

EFL Teachers' Cognitions and Practices of Professional Development in The Context of Curriculum Reform in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: *In the context of global integration, Vietnam has implemented significant reforms in its English language teaching (ELT) to adopt modern teaching methods and improve learners' communicative competence. The effectiveness of these reforms largely depends on teachers' ability to adapt their teaching practices. This paper reviews EFL teachers' cognitions and practices of professional development in the context of curriculum reforms in Vietnam. Adopting a systematic review approach, the study utilizes keyword-based searches across major academic databases (such as ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar and EBSCO). The study selects 21 academic papers which were peer-reviewed, conducted in the context of Vietnam and published from 2017 to 2024 across various journals and international conference proceedings. The findings from these studies are analysed and synthesized in terms of teachers' perceptions, the use of innovative teaching methods, integration of information and communication technologies (ICT), and assessment practices. Results indicate a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices, showing both alignment and discrepancies. Overall, the findings highlight the need for professional development programs that address teachers' specific needs and challenges, aiming to bridge the gap between educational policy and what actually takes place in the classroom.*

KEYWORDS: Cognitions, curriculum reforms, EFL teachers, practices, professional development, Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and educational modernization, Vietnam's educational system, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), has gone through a remarkable evolution. English has now become an important foreign language to Vietnam's socio-economic development (Nguyen, 2017). This transformation ensures that English competency can open doors to global conversations and economic opportunities.

Vietnam's 2020 National Foreign Language Project has brought changes to the curriculum, focusing on strengthening English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. These changes focus on developing communicative abilities, bringing technology into classrooms, and shifting from conventional grammar-translation approaches (Pham & Doan, 2020). Such transformations require teachers to completely rethink their

pedagogical practices to foster more dynamic and learner-focused educational settings.

For these changes to work well, EFL teachers need to keep growing professionally. Indeed, teachers need to master not only the language but also new teaching methods, curriculum planning, testing approaches, and ways to use technology effectively (Le, 2018). It is necessary for teachers to stay up-to-date with the educational developments to deliver lessons successfully (Tran, 2019).

Despite progress, some challenges continue to exist, especially in teacher training and sharing resources. Vu and Burns (2014) noted that many English teachers in Vietnam received training which prioritizes grammar and vocabulary, often overlooks crucial oral and listening capabilities. The transition toward communicative language instruction requires a fundamental shift in both methodology and perspective.

Ongoing professional development (PD) is key to bridging the gap between what education policies aim for and what actually happens in classrooms. Bui *et al.* (2017) observed a gap between theoretical curriculum reforms and their actual classroom application. Thus, professional development needs to address what Vietnamese EFL teachers specifically need while maintaining alignment with broader curriculum goals.

As Vietnam's education system goes through major changes, particularly in high school English teaching, governmental curriculum reforms seek to enhance English proficiency and meet international educational standards. However, the adaptation process of Vietnamese EFL high school teachers to these reforms, regarding their understanding and implementation, remains relatively unexplored.

The success of any curriculum change fundamentally depends on teachers, who create the learning environment and choose teaching strategies. Nguyen (2017) emphasizes that teachers are not simply knowledge transmitters but are essential to the learning journey. However, many EFL teachers, educated within conventional systems, face significant difficulties adapting to the new communicative approaches mandated by reforms (Vu & Burns, 2014). This mismatch creates significant obstacles.

PD plays a vital role; however, Le (2018) highlights that Vietnamese EFL teachers often do not get enough training opportunities that align with what the curriculum demands. These limitations often result in reforms being implemented superficially, making it harder to achieve the goal of improving students' English skills

In light of this, this study aims to consolidate and evaluate current research examining Vietnamese EFL teachers' cognitive processes and professional development approaches in relation to recent English curriculum modifications. The investigation specifically focuses on finding the answers to the following research questions:

1. What are EFL school teachers' cognitions of professional development in response to the English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam?

2. What are EFL teachers' practices of professional development in response to the English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam in terms of

- a. the innovation of teaching methodologies?
- b. the ICT integration in English teaching?
- c. the innovation of testing and assessment?

3. How is the alignment between EFL school teachers' cognitions and practices of professional development in response to English language curriculum reform?

By investigating these aspects, this review could provide insights into the complex relationship between curriculum reform, teacher cognition, and professional development in the Vietnamese context. The findings could help to inform better PD programs for EFL teachers, ensuring they have the necessary tools to adapt to curriculum changes. This is crucial for enhancing the quality of English language instruction in Vietnamese high schools and facilitating successful curriculum reform implementation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher's Professional Development

2.1.1. Concepts of Professional Development

In the field of education, the term professional development (PD) refers to a complex, continuous process aimed at enhancing educators' knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve student learning. This view by Guskey (2000) challenged the traditional conception of PD as isolated training sessions, considering PD as a sustained approach that fosters ongoing growth among teachers. Building on this, Desimone (2009) identified five important characteristics of effective PD including content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. These elements ensure that PD is relevant, engaging, consistent, sufficiently long, and collaborative for lasting improvements in teaching.

Further emphasizing the connection between PD and student achievement, Wei *et al.* (2009) argued that PD activities should directly address classroom challenges and be closely linked to student learning to improve student outcomes. In the 2010s, the focus shifted towards integrating

new technologies and pedagogical strategies into PD. Hunzicker (2011) stressed the necessity for ongoing PD to keep educators effective in the ever-evolving landscape of education.

Overall, over the past few decades, the concept of PD in education has transformed from a series of isolated training events to a continuous, collaborative, and reflective process that supports improved teaching practices and enhances student success.

2.1.2. Operational Definitions of Professional Development in Teaching Practice

The English language curriculum reform in Vietnam indicated a communicative, student-centred approach to enhance students' language proficiency and practical skills. This shift required changes in teaching methods, assessments, and technology use, challenging teachers to adapt professionally. To address these demands, Vietnamese English teachers have engaged in ongoing PD through workshops and training. These sessions emphasize interactive methods like flipped classrooms, cooperative learning, and real-world tasks, often including demonstrations and hands-on activities to help teachers apply and reflect on new approaches (Pham & Ho, 2022).

Besides, other factors such as collaboration among teachers, technology and reflective practice have also been taken as critical activities for PD. Actually, teachers form learning communities and networks to share ideas, materials, and support each other. They meet regularly, both face-to-face and online, to discuss challenges and find solutions together (Nguyen, 2021). Technology has also expanded professional learning opportunities. Many teachers use online resources and social media groups focused on English teaching to stay updated. This allows them to choose learning activities that fit their needs and teaching contexts (Le, 2020). According to Tran (2019), reflective practice has become another key part of development. Teachers keep journals, conduct action research, and engage in discussions with peers to evaluate and improve their teaching methods. Schools

support these efforts by providing resources, time, and funding for professional development activities. They also recognize teachers' growth in evaluations, encouraging continuous learning (Hoang, 2021).

While Guskey (2000) and Desimone (2009) provide a robust theoretical framework for effective PD, a contradiction emerges when applying these Western-centric models to the Vietnamese context. Pham and Ho (2022) note that while Vietnamese teachers engage in workshops, these often remain top-down in nature, creating a tension between the collective participation praised by Desimone (2009) and the hierarchical educational culture of Vietnam. Furthermore, although Wei *et al.* (2009) argue that PD must link directly to student outcomes, Nguyen (2021) highlights a methodological gap: most PD in Vietnam focuses on what teachers do rather than how they think, leaving a disconnect between reform policy and classroom reality.

2.2. Teacher Cognition of Professional Development

2.2.1. Definitions of Cognition

Cognition refers to the mental processes involved in acquiring and understanding knowledge through thinking, experience and the senses. Neisser (1967) described cognition as all processes that transform, store and use sensory input. This definition emphasizes cognition's key role in learning and adapting by processing sensory information. Additionally, cognitive processes develop over time and are not fixed. Piaget's (1952) theory explains how cognition progresses through stages from infancy to adulthood as people engage with their environment. More recent views recognize that cognition is influenced by emotions and social factors. Damasio (1994) stated that emotions affect decision-making and reasoning, while Vygotsky (1978) through his sociocultural theory stressed that cognitive development is shaped by social interactions, culture, and language. According to Sternberg (2003), cognition includes how the mind represents and processes information, covering functions such as perception, attention, memory, language, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Overall, cognition is a complex, dynamic process essential for learning, thinking and adapting throughout life.

2.2.2 Conceptual Domains of Teacher Cognition

Teacher cognition refers to the beliefs, knowledge and thinking processes that teachers bring to their teaching practice. Borg (2003) describes it as the internal, often unobservable, mental activity that shapes how teachers make decisions and behave in the classroom.

Several factors are found to make up teacher cognition. Shulman (1986) introduced pedagogical content knowledge as an important factor that combines subject knowledge and teaching methods, helping teachers present material in ways that students can understand and engage with. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes also play a major role in shaping their teaching. Pajares (1992) highlights that what teachers believe about learning and their students affects their instructional choices and classroom interactions. Schön (1983) explains reflective practice as a crucial process of teacher cognition where teachers think critically about their teaching experiences to improve and develop new strategies. From another perspective, Shavelson and Stern (1981) consider decision-making as a continuous part of teacher cognition. They believe that teachers often make quick, complex decisions based on student needs and educational goals. A teacher's professional identity influences their approach to teaching. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) argue that this identity evolves over time and shapes how teachers interpret their role and educational practices.

In summary, teacher cognition encompasses the beliefs, knowledge, reflective practices, decision-making, and professional identity that collectively shape teachers' instructional decisions and teaching styles.

2.2.3. Teacher Cognition of Professional Development in Response to the English Language Curriculum Reform

PD plays a crucial role in shaping teacher cognition and facilitating the implementation of English language curriculum reforms. Research

shows that effective PD programs support teachers in rethinking their teaching methods to match new curriculum goals (Avalos, 2011). These programs should offer continuous, relevant learning opportunities that encourage teachers to reflect on their practices and adopt new teaching strategies (Guskey, 2002). Additionally, PD must consider teachers' individual needs, experiences, beliefs, and teaching environments to engage them meaningfully with reform efforts (Desimone, 2009). By focusing on these areas, PD can deeply influence teacher cognition, resulting in lasting improvements in teaching practices that align well with curriculum changes.

2.3. English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam

2.3.1. Objectives of the English Language Curriculum Reform

The English Language Curriculum Reform (ELCR) aims to update language education to meet the changing needs of learners in today's globalized world. Its main goal is to improve language proficiency as well as effective communication skills for cultural and professional settings (Canale & Swain, 1980). Actually, it aims to build communicative competence beyond grammar and vocabulary. This includes linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic skills to communicate appropriately in real-life situations.

The reform also emphasizes cultural awareness and intercultural communication. According to Kramsch (1993), language learning is intrinsically linked to cultural understanding. Therefore, ELCR needs to help learners appreciate and engage with different cultures, an important skill globally. Additionally, ELCR integrates higher-order thinking skills like critical thinking and problem-solving into language learning in order to enhance learners' ability to analyse, evaluate, and create information (Grabe & Stoller, 1997).

Using technology in language teaching is another important goal. Technology is seen not just as a tool but as a way to make learning more interactive and engaging (Bax, 2003). Incorporating technology in language teaching is to support and enhance the language learning process. Finally, ELCR highlights the importance

of ongoing PD for teachers, ensuring they can effectively apply new methods and content for the success of curriculum reform (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

2.3.2. Student Learning Outcomes of the English Language Curriculum Reform

The Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) of the ELCR are what learners are expected to achieve through the updated curriculum. These outcomes align with global language and communication standards, aiming to prepare students for effective communication in a multilingual world. Therefore, a key SLO is improved linguistic proficiency. Cummins (2000) highlights that strong skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening are essential for academic and professional success. The reform promotes these skills through innovative teaching methods and rich language exposure. Another important outcome is communicative competence defined by Canale and Swain (1980) as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in different settings. It covers linguistic skills as well as sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic abilities to handle diverse communication situations. Cultural competence is also emphasized by Byram (1997). He believes that understanding and respecting cultural differences enable learners to interact successfully with people from various backgrounds. Therefore, the curriculum needs to integrate cultural learning to build global awareness. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are vital SLOs as well. According to Binkley *et al.* (2012), these skills help learners analyse and create information to prepare them for complex real-life challenges. Finally, digital literacy is recognized as an essential element of the reform because technology use in language learning can support students to develop communication skills in today's digital world (Warschauer, 2004).

2.3.3. Educational Methodologies of the English Language Curriculum Reform

The ELCR in Vietnam introduces innovative educational methods to improve English proficiency and teaching effectiveness. Moving

away from traditional, teacher-centred ways, the reform promotes interactive, student-focused learning. A key method is communicative language teaching which encourages students to use English for real communication rather than just memorizing grammar and vocabulary. This approach helps learners practice language skills in everyday situations (Nguyen, 2011). Tran (2013) adds cooperative learning as another important strategy of the ELCR. It requires students to work in small groups to complete tasks together. This not only improves language skills but also builds teamwork and communication abilities. The reform also supports blended learning, combining classroom teaching with online resources. This mix offers flexible, diverse learning opportunities, allowing students to study both inside and outside the classroom (Le & Nguyen, 2014). Using authentic materials like newspapers, films, and websites is emphasized to expose students to real-life language and culture, making learning more meaningful (Bui, 2012). Finally, formative assessment plays a vital role in ELCR. Instead of relying mainly on final exams, ongoing assessments provide continuous feedback, helping students improve throughout their learning journey (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). This approach supports a more complete understanding of student progress.

2.3.4. Assessment of Learning Outcomes of the English Language Curriculum Reform

The assessment of learning outcomes in ELCR has shifted towards more comprehensive evaluation methods. Actually, methods like formative assessments facilitate continuous feedback (Le, 2017) and performance-based assessments reflect students' actual language abilities (Nguyen, 2015). Additionally, assessing intercultural competence and incorporating peer and self-assessment methods promote learner autonomy (Pham & Hamid, 2019).

The assessment of learning outcomes in the English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam represents a significant paradigm shift towards comprehensive, learner-centred evaluation methodologies. This transformation is crucial for measuring the reformed curriculum's

effectiveness in developing students' English proficiency and communicative competence. Firstly, the reform emphasizes formative assessment over traditional summative approaches. Le (2017) articulates how ongoing evaluation provides continuous feedback, enabling students to monitor their progress and identify areas for improvement. This aligns with the curriculum's communicative focus and interactive nature. Besides, performance-based assessments have become integral to the evaluation process. According to Nguyen (2015), assessments including presentations, projects, and group discussions, authentically evaluate students' practical language abilities in real-world contexts. Assessment of intercultural communicative competence is also emphasized by Tran (2018) because it can help measure students' ability to navigate cross-cultural interactions effectively, reflecting the increasingly globalized nature of communication. Furthermore, peer and self-assessment methods have been integrated into the curriculum. According to Pham and Hamid (2019), these approaches foster learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning process while developing a deeper understanding of educational objectives.

There is a consensus among Le (2017) and Nguyen (2015) regarding the theoretical benefits of formative and performance-based assessment. However, a critical divergence exists between reform mandates and teacher practice. While Pham and Hamid (2019) advocate for learner autonomy through self-assessment, the existence of high-stakes national examinations in Vietnam often forces teachers to revert to traditional summative methods. This suggests that the assessment shift remains more conceptual than practical.

2.4. Research Gaps

Despite the extensive literature on the theoretical frameworks of PD and the stated objectives of Vietnam's English Language Curriculum Reform, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of studies on both teachers' cognition and their practice. While Borg (2003)

and Pajares (1992) establish that teacher cognition is the primary driver of classroom behaviour, existing studies in Vietnam focus heavily on describing PD activities (e.g., workshops, journals) rather than the underlying cognitive shifts of the teachers involved. There is a lack of evidence regarding how PD actually reshapes a teacher's internal belief system to move away from traditional grammar-translation methods. Much of the current research (e.g., Tran, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2014) is descriptive or localized to specific institutions. There is a notable absence of systematic reviews that synthesize the experiences of EFL teachers across different reform stages, particularly regarding the mismatch between mandated communicative goals and the practical constraints of the Vietnamese classroom.

3. Research Methodology

This paper employed a systematic review methodology to synthesize existing research on EFL teachers' cognitions and practices of PD within the specific context of curriculum reform in Vietnam. The review process followed a structured approach, encompassing several key stages.

Firstly, a comprehensive search strategy was developed, utilizing relevant keywords and search terms such as EFL teachers, professional development, teacher cognition, curriculum reform, Vietnam, English language teaching, and their Vietnamese equivalents. These terms were applied across prominent academic databases, including ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar and EBSCO. These platforms were selected for their extensive indexing of educational research, linguistics, and social sciences to ensure a wide-ranging retrieval of global scholarly standards and localized Southeast Asian pedagogical studies. About 790 records were found containing these terms.

For the latest review, the research targets papers published in academic journals or proceedings of the international conferences that have been published in the range of eight years from 2017 to 2024. A screening process was then conducted, involving the review of titles and abstracts. The retrieved records were assessed,

resulting in the exclusion of 712 papers due to lack of relevance to the Vietnamese context or topic focus. Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused on EFL contexts outside of Vietnam; (2) targeted pre-service teachers rather than in-service professionals; (3) were published in non-peer-reviewed formats; or (4) lacked empirical data regarding the relationship between cognition and practice. These criteria ensured the synthesis remained focused on the actual implementation of curriculum reform. The remaining 78 papers underwent a careful full-text review to determine the eligibility of each study. A final total of 21 papers were ultimately selected for data extraction to achieve the research objectives.

After that, data extraction was performed, systematically recording relevant information from the selected studies, including research design, sample characteristics, data collection methods, key findings, and theoretical frameworks.

To ensure consistency and reliability during this process, the reviewer rechecked the data extraction form of three papers. Furthermore, inter-rater reliability was ensured by having another reviewer independently extract data from three other papers. The high agreement rate confirmed the reliability of the extraction protocol. Any disagreements were resolved through a consensus meeting.

Finally, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyse and synthesize the extracted data, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to EFL teachers' cognitions and practices of professional development within the context of curriculum reform in Vietnam. This process facilitated the development of a clear and comprehensive picture of the research landscape, showing key trends, gaps, and implications for future research and practice.

4. Findings

4.1. EFL Teachers' Cognitions of Professional Development in Response to the English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam

Perceived Importance of Professional Development

Recent studies have highlighted the

perspectives of EFL teachers on PD within the context of Vietnam's ELCR. Le and Ho (2022) found that high school EFL teachers in central Vietnam recognize the importance of skill development and staying updated with current educational trends. Similarly, Nguyen *et al.* (2022) reported that primary school teachers also view ongoing learning as essential for effectively performing their roles. At the university level, Le (2020) observed that EFL lecturers are aware of the need to continuously enhance their skills to adapt to the new curriculum changes. Together, these studies underscore a shared understanding among Vietnamese EFL educators across different educational levels regarding the critical role of continuous PD. This emphasis on lifelong learning reflects their commitment to improving teaching practices and successfully implementing curriculum reforms.

Desired Professional Development Activities

Research shows that EFL teachers in Vietnam have clear preferences for PD activities that support their growth and align with curriculum reforms. Teachers highly value collaborative learning and peer support (Duong, 2021; Huynh, 2018; Nguyen & Pham, 2018; Truong *et al.*, 2021). Le and Ho's study (2022) highlights the importance of professional networks, where teachers share experiences and deepen their understanding of English-speaking cultures and appropriate teaching materials. Similarly, Nguyen *et al.* (2022) find that teachers appreciate practical, relevant PD opportunities involving hands-on activities and peer interactions within learning communities. EFL lecturers also recognize the need for ongoing training in teaching strategies and classroom management to implement curriculum changes effectively (Le, 2020). Overall, these findings emphasize teachers' strong interest in collaborative, reflective, and contextually tailored PD programs. To sustain motivation and meet diverse needs, studies recommend diversifying PD content and scheduling, ensuring activities are practical, culturally relevant, and supportive of professional growth across all educational levels.

4.2. EFL Teachers' Practices of Professional Development in Response to the English Language Curriculum Reform in Vietnam

The reform of the English language curriculum in Vietnam has prompted various studies examining EFL teachers' practices of PD. These studies have focused on three main areas: innovative teaching methodologies, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) integration in English teaching, and the innovation of testing and assessment methods.

Innovation of Teaching Methodologies

Several studies have highlighted the implementation of innovative teaching methodologies by EFL teachers in response to curriculum reform. For instance, studies conducted by Tran *et al.* (2021), Bui and Newton (2022), and Tran and Nguyen (2020) indicate a shift toward task-based language teaching and learner-centred approaches. These methodologies also include an increased emphasis on communicative language teaching strategies, as noted by Phan and Hoang (2017).

The findings from these studies help to confirm the changes of teachers' practices to match the objectives of the curriculum reform. Despite their efforts to innovate their teaching methods, EFL teachers face several challenges such as time constraints and fear of criticism. These factors limit their ability to implement innovative practices effectively. Additionally, researchers noticed that teachers spent more time experimenting with different teaching methods rather than bringing new content into their lessons (Tran *et al.*, 2021).

ICT Integration in English Teaching

The integration of ICT in English teaching has gained interest from many researchers. Although Nguyen *et al.* (2022) did not go into great detail, they mentioned the existence of online teacher professional learning communities, showing a certain level of ICT integration in PD practices. Studies by Huynh *et al.* (2018), Badoni and Vu (2024), and Nguyen (2021) also highlight teachers' engagement in integrating ICT across various educational contexts, from primary schools to universities.

However, the level of implementation varies

among different teaching contexts. For example, Huynh *et al.* (2018) reported that while 200 primary teachers increased their use of ICT, a majority (72%) were identified as low-level users, predominantly employing a direct teaching style. In contrast, Badoni and Vu (2024) found that high school EFL teachers used a diverse range of ICT tools, with a particular focus on social media platforms, language learning applications, and online dictionaries. Interestingly, these teachers were even diving into digital tools like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies.

Moreover, online testing is becoming more popular although traditional paper assessments still persist. A study on university teachers revealed that EFL teachers integrated ICT confidently, blending it with traditional methods, which improved students' learning experiences. It can be concluded that while teachers recognize the engagement potential of ICT, they encounter resource and training gaps. Therefore, there is a need for software specifically designed for English language teaching and updated training programs, as well as for policies to support ICT integration in teaching practices, considering both what teachers are ready for and what they miss in terms of resources and training.

Innovation of Testing and Assessment

The studies conducted by Ha *et al.* (2021) and Nguyen (2020) investigated teachers' beliefs and practices regarding assessment in the context of curriculum reform. Ha *et al.* (2021) on testing documents found that high-stakes exams were widely employed, which significantly influenced teachers' beliefs about assessment. This reliance on high-stakes testing has led to an emphasis on linguistic elements within both the assessed content and assessment formats.

In contrast, Nguyen's study (2020) showed that while teachers acknowledged the value of alternative assessments, they perceived these methods as time-consuming and challenging. This perception resulted in a less favourable view regarding the feasibility of implementing alternative assessments. Moreover, the teachers expressed limited belief in the effectiveness of these methods for enhancing students'

proficiency, so they did not often use alternative assessments, especially when their students were at different levels and they had a lot of workload pressures.

Additionally, Badoni and Vu's study (2024) indicated a growing trend of online assessments, despite the use of paper tests. It also showed that teachers were finding new ways to test and assess students in response to the ongoing changes.

The research findings illustrate a complex landscape of EFL teachers' professional development practices in Vietnam in light of the ELCR. Despite significant shifts towards innovative methodologies and ICT integration, there are still challenges limiting effective implementation. Teachers need better support, more resources, and additional training to keep up with the evolving educational demands.

4.3. Alignment between EFL Teachers' Cognitions and Practices of Professional Development in Response to English Language Curriculum Reform

In the evolving landscape of ELCR in Vietnam, the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices has emerged as a crucial area of investigation. This paper synthesizes findings from various studies on this complex interplay.

Alignment of Cognitions and Practices

Research indicates that when EFL teachers' beliefs align with learner-centred approaches, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), they are more likely to use these methods effectively in class. Tran and Nguyen (2020) found that teachers who truly believe in a teaching method are more likely to implement it in their classrooms. Furthermore, Nguyen (2022) found that teachers express confidence in their ability to integrate ICT to enhance learning outcomes.

Gaps between Cognitions and Practices

Despite evidence of alignment, some studies still show the gap between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. Ha *et al.* (2021) identified this disconnect in assessment practices, where teachers tended to prioritize high-stakes exams over more curriculum-aligned assessment methods. Similarly, Nguyen (2020) found some teachers knew different ways of

testing could be valuable but were not keen on using them. Duong (2021) showed that while teachers thought reflecting on their teaching was important, they found it hard to actually do it. Ha and Murray (2023) also found that even though teachers preferred certain ways of giving feedback, they mostly stuck to simply correcting students' mistakes in class. Recent studies by Le and Ho (2022) and Nguyen (2022) found that while teachers know how important professional development and using technology are, they often do not have enough resources to put their knowledge into practice.

Changes in Cognitions and Practices over Time

PD programs can help bridge these gaps by changing teachers' beliefs and practices. Ha and Murray (2021) found that these programs could help teachers better understand and apply modern language teaching research. Long-term studies, such as Phan and Hoang (2017), show how teachers' beliefs and methods improve when they get ongoing support through professional development. Nguyen (2022) also found that teachers were happy to try new technology in their teaching when they had the right tools and training.

In summary, although there are some alignment between EFL teachers' cognitions and practices, substantial gaps can be found especially in assessment and reflective practices. However, PD programs and support can facilitate positive changes in both cognitions and practices over time. Research shows that teachers' belief strongly affects their practice, but the difference between what they want to do and what they actually do still shows gaps. Addressing these gaps is key to improving English teaching quality in Vietnam.

5. Implications

These findings emphasize that education leaders need to create PD programs tailored to the professional requirements of EFL teachers and to consider the actual difficulties posed by the curriculum reform in Vietnam. PD frameworks should focus on sustained collaborative and reflective PD that promotes alignment

with learner-centred approaches and task-based language teaching and communicative approaches. Furthermore, it is also necessary to promote effective ICT integration and alternative assessment methods to address teachers' concerns through ongoing training and adequate resources. Scheduling professional development activities should be carefully planned to minimize teachers' workload, while the training content should be designed to enhance their cultural understanding. By addressing the mismatches between cognitions and practices, Vietnam can significantly increase the quality of English language education and ensure the successful implementation of its curriculum reforms. Further research should continue to investigate the long-term impacts of PD programs and the evolving role of technology in EFL teaching in Vietnam.

6. Conclusions

This systematic review synthesizes research on Vietnamese EFL teachers' cognitions and professional development (PD) practices in light of recent ELCRs. The findings indicate that EFL teachers generally possess positive beliefs about PD. They recognise the importance of PD for their skill enhancement and career growth. They

particularly favour learning from each other and sharing experiences, and they understand how important it is to connect with their teaching community and understand English speaking countries' culture. While teachers are trying new teaching methods such as task-based language teaching and learner-centred approaches, they encounter challenges including time constraints and fear of criticism. Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) is also notable, with teachers expressing confidence in using various tools despite facing resource limitations.

The review shows both alignment and gaps between teachers' cognitions and practices, particularly in assessment and reflective teaching. PD programs have the potential to fix these differences over time. Therefore, educational policymakers should create training programs that address EFL teachers' specific needs, focusing on collaborative learning, cultural understanding, and practical methodologies. Investment in ICT infrastructure and alternative assessments is necessary to support teachers. By addressing these gaps, Vietnam can improve the quality of English language education and effectively implement curriculum reforms.

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