. 16)*

They blamed the TTI of providing them with general theories and lack of practice about classroom management.

In summary, the issues of discipline that beginning teachers experienced showed the common assumption of all teachers in three groups that all students should highly respect teachers, obey and pay full attention to teachers and follow the rules. While three of them recognized students' unruly behaviors as characteristics of the age, six others

did not accept this as appropriate and showed strong negative emotion. All three groups had difficulties in keeping students disciplined and dealing with unruly situations. They blamed the teacher training programs for the challenges

### **6.4.2 Dealing with the issues**

The criteria of a good adaptation that guides my analysis is that teachers feel they could deal with their reported issues with some personal sense of success; and their dealing strategies meet school criteria, or are not against the school standards. This clarification needs to be stated in respect of the following section where I determine the adaptation of teachers in dealing with discipline issues based on their perspective on and usage of punishment.

All three groups of teachers, by self-help and support from others, learnt sufficient strategies that helped them to deal with the issues; but in terms of the preference and usage of punishment, the use of strategies forbidden in all schools, the LA group LA and three teachers from group MA made adaptations off the track of the school's expectation. Hence, I have categorized them as instances of negative adaptation.

I present this section with a focus on the perspective and usage of punishment by categorizing the teacher into two types. One illustrates positive adaptation (two teachers from group HA and two from MA). The other type illustrates negative adaptation (two teachers from group LA and three from MA).

#### **6.4.2.1 Group HA and two from MA - positive adaptation**

Both teachers in group HA (Nha-H1 and Minh-H2) and the other two teachers in group MA who did not experience strong negative feelings (Thuong-M4 and Luyen-M5) reported good adaptation with discipline. Their cases are illustrated by green circles in figure 6.4.

Nha-H1, Thuong-M4 and Luyen-M5, the three who did not experience strong negative feelings, kept believing that students should respect and obey teachers. But all three teachers shared the same idea that punishment is not a good way to make students behave as teachers expect. Instead, encouragement was appreciated.

This statement about not using punishment and preference of encouragement was drawn by teachers themselves from learning by experience and from their consultation with colleagues.

The element of *Self* (capacity of reflection and learning by experience) is positive in these teachers. Evidence of teachers' learning by experience shows that they put themselves in their students' position to understand the students' feeling, experimented with some strategies and reflected on them:

*My students, same to me, prefer gentle communications, the louder you yell the more they are brassy. So don't think about hitting them. I usually wheedled them and it worked. Instead, they would obey me and became more engaged in the class when I behaved gently and even soothingly to them. (Nha-H1; P. 4)*

*I never punish students physically. I don't hit the students and I think teachers shouldn't punish them physically because we are working in the educational environment, we should use pedagogical approaches to educate, such as explanation, communication . . . So I tried around these approaches and that was ok. I felt happy as I did not need to do anything hard, like hitting, but the students then obeyed and loved me. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

*Physical punishment is prohibited and may bring troubles to teachers. I usually reported the cases to master teacher or to parents; I also used complement and rewards. For example, one student who usually made noise in class but one day he kept silent then I complimented him so that he knew not making noise is a good thing and I appreciated that. This brought some positive changes in him from then. So I just kept these strategies. (Luyen-M5; P. 8)*

These teachers also reported that they received support from colleagues for discipline issues. Nha-H1 and Luyen-M5, who were in the same school, both mentioned with respect the same colleague in school who had a lot of experience dealing with students. They affirmed they learnt a lot from this colleagues about strategies to deal with unruly students and solve difficult situations. Thuong-M4 also confirmed that she usually talked with other teachers in the common room about situations and how to deal with them. She also appreciated the suggestions for strategies from others. Hence, these teachers adapted in the zone of *School* (+) and *Self* (+).

Also being in the group of having a good adaptation with discipline, Minh-H2 was slightly different from the other three cases. When some students were unruly and dis-

respectful, Minh-H2 felt so disappointed and upset that she applied punishment such as hitting a student's bottom, or pinching their ears. Then she learnt from a teacher in the school to pull the student's sideburns, but when the student's eye was moist with tears she felt sorry, because she did not want to hurt children. She also reported the lesson she learnt from observation of a case in same school that when a teacher raised his hand in an intention to slap a student, the student also raised his hand as if he wanted to hit the teacher.

So, from other advice, personal observation and experience, plus her sense of lovingness, Minh-H2 learnt that violence is not a good strategy to solve the situation. Then, from trying different strategies, she learnt that encouragement and gentle communication with students and combine with parents are the most effective.

The case of Minh-H2 is illustrated by the category of *School* (-) as the advice from colleagues given to her was inconsistent with the school rule of not using physical punishment. Her positive adaptation was based on her learning by experience plus the capacity of reflection in which she analyzed the information received from others and her own observation. These strategies place her in the category of *Self* (+) in this case of adaptation.

In sum, four teachers, including two from group HA and two from group MA, by self-learning with much reflection and support from others, reported their success in dealing with challenges of discipline based on their preference of strategies of encouragement and the negation of punishment, and hence had good adaptation in the area.

#### **6.4.2.2 Group LA and three others of group MA - negative adaptation**

Five teachers (Nguyen-L1, Hao-L2, Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, and Hue-M3) reported strong negative emotions in situations with misbehaving students. In dealing with those challenges, they kept believing in and using physical punishment, the strategy that was reported to be prohibited in all schools. This is the reason I consider these teachers, even though finding some solutions that helped them succeed in solving the disciplinary issues, retained beliefs and applied strategies that did not meet the school regulations, as belonging in the group of negative adaptation.

The encouragements used by all teachers included rewards and compliments that were reported to bring positive results in dealing with discipline issues. All the teachers in the study appreciated the value of reward scores. I use the term reward scores (điểm cộng) for the meaning of the extra scores that the teacher gave a student when that student did something well as a reward to enhance the students' motivation of learning. For example: no unruly behavior during a week, or having good behaviors such as helping friends. The effects of this approach were described as "it made the classroom become ebullient, the students more elated and more enthusiastic to behave nicely" (Nguyen-L1).

Giving a compliment was another common approach employed by all beginning teachers to enhance the students' enthusiasm for learning. Nam-M1 emphasized:

*It was important to give a difficult student good compliments as it would encourage him more than anything. For example, when the class was noisy but surprisingly the naughty student was silent, I said that if all of you were as good as this student, it would be great and I would be very happy. (Nam-M1; P. 30)*

Self-help and support from colleagues were reported to assist the teachers' with discipline issues. Hao-L2, in the low adapting group, who used encouragement, reported her appreciation of the supportive colleagues who gave her advice about useful strategies dealing with difficult situations. But Nguyen-L1 decided she had to help herself.

*My colleagues... they just talk something to make a sense of propriety... nothing useful I could learn from them... I tried ways by myself to improve... Some strategies that I was successful with in teaching induction such as rewards scores, compliments could help me to solve many situations... and I tried some more... (Nguyen-L1; P. 16)*

Among the three teachers from group MA, Nam-M1 and Thoa-M2 valued the support from colleagues that suggested to them some useful strategies such as explanation, compliment and rewards. But Hue-M3 was in the same situation as Nguyen-L1, as she could not get help from people in school. Hue-M3's told me her story about the students keeping laughing when she was giving a lecture and she was so upset. After the class finished, she left the class and went to the staff common room.

*There, I met the master teacher of that class. I reported the situation to him in hope that he would share my feeling, give my some advice of how to do in such a circumstance and punish the students so that they would never*

*do that again. However, that teacher coldly told me “you are a teacher and it was your class. It’s your business” before he turned his back to me and went away. You know. . . how could he behave like that to me? He was the master teacher, he got the responsibility. He did that. . . . Like dashing ice-water to my face. I could not sleep that night, was really frustrated about that colleague and thought that it’s a mistake to be a teacher. I may never be able to forget that day. (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

As she felt she could not rely on others, Hue-M3 had only self-help as a means to cope with discipline problems. She tried various ways and concluded that considerateness and communication are good ways to make students obey teachers and follow the rules.

*After that I preferred self-help. I tried many ways to treat students and found that be nice with students is a good strategy to make them obey. For example: there was a male student with long hair which was not allowed in the school. His master teacher ordered him to have it cut but he did not obey. I talked to him friendly and sweetly and then he followed. (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

So, in terms of using encouragement (rewards, compliments and considerateness), all these teachers reported their satisfaction of these strategies in dealing with problematic situations with discipline. However, the use of physical punishment is the reason why I have categorized some of the teachers as displaying a negative form of adaptation in this area.

They reported the punishments used included rebuke, isolation, report, and physical punishment. The punishment could be indirect like cleaning the classroom for one week (Thoa-M2) and requiring the students to keep their hands raised for a long time (Nam-M1); or it could be direct such as pinching the student’s ear (Nguyen-L1, Thoa-M2 and Hue-M5) and hitting the students’ bottoms (Nam-M1), hands or cheeks (Nguyen-L1, Hao-L2, and Thoa-M2).

All teachers confirmed that physical punishment is prohibited in schools and they were aware of the possible consequences of its use. However, all these five teachers still applied physical punishment by some ways because they felt it necessary to substitute for other methods such as explanation, compliment and rewards when these methods did not work.

They argued that they applied physical punishment for the wellbeing of students as it made them behave better. All these five teachers believed using punishment could help

to make students scared and dare not repeat the challenging behaviors again. Being angry or feeling powerless are other reasons that made some of these teachers (Thoa-M2, Hue-M3 and Nguyen-L1) punish students physically. The belief and negative emotion are the reasons for locating them in the category of *Self(-)*.

*School doesn't want the teacher to hit students but when I was so upset and irritated of their bad behaviors, I made a slight hit... that's ok I think.* (Thoa-M2; P. 20)

*They banned... I know but when they did not obey and I was so angry, I pulled the ear or hit them on bottom... it's normal... they would not be scared if teacher just communicate gently or use explanation only.* (Nguyen-L1; P. 16)

Although the schools called for not using physical punishment, these teachers still applied some kinds of physical punishments by dodging the rules. Their justification was that they as they believed punishment could effective in dealing with students. They believed punishment would make students scared so that they would not repeat the challenging behaviors again. Some teachers admitted it helped them to release negative feeling when not able to solve the situations through other methods.

The stories above show that this strategy was being used not only by beginning teachers but also their more experienced colleagues. This is illustrated by the *School(-)* in the figure 6.4 as this suggests the conflict between the school overt rules of not using physical punishment and the unofficial use of the method in reality that encouraged beginning teachers to punish students physically.

### **6.4.3 Interpretation**

#### **6.4.3.1 Issues - unrealistic expectation**

All three groups had difficulties keeping students disciplined and dealing with unruly situations. In most of the cases, teachers admitted that they did not know what to do in the situations. This suggests that these beginning teachers might lack sufficient skills, or might lack experience of practicing in the field.

However, these teachers thought they were under prepared as they blamed the teacher training programs for not providing them with sufficient skills to deal with all the possibilities that might happen in reality. It may be true, also may be false, that the teacher

training programs offered them too much general theory and lacked opportunities for practice, as these teachers reflected. However, the blame on the training programs may suggest that teachers expected they should have been prepared to deal with all the possibilities that might happen in reality.

This is unlikely to be a realistic expectation. The teachers' blaming of training programs themselves unintentionally shows problems:

*What I learnt in TTC is very general about classroom management, not specific situations in reality. (Minh-H2; P. 34)*

*The TTC taught me generally about pedagogical situations and some strategies with classroom management, but the reality is "multicolored and multiform" (muôn hình muôn vẻ) so the theories in TTC is not enough to do well; ... (Thoa-M2; P. 20)*

*TTC did not emphasize all the possible common situations so as to avoid shocking her with unforeseen problems. We were only introduced with some typical situations... (Hue-M3; P. 25)*

*I learnt something about situations solving but the real situations were so different. I was so disappointed that the teacher training program did not notify and give me a chance to practice with the situations that could frequently appear in real teaching. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

In their comments these teachers actually noted that the reality of teaching is complex, "multicolored and multiform" that can occur in different ways. Hence, the expectation of being taught all possibilities of situations in reality is unrealistic.

The teachers' assumption of the students is another noticeable finding. The issues of discipline that beginning teachers experienced show the common assumption of all teachers in three groups that all students should highly respect teachers, obey and pay full attention to teachers and follow the rules. This assumption suggests that these teachers brought the traditional Confucian perspective into their relationship with students.

The assumption by itself, however, seems to be an unrealistic perspective about the students in the current time when the Confucian system is no longer the strict standard for regulation in Vietnamese society, where people may adopt other moral systems.

The perspective may indicate the teachers' expectation of how students should behave; the awareness of the fact that not all students may believe and behave in the same moral

system as teachers, however, is necessary. Indeed, the awareness that students may not behave with discipline and respect for hierarchy may help teachers' perspectives become more realistic.

For example, the recognition that the students' unruly behavior is an indicator of the characteristics of their age which needs the teachers' understanding and skills to deal with, helped three teachers (Nha-H1, Thuong-M4 and Luyen-M5) to be more realistic, and hence avoid the experience of the strong negative emotion when facing the problematic situations with discipline.

#### **6.4.3.2 Dealing with the issues**

The stories of how the beginning teachers in this study dealt with the issues of discipline show that all three groups had success using encouragement. The teachers' descriptions of their attempts to deal with the disciplinary issues highlighted their capacity of reflection in learning by experience.

Accordingly, the beginning teachers described of the results of experimenting by themselves with these strategies, analyzing the outcomes, and judging their existing personal perception (Minh-H2). Noticeably, not only the teachers with positive adaptation but also the beginners with negative adaptation revealed capacity for reflection and illustrated a process of dealing with the issues through learning by experience.

*I never punish students physically. I don't hit the students and I think teachers shouldn't punish them physically because we are working in the educational environment, we should use pedagogical approaches to educate, such as explanation, communication . . . So I tried around these approaches and that was ok. I felt happy as I did not need to do anything hard, like hitting, but the students then obeyed and loved me. (Thuong-M4; P. 38)*

*It's very important to give a difficult student good compliments as it would encourage him more than anything. (Nam-M1; P. 30)*

Hence, the capacity for reflection in learning by experience is the dominant element of most beginning teachers' success in finding appropriate strategies (which were all about encouragement and positive rewards) to deal with students and disciplinary issues.

A notice-worthy finding is the widespread belief in the effectiveness of physical punishment (Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, Hue-M3, Nguyen-L1, and Hao-L2). Although the school

called for not using physical punishment, these teachers (negative adaptation group - two in group LA and three in MA) still applied this treatment by dodging the rules.

They believed physical punishment was beneficial for the students. This belief is described to be one corollary of the Confucius system (D. Y. F. Ho & Ho, 2008; Liu, 2007; H. N. Nguyen, n.d.) which has been affecting Vietnamese's perspective for generations. The proverb "thương cho roi cho vọt, ghét cho ngọt cho bùi" (equivalent to the English "spare the rod, spoil the child") is perhaps still appreciated by Vietnamese teachers.

And possibly also by many parents. The public opinion toward some reported incidents in which teachers punished students physically indicates a division of attitudes. In the recent forums where Vietnamese people discussed these incidents, both the pros and cons of physical punishment have been defended by countless Vietnamese people. For example, in the case of a teacher in Thai Nguyen, a number of public comments that strongly negated this violent treatment, but a lot of comments, including from teachers, agreed with physical punishment in schools (Ngo, 2013; Thaodt (penname), 2012).

The experiences of the beginning teachers in my study indicate that their more experienced colleagues also used physical punishment in the schools:

*I remembered in my chat with an experienced teacher in the school my friend, who was also a teacher, she had showed me that pulling the side-burns could help in dealing with unruly students as it really hurts... I used to witness a situation that my friend a teacher hit her student, then that student rose up his hand to threaten her. In the teachers' room, I heard a teacher who had 6 or 7 years teaching telling that she had to hit a student until the ruler was broken but on the following days the student had no positive change. (Minh-L2; P. 34)*

This shows that even though the physical punishment is officially prohibited in schools, this strategy was still used by some experienced teachers and orally imparted to others. This appears to reveal the lack of comprehensive measures in the school regulation to ensure this prohibition is effectively executed.

All of these signposts suggest that the finding about the five (of the nine studied) participants' belief on the effectiveness of physical punishment reflects a common perspective of some Vietnamese people one of the permissible treatments to eliminate the unwanted

behaviors of children. This finding concerned me at a personal level for quite a while. Physical punishment is officially prohibited, but unofficially supported by some colleagues and consistent with the traditional point of view as one side of the social current debate.

However, I was heartened to learn from my research that beginning teachers do not always need to revert to traditional approaches to discipline. Minh-H2 was the teacher who experienced strong negative emotion like these five teachers, but she had a different adaptation. The process of reflection contributed to her adaptation. Initially, when some students were unruly and disrespectful, Minh-H2 was so disappointed and upset that she applied punishment such as hitting a student's bottom, or pinching their ears. Then she learnt from a teacher in the school to pull the student's sideburns. But when the student's eyes were moist with tears she felt sorry, because she did not want to hurt children.

She also reported the lesson she draw from observation of another teacher who was failed to deal with students by violence. Combining all the experiences, Minh-H2 learnt that violence is not a good strategy to solve the situation. Then, from trying different strategies, she learnt that encouragement and gentle communication with students and combine with parents are the most effective.

Minh-H2's story shows her thoughtfulness and heartfulness in the attempt to find sufficient strategies to deal with problems of discipline. The thoughtfulness is revealed in her analytic considerations of the experiences she obtained from asking about others' experience, by observing others' actions and by trying the strategies herself. Her heartfulness on the issues reveals her full involvement of the senses, feeling and love to students in seeking a strategy that could help her to keep students disciplined but not hurt them. All these processes illustrate this teacher's full involvement in reflection on her experience which helped her to draw valuable solutions for her issues at the same time with meeting the school regulation.

Minh-H2, a positive adapter, and the five negative adapters had the same beginning experience with discipline, but Minh-H2's shifted away from punishment based on her thoughtful and heartfelt involvement in the issues. She received advice from others in the school with a full possession of senses and reasons. Meanwhile, the lack of compre-

hensive measures to ensure the school regulation executed seems to have encouraged the preference for using punishment by the other five teachers.

This discipline issue is an example of the gap between the ideal of positive reinforcement of students by encouragement and reward and the reality of the use of physical punishment for undesirable student behavior. Some of the beginning teachers maintained a belief in and use of positive rewards. Others were unable to survive without bowing down to the imperatives of what they saw as reality.

## 6.5 Ethnic minority students

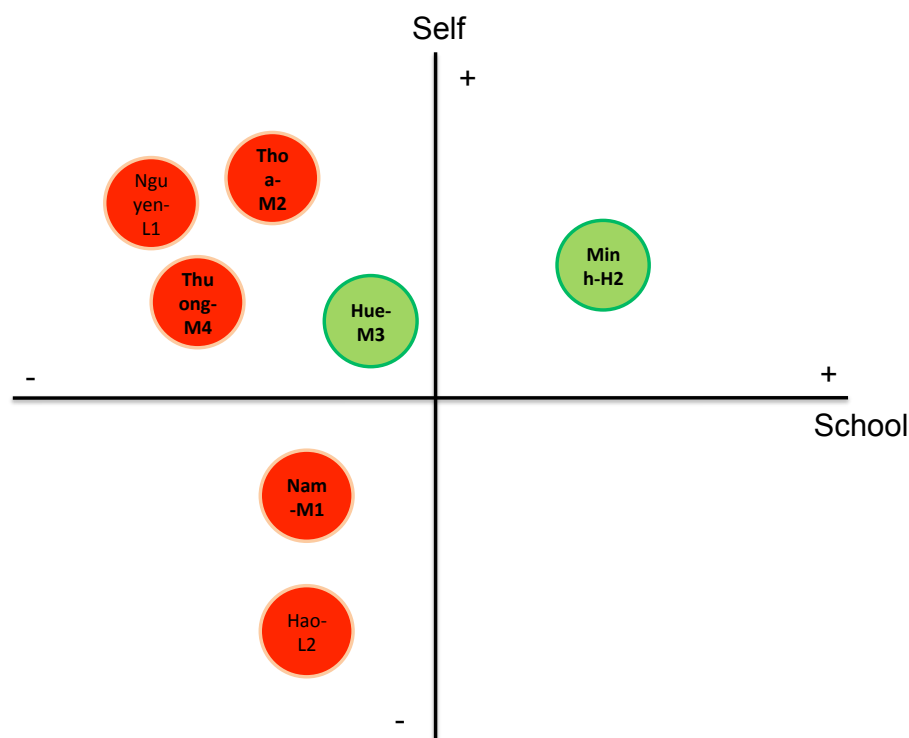


Figure 6.5: The beginning teachers' adaptation at the school level in the area of Ethnic minority students. It is noted that green circles represent participants with positive adaptation; red circles represent participants with negative adaptation.

Seven of the nine studied (except for Nha-H1 and Luyen-M5) had concern about ethnic minority students. Only in the school where Nam-M1, Nha-H1 and Luyen-M5 teach there were few ethnic minority students. In the four other schools, there were more minority students. For example: Hue-M3 (80% minorities), Thuong-M4 (65% minorities), Thoa-M2 (35% are minorities) and Nguyen-L1 (many students are minorities).

Although this topic was not the concern for all the beginning teachers, because ethnic minority students are a feature of schools in Kontum City, I believe this topic, in a separate presentation, is essential to understand the specific situation of beginning teachers.

### **6.5.1 Issues**

Teachers found that real teaching involved them with responsibility for teaching ethnic minority students beside those in the mainstream. They reported that this task was very challenging for them in their concern of making these students understand lessons and involved in learning.

#### **6.5.1.1 Difficulty in making students understand lesson**

Firstly, these teachers connected their difficulties in teaching the ethnic minority students to the students' inadequacy. Some teachers focused on the students' language proficiency, some were concerned with their learning ability, and some blamed their academic background.

Two in group MA, Thoa-M2 and Thuong-M4, commented that the students' inadequate proficiency in the Kinh language that was a barrier for their understanding in class:

*They didn't even understand Vietnamese very much... hard to teach.* (Thuong-M4; P. 39)

*They even could not write their names, could not read. Don't know how they could enroll in grade 6... I was not prepared for this situation but I felt so sorry for them. In the teacher training college they only taught me general teaching and classroom management skills. It is very hard for me to teach in a class with students who are so different at learning ability, and at the same time guaranteed the quality of the outcome.* (Thoa-M2; P. 21)

Two teachers in group LA and three in MA commented that ethnic students' inadequate ability to learn made it hard to help ethnic minorities understand the lessons.

*... Slow on the uptake (chậm hiểu), it's hard to make them understand the lesson.* (Hue-M3; P. 26);

*I know they are very bad learners; I had to take a lot of effort to make them understand...* (Hao-L2; P. 13)

Two from group MA and one from LA commented on the students' lack of essential basic knowledge and skills to understand content in secondary school level:

*... Passive, no basic knowledge and bad ability. It's hard to teach with the same method to different level of students in the same class. (Thoa-M2; P. 21)*

*... Very slow learners without basic knowledge, hard to teach to make them understand, unfair to other students, it's a handicap for other students. (Nguyen-L1; P. 17)*

### **6.5.1.2 Difficulty in attracting students' involvement**

Secondly, these teachers attributed the students' bad concentration and poor attendance on their lack of involvement in learning

*... Tired with them... they do not concentrate to learning but teased other students and made noise. (Nam-M1; P. 31)*

*They don't like learning... kept doing personal things in class. (Hue-M3; P. 26)*

*The ethnic minority students were not enthusiastic and motivated in learning. At the beginning, I did not know how to make them learn. (Minh-H2; P. 35)*

Poor attendance was also blamed for the learning problems of minority students. Thoa-M2, Thuong-M4, Hue-M3 and Minh-H2 shared the same opinion that the ethnic minority students were usually absent from school and this brought more challenges to teachers as they had to do assume responsibility for the students.

Hue-M3 explained that these students did not want to be away from their farm and that they preferred daily duty to learning so it was hard to make them go to class. So, when they did not like to go to class, it was hard to recruit them. Thuong-M4 added that it was not easy to encourage these students to go to class frequently as they took all the opportunities to be off school:

*I had 30 students but after the New Year holiday, only 10 of them went to class. I had to take a long way to their houses to inspire them to go to school. Next year when I must be the master teacher who takes main responsibility for all of this, I would possibly ... "die". (Thuong-M4; P. 39)*

### **6.5.1.3 Felt under-prepared and pressure of students' outcome**

Teaching ethnic students and attracting them to learning, by themselves, were the challenges for these teachers. Besides that, the school's requirement that the students' learning outcome be satisfactory, which was mostly based on the examination results, seemed

to increase the difficulties for them.

Faced with the challenges of teaching ethnic students and attracting them to learning, the beginning teachers had the common expression that they did not know how to do to deal with these challenges. They also reported their feeling of being under-prepared to teach with this group of students.

*When being a student in the teacher training college, I never thought that being a teacher I would be involved in such challenging responsibility. (Thuong-M4; P. 39)*

*I was not prepared for this situation. In the teacher training college they only taught me general teaching and classroom management skills. It is very hard for me to teach in a class with students who are so different at learning ability, and at the same time guaranteed the quality of the outcome. (Thoa-M2; P. 21)*

## **6.5.2 Dealing with the issues**

### **6.5.2.1 Minh-H2 and Hue-M3 - positive adaptation**

The teacher of group HA (Minh-H2) reported some strategies that she applied and succeeded with. In order to help ethnic students understand the lessons, Minh-H2 combined many teaching methods in her classes to convey content. Explicit explanations were specially used for these students.

*I tried different teaching methods. I combined traditional and new methods; I also give explicit explanations to them. The Dean read my lesson plan and observed my teaching sometimes, then he gave me comments on the ways I treat the students... then it was ok... (Minh-H2; P. 35).*

In order to make the students interested in class and learning, Minh-H2 used much of encouragements. In addition, she combined with local government in the precinct where students live to recruit and encourage students go to school. That made the parents care the situation and put effort to their children to go to school. She acknowledged a teacher who had experience with ethnic minorities students in sharing her this strategy.

*My friend who was teaching in a school where all students are minorities shared with me many useful experiences. I learnt from her... (Minh-H2; P. 35)*

So, the case of Minh-H2 is illustrated as a green circle for her positive adaptation, in the zone of *Self(+)* which stands for her activeness in seeking solutions from her school,

friends in other schools, local precinct government and students' parents; and *School(+)* which represents the accessibility of support in her school.

In group MA, only Hue-M3 was satisfied with what she achieved, revealing in her critical analysis of the strategy of her success a contrast with the advice other teachers gave her. This is the reason her case is represented as a green circle in the zone of *Self(+)* and *School(-)*. Her capacity of reflection in learning by experience is dominant over the effect from school.

*I observed and found that ethnic minority students have high inferiority complex but also high self-respect... They specially preferred to be treated kindly... so I tried to forget I was their teacher, and treat them like friends or sister-brother. That made them feel I love them and they would gradually love schooling... There was an ethnic student who was always very quiet in the class and never did the homework. I experimented to talk with him friendly and asked him kindly about the his family members, about the farm... On the next day, the first time I saw he raised his hand to voluntarily read out loud a peace of the content in the textbook.*

*Other teachers in the school said that I was too gentle to these students, they thought that would make them not scared of teacher and hard to make them obey, but I tried and found my ways worked well. (Hue-M3; P. 26)*

#### **6.5.2.2 Group LA and three from MA - negative adaptation**

Teachers in group MA (Nam-M1, Thoa-M2, and Thuong-M4) also reported their attempt to deal with the challenges of ethnic students by adjusting the ways to treat them with more encouragement than oppression, adjusting teaching methods that could involve them into learning activities and co-operating with the students' parents.

*I invited their parents to have a meeting many times but they didn't come. I usually talk to them, encourage them, buy some notebooks as rewards for their effort every week so that they feel more motivated with learning. (Thoa-M2; P. 21)*

*I taught with the same methods but when I wanted a student to read out loud something, I requested an ethnic student. (Thuong-M4; P. 39)*

However, they revealed a general dissatisfaction with all the results they got for these attempts. The unclear attempt teachers made to deal with the issues, or the unfavorable attitudes to solve the problem (Nam-M1), together with the pressure of students' learning outcomes, plus the discouraging consultation from the school, suggest that these teachers seemed to give up or want to avoid the situations. The cases of Thoa-M2

and Thuong-M4 are illustrated by the red circles dropping in the zone of *Self*(+) and *School*(-); while a red circle in the zone of *Self*(-) and *School*(-) represents Nam-M1's case.

*I always applied all ways from gentle talking to physical punishment for all cases... but if could not help anything, I don't care anymore. That's students' responsibility of their lives, I could not do anything if they did not want to change. (Nam-M1; P. 31)*

*This year I have to take the responsibility as a master teacher, other teachers said I should be more fierce/ aggressive (dữ dằn) so that the students would fear and dare not to misbehave. Try ways such as talking to students' parents and encourage them to push their children to school but they did not co-operate. Other teachers said we should care of the ones who want to learn, because it's very hard to change someone who doesn't want to learn. So, I just do what I could do, and up to them. (Thoa-M2; P. 21)*

None of the teachers in group LA completely adapted well with the tasks of teaching ethnic minority students. Nguyen-L1 reported her attempts to deal with the problems such as using more encouragement, adjusting teaching methods, increasing the students' involvement in learning and raising learning quality.

However, the outcomes of these strategies could not be as successful as she expected so that teaching ethnic minority students remained a challenge for her. At the same time, the pressure of achieving good students' test scores and the evaluation by other teachers were reported to affect teachers' adaptation negatively. Hence, Nguyen-L1's case is illustrated by the red circle in the zone of *Self*(+) and *School*(-).

Hao-L2 reported the same element of *School*(-) but she did not mention the role of herself in dealing with issues: so for her case, the disadvantages from the workplace becomes dominant; hence the circle of her case goes to the zone of *Self*(-) and *School*(-).

*I made groups of two students, the better to help the worse. Sometimes it does not work but sometimes ... no one helped, I tried ways... but not work all the time... when angry I yelled or punished them... teaching with ethnic minorities is miserable, it's lucky to teach in school with no ethnic students. (Nguyen-L1; P. 17)*

*With low-learning-capacity students and under the pressure of students' score, all teachers in most of the school with many ethnic minority students, had to make magic with the score to meet the school requirement. It would*

*be much better to teach in a school without ethnic students.* (Hao-L2; P. 13)

For these two teachers, the lack of support and the large amount of judgement by peers in school (mentioned in the previous section) led them to a negative point of view about the ethnic group of students when their attempt to improve the situations could not help.

### **6.5.3 Interpretation**

Seven of the nine studied had concerns about ethnic minority students. Their linguistic and cultural differences appeared to make the teaching of these beginners, who were not trained to work with students' diversity, become even more challenging. The teachers blamed the students' inadequacy of language, learning capacity and poor academic background as well as their lack of involvement in learning for their difficulties in teaching them.

It is strange that the teachers did not conceive they would encounter these students in real teaching in Kontum, a province where ethnic minority people are in the majority. They confirmed they felt under-prepared for teaching students out of the mainstream even though most of them graduated from local colleges that prepare teachers for local schools. This may be a key for the future examination of the training program there.

Despite the lack of preparation, there were still two of the seven who adapted well with the issues. Both elements of *Self* and *School* were presented in the success. The case of Minh-H2 seems to be ideal as both of the elements, *Self* and *School*, appear in the teacher's reflection about her adaptation. Indeed, the activeness of this teacher seems more and more clearly through her story of how she tried to solve the challenges with ethnic minority students. The combination of both traditional and new teaching approaches in the class, and the use of explicit explanations are the evidence of her mindful attempts of helping these students understand the lesson.

Her consultation with the Dean and a teacher in another school who was richly experienced with ethnic minorities, plus her dash into making connections with local government and students' parents to recruit students to school, are more evidences of her activeness in seeking solutions. This element of *Self* seems to be essential and crucial in helping her to make best use of the availability and advantages of sources around her,

including the support inside and outside the school.

However, not lucky like Minh-H2, other participants did not receive positive support from school (all the cases on the left of the axis *Self*). Nam-M1 and Hao-L2 had unfavorable attitude toward the issues. Indeed, Nam-M1 had the assumption that students have to take responsibility for their lives, and teachers could not do anything if the students did not want to change. Hao-L2 believed ethnic students had low learning capacity and all other teachers had to make up the students' results to meet the requirement, as an excuse for the way she dealt. While there were no signpost of school support, these teachers carried their own negative preconceptions of the students, hence their negative adaptation seems inevitable.

The stories of all four teachers in the zone of *Self* (+) and *School* (-) exposed their attempts in trying ways they could to improve the situations. However, for the cases of Nguyen-L1 and Thuong-M4, the pressure of responsibility and students' testing scores seems to have forced these teachers to dodge the effective ways in order to survive; and hence, these poor school characteristics had negative influences on these teachers' adaptation.

Hue-M3 and Thoa-M2 reported they also received advice from other people for the issues, but these suggestions seemed not to be positively contributive but discouraging. Accordingly, the advice seem to have directly guided them away from the positive adaptation, as other teacher encouraged the beginners to be more aggressive, and argued that there was no need to pay much attention and effort to the needs of the minority students. These negative influences from school were obviously discouraging beginners who were trying to struggle with challenges.

*Other teachers said we should care of the ones who want to learn, because it's very hard to change someone who doesn't want to learn. So, I just do what I could do, and up to them. (Thoa-M2; P. 21)*

*Other teachers in the school said that I was too gentle to these students, they thought that would make them not scared of teacher and hard to make them obey, but I tried and found my ways worked well. (Hue-M3; P. 26)*

Although Thoa-M2 described herself taking some attempts to seek solutions to teach minorities effectively, the unfavorable consultations from colleagues seemed to discour-

age her from the resilience of dealing the issues.

The case of Hue-M3 was different. She demonstrated the capacity of reflection in learning by experience, revealing in her critical analysis of the strategies a consideration of the students' characteristics and the special nature of their life and culture. Also, a decisiveness with her strategies of success in a defense against the discouraging advice from others kept her steady with the effective strategies she had discovered by herself. The capacity of reflection in learning by experience and the decisiveness seems to be crucial in this case of positive adaptation.

The successful cases in revealed a dominant capacity of reflection in which the beginning teachers analyzed the advice from their colleagues with their full possession of senses and thought. They examined the issues, analyzed the strategies and chose the appropriate methods that worked in their situations. Hence, with the same suggested strategy for the same issue which happened to two teachers, each of them reported different levels of success. Also, with the same issue happening to two teachers, each would be comfortable and succeed with a specific dealing strategy.

In summarizing for this topic, the cases of negative adaptation bring out the problematic school context where there was a lack of positive support for beginning teachers to deal with their difficulties in teaching ethnic minorities. Rather, there was likely a surplus of pressure relating to the teachers' responsibility to all students and to ensure that their students received high evaluations in the subject tests.

Meanwhile, the cases of positive adaptation highlight the importance of self-help. Accordingly, the teachers' decisiveness in recognizing the issues, their activeness of creating networks where they could develop support; and their capacity for critical reflection in learning by experience seem to have been the most relevant influences in successful adaptation to the issues of teaching ethnic minority students.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

My analysis in this chapter suggests that in general terms, the experiences of beginning teachers can be characterized in the three groups I have described. In general terms, two

of the beginners were less successful in adapting to the expectations of the school in relation to subject content mastery, to innovative pedagogy and to successful classroom management. The middle group of five teachers adapted more successfully in some areas than in others. The best adapted group seemed to have adapted well in all areas.

When I examined the experiences of these teachers in the four specific thematic topics of subject content, teaching methods, classroom discipline and ethnic minority students, the patterns of adaptation were not always consistent. The pattern is complicated because I have included two dimensions related to adaptation. One is perceptions of *Self*. The other is perceptions of the influence of the *School* environment. So the perceptions of *Self* and the perceptions of *School* influences vary depending on the topic under discussion. Only in one area – the issue of discipline - is there a close alignment of *Self* and *School* in locating recognizable adaptations of the groups.

Apart from one person, the teachers with low perceptions of their own skills, knowledge and attitudes are also those reporting negative influences from colleagues and the school, and the teachers with positive self perceptions also report positive support from colleagues and the school environment. This supports several possible interpretations: people who are not succeeding in this area very quickly get feedback from students and colleagues that is difficult to ignore or misinterpret for very long; feedback influences their own self-perception and therefore the amount of effort they are willing to put into success; or people with either positive or negative behavior and beliefs achieve better or worse relative to their input over a sustained period of teaching. It is not clear why this closer relationship is not apparent in the areas of mastery of subject content and pedagogy.

The assistance of colleagues and support from the school seems a necessary condition for positive adaptation in both these areas. But it is not sufficient. Individual behavior, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs are also important for perceived successful performance and adaptation. It seems that in these two areas of subject mastery and pedagogy the two sets of factors - positive self perceptions and positive perceptions of school's roles - are not systematically related.

So I conclude that when they both operate positively, in conjunction, successful adap-

tation is more likely. When they both operate negatively, successful adaptation is less likely. But they seem to be operating independently in the perceptions of this group of Kontum teachers. So to some extent, particularly in the areas of subject mastery and pedagogy, both individual and environmental influences can operate independently to influence perceived performance and adaptation.

There are interesting implications of these findings for policy and practice in both training organizations and in schools, which I will explore in the final chapter.

# Chapter 7 Conclusion

## 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined some interpretations and discussions of the behavior data. Some understandings of the beginning teachers' experiences have been obtained in four different areas of teaching. In this chapter, I gather all the findings, then re-frame them to emphasize the essential meanings of the investigating phenomenon. From these meanings, what needs to be done to enhance the beginning teachers' positive adaptation is discussed. At the same time, the principle reasons for the recommendations, which are presented in the later section of the chapter, are also highlighted.

Firstly, I present my arguments which bring foundations for my recommendations based on the understanding of the beginning teachers' teaching experience that is explored in this study. I organize the arguments under three categories:

- The beginning teachers reported the issues that they were concerned about and felt under-prepared for.
- The personal and contextual elements influenced the teachers' experience and their adaptation at the school level
- The teachers' pedagogical beliefs affected their experiences and adaptation at a personal level

Then, from the understanding that this study has brought out, recommendations for educational practice and future research are provided. Also, my discussion about contributions and limitations of the study as well as my reflection on the journey with this thesis are presented in this chapter.

## **7.2 Further discussion of findings**

### **7.2.1 The beginning teachers reported issues that they were concerned about and felt under-prepared for**

Issues reported include the difficulties of subject content in major or inconsequential aspects; unfamiliarity with the innovative teaching approach; the troubles in dealing with students and keeping discipline; and challenges of teaching ethnic minority students. Not all the teachers experienced all these issues and the way each participant reflected on her experience of each issue was different from others.

Beginning teachers tended to blame the teacher training program (TTP) for not providing them with enough preparation for the issues they faced in the early years of teaching. The common issue they blamed the TTP for was that its curriculum was general and unrealistic which means containing too much inappropriate theory and a lack of practical skills. More particularly, the participants blamed the training institutions for preparing teachers with subject content that was too general, scholarly, theoretical and not completely relevant to teaching in the secondary schools.

They also blamed the TTP for their lack of skills in using the innovative teaching methods that were required in schools. In addition, facing the troubles of dealing with difficult situations and keeping discipline, beginning teachers blamed the TTP for not teaching them all the possibilities of situations happening in real teaching. Parallel with the concern of not knowing how to teach ethnic minority students, the neophytes also expressed the feeling of being under-prepared by the TTP to teach this group of students in reality as well.

However, these criticisms need to be carefully considered when examining the beginning teachers' experiences of teaching methods. The teacher training institutions (TTI), where the beginning teachers graduated from, may in reality be filled with problematic training programs. All the beginning teachers claimed that at the schools they were required to use innovative teaching approaches which enhanced students' activeness in learning. They did not feel comfortable with this or necessarily see the reason for this.

Innovative teaching approaches are in line with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)'s recent directive to move to more active teaching and learning methods which is about the student-centered approach (Phương pháp lấy học sinh làm trung tâm). From my experience as teaching in a TTI, I understand that one of the strategies to carry out this directive is that the innovative program would start from TTI and trickle down to schools. That means the teacher students in the TTI should be provided with skills to apply the student-centered approach before the implementation of this innovation invaded the schools. The beginning teachers' unfamiliarity with the approach suggests that the teaching innovation in the TTI that teachers graduated from (most from local college) is problematic and needs to be examined.

As mentioned previously in the Literature review chapter, the student-centered approaches have been applied widely, but only in the trial stage, in recent years in Kontum TTC. All the lecturers in this college are required to and reported to be using new teaching approaches. Regular discussions have been organized to exchange experience and lessons for more effective implementation. In this circumstance, the beginning teachers from the local training college could hardly be well-prepared for the use in practice of the innovative approach by the trainers who are still struggling themselves to find out the way to apply innovative technologies. On one hand, a massive amount of reviews and reports as well as workshops and seminars in the local TTC on the concern of how to implement new approaches effectively seems to be a good sign of the situation being improved (Le et al., 2005; T. T. Nguyen, 2011; V. G. Nguyen, 2012; T. M. L. Ho, 2011). On the other hand, I doubt that the same struggle has been happening in the schools. Therefore, it seems to be beyond the capacity of the TTC, in this condition, to prepare their students to be skillful practitioners before entering teaching reality in terms of using the innovative approach.

I am suggesting that addressing the concerns about the innovative approach for the next generations of beginning teachers needs to be based on both the issues raised by the participants of this study and the current condition of the implementation of new approach in the local TTC and schools. Accordingly, during the transition time toward the teaching innovation, the teacher students in the TTC need to be involved in the progress of seeking effective ways of applying new approaches in teaching. It is necessary to

record models of successful implementation of the approaches in TTC. These also need to be reported through workshops and seminars with the participation/ attendance of the teacher students. This together with chances for practice in the induction time may help the next generations of beginning teachers to accumulate lessons, practice effective strategies as a first base for the teaching of themselves in the early career time.

In addition to teaching methods, the teachers' feeling of being under-prepared to teach ethnic minority students is another suggestion about the problems of the TTP. As discussed previously, it is strange that the teachers did not conceive they would teach these students in real teaching in Kontum, a province where ethnic minority people are the largest element in the population. They confirmed they felt under-prepared for teaching students who were not in the mainstream, with such responsibilities as recruiting students to schools and teaching students with barriers of language and culture; while most of them graduated from the local college that prepares teachers for the local schools. This may be an issue that needs to be examined further in the training program there.

On the other hand, the teachers' criticisms of the TTI for their experience of being under-prepared seem to reflect their excessive and unrealistic expectation of teacher preparation. The teachers' reflections of their difficulties with subject content are one evidence. Firstly, both teachers in group Low Adaptation (LA) who experienced subject content as a major challenge placed the responsibility for their current difficulties on the TTI, citing its general, difficult and unpractical curriculum that did not meet the requirements of teaching in real schools. This contrasts to what seven teachers, of the nine studied, reflected, that the teacher training program covered basic subject contents that are generally sufficient for teachers to teach in secondary school, which is seen to be generally simple and at a low academic level, hence they thought subject content was easy for them.

The perceptions about challenges with subject content suggest that the role of the beginning teacher is as important as the role of the TTI in the teachers' preparation for their future teaching. The teachers who experienced subject content as a major challenge in the school admitted in their stories their personal poor interest in the content and the career of teaching. They were aware in their reflections that this may have contributed

to their poor learning attitude in TTI, and hence low competence in the subject content. One teacher who did not see subject content a major concern emphasized that her personal activeness of learning in TTI was the most important reason for her familiarity with what she needed to teach in school. This contrast suggests the individual's learning interest and attitude may affect teachers' preparation, thus their competence, and therefore their experience, of the subject content they need to teach in future.

Therefore, the TTI seems not to be the main or only cause of the beginning teachers' experience of subject content as a major challenge. Instead, the teachers themselves, with their learning attitude in TTI and irrelevant qualification appear to take some responsibility for this experience of challenge.

Most teachers, who were initially confident of their knowledge to teach the content in secondary schools, lost this confidence and became self-doubters when they found themselves unacquainted with some points of content. They turned to blame the TTP for preparing them with content that was too general, scholarly, theoretical and not linked to curriculum in the secondary schools. It appears that these teachers expected the TTI to provide them with fully consistent subject competence identical with the school curriculum. Given that most schools are different from each other in the ways they approach curriculum and teaching, this expectation may be unrealistic.

Regardless of the connection between this expectation and the belief of the role of a teacher and teaching which is discussed in the later section, it is increasingly difficult for the neophyte teacher to be fully prepared for the content they would teach. The present world with its ever changing development of sciences and technology is making human knowledge continuously updated very quickly; hence, the school curriculum is also changing all the time. Consequently, it is unlikely to fully prepare a practitioner for the fluid content of the profession in a changing reality.

The teachers' reflection on their troubles of dealing with difficult situations and keeping discipline, and the way they sought to place the blame for this on TTP, are possibly signs of their unrealistic expectations. The beginners reported their difficulties of dealing with students and solving the disciplinary situations and they thought the TTP did not provide them with sufficient preparation. However, the way these teachers reflected on

their experience suggests that teachers expected the TTC should have been prepared to deal with all the possibilities that might happen in the real classroom situation that they themselves identified to be complex, multidimensional, and changing.

The expectation that teachers should be fully prepared with knowledge and skills (of teaching and dealing with students) puts extra pressure on new teachers. The research participants, even the teachers who initially were confident with their preparation for their career, reported their experiences of losing confidence and coming to doubt themselves when they met something unfamiliar in real teaching.

As discussed above, all participants found that the real world of teaching is complex and changing so the appearance of new aspects of knowledge or new pedagogical situations is unavoidable. Therefore, instead of expecting to be fully prepared with practical knowledge and skills, which is shown that unrealistic, some skills to work in the multidimensional and changing reality is rather necessary.

My exploration of the essentials in teacher preparation is embedded in the discussion below.

## **7.2.2 Both personal and contextual elements influence the teachers' experience and their adaptation at the school level**

### **7.2.2.1 School context has an important impact on beginning teachers' adaptation**

My interpretation of the beginning teachers' adaptation to their teaching suggests that only two of the nine studied had High Adaptation (HA), five had Medium Adaptation (MA), and the other two had Low Adaptation (LA). Teachers in the group HA are the persons who adapted positively all the four topics of subject content, teaching methods, discipline, and ethnic minority students. Teachers in group LA are the persons who positively adapted in none of the topic; and teachers in group MA are the persons who positively adapted to at least one but not all of the topics.

It is also worthwhile to remind the reader that the teachers' adaptation is defined, in this study, by the two components: (1) teachers reported their personal sense of success in dealing with their issues; and (2) their dealing strategies were consistent with the

school's overt expectations or regulations. A positive adaptation includes both components; and a negative adaptation means most of one or both elements is missing.

The results of how beginning teachers dealt with their issues and adapted to teaching highlight the teachers' personal elements focusing on teachers' characteristics (that I call *Self*); and contextual elements, focusing on the school characteristics (that I call *School*). The elements of *Self* and *School* were found to affect the teachers' adaptation.

The support in school appears to be an important element that constructively influences the beginning teachers' adaptation. The results from four topics show that the people who had accessible support in their schools reported greater experiences of success dealing with their issues and adapting positively. The successful cases of overcoming challenges reflected their appreciation of the colleagues who were available in the school, including the Dean, mentors and other teachers, who were willing to provide beginning teachers with advice, guidance, examples from their teaching experiences, and confirmation of the efforts of the new teachers.

Most of the cases that reported their reception of negative influences from school reported evidence consistent with negative adaptations. These people, however, were different in their personal characteristics. They might have made some attempts to deal with problems, or they reported the unfavorable attitude, or the belief and the use of strategies that were against the school expectations (such as using physical punishment). However, the characteristic they shared are that they reported the experience of negative influence from schools.

The negative influences from schools consisted of no accessibility to support in school, discouraging consultation, the inconsistent system of rules and practices, pressure of responsibility and critical teacher evaluation. Despite some attempts, that in some cases were remarkable, to seek solutions for their issues of teaching methods or teaching ethnic minority students, some beginning teachers still could not cope successfully. I consider from the data that the lack of support in their schools was the cause of their negative adaptation in these cases. Additionally, under the pressure of ensuring the students achieved good scores in the testing system, which reinforced the use of transmission teaching and rote learning, and under the pressure of being observed and evaluated

by the school, some beginning teachers maintained traditional teaching methods or reverted to them after failing to use the new approaches successfully.

Teachers were aware of the advantages of the encouraging strategies in helping them to overcome the disciplinary issues, but some of them kept believing in and using physical punishment in the hope that it could bring some effectiveness. Even though the physical punishment is forbidden in all the schools, this method was still used by some experienced teachers and orally imparted to others and this inconsistency of the system indirectly encouraged the beginning teachers in using this illegitimate strategy.

In short, most of the cases of positive adaptation and all the cases of negative adaptation suggest that the school characteristics played a crucial role in the beginning teachers' adaptation to teaching. Accordingly, the accessibility of support in school may help the beginning teachers to adapt positively. By contrast, the poor school characteristics, such as no accessibility of support in school, discouraging consultation, the inconsistent system, pressure of responsibility and teacher evaluation, may lead to beginning teachers' negative adaptation.

#### **7.2.2.2 Teachers' personal characteristics affect their adaptation**

Despite the poor school characteristics, there were still three people who positively dealt with their issues. In the attempt to make clear why these cases successfully dealt with their challenges, some interesting personal elements (*Self*) were manifest. These are the capacity for reflection in learning by experience, and the outside school network that they constructed and belonged to, the attempts to seek solutions for the issues, the qualities of decisiveness and wisdom, and belief in a positive pedagogical approach.

Firstly, the capacity of reflection in learning by experience was found to be present in most cases of successful adaptation, including the teachers who reported positive characteristics of the school and even the teachers who were under the negative influences of the school context. Accordingly, these teachers described the ways they dealt with problems and how they felt when they were trying to solve them with an emphasis on their full possession of thought and senses (dealing with the issues relying on their own personal philosophy and creativity). These strategies were what I call learning by experience because the participants put in place experiments with strategies in their real

teaching, and from them drew out and discovered the effective solutions for their practical problems.

In this learning process, their thoughtfulness was revealed in the analytic consideration of what they obtained from asking others' about their experience, observing others' actions and trying the strategies by themselves. They examined their issues, analyzed the strategies and chose the appropriate methods that worked in their situations. They also gave emphasis to their heartfelt involvement, revealed their love for the students, their consideration of the students' characteristics, and respect for the special aspects of their life and culture, especially in the case of dealing with issues of ethnic minority students.

All these signs of this full possession of senses and reasons in the process of learning by experience appear to be consistent with Schon's (1987) notion of a reflective practitioner. According to Schon, practitioners continually find themselves facing complex, uncertain, unstable, unique and conflicting situations which disturb their confidence. With those characteristics, the reality is not easily understood, and even a threat, for those who are skillful at techniques of "selective inattention, junk categories, and situational control" (p. 69) using technical rational models. Schon suggested three concepts that are necessary to develop understanding everyday reality, and ways to contribute the artistry of professional practice. These are knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action.

Knowing-in-action allows practitioners to unconsciously use their existing knowledge and experiences as frames of action to yield the expected outcomes as long as the situation occurs as normal as practitioners know about it. Reflection-in-action allows practitioners to rethink about their existing knowledge and make "on-the-spot" experiments and explore new outcomes (Schön, 1987, p. 28). Skillful practitioners could not adequately describe verbally what they were doing in the process of knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. The good verbal description about that is produced when the practitioners think back to the situation; and this process is reflection-on-action. This process may indirectly frame the future action (p. 31).

The teachers being discussed described their experience of collecting of possible strate-

gies, then taking experiments with these strategies into their practice, analyzing the effectiveness of them and thinking back to the situations, and finally drawing out the strategies that could be used in their future practice. These signs appear to be consistent with Schon's (1987) description of the reflective practices which are believed to essentially help practitioners to adapt themselves to complex and unstable circumstances.

Secondly, the creation of and use of an outside school network was another personal element in the successful adaptation of some teachers. Two teachers described their appreciation of the networks that they constructed with people from outside the school where they worked. The network connected the beginning teachers with the teachers in the local teacher training college, the friends who were teachers in other schools, and a part-time job (for one teacher); or with friends who were teachers in other schools, with students' parents, and the local government where the students lived (for another teacher). These two teachers reported their high appreciation of the network they had in the sense that the network provided assistance to them when they could not seek enough support in the school.

The network may not be revealed with all of its advantages if this element is examined by itself. When looking at many other cases who reported high activity and attempts to seek solutions for their problems but could not get help from the school where they worked, the values of network from outside of the school may be more manifest.

In fact, I consider the process of self-researching to seek solutions for problems to be a personal element that the beginning teachers brought to their adaptation. Facing problems, most of the teachers (except for one case who was not willing to ask for help) were active to take some attempts of dealing with the issue. These attempts were listed as self-researching activities by reading books and searching the Internet, observing other teachers working, and looking for help in the school.

*Positive School* with accessibility of support essentially helped beginning teachers to adapt successfully. Otherwise, with only the teachers' self-researching, many cases reported their failure of dealing with teaching challenges. Therefore, the success of some few cases, who were also in *Negative School*, and relying on their capacity for reflection and their supportive network outside of the school, is remarkable.

The two elements of *Self* and others' support were reported by both of the beginning teachers who had High Adaptation (HA – i.e., they successfully dealt with all four topics). One case reported success in dealing with issues of teaching ethnic minorities through the capacity of reflection. Although one of the two had supportive mentor and colleagues, her success was reported not just based on the support in the school was also based on her self-learning using her reflective skills and on the assistance she received from outside of the school.

The other teacher did not have a mentor but she could seek solutions by herself from learning by experience in the combination with guidance from colleagues on some issues. For the other difficulties that no one available in the school could help with, she used helpful people in the network.

Therefore, although the element of the network outside of the school are not the common elements causing successful adaptation for most of the cases, its random presence in the success of both teachers in the group of High Adaptation suggests the considerable influences of a useful network, providing support and advice, on the beginning teachers' adaptation. The data of this study was collected by using open-ended questions; and the elements affecting the teachers' experiences have emerged from stories that the participants felt were the most important for them.

Consequently, it would be possible that the benefits of a network also occurred in other successful cases but they did not feel these factors as important as others to report in the interviews. However, network is another form of support that teachers may get benefit from, like the support in school; hence developing a network could be considered as a useful element to be suggested for beginning teachers for success.

The qualities of decisiveness and wisdom are two elements perceived by one or two participants to have influenced their experiences. Decisiveness helped one beginner keep going steadily with the effective strategies she had discovered by herself in spite of the unofficial discouraging advice from school. I have also argued that wisdom helped two teachers who exploited available colleagues in the school to confirm whether what they have learnt by self-research met the school requirements or not, and helped them to avoid being criticized.

Although these two elements seem to contradict each other at first sight, flexible and soft ways of implementation are necessary to help the beginners to keep behaviors that are consistent with their belief, and at the same time deal with the hierarchical based relationships in the school workplace that emphasize reverence to age and position. The appearance of the two elements are scattered through the teachers' perceptions and it is not possible from my data to interpret their roles in this study; hence, there is still a need of further examination of the effect of these elements on the beginning teachers' adaptation.

I am trying to clarify the personal characteristics that a successful teacher may need to have, by examining the elements affecting the beginning teachers' adaptation in this study. Some personal elements have emerged from the data, including the capacity of reflection in learning by experience, the outside school network that they constructed and belonged to, the capacity of self-researching, and decisiveness and wisdom.

I have argued that some of the elements appear to be more remarkable than some others. The capacity for reflection in learning by experience and the outside school network that teachers constructed and belonged to seem to be the two crucial characteristics of the successful beginners. These elements appeared commonly in the cases of success useful tools for the neophytes to deal with the complex changing teaching reality by themselves or by sources from elsewhere when they could not access assistance in the school. The capacity for self-researching, by itself, was found to help only one neophyte, who revealed decisiveness, to adapt successfully.

A combination of self-researching with the support from others, either in the school or in the network outside the school, might be needed in order to direct and confirm the beginners' adaptation that meets the school' overt expectations. Also, there are some little clues that wisdom is important in helping teachers to adapt to the hierarchical relationship in the school workplace which tends to pay reverence to age and position.

### **7.2.3 The teachers' pedagogical beliefs affect experiences and adaptation at the personal level**

In the previous sections, I discussed the beginning teachers' adaptation based on a measure that involves both the teachers' personal sense of achievement and success in meeting the school's overt expectations. In this section, in the attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the neophytes' experience, I look at the adaptation at the teacher's personal level, which is based on the integration between the teachers' beliefs and their behaviors.

The beginning teachers' description of their teaching experiences, including the issues and strategies for dealing with them exposed the strengths of traditional views in pedagogical beliefs about the role of a teacher and teaching. All of them believed that teachers must be the guru of knowledge who should be the expert in subject content. In dealing with the students, five held the trust in the effectiveness of physical punishment while all believed teachers have the highest authority in the class and the students should respect, obey and pay full attention to teachers. In the aspect of teaching methods, five of them revealed their preference for the transmission of knowledge approach.

These beliefs seem to be based on more traditional Vietnamese assumptions of the role of a teacher in relation to the knowledge aspect and the appropriate teacher-student relationship. These assumptions guided their teaching behaviors. Regardless of their experiences of the reality of being in the difficult situations that put their role as a knowledge guru and the most authorized person in the class at risk, all the strategies teachers reported to deal with their issues of subject content and discipline were aimed at keeping this role. Accordingly, teachers took actions (from self-help and/ or gaining support from others) to fill in the knowledge of the content that they thought they lacked in order not to expose this lack in front of the students. For the disciplinary issues, they also sought solutions (encouragements and punishments) to gain the students' obedience, attention and respect.

For the teachers who had positive adaptation (based on the measure of the teachers' personal sense of achievement and the satisfaction of the school overt expectations), the integration of teachers' belief and behavior at personal level was not problematic

or thought worthy of discussion with me. Indeed, they had the perception that their assumptions of the role, and the strategies they used to keep their role were in harmony with school practice and they were successful. Hence, these teachers had good adaptation at the personal level as well.

However, the same adaptation at the personal level did not seem to be present for the cases that did not have positive adaptation at school level. In the topic of discipline where five teachers reported their belief in the physical punishment, although physical punishment was officially prohibited in the school, these teachers did not feel harmony with this rule and still applied some kinds of physical punishment. This breaking of the overt school rule constituted negative adaptation at the school level. However, these teachers revealed a high level of integration between their belief and their behavior at the personal level.

In short, the results under the topic of the subject content and discipline show that teachers who did not have positive adaptation at the school level showed a high level of integration between their belief and behaviors about how to deal with the students. In this area of teaching, the demands of personal survival were more relevant than the official rules of the school, and were fortified by knowledge that many experienced teachers behaved in the same way.

The teachers' adaptation at the personal level in the topic of teaching methods is more complex. Actually, the data did not show the teachers' assumptions of the effective teaching methods that they initially carried into their teaching career. They reported the school mandating of using innovative teaching approach that was about child-centered and integration of multimedia into teaching plus group work.

Although the approach was not necessarily used all the time, just at least one lecture a week or a month, and as much as the teachers could, it was a concern for the new teachers as they were not trained to teach with this approach. But most seemed to support the modern methods and to feel in harmony with the school practice at the beginning. They somehow jumped into learning to apply the approach.

The four teachers who had positive adaptation with new teaching methods at the school

level reported a high integration of teachers' belief and behavior. Indeed, they were successful with the new approach and they reported a sense of achievement that helped them maintain the initial feeling of harmony with the school practice. Hence, these teachers had good adaptation at the personal level as well.

But not all were successful with this task. For other teachers who did not adapt well at the school level, the complexity was revealed in their perceptions. Four teachers made the initial attempt to use the new approach but did not succeed well. They used the modern methods as little as possible and the traditional methods as much as possible, just to deal with the reality of teaching material for memorization to unmotivated students, to pass exams that test memory, and to deal with the teacher evaluation from school management. Although they did not fit well with the school overt aims and rules, they had a high level of integration between belief and behavior at the personal level.

Nguyen-L1 felt harmony with school practice at the beginning but after the initial attempt to use the new approach did not help her to succeed, she was in conflict between what was expected by the school and what she as a teacher preferred to do. She kept using the new methods but the way she used them was like a traditional approach. Although her lack of success was related to the perceived disadvantages of the modern methods, she kept using the new approach to deal with the supervision from the school, even though she did not feel appreciate the methods any more. This is a case of a low level of integration between belief and behavior at the personal level, about which the beginning teacher could do little except practice a surface compliance with the school's requirements for successful adaptation.

This highlights how the beginning teachers have sometimes to adapt to the real school rules of behavior, the result of which in this case contradicted the ideal of modern/progressive teaching. It reflects the tension between top down policy from MOET and often from TTC that emphasizes progressive educational methods, contrasted with the reality of having to teach material for memorization to unmotivated students, to pass exams that test memory, and to deal with the school evaluation.

With the tension between the idea and reality and the tension between teachers' belief and behavior, the teaching innovation commanded by the centralized MOET structure is

difficult to implement, despite the policies and programs developed after the announcement of đổi mới.

Hence, it is necessary to openly address the tension between official policy and teachers' practice in reality in TTC training and in schools' reflection on their real practices, to suggest some policies and practices that might help new teachers work through the tension.

### **7.3 Limitations of my study**

Although teachers' belief is predictably an element affecting teachers' experience and I was aware of the needs to put a satisfactory focus on the role of belief in the educational inquiry, the results relating to teachers' belief have not completely satisfied me. In this study, the results about teachers' belief are adequate to bring out a reasonable understanding of the teachers' adaptation at the personal level. It however could bring a more outstanding discussion if the examination of the relationship between the teachers' belief and behavior could be carried out with a precise preparation of possible assumption and constructs.

However, due the methodology employed, the data collection was conducted with semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions; the participants were encouraged to report their experiences as much as they could. The researcher did not direct the participants to describe their experiences based on any assumptions about the possible findings. Hence, all the information about the belief teachers brought to teaching at the first time and how it affected their teaching experience plus how it changed under the conditions of practical teaching is not completely uncovered. This limitation could be satisfactorily solved with future research using precise structured questions to measure the relationship between belief and behavior.

In addition, not being a longitudinal study, my study only focuses on the experience of teachers in their first three years of career, from the stories of their impression and memory; so that their experience of challenges, coping and adaptation are examined while the concern of time is excluded. Therefore, while the data shows that there were changes, in terms of issues concerned and needs, from the very first time teachers en-

tered the career to the time they were interviewed, I do not distinguish these changes into stages; hence the results do not reflect these changes chronologically. Consequently, the recommendations cannot be specific for each stage of the teacher's experience, as some longitudinal studies can enable us to do.

Besides, the success of the teachers' adaptation is solely based on the reflection of their feeling and information they reported, from the teachers' perspective. Therefore, the level of satisfaction with their success of dealing with issues was based on the teachers' personal sense of achievement. I cannot conclude that they were really adapted to the school's expectations of them at this early stage of their careers. Also, the causes of their teaching issues that relates to TTP are reflected from their perspective. Therefore, there is a need of further study from different standpoints (for example perspectives of school administrators and of mentors about the beginning teachers).

## **7.4 Concise recommendations**

In the previous section, I have made discussion and arguments on the findings and from that my suggestions are brought out with reasons. This section collects all the suggestions and presents them in a concise way.

### **7.4.1 For educational practice**

#### **7.4.1.1 First years as learning years**

I am suggesting that in order to help beginning teachers to have better experiences in early career years and better adaptation, early career time needs to be considered as learning/ practicing time, not as the time to perform as veterans. This suggestion is consistent with the ideas of Feiman-nemser (2003) and Palmer (2007).

In order to put this suggestion into practice, the MOET needs to promulgate policy that assign the first years of teaching as learning/ practicing time. Accordingly, the task allocation and teacher evaluation need to be based on separate criteria for the beginning teachers, to reduce pressure on the new teachers and to officially give chances for them to learn by experience. Clear regulations about how to implement this policy are also necessary so that all the teachers have an official mentor, including the short-term

contracted neophytes.

This notion needs to be understood widely by school administrators, other teachers and beginning teachers so that the neophytes' rights and responsibilities are put into practice and supported by the whole school. The school should have a careful consideration of each case of a beginning teacher in terms of her/ his qualification, individual differences and needs. Then an allocation of an appropriate mentor who has a relevant major and experience for each particular beginning teachers is essential to implement the policy seriously. The supervision should focus on support, provide the new teacher with advice rather than judgment.

Besides giving the beginners a chance to express their capacity and opportunity for self-learning, the support from school is needed to ensure the learning process will not go in the wrong direction from official expectations. Also, chances for reflection with colleagues need to be provided in school. It maybe the regular group meeting among teachers in the same subject, or school workshop with practical guidance and chances to exchange the experience of different pedagogical approaches.

#### **7.4.1.2 Teachers preparation**

Regardless of the teachers' excessive and unrealistic expectation that they should be fully prepared with all the knowledge and for all the possible situations in the real teaching, a basic preparation of the knowledge and skills of subject and pedagogical matters is necessary. It is essential that student teachers have a good learning attitude to build up the knowledge for themselves and an activeness in connecting what they have been studying with how to apply it in the school curriculum. Due to the fact that the short induction time is documentarily reported to be a tough issue, lecturers in the teacher training program (TTP) need to create chances for their students to get familiar with the school curriculum through activities such as regular assignments or a final test.

In terms of teaching methods, the teacher students in the TTC need to be involved in the progress of seeking for the effective ways of applying new approaches in teaching of the lecturers in the TTC. Models of successful implementation of the approaches in TTC are necessary to be recorded and reported through workshops and seminars with the participation/ attendance of the teacher students. This together with chances for practice

in the induction time may help the next generations of beginning teachers to accumulate lessons, practice and withdraw effective strategies as a first base for the teaching of themselves in the early career time.

Besides the basic subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills, the TTP should prepare the pre-service teachers in their capacity for reflection. Some teachers may have the capacity of reflection without being aware of it or able to name it. The awareness of this capacity and its role in practical teaching may orient the teachers' focus from a single scattered event or activity to the underlying causes for classroom outcomes and how to solve the current problems. Hence, the TTP needs to put reflection in their training and practice of the pre-service teachers with a clear guidance of what is reflection and how to use it effectively in the school.

It is also important that pre-service teachers are made aware of their role as a teacher and of real teaching, which may contain tensions between the ideal and reality and between their belief and behavior. Hence, it is necessary to openly address in the TTP the tension between official policy and teachers' practice in reality, and how schools' reflection on their real practices could be used to help new teachers work through the tensions. Also, the student teachers should be made aware that the first years of teaching are a learning time and that the role of a beginning teacher is more that of a learner, not an expert. This awareness could help beginning teachers to be clear and access their reasonable rights and responsibilities, hence, reduce pressure at this critical time in their careers.

A preparation of a supportive network that allows teachers to connect to other supporting sources outside the school is also worthy. The future teachers need to create a network for themselves which may consist of friends who study in the same TTP, teachers they know in the induction school, and lecturers in the TTP. This is consistent with the characteristics of the successful teacher found in E. Hebert and Worthy (2001)'s study that include aspects of the teacher's personality and behavior of being willing to seek support and being outgoing.

#### **7.4.2 For future research**

The findings that the beginning teachers are unfamiliar with innovative teaching approach suggest that the implementation of teaching innovation in the TTI is problematic

and needs to be examined. Also, the teachers' feeling of being under-prepared for teaching ethnic minority students, even though most of them graduated from the local college which prepares teachers for the local schools, is also a key point for the future examination on the training program there.

Although there are some personal elements that I found to be present in some successful cases of adaptation in this study, the scattered appearance of some elements limits the validity of interpreting their significance. Particularly, the network outside of the school, the impact of decisiveness and wisdom are the elements that need further examinations of their influence on the beginning teachers' adaptation.

The belief teachers bring to teaching the first time and how it affects their teaching experience plus how it changes under the conditions of practical teaching needs further investigation. Also, how beginning teachers perceive their teaching from being pre-services to first years of teaching needs to be examined carefully in longitudinal studies for a more comprehensive understanding of what should be the focus to help them in each particular period.

Although a small number of participants is a characteristic of the qualitative research study, the cases of only nine teachers in Kontum are hardly enough to convince the stakeholders for the changes. Hence, for a greater source of data about the lived experiences of beginning teachers, more case studies about these people, from primary to secondary and high school, are needed.

In addition, the findings of this study suggests some issues that could be considered to be crucial for beginning teachers, such as teacher preparation of knowledge, teaching methods, pedagogical belief as well as elements affecting their experience. These findings may contribute to the development of an instrument, specific to the cultural context of Vietnamese schools and teacher preparation institutes, to survey larger numbers of early career teachers in Vietnam.

## **7.5 Contributions of my study**

The study extends the understanding of the phenomenon of beginning teachers' teaching life in a context that is not covered in the literature about the topic. It has made useful contributions in terms of supplementing understanding of the topic in a context not researched before; and suggested practical strategies for increasing local knowledge of teachers' training and monitoring in Kontum.

The study provides beginning teachers with the chance to raise their problems using insights from this research, in order to bring the understanding of the issue to the stakeholder in the specific context with empirical evidence of perceptions about what is happening in the training and teaching context. Also, the factors contributing to success and failure of beginning teachers found in this study raise implications for how the stakeholder can help improve the positive adaptation of the next generation of beginning teachers.

To the best of my knowledge, for the first time in the Vietnamese context, Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach is used as a methodological framework for data gathering. In my role of the researcher who lives in the same region with appropriate background, brings to the process of understanding an emic perspective unavailable to Western researchers from different cultures. While the Vietnamese tend to trust quantitative research and statistical results, I believe that this way of looking at the world does not help to investigate the teachers' experience in depth. Therefore, my study has a part in making an introduction of the constructivist world view to Vietnamese research; and specifically this is the first time in Vietnam that van Manen's framework has been employed as a useful way of understanding the phenomenon of beginning teachers experiences.

## **7.6 My reflection on the journey with the thesis**

In a consideration of the ontology and epistemology, there was initially a struggle in my mind about which philosophical point of views were appropriate to this study. I was a biology teacher who learned and taught about living organisms which are physically

extended in the environment. I was trained to get the facts or understand reality by using natural science methods such as observations and experiments. I believed in the significant statistical numbers and what I could see with my physical eyes, directly or through the microscope.

So, for me, Truth was the only one and fixed, no matter what I felt about it and no matter who I was. I believed that other observers can see the Truth exactly the same as me. The biological reality, no matter if I am aware of it or not, always exists in the world and can be discovered through my conscious. From this world view, I primarily defined myself, without self-awareness of the philosophical terms, as a realist as well as objectivist.

When I started to step into the field of researching lived experience, I brought that point of view with me. At first, I expected that I could get the result of the study presenting the fixed facts and they could be generalized for bigger populations; this was the point of view that I used to stand on when I did the biological research before. At that time, I believed solely in the quantitative research methods which could help me to seek the Truth that simply exists in the linear causality and based on the findings from big populations.

However, my aim was to study the lived experience of early career teachers which is absolutely different from the objects of the studies in the biological sciences that I was familiar with. Truth being sought in this study does not simply exist in a linear but a mutual causality, within a specific context and is relative, dependent on the subjects' consciousness. I found that the realist and objectivist points of view could not help me to access and examine human consciousness.

The process of approaching and performing the study, step-by-step, helped me to shift from the negation to acceptance of the relativist standpoint. This shift is not only the external manifestation in the research design and actions, but also the internal change inside my perception toward another way to view the world. I appreciate the new world view as it helps me to value individuals in their full life contexts which are mutual, complex, and embedded in a multidimensional network of relations.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

At this point of my study I have completed its mission of seeking understanding of the teaching experiences of the beginning teachers working in some secondary schools in Kontum City.

The study results show that the beginning teachers reported the issues that they were concerned about and that they felt under-prepared to cope with them. The issues include the difficulties of subject content in major or at inconsequential aspects; the unfamiliarity of the innovative teaching approach; the troubles in dealing with students and keeping discipline; and challenges of teaching ethnic minority students. Not all the teachers experienced all these issues; and the way each participant reflected on her experience of each issue was different from others.

The school characteristics played a crucial role in the beginning teachers' adaptation to teaching. Accordingly, the accessibility of support in school may help the beginning teachers to adapt positively. By contrast, the poor school characteristics, such as no accessibility of support in school, discouraging unofficial consultation, the inconsistent system, pressure of responsibility and teacher evaluation, may lead to beginning teachers' negative adaptation.

The capacity of reflection in learning by experience and the outside school network that teachers constructed and belonged to were the two crucial personal characteristics of the successful beginners. These elements appeared commonly in the cases of success as the useful tools for the neophytes to deal with the complex and changing teaching reality, by themselves or by using sources from elsewhere when they could not access assistance in the school. The capacity of self-researching, by itself, was found to help only one neophyte, who revealed decisiveness, to adapt successfully.

A combination of self-researching with support from others, either in the school or in the network outside the school, might be needed to direct and confirm the beginners' adaptation that meets the school's overt expectations.

The study also found that teachers' beliefs about their role and teaching need to be

integrated with their actual behavior for successful adaptation at the personal level. Some teachers, especially the most successful, achieved this integration. Others had more complex responses, reflecting the difficulties faced by teachers forced to adapt to real school rules of behavior which embody the ideal of progressive teaching but in reality promote more traditional teaching practices. The examination of the issue at the personal level expose the tensions between teachers' belief and behavior in the context of the gap between ideal and reality in these Kontum schools.

This study suggests that first years of teaching need to be considered as learning/ practicing time. In this time, beginning teachers could learn by experience and have chance for reflection by themselves and with other colleagues. Therefore, beginning teachers should be prepared with some basic techniques of reflection before going to face the reality of the classroom.

Beginning teachers should be prepared in such areas as making themselves belong to a network, developing decisiveness and wisdom, and openly addressing the tension between ideal and reality, and between belief and behavior. In order to take these suggestions up, the MOET, TTP, school, and teachers need to be involved.

Especially important, mentors and support from school are needed to ensure the learning process will not go in a different direction from school official expectations. Chances for reflection with colleagues need to be provided in school. The responsibility and evaluation should not be based on the common responsibility and evaluation for experienced teachers; there is a need of separate criteria of task and evaluation.

Despite some inconsequential limitations that seem to be unavoidable for all this kind of research, I feel that this study has made useful contributions in terms of supplementing understanding of the topic in the context of Kontum, and possibly for other ethnically diverse or mountainous areas in Vietnam. This has not been done before in this topic. I have suggested practical strategies for increasing the local knowledge of teacher training and monitoring.

Personally, I have been gratified that my research has help me to increase my knowledge and feel confident that it has addressed my professional and personal concerns as a

teacher and as a teacher educator about how to improve the experiences of beginning teacher and the quality of the teachers entering the schools in my province of Kontum.

## Appendix A Data translation's statement

Melbourne, 20th July, 2012

I, hereby, certify that

1. The English translation of the *Participant Information Statement, Consent form, and Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form* is accurate and complete.
2. I have compared and checked both English and Vietnamese versions of the *individual textural-structural descriptions* and their summaries which are presented in Chapter Five. They are translated faithfully from Vietnamese into English.

**Xuan Thu Dang**

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## **Appendix B Participant Information statement (English version)**



### **Participant Information Statement**

Title of the project: **An investigation into the experiences of early career secondary teachers in Kontum City**

I am a student at La Trobe University, Australia, and I am conducting a study of the experiences of early career secondary teachers as part of my study for the Doctor of Education. I am hoping you are willing to be a participant in this study. If you agree to take part in it, it will involve an interview of about one hour. The locations of the interviews will be at a place of your choice. Your identity will be preserved at all times as pseudonyms will be used in any writing emerging from this study. A summary of the results of the research will be sent to you upon your request. The results of the research may be presented at conferences or published in a journal. Participation in this study will provide you with an opportunity to review and reflect on your experiences, perspectives and provide information that may be helpful to others. There will be no risk, discomfort or harm resulting from your participation in this research.

If you are willing to take part in this research will you sign the attached 'Consent Form' and return it to me?

Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any time by sending me an email indicating your demand. There will be no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating or for withdrawing prematurely from the research. You have the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at anytime and, further, to demand that data arising from your participation are not used in the research project provided that this right is exercised within four weeks of the completion of your participation in the project. You are asked to complete the "Withdrawal of Consent Form" or to notify the investigator by e-mail or telephone that you wish to withdraw your consent for your data to be used in this research project.

Any questions regarding this project may be directed to my supervisor Dr Peta Heywood via email at [p.heywood@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:p.heywood@latrobe.edu.au) or me at [lethiminhthi@gmail.com](mailto:lethiminhthi@gmail.com). If you have any complaints or queries that the investigator has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Secretary, Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee, Education Faculty Office, La Trobe University, PO Box 199, Bendigo 3552, e-mail: [educationethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:educationethics@latrobe.edu.au).

Thank you for your participation!

Yours Sincerely,

Thi Minh Thi Le Email:

[lethiminhthi@gmail.com](mailto:lethiminhthi@gmail.com)

## Appendix C Consent form (English version)



### Participant Information Statement

Title of the project: **An investigation into the experiences of early career secondary teachers in Kontum City**

I,....., have read and understood the participant information statement and consent form, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may withdraw at any time and may request that no data arising from my participation are used, up to four weeks following the completion of my participation in the research. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

Name of Participant (block letters):

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Name of Investigator (block letters): THI MINH THI LE

Signature:.....

Date:.....

## Appendix D    Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form (English version)



### Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form

Title of the project: **An investigation into the experiences of early career secondary teachers in Kontum City**

I, ....., wish to WITHDRAW my consent to the use of data arising from my participation. Data arising from my participation must NOT be used in this research project as described in the Information and Consent Form. I understand that data arising from my participation will be destroyed provided this request is received within four weeks of the completion of my participation in this project. I understand that this notification will be retained together with my consent form as evidence of the withdrawal of my consent to use the data I have provided specifically for this research project.

Participant's name (printed): .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix E Participant Information Statement (Vietnamese version)



### THÔNG TIN CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

Tôi hiện đang là sinh viên của trường Đại học La Trobe, Úc. Tôi đang thực hiện đề tài luận văn Tiến sĩ, nghiên cứu về giáo viên trung học cơ sở giai đoạn mới vào nghề.

Tôi hy vọng rằng thầy (cô) sẽ vui lòng tham gia nghiên cứu này.

Nếu thầy (cô) đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài, thầy (cô) sẽ được phỏng vấn khoảng một tiếng. Nơi phỏng vấn sẽ tùy theo lựa chọn của thầy (cô). Những thông tin cá nhân của thầy (cô) sẽ được bảo mật hoàn toàn và thầy (cô) sẽ được gọi bằng biệt danh trong quá trình viết về đề tài. Kết quả của nghiên cứu có thể sẽ được trình bày ở Hội thảo khoa học hoặc đăng trên các tạp chí khoa học. Nếu thầy (cô) có nhu cầu, một phiên bản tóm tắt của kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ được gửi cho thầy (cô).

Nếu tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, thầy (cô) sẽ có cơ hội nhìn lại và chia sẻ những kinh nghiệm của mình mà những kinh nghiệm đó có thể là thông tin bổ ích cho nhiều người khác. Sẽ không có nguy hiểm hay bất lợi nào nếu tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Nếu thầy (cô) vui lòng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này, thầy (cô) sẽ được đề nghị kí vào “Bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài” và đưa lại cho tôi. Sự tham gia của thầy (cô) vào đề tài này hoàn toàn là tự nguyện và thầy (cô) có thể rút khỏi đề tài này bằng cách gửi email cho tôi. Sẽ không có bất lợi hay hậu quả gì nếu thầy (cô) rút khỏi đề tài. Nhưng trong trường hợp đó, thầy (cô) sẽ được yêu cầu điền vào “Bản xin rút khỏi đề tài” hoặc báo cho tôi trong vòng 4 tuần sau khi tham gia bằng email hoặc điện thoại.

Câu hỏi liên quan tới đề tài này có thể được gửi đến cho người nghiên cứu Lê Thị Minh Thi theo số di động (+61) 431 345 089 hoặc địa chỉ email lethiminhthi@gmail.com, hoặc gửi đến cho giáo viên hướng dẫn, tiến sĩ Peta Heywood, địa chỉ email p.heywood@latrobe.edu.au.

Nếu thầy (cô) có bất kì phản ánh hay yêu cầu nào mà người nghiên cứu chưa đáp ứng được, thầy (cô) có thể liên hệ Ủy ban phê duyệt nghiên cứu trên đối tượng con người

của Khoa Giáo dục, đại học La Trobe theo địa chỉ: Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee, Education Faculty Office, La Trobe University, PO Box 199, Bendigo 3552, e-mail: educationethics@latrobe.edu.au. Trân trọng cảm ơn sự tham gia của thầy (cô)!

Lê Thị Minh Thi

Email: lethiminhthi@gmail.com

## Appendix F Consent form (Vietnamese version)



### BẢN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA ĐỀ TÀI

Đề tài: TÌM HIỂU NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG NHỮNG NĂM ĐẦU MỚI RA TRƯỜNG CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRƯỜNG CẤP 2 TRÊN ĐỊA BÀN THÀNH PHỐ KON-TUM – TỪ KINH NGHIỆM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ CÁCH NHÌN CỦA NGƯỜI QUẢN LÝ.

Tôi, ....., đã đọc và hiểu bản “Thông tin cho người tham gia nghiên cứu” cùng với “Bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài” do người nghiên cứu đề tài cung cấp, và những câu hỏi của tôi đã được trả lời thỏa đáng. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài, đồng thời biết rằng trong vòng 4 tuần kể từ khi tôi tham gia, tôi có thể rút lui khỏi đề tài và yêu cầu những dữ liệu từ việc tham gia của tôi sẽ không được sử dụng trong đề tài. Tôi đồng ý rằng những dữ liệu nghiên cứu có được từ sự tham gia của tôi có thể được sử dụng trong luận văn của đề tài, được trình bày tại hội thảo và xuất hiện trong các tạp chí với điều kiện tên hoặc bất cứ thông tin cá nhân nào của tôi sẽ không bị tiết lộ.

Name of Participant (block letters):.....

Chữ kí:.....

Ngày/tháng/năm:.....

Name of Investigator (block letters): THI MINH THI LE

Chữ kí:.....

Ngày/tháng/năm:.....

Tên giáo viên hướng dẫn: Peta Heywood

Chữ kí:.....

Ngày/tháng/năm:.....

## Appendix G Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form (Vietnamese version)



### Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form

**Đề tài: TÌM HIỂU NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG NHỮNG NĂM ĐẦU MỚI RA TRƯỜNG CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRƯỜNG CẤP 2 TRÊN ĐỊA BÀN THÀNH PHỐ KONTUM – TỪ KINH NGHIỆM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ CÁCH NHÌN CỦA NGƯỜI QUẢN LÝ.**

Tôi, ....., mong muốn được RÚT LẠI sự đồng ý của tôi về việc sử dụng dữ liệu của tôi trong đề tài. Các dữ liệu có được từ sự tham gia của tôi sẽ KHÔNG được sử dụng trong đề tài nghiên cứu này như đã từng được trình bày trong Bản thông tin cho người tham gia nghiên cứu và Bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài. Tôi hiểu rằng những dữ liệu liên quan đến tôi sẽ bị tiêu hủy nếu yêu cầu này được đưa ra trong vòng 4 tuần kể từ khi tôi tham gia. Tôi hiểu rằng bản thông báo này sẽ được cất giữ cùng với Bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài của tôi như là bằng chứng của việc tôi xin rút lại sự đồng ý cho sử dụng những dữ liệu do tôi cung cấp cho đề tài này.

Tên người tham gia: .....

Chữ kí: .....

Ngày /tháng /năm .....

# Appendix H Ethics Approval



Faculty of Education

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Victoria 3552 Australia  
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[www.latrobe.edu.au/education](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/education)

13 October 2010

Thi Minh Thi Le  
24 Keats Avenue  
Kingsbury 3083

Dear Thi

**RE: YOUR APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL**  
**FHEC No:** R053/10  
**Supervisor/s** Dr P. Heywood  
**Project/Activity Title:** An investigation of problems facing early career secondary teachers – A case study of Kuntum city, from the teachers' experience and school administrators' perceptions

Thank you for submitting your project for consideration by the Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee. The proposal has now been considered by the Committee and has been assessed as complying with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Your project has now been granted ethics approval and you may now commence the study.

The project has been granted approval till **25/6/2013**.

The following standard conditions apply to your project:

- **Complaints** - If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, researchers should advise the Secretary of the Education FHEC.
- **Limit of Approval** - Approval is limited strictly to the research proposal as submitted in your application while taking into account the conditions and approval dates advised by the FHEC.
- **Variation to Approval** - As a consequence of the previous conditions, any subsequent variations or modifications you wish to make to your project must be notified formally to the FEHC. This can be done using the 'Application for Approval of Modification to Research project' which is available at the following website:  
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/human.htm>.
- **Progress Report** - A condition of approval is that you submit a Progress Report to the Committee annually throughout the approval period, to cover activities of the previous calendar year and is due on **12 February**. Failure to submit a progress report may result in the withdrawal of Human Ethics approval. A Final Report will be due within 6 months of the expiry date of the approval period. The Report Form is available from <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/human.htm>. Please note that your application has been reviewed by a sub-committee of the FHEC in the interest of facilitating a decision before the next committee meeting. The decision will require ratification by the full Human Ethics Committee and, as a consequence, approval may be withdrawn or conditions of the approval altered. However, you may commence your project prior to ratification of the approval decision and you will be notified if the approval status is altered.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your project, please contact your supervisor (if you are a student) in the first instance, the Secretary Ms Joan Freeman, ([j.freeman@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:j.freeman@latrobe.edu.au)) or the Chairperson Dr Ramon Lewis ([r.lewis@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:r.lewis@latrobe.edu.au)).

On behalf of the Committee, best wishes with the success of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Freeman  
Executive Secretary, Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee.

cc: Chair: Supervisor/s Dr P. Heywood

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