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## **The Curriculum for English Language Teacher Education in Australian and Vietnamese Universities**

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*Abstract: This paper examines the curricula for English language teacher education in two universities, one in Australia and the other in Vietnam. Specifically, it analyses the structures of the two curricula, compares and contrasts them, and examines how the development of the curricula was shaped by distinctive contextual factors. Sources of data include relevant literature, policy and curriculum documents, and interviews with curriculum developers from the two universities. Analysis of data revealed great variation across and within the two curricula in terms of structure and content. Findings also reveal specific contextual factors that influenced the development of the curricula. Although the findings are specific to the two teacher education institutions under research, the study suggests that curriculum development for second language teacher education needs to account for the context of teacher learning and offer substantial opportunity for preservice teachers to develop key domains of knowledge.*

### **Introduction**

The field of second language teacher education (SLTE) has been shifting towards sociocultural perspectives, which view knowledge as socially constructed through participation in sociocultural practices and contexts (Brandt, 2006; Crandall, 2000; Johnson, 2009a). From this perspective, preservice teachers' participation in SLTE programs, of which the content reflects the knowledge base (i.e. what teachers need to know), plays an influential role in shaping how they learn and teach. Therefore, there is a wide agreement that establishment of the knowledge base is fundamental to SLTE reform (e.g., Fradd & Lee, 1998; Graves, 2009; Richards, 1998; Roberts, 1998). As a result, there has been a large body of theoretical discussions on what should constitute the content of SLTE (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Graves, 2009; Richards, 1998; Roberts, 1998). However, for the most of its history, SLTE has been a field of practice rather than a field of research (Johnson, 2009b; Kiely & Askham, 2012). What this means is that practitioner researchers have mostly been theorising rather than empirically studying SLTE practices.

During the last decade, the field has made significant progress, which can be seen in the growing body of research on second language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006). It has established that teachers' prior experience, knowledge, beliefs, interpretations of their practices, and, most importantly, the sociocultural contexts of their practices are very influential in shaping and explaining the ways teachers do their work (Borg, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009b, 2010a, 2011; Johnson, 2006, 2009a). This body of literature also suggests that SLTE programs have great influence on teachers' development and that designing and revising SLTE programs that enable effective teacher learning are among the key tasks of teacher education reform (e.g., Abednia,

2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Freeman, 1996; Johnson, 1994; Kiely & Askham, 2012). Although this literature has contributed enormously to the field's empirical understanding of SLTE, research on some important aspects of SLTE is still under-represented within this literature. One under-researched topic is the development of the curriculum of SLTE. Another missing "hot" topic is comparative research on teacher education (Dooley, Dangel, & Farran, 2011).

In an attempt to address the research gap discussed above, this paper reports on a comparative case study that analyses, compares and contrasts the curricula of English language teacher education in universities in Australia and Vietnam and the distinctive contextual factors shaping the development of the curricula in the two contexts. The term knowledge base of SLTE in this paper is used interchangeably with the curriculum of SLTE.

### **SLTE Curriculum Design**

As mentioned earlier, there is quite a large body of theoretical discussions about the content, or the knowledge base, of SLTE. However, there has been little theory or research of SLTE curriculum design. Brief discussion of the topic can be found in Johnston and Goettsch (2000) and Graves (2009). Johnston and Goettsch (2000) propose four issues that need to be addressed in designing and revising SLTE programs. The four issues include: the content of SLTE, the forms and structures of SLTE programs most likely to allow student teachers to make best use of this content, the sequencing of content and form that is most conducive to effective learning, and the articulation between teacher education and actual teaching.

Similarly, Graves (2009) proposes a framework for curriculum planning for SLTE that focusses on (1) who will be taught, (2) what will be taught, (3) how it will be taught, and (4) how what is learned will be evaluated. Graves further highlights the role of context analysis (i.e. gathering of information about available resources and existing constraints) in designing a pragmatically feasible curriculum for SLTE. This view is supported by a sociocultural perspective on SLTE (e.g., Johnson, 2006, 2009b; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), which sees context as an influential factor in teacher learning.

The two frameworks discussed above are clearly useful in planning for, designing and revising SLTE programs. However, rather than discussing the whole question of SLTE curriculum design, this paper is concerned primarily with the content and structure of SLTE programs and the role of context in shaping the development of the content and structure. The following section lays the theoretical foundation for this paper by discussing conceptualisations of the knowledge base of SLTE.

### **The Knowledge Base of SLTE**

From a sociocultural perspective, Freeman and Johnson (1998) make a significant contribution to the field of SLTE by proposing a reconceptualised knowledge base of SLTE that focusses on "the activity of teaching itself – who does it, where it is done, and how it is done" (p. 405). According to the scholars, such a knowledge base must account for three inter-related domains constituting the activity of teaching: the teacher-learner, the social context, and the pedagogical process. This proposal has stimulated a large body of conceptual debate (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 2005; Kramsch & Ware, 2004; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Yates & Muchisky, 2003), which has contributed to moving the field forwards. The framework for the reconceptualised knowledge base is viewed as a broader conceptual framework that frames research in SLTE and informs modifications and improvements of SLTE programmes (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). This study, therefore, draws upon this framework as a broader conceptual framework in

highlighting the curriculum as a part of the process of learning to teach along with contextual differences that inform curriculum development and teacher learning.

A sociocultural perspective is concerned with both the content and process of SLTE (Johnson, 2009a), and so studying the content of SLTE and factors influencing its development is fundamental to the understanding of second language teacher learning. Many researchers use the term ‘content’ and ‘knowledge base’ alternatively (e.g., Day, 1991; Richards, 1998). As the present study focusses on the curriculum development aspect of SLTE, it adopts the definition of the knowledge base of SLTE as the “constituent domains of knowledge, skill, understanding, and awareness” (Richards, 1998, p. 1) rather than a conceptual framework proposed by Freeman and Johnson (1998) as discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Several researchers have attempted to outline what content should be included in a SLTE programme. Table 1 summarises different views of the knowledge base of SLTE.

<b>Lafayette (1993)</b>	<b>Day (1993)</b>	<b>Roberts (1998)</b>	<b>Richards (1998)</b>
language proficiency	content knowledge	content knowledge	theories of teaching
civilization and culture	pedagogical knowledge	pedagogical content knowledge	teaching skills
language analysis	pedagogical content knowledge	general pedagogic knowledge	communication skills
	support knowledge	curricular knowledge	subject matter knowledge
		contextual knowledge	pedagogical reasoning and decision making
		process knowledge	contextual knowledge

**Table 1: Views of the knowledge base of SLTE**

Lafayette (1993) argues that a SLTE programme needs to include three major domains of knowledge, namely language proficiency, civilization and culture, and language analysis (i.e. knowledge about the language). Although Lafayette acknowledges the crucial role of language proficiency, the civilization(s) and culture(s) of the target language, he does not seem to recognize the importance of pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Day (1993) addresses this weakness by suggesting that the knowledge base of SLTE program should include four categories of knowledge, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and support knowledge. Day’s framework appears to be more comprehensive than Lafayette’s (1993) framework, and he adds support knowledge to the framework to emphasise the role of “the knowledge of the various disciplines that inform our approach to the teaching and learning of English; e.g., psycholinguistics, linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methods” (Day, 1993, p. 4).

However, there is still a lack of concern for understanding the teacher as learner of teaching and how they learn to teach. This shortcoming is later addressed in two views of the knowledge base of SLTE held by Roberts (1998) and Richards (1998). Roberts (1998) suggests six types of teacher knowledge, including content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogic knowledge, curricular knowledge, contextual knowledge, and process knowledge. Similarly, Richards (1998) proposes six major domains of knowledge: (1) theories of teaching, (2) teaching skills, (3) communication skills, (4) subject matter knowledge, (5) pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and (6) contextual knowledge. Commenting on the comprehensiveness of Roberts’ (1998) and Richards’ (1998) models, Graves (2009) writes:

These knowledge bases expand far beyond subject matter competence – competence in and knowledge of the target language – and general pedagogic skills. They include pedagogical content knowledge, contextual knowledge – of the learners, the school, and community – and of how the context affects and shapes teaching. They include pedagogical reasoning and decision-making skills, skills in relating to and communicating with learners and colleagues, and skills in inquiry. (p. 119-20)

Richards' (1998) framework is used as a guideline for analysing SLTE curriculum documents in this study. First, in comparison with the frameworks proposed by Day (1993) and Lafayette (1993), it presents a more comprehensive overview of the "constituent domains of knowledge, skill, understanding, and awareness" (p. 1). Second, I agree with Faez's (2011) argument that Richards' framework "allows for differences to surface more clearly" (p. 37), which is useful for this study in analysing and comparing the content of the curricula. The following table summarises Richards' elaboration on the six domains of knowledge constituting SLTE:

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Elaboration</b>
Theories of teaching	Theories of teaching are central to how we understand the nature and importance of classroom practices. They provide the theoretical foundation for the programme as well as the justification for the approach to teaching and the instructional practices student teachers are expected to develop in the programme.
Teaching skills	Teaching skills refer to the observable performance of teaching including dimensions of teaching that are essential to the repertoire of any teacher, regardless of the subject, and additional teaching skills that are specific to second language teaching. Examples of teaching skills include selecting learning activities, preparing students for new learning, asking questions, checking students' understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring students' learning, giving feedback on students' learning, reviewing and reteaching when necessary.
Communication skills	Communication skills include two dimensions. The first dimension is the general ability to communicate effectively such as personality, presence, general style, voice, and ability to establish/maintain rapport. The second dimension is the level of proficiency in the target language that a teacher needs to acquire in order to teach effectively in it. Some examples of the speech acts and functions that second language teachers need to develop include requesting, ordering and giving rules, establishing attention, questioning, and giving instructions. Development of teacher candidates' language proficiency is often a core component of many SLTE programmes.
Subject matter knowledge	This domain includes what second language teachers need to know about their subject – the specialized concepts, theories, and disciplinary knowledge that constitute the theoretical basis for second language teaching. Subjects within this domain typically include phonetics and phonology, syntax, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, curriculum and syllabus design. Another dimension within subject matter knowledge is the specialized discourse or register that second language teachers use to talk about their discipline.
Pedagogical reasoning skills and decision making	This domain focusses on the complex cognitive skills underlying teaching skills and techniques, which constitute the essence of teaching. It is the teacher's ability to transform their subject matter knowledge into pedagogically powerful forms which are adaptable to the students' varied

	ability and background. Teachers' ability to make interactive decisions that are appropriate to the specific dynamics of their lesson is also an important dimension of SLTE.
Contextual knowledge	An understanding of how language teaching practice is influenced by its context and societal, community, and institutional factors is what constitutes this domain of knowledge. The key contextual factors that need to be considered in second language teaching include language policies, language teaching policies, community factors, types of schools/institutions, administrative practices, school cultures, school programs, teaching resources, and testing factors.

**Table 2: Summary of Richards' (1998) framework of the knowledge base of SLTE**

### Studies on SLTE Curriculum Development

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the body of theoretical discussion about what should be included in the knowledge base of SLTE appears to currently constitute the majority of the literature on the knowledge base of SLTE (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998, 2004, 2005; Kramsch & Ware, 2004; Muchisky & Yates, 2004; Richards, 1998; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Yates & Muchisky, 2003). There has been very little critical analysis of context-specific SLTE curriculum practices in general and empirical research on the development of the knowledge base of SLTE in particular.

Among a few attempts to address the gap, Fradd and Lee (1998) discuss the process of knowledge base development for a TESOL program within the context of a U.S. university and the components of this knowledge base. The researchers identified several factors directly related to the development of the TESOL knowledge base, including resources and information available, standards for teaching practices and policies, English as a second language (ESL) standards, and the needs of the teachers and the school districts served by the university where the knowledge base is developed. The knowledge base includes three major components, namely knowledge of academic content (including knowledge of the language acquisition process, knowledge of subject area content, and knowledge of culture and pragmatic language use), knowledge of pedagogy (including curriculum and instruction, assessment, and technology), and knowledge of students, schools and communities (including the classroom context, the school context, and the community context).

Similarly, Alsagoff and Low (2007) report on the process of developing a SLTE curriculum in Singapore. By tracing the development of the curriculum, Alsagoff and Low reveal the factors shaping the development of the curriculum and reflect on the changes in the curriculum over a period of 21 years (1985-2006) under the influence of these factors. The case study shows an example of how contextual factors such as economic development, the expanding role of English language, the shift in educational perspectives, and teacher trainees' desires shape the changes in the curriculum of the SLTE program. Although the study is not based on a specific framework for the knowledge base of SLTE, it does provide some insights into the kinds of changes in different aspects of the knowledge base in response to the influential contextual factors. Some examples of the changes include a shift from two subjects (e.g. English and science) to a single subject (English) to allow for a centralisation on language methodology modules, an addition of an academic research module, and an increase in curriculum load.

In a recent paper, Faez (2011) discusses how a variety of local contextual factors impact the development of the knowledge base of SLTE programs in Canada. From a sociocultural perspective, Faez identifies individual and contextual factors that influence the SLTE knowledge base development. Examples of individual factors

include teacher candidates' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, language proficiency, personal experiences, understanding of language development, and understanding of second language students. Contextual factors which play important role in shaping the knowledge base of SLTE in Canada include the range of student populations and the variety of teaching contexts student teachers could work with.

A common theme that runs through the three studies above is the role of contextual factors in shaping the development of the knowledge base of SLTE. Some common categories of factors can also be observed from the studies, such as teacher candidates' personal factors and factors of the language learners, teaching contexts, and the wider social, cultural, economic, and political context. The studies, although limited in number, have provided evidence to show that development of the knowledge base of SLTE needs to be viewed as changing, contextualised and situated (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). In other words, although analysing the content of SLTE programs is important, studies on the development of the knowledge base of SLTE cannot lose sight of the context of its development and implementation since context analysis is one of the key factors in designing a SLTE curriculum that is "pragmatically feasible" (Graves, 2009, p. 116).

Although the field of SLTE has a strong conceptual base, such empirical research and analyses of practices in the area of knowledge base development as reviewed above (Alsagoff & Low, 2007; Faez, 2011; Fradd & Lee, 1998) account for only a limited volume of the existing literature. As a result, the field has been relying mainly on conceptual analyses and may have gained inadequate understanding of what is actually happening at diverse STTE institutions and the sociocultural contexts shaping their teacher education contents and practices. Moreover, the types of SLTE programmes are diverse and so are the contexts of these programmes. Consequently, we cannot assume that a framework of the knowledge base of SLTE can be transferrable from one institution to another without understanding the context. It is time to enrich the field's empirical data on the development of the knowledge base of SLTE with a particular focus on its context. It is time to look at specific SLTE curricula, their componential constituents, why they include such components, the contextual factors inherent in the settings where they are developed and implemented, and the extent to which they meet the goals of specific teacher education institutions and cater for the needs of preservice language teachers. Such information will have potential to inform both conceptual debate about the knowledge base and practices of SLTE. This study is an attempt to probe into some of these gaps. It aims to find empirical evidence to answer the following questions:

1. What componential variation is there across and within the curricula of English language teacher education at the Australian and Vietnamese universities?
2. What contextual factors shape the two respective curricula of English language teacher education?

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The study used a mixed methods approach to investigate the variation across and within the curricula for SLTE in terms of structure and content and the contextual factors influencing the development of the curricula. Unit descriptions were first collected and analysed qualitatively using content analysis to determine which domains of knowledge each unit contributed to. The weighting of each unit was indicated through its number of credit points, based on which the total number of credit points contributing to each domain of knowledge was then quantified and the weighting of each domain within the curriculum calculated in the form of percentage. For example, if a 96-point curriculum included in total a 3-point unit, a 2-point unit, and a 6-point unit that contributed to contextual knowledge, the total credit points for contextual knowledge would be 11 (i.e., 3+2+6) and the weighting of the domain of contextual knowledge within the curriculum would be 11.45% (i.e., 11 out of 96). It is believed that qualitative data could shed light on and explain quantitative data. Therefore, qualitative interviews were conducted with academics from the two universities who participated in the development and implementation of the curricula. In addition, teachers' standards, relevant documents and literature were collected for the research. The interview and document data were analysed thematically to identify contextual factors that influenced the structure and content of the respective curricula.

### **Research contexts**

The study was conducted at Treehills University in Australia (pseudonym) and a Nam-Do University in Vietnam (pseudonym). Treehills University's curriculum for SLTE was a four-year double degree with Education being one of the two majors. The total number of credit points for the double degree is 204, of which studies in Education account for 108 credit points (53%) and studies in the second area account for 96 (47%) credit points. The Education units academically qualify students for two teaching specialisms, such as English as an additional language (EAL) – Japanese, or EAL – Music. Nam-Do University's curriculum was a four-year degree of English Language Teaching. This curriculum includes a total number of credit points of 137. This programme prepared student teachers for teaching English language at all levels from pre-school to university.

There are some differences between the two programs raising questions about to what extent the two programs are comparable, but this paper argues that comparing the two programs is productive. Firstly, only a small proportion of preservice teachers in the Australian program come from a non-English speaking background; while all preservice teachers in the Vietnamese program are from a non-English speaking background. However, this study offers implications that are directly relevant and significant to both contexts as the number of non-English background preservice teachers is increasing in Australian universities. Secondly, while the Australian program was implemented in an ESL setting, where English is spoken both inside and outside the classroom, the Vietnamese program was implemented in an EFL context where English is mostly used within the classroom (Nayar, 1997). This study conceptualises this as a contextual difference that potentially contributes to the variation across the two programs. Thirdly, the credit point units are not equivalent between the two programs, which results in very different total numbers of credit points for the two programs. This difference is not likely to affect the results of this study because the study compares and contrasts the two curricula based on the percentage of total credit points for each domain of knowledge per the total number of credit points for each program. Another difference is that the Australian program was a double degree while the Vietnamese program was



not. This could potentially be one of the many contextual factors that contributed to differences between the programs, and one of the aims of this study was to identify how specifically the programs were different and what distinctive contextual factors contributed to the differences. Moreover, since both programs were designed to prepare candidates for the teaching of English language in a full range of contexts as stated in the curriculum documents, this study was conducted on the common ground that despite their different forms and structures, SLTE programs need to provide opportunity for teachers to develop knowledge domains that are necessary for them to function effectively as teachers (Richards, 2010).

### **Participants**

Two academics working at the two universities under research voluntarily participated in this study. The two academics were selected as participants because they had extensive experience in SLTE and curriculum development and had played key roles in the development and implementation of the two teacher education curricula under research. Angela (pseudonym) from Treehills University had been working as a teacher educator for more than 20 years, with nine years at Treehills University. During the time working at Treehills University, Angela was involved in several curriculum innovations and took part in teaching units within the curriculum. Lan (pseudonym) from Nam-Do University held a coordinating position in the curriculum development committee. She had also taught in the program for over 15 years and had great insights into the program from both curriculum development and curriculum implementation perspectives.

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

#### ***Document Analysis***

Two types of documents were used as data in this study. The first type of documents including English language teacher education curricula, syllabi and unit guides were collected from the universities' websites. Where documents needed were not available from the websites, they were obtained from the participants with permission to use for research purpose. The documents were examined carefully and coded to domains of knowledge adapted from Richards' (1998) model of the knowledge base of SLTE. For example, a unit that aims to "develop a repertoire of teaching skills and strategies that promote purposeful, meaningful, engaging, innovative, creative, intellectually challenging, and authentic learning" (an extract from a unit guide) would be coded towards the domain of teaching skills. The proportion of each domain of knowledge within each curriculum was calculated based on the percentage of the total credit points for each domain of knowledge per the total number of credit points for each language teacher education program. For instance, if three 6-point units are coded towards contextual knowledge, the total number of credit points for that domain is 18 points and the percentage is 36.72 (i.e. 18 out of 204). Comparison was then made between each domain of knowledge across and within the curricula. A second type of documents including teachers' standards, teacher education policies, and relevant literature that had potential to shed light on the contexts of the two curricula were also collected and analysed to identify contextual factors shaping the development of the curricula under study.

#### ***Interview***

Interviews are viewed as one of the most effective research methods to elicit qualitative data that can shed light on quantitative data (Adams, Fujii, & Mackey, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Neuman, 2011). In this study, individual interviews with the two

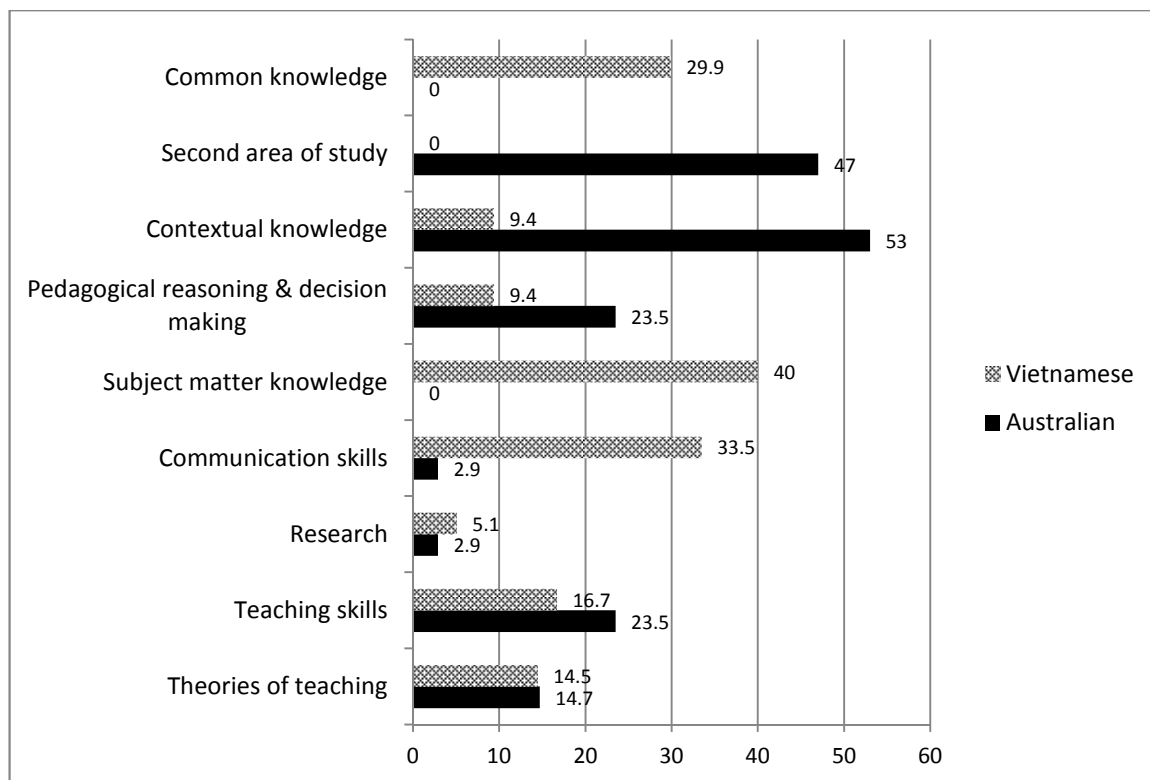
academic participants were conducted to validate my coding of the curriculum documents against domains of knowledge (Richards, 1998) and to find out the contextual factors influencing the structure of the curricula. The interviews were conducted after initial analysis of curriculum documents had been done. Each interview lasted between 30-40 minutes. During the interviews, I used the results of my initial document analysis and the analysed curriculum documents as stimulus materials. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for qualitative content analysis (Merriam, 2009). This analysis approach involves a close line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts with attention to the content of the interviews. The approach was adopted because it allowed the study to achieve a holistic and comprehensive analysis of complex social phenomena (Kohlbacher, 2006) and to classify large amounts of text into efficient numbers of themes corresponding to the issues under research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

## Findings

Analysis of the curriculum documents currently in use at the Australian and Vietnamese teacher education institutions revealed that each curriculum included all the six main domains of knowledge suggested by Richards (1998). Besides, there were three other areas of knowledge and skills included in either or both of curricula, namely research knowledge, knowledge for the second area of study, and common knowledge. The study found different foci in the domains of knowledge across and within the two curricula. Findings from interviews with academics and documents analysis revealed distinctive contextual factors that help to explain this variation. The findings are presented and discussed below.

### Different Foci across the Respective Curricula

Figure 1 clearly shows that there were different foci across the two curricula of English language teacher education used at the Australian and Vietnamese universities. First, Treehills University integrated much more contextual knowledge (53%) and pedagogical reasoning and decision making skills (23%) into the curriculum than Nam-Do University (9.4% for each of these two domains). Second, while Nam-Do University's curriculum placed much greater emphasis on developing preservice teachers' knowledge of the subject matter and communication skills and proficiency, Treehills University's curriculum offered only 2.9% of its credit points to developing communication skills and allocated no credit point to explicitly developing subject matter knowledge for its preservice teachers. Moreover, while the Australian double degree allocated 47% of its curriculum load to the second, non-education area of studies such as Business, Music and Arts, the Vietnamese program reserved its 29.9% for common knowledge subjects such as Philosophy, History of the Vietnamese Party, Physical Education.



**Figure 1: Comparison between the two curricula**

The finding on the variation between the two curricula is supported by relevant literature (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Graves, 2009; Santoro, Reid, Mayer, & Singh, 2012). For example, according to Fradd and Lee (1998),

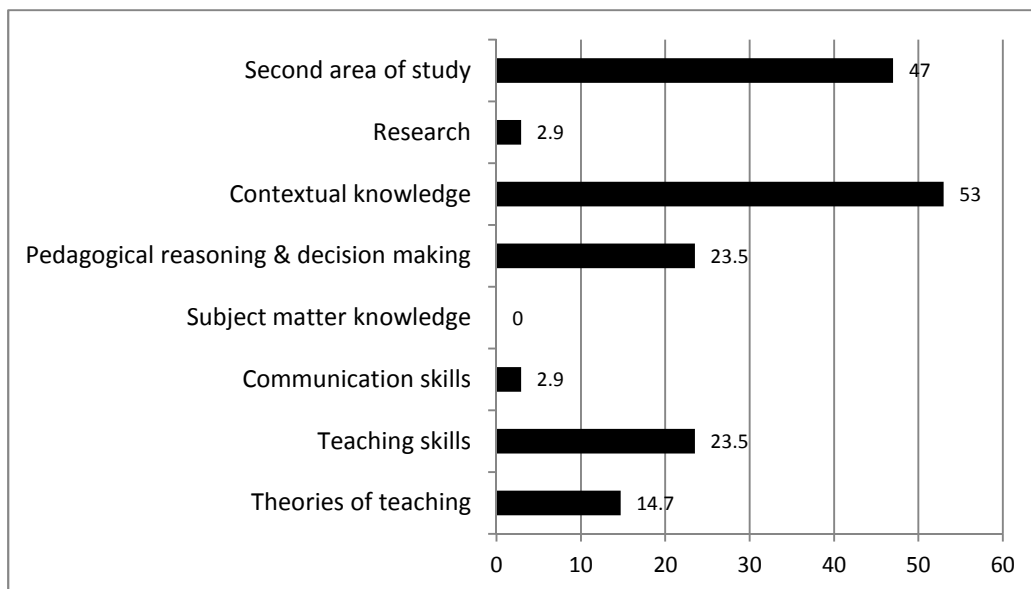
a TESOL knowledge base at the international level is difficult to conceptualize and define because of differences among nations in terms of the status of the teaching profession in general and English teaching in particular, students' motivations for studying English, and the conditions under which instruction occurs. (p. 763)

Similarly, Santoro, Reid, Mayer and Singh (2012) also note that teacher education is related to and defined by its local contexts. The following sections will present and discuss findings on the variation within each teacher education program and the influence of contextual factors on this variation. The influence of different contexts as an explanation for the variations across the two curricula was drawn from the findings about each curriculum discussed as follows.

#### **Different Foci within the Respective Curricula**

A similarity found between the two curricula of English language teacher education currently in use at the Australian and Vietnamese universities was the varied curriculum loads given to their different domains of knowledge. The following subsections discuss this internal variation in detail, with support from quantitative data to illustrate and qualitative data to explain.

Figure 2 shows a variation in the percentages of curriculum load for the different domains of knowledge within Treehills University's curriculum for English language teacher education. All the education units (i.e. 53% of the whole double degree programme) offered opportunities for student teachers to develop contextual knowledge by inquiring into and connecting with contexts of teaching at different levels and incorporating at least five hours of fieldwork placement each. Among these units, there were four school-based professional experience units separated from the university-based course work units.



**Figure 2: Allocation of credits within Treehills University's curriculum**

There were several contextual factors that can explain the high percentage of the credit points contributing to the development of the student teachers' contextual knowledge. First, the central role of the fieldwork placement in Treehills University's teacher education program was underpinned by a universal agreement among the Australian Council of Deans of Education, as noted in Ingvarson, Beavis, Kleinhenz and Elliott (2004):

There is wide spread agreement that professional experience is an integral part of all preservice teacher education programs and provides the key link between theory and practice. The Australian Council of Deans of Education says that professional experience must be at the "heart" of teacher education and that theory and practice should be "mutually informing". (p. 28)

Second, as an accredited teacher education program, this large proportion of fieldwork placement within the curriculum load also appeared to comply with the standards for accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia:

The professional experience component of each program must include no fewer than 80 days of well-structured, supervised and assessed teaching practice in schools in undergraduate and double-degree teacher education programs. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, 2011a, p. 15)

The emphasis of Treehills University's curriculum on the domain of contextual knowledge is consistent with a sociocultural perspective on learning, which sees learning as taking place in specific contexts that shape learning (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2009a). According to Richards (2010), in order for teachers to function effectively in the contexts where they teach, they need to acquire appropriate contextual

knowledge including, for example, norms of practice expected of teachers, school culture, behaviour expectations, available resources, curricula, syllabi, and textbooks used at specific schools.

In contrast to the domain of contextual knowledge, much less curriculum load was given to the domains of communication skills and research, each of which accounted for only 2.9% of the total credits. Especially, there was not a single unit offered to develop student teachers' knowledge of English language, the subject matter that they were going to teach. One possible explanation for the little load given to communication skills and subject matter knowledge is that these domains of knowledge were considered prerequisites for EAL teacher education by the university. Specifically, applicants were required to have done their prior education through English for a certain period of time and obtained a certain level of results in English subjects (e.g. VCE English, VCE literature, ESL), or achieved an IELTS overall score of 7.5 or equivalent in other English tests. Another explanation for including only one unit that develops preservice teachers' communication skills and no unit to develop preservice teachers' knowledge of English language as subject matter was the limited time given to the general curriculum load. Angela, the academic working at the university, commented on this issue during an interview:

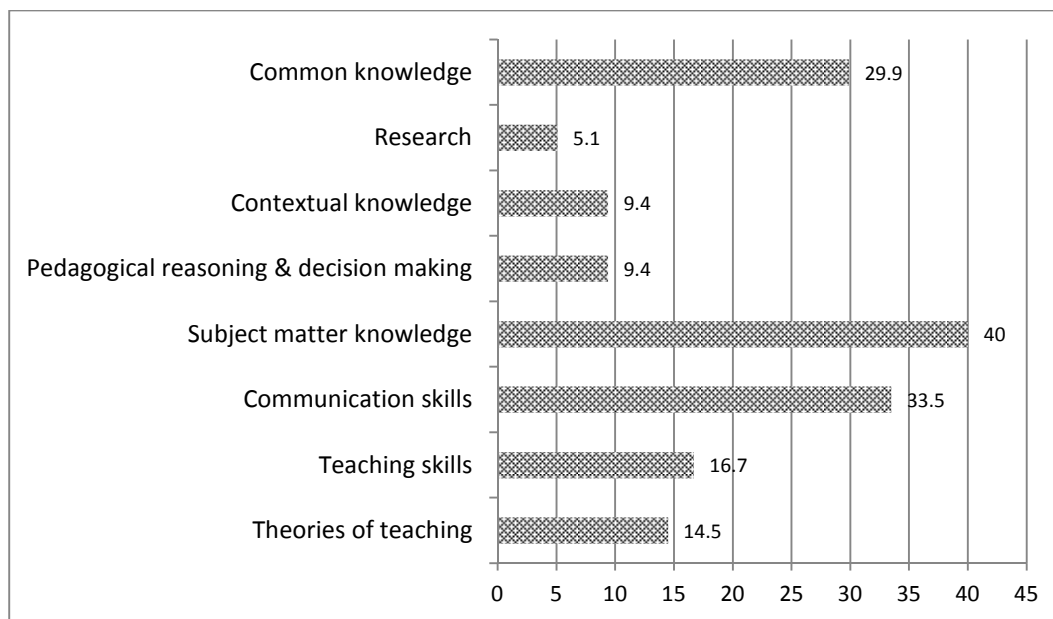
I think our course is too short. It's too short in weeks and it's too short in hours. So our students have 12 hours face to face. I think that's not enough. I did a little bit of digging around on this and in Singapore they have 26 hours face to face plus 10 weeks of practicum. When they are at uni, they're at uni five days a week, long days. When I did my DipEd in the 70s, which is a long time ago, you know, I'm sure we had about 19 hours a week. Now we have 12. [...]. I think this is problematic. It's not enough investment of time by the university or by the students.

In the Education double degree, student teachers spent the first three years of their degree studying education units along with units in a second specialism such as Arts, Music, or Commerce. Although they had opportunity to develop their subject matter knowledge in those areas, they did not have any units in English language or linguistics because the university did not offer a double degree in Education and English.

Each of the other domains (i.e. theories of teaching, teaching skills and pedagogical reasoning and decision making) accounted for between 14.7% and 23.5% of the total number of credits. These domains provided student teachers with an understanding of relevant theories of teaching and develop their teaching skills. These domains corresponded to the teachers' professional standards outlined in the new Australian *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, 2011b) and the *Standards and Procedures for Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, 2011a). Therefore, these domains were among the core components of any accredited teacher education programs in Australia, including the curriculum under research.

#### *Variation within Nam-Do University's Curriculum*

Analysis of Nam-Do University's curriculum documents also revealed an imbalance in focus on the different domains of knowledge. Figure 3 shows that a majority of the curriculum is allocated to the domains of communication skills and subject matter knowledge (33.5% and 40% respectively). This study found that a high concentration on these domains of knowledge was influenced by contextual factors on institutional and national levels.



**Figure 3: Allocation of credits within Nam-Do University's curriculum**

On the institutional level, preservice teachers' low proficiency at entry into the teacher education program seemed to play an influential role, as commented by the Vietnamese academic:

Because you see that our students after graduating school, their proficiency is hardly B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference and also let alone talking about their speaking and listening. And so these subjects on language skills are very necessary for them to build up their proficiency level so that they can speak English, use English fluently before they can teach English.

The interview excerpt above showed that preservice teachers' low English proficiency, especially in the areas of speaking and listening, on entering the teacher education program was an important contextual factor that helped to explain why Nam-Do University's curriculum placed a great emphasis on developing preservice teachers' English proficiency and communication skills. This finding is consistent with Le's (2002) explanation that "[b]ecause their entry level of proficiency in English is generally low, most time is devoted to improving English knowledge and skills" (p.33).

On the national level, policy was a major factor that shapes the curriculum structure. In 2008, the Prime Minister of Vietnam issued Decision 1400, which identified the goal of the National English language education by the year 2020 as follows:

By 2020 most Vietnamese students graduating from secondary, vocational schools, colleges and universities will be able to use a foreign language confidently in their daily communication, their study and work in an integrated, multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment, making foreign language a comparative advantage of development for Vietnamese people in the cause of industrialization and modernization for the country. (The Government of Vietnam, 2008)

In order to achieve this goal, the Government of Vietnam identified major tasks for the nation's foreign language education. One of the tasks was to implement new compulsory English programs at schools: primary school to achieve level 1 (A1) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001); lower secondary school level 2 (A2); higher secondary school, non-English college and university level 3 (B1) (Nguyen, 2010). The Ministry of Education and Training has

since established the National English 2020 Project to carry out the Government's Decision 1400. The Government of Vietnam (2008) also identified teacher development as the key to the success of the Project. Commenting on the influence of the policy document on the development of the English teacher education program in Nam-Do University, the academic said:

And according to the latest, I think, decision from the Ministry of Education and Training [...] high school students would have to finish school and reach the level of B1 [...]. So in order to teach the students and to bring them to B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, our teachers would have to acquire the English proficiency level of at least C1. And so knowledge of the English language and linguistics are necessary for them because they need to speak English well and also to know the metalanguage so they can explain about the language for the students.

The policy document and interview excerpt above showed an example of how "a TESOL knowledge base is shaped by national expectations as well as local and regional demands" (Fradd & Lee, 1998, p. 763). In order to meet Vietnam's national goal for English education as above, English teacher preparation needs to make sure that besides the other domains of knowledge, preservice teachers reach at least C1 level in English proficiency by the time they graduate. It was a challenging task for the university to design a program that can bring student teachers from below B1 level at entry to at least C1 level at graduation. Therefore, the university gave a significant proportion of the program to the domains of English proficiency and communication skills.

In comparison with the domain of communication skills, the domains of pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and contextual knowledge accounted for a much smaller proportion (each at 9.4%). As the Vietnamese student teachers only had six weeks of professional placement throughout their four years of study, they did not have adequate opportunity to develop their pedagogical reasoning and interactive decision making on the job. Commenting on this limitation, the academic participant noted:

In the current programme and also in the future programme (the new curriculum) there will be only one time for practicum of six weeks, and personally I think it's not enough [...] We can't afford to send them to schools just to observe for four weeks as before.

This appeared to be a persistent problem of language teacher education in Vietnam, where "undergraduate courses were often based on linguistics and literature and dealt very little with teaching practice" (Pham, 2001). The limited time on practicum also contributed to the fact that student teachers have limited opportunity to develop their contextual knowledge or an understanding of the realities of teaching in schools. According to the academic, this was one of the weaknesses of the curriculum.

In the current curriculum, there's a lack of subjects in the domain of knowledge of the learners and knowledge of the context in which English is taught and learnt. I think we are lacking subjects in these two domains.

This finding is consistent with Le's (2004) statement of the weakness of English language teacher education in Vietnam in general:

Obviously, there is a missing link between training and the reality of the schools where trainee teachers will be expected to work. Teaching practice is used to bridge the theory with the real world, but too often it is separated, superficial, or patronizing. [...] Teachers begin their careers as English teachers having had just eight weeks of such practice. (p. 33)

The academic further noted that the curriculum was at the time being revised and subjects in these domains would be added to the new programme.

The knowledge of the context, I think that is lacked in our current curriculum, and so we proposed to include it into the new curriculum to provide the preservice teachers with the knowledge of the context in which English is taught.

Each of the domains of theories of teaching and teaching skills accounted for approximately 15% of the total credit points of Nam-Do University's English language teacher education curriculum. According to the academic, these were among the core domains of knowledge in the teacher education program:

And the third (core) domain is the domain of English language teaching methodology, including some other subjects taught in Vietnamese about pedagogy and psychology of learners. Those subjects I think are also very important, and the subjects in the domain of the English language teaching methodology like English teaching methodology, approaches to teaching and learning English, testing and assessment and evaluation, and using technology in English language teaching.

However, although considered a core domain, the domains of theories of teaching and teaching skills were much outweighed by the domains of communication skills (33.5%) and subject matter knowledge (40%). This is in congruence with the observation that language teacher education curriculum in Vietnam is typically heavily weighted toward the direct instruction of English knowledge and skills (Le, 2004), linguistics and literature (Pham, 2001).

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study sought to understand more thoroughly the structures of the two curricula for English language teacher education in an Australian and a Vietnamese university, the variation between and within the two curricula in terms of structure, and the contextual factors that contributed to shaping the curricula. The study used Richards' (1998) framework for the knowledge base of second language teacher education as a theoretical framework for analysing the curricula under research. The study, however, did not describe the detailed content of the various units or subjects comprising the two teacher education programs – it revealed the domains of knowledge constituting the programs and the contextual factors underlying the structures of the programs. The findings showed great variation across and within the two curricula of English language teacher education in use at the Australian and Vietnamese universities and various contextual factors that influenced the development of the curricula.

While the study found areas of strengths within each curriculum, it also revealed areas of weaknesses that should be addressed to better prepare preservice teachers for teaching English language in the two contexts. Specifically, Treehills University's curriculum was strong in the domains of contextual knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills. These are very important domains of knowledge for English language teachers in Australia where great cultural and linguistic diversity is a dominant feature of school contexts (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Miller, 2011; Premier & Miller, 2010). However, a noticeable problem of Treehills University's curriculum was that it did not include any unit that explicitly developed subject matter knowledge for English language teachers because of limited course length and double foci which provided opportunity for preservice teachers to develop subject matter knowledge in the second area (e.g., Arts, Music and Business) but not English language.

This study suggests that preservice teachers should also have opportunity to develop subject matter knowledge because it comprises what teachers need to know



about the subject they teach (Richards, 1998). This is empirically supported by Faez and Valeo's (2012) finding that 66% of beginning teachers who graduated from a TESOL program rated grammar as one of the most significant elements of the program. A Singaporean study found that a teacher education curriculum change from focus on two subjects (Teaching English language and Teaching science) to focus on one (Teaching English language) is productive as it allows for more curriculum time on English language teaching units (Alsagoff & Low, 2007).

On the other hand, Nam-Do University's curriculum devoted most of its curriculum load to English proficiency and subject matter knowledge, but little to contextual knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making. This finding showed that Nam-Do University responded well to the distinctive contextual feature that its preservice teachers had limited proficiency and knowledge of the English language at entry. However, it should also pay due attention to developing preservice teachers' initial contextual knowledge such as types of schools/institutions, administrative practices, school culture and expectations, testing factors, students' demographic backgrounds and prior learning, and so on through course work and more time on authentic teaching practice because this knowledge enables the teacher to function effectively in the teaching context (Richards, 1998, 2010). This is also consistent with Le's (2002) argument that Vietnamese universities and colleges need to provide a closer relationship between their teacher education content and realities of teaching in schools.

The study identified a number of distinctive contextual factors that linked to the weighting of domains of knowledge in the two universities' curricula. The Australian university, under the influence of policies regarding teacher education accreditation standards and agreement among Deans of Education, appeared to allocate a large proportion of curriculum weighting to contextual knowledge and a some weighting to theories of teaching, teaching skills, and pedagogical reasoning and decision making. The program's double foci and admission policy related to English language requirements contributed to the fact that little time was spent on the domain of communication skills and no time on the domain of subject matter knowledge. Regarding the Vietnamese program, general low English proficiency of preservice teachers, national expectations and language policy were major contextual factors that defined a high percentage of curriculum weighting for subject matter knowledge and communication skills. Financial constraints were the principal factor that contributed to the limited curriculum time for the teaching practicum, which contributes greatly to the domains of pedagogical reasoning and decision making and contextual knowledge. The study recommends that the different aspects of the context of SLTE should be systematically analysed and connected in developing the curriculum for SLTE. This is in line with Adoniou's (2013) proposal for a model of quality teacher education where the interplay between types of context (e.g., the personal, university-based coursework, practicum, and first employment contexts) is taken into account.

This study further suggests that SLTE adopt an integrated approach to SLTE curriculum where different domains of knowledge are included and synthesised (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Le, 2002). Yet, the study also provides evidence to suggest that in curriculum development for SLTE, it is important to consider the specific context of curriculum implementation and teaching rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach. It does not suggest that all domains of knowledge should be weighed equally; rather decisions about what and how much of that should be included in the curriculum should be made based closely on needs analysis and context analysis (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Le, 2002). Consequently, the curriculum cannot be considered as a static set of knowledge, but an evolving one that corresponds to the specific and changing needs of teacher candidates and the dynamic nature of context (Graves, 2009; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000).

It is acknowledged that although both SLTE programs under research concern English language teachers, all preservice teachers in the Vietnamese program come from a non-English speaking background while only a small proportion of preservice teachers in the Australian program are of a non-English background. Consequently, some of the findings (e.g., findings about language proficiency) may not have direct implications for many Australian preservice teachers. However, with the number of non-English language background preservice teachers of EAL increasing in the Australian context, this study offers implications for better preparing this group of student teachers for EAL teaching. Specifically, EAL teacher education should provide opportunity for preservice teachers to develop content knowledge of English language and linguistics.

An important finding of this study was that both SLTE programs included domains of knowledge that are not represented within Richards' (1998) framework. Apart from subjects in the second area of study in the Australian case due to its double degree and subjects in common knowledge in the Vietnamese case due to its educational policy, research knowledge and skills appeared in both curricula. This reflects the field's increasing attention to research knowledge and skills as an important part of language teacher professional development (Borg, 2009a, 2010b). The study, therefore, recommends that the knowledge base should be expanded to reflect this development, in addition to the domains of knowledge that Richards proposes.

Finally, as this study focussed on the curriculum of SLTE at one university in each of the two respective countries, the reader should be cautious in generalising its findings to the wider context. In addition, as mentioned earlier, there is a lack of research into SLTE curriculum development, particularly in these two contexts. Therefore, the study suggests the need to look into the curriculum and contexts of SLTE programs in various contexts so that findings can be aggregated and compared and the knowledge base of the field enriched.

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