

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL  
STUDIES, HUE UNIVERSITY**

**NGUYỄN THỊ NGỌC UYÊN**

**MAINTAINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: THE  
CASE OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE  
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY THESIS IN THEORY AND  
METHODOLOGY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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Supervisor  
**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pham Thi Hong Nhung**

**HUE, 2022**

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO  
ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ**

**NGUYỄN THỊ NGỌC UYÊN**

**NGHIÊN CỨU VIỆC DUY TRÌ NĂNG LỰC NGOẠI NGỮ CỦA  
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**HUE, NĂM 2022**

## DECLARATION

I certify that the current dissertation entitled:

**“Maintaining English language proficiency: The case of upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam”** for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in theory and methodology in English language teaching, is the result of my own research, and to the best of my knowledge, contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree in any institute, college, or university, and not previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

Signature:

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the Central Highlands EFL teachers' language proficiency maintenance since they finished the formal training workshops held by authorized universities. EFL teachers' perceptions of the necessity and effectiveness of the national large-scale English language proficiency training to their teaching was explored. Changes they perceived in teaching practices after participating in the training workshops and strategies implemented to maintain the achieved level of English language proficiency by EFL teachers at upper secondary schools in the Central Highland of Vietnam were also investigated. The study employed a mixed-methods approach with a concurrent research design and content-based data analysis. One hundred and fifty EFL teachers, having participated in the ELP training workshop(s) and achieved the CEFR-C1 level as professional standards by authorized universities, participated in the study. The data collection was based on the questionnaire, reflective report and interview. The analysis of the three different data sources and the triangulation of the data helped create an advanced level of emergent contents. Overall, findings have indicated that the more than 90% of the EFL teachers agreed that their language knowledge and skills were well improved after the training apart from the quantified evaluation-the CEFR-C1 level. English language proficiency training workshops were believed to be necessary and important for teachers' language proficiency improvement and maintenance. After the training, the EFL teachers perceived changes in teaching practices, and they were aware of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency. While many EFL teachers acknowledged struggles to improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency, they made efforts to handle difficulties and challenges to implement different strategies to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. There were six strategies identified as the most commonly implemented by the teachers for their language proficiency maintenance. On the basis of the findings, practical implications have been made to increase the sustainability of professional development for upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands. The study has proposed a blueprint for future policies on language proficiency training and post-training activities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, and other areas with the same context can perhaps benefit from.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BA</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>CD</b>	Compact Disc
<b>CERF</b>	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>DOET</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>EFL</b>	English as a foreign language
<b>ELP</b>	English language proficiency
<b>FL</b>	Foreign language
<b>ICT</b>	Information communication technology
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>L1</b>	First language
<b>L2</b>	Second language
<b>LP</b>	Language proficiency
<b>LPD</b>	Language proficiency development
<b>LPM</b>	Language proficiency maintenance
<b>LT</b>	Language teacher
<b>M</b>	Mean
<b>MA</b>	Master of Arts
<b>MOET</b>	(Vietnamese) Ministry of Education and Training
<b>PD</b>	Professional Development
<b>SD</b>	Standard Deviation
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
<b>TL</b>	Target language
<b>TPD</b>	Teacher professional development
<b>VSTEP</b>	Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*The present study investigates upper secondary school teachers' maintaining their achieved level of proficiency. This chapter serves as an introduction to the thesis. It first presents the background to the study and then moves on to the statement of the research problem. The chapter continues with the aim and research questions that are followed by the significance of the study. The last part of this chapter shows how the whole thesis is organized.*

### **1.1. The setting of the study**

The English language proficiency of foreign language (FL) teachers has been of considerable interest in many non-native English speaking countries including Vietnam (Baker, 2008; Butler, 2004; Elder, 2008; Ellis, 2005; Freeman, Katz, Gomez & Burns, 2015; Kim & Le & Renandya, 2017; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Pham, 2017; Pham, 2018; Richards, 2017). The ELP of teachers in EFL teaching context plays a critical role because EFL teacher is not only the linguistic model for students but provides them with main source of target language (TL) input (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Moreover, for EFL teachers, not only language proficiency (LP) but pedagogical knowledge and skills are crucial professional development (PD) areas as well (Freeman et al., 2015; Richards, 2017). According to Pham (2017), language teacher's responsibilities and qualities are expected to be standardized and continuously improve because they are considered an important factor to enhance students' English proficiency in order to use it as an international language.

In Vietnam, since the implementation of the National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (Project 2020), the ELP level of language teachers has been promulgated in Vietnamese government policy (Government of Vietnam, 2008). Upper secondary school EFL teachers are required to reach the CEFR-C1 level of English as described in Circular N0 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT on the 24th of January in 2014, promulgating the use of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (MOET, 2014). The enhancement of ELP and pedagogical skills for EFL teachers is one of the major goals of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam (MOET, 2008; MOET, 2017). Noticeably, an important framework for FL teachers in Vietnam has been issued by the MOET at the Dispatch No.2069/BGDDT-NGCBCBGD dated on 11/6/2020. In this framework, EFL teachers are expected to own five distinct

competences: the competences to use the TL in teaching, to apply teaching approaches and methods to teaching, to make use of learners' characteristics in teaching, to develop values in teaching a FL, and to apply general knowledge of teaching contexts into language classrooms. Among these competences, the competence of using the TL is ranked first.

Large-scale ELP training held as part of Project 2020 has a substantial influence on the EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Thanks to it, most teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces were assessed and trained in ELP programs for the target set of the level of C1 in CEFR. The training workshops were particularly designed for upper secondary school EFL teachers to develop and achieve at least one higher level of proficiency after the training. The training workshops consisted of both online and onsite training types, which suggested about 400 guided learning hours to advance from one level of proficiency to the next. Before the training, the teacher trainees took a placement test and were identified to have the CEFR-B2. When the training workshop ended, these trainees took part in the exam by the training institutes and they were among the ones who obtained the CEFR-C1 level. According to the statistics in the annual reports in 2017 by the Departments of Education and Training (DOETs) in Gia Lai and Kon Tum, the number of upper secondary school EFL teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum, who had participated in the ELP training workshops held by the DOETs were about 146 out of 198 (74%) and 63 out of 80 (79%), respectively (DOET, 2017).

Together with ELP training workshops, since 2017, each year, about one hundred teachers from upper secondary schools in Gia Lai and Kon Tum, who had achieved the CEFR C1 level, have been selected by the DOETs to participate in short-term LP improvement workshops as part of PD which were held annually by authorized universities. Many short-term PD activities for EFL teachers were held by authorized universities through ELTeach program of Cengage National Geographic Learning in many forms of seminars, meetings, training workshops, and presentations at national and international conferences, etc.,. Those workshops emphasized TPD regarding their ability to socialize and communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom. In such workshops, EFL teachers were trained in skills such as teaching techniques, curriculum development, and assessment. In addition, teacher

trainees had opportunities to access online teaching resources provided by authorized universities to support their LP improvement and to network with colleagues, which might affect their teaching practices.

While Project 2020 aims to organize many training workshops to deal with teachers' ELP and their PD, there has been a limited number of research exploring the effectiveness of post-training activities in Vietnam, specifically teachers' language proficiency maintenance (LPM) after finishing formal training workshops. Therefore, it would be helpful to investigate teachers' LPM after finishing the formal training workshops.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

The language proficiency of language teachers in EFL contexts is a key component of their professionalism because EFL teachers' LP is the main source of language input that is considered as an essential principle for effective instructed language learning (Ellis, 2005; Freeman et al., 2015; Kim & Elder, 2008; Le & Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2017). Given EFL teachers achieve a standardized level of LP, LPM is necessary for EFL teachers since "regardless of the skills and knowledge that FL teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process" (Peyton, 1997, p.4). However, in Vietnam in general and in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in particular, little seems to be done to explore in-service EFL teachers' LPM as well as strategies they implement to maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

Maintaining the achieved level of LP in a non-speaking English circumstance like Vietnam, where most people do not use English in their daily life and where English native speakers are hardly available for learners to communicate, may not be a very easy job. Once EFL teachers have passed the standardized test and achieved the required level of LP by the MOET, they would not need to retake the test, which might discourage them from putting forth the effort to implement activities to maintain their LP (MOET, 2017). More importantly, the geographical traits and rural working conditions might deprive them of opportunities for co-constructing knowledge and skills. There are few opportunities for EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam to communicate with native speakers.

This may be explained that in 2020, there were sixty-five foreign workers coming from 26 different countries around the world living in working in Gia Lai province according to Report No 10/BC-SLĐTBXH dated 19th January 2021 by the Department of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs in Gia Lai on the foreign workers working in Gia Lai province in 2020. Also, EFL teachers do not usually use much English in their teaching practices due to students' low and heterogeneous levels of language proficiency within one classroom. Last but not least, family issues, job commitments, and low incomes may make it challenging for them to invest more time in their LP improvement and maintenance. Therefore, by employing a mixed-methods approach, this research is believed to provide unique insights into Central Highlands EFL upper secondary school teachers' perceptions of the formal ELP training as part of PD for their LPM, their perceptions of changes in their teaching practices as a result of LP improvement and strategies they implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency, and factors affecting their LPM after leaving the training workshops.

I am a teacher of English who has witnessed the changes and implementation of the national curriculum and been involved in the LP training workshops for in-service EFL teachers at different levels. In the last eight years, having worked as a staff of English at the DOET of Gia Lai, I had opportunities to work closely with upper secondary school teachers for classroom observations and have both formal and informal meetings after the classroom observations. All the above-mentioned roles have given me certain ideas about how LP training workshop(s) and in-service teachers' classroom practices. In other words, my experiences as an EFL teacher, a staff of English, and a researcher have given me a suitable background and strong motivation to complete this thesis.

### **1.3. Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of the study is to investigate upper secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices for their language proficiency development and maintenance. Firstly, it aims to identify the teachers' perceptions of the national-large scale ELP training as part of PD for their LP improvement and maintenance. Secondly, the study aims to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of their participation in the ELP training; and it identifies whether



the teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices bring about their practices of LPM. Lastly, it investigates strategies and activities the teachers implemented to maintain the achieved level of LP. Thus, the present study is designed to answer the overarching research question: What are the teachers' perceptions of and their practices for their language proficiency maintenance and development. This overarching research question generated three sub-questions as follows:

1. What are upper secondary school English language teachers' perceptions of language proficiency training for their language proficiency improvement and maintenance?
2. What changes in teaching practices are perceived by upper secondary school teachers as a result of their language proficiency improvement?
3. What do the teachers do for their language proficiency maintenance?

#### **1.4. Scope of the study**

The primary goal of this study is to investigate strategies and activities EFL teachers at upper secondary schools in the Central Highlands of Vietnam implemented to maintain the achieved level of LP after finishing the formal ELP training workshops. The researcher firstly examines the teachers' perceptions of the formal ELP training as part of PD for their LP improvement and maintenance. Next, the researcher explores the teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices after participating in the ELP training and identifies whether those perceived changes bring about their practices of LPM. All the issues under investigation in the research, therefore, are as perceived by the participants, not as observed by the researcher, even the participants' practices to develop and to maintain their LP.

In particular, the present study looks into teachers' perceptions of the necessity and major impacts of the formal ELP training workshops on EFL teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces that authorized universities mainly held as part of Project 2020. The results of this study are from perceptions of the EFL teachers who had participated in those training workshops and achieved the CEFR C1 level after the training. It does not involve ELP training workshops beyond Project 2020. The scope of the present study is, therefore, limited to ELP training workshops held by authorized universities for EFL teacher LP improvement and development.

Additionally, the research addresses not only the teachers' LPM but also their LP development and improvement.

Secondly, this study focuses on exploring changes (whether or not, what and how, in pronunciation accuracy, and use of vocabulary or grammar) the teachers perceived in their teaching practices after returning from the formal training workshops. Changes perceived by the teachers after the training regarding the language skills, the use of vocabulary or grammar, and the knowledge of phonetics and phonology were taken into consideration since these language knowledge and skills are embedded in the current teaching curriculum at upper secondary school. Thus, changes in the knowledge areas of semantics, morphology, and pragmatics were not explicitly included.

Finally, the research setting is the regional upper secondary schools in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, where the FL teaching and learning context and other socio-economic factors may differ from those of other cities in the country. Therefore, whether the EFL teachers encountered any challenges and how they dealt with those difficulties while making efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency, and their perceptions and practices of LPM may differ from the teachers in regions to regions.

### **1.5. Significance of the study**

While in Vietnam the efforts to improve EFL teachers' LP have been vast and costly on the national level, the effects of those efforts can only be reflected first and foremost by the stakeholders, especially the teachers themselves. This study holds significance in three main areas.

Firstly, although there has been much research in ELP and PD in language education, very few of previous studies were conducted in the settings of mountainous and remote areas. Therefore, from the perspective of academic contribution, this in-depth study has contributed to the literature in these fields. Particularly, the findings of this study highlight the need to refocus existing theories in EFL teacher proficiency maintenance and professional development so that they are more relevant to the teaching of an L2 or FL in other exceptional contexts.

Secondly, as this study relies upon data collected from participants in a specific environment (i.e., highland, disadvantaged area), the research design was chosen to suit the situated nature of the study. A mixed method study was employed, including quantitative and qualitative methods to assure the reliability and validity of the study. A unique feature of mixed methods research is that qualitative and quantitative data are separately collected and analyzed and are then brought together in a final interpretation in what are known as meta-inferences or integrated mixed inferences. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Hence, the main methodological contribution of the study has been the successful use of the mixed-method concurrent strategy that contributes towards the development and interpretation of a comprehensive understanding of EFL teachers' perceptions of ELP training and practices for their LP maintenance.

Thirdly, this study investigates strategies and activities that EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam implemented to maintain their attained level of proficiency and potential factors affecting their LPM. Since EFL teachers' beliefs resulted from factors such as training and PD (Utami, 2016), and EFL teachers' perceptions in teaching are considered as the basis of their confidence and the way they perceive themselves strongly affects their teaching behaviors (Eslami & Harper, 2018; Kamhi-Stien, 2009; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017), this study should benefit EFL students if their teachers can provide them with more supportive EFL learning context and rich in English language input both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, PD activities contribute to teacher's provision of good language models and teacher's maintaining their use of English in the classroom, which scaffolds students' learning language. To ensure the sustainability of professionalism of the EFL teachers, emphasis should be placed on understanding the potential impacts relating to local social-cultural, and geographical traits of teachers, students, and administrators. The findings of the study may provide useful information for both teacher educators and policymakers by providing the teacher with relevant post-training activities as part of PD to facilitate their professionalism. This study, therefore, is an attempt to provide detailed insights into in-service EFL teachers' implementation of activities for their LPM, a top-down language policy from the perspective of the teachers themselves.

## **1.6. Organization of the thesis**

The thesis was structured into six chapters.

Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides an overview of the research that includes such issues as the background of the study and statement of the problem and elaborates on the research aim, the research questions, and its significance.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) provides key terms related to ELP maintenance and its procedures to lay the foundation for the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter 3 (Research Methodology) describes the research design, participants, methodology in terms of approach, method and techniques for data collection, analytical framework, data analysis as well as the issues of research validity and reliability.

Chapter 4 (Findings and Discussion) presents the data analysis of the two types of data consisting of quantitative and qualitative data and findings in response to the research questions formulated. Relevant discussion and interpretations are also provided.

Chapter 5 (Conclusion) summarizes key findings of the study. A number of relevant implications on the basis of these findings are made for on upper secondary school teachers' LPM. It also addresses the shortcomings of the research and suggests topics for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*This chapter critically reviews relevant literature so as to provide the foundation on which the research questions are grounded. It first defines key terms, especially of the teachers' English language proficiency in the field of English language proficiency maintenance. The chapter begins by examining the concepts and the working definitions of the key terms. The chapter ends by providing an overview of in-service teachers' professional development in Vietnam and the English language proficiency of upper secondary school teachers in the Central highlands of Vietnam, where the research gap is identified and stated.*

### **2.1. Definitions of the key terms**

The following list of definitions assists in understanding the study and its data. Those terms were used throughout this study and are currently used in the educational field. Some key terms will also be defined in the coming sections of the literature review, and sources are cited.

#### **2.1.1. Professional development**

In the field of education, the term *professional development* (PD) has been defined in a number of ways. The term PD implies a long training process, involves theory as a background to practice, and suggests a process that enables teachers to become more professional (Dean, 1991). Fullan (2001) states that PD enhances a person's learning experiences, which are formal or informal, throughout his/her career life from the starting point of a profession to retirement. This entails that in PD activities, teachers are assumed to be participants, and are the ones whose qualification is upgraded. According to OECD (2010), PD refers to well-planned activities incorporating training, and continuous professional formation to prepare teachers for their profession. In this sense, this definition implies that PD is a deliberate action taken by teachers and carried out when teachers are on duty so that they can become more competent in their profession.

#### **2.1.2. Teacher professional development**

Like the term *professional development*, the term *teacher professional development* (TPD) is studied and presented in many ways. Hoyle (1982) and Glatthorn (1995) see the concepts of teacher PD differently. Hoyle firstly defined

TPD as “a process in which a teacher continues to develop the knowledge and skills required for effective teaching practices as circumstances change and as new responsibilities are accepted” and secondly as “knowledge acquisition and skill development” (p.164). Meanwhile, Glatthorn (1995) drew attention to the fact that TPD aims to address the individual teacher’s professional growth and enhancement as well as the school and systemic context. Despite being studied and presented differently, those definitions have suggested that teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of increasingly gaining experiences and examining his or her teaching practices systematically.

Seeing TPD as lifelong and a necessary part of teaching, which is highly dependent on both personal and group professional purposes, policy and school settings where they work, Day (1999) explains the concept of TPD as follows:

*[Teacher] Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people, and colleagues critically through each phase of their teaching lives (p.18).*

Day’s definition of TPD has revealed teachers’ lifelong effort to enhance the quality of teaching and their willingness to adjustment in professionalism so that they can perform at their best. In other sense, TPD is a systematic attempt to bring about changes to improve teaching. Guskey (1986) illustrates the change components explicitly: (i) change in the classroom practices of teachers, (ii) change in teacher’s beliefs and attitudes, and (iii) change in the learning outcomes of students. Teachers’ PD is “the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling and dynamic change” (Fullan, 1995, p. 265). There is a common belief that changes in perceptions and thoughts may lead to changes in behaviors but research on TPD (e.g. Pham, 2018) has shown that changes in behaviors and practices can lead to changes in teachers’ perceptions and confidence.

For EFL teachers, the term *professional development* is mainly associated with activities for enhancing LP and teaching methodology (Freeman, 2017). Thus, EFL teacher professional development is defined in this study as all activities, ranging from formal to informal, which teachers consciously engage in so as to enhance their ELP, both general LP and classroom LP, metalinguistic knowledge about English, and methodology of teaching English. Those activities aimed at making teachers become more competent, confident, and comfortable when applying the knowledge and skills they have accumulated in their teaching practices.

In short, the review of PD touches upon on the aim of PD (i.e., to enhance ELP) and the means to achieve that aim (i.e., the activities). In view of the research questions of the current study, PD is used to refer to a process of development encompassing continuing education and training, learning experiences, changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes, changes in perceptions and practices.

## **2.2. English language proficiency**

Many notions of ELP have been discussed from the research in second language acquisition over the last 50 years. First, the concept of ELP can be examined from different aspects. In the early 1980s, LP was used to refer to the actual performance of a learner in a given language, and it involves the mastery of the forms, the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings of those forms, the capacity to use the language with focus mainly on communication and minimum attention to form, and the creativity in language use (Stern, 1983). Later, Bachman (1990) defined LP as “knowledge, competence, and ability in the use of a language, irrespective of how, where, or under what conditions it has been acquired” (p.16).

When it comes to English language education, the concept of ELP can be examined from different aspects. Wylie (1995) describes ELP in terms of four discrete macro-skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), ELP represented in the design and components of LP tests measuring organizational knowledge pertaining to the way in which texts are structured; grammatical knowledge including knowledge of vocabulary, syntax and phonology; textual knowledge, which includes knowledge of cohesion and knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organization; pragmatic knowledge,

related to the communicative goals of the language user and the context in which the language is being used; functional knowledge including an understanding of ideational, manipulative, heuristic and imaginative functions, as well as socio-linguistic knowledge (p. 68).

Hulstijn (2015) defined ELP as “the extent to which an individual possesses the linguistic cognition necessary to function in a given communicative circumstance, in a given modality (listening, speaking, reading, or writing)” (p.242). The proficiency of a language user can be classified into different levels, most commonly, elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. Lately with the spread of a number of global frameworks for references of language (e.g., the CEFR), English language proficiency is divided into 6 different levels, from very basic (A1) to proficient (C2).

### **2.2.1 EFL teachers’ language proficiency**

According to Madsen (1983), teachers’ LP is “the overall mastery of a given language, and how well prepared one is to use that language in a particular setting” (p.6). Elder (2001) proposes a useful definition for teachers’ LP, which includes “normal” language use in formal and informal contexts along with various specialist skills. These specialist skills include subject knowledge, the discourse competence necessary for effective delivery of the lesson content, and even management techniques that draw on language forms that may not be typical of everyday communication (Elder & Kim, 2014). Similarly, according to Freeman et al., (2015), teachers’ LP refers to as “a specific subset of language skills required to prepare and teach lessons” (p. 129).

EFL teachers’ LP includes the ability to provide good language models, to maintain the use of the TL in classroom, to give correct feedback on learner language, and to provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty (Freeman, 2016; Richards, 2011). LP covers the abilities to use the TL fluently and confidently in classroom and to give appropriate feedback on students’ spoken and written tasks (Le & Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2017). In other words, teachers’ ELP refers to not only teachers’ knowledge of English language system but their ability to use English to communicate as well (Hulstijn, 2011).



Analyzing the above definitions and aspects of LP in general and ELP in particular, it is argued that ELP is often associated with the ability to perform, that is, how a person uses English to communicate effectively in real life. However, when it comes to EFL teachers, there is a consensus understanding that LP refers to both their knowledge of English language system and their ability to perform the language as users, analysts, and teachers to both communicate and enact their role as a teacher. This is also the working definition of teachers' LP adopted for this study.

### **2.2.2. English language proficiency maintenance**

Literature on foreign LPM suggests that in a context where English is used mainly inside classrooms, ELP may attrite over time if English is not frequently used or practiced (Schmid, 2011; Schmid & Mehotcheva, 2012). Schmid and Mehotcheva (2012) state that “unlike first and second language, FL acquisition (and presumably FL attrition) is not a linear process” (p. 11). According to Włosowicz (2017), “language attrition can involve the gradual loss of different language skills, not only of accuracy but also of fluency and complexity, which can be assumed to be particularly visible in teachers whose contact with English is limited mainly to teaching” (p.80).

Maintaining LP is often the biggest concern of many FL users/teachers since unlike other skills or knowledge of other subjects, LP is strongly influenced by the rule “use it or lose it”. LPM requires EFL teachers' constant practices and use of the language so as to maintain the achieved proficiency. Once the language is not used or practiced (i.e., neglected), both the knowledge of the language and the ability to use it will be lost.

Education policymakers have set standards on levels of proficiency for EFL teachers and students based on standardized proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS, EFL teachers in Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand are assessed based on the CEFR and are expected to reach a CEFR B2 or CEFR C1 level (Franz & Teo, 2018; Pham, 2018; Renadya, 2018). However, once EFL teachers have graduated from the formal training, it seems that they have been removed from a supportive environment to a less supportive environment where English is less likely to be used, or if they do use the TL, the frequency of their use is rather low (Lengkanawati, 2005; Lie, 2007).

In EFL context, due to the fact that students who learn English that is not used much outside the classroom, EFL teacher's use of language in the classroom is considered a significant way of providing the TL input (Nunan, 1991). Moreover, when the TL is seldom used outside the classroom, LPM is considered as an essential element for EFL teachers' PD. Thus, EFL teachers need constant practices and use of the language so as to maintain their LP.

### **2.2.3. EFL teachers' language proficiency maintenance**

Upon the cease of formal training from universities, institutes, or LP training workshops, most EFL teachers may face problems maintaining their achieved level of proficiency. Peyton (1997) stated that "regardless of the skills and knowledge that FL teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an on-going process" (p. 3).

The emphasis in language maintenance is mostly felt in EFL contexts where most teachers do not have many opportunities of communicating with native speakers of English (Berry, 1990; Cullen, 1994), which is also the case of Vietnam. Language teachers are required to frequently use English both inside and outside the classroom since, once improved, if lack of use or practice, FL teachers are very likely to deteriorate or lose what they have acquired over time (Schmid & Mehotcheva, 2012). For EFL teachers, specifically EFL teachers in remote, mountainous areas in Central Highlands of Vietnam, maintaining LP after training is a matter of consideration. Many factors are involved in the acquisition (and attrition), including the learners' linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. The extra-linguistic factors are personal (age, age at the onset of attrition, attained proficiency, and attitude and motivation) and external (time since onset of attrition, language contact and use, and length of exposure to the language).

Although maintaining LP is challenging for EFL teachers since language teaching and learning is tied to its social context, maintaining the achieved level of LP can increase the flexibility of the language teacher's classroom practices and promote EFL students' learning qualities (Freeman et al., 2015; Richards, 2007; Valmori & Costa, 2016). Teachers' LPM is associated with activities teachers intentionally take to maintain and develop the level of proficiency gained or achieved

by language users. LPM is mainly concerned with FL users who often do not have the opportunities to use the target they have learned frequently outside the classroom context and very often face the risk of losing the proficiency they have gained.

In this study, EFL teachers' LPM refers to the efforts to sustain the level of LP and is associated with the strategies and activities intentionally taken after having attended the training workshops to maintain the achieved level of proficiency so as to be able to both teach the TL and to use that language to communicate effectively.

### **2.3. The role of EFL teacher classroom language**

#### **2.3.1. Language as a means of communication**

The areas in which EFL teachers' classroom language use is influenced by teacher LP are: managing the classroom; understanding and communicating lesson content; and assessing students and giving them feedback. In this sense, teachers' language teaching is measured by their ability to (i) provide good language models, (ii) maintain the use of English in the classroom, (iii) give explanations and instructions in English, (iv) provide examples of words and grammatical structures, (v) to give accurate explanations of the meaning of English words and grammatical items, (vi) using and adapting authentic English language resources in teaching, (vii) giving correct feedback on learner language use, providing input at an appropriate level of difficulty, and engaging in improvisational teaching (Richards, 2015).

Language in the classroom is used as a valuable means of communication. Teachers use language to deliver the knowledge and skills required to achieve the objectives of the lesson and curriculum. Learners use language to negotiate with the teacher and one another to develop their cognitive development. For the purposes mentioned above, classroom language use is not the same as the discourse when the language is used in real life (Christine, 1997). It has its own characteristics, which help it serve well the pedagogical purpose. No matter what they teach, teachers need to develop the capacity to use the language, either their native or TL or both, proficiently so as to allow the teachers to communicate the required teaching contents with their students effectively.

### **2.3.2. Functions of EFL teachers' language**

Language is a means of communication that allows the teacher to effectively deliver the expected teaching contents to learners. Regardless of the subject they teach, teachers should be competent at using the language to express themselves clearly and make the required teaching content accessible and comprehensible to their learners. In this sense, language use in the language classroom is widely viewed as both the means and the objective of instruction (Freeman, 2016; Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

It is important for the teachers whose mother tongue is not English to carry out many aspects of a lesson fluently and comprehensively in English. That is why it is necessary to have a threshold proficiency level for EFL teachers to reach so that they can teach effectively in English. Research (e.g., Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman, 2017; Le & Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2017) shows that teachers' classroom proficiency is at least as important as their general LP to promote learning.

Teachers' classroom language use serves as an important, perhaps even the only input for students. Such input needs to come from teachers with high LP because rich input is fundamental to developing high-level skills in the TL (Ellis, 2008). Teachers' language use as a language input is crucial in helping learners' acquire the language and shaping learners' learning outcomes (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Tsui, 1985). In the context with limited resources like Vietnam, where there is an almost total lack of native speakers of English in every level of education, in order to have successful communication with students, teachers are required to structure their language input for maximum clarity (Fillmore & Snow, 2002). In other words, the TL is "part of teacher knowledge," and it is both "the medium and the object of learning" (Tsui, 2003, p. 136). The more frequent use of English in classroom makes higher student motivation and helps them realize that English is a means of genuine communication in class. Moreover, EFL teachers' language classroom use can contribute to students' success in learning a FL because they are able to give more accurate explanations and richer language input at a natural pace and respond to questions about the language or culture (Richards et al., 2013).

### **2.3.2.1. For teaching, pedagogical and instructional functions**

Teacher language is not only to convey the lesson contents but the medium of teaching as well (Johnson, 1999; Freeman et al., 2015). The pedagogical function of teacher language involves the use of language to explain the lesson, to provide instructions on learning activities, to illustrate the teaching points, to paraphrase abstract contents whenever relevant, to respond to learners' performance, to deliver feedback to learners' progress, to provide support to learners (e.g., provide hints or prompts), to encourage learners to take part in learning activities, to evaluate learners' response (i.e., corrective feedback), etc. (Forman, 2011). This requires the teachers to be competent in the language being used as a means of instruction.

### **2.3.2.2. For classroom management**

Teachers also use language to manage the classroom. Classroom management becomes an important skill that the teacher needs to possess to ensure the classroom becomes a supportive environment for effective learning. Managing the classroom involves the teacher using language to discipline learners, to keep the class in order, to make sure the activities or tasks are being completed within the time scheduled, to give learners a fair chance to participate in learning activities, to monitor students' learning pace, to solve discipline-related troubles in the class, and so on. Teacher language in classroom management plays an important role in students' English language learning (Kim & Elder, 2008; Richards et al., 2013; Tsui, 2003). Teachers' English use in classroom management provides students the opportunities to communicate in English frequently and can result in the development of students' awareness that English is a means of genuine communication in class. Thus, teachers' language classroom discourse is significant and seen as a key factor contributing to effective classroom management.

### **2.3.2.3. For interpersonal communication**

Interpersonal communication is defined as "communication that occurs among teachers-students, and students-students allowing them to communicate both verbally and nonverbally with an effort to generate shared meanings and accomplish academic and social goals which create a personal bond among them in terms of socially and psychologically perceived appropriate distance" (Rasyid, 2015, p. 35).

Apart from the use of language for instructional and classroom management purposes, the teacher also uses language to communicate with their learners in genuine, authentic interpersonal interactions. Establishing a good relationship with their learners and gaining their respect is part of what the teacher needs to do in their job. Genuine communication allows the teacher to understand their learners better and to create good bonding with the people they teach, which in turn facilitates their teaching and their students' learning. Interpersonal communication requires the teacher to ask about their learners' life, for instance, health, families, hobbies, etc., to express care and attention in a timely manner. This function of teacher language is very often taken for granted, not because it is taken for granted but because it is limited compared with the other two functions.

In brief, teacher language plays an important role in contributing to effective pedagogical functions, classroom management, and interpersonal communication. It is important that teacher language used in the classroom should be accurate and appropriate.

## **2.4. The role of EFL teachers' language proficiency**

### **2.4.1. Teachers' English language as a valuable source of foreign language input**

In FL teaching contexts, the quality of teacher language input is significant because the teacher is often the only linguistic model for students and provides the main source of TL input (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Turnbull, 2001). The input given to the students has to be comprehensible for acquisition to happen (Reid, 1998). Comprehensible input means "language directed to the learner that contains some new elements, but the learner nevertheless understands this because of linguistic, paralinguistic, or situational cues, or world knowledge backup" (Richards & Renandya, 2001, p.126).

Indeed, in the context of EFL teaching in Vietnam, where both EFL teachers and students share the same language and where students have very few opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, classroom activities are considered the main source for students' exposure to English language. Creating opportunities for real-life communication and providing a language environment rich and authentic in

the TL input (Gilmore, 2007; Richards et al., 2013) is a fundamental principle for effective instructed language learning (Ellis, 2005), which shows the influences of language teacher input in EFL classrooms. Additionally, “the proficiency level of a EFL teacher will in many cases determine the extent to which the teacher is able to use many current teaching methods appropriately and whether the teacher is able to provide a reliable model of TL input for his or her students” (Farrell & Richards, 2007, p. 60).

#### **2.4.2. Teachers’ English language as scaffolding language development**

EFL teachers who use English consistently and frequently in the classroom can create a more authentic language for students and better support students in learning that language. Thus, to use language effectively in their classrooms, teachers need to achieve “a certain level of proficiency in the TL and pedagogical knowledge of how language can be used to support learning” (Cullen, 1998, p. 181). Regarding assessing students and giving them feedback, for example, EFL teachers’ provision of comments to give corrective feedback should be consistent, efficient, and explicit to facilitate EFL students. Richards et al. (2013) maintain that EFL teachers with comprehensive language knowledge are likely to provide valuable comments briefly and accurately so that students are more likely to receive teachers’ feedback. Besides, EFL teachers with high LP are able to provide more appropriate comments and adequate answers in response to their students’ problems than ones with a limited level of proficiency (Farrell & Richards, 2007; Tsui, 2003).

In addition, teachers use language in EFL classrooms to provide students with adequate explanations of English language vocabulary and structures and cultural and pragmatics issues (Farrell & Richards, 2007; Richards et al., 2013). By giving explanations appropriately and comprehensibly, teacher’s classroom language use contributes to facilitating students’ language development, “taking them from the familiar to the unfamiliar through fluid movement from one type of activity to another, with transparent goals and cohesive structures” (Tsui, 2003, p.55). In contrast, EFL teachers with a low level of proficiency have difficulty answering their students’ questions spontaneously and avoid giving a detailed explanation of grammatical work (Borg, 2001). Therefore, in the EFL classroom, teachers’ LP plays a significant role in scaffolding students’ language learning because teachers with an

advanced proficiency level are able to create opportunities for students to ask questions so that EFL teachers can explicate the meaning and the use of vocabulary and structures in specific learning contexts (Farrell & Richards, 2007).

## **2.5. EFL teachers' language proficiency and professional standard and development**

### **2.5.1. EFL teachers' language proficiency and teachers' professional standards**

EFL teachers' perceptions of their LP is crucial since EFL teachers' beliefs in teaching are considered the basis of their confidence, and the way they perceive themselves strongly affects their teaching behaviors (Eslami & Harper, 2018; Hiver, 2013; Kamhi-Stien, 2009; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017). Lee (2004), and Lee, Schutz and Vlack (2017) state a direct correlation between teachers' perceptions of their proficiency level and how it impacts their professionalism. For non-native teachers, "language proficiency will always represent the bedrock of their professional confidence" (Murdoch, 1994, p. 49). A teacher who does not perceive herself to be proficient in the TL will not be likely to carry out her teaching tasks confidently. Indeed, EFL teachers who have positive self-perceptions show high confidence in their teaching (Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017). What teachers do in their classroom (e.g., how to plan, manage, and evaluate classroom instruction) is said to be governed by what they believe (Utami, 2016). It is worth mentioning that ELP training workshops as PD may help teachers increase their LP and affect their beliefs (Borg, 2011; Nazari, 2007; Özmen, 2012). Teachers' beliefs originate from four sources: content knowledge, educational materials, formal teacher education, and experience (Shulman, 1987). In other words, LP training may shape their positive beliefs on the role of LP for EFL teachers. Therefore, EFL teachers need to be provided with diverse opportunities to participate in LP-oriented training as part of PD, which helps them increase awareness of the necessity of LP improvement.

The association between teachers' LP level and three areas of FL teachers' teaching ability, studied and developed by many authors (e.g., Borg, 2001; Ellis, 2005; Farrell & Richards, 2007; Freeman et al., 2015; Kim & Elder, 2008), then supported by several researchers in the area (e.g., Freeman et al., 2015; Le &



Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2017; Richards, 2015; Tsang, 2017; Tsui, 2003), has contributed to the success of teaching practice and teaching professionalism. The relationship between teachers' levels of TL proficiency and their classroom practice was further stated by Richards et al. (2013) that teachers with lower LP were still able to correct learners' grammatical errors. However, they were more limited in other aspects of corrective feedback. Once teachers did not have a remarkably good command of the TL, aspects of teaching such as a provision of rich language input and the ability to improvise would be beyond their grasp. Thus, EFL teachers with extensive knowledge are able to improvise appropriate learning activities to motivate students to learn the TL.

Freeman et al. (2015) explored the relationship between general LP and teacher classroom language, highlighting the teacher's role in the EFL classroom. Teachers are simultaneously expected to provide models of the TL and to create learning opportunities for their students to use that language. Hence, language is used "simultaneously the medium and the object of instruction" (p. 3). However, a teacher may have good general LP but she may not use English to perform well when teaching (Freeman et al., 2015).

Within Freeman et al.'s (2015) approach, the construct of classroom English proficiency or English-for-Teaching is defined as English for Specific Purposes, where situational differences in the language use provide implications for determining the construct of the LP an EFL teacher needs to function well in her classroom. This construct focuses on three functional areas in the language classroom: managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, assessing students, and giving them feedback.

Table 2.1. Functional areas, sample classroom routines, and language exemplars (Freeman et al., 2015, p.8)

Functional area	Sample classroom routines	Language exemplars
Managing the classroom	Organizing students to start an activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please go to your seat</li> <li>• Copy the words from the board</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the words to write a summary of the story</li> </ul>
Understanding and communicating lesson content	Giving instructions and explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with a partner</li> <li>• Match the questions and answers</li> <li>• Take turns to read the paragraph. Then underline the words you don't know</li> </ul>
Assessing students and providing feedback	Responding to student oral output during a role play activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That's right</li> <li>• Nice work</li> <li>• Look at the example in the chart again</li> <li>• Those are great ideas</li> </ul>

When discussing EFL teachers' ability in teaching, Freeman et al. (2015) take a stance that the analytic approach of English for Specific Purposes can help define the construct of teacher classroom LP since it highlights the situational differences in the use of English for teaching. Freeman et al. (2015) focus on improving teachers' classroom language combined with developing their methodological competencies, especially for those required to teach the subject and teaching intermediate students and below in EFL contexts. While the focus on general LP is not uncommon in most ELT teacher education (Sesek, 2007), Freeman et al. (2015) argue that it is more efficient to focus directly on the particular language skills necessary for classroom work to be done in English. Furthermore, it is not necessary for EFL teachers with low and intermediate students to have high levels of LP, but they should focus on English-for-teaching that serves their immediate classroom needs (Freeman, 2017; Richards, 2017).

As addressed above, LP is a part of EFL teachers' professionalism. In Vietnam, EFL teachers are obliged to have a good command of ELP to access information, to keep up with the development of science and technology, to share knowledge, ideas, and skills, and to answer the growing demand of proficient EFL teachers in the national, regional, and international levels (Government of Vietnam, 2008).

### **2.5.2. English language teachers' professional development**

The LP of teachers in FL teaching context plays a critical role because EFL teacher is not only the linguistic model for students but provides them with main source of TL input (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). EFL teachers need suitable training and resources within realizable timeframe to be able to use English as both the means of language communication and content lessons delivery (Richards, 2017). Accordingly, for EFL teachers, both LP and pedagogical knowledge and skills are crucial PD areas (Freeman et al., 2015; Richards, 2017).

PD plays important roles in changing teachers' teaching methods, and these changes positively impact students' learning. To be learner models, EFL teachers first need to be confident with their proficiency and overcome the fear that the students may not understand everything or want to speak the FL with a non-native speaker (Medgyes, 2001). Hence, it is important that EFL teachers notice changes in their classrooms and implement activities to maintain their LP after the training workshops, and for their on-going PD (Harmer, 2007; Pinter, 2009).

In Vietnam, Vietnamese Government puts more emphasis on building and improving knowledge and professional skills for EFL teachers through training programs as part of PD (Government of Vietnam, 2008; 2017). PD for EFL teachers provides them with the necessary knowledge and professional skills to implement changes in response to educational reforms (MOET, 2017). It is prior and compulsory LP improvement activities in teacher training workshops. In brief, having regular opportunities to update EFL teachers' knowledge and professional skills is indispensable to EFL teachers. An advanced level of English proficiency and the enhancement of English language pedagogical skills for EFL teachers (e.g., the *ELTeach* program of Cengage National Geographic Learning) should be prioritized in ELP training workshops. EFL teachers' LP can be sustainable, and EFL students' language learning can be promoted.

## **2.6. In-service teachers' professional development in Vietnam**

### **2.6.1. The National Foreign Languages Project**

With an aim to enhance the effectiveness of FL teaching and learning, various attempts have been made by the Government of Vietnam and the MOET to reform

the FL teaching system, among which is the introduction and implementation of Project 2020. In 2008, the Government of Vietnam launched a national project named “Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national educational system from 2008 to 2020”, often referred to as Project 2020 as an innovative campaign of English language education reforms during the period 2008-2020 (Government of Vietnam, 2008), now it has been extended to 2025 (Government of Vietnam, 2017). Project 2020 aims at testing, training, and retraining EFL teachers in Vietnam, which has had strong impacts on many aspects of language learning and teaching at all levels of education over the past ten years.

To improve and develop the English proficiency of language teachers, the Vietnamese Government has put more emphasis on language improvement activities in training programs, including components of content knowledge and pedagogical competencies (MOET, 2008; MOET, 2017). The Circular 30/2009/TT-BGDDT promulgated by the MOET on professional standards of teachers of lower secondary and upper secondary schools was issued in 2009 and considered as a guideline to set professional standards for both EFL teachers and FL learning outcomes at all levels of education, for teacher training, TPD and teaching, and learning performance evaluation (MOET, 2009). Thus, since the implementation of the Project 2020, the level of EFL teachers has been promulgated in Vietnamese government policy.

#### **2.6.2. English teachers’ professional standards and in-service teachers’ English proficiency**

The Prime Minister introduced the CEFR in 2008 through Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTĐ (Government of Vietnam, 2008). In 2014, the six-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnam, the Vietnamese version of the CEFR-based framework, was officially promulgated through Circular No.1/TT-BGĐĐT dated January 24, 2014 by the MOET. Since then, the CEFR has been widely applied in language education for setting EFL teacher professionalism standards at different levels of education. In 2020, the MOET has issued an important framework for FL teachers in Vietnam at Dispatch No.2069/BGĐĐT-NGCBCBGD dated June 06, 2020. In this framework, EFL teachers are expected to own five distinct competencies: the competence to use the TL in teaching, to apply teaching

approaches and methods to teaching, to make use of learners' characteristics in teaching, to develop values in teaching a FL, and to apply general knowledge of teaching contexts into language classrooms. Among these competencies, the competence in using the TL is ranked first. Indeed, the implementation of Project 2020 has emphasized the importance of reviewing, assessing, training, and retraining EFL teachers, to "standardize teachers' training level under regulations" (Government of Vietnam, 2008, p. 3).

Together with ELP training workshops initiated in 2013, since the academic school year 2016-2017, each year, about a hundred teachers at primary, lower, and upper secondary schools have been selected by the DOETs to train the *ELTeach* program of Cengage National Geographic Learning by authorized universities (*see 2.5.1, for more information about this program*). EFL teachers' responsibilities and qualities are expected to be standardized and continuously improved because they are considered one of the important factors to enhance students' English proficiency in order to use it as an international language (Pham, 2017). Therefore, the enhancement of ELP and English language pedagogical skills for EFL teachers at all levels of education as part of PD is also one of the major goals and prior training activities of the MOET of Vietnam (MOET, 2008; MOET, 2017).

### **2.6.3. In-service teachers' English proficiency training**

#### **2.6.3.1. Training program and training modes**

Following the 6-scale framework of the CEFR, EFL teachers at upper secondary schools are required to attain the CEFR-C1 level (MOET, 2012, 2014). Teachers' ELP is assessed in four skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The training workshops were designed for upper secondary school EFL teachers to develop and achieve at least one higher level of proficiency after the training. The training workshops consisted of both online and onsite types of training, which suggested about 400 guided learning hours to advance from one level of proficiency to the next. The implementation of the Decision 3321/QĐ-BGDĐT (MOET, 2010), Decision No. 01/QĐ-BGDĐT (2012), and Decision No. 5209/QĐ-BGDĐT (2012b) by the MOET set out new language curricula for primary, lower and upper secondary school levels. The

LP improvement activities dedicate to help teachers reach the required level of proficiency and raise English language knowledge and skills in teaching practice.

The teacher trainers of the authorized universities have met the standard qualifications (i.e., English language knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and professional development knowledge) as promulgated in Decision No 2912/QĐ-BGDĐT dated August 23, 2016 of the MOET on promulgating the training program for officers to prepare exam questions for the format of test questions to assess English proficiency of the 6-level FL proficiency framework used for Vietnam, and Decision 2913/QĐ-BGDĐT dated August 23, 2016 of the MOET on promulgating the training program for speaking and writing test examiners of the format of English proficiency assessment exam questions according to the standards of 6-level FL proficiency framework for Vietnam.

### **2.6.3.2. Training materials**

In adopting the CEFR framework to develop the proficiency level of upper secondary school EFL teachers, the training materials known as published training textbooks were approved by Project 2020 and authorized universities. The teacher trainers adopted different training materials to help the EFL teachers develop their LP. Most of the selected English language textbooks were published by academic publishers and available in Vietnam (e.g., *Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)*, *Cambridge University Press*, *Oxford University Press*, *Macmillan Education*, *National Geographic Learning*, *Cengage Learning*, and *Pearson*). Apart from the existing textbooks by prestige publishers, there were other ones introduced by the teacher trainers at authorized universities, which were considered to be appropriate for their teacher trainees in their respective teaching contexts. The teacher trainees tended to adopt these teaching materials as the main sources in their training with extra materials provided by the teacher trainers.

## **2.7. Upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands**

### **2.7.1. Teachers' general English proficiency**

There is a strong focus on training activities so that EFL teachers can attain a high level of ELP and can use English as a key means of communication in classrooms (MOET, 2008, 2017). EFL teachers were frequently built and developed

professional skills (Government of Vietnam, 2008, MOET, 2010). Since the academic year 2016-2017, EFL teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces have been assessed and trained, focusing on ELP development by the authorized universities under the implementation of Project 2020. Gia Lai and Kon Tum DOETs provided EFL teachers with many training workshops for PD (DOET, 2017). These language improvement activities have provided many opportunities for most teachers to attend PD workshops.

The outcome could live up to the authorities' expectations with great efforts and investment devoted to increasing EFL teachers' LP. Most in-service upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands, who had participated in ELP training workshop(s) by authorized institutions, achieved the CEFR-C1 level as professional standards. The total number of upper secondary school EFL teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum who had reached CEFR-C1 level until 2017 was 198 out of 232 (85%) and 80 out of 116 (69%), respectively (DOET, 2017). In short, Project 2020 has a substantial influence on the EFL teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces. Thanks to it, most EFL teachers were trained in courses of ELP for the target of achieving CEFR-C1 level. Also, many key teachers and leader teachers are appointed by the DOETs to be trained in the *ELTeach* program of Cengage National Geographic Learning by authorized universities every year (in this study, key teachers are the ones who had been trained and achieved the CEFR C1 level and were selected to be trained in classroom language proficiency through the ELTeach program; leader teachers are the ones who have administrative duties at school).

### **2.7.2. Teachers' English language proficiency training**

Before the training, the teacher trainees took a placement test and were identified to have the CEFR-B2. When the training workshop ended, these participants took part in the exam by the training institutes, and they were among the trainees who obtained the CEFR-C1 level. After having achieved the CEFR C1 level, in-service EFL teachers are selected by the DOET to participate in short-term ELP workshops as part of PD held annually by authorized universities. English is mainly adopted as the medium of instruction for providing EFL teachers with many teaching techniques for developing and improving teacher professional skills. The training



workshops enhance teachers' ELP that builds their confidence to use English effectively in their teaching. In addition to this, teacher trainees in such workshops have opportunities to access teaching resources such as teaching materials and networking with colleagues that can affect their teaching practices.

## **2.8. Review of previous studies**

Several studies (e.g., Nunan, 1991; Farrell, 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Murray, 2010; Zuhairini, 2010; Valmori & Costa, 2016, Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian, 2018) have been carried out in various contexts to explore factors affecting teachers' LPM, and activities they implemented to maintain their LP. However, little seems to be done in exploring in-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency.

There has been an increase in opportunities for EFL teachers to develop their ELP and improve their professional knowledge and skills both formally and informally. Formally, classroom observations seminars, meetings, training workshops, presentations at national and international conferences, and symposiums are appropriate resources for EFL teachers to improve professional knowledge and skills (Reilly, 1998; Farrell, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Informally, Reilly suggests that "traveling abroad, the use of computer-aided instruction, self-instruction, and specific uses of cultural resources in their local ethnic communities" (p. 5) can be beneficial to keeping individuals maintaining foreign language skills. Whether it is the individual or institutional form, joining TPD activities is of great importance since they can enhance EFL teachers' teaching practices and promote students' learning achievement (Pham, 2017; Le & Renandya, 2017).

Nunan (1991) conducted a study to investigate learning strategies preferences of 44 language learners and EFL teachers in Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. The results showed that there were eight main strategies that good language learners and EFL teachers use inside and outside the classroom, including i) making communication with native speakers outside class, ii) reading various kinds of printed materials in English, iii) listening to native speakers through radio and TV, listening to music and singing songs, iv) watching TV and cinema, v) visiting English speaking countries for communicating with native



speakers, vi) practicing through conversation with proficient speakers in English and using the media, vii) creating a social interaction (exposure and practice the language) at home and with friends, and viii) practicing English outside the classroom. Nunan's (1991) study emphasized that learning strategies preferred by EFL learners and teachers contributed to their LP improvement and maintenance when the TL is seldom used outside the classroom.

Research in strategies used to maintain LP was even more popular. Zuhairini (2010) carried out a study on identifying types of strategies that EFL teachers in Indonesia used to maintain proficiency. The study included 93 participants who were given two sets of the instrument, a Likert-scale questionnaire of English proficiency maintenance strategies and a TOEFL test at the post-graduate program of the Islamic University of Malang. Results indicated that there were nine types of maintaining strategies, of which language focusing strategies (e.g., *identifying text structure when reading, paying attention to the correctness of pronunciation when communicating*) were found to be the most intensively and prevalently used by the teachers. Meanwhile, radio listening strategies (e.g., *dealing with activities to listen to radio programs such as American VOA, British BBC, and Australian ABC*) were the least level of intensity.

Murray (2010) proposed some PD activities from teachers' motivation to stay up to date with English language teaching and LPM by observing an EFL teacher teaching an English class at a high school in West Africa where there were some school environmental constraints (e.g., *the only light in the classroom comes from three open windows and the doorway, and the students are crammed three to four to a desk; learning is not fruitful because of the oppressive heat*). Both individual and group or structured activities are included in the strategies and activities that are suggested. Reading journal articles, completing reflections on teaching, maintaining a teaching journal, sharing journals, peer mentoring/coaching, and joining teacher support groups are some suggested individual teacher PD activities.

Similarly, in a qualitative study, Valmori and Costa (2016) investigated nine Italian high school (college preparation and vocational schools) FL teachers' perceived changes in proficiency, challenges in maintaining their proficiency,

activities to maintain proficiency, and the relationship between FL proficiency and FL teaching. The findings, which were based on the grounded theory and interview data collection and analysis, revealed that EFL teachers who took part in different forms of PD activities perceived growth and improvement in proficiency. However, while some activities that were dependent on the social and material resources, matched their teaching needs, others teachers did not find such a match and implemented self-development activities to maintain their proficiency. The study suggested that EFL teachers should develop and maintain their LP by “using the Internet, watching TV and movies in the FL, newsletters by teachers’ associations, books, summer trips and a nationwide EFL teachers’ organization which organized activities for PD for the different languages” (p. 103).

Włosowicz (2017), in a study on language proficiency, language maintenance, and language attitudes, suggested that EFL teachers make efforts to maintain their proficiency levels by using the language in many different ways, such as by reading books and articles in English, watching films in English, and talking to native speakers. The available linguistic resources such as films, lectures, and newspapers in the FL provide EFL teachers with practical activities and opportunities to develop and maintain their language skills. According to Włosowicz (2017), EFL teachers should be given on-the-job learning strategies to support their ongoing professional development in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

In the same line, Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian (2018) conducted a study to examine techniques applied by EFL learners in Iran in maintaining foreign LP after they left language education programs. The study employed the phenomenology research design and thematic analysis. Results indicated that the EFL learners in Iran actively implemented many techniques to maintain their proficiency level and develop their language skills through self-study, which were originated from their internal motivation. Some applied techniques were reviewing previously learned materials, watching TL movies and actively manipulating subtitles, reading for pleasure, attending discussion groups, and using the internet to communicate in the TL.

Foreign language proficiency maintenance issues have been studied in different contexts with various participants and methodology. Findings of these studies were mainly based on qualitative data, but not on both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Furthermore, some researchers (e.g., Valmori & Costa, 2016; Pham, 2017; Le & Renandya, 2017) focused on techniques and factors affecting EFL teachers' proficiency development and maintenance, and some others (e.g., Nunan, 1991; Reilly, 1998; Murray, 2010; Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian, 2018) explored strategies that contribute to FL learners and teachers' proficiency improvement and maintenance. None of these studies, however, investigated in-service upper secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of formal ELP training, their perceived changes in teaching practices after attending the training, and strategies they implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

## **2.9. Summary**

The present chapter has presented a relevant literature review central to ELP and EFL teachers' LPD and maintenance to help build up the conceptual framework for data discussion and analysis. It provided definitions of the key terminology of the thesis. Secondly, the chapter briefly reviews ELP and EFL teachers' LPD and maintenance in language education. Related studies on the field both in the world and Vietnam were also summarized and synthesized. A gap in research on ELP maintenance by upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam has been identified for the formulation of the research questions.

The following research methodology chapter will present the choice for the research approach, research design, methodology, and procedures of the current study.

### CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*This chapter is the methodological, theoretical and ethical considerations that underpin the process of data collection and analysis. It begins with a discussion of how a mixed method approach responds to the research aims of the study. It goes on to explain some benefits of concurrent mixed methods as the selected inquiry strategy with a design of a survey, content analysis, and interview. The next section is the information of the participants. This is followed by a description of the pilot study. After that, the chapter continues with the data collection methods, data analysis, and measures taken to assure the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The final section explains the ethical assurance procedures.*

#### **3.1. Mixed-methods approach**

The selection of the research approach of this study was based on the philosophical assumptions of pragmatic worldview, the nature of research problem, and the aims of the study.

The researcher adopted a pragmatic worldview which enabled her to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet the needs and purposes (Creswell, 2009). The pragmatic paradigm allowed her to emphasize the what and how of the research problem by using both quantitative and qualitative data because pragmatism pays careful attention to problem-solving (Fishman, 1991; Powell, 2001). In other words, with a pragmatic worldview, the researcher could employ the use of multiple approaches and techniques for data collection and analysis to gain a sound understanding of the issues involved (Morgan, 2007; 2013).

The mixed-methods approach is “the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research” (Creswell et al. 2003, p.165). The chosen methodology is mixed methods because the research questions demand both quantitative and qualitative data, and also it allows the researcher to get the added value from qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Figure 1 shows the concurrent triangulation strategy diagram to be used in this study, which shows quantitative and qualitative in capital letters. According to

Morse's (2003) notation system for mixed methods strategies, the capitalization means that the priority between the quantitative and qualitative data is equal and mixed upon integration.

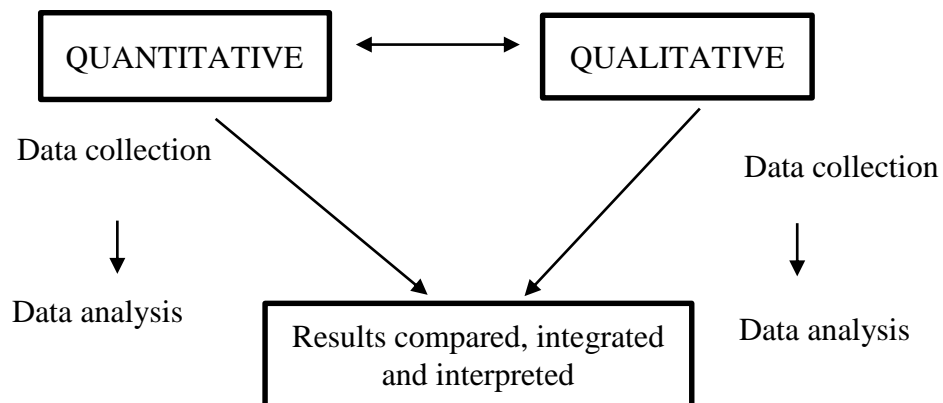


Figure 1. The diagram of the concurrent triangulation strategy (Adapted from Creswell, 2009)

The overall design of the study is illustrated in Figure 2.

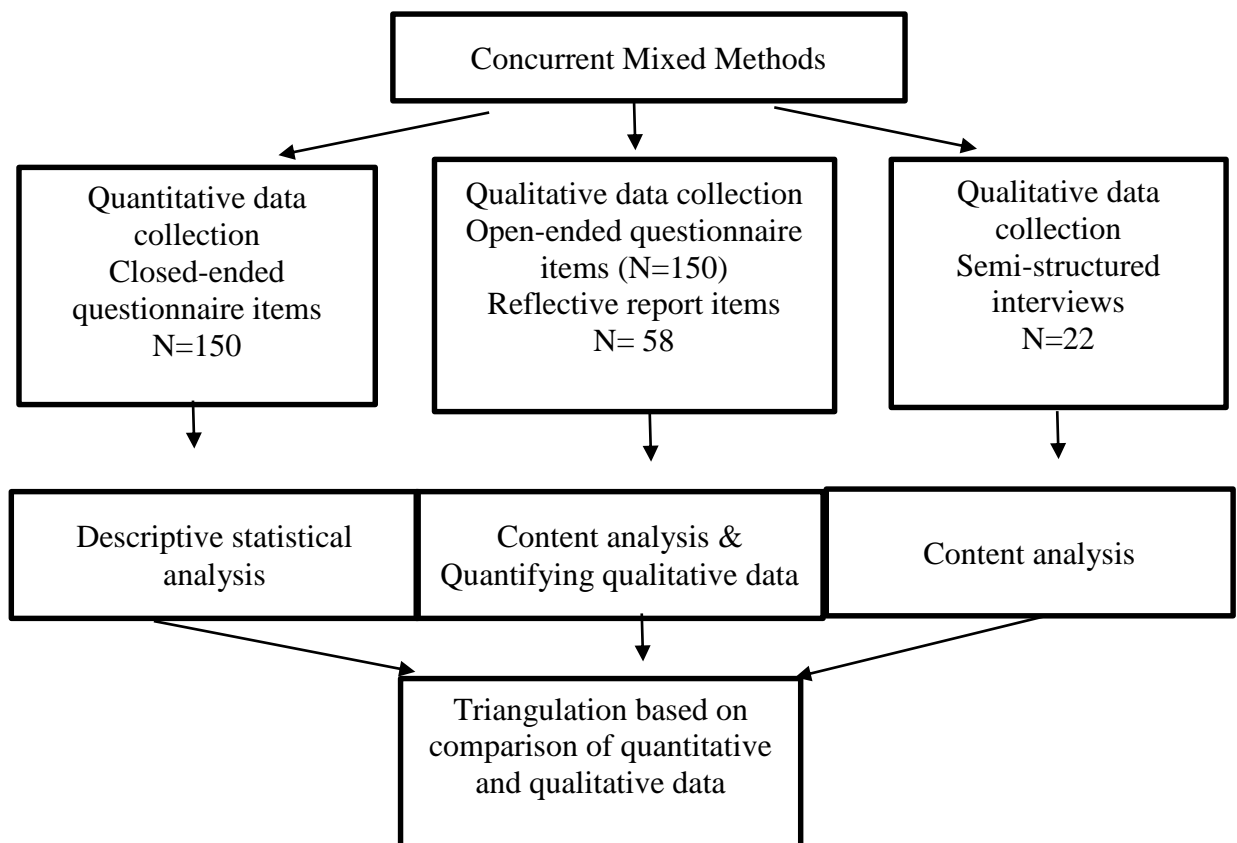


Figure 2. Research design overview

On the basis of the concurrent triangulation strategy, data analysis is usually separate, and “integration usually occurs at the data interpretation stage” (Hanson et al. 2005, p. 229). This means all the data to do the work of triangulation were merged

and statistics analysis (e.g., by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), quantitative variables were presented as means (M), standard deviation (SD), and qualitative variables were expressed as frequency and percentages), and content analysis (e.g., content codes, text, themes, patterns, interpretation) were used (Creswell, 2009). Then, results from different sources of data were compared, integrated, and interpreted (Morgan, 2014). Specifically, in the quantitative dimension, this current study used a survey. The qualitative dimension of the research contained the reflective report and the interview. The design indicated the most appropriate choice of this current study for some following reasons.

Firstly, the mixed-methods approach encouraged the researcher to employ a multi-method matrix, which could help to exploit the strengths and overcome the weaknesses of using only quantitative or qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2006, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For the present study, it provided the opportunity to explore both what and how changes in teaching performance and activities the teachers implemented to maintain their language proficiency, and the complexity of the teachers' perceptions.

Secondly, applying the mixed-methods approach could help the researcher improve insights into and understanding of the data, which might be missed when using a single approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). It offered the flexibility to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods and employ different data collection techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' beliefs that underpin their behaviors and practices.

Thirdly, the mixed method approach via the employment of multiple sources of data collection would enable the researcher to triangulate the interpretations of the study generated. The goal was to use each method so that "it contributes something unique to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon" (Morgan, 1997, p.3). The comprehensive but general data gained through questionnaire became the basis for the development of questions of the semi-structured interview.

Finally, yet importantly, integrating qualitative and quantitative data possibly provided strong evidence for conclusions, and triangulating the data from different methods increased the validity of the results (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Further, it enabled the researcher to propose practical solutions to the research problems, and it could result in well-validated and substantiated findings (Creswell, 2009). The adoption of the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview helped us tackle the large data set collection and contributed to providing insights into the LPM of upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It could also support the researcher in comparing two data-sets and thereby allows her to determine if there are convergence and differences, and whether some combination of results can be achieved (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2009).

In brief, the adoption of the pragmatic research paradigm and the mixed-methods approach contributed to this current research with every opportunity to explore both what and how (changes in teaching performance and activities the teachers implemented to maintain their language proficiency), the complexity of the teachers' perceptions, the flexibility to gain insight understanding of the teachers' beliefs underpinning their behaviors and practices, and the rigorousness and efficiency to achieve the research aims.

### **3.2. Participants**

This study aimed at investigating strategies and activities EFL teachers at upper secondary schools in the Central Highlands of Vietnam implemented to maintain the achieved level of language proficiency after finishing the formal ELP training workshops to provide insights into what the teachers do to maintain their language proficiency and to explore factors influential to their LPM. The first criterion of selecting participants was the EFL teachers from upper secondary schools in Gia Lai and KonTum provinces, who had attended EFL training workshops held by authorized institutes as part of Project 2020, increased at least one level and achieved the CEFR-C1 level after being trained. The second criterion was based on their willingness of participation in the study.

There were two hundred and nine EFL teachers at upper secondary schools in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces voluntarily participating in the study. However, one hundred and fifty teachers were recruited because these teachers had attended at least one language proficiency training workshop organized by the DOET as part of Project 2020 and were certified to be at level 5 (CEFR-C1 level) by Vietnamese

mandated testing institutions. They agreed to share their experiences during and after the LP training workshops with us so that the researcher can get more insights into the impacts of the training on the teachers' perceptions of the LP training workshops for their LPM, perceptions of changes in teaching practices, and strategies they implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. Their demographic information is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Demographic data of the participants

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Provinces</b>	Gia Lai	96	64%
	Kon Tum	54	36%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	22	14.7%
	Female	128	85.3%
<b>Teaching experience</b>	2-5 years	12	8%
	6-10 years	19	13%
	11-15 years	46	31%
	>15 years	73	48%
<b>Qualifications</b>	College	18	12%
	BA	90	60%
	MA	42	28%
	PhD	0	0%
<b>Age</b>	Minimum	24	
	Maximum	48	
<b>Average</b>		36	
<b>EFL teachers</b>	Key teacher, leader teachers	75	50%
	Neither key nor leader teachers	75	50%
<b>Average number of students per class</b>	<35	32	20.9%
	36-40	33	22%
	41-45	68	46%
	>45	17	11.1%
<b>Number of training workshops attended</b>	1	99	66%
	2	47	31.3%
	3	03	2.0%
	>4	01	0.7%

\* The total number is 150

As seen, a total number of 150 EFL teachers at upper secondary schools participated in this study. The female teachers outnumbered the male teachers by more than five to one. The participants' average age was 36, ranging from twenty-four to forty-eight. They had an average of 9.87 years of teaching experience, ranging from 2 to more than 15 years. Only eight teachers (12%) experienced under five years of teaching, whereas the rest had more than 5 years of teaching, which reflects that most of the participants were experienced EFL teachers.



Regarding academic qualifications, all the teacher participants had studied English as a FL, 18 teachers (12%) graduated from the teacher training colleges whereas 90 (60%) achieved a Bachelor's degree and the others 42 (28%) held a Master's degree. Regarding the number of ELP training workshops that the participants officially took part in, there were 99 participants (66%) attending one training workshop, 47 participants (31.3%) attended two workshops; 03 (2%) attended three, and only one (0.7%) attended more than three workshops. Half of the participants were key, or team leader teachers and the rest were teachers without any administrative positions in school. The teachers had to teach classes of 40.1 students, on average. Eighty-five teachers (58%) were teaching big classes with more than 41 students, thirty-three (22%) taught classes from 35 to 40 students, and only eleven (11%) of the teachers were teaching classes with less than 35 students.

### **3.3. Data collection methods**

#### **3.3.1. Data collection instruments**

In order to provide broader information about EFL teachers' perceptions of LP training for their LP, their perceptions of changes in their teaching practices as a result of the language proficiency improvement, whether their perceived changes in teaching as a result of participation in the training workshop resulted in their perceptions of language proficiency maintenance, and strategies they implemented to maintain their LP, questionnaire, reflective report, and interview were chosen due to the advantages and disadvantages of each data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009). This section in turn describes each of the three instruments including benefits and potential problems of adopting each instrument. Table 3.2 shows the data collection instruments employed to answer the formulated research questions.

Table 3.2. Research questions and data collection methods

<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Research tools/instruments</b>	<b>Techniques</b>
Quantitative and qualitative	(1) What are upper secondary school English language teachers' perceptions of language proficiency training for their language proficiency	Questionnaire; Reflective report; Focused group semi-structured interview	Online survey, voice recording, notes-taking (while voice recording)

Research methods	Research questions	Research tools/instruments	Techniques
	improvement and maintenance?		
Quantitative and qualitative	(2) What changes in teaching practices are perceived by upper secondary school teachers as a result of their language proficiency improvement?	Questionnaire; Reflective report; Focused group semi-structured interview	Online survey, teachers' reports, voice recording, notes-taking (while voice recording)
Quantitative and qualitative	(3) What do the teachers do for their language proficiency maintenance?	Questionnaire; Reflective report; Focused group; semi-structured interview	teachers' reports; voice recording, notes-taking (while voice recording)

#### 3.4.1.1. Questionnaire

Investigating upper secondary school EFL teachers' maintaining their achieved level of proficiency is important to determine what they do to sustain their professionalism. Thus, following Hulstijn's (2011) and Freeman et al.'s (2015) framework of language proficiency the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview were constructed and developed to investigate (i) teachers' perceptions of LP training for their LPM, (ii) their perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of the participation in the formal LP training workshop(s), and (iii) strategies implemented by the teachers to maintain the achieved level of proficiency, as shown in the research questions 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

The first instrument to be administered was the questionnaire. A questionnaire was chosen because comprehensive answers to complex research questions often require both quantitative and qualitative data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this study, the questionnaire was created electronically using Google Forms and then sent to the teachers via multiple methods. The participant teachers were asked questions about the support and incentives from their school and the DOET, the teaching conditions, and teaching and learning quality at their workplace. Due to the respect and authority teachers hold in the Vietnamese education system, the assumption was that teachers would feel more comfortable answering the questionnaire items rather than through interviews. Hence, a questionnaire was

employed to help the researcher get broad-based and accurate statistical and descriptive data.

Following Hulstijn's (2011) and Freeman's (2015) framework of LP, the questionnaire was developed in four parts (See Appendix A2 for the full form of the questionnaire). The questionnaire consists of four sections: personal information, teachers' perceptions of ELP for their LP improvement and maintenance, perceptions of changes in their teaching practices, and teachers' implementing strategies to maintain the attained level of proficiency. Each section consists of two or more questions. Altogether there were 17 items in the questionnaire. Twelve out of sixteen items in the questionnaires were closed-ended questions, and five items were open-ended questions.

Part one of the questionnaire collects ethnographic information from the participants, which later on can become helpful in the process of understanding and interpreting the data collected. This includes information about gender, age, workplaces, teaching experiences, professional qualifications, their level of LP, the number of ELP workshops they have attended, the number of students in classroom, the administrative positions at school, and their weekly teaching hours.

Part two consists of eight questions that aim to investigate upper secondary school language teachers' perceptions of the necessity of LP training. This cluster has two open-ended questions and six closed responses (five-Likert scale items). Take it as an example using the framework of language proficiency developed by Hulstijn (2011) and Freeman (2015) in constructing the questionnaire items regarding teachers' perceptions of the necessity of ELP for an EFL teacher. The questionnaire item 1, "How necessary are the following language aspects to an English language teacher" is developed based on Hulstijn (2011)'s definition of ELP, and the questionnaire item 2 "To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding teacher's English classroom proficiency" is adopted from Freeman (2015)' framework of teacher' language proficiency.

Part three explores the teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices when they finished the training workshops. This cluster has three open-ended items (five-Likert scale items).

Part four aims to explore strategies teachers implemented to maintain and improve the achieved level of proficiency and difficulties they might encounter while making an effort to maintain their LP. This part has six questions, including three open-ended and three closed responses (five-Likert scale items).

The questionnaire was written in English and expected to be answered in English because the target respondents are English teachers. However, any answer in Vietnamese was acceptable due to the respondents' preferences and comfort with using Vietnamese.

Regarding five-Likert scale question items, participants responded on a scale from 1 (strongly/totally disagree or not necessary at all) to 5 (strongly/totally agree or very necessary). The data were coded and analyzed with SPSS version 20 to derive the descriptive data. Moreover, by statistics, Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire items was established to check for a satisfactory level of reliability analysis. If a scale has Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of 0.6 or above, it has internal consistency (Taber, 2018).

There are many ways of administering a questionnaire: mailed questionnaire, collective administration, and administration in a public place (Kumar, 2011). In this study, online survey administration was used. Although it could be deleted and ignored for any reason, it was among the quickest ways of collecting data. In addition, it ensured that respondents answered questions on their own schedule and even had flexibility with completion time.

However, the questionnaire could not reveal the nature of this research phenomenon, and there was a need to "listen to the views of the participants of a study" (Creswell, 2005, p.43). Hence, reflective report and semi-structured interview were chosen to help the researcher enhance the ability to interact with the research subjects in their PD and teaching practice. Data from reflective reports and semi-structured interviews offered flexible ways to perform data collection, subsequent analysis, and interpretation of collected information (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

#### **3.4.1.2. Reflective reports**

The second instrument to be administered was the reflective report. In this study, the reflective report was chosen for the teachers to reflect and report on diverse

aspects of their LP since they came back from training workshops for some main reasons. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, PD can be seen as “a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically” (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41). This definition emphasizes the importance of reflecting on one’s own performance as an essential aspect of teachers’ professional growth. If a teacher does not clearly understand why certain activities do or do not take place in his/her classroom, he/she cannot shape other classes accordingly efficiently and productively (Hoban, 2002). That is why teachers’ reflection is a useful practice to support TPD and their efforts to improve students’ learning (Fendler, 2003; Hoffman et al., 2003). The second important reason to reflect is the fact that “without more time spent focusing on or discussing what has happened, we may tend to jump to conclusions about why things are happening” (Tice, 2004).

Similar to the development of the questionnaire, the reflective report derived from the questionnaire data, was also developed based mainly on Hulstijn’s (2011) and Freeman’s (2015) framework of language proficiency. The reflective report consisted of six questions to assess the participants’ perceptions of language proficiency training, their perceptions of changes in teaching practices, strategies, and activities implemented to maintain the level of proficiency (see Appendix B2 for the full form), and factors that hindered their LPM. The questions were designed to elicit and identify (i) teachers’ perceptions of LP training for their LPM (question 1); (ii) teachers’ perceptions of changes in their teaching practices (questions 2, 3), and (iii) their implementing strategies for LPM and improvement (questions 4, 5, 6).

To explore the teachers’ perceptions of changes in their teaching practices and activities they implemented to maintain their proficiency level after finishing the formal training workshops, the researcher selected 64 teachers who voluntarily agreed to write a reflective report and adequately responded to a subset of question items (8, 9, 10, 13, 15 and 17) in the questionnaire (see the appendix A2). These questions in the questionnaire provided information on the teachers’ perceptions and practices for their language proficiency maintenance so that the researcher could get more in-depth into their language proficiency maintenance. The reflective report with six questions was sent to 64 teachers via email with careful instructions relating to the explanation of terms and the deadline of the report. The teachers were asked to

write about the necessity of the LP training for their LPM, teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices, and strategies implemented while maintaining the achieved level of proficiency.

Like the questionnaire, the reflective report was written in English and should be answered in English because the target respondents are English teachers. However, any answer in Vietnamese was acceptable due to the respondents' preferences and comfort with using Vietnamese.

The teachers were given up to six weeks to complete their reports properly. During this time, they were encouraged to contact the researcher with any questions regarding the report. They were also encouraged to elaborate as much as they thought was relevant in their responses. Fifty-eight teachers who completed all questions of the reflective report returned the reports (37 teachers in Gia Lai and 21 in Kon Tum).

#### **3.4.1.3. Interview**

Interview was used to provide more information about teachers' teaching contexts (curricular, teaching loads, colleagues, students, PD activities), difficulties that hindered LPM, attitudes towards training courses and standardized levels of LP, changes in teaching practice they perceived after training and strategies related to LPM. A semi-structured interview was employed to elicit more comprehensive information and explore unexpected issues that might arise during the interview process. The predetermined questions in semi-structured interviews also helped keep interviews "on track", but the flexibility of the structure allows the interviews to flow like natural conversations, creating a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for participants. Since semi-structured interviews are likely to (i) be less structured, focus more on interviewees' points of view (Patton, 2002), and (ii) promote the so-called "rambling", they can better gain insights into what interviewees perceive as important (Bryman, 2008). Indeed, personal in-depth interviews could help the researcher provide a more suitable data gathering method when she needs to gain insights into individuals' opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences (Denscombe, 2007).

Since it is difficult to arrange a meeting with all the teachers at the same time, an individual interview that refers to as "a meeting between the researcher and one informant" allowed us to meet with teachers individually at different schools without

affecting any class time (Denscombe, 2017, p. 177). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews can help us obtain more detailed and rich data, and, as Denscombe (2007) suggests, “the face-to-face contact offers some immediate means of validating the data” (p. 10). Thus, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were believed to be the most effective method to gather data that captured the perceptions and experiences of teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam (see Appendix E for Interview schedule).

The interview was structured around 12 main questions based on the relevant literature and the specific context. The main themes were written out in the form of interviewing question prompts (see Appendix C) to help the researcher feel more confident and well-prepared while interviewing. Moreover, they served to remind the researcher of the significant contents of the study. Besides, the researcher followed up the interviewees’ responses with contextually relevant supplement questions. With this flexibility, the research participants could provide their real-life stories involving their teaching practice during the interviews, so the researcher was able to shape a picture of the teachers’ perceptions of changes in their teaching practices as a result of their participation in the training workshop(s), their strategies and any factors influential to their implementing strategies to maintain the achieved LP after returning from the training workshops.

The interview (See Appendix C for the list of interview questions) consists of a series of semi-structured open-ended items. The questions were designed to elicit and have deep insights into (i) teachers’ perceptions of LP training for their LPM (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) (ii) teachers’ perceptions of changes in their teaching practices (question 12), (iii) their encountering difficulties and implementing strategies for LPM and improvement (questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).

In addition, apart from the major interview questions and depending on the flow of each interview, whenever relevant, emerging questions related to the information provided by the participants in the reflective reports were also asked so that the researcher could collect more insightful understandings of the perceptions and practice of the participants regarding LPM. Table 3.3 shows that interview questions for the participant teachers are relevant to the reflective report.

Table 3.3. Question items in the interview

Questions in the interview
5. In the reflective report, you mentioned three most valuable things you perceived from the training. In your opinion, is it significant to maintain the achieved level of proficiency? Why and why not?
7. In the reflective report, you described some activities to do to maintain the level of proficiency after you left the training workshop. In general, are there any activities to you want to do to maintain and improve your LP but you cannot do? Why not?
8. If you feel any language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
9. If you feel any area of knowledge (syntax, pronunciation, morphology) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
10. What problems do you face when you try to maintain and improve your LP you achieved?
12. You mentioned in the reflective report that you noticed some changes in your teaching since you came back from the training workshop(s). How do you notice the changes? Please provide specific examples.

The researcher tried all means to make the respondents feel comfortable enough to freely express their thoughts and perspectives in response to questions in the interviews. Individual interviews were arranged at the teachers' convenience so that they would feel relaxed, and able to talk and discuss in depth.

### 3.3.2. Data collection procedures

Before commencing the research, the researcher asked for official permission from the DOET in Gia Lai and Kon Tum and schools to contact the EFL teachers for their voluntary participation in the data collection procedure of the study. An effort was also made to obtain permission from the staff of these DOETs to have the lists of the teachers who had attended at least one ELP training workshop held by the DOETs as PD activities. Then she took different visits to the selected schools to seek the head masters' approval and teachers' agreement to participate in the study. The last step was making arrangements with the selected teachers at a convenient time for them to respond to the questionnaire and report in the reflective report.



Two hundred and nine teachers in both provinces were purposefully sent the link of the questionnaire online with the support of the staff of English in Kon Tum province in terms of his provision of a list of teachers who had attended the ELP training their email address and Zalo account. The participants were all gathered because the questionnaire data collection relied upon the attendance of the teachers in the annual PD training during their summertime (generally in late July and early August of 2019). These workshops became the vehicles the researcher used to meet the teachers and administer the study. She contacted most of them through emails and the Zalo group. The participant teachers were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire. During that time, they could contact the researcher for any questions regarding the question items. They were also encouraged to elaborate as much as they thought it was relevant in their responses. However, from the data collection, only 150 out of 209 EFL teachers adequately completed the questionnaires, with 54 teachers in Kon Tum and 96 in Gia Lai province. The number of male and female participants was not balanced (males,  $N = 22$  and females,  $N = 128$ ).

The questionnaire data were used to inform the reflective report and the semi-structured interview. The researcher aimed to establish a more balanced view of upper secondary school teachers' perceptions and their noticed changes in teaching in different areas (city vs. disadvantaged areas) by carefully identifying proper responses in the questionnaire. Further insight was gained by identifying their reports and interviewing both key teachers and teachers without any positions at their school.

After collecting and identifying data in the questionnaire, the researcher decided to choose 64 teachers who appropriately responded to a subset of question items (8, 9, 10, 13, 15, and 17) in the questionnaire (see appendix A2). The reflective report was sent to those 64 teachers via email with careful instructions relating to the explanation of terms and the deadline of the report. The participants were given up to six weeks to complete their reports properly. During this time, they could contact the researcher with any questions regarding the report. They were also encouraged to elaborate as much as possible in their responses. Fifty-eight teachers (37 teachers in Gia Lai and 21 in Kon Tum) completed all the questions included in the reflective report and returned the reports.

After collecting and identifying the reflective reports, 41 out of 58 participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the interview. However, the researcher selected 22 out of 41 respondents who reflected properly the questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 in the report. The interview questions (Appendix C2) were also sent to the teachers via email, so the teachers could read them carefully before making a formal acceptance.

The researcher informed the participants via phone calls that the interviews would be voice-recorded and sought their acceptance by getting them to sign the consent forms (see Appendix D for an example of the consent form). After the researcher received the signed consent forms from participant teachers, the interviews were scheduled and conducted.

A smartphone was used to record the interviews. The participant teachers were told clearly that the purpose of the study was to investigate what activities they do to maintain their achieved level of proficiency after coming back from the training. Moreover, they were all assured that this study did not aim to criticize or make any judgmental assessments of any teacher or school.

Apart from the major interview questions, relevant questions related to the information provided by the participants in the reflective report were also asked so that a more insightful understanding of the perceptions and practices of the participants regarding LPM could be collected. Before the interviews, participants were asked if they would like to be interviewed in Vietnamese or English. All of them preferred to use Vietnamese. Thus, the interviews were conducted in the Vietnamese language and recorded for later transcription and analysis. All interviews were voice-recorded since voice recording allowed the researcher to revisit interviews and re-listen to answers provided if unsure of the participants' responses (Minichiello, 1995). Each participant was interviewed once, and the average length of the interviews was 15 minutes, ranging from 8.5 minutes to 20 minutes.

Apart from 22 formal semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded, the researcher also held 35 follow-up conversations which were not recorded but for which the researcher took notes. These conversations lasted about from

Appendix E summarizes the information of the twenty-two teachers participating in the interview. The average age of the teachers was 36 years and the average length of service was 17.4 years.

Table 3.4 summarizes the number of participants for each tool.

Table 3.4. Numbers of participants for each tool

<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Reflective reports</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
<i>Piloting</i>	20	10	4
<i>Main procedure</i>	150	58	22

### **3.4. Data analysis**

A mixed-methods approach was used to understand both data sets. Questionnaires, reflective reports and interviews were used to collect data for the study. These data sources are complementary to one another when it comes to research on perceptions (Creswell, 2009). This study uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the three research questions meaning that analysis occurs both quantitatively (descriptive and inferential numeric analysis) and qualitatively (descriptive and content analysis) (Mayring, 2000; Creswell, 2009).

As mentioned, the data were gathered from the three collection instruments, including 150 questionnaires, 58 reflective reports, and 22 interviews. The questionnaire data provided EFL teachers' perceptions of the ELP training.

The data collected from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, reflective report and interview were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis (e.g., content codes, texts, themes, patterns, and interpretation) (Creswell, 2009). This involved creating codes and content qualitatively, then counting the number of times they occur in the text data and entering them carefully into a computer database for data triangulation (Creswell, 2009).

In the study, the analysis of the three different data sources and the triangulation of data from three sources helped create an advanced level of emergent content. Table 3.5 provides an overview of how data were collected and analyzed.

Table 3.5. Data types and analyses

Data	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
Quantitative	Questionnaires	Descriptive statistics, mean, SD, %, frequency
Qualitative	Reflective reports; Interviews	Content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Weber, 1995)

### 3.4.1. Pilot study

The aim of the pilot study was twofold. Firstly, it was undertaken mainly to test the research instruments and ensure that the data collection instruments work as intended. Secondly, it was used to collect baseline data on teachers' perceptions of LP training, their perceptions of changes in teaching practices after participating in the training, and strategies implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. Qualitative results from the questionnaire were used to develop questions for the reflective report and the in-depth interview. Its purpose is to gather rich, thickly descriptive data to get insights into the issues it reflects. Moreover, the pilot study would demonstrate the adequacy of the research procedures (Ary & Razavieh, 1990). Unanticipated problems that might include logistical and ethical considerations would be solved at this stage, thereby saving time and effort later during the main study data collection. A pilot study was then conducted prior to the main study to establish the study's feasibility and reliability and ensure that the research instruments could collect reliable data relevant to the research questions formulated (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

#### 3.4.1.1. Piloting the questionnaire

Twenty EFL teachers who participated in the piloting were teaching at upper secondary schools in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces. These teachers were not the participants of the sample who later participated in the main study. The researcher followed up the participants' responses with contextually relevant supplementary questions so that other issues had room to arise. The following checklist was sent to the pilot participants through email or Zalo account as soon as the pilot study was completed for the researcher to get feedback.

- a. Clarity of the questions (in questionnaire, reflective report and interview)
  - (a.1) Were the questions clear enough?
  - (a.2) Which questions did you find unclear and vague?
  - (a.3) Which questions did you think were difficult to answer?
  - (a.4) Which questions did you find problematical?
- b. Perceptions of the researcher's interviewing skills
  - (b.1) Did you feel comfortable when being interviewed by me?
  - (b.2) What were your perceptions of the interview?
  - (b.3) Was I a patient and attentive listener?
  - (b.4) Was my body language appropriate during the interview?

(Adapted from Bryman, 2008; Berg, 2009)

To check whether the instructions were comprehensible and unambiguous, the questionnaire was piloted prior to its use with the study participants. The pilot questionnaire was sent directly to 20 upper secondary school teachers (10 in Gia Lai and 10 in Kon Tum) in an annual training workshop held in summer time in June, 2019. The questionnaire was delivered to the teachers by the researcher in the break time training day, rather than the class study time, so as not to affect their studies. The participants had 20-25 minutes to fill out the questionnaire and then it was collected by the researcher. Of the 20 questionnaires handed out, 20 were returned. This high return rate can be attributed to the researcher observing and collecting the questionnaire immediately after the teacher participants had finished. The researcher then checked the questionnaire papers.

The EFL teachers answered most of the questions, which were Likert scale and open-ended questions. Some teachers did not provide full answers for the open-ended questions (Appendix A1, questions 5, 8, 16, 17 and 18). For example, question 5 asked teachers to explain if he (she) chose “not sure”, “hardly” or “never” for any component of question 4, but they left it out. To address the issue of the teachers' leaving the questions unanswered, the researchers asked them to give explanation and got that they confused the words “hardly” and “never”. Therefore, in the main questionnaire, the researcher replaced “hardly” by “almost not” and “never” by “not at all”.

The teachers were also asked to evaluate the questionnaire, and in relation to the questionnaire “were there any ambiguous or unclear questions which you found difficult to understand?”, the researcher received some feedback as follows:

In Section 1-Personal information, question 5 asked “the number of official English language proficiency training workshop(s) you have attended:

None                      ☐ 1                      ☐ 2                      ☐ 3                      ☐ > 4

some teachers got confused whether the language proficiency training workshop(s) was the B2, C1 courses or other PD workshops. Thus, the researcher added more explanation at the end of the question to make it clearer (see Appendix A1).

The feedback from the respondents was used to improve the instructions and wording of the questionnaire used in the main study. Only some minor changes were made to some questions regarding the use of words that are more familiar to the teachers so that they can understand easily (Appendix A2, Section 1: question 5; Section 2: questions 6, 8, 16, 17, and 18). Since the items in question 13 overlapped with the ones in question 12, so it was taken out. Hence, there would be 16 questions in the main questionnaire. It was realized that one of the key reasons the pilot questionnaire was so successful was the feedback and development from the supervisor and teacher participants. After collecting the pilot questionnaires and the input of raw data in May, several steps involved in data cleaning and data filtering were carried out before quantitative data analysis was conducted via SPSS 20 (Julie, 2001).

For reliability purposes, Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the questionnaire was established to check for a satisfactory level for reliability analysis. According to Taber (2018), if a scale has Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient value of 0.7 or above, it has internal consistency. The questionnaire included three groups of questions to answer 3 research questions. Therefore, the reliability testing measure was run for 3 clusters of questions in turn. The first cluster contains 34 items in the questions numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6; the second cluster belongs to the questions numbered 8, 9, and 10 with 15 items; the third cluster composes of 34 items in questions 11, 12, 13, and 14. By statistics, the reliability analysis was demonstrated in Table 3.5.

Table 3.6 showed the Cronbach alphas for the whole questionnaire and three groups of questions regarding teachers' perceptions of LP training, teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of participation in the training, and strategies implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

Table 3.6. Reliability of the pilot questionnaire

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>		
	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Cluster 1 (Questions 1-2-3-4-6)	.857	34
Cluster 2 (Questions 8-9-10)	.913	15
Cluster 3 (Questions 11-12-13-14-15)	.760	31
Overall Cronbach's Alpha	.856	83

As seen, the overall Cronbach Alpha was at .856, and for each of the clusters was at .857, .913, and .760 higher than the .700, which means that the questionnaire scale was reliable.

Thanks to the pilot, the researcher changed some questions in the questionnaire. The value of piloting the questionnaire was beneficial because it helped improve the design of the main questionnaire. Based on the agreement of participating in the pilot reflective report that was given in the questionnaire, the researcher sent the reflective reports to these teachers through emails.

#### **3.4.1.2. Piloting the reflective report**

The reflective report was in turn piloted with four teachers (two in Gia Lai and two in Kon Tum) at the third week of June 2019 to identify some potential problems. The reflective report was sent to them by email after the participants responded to and returned the questionnaire. The participants were given up to six weeks to complete their reports adequately. During this time, they could contact the researcher with any questions regarding the report. They were also encouraged to elaborate as much as they thought it was relevant in their responses. All participants completed the report without any comments or questions on the questions of the reflective report.

After that, through phone calls, the researcher made appointments with the above teachers, who agreed to participate in the pilot interview.

#### **3.4.1.3. Piloting the interview questions**

Piloting the interview questions is to identify potential problems and to revise the questions before the commencement of the data collection (Friedman, 2012). The practice interview to test the interview questions for teachers was done at the early of July 2019 with two teachers in Gia Lai and two in Kon Tum who were attending the annual formal training workshop for teachers held by the DOETs in summer time. These teachers were chosen because they are satisfied with the criteria of selecting research participants, and they had similar characteristics with the participants of the present study. The pilot interviews were carried out at the break time of the training. This piloting phase allowed the researcher to consider the answers and reactions of the participants in light of the intentions behind the questions, which helped her rephrase and modify discussion questions to obtain richer data. It also allowed the researcher to self-assess her ability to conduct this tool effectively. Specifically, the researcher improved her ability to encourage interviewees to share insights that were relevant to answering the research questions.

After the first interview (34 minutes), the researcher revised the interview protocol and audio recording to check the quality of recording and the whole process of interviewing. The researcher realized that it took her too much time to ask and explain the questions. The second interview (29 minutes) helped her realize that handling a basic checklist with key and probing questions was a useful asset because sometimes the researcher was engrossed in the conversation with participants and forgot to ask some key points. After two piloting interviews, the researcher mastered the interview procedures and developed the skill of asking for further information regarding unanticipated themes that were relevant for the research. This pilot phase helped the researcher realize the importance of the interview questions, which serve to put interviewees at ease, and to check the researcher's understanding of participants' responses to ensure that the interviewees' opinions were fully captured.



### **3.4.2. The main study**

The data collection for the main study took place from early August 2019 to late November 2019. The participants participated in the pilot round were informed not to take part in the main data collection of the study. After the data from the questionnaire were collected and raw data input was carried out, a procedure to create the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was applied, i.e., data cleaning and data filter, Cronbach alpha values of the questionnaire, and clusters were conducted.

#### **3.4.2.1. Quantitative data analysis**

The questionnaire data were scrutinized, and only those adequately completed (with no closed items left out un-responded) were used for the official analysis. Among many computer packages developed for the analysis of quantitative data, the most widely used in social science research is the SPSS (Punch, 2005), which is:

*an extremely comprehensive package that can perform highly complex data manipulation and analysis with simple instructions. SPSS has many statistical and mathematical functions, scores of statistical procedures, and a very flexible data handling capability (p. 130).*

Therefore, in this study, the SPSS 20 (IBM Corp, 2011) was used to determine the frequencies, percentages, mean, SD, and average scores of the questionnaire data.

After the data were entered into the computer database, the researcher checked for consistency throughout the entered data. Once the data entry procedure was completed and checked to ensure accuracy, the data underwent analysis using SPSS. The results gained from data analysis in SPSS were imported into a spreadsheet using Microsoft's Excel software. Excel was used for presenting the analyzed data in tables, bar charts, and pie charts. The findings and interpretations were made in narrative writing.

Although the questionnaire was reworded (Appendix A2, Section 1: question 5; Section 2: question 6, 8, 16, 17, and 18) and changed (question 13 was deleted) to make them more transparent and more explicit, the Cronbach alphas of the questionnaire and clusters were run to test the reliability of the revised questionnaire with value as reliable as in the pilot study, and shown in Table 3.7 below.

Table 3.7. Reliability of the main questionnaire

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>		
	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Cluster 1 (Questions 1-2-3-4-6)	.857	34
Cluster 2 (Questions 8-9-10)	.913	15
Cluster 3 (Questions 11-12-13-14)	.860	31
Overall Cronbach's Alpha	.912	80

As seen, the overall Cronbach Alpha in the main questionnaire was slightly higher than the one in the pilot study. The overall Cronbach Alpha in the main questionnaire was at .912 and for each of the clusters was at .857, .913, and .860 (compared to .857, .913, and .760 in the pilot study, respectively).

Data from the teachers' responses to questions 15, 16, and 17 of the questionnaire (Appendix A2) were collected and coded in contents and entered carefully into a computer database for data triangulation.

#### **3.4.2.2. Qualitative data analysis**

The instructions for qualitative data analysis introduced by Creswell (2009) were used to analyze the reflective report and transcribed interview data. In this study, qualitative content analysis was adopted for two main reasons. First, qualitative content analysis is one of the most commonly used methods to analyze text data that might be in verbal form and might have been obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals (Mayring, 2000; Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). It permits greater certainty in data analysis by minimizing statistical problems of confounding variables (Cavanagh, 1997). Since it is a commonly-used method of analyzing a wide range of textual data, including interview transcripts, narratives, responses to open-ended questionnaire items, content analysis is seen as a quality, descriptive, explanatory, and subjective interpretation of the text data via the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes (Julien, 2008). Moreover, it allows the researcher to analyze collected data "systematically and reliably so that generalizations can be

made from them concerning the categories of interest to the researcher” (Haggarty, 1996, p.99).

Secondly, according to Mayring (2000), content analysis is “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within the context of communication, following content analytic rules and step-by-step models, without rash quantification” (p. 23). Qualitative content analysis is one of the effective methods for making replicable and valid inferences from data to the context, to provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff, 2018). Hence, by linking emergent themes and related contents among collected data, the qualitative content analysis could help the researcher construct and develop a coherent argument and provide real insights into teachers’ implementing strategies to improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

The steps of content analysis were conducted as follows.

When analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher paid attention to the similar themes, contents, and patterns across the data sets. The researcher interpreted the themes or the codes by reading and checking relevant literature on improving and maintaining EFL teachers’ language proficiency. The contents, themes, or codes were reviewed and refined during the data analysis. After robust contents, themes, and extract examples were identified and analyzed, the researcher related back the analysis to the research questions and literature and finally reported the analysis. Relevant themes and labels, and groups were identified using different colors. Based on the grouped themes, descriptions and interpretations were made, and findings were presented in narrative passages. The participants’ responses in open-ended questionnaire, reflective report, and interview were coded using the themes and colors as presented in Table 3.9 (Appendix).

#### **3.4.2.3. Reflective report data analysis**

The focus of the reflective report was to explore the changes noticed by the teachers after they came back from the training workshop(s). When the main themes and contents relevant to each research question were obtained, an inductive approach was used to code the data within each main theme. Similar categories were grouped together to make sub-themes. These categories were labeled with names to indicate

their content. Some excerpts in the reflective reports were quoted in the thesis to support the analysis and findings. Then, the findings were interpreted and discussed in narrative passages.

Extracts taken from the reflective reports were coded and labeled in chronological order of receiving email and participant in each place, so that extracts could be easily identified, for instance: Reflective report excerpt RF. KT. Teacher 12). This code means that this excerpt was extracted from the reflective report by teacher 1 in Kon Tum province. The profile of teacher participants is presented in Table 3.8. (Appendix D)

#### **3.4.2.4. Interview data analysis**

After the transcriptions were performed, the data collected were coded and analyzed by content. That is, the data were transcribed and coded to find similar patterns within the content using Strauss & Corbin's method (1990). Transcribing was conducted in Vietnamese and then translated into English. Interview records were transcribed in full and sent back to the participant for their variation and confirmation. Their request was respected for any information the participants asked to remove from the transcript. As a result, no participants requested changes to the transcript of their interview.

The transcripts were initially read to ascertain the main contents, including the predetermined contents and new, emerging contents. After that, an inductive approach was used to code the data within each main theme and content. The unit of data analysis was a phrase or a short sentence. Similar expressions were grouped into sub-themes and were labeled with names that described their content. Then, the interpretations of the results were made in narrative passages. Particular responses of the teachers were quoted in the thesis to provide evidence for the analysis and findings. Finally, the findings will be presented in tables in order to facilitate the final analysis of the data.

Extracts taken from the interviews were coded using the order of interviewed participants in each province and date, so extracts could be easily identified, for instance: Interview excerpt KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019. This code means that this excerpt was extracted from the transcription of the interview with

teacher 1 in Kon Tum province, which took place on 05th October, 2019. (See examples of analysis of participant' interview excerpts in Appendix A).

### **3.5. Validity and Reliability**

To achieve the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher interacted with the participants in their professional practices (professional training workshops and teaching practices) to gain multiple ways of the improvement and maintenance of teachers' ELP from the perspectives of the research participants. A better understanding of the participants' improving and maintaining their LP was constructed by the researcher's communication with 58 participants through reflective reports and 22 semi-structured interviews. The understanding is, more or less, influenced by the research informants' subjectivity and inter-subjectivity via their interaction with the researcher and with other participants. Therefore, many forms of data in this study helped the researcher triangulate the viewpoints of the research participants, which is effective to enhance the research validity (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2012).

Before data collection, the development and piloting of the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview can create the credibility of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Morse, 2015). The pilot phase was conducted to gather feedback and changes to revise and modify the questionnaire to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was established to check for a satisfactory level of reliability analysis (Taber, 2018). In the reflective report and interview, anonymity and confidentiality were assured to make all participants feel confident and comfortable answering questions openly. To increase the validity of the online questionnaire, the characteristics of the sample population were similar to those of the target population. During the interview, every effort was made to create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere to encourage the interviewees to express their thoughts and opinions freely.

The quantitative analysis was followed by qualitative analysis to identify the connections between items or sub-sections where significant quantitative perceptions, changes, and implementation of language maintenance activities had occurred. The analysis of emergent data in the reflective report and interview

revolved words frequently repeated by teachers in their written reflections. Thus, the qualitative data strengthened the validity of the interpretations of the statistical data.

In the data analysis procedure, different steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the data analyzed. The researcher transcribed the written reflection and recorded interview carefully to ensure accuracy since she conducted the interview, thus including nonverbal aspects that no transcriptionist could (Hay & Singh, 2012). Similar contents were grouped during the data analysis, and emerging patterns were checked for their consistency and variability. After reviewing the contents, the researcher continued refining them, narrating the analysis results and finally reported the analysis. While the analysis based on teachers' perceptions, reported changes in teaching performance, and their implementing strategies may not be necessarily congruent with teachers' actual practices, the results may still give valuable insights since there is the recognition that teacher education which impacts teachers' perceptions is more likely to impact their practices (Lamb, 1995; Borg, 2011; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017).

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

This study followed the ethical principles required by the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University. All participants of this study were selected on a voluntary basis. Approval from Gia Lai and Kon Tum DOETs' leaders to conduct this study was also sought in advance.

This study confronted the principle of informed and voluntary consent. Specifically, the researcher sent each potential participant the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, which were translated into the Vietnamese language. In addition, the researcher explained this study to potential participants and gave them opportunities to ask any questions they had concerning the study. The participants were given one week to consider the invitation. They signed the Consent Form if they agreed to participate. Moreover, transcript checking was sent to the participants to confirm accuracy.

Before the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview were conducted, all participants were informed clearly about the purposes and nature of this study. The participants were also assured that their information would be used only in this

research. Participants were informed that analyzed data might be published in seminars, journal articles, or presented at conferences, but participants' names would not appear in these publications or presentations. They were also assured that there were no impacts on their teaching practice. They had the right to withdraw from participation at any time, and any unprocessed data could also be withdrawn from the research study. The contact information of the researcher and the supervisor, including emails and phone numbers, were provided so that the participants could make contact to ask for any information or raise any issues relating to this research.

Ethical issues were also considered in the data analysis procedure. In the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview, participants' anonymity was protected through the coding procedures and reporting of reflective report and interview data (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). The coding numbers for participants and places were used to protect identities. In addition, ethical considerations in interpretation, writing, and disseminating the research were also applied. The language or words which are biased against persons were avoided, and caution was taken to present the findings objectively.

### **3.7. Summary**

This chapter has detailed the research design and research methodology taken to conduct this research study. This current thesis is mainly explanatory and descriptive, framed by Pragmatic worldview (Creswell, 2009). The mixed-methods approach was employed, which is a key feature of this study since it provides a holistic view of the impacts of the national large-scale ELP training on upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. In addition, this chapter also addressed concerns of validity and reliability, providing clear descriptions that explicate the necessity of reliable and valid instruments and methods. Finally, this chapter has addressed the ethical considerations and concerns for the research, highlighting the steps taken to ensure this research was undertaken in an ethical manner.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*This chapter presents findings of the three formulated research questions and discusses the findings in relation to the literature and theory on TPD, teacher language proficiency, and teacher language proficiency maintenance in EFL teaching context. It starts with reporting teachers' perceptions of the national large-scale English language proficiency training regarding the perceived necessity and importance of language proficiency for their language proficiency development and maintenance. It then reports teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of their participation in the formal language proficiency workshops. The last section presents strategies and methods implemented to improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency and factors affecting their language proficiency maintenance.*

### **4.1. Teachers' perceptions of English language proficiency training**

For a better understanding of the upper secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of ELP training for their LP improvement and maintenance, the data analyzed from the questionnaire items, reflective reports and interviews are merged and transformed into four themes, representing teachers' perceptions of (i) the necessity of ELP to an EFL teacher, (ii) the necessity of teachers' classroom language use, (iii) the possibility of developing ELP, and (iv) the possibility of maintaining the achieved level of ELP.

#### **4.1.1. EFL Teachers' perceptions of the necessity of English language proficiency**

The participants were asked to indicate the necessity of LP to an EFL teacher by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *not necessary at all* and 5 being *very necessary*). The ELP components includes 9 items of four main skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and the knowledge (i.e., the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, and Morphology) which were numbered from 1 to 9. The teachers' responses regarding their perceptions of the necessity of ELP components to an EFL teacher is presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Teachers' perceptions of the necessity of ELP

Scales	NA	NN	NS	N	VN	M	SD
--------	----	----	----	---	----	---	----



Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Listening skills	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.7%	35 23.3%	114 76.0%	4.75	.45
2. Reading skills	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	45 30.0%	105 70.0%	4.70	.46
3. Speaking skills	0 0.0%	3 2.0%	0 0.0%	28 18.7%	119 79.3%	4.75	.56
4. Writing skills	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.7%	53 35.3%	96 64.0%	4.63	.50
5. Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	2 1.3%	69 46.0%	77 51.4%	4.47	.60
6. Knowledge of Syntax	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	8 5.3%	92 61.3%	50 33.3%	4.28	.56
7. Knowledge of Semantics	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	10 6.7%	96 64.0%	44 29.3%	4.23	.56
8. Knowledge of Morphology	1 0.7%	1 0.7%	16 10.7%	94 62.7%	38 25.3%	4.11	.66
9. Knowledge of Pragmatics	7 4.7%	1 0.7%	15 10.0%	93 62.0%	34 22.7%	3.97	.88

Generally, almost participant teachers thought that LP components were strictly necessary to EFL teachers. As can be seen from Table 4.1, all aspects of language were regarded to be necessary for the teachers with the means ranging from 3.97 to 4.75. Specifically, nearly 100% of the teachers confirmed that the four language skills were very necessary or necessary. They expressed a tremendous high level of the tendency when the highest means reached  $M = 4.75$  for listening and speaking skills,  $M = 4.7$  for reading skills and  $M = 4.63$  for writing skills. With regard to the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics, although the means were slightly smaller than those of the four skills, their necessity was also agreed by the majority of the teachers. For the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, there were only 2.6 % of the teachers who were not sure about their importance, 97.4% of the rest found them necessary ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = .60$ ). Also, the means at 4.24 and 4.28 showed the same positive tendency though less or more than 10 % of the teachers were unsure about the role of the knowledge of Semantics and Morphology. The lowest mean fell in the last item of the knowledge of Pragmatics with  $M = 3.97$  and  $SD = .88$ . However, even though a

small percentage of teachers felt uncertain and unnecessary (15%), most of them (85%) fully advocated the necessity of Pragmatics.

Some common explanations for the uncertainty and unnecessary of the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics to an EFL teacher are extracted from the open-ended questionnaire question as follow:

*Extract 1: “I didn’t pay much attention to the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology or Syntax because it was not thoroughly trained in the workshop. I did not explicitly apply it in my teaching” (August, 2019).*

*Extract 2: “My students were not required to do tests about the knowledge of Semantics or Morphology” (August, 2019).*

*Extract 3: “I think the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics were not very necessary. I did not remember much of these fields of knowledge, and I rarely did any tests or read any books related to these fields since I left the university” (August, 2019).*

As can be seen, the EFL teachers’ positive responses to the 9 items questionnaire question illustrated their belief that ELP components were necessary. This might be because those teachers used to be English learners who were formally trained all those aspects of ELP thus might strong awareness of all those components. The result further strengthens the fact that LP does not just involve the actual performance of the language; it also covers the cognitive and linguistic aspect (Stern, 1983; Bachman, 1990). Noticeably, the result reveals that the teachers overestimated the importance of ability to perform the language rather than the ability to know about the language, which may be explained by the teachers’ roles as language users which focus on the ability in the use of a language in certain situations. This finding aligns with Hulstijn’s (2015) approach to LP.

With respect to the necessity of the TL knowledge components to an EFL teacher, the result shows that some teachers thought the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics were unnecessary because they were not explicitly trained in the LP training workshops, and were something they rarely revised or applied in their teaching practices. One participant shared that these areas of knowledge were unnecessary since they were not part of evaluation tests for her

students. These findings have illustrated how the teachers connected their LP and students' learning outcomes. Playing the role of EFL teachers, they tried to use the knowledge and skills (referred to language proficiency) to make good models of English, better respond to students' learning needs, and makes teaching more creative (Farrell & Richards, 2007). This role is likely to make the teachers choose what aspects of the TL knowledge to continuously revise and improve so that they can better transfer to their students. Seeing that students do not need Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics knowledge, the teachers underestimated their roles in the LP. In other words, the teachers' perceptions of the importance of LP components has illustrated how the teachers connected their LP improvement and students' learning outcomes.

#### **4.1.2. Teachers' perceptions of the necessity of EFF teachers' classroom language use**

With respect to the necessity of EFL teachers' classroom language, the teachers were asked to respond to two questionnaire questions. Firstly, the teachers were asked to respond to a four-item questionnaire question concerning the necessity of teacher's classroom language use by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *not necessary at all* and 5 *very necessary*). The teachers' responses are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Teachers' perceptions of the necessity of the classroom language use

Scales	NA	NN	NS	N	VN	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Ability to use English to teach English effectively	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	48 32%	99 66%	4.63	.55
2. Ability to use English to deliver English lesson contents properly	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	5 3.3%	72 48%	72 48%	4.43	.60
3. Ability to use English properly to assess students and give feedback	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	66 44%	79 52.7%	4.49	.59
4. Ability to use English to manage classroom properly	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	7 4.7%	73 48.7%	70 46.7%	4.42	.58

Table 4.2 suggests that teachers' classroom language use was thought to be absolutely necessary to an EFL teacher in terms of the teaching, pedagogical, instructional, and classroom management functions with the means ranging from 4.42 to 4.63. To begin with, a high percentage of the teachers (98%) show their positive

perceptions of the necessity of the teachers' classroom language use regarding the use of English to teach English ( $M = 4.63$ ;  $SD = .55$ ). Most teachers (97%) also expressed the necessity of teacher's language classroom in assessing students and giving feedback ( $M = 4.49$ ;  $SD = .59$ ). Although a low percentage of the teachers felt uncertain (4.7%), most of them (95.3%) fully advocated the necessity of classroom language that enables them to manage classroom properly ( $M = 4.42$ ;  $SD = .58$ ). Similarly, while there was 96% of the teachers perceived that language teachers were necessarily using English to convey lesson content, about 4% of them were unsure about this function ( $M = 4.43$ ;  $SD = .60$ ).

The triangulation of the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview data has illustrated that the EFL teachers found classroom proficiency. The teachers thought that it was necessary for them to maximize the use of English in classroom as a knowledge subject and as a means for classroom communication activities so as to help their students become proficient in English and to meet the student's learning needs. In this sense, since English has been part of the teachers' knowledge, they made English the medium and the object of their students' learning (Tsui, 2003). The following accounts from the open-ended questionnaire questions illustrate the points.

*Extract 4: "Every day I often start a lesson by asking my students some questions such as "how are you?, how was your weekend?, did you do your homework?, was the homework difficult?" to help them practice speaking English and become confident in communicating in English". (August, 2019)*

*Extract 5: "I tried to use more English to perform classroom tasks such as calling the rolls and asking students to work in pairs, in groups to help the students hear English frequently in classroom". (August, 2019)*

It is further explained by the teachers in the reflective report and interview as follows.

*"I intentionally used English in long and complex sentences when teaching to motivate students with high levels of English proficiency in my class" (RF. KT. Teacher 10).*

*"I used much more English in the classroom to help my students communicate better. I tried to motivate my students and create more interactions*

*during classes by designing different classroom activities such as quizzes, games, and oral speaking contests” (RF. GL. Teacher 22).*

*“I designed more pair and group work and made students use more English in discussion” (GL. Teacher 17, Interview 17, 23.11.2019).*

In the above extracts, the teachers have voiced their belief that EFL teachers’ classroom language use plays a vital role in making their students use the TL and better motivating them in learning English as well. By using more English in classrooms, the teachers have tried to both create richer English input for students (Richards et al., 2013) and make their students perform English output, which can enhance their students’ motivation by making classroom language a means of genuine communication (Tsui, 2003), which altogether can contribute to the development of students’ English learning. As mentioned in 3.3.2, teaching English in the Central Highlands context can be more challenging since the students normally have low and limited resources for using and practicing English outside classrooms; thus the teachers in this study might have seen the particularly essential role of their classroom language use in enhancing their students’ English learning.

The result shows that almost all the teachers were highly aware of the necessity of teacher’s classroom language use to an EFL teacher in dealing with different classroom tasks. Although all the teachers’ perceptions of the necessity of the three main functional areas of classroom language use in terms of managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing and giving corrective feedback, a few of them were still uncertain about using English to deliver English lesson contents properly. This has reflected the fact that, although all the teachers had undergone formal ELP training programs, not every teacher could capture subject knowledge or discourse competence in order to deliver the lesson content more effectively (Elder & Kim, 2014).

Secondly, the teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with three statements numbered from 1 to 3 concerning the roles of teacher’s ELP by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *totally disagree* and 5 *totally agree*). The teachers’ responses are presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3. Teachers’ perceptions of the roles of teachers’ language proficiency

Scales	TD	D	NS	A	TA	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. The language that language teachers use in classroom serves as both the means of language communication and content.	0 0%	06 4.0%	01 0.7%	59 39.3%	84 56%	4.47	.711
2. The language proficiency is useful only when it is well employed in the classroom to facilitate language learners.	0 0.0%	03 2.0%	04 2.7%	78 52%	65 43.3%	4.37	.639
3. Language proficiency must be maintained and developed. If not maintained, language proficiency will be lost.	0 0.0%	03 2.0%	0 0.0%	78 52%	69 46%	4.42	.605

Table 4.3 suggests that the teachers were fully aware of the significant roles of teachers' LP regarding the means of language communication and the knowledge subject, facilitation, and maintainability. For item 1, the teachers expressed their agreement at a high level on ELP as means of communication and lesson content ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = .71$ ). Obviously, 95.3% of the teachers confirmed their beliefs while only 4.7% of them expressed their uncertainty. The situation was repeated on item 2 when 95.6% of them agreed to the language proficiency in class to facilitate learners ( $M = 4.37$ ;  $SD = .64$ ). For item 3, the teachers also expressed a high level of the tendency ( $M = 4.42$ ;  $SD = .61$ ). Concretely, 98% of them acknowledged the decline of language proficiency if it was not maintained, and only 2% of them disagreed with this possibility.

In the open-ended questionnaire question, a common explanation for the teachers' choosing "not sure" for item 2 was that they could facilitate their students by using both English and L1 in class due to the low and inhomogeneous ELP levels of students within one class, as further clarified in the following extracts.

*Extract 6: "I think small talks in English with my students outside the classroom would also encourage and motivate them to learn English".*

*Extract 7: "Using Vietnamese in the classroom to explain difficult vocabulary and grammar points, and to make sure that students with low levels of proficiency could understand the lesson contents better in my classroom and I often used L1 in my classroom". (August, 2019)*

The result shows that the teachers were well aware of the important roles of teachers' English proficiency. Noticeably, they thought that they should use English both inside and outside classroom to facilitate language learning. In fact, EFL teachers' English plays an important scaffolding role in their student English development (Andrews, 2007; Butler, 2004; Cheng & Wang 2004; Richards, 2015). This is particularly important for EFL students in such remote and disadvantaged areas like the Central Highlands region who lack the TL environment. Being well aware of this, the teachers in the study assume to make a great effort to use the TL flexibly so as to make sure their EFL students have more exposure to authentic English input (Richards et al, 2013). The teachers' perceptions have indicated their certain level of LP and pedagogical knowledge of how English should be used to optimize students' learning (Cullen, 1998).

In addition to general English proficiency, the teachers in this study also found classroom LP necessary to an EFL teacher. The finding shows that the teachers had positive perceptions of the necessity of EFL teachers' classroom language use in dealing with different classroom tasks, which contributed to the development of students' language learning. In such a complex and social context of classrooms, EFL teachers need both general English proficiency, discourse competence, and specialized language skills (Elder, 2001; Elder & Kim, 2014; Freeman et al., 2015) in order to deliver effective lessons and enact intended pedagogical purposes.

It is also worth noting that some teachers thought that using L1 in EFL classrooms could help students understand the lessons, especially the low and inhomogeneous ELP levels of students in the classroom. Since language use in the classroom discourse is different from other discourses when the language is used in real life (Christine, 1997), some teachers in this study were in fact highly aware of their L1 use and considered it to be a beneficial teaching tool. In response to the cultures of students' learning habits and preferences, teacher #89 decided to use L1 depending much on her/his students' competency and their practical classroom teaching experience. In other words, the teacher's decision about classroom language use was based on the recognizable culture of their students (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). The finding indicates that while the teachers were well aware that they should use more English in classroom to maintain LP, they tried to maintain a balance between

using both English and Vietnamese to facilitate students' language development. A possible explanation for many upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam who found a right balance of using both languages when teaching is that they have a better understanding of the current difficulties regarding students' mixed level in class, students' low motivation in learning English, big class-size classroom, and the presence of many ethnic minority students in class. In the context of EFL teaching in Vietnam where both EFL teachers and students share the same first language, this is considered an advantage for students because EFL teachers can build up a good rapport with students and facilitate students' FL learning by employing students' first language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Grant & Nguyen, 2017).

#### 4.1.3. Teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of developing English language proficiency to the required level CEFR-C1

In terms of the teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of developing ELP to the required level CEFR-C1, the teachers were asked to respond to a nine-item question numbered from 1 to 9 by choosing a number from 1 to 5 with 1 *not at all* (NA), 2 *almost not* (AM), 3 *not sure* (NS), 4 *maybe* (MB), and 5 *certainly* (CE). Their responses are presented in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4. Teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of developing ELP to the required level CEFR-C1

Statements	Scales	NA	AM	NS	MB	CE	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1. Listening skills		0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.7%	63 42%	86 57.3%	4.57	.51
2. Reading skills		0 0.0%	0 0.0%	01 0.7%	44 29.3%	105 70.0%	4.69	.48
3. Speaking skills		0 0.0%	6 4.0%	13 8.7%	46 30.7%	85 56.7%	4.40	.81
4. Writing skills		0 0.0%	0 0.0%	13 8.7%	52 34.7%	85 56.7%	4.48	.65
5. Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology		0 0.0%	5 3.3%	5 3.3%	72 48.0%	68 45.3%	4.35	.71
6. Knowledge of Syntax		4 2.7%	10 6.7%	17 11.3%	82 54.7%	37 24.7%	3.92	.93



7.Knowledge of Semantics	4	11	22	82	31	3.83	.93
	2.7%	7.3%	14.7%	54.7%	20.7%		
8.Knowledge of Morphology	4	14	22	77	33	3.81	.97
	2.7%	9.3%	14.7%	51.3%	22%		
9.Knowledge of Pragmatics	4	11	23	83	29	3.81	.92
	2.7%	7.3%	15.3%	55.3%	19.3%		

Overall, all participants showed their possibilities of developing LP to the required level of CEFR-C1. Table 4.4 suggests that the teachers were able to develop all aspects of language, with the means ranging from 3.81 to 4.69. Noticeably, nearly 100% of the teachers confirmed that they were well able to develop reading and listening skills. They showed a tremendously high level of the ability when the highest means reached  $M = 4.69$  for reading and  $M = 4.57$  for listening skills. With regard to speaking and writing skills, the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics, although the means were slightly smaller than those of the reading and listening skills, the possibility was also confirmed by the majority of the teachers. Only 6.6% of the teachers were not sure about the possibility of developing the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology while 94% of them were able to ( $M = 4.35$ ;  $SD = .71$ ). The situation was repeated in speaking and writing skills when there were 8.7% of the teachers were uncertain, 87.4% and 91.4% of them had a great possibility of developing speaking ( $M = 4.40$ ;  $SD = .81$ ) and writing skills ( $M = 4.48$ ;  $SD = .65$ ), respectively. Also, the means at 3.93 and 3.83 showed the same positive tendency though 79.4% and 75.4% of the teachers found the knowledge of Syntax and Semantics possible to develop. The lowest means fell in the last items of the knowledge of Morphology ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = .97$ ) and Pragmatics ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = .92$ ). However, while nearly 27% of the teachers felt hard or not sure about the possibility of development, there were 73.3% and 74.6% having ability to develop the knowledge of Morphology and Pragmatics, respectively.

Some explanations that were commonly mentioned for teachers' possibilities of developing language proficiency are as followed:

*Extract 8: "The training activities were helpful and interesting. The teacher trainers provided us with good training materials and supported us all the time, including the time we studied online" (August 2019).*

*Extract 9: “I was afraid of not reaching the C1 level because I was old (I worked as a teacher for nearly 26 years) and I did not frequently attend PD activities, so I tried to put most of school and family work aside to concentrate on the training activities” (August 2019).*

*Extract 11: If I had failed the exam, I might have lost my job or moved to other schools because of the policy” (August 2019).*

The result demonstrates that most teachers showed their belief that they would be able to develop LP to CEFR C1 level and that the teachers were aware of the importance of developing LP. The teachers’ positive attitude can be explained by the positive influence of LP training workshops which might have helped the teachers believe that they have increased their LP (Nazari, 2007; Borg, 2011; Özmen, 2012). To achieve at least one level higher after finishing the training, the teachers reported that they not only invested time and effort but they needed support from their family, school, the DOET, and authorized institutes as well. As reported, the pressure of having to achieve the required level of proficiency, job attainment and encouragement, and the helpfulness of the training workshops were contributing to teachers’ high possibility of developing ELP.

To have deep insights into the teachers’ possibility of developing LP to the required level of C1 CEFR, the teachers were asked to answer two interview questions, *“if you gained at least one level of proficiency higher after the training what do you think is the reason for this?”* and *“if you failed to achieve one level of proficiency higher after the training, what do you think is the reason for this?”*.

The results indicate that to gain the required level of proficiency, the teachers thought they would be active and had to spend time for their studying. They reported that to develop their LP, they invested time and made efforts both in the training activities and at their work place. This again strengthens that formal teacher education and frequent use of English both inside and outside classroom can contribute to teachers’ positive belief in their LP improvement (Schmid & Mehotcheva, 2012; Shulman, 1987). The following accounts below illustrate the points.

*“I was active and spent most of time studying for the standardized tests. Apart from the given course books and delivered handouts by the trainers, I*

*also looked for more books for reference” (KT. Teacher 02, Interview 02, 05.10.2019).*

*“I was under pressure of having to achieve C1 level, so I made great efforts and spent most of my summer time during the training workshop to force myself to study” (KT. Teacher 06, Interview 06, 12.10.2019).*

*“I could achieve C1 level because I spent much time practicing speaking English with the teacher trainers and colleagues in the training. At home, I did practice tests and followed the trainers’ guidelines as required” (GL. Teacher 08, Interview 08, 19.10.2019).*

To teachers, the inclusion of four language skills in the standardized tests contributed to motivating the teachers to reach the required level of proficiency because they thought competency in those four communicative skills would be helpful to teach their students. The following accounts illustrate the point.

*“I often listened to news, watched movies in English, and used English when teaching. I did many practice tests during the training. So when taking the standardized test, I felt quite confident and was not very anxious to reach the C1 level” (KT. Teacher 7, Interview 7, 12.10.2019).*

*“I could reach C1 level because the requirement of the standard of the English language proficiency tests consisted of four language skills, which boosted me practice all four skills. I need to develop these skills to teach student better” (KT. Teacher 03, Interview 03, 10.10.2019).*

Noticeably, frequently using English in classroom and beyond to helped to develop their LP was frequently mentioned by many teachers. The result shows that the teachers’ perceived possibilities of developing ELP were strongly affected by their frequently using language skills and knowledge during the training and in their teaching practice.

In contrast, lacking time to spend on self-study for the standardized tests, lacking effort, and lacking language resources to do practice tests were thought to probably affect their LPD.

*“If I failed, it would be that I did not focus on doing practice tests and practicing speaking English with the teacher trainers” (KT. Teacher 04, Interview 04, 10.10.2019).*

*“If I could not reach the level C1 after the training, the reasons would be that I did not spend time attending the training. I did not often communicate in English both in classroom and outside classroom” (GL. Teacher 19, Interview 19, 24.11.2019).*

*“Lack of materials for further practice would make it difficult for me to self-study for the test” (KT. Teacher 09, Interview 09, 19.10.2019).*

The result has also indicated that the teachers reported that their LP would decline, specifically their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills if they did not frequently speak English inside and outside classroom, and did not spend time for self-studying. Also, having few opportunities to participate in PD activities, and network with other teachers were thought to affect their LPD.

*“My language proficiency would decline if I did not use English as often as I used to in the training workshop. (GL. Teacher 15, Interview 15, 23.11.2019).*

Besides, as reported age, anxiety, and test pressure might affect their achieving the required level of proficiency.

*“I was terribly under the pressure of having to achieve C1 level at the end of the workshop” (GL. Teacher 15, Interview 15, 23.11.2019).*

*“I think I was old so it was not easy for me to do the tests. I worried about not being able to achieve C1 level” (GL. Teacher 21, Interview 21, 27.11.2019).*

In the above interview excerpts, the teachers thought they were able to develop their ELP to the CEFR-C1 level. However, the pressure of having to achieve the required level of proficiency, age, anxiety, the lack of language teacher support resources, and lack of time and effort for the test preparation was seen as potential negative impacts on teachers' LPD.

The findings indicate that there are potential impacts on the teachers' possibilities of developing their LP. Their belief in the necessity and importance of developing LP, the helpfulness of the training workshops, job attainment and encouragement, the awareness of frequently using language skills and knowledge during the training and in their daily teaching, and the awareness of self-learning skill development are believed to positively affect their LPD. Some of these findings have been mentioned in Farrell (2007)'s suggestions to improve the target LP of in-service teachers. For example, developing EFL teachers' language knowledge and skills, developing teachers' ability to employ language skills to create classroom communicative tasks, and raising awareness of how the TL works. However, Farrell (2007) did not mention the development of teachers' awareness of self-learning skills. The finding has showed that the teachers thought in order to develop their LP, they needed to develop self-learning skills and the support of some external factors (e.g., stakeholders). This may cause a dilemma for the teachers in realizing the proficiency level as desired. Thus, this finding has revealed the role of LP training in evoking teachers' enthusiasm for their LPM.

#### **4.1.4. Teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of maintaining the achieved level of English language proficiency**

Regarding teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency, the teachers were asked to respond to a nine-item questionnaire question, numbered from 1 to 9. The teachers responded to the question by choosing a number from 1 to 5 with 1 *never* (NE), 2 *hardly ever* (HA), 3 *not sure* (NS), 4 *maybe* (M), and 5 *certainly* (CE). Their responses are presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5. Teachers' perceptions of their possibilities of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency

Scales	NE	HA	NS	M	CE	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Listening skills	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	0 0%	71 47.3%	78 52%	4.50	.58
2. Reading skills	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.7%	51 34%	99 66%	4.66	.48
3. Speaking skills	0 0.0%	6 4.0%	6 4.0%	47 31.3%	91 60.7%	4.50	.76

4. Writing skills	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	9 6.0%	52 34.7%	85 56.3%	4.45	.72
5. Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology	0 0.0%	9 6.0%	5 3.3%	68 45.3%	68 45.3%	4.30	.80
6. Knowledge of Syntax	0 0.0%	7 4.7%	10 6.7%	90 60%	43 28.7%	4.13	.73
7. Knowledge of Semantics	0 0.0%	7 4.7%	12 8.0%	89 59.3%	42 28%	4.11	.73
8. Knowledge of Morphology	0 0.0%	9 6.0%	13 8.7%	94 62.7%	34 22.7%	4.02	.75
9. Knowledge of Pragmatics	1 0.7%	14 9.3%	16 10.7%	91 60.7%	28 18.7%	3.87	.85

Table 4.5 suggests that the teachers thought they would be able to maintain the achieved level of LP, with the means ranging from 3.87 to 4.66. Only a little more than half of the teachers (52%) thought that they were certainly able to maintain four language skills (items 1, 2, 3, 4) with the highest means reaching  $M = 4.66$  for reading and  $M = 4.50$  for listening and speaking, and  $M = 4.45$  for writing skills. Less than 30% of them found it certainly feasible to maintain other language aspects although the means were just slightly smaller than those of four language skills. Concretely, only 28.7% and 28% of the teachers were certain, about 60% unsure, and nearly 7% and 8% showed their perceived inability to maintain the knowledge of Syntax ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = .73$ ) and Semantics ( $M = 4.11$ ;  $SD = .73$ ), respectively. Also, the means at 4.02 and 3.87 revealed the same tendency though nearly 23% and 19% of the teachers were certain, 63% and 61% unsure and nearly 9% and 10% expressed impossibility to maintain the knowledge of Morphology and Pragmatics, respectively. There were about 45% of the teachers feeling certain or unsure to maintain the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology but only 9% found it uncertain or seldom to maintain.

In the questionnaire, three open-ended question items (questions 4, 6 and 15) asking the teachers to provide further explanation for their choosing “not sure”, “hardly” or “never” of LPD and maintenance and difficulties the teachers faced while maintaining and improve the achieved level of proficiency were analyzed. (question 15: *please write down at least two activities you wish to do to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you required but you cannot do. State any reasons or difficulties that prevent your efforts to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved*).

The reflective report question which reads “*what did you find most valuable from those training that helped you develop and maintain your language proficiency? Please list at least 3 things and put them in the order of priority*” was analyzed to have insights into the teachers’ perceptions the necessity and helpfulness of the LP training for their LPD and maintenance.

Similarly, in the interview, the teachers were asked to clarify factors affecting their LPD and maintenance by answering the interview question which reads “*if you feel any language skills (reading, speaking, ...) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?*”.

Data analyzed from the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview suggest that regarding the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics, some teachers found it less certain to develop. Some of the common explanations show the point (questionnaire #3, #13, #47):

*Extract 12: “I didn’t pay much attention to the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology or Syntax because it was not thoroughly trained in the workshop. I did not explicitly apply it in my teaching”.*

*Extract 13: “My students were not required to do tests about the knowledge of Semantics or Morphology”.*

*Extract 14: “I think the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, Phonology and Pragmatics were important but I rarely did any tests or read any books about it since I left the university”.*

Similar to the possibilities of LPD, the teachers explained in the questionnaire that they found it less certainly possible to maintain the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology (9 teachers), Syntax (7 teachers), Semantics (7 teachers), Morphology (9 teachers), and Pragmatics (14 teachers). The main reasons for the less certainty of LPD and maintenance were thought by the teachers that they were not explicitly trained in the LP training workshops. These areas of knowledge were not necessarily taught in the current teaching curriculum or in the test and exam requirements. They rarely applied the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics in their

teaching practice. And two teachers shared that they rarely did any tests or read books about Pragmatics since they left the university. Thus, their possibilities of developing and maintaining these areas of knowledge were not as expected.

Some extracts from the interview further explain for teachers' possibilities of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency as follow:

*"My speaking and writing skills would easily decline because after the training I had fewer opportunities to practice these skills. I had to try to study online in my free time to maintain the achieved knowledge and skills"* (KT. Teacher 06, Interview 06, 12.10.2019).

*"Once having achieved the required level of proficiency, I did not have to retake the standardized test, which also demotivated me to do any practice tests to keep updated on language knowledge and skills. To maintain the achieved level of proficiency, I actively participated in professional development activities to update my knowledge and to network with my colleagues"* (KT. Teacher 07, Interview 07, 12.10.2019).

Noticeably, one teacher reported that her level of proficiency might decrease if she were not required to retake the proficiency test. It is reported that the teachers might lack the motivation to improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency once they have reached the professional standard. The result indicates that the teachers were able to maintain the achieved level of LP, but the possibilities of maintenance were different among the language aspects. Specifically, the teachers showed stronger certainty about their ability to maintain the four English communicative skills than other knowledge aspects of the language. The teachers' perceptions might be attributed to how they have experienced the frequency of use and the importance of those language aspects during their practical teaching and LP training. Seeing that the four English skills are explicitly used and trained and thus more helpful for them to communicate with students and conduct the lessons, the teachers are more certain about the possibility to maintain those four skills.

The finding reveals teachers' perceptions that LPM is very important in EFL contexts. More importantly, once developed, teachers' LP would be very likely to decline over time if it were not used or practiced frequently. It goes without saying



that lack of language use leads to decline or loss. This finding accorded with factors and techniques contributing to LPD and maintenance pointed out by a number of researchers (e.g., Fraga-Canadas, 2010; Murray, 2010; Zuhairini, 2010; Valmori & Costa, 2016, Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian, 2018). Noticeably, the finding of this study has confirmed that more influence of external factors affecting EFL teachers' perceptions of English proficiency maintenance.

The triangulation of the data from the open-ended questionnaire, reflective report, and interview indicates that there were other opportunities and possibilities for teachers' LPD and maintenance. One of the opportunities reported to help the teachers develop and maintain their LP was the usefulness of the training aspects (e.g., *training modes, training contents, training activities, training materials, and length of training*). On sharing the possibilities for their LPD and maintenance, the following teachers' reports exemplify the points.

*"I enjoyed learning online and offline during the training because it helped me manage my time flexibly. The trainers supported me and sent reminding messages on my studying tasks, which was helpful."* (RF. GL. Teacher 51).

The result indicates that the provision of English knowledge and skills through the appropriate training modes (both online and onsite) was reported to be sufficient and helpful for the teachers to achieve the required level of proficiency. Besides, many teachers reported that they received a good supplement to enhance their English knowledge and skills as a result of the usefulness of the training workshops. The following accounts illustrate the point.

*"I learned from the trainer teachers how to be flexible in using English in my classroom; The given training materials and delivered handouts helped me revise and enhance my knowledge and skills"* (RF. KT. Teacher 18).

*"The training held and lasted during summer time was very convenient because I did not have to be responsible for school work at that time. I also had opportunities to do practice tests for the exam"* (RF. KT. Teacher 30).

The teachers reported that having adequate training course books and materials for reference also contributed to their success in reaching the required level of proficiency. Noticeably, one teacher reported that the workshops she attended prioritized the development of their LP and teaching skills, thus it helped her be flexible to use English in her teaching. Furthermore, they thought they were provided effective strategies for good preparation for the standardized tests.

In addition, the data analysis from the reflective report and interview show other opportunities and possibilities for teachers' LPD and maintenance as a result of participation in the training, as shown in the following extracts:

*"Thanks to the teacher trainers' designing practicing activities, I had opportunities to use much English and more frequently in the training than at my workplace, which motivated me a lot"* (RF. GL. Teacher 48).

*"I could use more English and could join teachers' networking to exchange many teaching ideas, teaching resources, and design extra curriculum activities for students as a result of having attended the training"* (RF. KT. Teacher 21).

The result indicated that LP training workshops provided the teachers with more opportunities to frequently practice four language skills during the training, speak English with the teacher trainers and colleagues, and use more English than they used to in their teaching contexts, which were considered valuable. During the training workshops, the teachers thought they had chances to exchange new and innovative teaching ideas, network, and share teaching and learning resources with other teachers locally. The finding indicates that the interaction opportunities between teacher trainers through training activities and teacher trainees is one of the important factors contributing to the increase of teachers' LP after the training.

#### **4.2. Teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of their participation in LP training**

With an aim to explore teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices after having participated in LP workshops, and to examine whether the changes bring about teachers' perceptions of the importance maintaining their achieved level of proficiency, the researcher looked into (i) teachers' self-evaluation of their LP after

finishing the training workshop(s); (ii) teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices in terms of improvement in accuracy in language use (*accuracy in pronunciation, use of vocabulary or grammar*); variation in English use (*ability to say the same things in different ways*); fluency in English use in classroom; frequency in using English to teach English and improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively; (iii) teachers' perceptions of changes in students' English language learning as a result of their LP improvement; and (iv) their perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency.

#### 4.2.1. Teachers' self-evaluation of their LP after finishing the formal training

To explore teachers' perceptions of their ELP after leaving the training workshop(s), the teachers were asked to respond to two questions in the questionnaire. The first question that reads "*since you finished your last English language training workshop(s), how do you evaluate your English proficiency*" consists of four items calling for one out of five options numbered 1 for *declined*; 2 *slightly declined*; 3 *stayed the same*; 4 *improved*, and 5 *well improved*. Their responses are presented in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6. Teachers' self-evaluation of their language proficiency after the formal training

Statements						M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Since you finished your last English language training workshop(s), how do you evaluate your English proficiency?	0	2	13	48	87	4.47	.71
	0%	1.3%	8.7%	32%	58%		

Generally, most teachers thought that their ELP was improved or well improved after the training. While 90% teachers had positive evaluation of their language proficiency after finishing the training (32% improved, and 58% well improved), only 8.7% thought that their language proficiency stayed the same and 1.3% slightly declined.

The teachers were expected to critically self-evaluate their general language proficiency after having attended the training workshops by responding to a nine-

item question numbered from 1 to 9. The teachers responded to the questionnaire question by choosing 1 for *totally disagree* (TD) 2 *disagree* (D) 3 *not sure* (NS) 4 *agree* (A), and 5 *totally agree* (TD) to show the extent of the improvement of specific language aspects, as illustrated in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7. Teachers' perceptions of the improvement in ELP

Scales	TD	D	NS	A	TA	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. I believe my speaking improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0%	1 0.7%	5 3.3%	104 69.3%	40 26.7%	4.22	.53
2. I believe my listening improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	6 4.0%	108 72%	32 21.3%	4.12	.59
3. My reading improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	8 5.3%	101 67.3%	39 26%	4.18	.58
4. My writing improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	8 5.3%	105 70%	35 23.3%	4.15	.56
5. My knowledge of Grammar is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	5 3.3%	105 70%	38 25.3%	4.19	.55
6. My knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	17 11.3%	107 71.3%	24 16%	4.02	.57
7. My knowledge of Semantics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	6 4.0%	30 20%	97 64.7%	17 11.3%	3.83	.67
8. My knowledge of Morphology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	6 4.0%	31 20.7%	96 64%	17 11.3%	3.83	.67
9. My knowledge of Pragmatics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	6 4.0%	32 21.3%	95 63.3%	17 11.3%	3.82	.68

Table 4.7 suggests that most of the teachers thought that their ELP was well improved in almost every area of language knowledge and skills after leaving the training workshops, with the means ranging from 3.82 to 4.22. Most noticeably, of all the language aspects, 96% and 95.3% of teachers felt speaking skills (M = 4.22; SD = .53) and the knowledge of grammar (M = 4.19; SD = .55) most improved, respectively. The same percentage of the teachers expressed their agreement at a markedly high level of about 93.3% finding listening skills (M = 4.12; SD = .59),

reading skills ( $M = 4.18$ ;  $SD = .58$ ), and writing skills ( $M = 4.15$ ;  $SD = .56$ ) well improved. The situation was repeated in the knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology when 87.4% of them expressed their strong agreement on the improvement as self-evaluation ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = .57$ ). There were only nearly 13% of the teachers expressing disagreement and uncertainty about their improvement in this item. Also, the majority of the teachers showed the same strong agreement regarding the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics. Concretely, the improvement was confirmed by a quite high percentage of the teachers 76%, 75%, and 75% regarding the knowledge of Semantics ( $M = 3.83$ ;  $SD = .67$ ), Morphology ( $M = 3.83$ ;  $SD = .67$ ) and Pragmatics ( $M = 3.82$ ;  $SD = .68$ ), respectively. Meanwhile, about 20% of the teachers showed uncertainty and only 4% expressed disagreement in each language aspect regarding the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics. The triangulation of data from the questionnaire and interview revealed that although these language knowledge aspects were not explicitly taught in the training workshops, the teachers showed their agreement on their language proficiency improvement since they reported that these knowledge areas were embedded in English language knowledge and skills that an EFL teacher had been acquired during teacher professional development. The following account illustrates the point.

*“Actually, the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics was not included in the training program, and I did not have a deep understanding of it but I still perceived the improvement in my LP because I believed that these knowledge areas were implicitly embedded in English language knowledge that any EFL teachers had to acquire when learning at university”* (GL. Teacher 18, Interview 18, 24.11.2019).

The triangulation of data from the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview suggested that a majority of teachers reported that their English language knowledge and skills were improved or well improved after the training. The participants’ open-ended responses to the survey question *“what skills and knowledge do you feel has been the most improved since you took part in the English language training workshop(s)”*, and the interview questions *“what is the level of language proficiency you achieved before attending the training course (s)?”* and *“what area(s) do you feel most improved (knowledge and skills) when you took part*

*in the English language training workshop (s)?”, yielded interesting and constant responses in Kon Tum and Gia Lai provinces. Some of the following accounts illustrate the point.*

*“My language proficiency level was well improved. I could see all knowledge and skills increase, specifically speaking and listening because I focused much on doing practice tests, practicing English with the teacher trainers and with peers, and frequently used English in my teaching practice” (KT. Teacher 07, Interview 07, 12.10.2019; KT. Teacher 04, Interview 04, 10.10.2019).*

*“After the training, I reached the C1 level. I found my language skills and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary well improved. I did not think my knowledge of Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics was improved. I took advantage of the training to study hard, which boosted my ELP and enhance my teaching quality” (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019; GL. Teacher 19, Interview 19, 24.11.2019).*

A few teachers thought that they did not make progress in some knowledge areas such as Pragmatics, Semantics, and Morphology because these language knowledge aspects were not necessarily taught for upper secondary school students and were not clearly emphasized in the current curriculum at their school. The reasons given were quite similar to those that were explained for their impossibility of developing and maintaining the LP. They rarely applied the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics in their teaching practices. As a result, the teachers tended to pay less or even no attention to these areas of language knowledge during the training. Therefore, they felt these aspects of language were not considerably improved.

Before the training, the teacher trainees had taken a placement test and were identified to have the CEFR-B2. When the training workshop ended, these participants took part in the exam held by the training institutes and all the trainees obtained the CEFR-C1 level.

The results indicate that apart from the quantified evaluation-the CEFR-C1 level, the teachers themselves thought that their knowledge and skills in English were well improved after the training workshop(s). This was because the teachers spent

time self-studying and made great efforts to frequently use English both inside and outside the classroom. The training workshops provided many opportunities for the teachers to reflect on their proficiency, evaluated how their proficiency improved over the training workshops and allowed them to acquire the language attentively. Although only a few of them noticed little improvement in certain knowledge and skills (i.e., the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics), their English language knowledge and skills were thought to be well improved after attending the training workshops.

The finding shows that there was satisfactory progress in the teachers' general language knowledge and skills after the training because they made great efforts to frequently practice English skills with the trainers and peers. The teachers reported that they also spent time practicing English online and applied knowledge and skills in teaching practice. Hence, that the teachers found their language knowledge aspects, especially four language skills, pronunciation and grammar knowledge well improved is very necessary and important since it means that the teachers could master English language knowledge and use the knowledge competently. This finding accorded with previous researchers (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Mann, 2005; Freeman, 2017) who found a close relationship between the role of continual formal training on in-service EFL teachers' PD. The teachers reported that the language proficiency training workshops provided them with opportunities to frequently practice four language skills during the training and speak English with the teacher trainers and colleagues. It can be explained that in response to the experiences they gained from the training (outside world), the teachers' inner world changed consciously which made them change their teaching practices. This reflects part of language teacher professional development (Mann, 2005).

Noticeably, the training workshops were reported to help the teachers become more confident and motivated. The teachers expressed their satisfaction about getting a good chance to attend the training workshops and thanks to that they could use English in classroom more frequently and confidently. They reported that they had more opportunities to practice using English than they used to in their teaching contexts, which was considered the most valuable. This can be seen in the following interview accounts:

*“I felt more confident in helping my 12<sup>th</sup> grade students do the national examination tests. Particularly, I could apply many useful strategies to help them do the reading texts, which I learned from the trainers and colleagues during the training. Interestingly, I loved my teaching more because I felt I know how to manage my lessons”* (RF. GL. Teacher 15, 04.8.2019).

*“I felt so much proud of myself and more confident when teaching my students. It seemed that teaching was easier and more interesting since I came back from the training. I had learned something new and tried to apply new things in my teaching* (KT. Teacher 03, Interview 03, 05.10.2019).

The result showed that after leaving the formal training workshop(s), the teachers felt happy and proud of themselves because they could achieve the LP standard requirement. Specifically, they felt more confident and motivated in their teaching practice thanks to the LP training workshops they had participated in. This finding is very encouraging since it shows a close link between the level of teachers' language proficiency and their confidence in teaching English as an FL (Llurda, 2006). Teachers with a higher level of proficiency are more confident and motivated in teaching than those with a lower level of proficiency, which is in line with past studies (e.g., Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Farrell & Richards, 2007; Pham, 2017; Le & Renandya, 2017) which stated that teacher's general proficiency can positively or negatively impact on their professional confidence. Reversely, EFL language teachers who perceived inadequate LP experienced anxiety insecurities, or a sense of inferiority (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Horwitz, 1996; Medgyes, 1999; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Brinton, 2004; Rajagopalan, 2005; Mousavi, 2007; Takahashi 2014; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017). Although this finding is not new, it especially shows that the more confident and motivated teachers become after having reached the professional standard, the less anxious and insecure they feel in their teaching profession (Reves & Medgyes, 1994).

In addition, ten out of one hundred and fifty teachers thought that their English proficiency remained unchanged and two slightly declined after the training further explained:



*“After I left the training, my overall proficiency slightly declined because I did not use English as much as I used to in the training”* (KT. Teacher 06, Interview 06, 12.10.2019).

*“My language proficiency declined for sure because I did not invest time for self-study online as the trainers guided”* (GL. Teacher 21, Interview 21, 27.11.2019).

The result shows that some teachers felt their ELP slightly declined after the training workshop(s). The teachers reported that the lack of time and effort for practicing English as they used to be at the training resulted in the gradual decline of their language proficiency. Noticeably, that some teachers found their LP stayed the same or declined after the training highlights the contextual factors affecting the teachers’ perceptions of LP.

*“I think my language proficiency was not improved because I had little time for practicing the English language and skills. After the training, I had to return to work, and most of my time was spent on teaching and other school work”* (GL. Teacher 16, Interview 16, 16.10.2019; GL. Teacher 19, Interview 19, 24.11.2019).

*“My speaking and listening skills gradually declined because I did not often practice these skills when I left the training.”* (KT. Teacher 8, Interview 8, 12.10.2019; GL. Teacher 16, Interview 16, 16.10.2019).

As teachers who had spent time working with students and curriculum, they might have recognized what their students actually need to learn and what knowledge aspects the training programs aim at. Previous studies (e.g., Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, & Smit, 1997; Llurda, 2008) indicate that spending time in English speaking countries, having more frequent contact with native speakers and experiencing more authentic communicative competence would affect EFL teachers’ self-perceptions about their LP. The findings have further strengthened that contextual factors such as low and different language levels of students within one class, and teachers’ discourse skills made the teachers unable to apply certain knowledge that they had acquired from the training into their practical teaching, and affected their perceptions of improving and maintaining ELP.

The findings have showed that the LP training that was carefully considered and planned to emphasize the development of higher levels of ELP for the teachers in the Central Highlands was of substantial benefit to them. In the context of FL teaching, teachers' subject knowledge and teachers' language classroom proficiency are indispensable ingredients for successful teaching (Turnbull, 2000; Turnbull & Arnette, 2002; Richards et al., 2013). Specifically, in a non-speaking English context like Vietnam, which uses CEFR as a benchmark for their EFL teachers' proficiency (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015, p. 47-48), that language teachers fully met the national standard of EFL teachers and master English language knowledge and skills after finishing formal training workshops is highly helpful and appreciate.

In short, although the teachers' perceptions of the improvement in ELP slightly varied among the language aspects, the results show that four language skills and the knowledge of grammar and phonetics and phonology were perceived as the most improved by the teachers. Only a few of them felt little improvement in their knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics. To put it simpler, those teachers seem to overlook the roles of these knowledge areas, leading to their uncertainty about the improvement in those knowledge areas. Also, some teachers felt their language proficiency slightly declined or stayed the same after the training because they did not invest time and effort in practicing the knowledge and skills they had learned in the training workshops.

#### **4.2.2. Teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices as a result of participation in the LP training**

The teachers were expected to respond to a questionnaire question regarding their perceptions of changes in teaching after finishing the formal training workshops by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *totally disagree* and 5 *totally agree*). Teachers' perceptions of changes was described in 5 items numbered from 1 to 5 in terms of (1) improvement in accuracy in language use (accuracy in pronunciation, use of vocabulary or grammar); (2) variation in English use (ability to say the same things in different ways); (3) fluency in English use in classroom; (4) frequency in using English to teach English, and (5) improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively. Their responses are presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8. Teachers' perceptions of changes in classroom language use

Statements	Scales		TD	DA	NS	A	TA	M	SD
			1	2	3	4	5		
After the training workshop (s), I have experienced									
1. improvement in accuracy in my language use (accuracy in pronunciation, use of vocabulary or grammar)	0	1	6	81	62			4.36	.59
	0%	0.7%	4.0%	54%	41.3%				
2. variation in my language use (ability to say the same things in different ways)	0	2	10	91	47			4.22	.62
	0.0%	1.3%	6.7%	60.7%	31.3%				
3. fluency in my language use in classroom	0	2	6	96	46			4.24	.59
	0.0%	1.3%	4.0%	64%	30.7%				
4. frequency in using English to teach English	0	3	7	94	46			4.22	.62
	0.0%	2.0%	4.7%	62.7%	30.7%				
5. improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively	0	4	10	90	46			4.19	.67
	0.0%	2.6%	6.7%	60%	30.7%				

Table 4.8 shows that the teachers noticed changes in using the TL in the classroom as a result of LP improvement after having attended the training, with the means ranging from 4.19 to 4.36. Specifically, more than 90% of the teachers experienced an improvement in using classroom language in teaching after leaving the training workshops. The most noticeable change perceived by 95.3% of teachers was item 1 ( $M = 4.35$ ;  $SD = .59$ ). Meanwhile, only 4.7% of them expressed uncertainty about this change. The second major change perceived by the same percentage of teachers (94.7%) was item 3 ( $M = 4.24$ ;  $SD = .59$ ), with a low percentage of the teachers (5%) uncertain about this change. For items 2 and 4, changes were also experienced at a markedly high level that about 93% of teachers could show great ability to say the same things in different ways and fluency in using English to teach English ( $M = 4.22$ ;  $SD = .62$ ). For item 5, while about 91% teachers found improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively in classroom ( $M = 4.19$ ;  $SD = .67$ ), about 2.6% and 6.7% of the teachers showed their disagreement and felt uncertain about this change, respectively.

The common explanation given for the uncertainty or disagreement on changes perceived by the teachers in teaching practices was that the teachers did not frequently use English in the classroom. They reported that they tended to use L1 as the main tool for classroom communication due to the high rate of ethnic minority students, low and different ELP levels of students within one class. Some teachers reported that many students in their class had low learning motivation and many

ethnic minority students often quit classes to help their family at harvest time. The following extracts illustrate the point.

*Extract 15: “I wished my students were more interested in learning English so that I could use more English in classroom. In fact, many students did not want to study English. A majority of ethnic minority students were too shy to speak English. Therefore, I felt hard to use English regularly in classroom. I used much L1 when teaching English lessons”.*

*Extract 16: “I wanted to create more interactions in classroom to help my students practice speaking and listening and to keep myself fluent in English but I couldn’t because most of the time I had to teach English grammar, vocabulary and reading skills to meet students’ test requirement. Most of the time, I used Vietnamese to explain grammar points and meanings of words”.*

Some accounts from the reflective report and interview give further information:

*“I wanted to speak English in my classes but my students’ different levels of language proficiency prevented me from using English in classrooms. I was not highly motivated to speak English in class due to long, challenging lessons and low levels of my students” (RF. GL. Teacher 58).*

*“I really wanted to use English in classroom but the more I tried the more disappointed I felt. My students were shy and there were nearly 50 students in one class. I felt bored and gradually gave up using English to teach English. I tended to use L1 in my English lessons” (RF. KT. Teacher 06).*

The result showed that the teachers noticed changes in using the TL in classroom as a result of their LP improvement after having attended the training. However, large class sizes, students’ low motivation in English learning, a high rate of ethnic minority students, and students’ different English levels within one class were some main factors hindering their efforts of using English in classroom. The finding reveals that while most teachers thought that frequently using English in classroom would bring many benefits for both teachers and students to develop higher levels of proficiency, maintaining oral skills was not a very easy task since both

teacher and students did not frequently use English in classroom. As a result, some of them tended to use L1 in many English lessons.

The triangulation of data from the reflective reports by fifty-eight teachers that reads *“since you came back from the language proficiency training workshop(s), do you think that your teaching practice has changed thanks to the training (s)? in what ways? Please describe those changes in detail”*, and from the interviews by twenty-two teachers that reads *“since you came back from the English language proficiency training workshop(s), what changes have you noticed in your teaching as a result of the training(s). How do you know the change? Please provide specific examples,”* give deep insights into changes that the teachers perceived in their teaching practices, as demonstrated below.

#### **4.2.2.1. Teachers’ perceptions of changes in using English for teaching, pedagogical and instructional functions**

These changes relate to the teachers’ providing good language models, giving an accurate explanation of the meaning of English words and grammatical items, maintaining the use of English in the classroom, providing input at an appropriate level of difficulty, and using and adapting authentic English language resources in teaching.

With respect to providing accurate modeling for students of TL structure, lexis and pronunciation in classroom, the use and presentation of useful and accurate models of language for their students, and maintaining the use of English in the classroom are given with some of the accounts below:

*“I had been confused pronouncing words in “ed” endings and misused some the words such as “lie” and “lay”. But now I no longer mispronounced and misused them”*. (RF. GL. Teacher 32).

*“I paid attention to use long and complex sentences when teaching to challenge better students in my class”* (RF. KT. Teacher 10).

The result indicates that after the training the teachers found they could provide appropriate and useful models of precise TL for their students, and made efforts of maintaining speaking English in the classroom. By creating authentic contexts to help students learn lexis and language structures meaningfully, and through the provision of accurate pronunciation, the teachers thought they contributed

to creating a learning environment rich in the TL. Further excerpts illustrate the points.

*“I actively changed difficult words or grammatical structures to easier levels for low-level students to have chances to participate in the lessons, sometimes I used Vietnamese to explain if my students get confused” (RF. KT. Teacher 12).*

*“I used much more English in classroom to help my students communicate better. I felt that I could successfully teach grammar in living and communicative ways” (RF. GL. Teacher 22).*

Many teachers explained that they were more flexible in varying the English used in their classrooms to draw on their students’ understanding or to encourage them to complete the tasks. This finding about the teachers’ perceptions of change in teaching practices is important because what EFL teachers do in the language classroom is influenced by what they think, react, and respond to in their professional routine tasks and teaching practice (Lee, 2012; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017).

The teachers reported that they tried to adapt different teaching methods in their classrooms to meet the students’ learning needs. Some of the following accounts illustrate the points:

*“I changed my “teaching style” gradually after completing the training. I supposed that it was very important to use English in classroom because students could learn from simple English sentences to more complex English from their teachers” (KT. Teacher 05, Interview 05, 10.10.2019).*

*“I could teach language skills, grammar, and vocabulary in communicative ways by designing many activities to get students involved and using songs, pictures, flashcards to elicit and help them refer to the lesson contents” (GL. Teacher 16, Interview 16, 16.10.2019).*

As reported, the teachers found they were flexible to adapt different teaching methods to teach English at an appropriate level for their students. They tried to use English in communicative situations such as pictures, games, songs, video clips, and

authentic texts to provide examples of words, and introduce and explain grammar points in the textbooks.

However, while many teachers reported that they varied English teaching activities to provide rich language input to promote students' interactions, the ones whose students had low levels of proficiency tended to use traditional teaching methods and tried to balance the use of L1 and English in classroom to help students understand the lessons.

*"I flexibly used the grammar translation method to teach and explain grammar points and vocabulary. Translating was really necessary for most ethnic minority students and the students with low levels of English"* (KT. Teacher 6, Interview 6, 12.10.2019).

*"During the lesson, I used English to teach the lessons, but I had to ask the students to translate into Vietnamese to make sure that they got the points"* (GL. Teacher 8, Interview 8, 24.11.2019).

They reported that to some extent, applying the Grammar translation method and using L1 when teaching English would be effective to help students understand lessons and get grammatical rules easily.

The finding suggests that at the same time, the teachers tried to take advantage of classroom practice to use a lot of English but meanwhile worried about students' comprehension and thus resorted to using L1. A possible explanation for this finding is that the teachers have a good understanding of their teaching context regarding the current curriculum, their students' characteristics (e.g., the high rate of ethnic minority students, and low and inhomogeneous ELP levels of students) because using L1 translation in classrooms can motivate autonomous learning and shapes students' conceptualization of learning (Turnbull, 2002; Ellis, 2008). Meanwhile, to facilitate students' language learning, the teachers were aware of immersing students in the English language. This finding is suggested by Cook (2002) who stated that "given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs" (p. 23).

Changes in teaching practice were also perceived by the teachers regarding their using and adapting authentic English language resources in teaching. The

teachers' perceived improvement in the adoption of information and communication technology in teaching is reported to help connect the teachers to their students and to teaching resources, and accelerate teaching and learning. They reported that they were more flexible in selecting appropriate authentic teaching materials instead of strictly using the textbooks and following each unit as a compulsory task as they used to do. The following interview extracts gave further information:

*"Instead of solely using the textbooks, I tried to exploit lessons and materials online, which now I found my classroom more motivating compared with my previous classes"* (GL. Teacher 14, Interview 14, 21.11.2019).

*"I was able to exploit authentic materials on the Internet as a supplement of teaching materials. I also introduced some websites and software to help my students further practice doing grammar exercises and language skills at home"* (KT. Teacher 02, Interview 02, 05.10.2019).

The teachers reported that they were not only able to be skillful in the accessibility of information technology in teaching but were aware of the exploitation of the Internet, which was to help increase student learning motivation and promote their language learning development.

*"I downloaded many video clips related to my teaching lessons. I used the video clips to elicit or lead students to the new lesson and to motivate them"* (GL. Teacher 11, Interview 11, 16.10.2019).

*"Thanks to online teaching resources such as YouTube videos, songs and games, and some basic technology skills the teacher trainers and my colleagues shared during the training workshop, I could apply them to design interesting lessons, especially to teach language skills, grammar, and vocabulary in communicative ways"* (GL. Teacher 16, Interview 16, 16.10.2019).

As revealed from the interview excerpts, the teachers noticed changes in their ability to enrich their lessons by accessing many supportive materials online such as YouTube videos, songs and games, language learning websites, and software. That EFL teachers in remote, mountainous areas perceived changes in adapting authentic



English language resources in teaching and improvement in using information and communication technology to personalize their teaching and to promote students' language development is motivating. Teachers who can manage the resource well are likely to contribute to the effectiveness of English teaching since the adoption of information and communication technology in teaching has "the unique capacity and potential for developing and enlivening all domains of learning" (Rose, 2008, p. 43). This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Anderson & Nunan, 2003; Rose, 2008) that indicate a close association between language teachers' appropriately using information and communication technology in teaching and students' language learning achievement. Thus, this finding further supports that teachers with extensive language proficiency are able to "reject an unsuitable aspect of the textbook" (Richards et al., 2013) and that LP plays an important role in helping EFL teachers produce authentic language teaching materials to engage their students' language learning (Farrell & Richards, 2007).

In short, the training workshops were found to be beneficial and have a significant impact on the upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The teachers' accessibility to information technology as a result of improvement after the training has contributed to the success of the language proficiency training because "technology and rich, input-based programs can do a great deal to support EFL teachers" (Anderson & Nunan, 2003, p. 608).

#### **4.2.2.2. Teachers' perceptions of changes in using English for classroom management**

The change concerning the teachers' use of English for managing classrooms was illustrated with the following extracts from the questionnaire and interviews.

*Extract 17: "I tried to use more English to perform classroom tasks such as calling the rolls and asking students to work in pairs, in groups to help the students hear English frequently in classrooms";*

*"I used English more frequently to check students' attendance, giving feedback on their lesson tasks and praising them" (GL. Teacher 20, Interview 20, 24.11.2019).*

*Extract 18: “My students felt confused whenever I used much English in teaching, so I tried to speak English first, then translated it into Vietnamese, or sometimes I used both languages to help them, for example, “Now, look at these pictures, what can you see? – một bãi biển có đông người?, a man painting at the beach? (một người đàn ông đang vẽ ở bãi biển)”.*

*“I designed more group work and made students use more English in discussion” (GL. Teacher 17, Interview 17, 23.11.2019).*

The result shows that the teachers thought they were able to use English to manage their classrooms flexibly. As reported, when managing classrooms, the teachers made great use of English for organizing different activities such as greeting, introducing the lesson, drawing students’ attention to the lesson, dividing students into groups, maintaining order in class, disciplining students, and praising students. It is worth noting that despite having different levels of proficiency of students in class, the teachers made efforts to use English to provide students with many opportunities to interact with teachers and their peers. The teachers were aware of creating an environment rich in English in the classroom, thus, interaction was mostly initiated and maintained by the teachers. As a result, the teachers thought that their students could develop communicative competence and make progress in their language learning.

The finding has indicated that after returning from the training workshops, upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam thought they were able to use more English to manage classes such as setting classroom disciplines, organizing classroom activities, and dealing with individual language proficiency differences, overcrowded and mixed-ability classes, and insufficient and/or inadequate teaching materials. This finding is meaningful in the context of lacking the delivery of authentic language as in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It is true that not only a classroom with native teachers of English but EFL teachers also who use the English language to organize different activities in the classroom can help make the language more authentic to the students and facilitate students’ classroom language learning (Freeman, 2017).

#### **4.2.2.3. Teachers' perceptions of changes in assessing and giving students corrective feedback**

With respect to teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practice, teachers' perceptions of change in providing meaningful comments and appropriate corrective feedback on student language use by correcting students' mistakes and assessing students' work was mostly mentioned by the teachers. A key teacher in Gia Lai reported in the interview,

*"Previously, whenever my students made mistakes in speaking, I immediately stopped them and provided correction. After I had learned how to give corrective feedback from the teacher trainers in the training, I tried to use English to ask my students questions or elicit rules for grammatical structures to help them notice the mistakes and self-correct"* (GL. Teacher 15, Interview 15, 23.11.2019).

Other teachers shared,

*"Now I tried to use body language and simple phrases more often to tell them whether their answers were right or wrong (for example, well done, good, you are right, really?). Previously, I sometimes ignored or terminated my student's turn and moved on with my lesson because I was afraid of lacking time for the lesson"* (KT. Teacher 03, Interview 03, 05.10.2019).

*"Whenever my students mispronounced many words, I often helped them by asking them to listen to words and repeat. Regarding grammar points, I directly corrected mistakes or asked them to distinguish the correct or incorrect structures"* (KT. Teacher 04, Interview 04, 10.10.2019).

The result suggests that the teachers generally noticed their changes in assessing students and giving feedback by giving students a chance to self-correct, as a result of benefiting from the teacher trainers in the training workshop. As reported, the teachers were aware of the importance of English language used in the classroom, they paid much attention to use English to give useful comments and provide students with multiple opportunities for self-correction. Giving corrective feedback on student language use includes correcting students' mistakes, providing accurate models of language use and assessing students' work. The teachers tended to focus more on developing students' fluency in using English, and by doing so, contributed to

increasing their students' learning autonomy. Compared with the ways of their previously giving corrective feedback, the teachers seemed not to focus on the accuracy of the students' responses but they could give more appropriate feedback or imply feedback using body language and hesitation. The teachers reported that they could give more appropriate corrective feedback implicitly and explicitly. They also paid more attention to creating a student-centered environment to develop students' learning.

The finding indicates that when the teachers perceived that any of their language skills were improved, they tended to initiate their language improvement in their teaching. This is one of the most important results of teachers' participation in the formal LP training as part of PD (Farrell & Richards, 2007) because one of the main objectives of TPD is to "enhance teaching effectiveness" (Villegas- Reimers, 2003, p. 67). This finding is in accordance with Banno (2003), who maintains that teachers with higher LP have higher confidence in delivering their lessons and that this attitude is passed on to their students, causing them to have a more positive attitude toward the TL. Furthermore, there is a consensus among researchers that EFL teachers with higher levels of proficiency are able to assess students and provide good quality corrective feedback for their students (Farrell & Richards, 2007; Richards et al., 2013; Tsui, 2003). Although this finding is not new, it shows a close relationship between teacher's level of proficiency and their language teaching practice, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Borg, 2001; Tsui, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Farrell & Richards, 2007; Kim & Elder, 2008; Richards et al., 2013).

In brief, the training activities were believed to be beneficial for most upper secondary school teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces. The teachers reported that they had learned new things useful and applied new knowledge and skills for their teaching practices since they came back from the training. As reported, the more the teachers used English in classroom, the more fluent and accurate they became and the more motivated their students felt. Thanks to the language proficiency training, the teachers reported that they enacted improvements in their teaching practices to fulfill different classroom tasks more often than they used to. The finding indicates that the teachers had positive perceptions of changes in teaching practices as a result of participation in the language proficiency training.

#### **4.2.3. Teachers' perceptions of changes in students' language development as a result of teachers' LP improvement**

The triangulation of data from the questionnaires, reflective reports and interviews indicates that the teachers' changes in their teaching practices as a result of their LP improvement were to some extent, beneficial to their students regarding students' learning motivation and learning outcomes.

In the reflective reports, the teachers' responses to the question "*to what extent do you think that those changes are beneficial to your students? and why do you think so (please justify why you think those changes are beneficial to your students)*", indicate that the teachers noticed the students' changes in terms of being increasingly active and motivated in learning English. Some accounts are presented as follow:

*"I tried to focus more on my students' learning by creating more authentic language learning opportunities. My students seemed to be more active and independent in classroom activities. Some of my students could confidently present topics (in speaking periods) and their learning results seemed to be better"* (RF. KT. Teacher 41).

*"My students enjoyed getting my using English to give comments and remarks both in their speaking and writing lessons. I found they were happy and excited"* (RF. KT. Teacher 19).

The teachers reported that their students were more willing to participate in language learning activities both during class time and outside classroom. Their students seemed to be more focused on tasks and made much more progress in their speaking skills and in language learning in general. Further excerpts illustrate the point.

*"I tended to use video clips more often as "warm up" and "lead-in" activities. I found that my students were willing to participate in many activities during my teaching. My students could actively do many lesson tasks without my support"* (GL. Teacher 07, Interview 07, 08.10.2019).

*"I found that many students made progress in their learning, they got better marks at the end of the semester and they also used more English in classroom attentively".* (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).

As reported, the teachers could notice students' changes in their learning English regarding their being motivated, active and independent in their learning as a result of the teachers' changes in using English to manage classroom, utilize English language resources, and in using more English to teach English (see 4.2.2). Moreover, the teachers said they creatively exploited the Internet as an additional source of teaching materials, adopted information technologies in teaching and provided more authentic language input to help students connect the lesson contents with the language outside classroom. Their perceived changes were reported to contribute to satisfying students' learning needs and enhancing their motivation in learning.

The results indicate that the teachers tended to maximize classroom language use in classroom as a result of their participation in LP training, which resulted in higher students' learning motivation and language development. The teachers could use English in their classroom more frequently (e.g., *give clearer explanations, express the same things differently, convey English knowledge to students more compressively and help their students improve communication skills*). They paid more attention to creating a student-centered environment in their teaching practice (see more in 4.2.2). This brings great benefits for students because once EFL teachers maximize opportunities for TL use in classroom, it helps the students to expose to English language as frequently as possible (Turnbull, 2000; Turnbull & Arnette, 2002). Although it does not seem to have an agreement on how much exposure to English language in classroom is adequate to enhance students' language development, EFL teachers tried to maximize English use in classroom so that their students can be exposed to it as exclusively as possible (Turnbull, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnette, 2002; Freeman et al., 2015) is beneficial for students' language development.

The finding shows that the LP training(s) the teachers participated in brought a substantial change in their teaching practices and as a result, they continued to sustain their focus on students' language learning by creating more communicative interactions and focusing more on students' English learning in class. From the interactional hypothesis (Long, 1996, cited in Ellis, 1999), interactional situations in L2 not only help students get L2 input (via listening to the teacher's L2) but also negotiate for L2 meaning. Interaction functions as an "attention-drawing device",

which aims at drawing learners' attention to the unknown features of a language (Fang, 2010, as cited in Alahmadi, 2019). Hence, the students could better develop communicative competence and made progress in their English learning thanks to the teachers' awareness of creating more L2 interactional situations in class. The finding shows that teachers' classroom language use especially contributes to developing students' oral English language skills, a matter of concern for EFL contexts in general and for the case of the teachers and students in this study. The teachers' perceived changes in students' language development came about because the formal LP training contributed to raising their awareness of the role of teachers' language classroom use. This finding is important because it shows the effectiveness of the formal ELP training on EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

#### **4.2.4. Teachers' perceptions of the significance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency**

The interview question which asks *"in your opinion, is it significant to maintain the language proficiency level you have achieved? why and why not"* indicates that the teachers were fully aware of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency. The following accounts illustrate the points.

*"Teachers should maintain their LP because EFL teachers often lacked English speaking environment outside classroom, if they did not maintain the achieved level of proficiency, it would gradually decline"* (GL. Teacher 20, Interview 20, 24.11.2019).

The teachers reported that it was important and necessary for them to maintain the achieved level of LP because their ELP would decline if they did not regularly practice using it. Furthermore, many teachers reported that maintaining the achieved level of proficiency would contribute to meeting students' learning needs, improving teaching and learning quality, helping them keep up with changes and innovations in EFL teaching, and fostering their confidence in teaching, as reported below.

*"It was very significant and necessary for English teachers to maintain their LP because a teacher with high levels of proficiency could meet students' learning needs and could improve English teaching and learning quality"* (GL. Teacher 12, Interview 12, 8.11.2019).

*“Maintaining the achieved level of proficiency was very important and necessary because it helped us feel confident when teaching. (KT. Teacher 8, Interview 8, 12.10.2019)*

The teachers reported that due to the lack of an authentic language environment outside classroom, LPM was more necessary for them. The finding has indicated that the training workshops not only brought about the teachers’ changes in teaching practices but also underlined their perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency (e.g., they frequently used English for instructions and communication in classroom). This has implicitly shown that the teachers have intrinsic more than extrinsic motivation in LPM. Intrinsic motivation can actually change teachers’ perceived perceptions and guide them into changing their classroom behavior (Harpine, 2015). The teachers’ intrinsic motivation is very important which will encourage them to implement activities to maintain the attained level of proficiency, despite some perceived challenges and constraints. This can further explain for the previous findings on the teachers’ high certainty about the possibilities of developing LP.

In brief, after participating in the LP training, the teachers not only had a positive perceptions of changes in teaching practice but also perceived the importance and necessity of maintaining their achieved level of proficiency.

#### **4.3. Strategies to maintain the achieved level of English proficiency: Teachers’ perceptions and implementations**

This section aims at presenting upper secondary school teachers’ perceptions and implementations of strategies implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency by synthesizing and analyzing data from the questionnaire of 150 participants, 58 reflective reports and 22 interviews. As discussed in section 4.1.4, it was advantageous that upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands had positive perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level. Thus, this section goes on presenting teachers’ perceptions of the helpfulness of LPM strategies, the level of helpfulness of the maintenance strategies, and the frequency of implementing the strategies. It then reports on difficulties and challenges the teachers



faced during their LPM, followed by identifying strategies the teachers implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency, albeit difficulties.

#### 4.3.1. The helpfulness of language proficiency maintenance strategies to an EFL teacher

In terms of teachers' perceptions of strategies helpful to EFL teachers' LPM, the teachers were asked to indicate the extent of agreement on their perceived helpfulness of the suggested strategies numbered from 1 to 10. The teachers responded to the question by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *totally disagree* (TD), 2 *disagree* (DA), 3 *not sure* (NS), 4 *agree* (AG) and 5 *totally agree* (TDA). Apart from the strategies numbered from 1 to 10, the teachers were asked to give other strategies or activities they thought to be useful. The teachers' responses are presented in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9. Teachers' perceptions of strategies helpful to EFL teachers' LPM

Scales	TD	DA	NS	AG	TA	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Seeking opportunities to practice English with native speakers	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	33 22%	117 78%	4.78	.42
2. Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)	0 0.0%	0 0%	0 0%	41 27.3%	109 72.7%	4.73	.48
3. Actively establishing informal environments for English language use (creating English speaking day at school)	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	20 13.3%	130 86.7%	4.87	.34
4. Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs (films, Ted Talks, YouTube videos)	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	24 16%	126 84%	4.84	.37
5. Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g. doing grammar exercise, practicing listening, reading, writing skills)	0 0.0%	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	14 9.3%	135 90%	4.89	.38
6. Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)	3 2.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	30 20%	117 78%	4.74	.56
7. Constantly making an effort to teach English in English	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	31 20.7%	118 78.7%	4.77	.51

Scales	TD	DA	NS	AG	TA	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
8. Paying for private lessons (with native or near native speakers to improve English language proficiency)	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	87 58%	62 41.3%	4.40	.53
9. Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community	2 1.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	53 35.3%	95 63.3%	4.59	.64
10. Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	72 48%	78 52%	4.52	.50

Table 4.9 suggests that all the suggested strategies were thought to be useful to EFL teachers' LPM, with the means of all items ranging from 4.40 to 4.89. To begin with, item 5 was thought to be the most useful ( $M = 4.89$ ;  $SD = .38$ ) when nearly 100% of the teachers agreed with its usefulness for EFL teachers' LPM. The situation was repeated on the rest of the items when from 99.3% to 100% of the teachers were in favor of the helpfulness of the strategies, meanwhile only from 0.7% to about 2% of the teachers showed their disagreement with the helpfulness of these strategies. It is worth pointing that of the ten strategies mentioned, item 8 got the lowest mean ( $M = 4.40$ ;  $SD = .53$ ) but this value still conveyed the usefulness of the strategies. The teachers found all the strategies helpful or very helpful for them to maintain the level of language proficiency. In short, the teachers' responses to 10 items of this questionnaire question clearly showed that they believed these strategies were helpful to their LPM.

The next questionnaire question also includes 10 items, in which the teachers were asked to indicate the level of helpfulness of each strategy to their LPM by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *not helpful at all* (NHA), 2 *not so helpful* (NSH), 3 *not sure* (NS), 4 *helpful* (HE), and 5 *very helpful* (VH)). The teachers' responses are presented in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4. 10. Teachers' perceptions of the level of helpfulness of the LPM strategies

Scales	NHA	NSH	NS	HE	VH	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Seeking opportunities to practice English with native speakers	3 2.0%	3 2.0%	8 5.3%	54 36%	82 54.7%	4.39	.84

2. Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	12 8%	79 52.7%	55 36.7%	4.23	.71
3. Actively establishing informal environments for English language use (creating English speaking day at school)	3 2.0%	4 2.7%	2 1.3%	81 54%	60 40%	4.27	.79
4. Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs (films, Ted Talks, YouTube videos)	1 0.7%	3 2%	9 6%	74 49.3%	63 42%	4.30	.73
5. Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g. doing grammar exercise, practicing listening, reading, writing skills)	1 0.7%	4 2.7%	3 2.0%	76 50.7%	66 44%	4.35	.71
6. Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	9 6.0%	84 56%	55 36.7%	4.28	.64
7. Constantly making an effort to teach English in English	3 2.0%	4 2.7%	8 5.3%	83 55.3%	52 34.7%	4.18	.81
8. Paying for private lessons (with native or near native speakers to improve English language proficiency)	3 2.0%	5 3.3%	22 14.7%	88 58.7%	32 21.3%	3.94	.82
9. Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community	1 0.7%	3 2.0%	15 10%	90 60%	41 27.3%	4.11	.71
10. Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue	2 1.3%	2 1.3%	27 18%	83 55.3%	36 24%	3.99	.77

Table 4.10 suggests that the teachers showed a high level of the helpfulness of the strategies to their LPM, with the means of all items ranging from 3.94 to 4.39. All the teachers thought that every strategy was helpful or very helpful. For item 1, the teachers expressed their opinion at the highest level that they found *seeking opportunities to practice English with native speakers* helpful or very helpful ( $M = 4.39$ ;  $SD = .84$ ). Obviously, 91% of the teachers confirmed that item 1 was helpful while only 5% of them expressed their uncertainty and 4% unhelpfulness. For item 5, a majority of the teachers (95%) realized the helpfulness of the activity ( $M = 4.35$ ;  $SD = .71$ ) while only 5% thought they were not sure or it was unhelpful. The situation was repeated on the rest of the items when from 79.3% to 94% of the teachers were in favor of the helpfulness of the strategies, meanwhile from nearly 6% to about 20% of the teachers felt unsure or found these strategies unhelpful. It is worth pointing that of the ten strategies mentioned, item 8 got the lowest mean ( $M = 3.94$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) but this value still conveyed the helpfulness of the strategy.

Regarding the frequency of implementing strategies to maintain the achieved level of proficiency, the teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire question

items numbered from 1 to 10. The teachers responded to the question by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *never* (NE), 2 *rarely* (RA), 3 *sometimes* (ST), 4 *often* (OF), and 5 *very often* (VO)). Their responses are presented in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4. 11. The frequency of teachers' implementing LPM strategies

Scales	NE	RA	ST	OF	VO	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Seeking opportunities to practice English with native speakers	2 1.3%	52 34.7%	61 40.7%	31 20.7%	4 2.7%	2.89	.84
2. Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)	0 0%	4 2.7%	12 8.0%	79 52.7%	55 36.7%	4.23	.71
3. Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school) for English language use	0 0%	6 4.0%	9 6%	81 54%	54 36%	4.22	.73
4. Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs (films, Ted Talks, YouTube videos)	0 0%	2 1.3%	16 10.7%	76 50.7%	56 37.3%	4.24	.69
5. Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, practicing listening, reading, writing skills)	0 0%	2 1.3%	9 6.0%	78 52%	61 40.7%	4.32	.65
6. Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)	0 0%	2 1.3%	7 4.7%	92 61.3%	49 32.7%	4.25	.60
7. Constantly making an effort to teach English in English	3 2.0%	4 2.7%	8 5.3%	84 56%	51 34%	4.17	.81
8. Paying for private lessons (with native or near native speakers to improve English language proficiency)	18 12%	53 35.3%	57 38%	21 14%	1 0.7%	2.56	.90
9. Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community	14 9.3%	46 30.7%	59 39.3%	26 17.3%	5 3.3%	2.75	.96
10. Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue	31 20.7%	66 44%	40 26.7%	11 7.3%	2 1.3%	2.25	.91

Table 4.11 shows that the implementation of each strategy was at considerably different levels of frequency. More than half of the strategies were implemented at a high level of frequency, with the means ranging from 4.17 to 4.32, while the rest of the strategies got lower means, from 2.25 to 2.89. To begin with, the most regularly implemented strategy was found in item 5 ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). Specifically, 92.7% of the teachers thought they implemented this strategy often or very often, 26% of teachers sometimes and only 1.3% rarely implemented this. The other strategies that were also thought to be implemented at high frequencies were (items 6, 4, 2, 3, and

7) *frequently referring to English language teacher support resources* ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = .60$ ), *regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs* ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = .69$ ), *creating different formal forums or environment to use English* ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .71$ ), *actively establishing informal environments for English language use* ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = .73$ ), and *constantly making an effort to teach English in English* ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = .81$ ). The least frequently implemented one was found in item 10 ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .91$ ). As can be seen, only 8.6% of the teachers thought they implemented this strategy often or very often, 26.7% sometimes while about 65% rarely or never implemented this. The situation was repeated on item 8 ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) when 47.3% of the teachers thought they rarely or never paid for private lessons, only 23.4% often had a tendency to improve ELP with the help of native or near native speakers. Regarding item 9 ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = .96$ ), there were about 39% of the teacher thought they sometimes and 40% rarely or never implemented this strategy. Similarly, for the last strategy, item 1 ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .84$ ), there were about 40% of the teacher thought they sometimes and 36% rarely or never implemented this strategy. In short, the teachers thought that they frequently implemented the strategies of items 5, 6, 4, 2, 3, and 7 while the strategies of items 1, 8, 9, 10 were never or rarely implemented.

The teachers found all the strategies helpful or very helpful, and as reported, they frequently implemented many strategies (e.g., 5, 6, 4, 2, 3, and 7), which further strengthens previous studies (e.g., Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, & Smit, 1997; Llurda, 2008). Noticeably, one striking finding is that the teachers perceived the oral exposure opportunities to native English resources (i.e., speaking to native speakers of English) to be the most effective of all the strategies that help them maintain their English proficiency. However, the teachers' perceptions were found to have a mismatch with their real application of the strategy while they hardly implement it. As mentioned in 3.3.2, the EFL teachers in this research are particularly more disadvantaged and faced many difficulties during English teaching among which a lack of authentic resources to apply to their teaching as well as to improve or maintain proficiency is typical. This can partially account for the inconsistencies and tensions between the teachers' perceptions and implementation of the strategies to maintain their proficiency.

#### **4.3.2. Factors affecting EFL teachers' language proficiency maintenance**

Data from 150 questionnaires, 58 reflective reports, and 22 interviews were analyzed and triangulated to examine factors supporting or hindering upper secondary school teachers' maintaining their attained level of proficiency.

To find out the advantages and difficulties the teachers might have while maintaining the achieved level of proficiency, in the questionnaire, two questions were analyzed (question 15 *"please write down at least two activities you wish to do to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you required but you cannot do. State any reasons or difficulties that prevent your efforts to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved"*, and 17 *"what are some difficulties you face while making an effort to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved? why"*). In the reflective report, the teachers were asked to write a reflection on the question *"what problems do you face when you try to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you have achieved"*. Similarly, in the interview, the teachers were asked to clarify factors affecting their LPD and maintenance by answering question 7 which reads *"in general, are there any activities you want to do to maintain and improve your language proficiency level but you cannot do? why not?"*, and question 10 *"what problems do you face when you try to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you have achieved"*.

##### **4.3.2.1. Supporting factors contributing to teachers' LP development and maintenance**

The analysis of the questionnaire of 150 teachers, 58 reflective reports, and 22 interviews suggests that the teachers had an average of 9.87 years of teaching experience, with a range of 2 to more than 15 years. Only eight teachers (12%) experienced under 5 years of teaching whereas the rest had more than 5 years of teaching, which reflects that most of the participants were experienced. With reference to academic qualifications, all teacher participants had studied English as a an FL, 18 teachers (12%) graduated from the Teacher Training College whereas 90 (60%) achieved a Bachelor's degree and the others 42 (28%) held a Master's degree.

Half of the participants were key or team leader teachers and the rest were just those without any administrative positions in the school.

As mentioned in section 4.1.4, there were two main advantages that were seen as supporting factors contributing to teachers' LPD and maintenance. The first main supporting factors pertaining to the training workshops that were considered as favorable conditions and good opportunities for teachers' LPD and maintenance was the usefulness of the training aspects (e.g., *training modes, training contents, training activities, training materials and length of training*), and the prioritization and inclusion of language proficiency and teaching skill development. The second supporting factors pertaining to the teachers was their perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of LP.

Besides, the availability and accessibility of participation in PD activities were seen as another supporting factor for teachers' LPM. As reported, being provided with available and easily accessible opportunities of participating in training workshops, conferences, seminars, and meetings was beneficial for the teachers. Many teachers reported that regularly or annually participating in TPD activities by the DOET or MOET helped them to improve and maintain their proficiency. Some teachers explained the impact of attending the training workshops and conferences on their LPM as follows.

*"I often took part in conferences and workshops held by local school groups and the DOET, which helped me widen my knowledge and enhance my teaching skills (RF. GL. Teacher 01).*

*Attending the national or international workshops helped me improve my English language skills and build up a rich network of relationships with other colleagues so that I can have more opportunities for professional development" (RF. KT. Teacher 19).*

Furthermore, peer assessment and peer competitiveness such as teacher meetings, peer classroom observations, and in-service teacher competitions were also reported to help the teachers improve and maintain their proficiency knowledge and professional skills. The following account illustrates the points.

*“Peer classroom observations, teacher meetings and annual competition for upper secondary school language teachers are interesting and motivating. These are good activities for us to exchange teaching ideas and maintain our language skills” (GL. Teacher 12, Interview 12, 8.11.2019).*

*“Every year, I participated in provincial or local school teaching competitions as useful activities to improve and maintain my knowledge and skills. (GL. Teacher 20, Interview 20, 24.11.2019).*

The results show that the opportunities of participating in PD activities, peer assessment, and peer competitiveness were other supporting factors that the teachers benefited from. Most teachers reported that regularly or annually having participated in the PD activities by the DOET or MOET helped them to develop and maintain their proficiency (e.g., training, conferences, seminars or workshops).

However, many teachers reported that although most of the given PD activities were in the form of short-term workshops (e.g., one to three days), which seemed not to have strong impact on the teachers’ LPD and maintenance, the teachers appreciated participating in such activities. The following excerpts illustrate the point.

*“Although some meetings or workshops lasted only one or one and a half day, I wanted to join because those opportunities would inform me of language knowledge and teaching skills” (RF. GL. Teacher 33).*

*“I wanted to attend the workshops held by the DOET or MOET although most of the workshops took place within three days, they were helpful and necessary for my teaching job” (GL. Teacher 18, Interview 18, 24.11.2019).*

Finally, having opportunities to teach classes of students with high levels of English proficiency encouraged the teachers to improve their language proficiency. Many teachers (interview participants #1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 22) reported in the interview that in order to help their students develop language proficiency and meet the student’s learning needs, the teachers should develop and maintain the achieved level of proficiency.



*“Every year I was responsible for one class specializing in English or classes with many students with high level of English proficiency. This was challenging for me but teaching these classes was an opportunity for my making efforts to prepare lesson plans better. I had to practice my language knowledge and skills frequently to be able to use English to teach English and thus I could help develop students’ language proficiency” (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).*

*“I think teaching students with high level of English and students with learning motivation kept teachers updating their knowledge and skills, which meant that teachers should be aware of developing and maintaining their achieved level of proficiency to use more English both inside and outside classroom (GL. Teacher 22, Interview 22, 27.11.2019).*

The teachers reported that when teaching students with higher levels of English, they needed to maximize the use of English in classroom, which motivated them to develop and maintain the achieved level of proficiency. In other words, frequently using L2 was a good opportunity for EFL teachers to maintain their English-speaking skill. In fact, most of the teachers of English in Vietnam are EFL speakers, who may have different linguistic deficits, for example regarding vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation (Medgyes, 2017; Riordan, 2018). This is because those EFL-speaking teachers typically work in non-immersion settings, where access to the target language and culture is scarce (Emma, 2018), and have few opportunities to practice and improve their English skills, especially speaking skills. Some researchers (e.g., Cooper, 2004; Fraga-Canadas, 2010) have documented in-service teachers’ difficulties in maintaining their language proficiency when confined to teaching lower-level classes for a long period of time. Hence, improving or at least maintaining English proficiency is a goal and desire of many EFL teachers in such a disadvantaged teaching context. This seems to be the case of the teachers in this study, who had spent at least five years teaching English in a non-immersion setting with limited input resources and students with really low and different proficiency levels. While previous studies (e.g., Reilly, 1998; Farrell, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009) reported different techniques as well as factors that affect EFL teachers’ proficiency maintenance, this finding indicates the

connection between EFL teachers' perceptions of maintaining English competency and students' proficiency level.

In summary, the finding indicates that the usefulness of the training workshops (e.g., *the flexibility of the training modes, the suitability of the running time of the training, the prioritization of language proficiency and pedagogical skill development*), the availability of opportunities to participate in PD activities (seminar, conferences, peer assessment, peer competitiveness held by the DOET and MOET), and teachers' perceptions of the significance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency (see 4.2.4) were advantageous to EFL teachers' LPM. These advantages were reported to be supporting factors affecting teachers' LPM. Meanwhile, the teachers also perceived one student-related factor that hinders their proficiency maintenance, which is the students' low level of English. The results have reconfirmed the important role of formal training on teachers' LPM and have set light on the issue of students' proficiency level in relation to EFL teachers' perceptions of the possibility of maintaining their LP.

#### **4.3.2.2. Factors hindering teachers' language proficiency development and maintenance**

The analysis of the questionnaire of 150 teachers, 58 reflective reports, and 22 interviews suggests that eighty-five teachers (58%) were teaching big classes with more than 41 students, thirty-three (22%) taught classes from 35 to 40 students, and only eleven (11%) of the teachers were teaching classes with less than 35 students. Their schools were located in different areas, only 17 out of 63 schools were in or around the city centers of both provinces. Many of them had to travel from 10 to more than 42 km to their school every day. The rate of ethnic minority students in both provinces was quite high, about 26% in Kon Tum and 23% in Gia Lai, which was considered a big constraint for teachers teaching them English. Students were at different levels of English within one class. Many of the ethnic minority students could not communicate in Vietnamese (L1) well, thus, it was not easy for teachers to cater to all their students' learning needs because of the lack of classroom communication both in English and Vietnamese.

As shown in Table 4.10, the teachers thought that they frequently implemented the strategies of items 5, 6, 4, 2, 3, and 7 while the strategies of items 1, 8, 9, and 10 were never or rarely implemented (*i.e., (1) seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers; (8) paying for private lessons with native speakers to improve English language proficiency; (9) joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community; and (10) joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue*). In the interview, the teachers were asked to give further explanations for their less frequent implementation of these strategies. Moreover, the result indicates that there were different difficulties and challenges affecting their LPM due to teaching physical settings. As reported, some difficulties and challenges were believed to be pertaining to teachers while there were other ones pertaining to students.

Regarding difficulties and challenges reported to be pertaining to the teachers, the result shows that the teachers had limited opportunities for their PD and did not regularly use English both inside and outside classroom because of the following hindrances. Firstly, there were limited opportunities for teacher professional development (*e.g., attending training workshops, seminars, conferences, accessing English language teacher support resources (online and on site), and joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue, etc.*).

*“Normally, key teachers at schools were often selected to participate in seminars or workshops held by the DOET. The teachers without any administrative positions at school had fewer opportunities to attend or to be trained directly from the DOET or MOET (RF.KT. Teacher 55).*

As reported, key teachers, leader teachers, or teachers with administrative positions at school were frequently selected to participate in most of the PD activities, other teachers had fewer opportunities to participate in workshops, seminars or conferences held by the DOET or the MOET. The triangulation of the data sources shows that while most of the key teachers were selected to participate in PD training workshops held by the DOET, other teachers who had fewer opportunities to attend such PD activities implemented different strategies to maintain their language proficiency. For instance, they actively established informal environments for

English language use by organizing English speaking activities at school or they regularly accessed authentic, rich English language inputs (films, Ted Talks, and YouTube videos as showed in Table 4.11. This result partially reflects that due to a paucity of school funding or a shortage of teachers of English, key teachers or team leader teachers are frequently chosen to participate in PD activities or be trained by authorized universities. They then share what they have learned with the other teachers in their team. This finding indicates that despite the consistency of PD policies, they do not provide equal opportunities for all teachers because of the unique characteristics of upper secondary schools in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. However, many teachers dealt with the challenges they faced and made effort to implement strategies for their LPM.

Secondly, due to the geographical traits, most teachers rarely met and communicated with foreigners in English. In the interview, two teachers (#5, #9) living in or around the city centers and having administrative positions in the school reported that they were certainly able to develop and maintain the speaking and listening skills while many others (e.g., #6, #7, #11, #14, #22) who were not key teachers or lived far from school thought that they found it hard to develop and maintain language skills, specifically listening and speaking skills.

Two key teachers said,

*“After achieving CEFR-C1 level on the first assessment by the DOET, I was chosen to study in Malaysia for 6 weeks. That was, perhaps the best opportunity for me to meet and communicate in English with international teachers and students. (KT. Teacher 9, Interview 9, 12.10.2019).*

*“Two years ago, my school leader invited a foreign language teacher who was from South Africa to teach speaking skills to our grade 10 and 11 students. She taught English at our school for two years and I had a good opportunity to improve my English skills (KT. Teacher 5, Interview 5, 10.10.2019).*

Some other teachers who had no administrative duties at school reported that they found it difficult to develop and maintain their LP because they had limited opportunities to attend TPD activities or to speak English with native speakers.

*“I rarely used English outside classroom because there were not any foreigners in my home town as well as there were not any native teachers having a contract of teaching English at our school as encouraged by Project 2020 (RF. KT. Teacher 29).*

*“I rarely met a foreigner to speak English with her/him. Some years ago, I was not a key teacher or team leader, so I had fewer opportunities to attend teaching seminars or training workshops by the DOET or MOET” (GL. Teacher 6, Interview 6, 12.10.2019).*

The result shows that the teachers thought they faced difficulties developing and maintaining their linguistic and oral communicative skills because they had few opportunities to attend PD activities, meet or communicate with foreigners, to join exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue. As can be seen, from the EFL teachers’ perceptions, external extra-linguistic factors (Schmid & Mehotcheva, 2012) were the most influential to their LPM and improvement. The teachers overvalued the roles of formal training and the TL use rather than personal factors such as age or self-motivation in maintaining their achieved level of proficiency. The results have strengthened those of Nunan (1991) and Harmer (2007) and contributed to a more holistic understanding of EFL teachers’ maintenance strategies as found by Zuhairini (2010) and Valmori & Costa (2016), which indicated the complexity of EFL teachers’ perceptions reflected by different discourse and context-based constraints hindering EFL teachers’ effort to maintain their proficiency levels.

Family issues such as low incomes and young children’s care were found to be other difficulties some teachers faced. The extracts below illustrate the points.

*“I wanted to follow post-graduate program or study in a speaking English country and regularly interacted with native speakers, but I couldn’t pay for so a big sum of money because of my low salary” (RF. GL. Teacher 26).*

*“I wished I could join exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue but I had to take care of my children and was busy with my school work” (GL. Teacher 16, Interview 16, 23.11.2019)*

As reported, some teachers also faced difficulties improving and maintaining their language proficiency due to issues relating to family incomes and children care.

The third difficulty was the heavy workload at the workplace which results in the teachers' lack of time for PD. Some of the extracts below exemplify the points:

*"I was so busy teaching and doing other school tasks such as holding weekly meetings for teachers in the English team, organizing extra curricula activities, observing other teachers' classrooms at school, and designing tests. I had 24 classes per week. Thus I did not have opportunities to take part in many workshops or conferences"* (KT. Teacher 1, Interview 1, 05.10.2019).

Although the workload varied from school to school, the teachers reported that they had difficulty managing their time to improve and maintain their language proficiency because there were too many administrative duties or extra curriculum activities to do. As reported, the average teaching hours per week of each teacher was 19.66, which was 2.66 hours more than regulated.

*"My school did not have enough teachers teaching English, so I had to teach many classes for the whole school year. I could not manage time to take part in any professional development activities by the DOET."* (GL. Teacher 12, Interview 12, 08.11.2019).

*"I had to teach more than 24 periods per week because my school lacked teachers of English, no one could take over my teaching job and I did not have much time for renovating my teaching skills"* (KT. Teacher 8, Interview 8, 12.10.2019).

Due to the lack of teachers of English at the schools in the remote areas of Gia Lai and Kon Tum, many teachers (e.g., #1, #8, #12, #22) had to teach more than 30 periods a week and were responsible for administrative work. They also joined or held at least two extracurricular activities in English during a semester. In addition, some of them had to take over other work such as working as a form teacher, a librarian, a school laboratory teacher or an administrator of the school office. In practice, many teachers were also busy with not only teaching but retaining the total number of students in their class as well because the ethnic minority students often

quit class during harvest time to help their family earn a living. This reflected that many teachers suffered from workload (both administrative and teaching load) and had little time for teaching preparation as well as for PD. It should be taken into account the fact that the teaching profession implied not only class teaching hours, but also a lot of extra work (teaching other subjects, being a form teacher, planning, grading, holding extra-curricular activities, etc.).

Fourthly, the current teaching curriculum and test format requirements, which seemed to focus more on paper-based tests, were reported to demotivate teachers' designing speaking activities in classroom. This also demotivated teachers' efforts of using English to teach English in class, and students' efforts of developing oral speaking skills in learning English, specifically for the ethnic minority students who had lower levels of English proficiency. The following accounts illustrate the point.

*"I only taught my students for tests and exams. We were not motivated to speak English in class due to long, challenging lessons and low levels of my students" (RF. GL. Teacher 58).*

Along with the lines, teacher #9 expressed in the interview as follows:

*"I followed most guidelines in the textbooks and taught what seemed to be tested in the final tests because providing all vocabulary and grammar knowledge in the textbook was enough for low English levels of students in my class" (GL. Teacher 09, Interview 09, 19.10.2019)*

The result indicates that most teachers reported that frequently using English to teach English helped them develop linguistic and communicative skills, which contributed to enhancing their language proficiency. However, this is also a challenge facing the teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in implementing communicative activities in their classroom. Therefore, to meet the students learning needs and to prepare well for the students' final tests, they tended to follow the textbook teaching guidelines, crammed vocabulary, and grammar points so that most students could do the tests well. The finding indicates using English to teach English and maintaining oral skills were believed to be beneficial for teaching and learning English but this is a challenge facing the teachers in the Central Highlands due to the requirement of paper-based test-oriented classroom activities. This finding thus

accorded with the finding suggested by Zuhairini (2010) that in maintaining their English proficiency, EFL teachers had a tendency to use form-focused strategies more than meaning-focused strategies despite the curriculum's objective to developing communicative competence for students.

Besides, lacking teaching facilities and digital support (*computers connected to the Internet, projector, cassette players*) would be associated with the teachers' limitation of technology access and literacy, which was also identified as a big challenge the teachers confronted while maintaining their LP. They reported that it was difficult for them to use English to teach English by promoting communicative activities with the adaptation of technology and teaching facilities in classroom.

*"I found it difficult to develop and maintain the achieved level of proficiency because the more I tried to use English in classroom with the adoption of teaching facilities to make the lessons more authentic, and to motivate students, the more I felt disappointed"* (GL. Teacher 10, Interview 10, 26.10.2019).

In addition, the adoption of information and communication technology in their teaching was infrequent and uncommon because the ICT adaptation at school was difficult. Five out of twenty-two teachers hardly got access to the Internet at the workplace due to poor Wi-Fi infrastructure and their lack of ICT literacy. Some extracts shed light on the point:

*"Teaching with digital support could be a complicated and difficult task for some teachers including me"* (RF. GL. Teacher 34).

*"It was not easy for me to select appropriate resources on the internet for my students, and how to use the resources online as a supplement to motivate students took me much time to prepare"* (GL. Teacher 19, Interview 19, 24.11.2019).

As synthesized from three sources of data, the teachers' schools were located in different areas; only 17 out of 63 schools were in or around the city centers of both provinces. Ten out of twenty-two teachers in the interview had to travel from 10km to more than 42 km to their school every day. Thus, they often stayed at school until



having finished work in late afternoon. During the time at school, besides teaching, the teachers spent time preparing for the next lessons and doing other tasks such as designing tests for students, marking students' papers and seeking extra materials to improve their LP. However, as reported, at some schools in or around the city centers, there were from two to six desktop computers having the internet access in the library and these computers were always occupied because there were many teachers using computers for both administrative duties and for their teaching preparation. Moreover, the school library was not well equipped; it had some movable chairs and some tables, no internet access and no computers. There were very few books or no books for reference available in the library. As a result, the limitation and adequacy of the adoption of technology in teaching at school was seen as one of the hindering factors challenging teachers' LPD and maintenance.

The finding shows that the inaccessibility of ICT at the workplace was reported to demotivate the teachers' adaptation of ICT in teaching and affect their LPM since English is one of the top ten languages used on the Web (Internet World Stats, 2020), the appropriate exploitation of the Internet as an additional source of teaching material is likely to be useful for language teachers. The lack of computers connected to the Internet, projector, and cassette players would be associated with the teachers' limitation of ICT access and literacy. Furthermore, Tsui (2003) states that teachers with high language proficiency are able to provide appropriate utilization of the Internet and Information and Communication technologies to satisfy students' learning needs and promote their motivation.

In conclusion, the teachers found that they faced many difficulties while making efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency because of having limited opportunities for PD, lacking environment of speaking English with native speakers, suffering workload at the workplace, facing difficulties designing and implementing communicative activities in classroom due to the paper-based test-oriented classroom activities of the current curriculum, getting low incomes, and lacking teaching facilities, digital support, and technology literacy. The teachers found it hard to seek opportunities to practice English with native speakers, pay for private lessons with native speakers to improve ELP, join a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community, and join

exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue. These difficulties and challenges were seen as hindering factors affecting their LPM because LPM is an ongoing process and that takes place continuously throughout their teaching career (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

With respect to difficulties that were reported to be pertaining to students, the results show that big class size, and other student-related factors (e.g., *students' low and inhomogeneous language proficiency level within one class, students' lack of learning motivation, students' lack of confidence in class communication, students' lack of parents' concern, students' low level of Vietnamese language proficiency*) were barriers hindering the teachers' LPD and maintenance.

The analysis of data indicates that among one hundred and fifty teachers, eighty-five (58%) teachers said that they had big classes with more than 41 students, thirty-three (22%) had classes within from 35 to 40 students, and only eleven (11%) had classes with fewer than 35 students. The teachers had to teach classes of 40.1 students, on average. The rate of ethnic minority students in both provinces was quite high, about 26% in Kon Tum and 21% in Gia Lai, which was considered a big constraint for the teachers teaching English. The ethnic minority students' low level of Vietnamese LP made it difficult for the teachers to cater to all their students' learning needs because of the lack of classroom communication both in Vietnamese and English.

The result suggests that the main hindering factors that were frequently reported by the teachers were the student's low and different LP levels, students' lack of motivation, large class sizes, students' low level of Vietnamese LP, students' lack of confidence in class communication. Furthermore, the teachers reported that it was difficult for them to organize pair work and group work for interactive activities in crowded classes since the students were shy and unconfident in expressing themselves in English. It was inconvenient for students with mixed levels of English to work on different learning activities. As a result, the teachers found it hard to use much English in the classroom. The following extracts illustrate the points:

*“I wanted to speak English in my classes but my students' different levels prevented me from using much English in classrooms” (RF. GL. Teacher 58).*

*“My students were shy and there were nearly 50 students in one class. Using English to give instructions or to organize interactive activities in classroom did not always bring effectiveness” (RF. KT. Teacher 06).*

Some accounts from the interviews gave further information:

*“My students were not interested in learning English because it was not the compulsory subject for their university entrance examination” (GL. Teacher 18, Interview 18, 24.11.2019).*

*“I had difficulties in using English frequently inside classroom because of the limited and different levels of students in a class. My students did not understand English even though I tried to use the simplest language to give instructions or explanations” (GL. Teacher 14, Interview 14, 21.11.2019).*

The result shows that large class sizes, students' low motivation in English learning, high rate of ethnic minority students, and students' inhomogeneous English levels within one class were reported to be other constraints hindering the teachers' efforts of using English in the classroom. Indeed, teachers' using English to teach English and maintaining oral skills were a matter of concern due to the low and different ELP levels of students within one class. While most of the teachers reported that frequently using English in classroom would bring many benefits for both teachers and students to develop higher levels of proficiency, maintaining oral skills was not very easy since both teacher and students did not frequently use English in the classroom.

Another major problem identified was the lack of parents' concern for their children's learning. Some teachers reported that many students' families moved from other places to the Central Highlands of Vietnam for a living, and their parents were busy working in the fields or doing business far from home.

*“My students lived far from school, so they did not want to go to school. They were from substandard families and often quit school to earn money. If my students cut class, I had to go to his/her house which was far from the school to see the reason and encourage him/her to go to school. I did not have much time to update and improve my teaching” (RF. GL. Teacher 44).*

*“My students’ parents were busy working far from home (in the fields or at the local markets), so they did not take well care for their children” (RF. GL. Teacher 15).*

The teachers thought that the lack of parents’ roles in taking care of the students affected their LPM to some extent. Some students were not fully financially supported by their parents, so they sometimes had to quit class (in harvest time) to help their family harvest corn, cassava or sweet potato. As reported, many students specifically those in rural areas came from farmers’ families. Apart from the time helping their family with farm work, they had little time for studying in general and for English learning in particular. Most of them have learned English as a compulsory subject for their school-leaving purpose and a limited number of them for the university entrance examination. This is the reason why they did not pay much attention to their learning English. Furthermore, that students quit classes for helping their family earn money took the teachers time and efforts to travel to their villages to encourage them to turn back to school. Also, students’ financial problems or family circumstances contributed to not only demotivating their learning but affecting teachers’ teaching practice.

In summary, despite some supporting factors, the teachers the teachers shared the same difficulties and challenges they faced in developing and maintaining their achieved level of proficiency. These hindrance factors were found to be mainly related to the particular geographical traits and teaching physical settings.

#### **4.3.2.3. Teachers’ self-evaluation about the support from the DOET and MOET available for their LP maintenance**

In terms of identifying the teachers’ perceptions of support or recommendations from the DOET/MOET available for their LPM, the teachers were asked to evaluate the support from school leaders, the DOET and MOET available

for them by responding to two questionnaire questions and one interview question. The first question in the questionnaire that reads “*how do you evaluate about the support from MOET/DOET available to you to maintain the language proficiency required*”. The second question is “*please write down two support or recommendations that you believe will help you to maintain or develop your level of proficiency*”. The interview question that reads “*do you get any incentive or supportive policy to maintain and develop your language proficiency?*” was asked the teachers to give more information about support or recommendations they received.

Firstly, teachers were asked to respond to one question in the questionnaire by choosing one option numbered 1 for *not at all supported* (NAS), 2 *limitedly supported* (LS), 3 *not sure* (NS), 4 *moderately supported* (MS) and 5 *extremely supported* (ES). Their responses are presented in Table 4.12 below.

Table 4. 12. Teachers' self-evaluation about the support from the DOET/MOET available for their LPM

Statements	NAS	LS	NS	MS	ES	M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
<i>How do you evaluate about the support from MOET/DOET available to you to maintain the language proficiency required</i>	7 4.7%	41 27.3%	51 34%	43 28.7%	8 5.3%	3.03	.98

Table 4.12 suggests that the teacher found the support from school leaders, the DOET and MOET not quite available for their LPD and maintenance. To begin with, only 5.3% of the teachers thought that they were extremely supported from school leaders, the DOET and MOET. Meanwhile, 4.7% of them thought that there was no support at all, 27.3% found the support limited, and 28.7% found it moderate, and 34% was not sure about the support.

The analysis of the open-ended question in the questionnaire that reads “*please write down two support or recommendations that you believe will help you to maintain or develop your level of proficiency*”, and the interview question that reads “*do you get any incentive or supportive policy to maintain and develop your language proficiency?*” show that the teachers mainly focused on the need to participate in long-term PD activities, in training workshops on ELP, and they desired to be given

time and financial support to pursue higher education. The following extracts illustrate the point.

*Extract 22: “It would be better if I were given time and money to pursue higher education”.*

*“All we needed was receiving financial support and scheduled time to follow higher education, but it was hard for us to require such support from the school” (GL. Teacher 10, Interview 10, 26.10.2019).*

The investment in time and financial support was reported to be important issues that the teachers needed from the school leaders and the DOET so that they could update, upgrade and maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

Some teachers reported that after participating ELP training workshops, they mostly took part in pedagogical skill development workshops, seminars or conferences, thus they suggested the DOET and MOET organize and prioritize training workshops on supporting teachers’ LPM.

*Extract 25: “It would be necessary if the school leaders and the DOET organized workshops prioritizing the workshops of ELP maintenance instead of mostly teaching skill workshops”*

*Extract 26: “I needed more workshops or training activities focusing on strategies of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency”.*

*“Though I achieved CI level, I wished my school leaders let me participate in more PD activities, specifically LPM workshops” (KT. Teacher 08, Interview 08, 19.10.2019).*

The results indicate that many teachers thought that regularly or annually participated in the PD activities held by the DOET or MOET would help them to develop and maintain their proficiency (e.g., *trainings, conferences, seminars or workshops*).

Besides, they thought that long-term workshops and workshops on both ELP and pedagogical skills would help them improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency and enhance teaching competence.

*Extract 23: “I think short-term workshops which only lasted from one to three days seemed not to have strong impacts on our language competence. Therefore, the DOET would rather organize long-term workshops so that we could have enough time to improve language proficiency”.*

However, as reported, their heavy teaching workload and financial problems prevented them from developing and maintaining LP. They expected to be reduced workload at school and created favorable working conditions so that they could improve and maintain their LP.

*Extract 24: “I had to teach 24 periods a week, and was in charge of other school activities, so I did not have time to attend any workshops” (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).*

*“I didn’t have lots of chances to join PD programs because of my heavy schedule at work” (GL. Teacher 13, Interview 13, 08.11.2019).*

The finding shows that limited time and financial incentives were perceived as barriers preventing their developing and maintaining achieved level of proficiency. Specifically, some of the teachers suggested the DOETs and MOET organize LPM training workshops because the lack of motivation and lack of English language both inside and outside classroom may result in decreasing and losing their LP. They thought that although they had achieved CEFR C1 level and were qualified to teach English at upper secondary school, they wished to regularly participate in LPM training workshops as part of PD.

#### **4.3.3. Strategies and activities teachers implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency**

As mentioned in section 4.3.1, the teachers thought that all the suggested strategies mentioned in Table 4.9 were helpful to their LPM. And they reported that they frequently implemented six out of ten strategies for their LPM (i.e., *the strategies of items 5, 6, 4, 2, 3, and 7*) as presented in Table 4.11. Meanwhile, section 4.3.2 has suggested that upper secondary school teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam confronted many difficulties and challenges while maintaining the achieved level of proficiency. Thus, to explore what the teachers do to overcome the difficulties to

maintain the achieved level of proficiency, data were collected and analyzed from the open-ended question in the questionnaire that reads “*what have you done to maintain and improve your LP since you came back from the training workshops*”, the reflective report question “*what have you done to overcome these problems*”, and the interview question *what have you done to maintain and improve your LP since you came back from the training workshop(s)?*”.

The triangulation of the questionnaire, reflective report, and interview data has indicated that generally, in different teaching contexts, teachers implemented two groups of strategies: language input-based strategies and language output-based strategies to overcome difficulties they faced while maintaining the achieved level of proficiency.

#### **4.3.3.1. Language input-based strategies**

##### ***Frequently revising knowledge of the target language***

The strategy of frequently revising knowledge of the target language to maintain the achieved level of proficiency was reported to be implemented by most of the teachers. In particular, practicing skills (listening, reading, writing), and doing grammar exercises were reported to be helpful for the teachers who suffered from the workload of teaching (e.g. #1, #8, #16, #19, and #22 in the interviews), helping them to retain the acquired level of proficiency. The following accounts give deep insights into what the teachers do to maintain the achieved level of proficiency.

*“I implemented many self-study activities at home to maintain and improve my language knowledge and skills such as reading graded books, doing practice tests online (reading, listening and grammar) (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).*

See more from the following excerpts.

*“I maintained four language skills by reading newspapers, listening to English news and watching movies without sub-titles. It was convenient since I could access the Internet” (RF. GL. Teacher 46).*

The result shows that the teachers made great efforts to maintain their LP by implementing many different internet-based activities including self-studying



through means of media, reading and listening in English, watching English movies with or without sub-titles, and doing grammar and language skills.

### ***Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources***

Regarding the strategy of frequently referring to English language teacher resources, many teachers said that they often actively accessed English language teacher support resources online such as webinars for EFL teachers, and digital teacher products to get online professional development, which contributed to their LP maintenance.

*“I looked for webinars for teachers or free digital teacher products such as software and apps for my language proficiency improvement and maintenance” (RF.KT. Teacher 25).*

*“I enjoyed free of charge and ready-to-use applications for teaching and learning English such as online English worksheets that helped me improve my language knowledge and skills” (RF.GL. Teacher 16).*

The teachers reported that since their school library often lacked teaching materials, they tended to access online teacher language support resources to find online materials for their teaching and for their language proficiency improvement and maintenance.

### ***Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs***

Some teachers reported that frequently accessing a language rich-environment (e.g., online resources, websites, authentic texts, realia, etc.) was helpful for their LP improvement and maintenance since such rich English language inputs could help them learn more about language knowledge and enable them to use the language independently.

*Extract 30: “I wrote diary in English, and listened to foreign programs such as TED Talks, VOA, BBC news to practice my English skills.*

*“I often listened to English music, English news and watched movies. I preferred to listen to Ted talk speeches since they were helpful” (KT. Teacher 5, Interview 5, 10.10.2019)*

In addition, participating in PD activities was also mentioned as an effective strategy for teachers' LPM although there were not all teachers provided with opportunities to participate in professional development activities held by the DOET. The following accounts illustrate the point.

*"I participated in TPD activities such as teacher contests, seminars, conferences and training workshops as participant or presenter to improve my language knowledge and skills" (RF. GL. Teacher 57).*

*"Every year, I registered to join national conferences and provincial teaching competitions as activities to improve and update my knowledge and skills. I also followed post-graduate studies (RF. GL. Teacher 58).*

Two teachers (# 57 and # 58) reported that they had opportunities to participate in TPD activities and found that such activities as attending and presenting at seminars, conferences and workshops for in-service EFL teachers, wrote journals or articles relating to English language teaching and learning held by the DOET or MOET were helpful for their LP maintenance.

#### **4.3.3.2. Language output-based strategies**

##### ***Creating different formal and informal environments to use English***

Some teachers reported that creating different formal forums or environment to use English was also one of the main strategies they implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. Some of the following extracts illustrate the points:

*"I often texted, chatted and exchanged teaching ideas with other teachers locally via email or social network" (RF. GL. Teacher 49).*

*"I often participated in contests for language teachers held by the DOET. I found it useful to maintain and improve my proficiency" (RF. KT. Teacher 07).*

Moreover, the teachers reported that officially observing other teachers' classrooms, exchanging teaching ideas through teaching meetings and local teacher groups, texting, and participating in contests for language teachers held by the DOET or MOET were common activities they often carried out for their LPM.

*Extract 27: “I found classroom observation useful and I maintained to visit my colleagues’ classroom at least twice a month. I learned from them many things interesting such as to how to use English to manage classroom and how to provide students with authentic English language input”.*

*Extract 28: “I wrote Teachers’ Initiative Report (Sang kien kinh Nghiem) every year as a way of improving and maintaining my English proficiency. I sometimes took part in contests for language teachers such as Giao vien day gioi, giao vien chu nhiem gioi”.*

The result shows that attending free online discussion groups, officially observing other teachers’ classrooms, exchanging teaching ideas and materials with colleagues in local areas, and participating in contests for language teachers were some main activities the teacher often took part in while maintaining their LP.

#### ***Actively establishing informal environments for students’ using English***

Since the implementation of Project 2020, building authentic English language use environment both inside and outside school has been one of the priorities contributing to developing and improving English language proficiency. Many upper secondary school actively held extra curricula activities for students to practice English. Specifically, some teachers reported that for big class size, they flexibly organized pair work and group work so that competent students could share their opinions in leaning activities and give support to incompetent ones. Regarding students’ low and different LP levels within one class, students’ lack of learning motivation, students’ lack of confidence in class communication, some teachers tried to motivate students by organizing different learning activities of using English both inside and outside classroom.

*“I designed some activities of using English for my students to take part in as extra-curricular activities, such as doing a project, English speaking club and English eloquent contest. These activities were beneficial for both teachers and students’ language proficiency development” (RF. GL. Teacher 22).*

*“I tried to help my students practice English in short conversations, present topics from one to two minutes, and summarize a reading passage”* (RF. GL. Teacher 06).

The result shows that EFL teachers made efforts to build authentic English language use environment for their students practicing English both inside and outside classroom. The EFL teachers believed that creating opportunities for real-life communication and providing a language environment rich and authentic in the TL input can promote students’ language learning.

### ***Constantly making an effort to teach English in English***

Many teachers reported that constantly making an effort to teach English in English was the main strategy implemented for their LPM. This strategy was reported to help them deal with paper-based test-oriented classroom activities, and difficulties relating to big class size, and other student-related factors (e.g. students’ low and inhomogeneous language proficiency level within one class, students’ lack of learning motivation, students’ lack of confidence in class communication).

*“I paid attention to using English frequently when teaching. I often searched for authentic language sources in the internet to make lessons more interesting and to motivate my students”* (KT. Teacher 03, Interview 03, 05.10.2019).

As reported, the teachers did not rely heavily on the current textbooks but created authentic English speaking environment for students by organizing different learning activities, and used additional teaching facilities available on the internet or at their school such as YouTube videos, flash cash, pictures, projectors or computers.

*“I designed many different activities to motivate my students by using songs, pictures, flashcards, YouTube videos from the internet”* (RF. GL. Teacher 09).

*“I found that my students felt excited when I guided them to work in pairs and groups. They made progress in using English, and felt more confident”* (GL. Teacher 07, Interview 07, 08.10.2019).

The result shows that constantly making an effort to teach English in English by creating communicative and interactive activities during class time, organizing different learning activities both inside and outside classroom, and using additional teaching facilities available on the internet were perceived as useful activities, and reported to be frequently implemented activities by the teachers to handle difficulties (e.g., large class size, paper-based test-oriented classroom activities, and other student-related factors).

It is found that making efforts to teach English in English was thought to improve both students' learning achievements and contributed to teachers' LPM. This finding is meaningful, specifically in EFL teaching contexts, language input and opportunities for classroom interactions need to be available, and classroom activities are the main source of students' exposure to the TL so that EFL students can easily pick up the English language in an authentic, rich in English language environment (Turnbull, 2003).

In short, there were six strategies identified as the most effective and commonly implemented reported by the teachers to maintain their achieved level of proficiency (e.g., (i) *frequently revising knowledge of the target language*, (ii) *frequently referring to English language teachers resources*, (iii) *regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs*, (iv) *creating different formal forums or environment to use English*, (v) *actively establishing informal environments*, and (vi) *constantly making an effort to teach English in English*). The findings have indicated that while facing many difficulties relating to their teaching context, the teachers were not only aware of self-studying but actively creating English using environments by implementing different strategies for their language proficiency maintenance.

The finding has indicated that, from the EFL teachers' perceptions, LPM is a co-construction of two tasks: teaching and learning. Only by having ongoing opportunities to use, practice, and revise the TL can EFL teachers maintain and improve their proficiency, which accorded with previous studies (e.g., Peyton, 1997; Schmid, 2012; Włosowicz, 2017). This finding is particularly important to the EFL teachers in this study whose working context and conditions tend to make them enact

the teacher role rather than the learner role. This finding has also been in accord with many researchers' findings (e.g. Farrell, 2007; Murray, 2010; Nunan, 1991; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Zuhairini, 2010; Valmori & Costa, 2016; Włosowic, 2017) who found maintenance strategies necessary and effective for EFL teachers. However, in the context of lacking authentic language environment and most of in-service EFL teachers who have been facing many difficulties hindering their LP improvement and maintenance that they actively implemented strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency is encouraging and appreciating.

#### **4.4. Summary**

The current chapter has reported important findings about EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of their LPM. For the main part of the chapter, both quantitative and qualitative data are triangulated, grouped and presented according to the three formulated research questions and respective themes.

The findings have indicated that thanks to the ELP training workshops as part of Project 2020, in-service EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam increased higher levels of proficiency and met their PD needs. In the Vietnamese context, the level of EFL teachers' LP (i.e., the CEFR-C1 level) was specified in government policy in 2008 (Vietnamese Government, 2008), since then this policy has been successfully translated for and incorporated into EFL teachers' LP training. The findings of the study show a strong positive relationship between teachers' perceptions and their practices. After leaving the formal training workshops, they perceived LP improvement, changes in their teaching practices, their positive perceptions of the necessity of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency, and made efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. The teachers' positive perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency was found to be an advantage and key factors contributing to their LP development and maintenance since changes in teaching practice can only take place when teachers perceive them possible (Van den Branden, 2009). This finding is very important since it is seen as intrinsic motivation to encourage them to implement activities to maintain the attained level of proficiency.

Studies (e.g., Farrell, 2007; Murray, 2010; Nunan, 1991; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Zuhairini, 2010; Valmori & Costa, 2016; Włosowic, 2017) have mentioned several ways for teachers to develop and maintain their foreign language proficiency, this research has added LP training as an effective way for EFL teachers to improve and maintain their achieved level of LP since LP training was perceived very necessary for EFL teachers' LP improvement and maintenance, specifically the ones in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

The finding shows that whether it is at the individual or institutional level, frequently and actively implementing TPD activities is of great importance for EFL teacher to improve and maintain their LP. When given appropriate resources, EFL teachers can improve their professional knowledge and skills as well as maintain the achieved level of proficiency in a number of ways, for example through seminars, presentation in national and international conferences, teacher meetings, training workshops, symposiums (Harmer, 2007), peer contest as well as peer classroom observations (Farrell, 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). PD activities can also contribute to enhancing teachers' confidence and their teaching practices, and promoting students' language learning achievement (Le & Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2018). This study contributes to the investigation of the in-service EFL teachers' perceptions and practices for their ELP development and maintenance in the context of teaching and learning English in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

This study also sheds light on the EFL teachers' efforts of implementing strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency. For more effective maintenance strategies at local context of the Central Highlands of Vietnam, a number of implications have been drawn out for close collaboration among those involved in in-service EFL teachers' proficiency maintenance. Collaboration related to the MOET, DOET, institutions (e.g., *authorized universities, or foreign language centers*), and in-service language teachers themselves who may be the most important implementers contributing to EFL teachers' LP improvement and maintenance in the context of English teaching in Vietnam.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

*This chapter summarizes key findings of the study in direct response to three research questions. Based on the findings, relevant implications are made and contributions of the study pointed out. The present chapter also addresses the and suggest. The chapter ends with limitations of the study, and suggestions of areas for future research.*

### 5.1. Summary of the key findings

The investigation of upper secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices for their language proficiency development and maintenance was guided by three research questions. Table 5.1. below presents a summary of the key findings for each research question.

Table 5. 1. Answers to the research questions

Research questions	Key findings
1. What are upper secondary school English language teachers' perceptions of language proficiency training for their language proficiency improvement and maintenance?	<p>EFL teachers perceived the necessity of language proficiency training for their LP development and maintenance.</p> <p>EFL teachers had positive perceptions of their possibilities to developing and maintaining the achieved level of proficiency after participating in the training workshops.</p>
2. What changes in teaching practices are perceived by upper secondary school teachers as a result of their language proficiency improvement?	<p>After leaving the formal training workshops, the teachers perceived positive changes in their teaching practices. EFL teachers noticed changes in using the TL in classroom after participating in the training workshops. EFL teachers found positive changes in students' language development because they tried to provide exposure to English language in classroom for the students' comprehensible inputs.</p> <p>EFL teachers perceived the importance and necessity of maintaining their achieved level of proficiency as a result of their LP improvement.</p>
3. What do the teachers do for their language proficiency maintenance?	<p>EFL teachers found the LPM strategies helpful or very helpful, and they reported frequently implemented many strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency.</p> <p>EFL teachers found the usefulness of the training workshops, the availability of opportunities to participate in PD activities, and teachers' perceptions of the significance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency were advantageous for their LPM.</p>



	<p>They reported difficulties and challenges they faced in developing and maintaining their achieved level of proficiency. The hindrance factors were found to be mainly related to the particular geographical traits and teaching physical settings. However, they made efforts to overcome difficulties and implemented different strategies and activities to maintain the achieved level of proficiency.</p> <p>There were six strategies identified as the most effective and commonly implemented reported by the teachers to maintain their achieved level of proficiency (e.g., (i) <i>frequently revising knowledge of the target language</i>, (ii) <i>frequently referring to English language teachers resources</i>, (iii) <i>regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs</i>), and language output-based strategies (e.g., (iv) <i>creating different formal forums or environment to use English</i>, (v) <i>actively establishing informal environments</i>, and (vi) <i>constantly making an effort to teach English in English</i>).</p>
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Generally, the findings of the study have indicated that EFL teachers had positive perceptions of the necessity and significance of LP training for their LP development and maintenance. About 90% of the teachers whose English language knowledge and skills, and level of proficiency were well improved after the LP training are more likely to contribute to improve teachers' teaching practices and students' learning English quality. The findings have confirmed the essential role of training for in-service EFL teachers and again indicate that PD of EFL teachers should be congruent with the opportunities to be trained to sustain their LP because for them, general English competency is not enough to become good teachers of English (Pham, 2018).

The findings of the study show a strong positive relationship between teachers' perceptions and their practices. After leaving the formal training workshops, they perceived LP improvement, changes in their teaching practices, their positive perceptions of the necessity of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency, and made efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. The teachers' positive perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency was found to be an advantage and key factors contributing to their LP development and maintenance since changes in teaching practice can only take place when teachers perceive them possible (Van den Branden, 2009). This finding is very important since it is seen as

intrinsic motivation to encourage them to implement activities to maintain the attained level of proficiency.

The findings have also showed that the teachers encountered many challenges and difficulties while making efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. Although the EFL teachers faced many difficulties and challenges that were believed to be pertaining to teachers and students due to the distinctive features of geographical traits, they made effort to maintain their achieved level of proficiency (e.g., *students' low and inhomogeneous proficiency level within one class, students' lack of learning motivation, lack of confidence in class communication, lack of parents' concern, students' low level of Vietnamese language proficiency*) and the teachers themselves (e.g., *having limited opportunities for PD, lacking of environment of speaking English with native speakers, suffering workload at the workplace, facing difficulties due to the paper-based test-oriented classroom activities of the current curriculum, getting low incomes, and lacking teaching facilities*). There were six strategies identified as the most effective and commonly implemented reported by the teachers to maintain their achieved level of proficiency (e.g., *(i) frequently revising knowledge of the target language, (ii) frequently referring to English language teachers resources, (iii) regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs, (iv) creating different formal forums or environment to use English, (v) actively establishing informal environments, and (vi) constantly making an effort to teach English in English*). These main strategies identified as the most commonly used by the EFL teachers contributed to increasing the sustainability of professional development for upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. This is the great efforts of the whole society, especially the MOET, the local DOETs, school leaders and the in-service EFL teachers themselves.

## **5.2. Implications**

In the Vietnamese context, the level of EFL teachers' LP (i.e., the CEFR-C1 level) was specified in government policy in 2008 (Vietnamese Government, 2008). Since then this policy has been successfully translated for and incorporated into EFL teachers' LP training. However, there are not many supportive policies for teachers' LPM. The findings have indicated that while the EFL teachers had positive

perceptions of the LP training for their LPM, there were factors hindering their implementation of strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency. EFL teachers had positive perceptions of the necessity and significance of LP training for their LPD and maintenance. After participating in the training workshops, they perceived positive changes in teaching practices as a result of their LP improvement. The teachers' perceptions of the positive impacts of the LP training on their teaching practice are very important since their positive perceptions strongly affected the way they teach to promote students' language development and create more effective teaching environment (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Schutz & Lee, 2014). Noticeably, the LP training brought about the teachers' perceptions of the importance of maintaining their achieved level of proficiency.

The findings have also showed that the teachers encountered many challenges and faced many difficulties while making efforts to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. The issues of high rate ethnic minority students, low and inhomogeneous ELP levels of students within one class, their low motivation in language learning and large size class are challenging EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Additionally, the teachers' heavy workload in teaching, the pedagogical and administrative duties at school, and the limited TPD have resulted in EFL teachers' the neglect of the significance of LPM. However, they tried to handles difficulties and wimplemented different activities for their LPM. The EFL teachers' perceptions and strategies they implemented to maintain their achieved level of proficiency could provide an overview of the effectiveness of LPM for EFL teachers. This shows the great efforts of the whole society, especially the MOET, the local DOETs, school leaders, and the in-service EFL teachers themselves. Therefore, for more effective implementation of LPM activities at local context of the Central Highlands of Vietnam, a number of implications have been drawn out for close collaboration among those involved in in-service EFL teachers' LP maintenance. Collaboration related to MOET, DOET, institutions (e.g., authorized universities, or FL centers), and in-service language teachers themselves may be the most important implementers contributing to EFL teacher LP improvement and maintenance in the context of English teaching in Vietnam.

### **5.2.1. Implications for the educational policy makers and institutions**

Firstly, the teachers' perceptions of LP training have a major impact on the extent to which teachers engaged in formal training workshops. In designing and organizing a LP training then, authorized universities should consider not only training activities that are offered to the teachers, but also their beliefs conducive to an effective and useful LP training so that feasible plans for teachers' LPM can be set up.

Secondly, one of the salient findings was that in-service EFL teachers perceived changes in their teaching practices and had positive perceptions of the importance of maintaining the achieved level of proficiency after their attending the formal training. This has demonstrated that both general English proficiency training and classroom English proficiency training should be equally prioritized for in-service EFL teachers (Pham, 2017). Hence, it is suggested that in pedagogical training programs, both general English proficiency and classroom English proficiency for pre-service EFL teachers should be key components for their teaching professionalism and sustainable professional development.

Thirdly, this study has some implications for educational practice. After achieving the acquired level of LP, in-service EFL teachers should be provided with opportunities for acquiring knowledge, techniques and skills necessary for implementing post-training activities and translating those techniques and skills into practice. The knowledge and skills of post-training activities can be important and necessary to foster teachers' LPM. Simultaneously, it is recommended that policies of ELP maintenance should be implemented to ensure that EFL teachers are motivated to retake the proficiency standardized test. Regular LPM training workshops are held so that EFL teachers' proficiency and professional skills can be well sustainable.

Next, the finding indicates that the teachers made efforts to teach English in English, which was thought to improve both students' learning achievements and contributed to teachers' LPM. In EFL context, teachers' ELP is an important TPD contributing to the successful English language teaching for EFL students. Thus, LPM training workshops which help teachers maintain the achieved level of

proficiency need to be carefully considered and planned for to ensure that EFL teachers improve and maintain their level of proficiency.

The DOETs, school leaders, and authorized institutions need to be aware of challenges hindering teachers' LPM. For example, teachers with heavy workload in teaching and limited opportunities to use English require time and opportunities to focus on their own learning and maintenance needs. Specifically, EFL teachers should be empowered to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching methodologies, uses of technologies in teaching, and other teaching resources. It is necessary that English LPM activities should be provided and integrated into TPD so as to help in-service EFL teachers maintain the achieved level of proficiency. The immersion programs in English speaking countries may be introduced to EFL teachers as they may provide teachers with opportunities to work with experts in authentic language speaking environment.

Finally, the study suggests that geographical and motivational traits should be taken into consideration when designing training workshops. Supportive policies including time, financial support, and incentives should be taken into considerations to help EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam develop and maintain their LP so that they can sustain their professional standard and contribute to improve the quality of teaching English as a foreign language.

### **5.2.2. Implications for EFL teachers**

The finding shows that the teachers' positive perceptions of the importance and necessity of LP training was found to be an advantage for their LPM. Their positive perceptions should be maintained and boosted since changes in practice can only take place when teachers perceive them possible (Van den Branden, 2009), and what EFL teachers do in their practices is influenced by what they think, react, and respond to in their PD (Lee, 2012; Lee, Schutz & Vlack, 2017).

Regarding EFL teachers' using L1 in classrooms, while many researchers (e.g., Levine, 2003; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002;) argue that it is necessary to immerse EFL learners in the L2 rather than using their L1 so that they can full exposure to the L2, other studies (e.g., Ellis, 2008; Turnbull, 2002) suggests that the L1 motivates learners of a second language to be active and it saves their

time, and at the same time shapes their conceptualization of learning. The finding suggests that how much English language should be used in EFL classroom depends on various factors such as the context of teaching and learning such as curriculum, students' characteristics (e.g., *their motivation in learning English, their level of proficiency, the social cultural contexts of students*), and teachers' ELP as well as their pedagogical skills.

In the present study, teachers reported that they encountered challenges and difficulties pertaining to students and teachers themselves while maintaining the achieved level of proficiency. The findings imply that for effective LPM, emphasis should be placed on understanding the potential impacts relating to local social cultural and geographical traits of teachers, students and administrators. Factors affecting teachers' LP improvement and maintenance should be acknowledged and acted upon. In-service ELF teachers need to be supported by administrators to have more opportunities for the sustainability of PD. It is suggested that they work collaboratively to set goals for and include LPM activities into their PD activities. Also, actively participating in teacher discussion groups to share their ideas as a continuous support and follow up-activities.

Besides, it is suggested that EFL teachers actively maintain their level of proficiency achieved at the time of their leaving teacher training workshops, or it may decrease over time since frequently using the TL in classroom is one of the main factors affects EFL teachers' LPM. Specifically, in the context of lacking authentic language environment, in-service EFL teachers actively seek opportunities to network with other teachers locally and nationwide, participate in national or international conferences, and share individual LPM strategies.

Last but not least, studies have mentioned several ways for teachers to develop their LP, such as using the Internet, watching TV and movies in the FL, newsletters by teachers' organizations, books, summer and school trips abroad, and a nationwide FL teachers' organization (Farrell, 2007; Murray, 2010; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Nunan, 1991; Valmori & Costa, 2016). The finding that EFL teachers perceived maintaining oral English in their teaching practice as a way to maintain their LP has implied that classroom language use is not only a means and objective of teaching

but also dynamics for EFL teachers to maintain (Banno, 2003; Valmori & Costa, 2016). Thus, improving or at least maintaining English proficiency should be a goal of many EFL teachers in such a limited English speaking context.

### **5.3. Research contributions**

First and foremost, the study takes the issues of teachers' ELP, the most significant part of Project 2020, into consideration. An overview of the LP training for EFL teachers at upper secondary schools, is pointed out. Specifically, an overview of EFL teachers' LPM, with local contexts of the Central Highlands in Vietnam, is discussed, making it clear for different stake-holders from policy-makers to implementers to recognize its potential impacts of LP training as part of TPD on EFL teachers' LPD and maintenance. Although maintaining LP is challenging for EFL teachers since language teaching and learning is tied to its social context, maintaining the achieved level of LP can increase the flexibility of the language teacher's classroom practices and promote EFL students' learning qualities (Freeman et al., 2015; Pham, 2018; Richards, 2007; Valmori & Costa, 2016). With its practical implications for teachers and stakeholders, (see 5.2), this study has established that cultural and geographical traits of teachers, students and administrators played key roles in EFL teachers' effective LPM and development.

Secondly, the main methodological contribution of the study has been the successful use of the mixed-method concurrent strategy that contributes towards the development and interpretation of a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of LP training and practices for their LP maintenance. The findings of this study have also provided more understanding on the necessity and importance of EFL teachers' LP maintenance because it requires constant practice and use of the language so as to maintain the achieved proficiency. Once the language is not used or practiced, both the knowledge of the language and the ability to use it will be lost. The triangulation of multiple data sources from the questionnaire, reflective report and interview also contributes to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Patton, 1999).

Finally, several studies (e.g., Farrell, 2007; Fraga-Canadas, 2010; Murray, 2010; Nunan, 1991; Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Zuhairini, 2010; Valmori & Costa, 2016;

Włosowicz, 2017) have been carried out in various contexts to explore factors affecting teachers' LPM, and activities they implemented their LPM. However, little seems to be done in exploring what in-service EFL teachers do to handle factors to maintain their achieved level of proficiency. Thus, the present study has provided insights into LP maintenance strategies implemented by in-service EFL teachers, a top-down language policy from the perspective of the teachers themselves. The EFL teachers at upper secondary schools in the Central Highlands of Vietnam made efforts to handle difficulties to maintain their achieved level of proficiency by actively implementing different strategies. The main strategies identified as the most commonly used to maintain their achieved level of proficiency contributed to increasing the sustainability of PD for EFL teachers. This is the great efforts of the whole society, especially the MOET, the local DOETs, school leaders and the in-service EFL teachers themselves. Thus, the findings of this study are beneficial for EFL teachers who have developed their proficiency in EFL contexts and are looking for strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency.

#### **5.4. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research**

The study has some limitations, which, in turn, provide some suggestions for further research. First, this study focused on LPM carried out by EFL upper secondary school teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces only. Future studies might need to delve into how EFL teachers at other levels of education implement strategies to maintain their achieved level of proficiency. The second limitation is related to long-term effects of teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices. Although the teachers in this study had positive perceptions of changes in their teaching practices after participating in LP training, they might fall back into the older ones later. Thus, based on the findings of the study, it cannot be suggested that the teachers' perceptions would change permanently. Future studies should follow EFL teachers into their classrooms to examine whether there are long-term effects. Thirdly, only teachers' perceptions of factors (i.e., *factors pertaining to teachers and students*) affecting their LP and strategies they implemented to maintain the achieved level of proficiency were explored in this study. Future research can expand this line of inquiry. Next, developing or adapting a more comprehensive questionnaire, reflective report and interview, and validating the instruments with a large number of random



samples of participants can boost the validity and reliability of the instruments and findings. Likewise, in-depth case studies of teachers may also shed more light on the impacts of LP training on EFL teachers as well as on teachers' practices in handling difficulties and implementing strategies to maintain the achieved level of proficiency. Finally, the result of the study would be more comprehensive if more data for maintenance activities had been collected from the teacher participants through the questionnaire, reflective report and interview.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

This study has investigated upper secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices for their LP development and maintenance. This mixed-methods concurrent design study has contributed to the investigation of EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices for their LP development and maintenance. Through the content-based analysis and the triangulation of the three main sources of data, the study has aimed to embrace three specific objectives. First, it has explored EFL teachers' perceptions of the LP training as part of PD for their LP development and maintenance. Second, it has examined teachers' perceptions of changes in their teaching practices after attending the LP training. Third, it has investigated factors affecting EFL teachers' LPM and strategies implemented to maintain their achieved level of proficiency. Based on the findings, this study has suggested relevant implications and pointed out major contributions to the sustainability of professional development for upper secondary school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands.

### **A LIST OF THE RESEARCHER'S WORK**

1. **Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Uyên** (2022). Some major impacts of language proficiency training on high school English language teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 131(6C). Hue: Hue University Publisher.
2. **Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Uyên** (2022). Maintaining English language proficiency: the case of high school EFL teachers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. *Journal of Inquiry into Languages and Cultures*, 6 (1). University of Foreign Languages, Hue University.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

**Table 3.8. Examples of analysis of participant' interview excerpts**

(Translated into English)

*Identifying and coding phases*

#### CODING DATA INTO THEMES

Data evidence	Coded themes
1. Before taking the C1 course, I was at the B2 level.	Background Required proficiency
2. After completing the C1 course, the skills that I developed were speaking skills and writing skills (achieving better standards).	background improvement
3. Due to the lack of practice time at a higher level.	Hindering factor improvement
4. The main reason is pressure from taking exams; teachers need to have some tests to reassess their abilities to supplement the weak sides.	Hindering factor Background change Strategies
5. This is very important. I myself also study and practice regularly through various channels such as YouTube videos, websites for learning and other related materials.	Strategies
6. Accessing a new and updated format of assessing materials helps me much in applying teaching gifted students, and the cause of teaching excellent students also develops my professional proficiency.	Strategies
7. In my opinion, the language skill/competence that I want to improve is Listening skill.	improvement
8. Listening skill.	improvement
9. Since I wasn't trained or taught in depth about these areas of knowledge such as Syntax, Phonology, Morphology..., I didn't focus much on them either.	Not improvement
10. It's a limited English-speaking environment. Students don't understand when I use English a lot in teaching.	Hindering factor
11. The school facilitates me with chances to participate in training courses to improve my professional proficiency as well as to update the latest information of English teaching and learning activities. In addition, English teachers should have opportunities to practice English language with foreigners to improve their speaking and listening skills.	Strategies  improvement
12. I now have my teaching plans well prepared with more appropriate teaching methods with various types of lessons and activities.	change

Code 1: background (turquoise)

Code 2: change (green)

Code 3: Improvement (red)

Code 4: hindering factor (gray)

Code 5: strategies (purple)

Appendix A1  
Questionnaire (Piloting)

**For English language teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces**

Please take your time answering these questions (25-30 minutes max). Answer them as accurately and truthfully as possible and remember that your name will be kept confidential. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you can choose not to continue at any time. Your insights are very valuable and very much needed in the profession of language teaching and teachers' LPM. Feel free to contact me via Mobile phone: 0349 58 81 86 or email: [ngocuyen.nguyen0401@gmail.com](mailto:ngocuyen.nguyen0401@gmail.com)

**I. PERSONAL INFORMATION**

The number of official English language proficiency training workshop(s) you have attended: (i.e., the B1 to B2 or B2 to C1 courses)

None<sup>1</sup>                      ☐ 1                      ☐ 2                      ☐ 3                      ☐ > 4

**Note:** If you choose "None", you do not have to fill the rest of this survey. Please return the form and let the researcher know. Thank you.

1. Your full name:.....

2. Your school is in .....

☐ Gia Lai                      ☐ KonTum province

3. How long have you been teaching English (in years)?

☐ 2-5 years                      ☐ 6-10 years                      ☐ 11-15 years                      ☐ > 15year

4. Your age: .....

5. Your gender:                      ☐ Male                      ☐ Female

6. Please choose the highest degree you received.

☐ College Graduation degree                      ☐ Bachelor's degree  
☐ Master's degree                      ☐ Doctoral degree

7. How many periods do you teach English per week?

☐ < 17 ☐ 17                      ☐ 18-24                      ☐ > 24

8. The average number of students in your classrooms is.....

☐ <35                      ☐ 35- 40                      ☐ 40-45                      ☐ >45

9. Tick all that apply

☐ I am a key teacher    ☐ I am one of the leaders of the English team at my school

☐ I am neither a key teacher nor a leader of the English team at my school

☐ Others.....

10. How often do you take part in extracurricular activities at school?

☐ once a semester                      ☐ twice a semester ☐ > three times a semester

**II. QUESTIONS**

***Q1. How necessary are the following to an English language teacher?***

N0	Statements	Not necessary at all	Not necessary	Not sure	Necessary	Very necessary
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					

7	Knowledge of Semantics					
8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

***Q.2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	The language that language teachers use in classroom serves as both the means of language communication (i.e the language used to teach) and content (i.e providing quality input for language learners)					
2	The language proficiency is useful only when it is well employed in the classroom to facilitate language learners.					
3	Language proficiency must be maintained and developed. If not maintained, language proficiency will be lost.					

***Q.3. What do you think of the necessity of teacher's English classroom proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Not necessary at all</b>	<b>Not necessary</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Necessary</b>	<b>Very necessary</b>
1	Ability to use English to teach English effectively					
2	Ability to use English to deliver English lesson contents properly					
3	Ability to use English properly to assess students and give feedback					
4	Ability to use English to manage classroom properly					

***Q.4. Are you able to develop your English language proficiency to the required level (The CEFR-C1 level)?***

<b>N0</b>		<b>Never</b>	<b>Hardly Ever</b>	<b>Maybe</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Certainly</b>
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					
7	Knowledge of Semantics					
8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

***Q.5. If you choose either NOT SURE, or HARDLY or NEVER for any component in Question 4 above, please explain.***

.....

***Q.6. Since you finished your last English language training workshop(s), how have you evaluated your English proficiency***

- ☐ Well improved      ☐ Well maintained      ☐ Stayed the same      ☐ Declined  
☐ Worsened

***Q.7. Are you able to maintain the level of language proficiency that you have achieved after attending the language proficiency training workshop(s)?***

N0		Never	Hardly Ever	Maybe	Not sure	Certainly
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					
7	Knowledge of Semantics					
8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

***Q.8. If you choose either NOT SURE, or HARDLY or NEVER for any component in Question 7 above, please explain.***

.....

***Q.9. Mark ALL the activities useful to the maintenance of your English language proficiency.***

- ☐ Seeking for opportunities to practice English with native speakers.  
☐ Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings).  
☐ Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school) for English language use.  
☐ Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs (films, ted talks, youtube,...).  
☐ Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g. doing grammar exercise,).  
☐ Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site).  
☐ Constantly making an effort to teach English in English.  
☐ Paying for private lessons (with native or near native speakers to improve English language proficiency).  
☐ Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community.  
☐ Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue.  
☐ Others

***Q.10. What do you think of the level of helpfulness of the following activities to the development and improvement of the achieved level of proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Not helpful at all</b>	<b>Not so helpful</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Very helpful</b>
1	Seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers					
2	Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)					
3	Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school)					
4	Regularly and actively accessing to reach authentic English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube,...)					
5	Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, referring to English language teacher support resources, )					
6	Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)					
7	Constantly making an effort to teach English in English					
8	Paying for private lessons (with native speakers to improve English language proficiency)					
9	Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community					
10	Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue					
11	Others					

***Q.11.To what extent do you agree with the following statements?***

<b>N0</b>	<b><i>After the training workshop (s), I have experienced</i></b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	improvement in accuracy in my language use (accuracy in pronunciation, use of vocabulary or grammar)					
2	variation in my language use (ability to say the same things in different ways)					
3	fluency in my language use in classroom					
4	frequency in using English to teach English					
5	improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively					



***Q.12. How often do you do the following activities?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Some times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
1	Seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers					
2	Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)					
3	Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school)					
4	Regularly and actively accessing to authentic English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube,...)					
5	Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, referring to English language teacher support resources,)					
6	Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)					
7	Constantly making an effort to teach English in English					
8	Paying for private lessons (with native speakers to improve English language proficiency)					
9	Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community					
10	Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as mother tongue					
11	Others					

***Q.13. Please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	Whenever I come across a native speaker of English, I try to speak English with him/her.					
2	I frequently seek opportunities to speak English					
3	When I am with other English teachers, I almost always speak English					
4	I frequently seek opportunities to read in English					
5	I frequently seek opportunities to listen to English texts (videos, films, tapes,..)					
6	I frequently seek opportunities to write in English					

***Q.14. Please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements?***

<b>N 0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	I believe my speaking improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
2	I believe my listening improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
3	My reading improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
4	My speaking improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
5	My knowledge of Grammar is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
6	My knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
7	My knowledge of Semantics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
8	My knowledge of Morphology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
9	My knowledge of Pragmatics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s)					

***Q.15. How do you evaluate the support from MOET/DOET available to you to maintain the language proficiency required?***

☐ No support at all ☐ Very limited ☐ Limited ☐ Available ☐ Fully support

***Q.16. Please write down at least two activities you wish to be able to do to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you required.***

.....  
.....

***Q. 17. Please write down two types of support or recommendations that you believe will help you to maintain or develop your level of proficiency.***

.....  
.....

***Q.18. What are some difficulties you face while making an effort to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved? Why?***

.....  
.....

### **Questionnaire evaluation**

Are there any ambiguous or unclear questions which you find difficult to complete?

a. No

b. Yes

Please specify if “yes”.....

I would like to ask you to volunteer to participate in a more in-depth study, which will involve a reflective report and an interview. May I please contact you to invite you to participate? Remember you will be compensated for your time.

Yes ☐      No ☐

If YES, please complete the information below

Name: .....

Email address: .....

Phone number: .....

***Thank you for your time!***

## Appendix A2

### Post-pilot Questionnaire

#### For English Language Teachers in Gia Lai and Kon Tum Provinces

Please take your time answering these questions (25-30 minutes max). Answer them as accurately and truthfully as possible and remember that your name will be kept confidential. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you can choose not to continue at any time. Your insights are very valuable and very much needed in the profession of language teaching and teachers' language proficiency maintenance. Feel free to contact me via Mobile phone: 0349 58 81 86 or email: [ngocuyen.nguyen0401@gmail.com](mailto:ngocuyen.nguyen0401@gmail.com)

#### I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

The number of official English language proficiency training workshop(s) you have attended: (i.e., the B1 to B2 or B2 to C1 courses)

None<sup>2</sup>                      ☐ 1                      ☐ 2                      ☐ 3                      ☐ > 4

**Note:** If you choose "None", you do not have to fill the rest of this survey. Please return the form and let the researcher know. Thank you.

1. Your full name:..... (Optional)

2. Your school is in .....

☐ Gia Lai                      ☐ KonTum province

3. How long have you been teaching English?

☐ 2-5 years                      ☐ 6-10 years                      ☐ 11-15 years                      ☐ > 15years

4. Your age: .....

5. Your gender:                      ☐ Male                      ☐ Female

6. Please choose the highest degree you received.

☐ College Graduation degree                      ☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Master's degree                      ☐ Doctoral degree

7. The average number of students in your classroom is.....

☐ < 35                      ☐ 35-40                      ☐ 40-45                      ☐ >45

8. You are either a key teacher or leader of the English team at your school. ☐ Yes

☐ No

#### II. QUESTIONS

*Q1. How necessary are the following language aspects to an English language teacher?*

N0		Not necessary at all	Not necessary	Not sure	Necessary	Very necessary
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					
7	Knowledge of Semantics					
8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

***Q.2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding teacher's English classroom proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	The language that language teachers use in classroom serves as both the means of language communication (i.e the language used to teach) and content (i.e providing quality input for language learners)					
2	The language proficiency is useful only when it is well employed in the classroom to facilitate language learners.					
3	Language proficiency must be maintained and developed. If not maintained, language proficiency will be lost.					

***Q.3. What do you think of the necessity of teacher's English classroom proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>		<b>Not necessary at all</b>	<b>Not necessary</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Necessary</b>	<b>Very necessary</b>
1	Ability to use English to teach English effectively					
2	Ability to use English to deliver English lesson contents properly					
3	Ability to use English properly to assess students and give feedback					
4	Ability to use English to manage classroom properly					

***Q.4. Are you able to develop your English language proficiency to the required level (i.e., the CEFR-C1 level)?***

<b>N0</b>		<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Almost not</b>	<b>Maybe</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Certainly</b>
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					
7	Knowledge of Semantics					

8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

**Q.5. If you choose either NOT SURE, or HARDLY or NEVER for any component in Question 4 above, please explain.**

.....

.....

**Q.6. Are you able to maintain the level of language proficiency that you have achieved after attending the language proficiency training workshop(s)?**

N0		Never	Hardly Ever	Not sure	Maybe	Certainly
1	Listening skill					
2	Reading skill					
3	Speaking skill					
4	Writing skill					
5	Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology					
6	Knowledge of Syntax					
7	Knowledge of Semantics					
8	Knowledge of Morphology					
9	Knowledge of Pragmatics					

**Q.7. If you choose either NOT SURE, or HARDLY EVER or NEVER for any component in Question 6 above, please explain.**

.....

.....

**Q.8. Since you finished your last English language training workshop(s), how have you evaluated your English proficiency?**

☐ Declined ☐ Slightly declined ☐ Stayed the same ☐ Slightly improved ☐ Well improved

**Q.9. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

N0	Statements	Totally disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Totally agree
1	I believe my speaking has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
2	I believe my listening has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
3	My reading has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
4	My writing has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
5	My knowledge of grammar has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
6	My knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					

7	My knowledge of Semantics has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
8	My knowledge of Morphology has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					
9	My knowledge of Pragmatics has improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s)					

***Q.10.To what extent do you agree with the following statements?***

<b>N0</b>	<b><i>After the training workshop (s), I have experienced</i></b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	improvement in accuracy in my language use (accuracy in pronunciation, use of vocabulary or grammar)					
2	variation in my English use (ability to say the same things in different ways)					
3	fluency in my English use in classroom					
4	frequency in using English to teach English					
5	improvement in conveying English knowledge to learners more comprehensively					

***Q.11. Mark ALL the activities useful to the maintenance of your English language proficiency.***

- ☐ Seeking opportunities to practice English with native speakers.
- ☐ Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings).
- ☐ Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school) for English language use.
- ☐ Regularly and actively accessing authentic, rich English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube videos).
- ☐ Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, practicing listening, reading, writing skills).
- ☐ Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site).
- ☐ Constantly making an effort to teach English in English.
- ☐ Paying for private lessons (with native or near native speakers to improve English language proficiency).
- ☐ Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community.
- ☐ Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as mother tongue.
- ☐ Others

***Q.11. Which of the following activities useful to the maintenance of your English language proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Totally disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>
1	Seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers					
2	Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)					
3	Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school)					
4	Regularly and actively accessing to reach authentic English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube videos)					
5	Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, referring to English language teacher support resources, )					
6	Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)					
7	Constantly making an effort to teach English in English					
8	Paying for private lessons (with native speakers to improve English language proficiency)					
9	Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community					
10	Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as mother tongue					
11	Others					

***Q.12. What do you think of the level of helpfulness of the following activities to the development and improvement of the achieved level of proficiency?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Not helpful at all</b>	<b>Not so helpful</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Very helpful</b>
1	Seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers					
2	Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)					
3	Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school)					
4	Regularly and actively accessing to reach authentic English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube videos)					



5	Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, referring to English language teacher support resources, )					
6	Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)					
7	Constantly making an effort to teach English in English					
8	Paying for private lessons (with native speakers to improve English language proficiency)					
9	Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community					
10	Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as mother tongue					
11	Others					

***Q.13. How often do you do the following activities?***

<b>N0</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
1	Seeking opportunities to practice English to native speakers					
2	Creating different formal forums/ environment to use English (regular English teacher meetings)					
3	Actively establishing informal environments (creating English speaking day at school)					
4	Regularly and actively accessing to authentic English language inputs (films, ted talks, YouTube videos)					
5	Frequently revising knowledge of the target language (e.g, doing grammar exercise, referring to English language teacher support resources,)					
6	Frequently referring to English language teacher support resources (online and on site)					
7	Constantly making an effort to teach English in English					
8	Paying for private lessons (with native speakers to improve English language proficiency)					
9	Joining a network of teachers returning from English language training workshops to create an English speaking community					

10	Joining exchange programs in countries where English is used as a mother tongue					
11	Others					

***Q.14. How do you evaluate about the support from MOET/DOET available to you to maintain the language proficiency required?***

☐ No support at all ☐ Very limited ☐ Limited ☐ Available ☐ Fully support

***Q.15. Please write down at least two activities you wish to do to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you required but you cannot do. State any reasons or difficulties that prevent your efforts to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved.***

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

***Q. 16. Please write down two support types or recommendations from your school, the DOET or the MOET that you believe will help you to maintain or develop your level of proficiency.***

.....  
.....  
.....

***Q.17. What are some difficulties you face while making an effort to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you achieved? Why?***

.....  
.....  
.....

I would like to ask you to volunteer to participate in a more in-depth study, which will involve a reflective report and an interview. May I please contact you to invite you to participate? Remember you will be compensated for your time.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If YES, please complete the information below

Name: .....

Email address: .....

Phone number: .....

***Thank you for your time!***

**Appendix B1**  
**Pilot Template for EFL Teacher's Reflective Report**

**(Post training)**

**I. About you**

- Workplace: ☐ Gia Lai ☐ Kon Tum  
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female  
- Years of teaching experience:  
- Teaching grade(s) in academic school year 2018-2019: ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12  
- Current Level of English proficiency according to the latest assessment results announced by the authorised University/Organization:  
☐ below B1 ☐ B1 ☐ B2 ☐ C1 ☐ C2 ☐ I don't know  
- The number of official English language proficiency training workshop you have attended:  
None<sup>3</sup> 1 2 3 4 >4

**II. Reflection on the impact of those trainings on your teaching practice**

**1. What did you find most valuable from those trainings? Please list at least 3 things and put them in the order of priority (1. As the most valuable, 2. As the second most valuable, and so on)**

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

**2. Since you came back from the English language proficiency training workshop(s), what changes have you noticed in your teaching/classroom as a result of the training(s)? Please describe those changes in detail:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**3. To what extent do you think that those changes are beneficial to your students? And why do you think so (please justify why you think those changes are beneficial to your students?)**

.....  
.....  
.....

**4. What do you do to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you achieved since you left the training workshop(s)?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**5. What problems do you face when you try to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you have achieved?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**6. What do you do to overcome these problems?**

.....  
.....  
.....

---

<sup>3</sup> If you choose "None", you do not have to fill the rest of this report. Please return the form and let the researcher know. Thank you.

I would like to ask you to volunteer to participate in a more in-depth study, which will involve an interview. May I please contact you to invite you to participate?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If YES, please complete the information below

Name: .....

Email address: .....

Phone number: .....

***Thank you for your time!***

## Appendix B2

### Post-pilot Template for EFL Teacher's Reflective Report

#### I. About you

- Workplace: ☐ Gia Lai ☐ Kon Tum
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
- Years of teaching experience:
- Teaching grade(s) in academic school year 2018-2019: ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12
- Current level of English proficiency according to the latest assessment results announced by the authorized University/Organization:  
☐ below B1 ☐ B1 ☐ B2 ☐ C1 ☐ C2 ☐ I don't know
- The number of official ENG language proficiency training workshop you have attended:  
None<sup>4</sup>      1      2      3      4      >4

#### II. Reflection on the impact of those trainings on your Teaching Practice

**1. What did you find most valuable from those trainings? Please list at least 3 things and put them in the order of priority (1. As the most valuable, 2. As the second most valuable, and so on)**

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

**2. Since you came back from the language proficiency training workshop(s), do you think that your teaching practice has changed thanks to the training (s)? In what ways? Please describe those changes in detail:**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**3. To what extent do you think that those changes are beneficial to your students? And why do you think so (please justify why you think those changes are beneficial to your students?)**

.....

.....

.....

.....

**4. What have you done to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you achieved since you left the training workshop(s)?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

**5. What problems do you face when you try to maintain and develop the level of proficiency you have achieved?**

---

<sup>4</sup> If you choose "None", you do not have to fill the rest of this report. Please return the form and let the researcher know. Thank you.

.....  
.....  
.....  
**6. What have you done to overcome these problems?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
I would like to ask you to volunteer to participate in a more in-depth study, which will involve an interview. May I please contact you to invite you to participate?

Yes ☐                  No ☐

If YES, please complete the information below

Name: .....

Email address: .....

Phone number: .....

***Thank you for your time!***

## **Appendix C1**

### **Pilot Interview Questions**

1. What is the level of language proficiency you achieved before attending the training course (s)?
2. What area(s) do you feel has been most improved (skills and knowledge) since you took part in the English language training workshop(s)?
3. If you failed to achieve one level of proficiency higher after the training what do you think is the reason for this?
4. If you gained at least one level of proficiency higher after the training what do you think is the reason for this?
5. In your opinion, is it significant to maintain your language proficiency level you have achieved? Why and why not?
6. What have you done to maintain and improve your language proficiency since you came back from the training workshop(s)?
7. In general, are there any activities you want to do to maintain and improve your language proficiency level but you cannot do? Why not?
8. If you feel any language skill (Reading, Speaking,...) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
9. If you feel any area of knowledge (syntax, pronunciation, morphology...) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
10. What problems do you face when you try to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you have achieved?
11. Do you get any incentive or supportive policy to maintain and develop your language proficiency?
12. Since you came back from the English language proficiency training workshop(s), what changes have you noticed in your teaching/classroom as a result of the training(s)? How do you know the changes? Please provide specific examples.

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix C2

### Post-pilot Interview Questions

I am interviewing you to have a full picture of teachers' English language proficiency. Please be advised that the interview will be recorded.

#### General questions

1. How are you? 2. Tell me about yourself. You can tell me about your name, job, how long you have been on the job, and position at school.

#### Specific questions

1. What was the level of language proficiency you achieved before attending the training course (s)?
2. What skills and knowledge do you feel has been the most improved since you took part in the English language training workshop(s)?
3. If you failed to achieve one level of proficiency higher after the training what do you think is the reason for this?
4. If you gained at least one level of proficiency higher after the training what do you think is the reason for this?
5. In your opinion, is it significant to maintain your language proficiency level you have achieved? Why and why not?
6. What have you done to maintain and improve your language proficiency since you came back from the training workshop(s)?
7. In general, are there any activities you want to do to maintain and improve your language proficiency level but you cannot do? Why not?
8. If you feel any language skills (Reading, Speaking,...) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
9. If you feel any area of knowledge (Syntax, Phonology, Morphology) of yours is not well maintained and declined compared with the time when you just finished the training workshop, what is the reason for this? Have you done anything in particular to maintain or develop it?
10. What problems do you face when you try to maintain and improve the level of proficiency you have achieved?
11. Do you get any incentive or supportive policy to maintain and develop your language proficiency?
12. Since you came back from the English language proficiency training workshop(s), what changes have you noticed in your teaching/classroom as a result of the training(s)? How do you know the changes? Please provide specific examples.

Before we finish, what questions or comments do you have for me?

#### Closing: thanking the interviewee(s)

I really appreciate the time you have spent to participate in the study. I believe that your answers will provide insights and will contribute to the betterment of teacher professionalism. Thank you.

## Appendix D.

Table 3.9. Information of fifty-eight teachers' reflective report

Identification numbers	Gender	Current level of EP	N0 of LPTW attended	Length of service (to 2019)	Teaching periods/ week	Email received dates
RF.KT.teacher 1	F	C1	1	25	20	02 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 2	F	C1	2	17	24	02 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 3	F	C1	1	19	24	02 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019



RF.KT.teacher 4	F	C1	1	18	18	02 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 5	F	C1	1	6	20	02 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 6	M	C1	1	7	28	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 7	F	C1	3	20	21	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 8	F	C1	1	17	27	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 9	F	C1	1	15	21	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 10	F	C1	2	10	18	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 11	F	C1	2	13	18	03rd August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 12	F	C1	1	20	17	04 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 13	F	C1	1	20	21	04 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 14	F	C1	2	22	18	04 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 15	F	C1	1	21	15	04 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 16	F	C1	1	16	28	06th August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 17	M	C1	1	25	24	06th August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 18	M	C1	3	17	18	06th August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 19	M	C1	4	24	21	06th August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 20	F	C1	1	16	24	06th August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 21	M	C1	4	2	22	07 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 22	M	C1	1	7	23	08 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 23	F	C1	1	12	25	08 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 24	F	C1	1	13	18	08 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 25	F	C1	1	8	17	08 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 26	F	C1	2	18	17	08 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 27	F	C1	2	15	18	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 28	F	C1	1	21	19	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 29	F	C1	2	9	19	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 30	F	C1	1	5	21	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 31	M	C1	2	22	20	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.KT.teacher 32	M	C1	1	8	16	21 <sup>st</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 33	F	C1	2	11	17	23 <sup>rd</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 34	F	C1	1	14	18	23 <sup>rd</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 35	M	C1	1	10	20	23 <sup>rd</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 36	F	C1	1	4	21	24 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 37	F	C1	1	9	18	24 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 38	F	C1	1	14	18	24 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 39	F	C1	2	15	17	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 40	F	C1	1	16	21	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 41	F	C1	1	20	18	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 42	F	C1	3	22	15	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 43	F	C1	1	24	28	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 44	F	C1	1	13	24	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 45	F	C1	1	6	17	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 46	F	C1	3	11	18	26 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 47	F	C1	2	16	19	26 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 48	F	C1	1	18	20	26 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019

RF.GL.teacher 49	F	C1	1	20	22	28 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 50	F	C1	2	20	21	28 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 51	F	C1	1	7	20	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 52	M	C1	3	11	17	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 53	M	C1	1	3	18	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 54	F	C1	1	15	18	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 55	F	C1	1	12	17	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 56	F	C1	1	16	19	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 57	F	C1	4	17	19	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
RF.GL.teacher 58	F	C1	1	10	20	29 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
			<b>1.51</b>	<b>14.52</b>	<b>19.66</b>	

Appendix E. Information of twenty-two teachers interviewed

Identification numbers	Gender	Age (by 2019)	Started teaching	Length of service (to 2019)	Teaching periods/ week	Teaching context
KT.teacher 1	F	47	1994	25	24	In district
KT.teacher 2	F	39	2002	17	20	In city
KT.teacher 3	F	41	2000	19	24	In city
KT.teacher 4	F	40	2001	18	28	In district
KT.teacher 5	F	28	2013	6	20	In district
KT.teacher 6	M	29	2012	7	28	In city
KT.teacher 7	F	42	1999	20	21	In district
KT.teacher 8	F	39	2002	17	27	In district
KT.teacher 9	F	37	2004	15	21	In city
GL.teacher 10	F	32	2009	10	18	In city
GL.teacher 11	F	35	2006	13	18	In district
GL.teacher 12	F	42	1999	20	17	In district
GL.teacher 13	F	42	1999	20	21	In district
GL.teacher 14	F	44	1997	22	18	In district
GL.teacher 15	F	43	1998	21	15	In district
GL.teacher 16	F	38	2003	16	28	In city
GL.teacher 17	M	46	1994	25	24	In district
GL.teacher 18	M	39	2002	17	18	In city
GL.teacher 19	M	45	1995	24	21	In district
GL.teacher 20	F	38	2003	16	24	In district
GL.teacher 21	M	35	2008	11	21	In city
GL.teacher 22	M	35	2000	19	21	In district
Average		37.22	Average	17.18	20.74	

Appendix F. Coding for teachers' interviews

Identification numbers	Gender	Age (by 2019)	Started teaching	Length of service (to 2019)	Teaching periods/ week	Interview dates
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KT.teacher 1	F	47	1994	25	24	05 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
KT.teacher 2	F	39	2002	17	20	05 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
KT.teacher 3	F	41	2000	19	24	05 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
KT.teacher 4	F	40	2001	18	28	10 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
KT.teacher 5	F	28	2013	6	20	10 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 6	M	29	2012	7	28	12 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 7	F	42	1999	20	21	12 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 8	F	39	2002	17	27	19 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 9	F	37	2004	15	21	19 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 10	F	32	2009	10	18	26 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 11	F	35	2006	13	18	26 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
GL.teacher 12	F	42	1999	20	17	08 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 13	F	42	1999	20	21	08 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 14	F	44	1997	22	18	21 <sup>st</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 15	F	43	1998	21	15	23 <sup>rd</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 16	F	38	2003	16	28	23 <sup>rd</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 17	M	46	1994	25	24	23 <sup>rd</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 18	M	39	2002	17	18	24 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 19	M	45	1995	24	21	24 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 20	F	38	2003	16	24	24 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 21	M	35	2008	11	21	27 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
GL.teacher 22	M	35	2000	19	21	27 <sup>th</sup> November, 2019
<b>Average</b>		<b>37.22</b>		<b>17.18</b>	<b>20.74</b>	

### Appendix G. Raw output of the SPSS data

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.1)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1.1	150	3	5	4.75	.448
Q1.2	150	4	5	4.70	.460
Q1.3	150	2	5	4.75	.555
Q1.4	150	3	5	4.63	.497
Q1.5	150	2	5	4.47	.599
Q1.6	150	3	5	4.28	.557
Q1.7	150	3	5	4.23	.557
Q1.8	150	1	5	4.11	.661
Q1.9	150	1	5	3.97	.882
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.2)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q3.1	150	2	5	4.63	.549
Q3.2	150	2	5	4.43	.595
Q3.3	150	2	5	4.49	.588
Q3.4	150	3	5	4.42	.582

Valid N (listwise)	150				
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**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.3)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q2.1	150	2	5	4.47	.711
Q2.2	150	2	5	4.37	.639
Q2.3	150	2	5	4.42	.605
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.4)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q4.1	150	3	5	4.57	.511
Q4.2	150	3	5	4.69	.477
Q4.3	150	2	5	4.40	.811
Q4.4	150	3	5	4.48	.653
Q4.5	150	2	5	4.35	.706
Q4.6	150	1	5	3.92	.931
Q4.7	150	1	5	3.83	.930
Q4.8	150	1	5	3.81	.974
Q4.9	150	1	5	3.81	.922
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.5)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q61	150	1	5	4.50	.576
Q62	150	4	5	4.66	.475
Q63	150	2	5	4.49	.757
Q64	150	2	5	4.45	.729
Q65	150	2	5	4.30	.801
Q66	150	2	5	4.13	.726
Q67	150	2	5	4.11	.734
Q68	150	2	5	4.02	.746
Q69	150	1	5	3.87	.846
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.6)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q8	150	2	5	4.47	.711
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.7)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q9.1	150	2	5	4.22	.529
Q9.2	150	2	5	4.12	.590
Q9.3	150	2	5	4.18	.580
Q9.4	150	2	5	4.15	.564
Q9.5	150	2	5	4.19	.552
Q9.6	150	2	5	4.02	.573

Q9.7	150	2	5	3.83	.670
Q9.8	150	2	5	3.83	.673
Q9.9	150	2	5	3.82	.676
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.8)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q10.1	150	2	5	4.36	.594
Q10.2	150	2	5	4.22	.623
Q10.3	150	2	5	4.24	.587
Q10.4	150	2	5	4.22	.623
Q10.5	150	2	5	4.19	.669
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.9)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q11.1	150	4	5	4.78	.416
Q11.2	150	4	5	4.73	.447
Q11.3	150	4	5	4.87	.341
Q11.4	150	4	5	4.84	.368
Q11.5	150	2	5	4.89	.376
Q11.6	150	2	5	4.74	.561
Q11.7	150	1	5	4.77	.511
Q11.8	150	2	5	4.40	.531
Q11.9	150	1	5	4.59	.636
Q11.10	150	4	5	4.52	.501
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.10)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q12.1	150	1	5	4.39	.843
Q12.2	150	2	5	4.23	.709
Q12.3	150	1	5	4.27	.793
Q12.4	150	1	5	4.30	.730
Q12.5	150	1	5	4.35	.714
Q12.6	150	2	5	4.28	.636
Q12.7	150	1	5	4.18	.812
Q12.8	150	1	5	3.94	.821
Q12.9	150	1	5	4.11	.710
Q12.10	150	1	5	3.99	.773
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.11)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q13.1	150	1	5	2.89	.840
Q13.2	150	2	5	4.23	.709
Q13.3	150	2	5	4.22	.732

Q13.4	150	2	5	4.24	.692
Q13.5	150	2	5	4.32	.648
Q13.6	150	2	5	4.25	.604
Q13.7	150	1	5	4.17	.809
Q13.8	150	1	5	2.56	.901
Q13.9	150	1	5	2.75	.964
Q13.10	150	1	5	2.25	.912
Valid N (listwise)	150				

**Descriptive Statistics (Table 4.12)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q14	150	1	5	3.03	.983
Valid N (listwise)	150				