The Cultural Appropriateness of Communicative Language Teaching: A Case Study of the EFL Program Implementation at a Vietnamese Tertiary Institution

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Thi Nguyet Minh Nguyen

September 2016
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFTA</td>
<td>ASEAN Free Trade Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUN</td>
<td>ASEAN University Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COL</td>
<td>collectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLT</td>
<td>Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEM</td>
<td>femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>International Business Machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDG</td>
<td>indulgence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTO</td>
<td>long-term orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>masculinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOET</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTIH</td>
<td>Major Tertiary Institution in Ho Chi Minh City (<em>pseudonym for the Institution under study</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTIH-ED</td>
<td>Major Tertiary Institution in Ho Chi Minh City – English Department (<em>pseudonym for the Department under study</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RST</td>
<td>restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STO</td>
<td>short-term orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESEP</td>
<td>Tertiary, Secondary, and Primary (English language education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL iBT</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language – Internet-based Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL ITP</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language – Institutional Testing Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC</td>
<td>Test of English for International Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPP</td>
<td>Trans-Pacific Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>uncertainty avoidance</td>
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<td>WVS</td>
<td>World Values Survey</td>
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Abstract

This thesis examines the cultural appropriateness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Vietnam, a question to which a sound research-based answer has been overdue. To provide insights into this issue, I conducted an “instrumental case study” (Creswell, 2012), considering the factors affecting the implementation of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a Vietnamese tertiary institution.

Using Brumfit (1984) and J. C. Richards (2001a, 2001b) as conceptual frameworks, I examined those factors according to three sets of variables: societal and institutional factors, teacher and teaching factors, and learner and learning factors. Subsequently, the findings from the examination were related to the implicit requirements for CLT operationalization (Brown & Lee, 2015) in order to reveal the extent to which CLT could be implemented in the case study. The outcomes of this comparison of CLT in action versus CLT in theory were then interpreted in light of Hofstede’s cultural orientation framework (Hofstede, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; and Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Employing a primarily qualitative research design, this study collected data by means of lesson observation to investigate the day-to-day operationalization of CLT at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. This classroom-based inquiry was supported by the employment of other research methods including questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview with students, lecturers, program administrators, and also with alumni and employers, and document analysis to ensure triangulation. Also, consultation with multiple stakeholders in the program implementation helped to achieve a multi-angle and in-depth understanding of the factors under study.

The study found that CLT did not actually take place as set out by the program, and that attempts to implement CLT did not run aground simply because of superficial problems with Vietnamese EFL education such as large classes, knowledge-oriented exams and inadequate teaching and learning infrastructure. Rather, as was revealed through the lens of the Hofstedian dimensions, the operationalization of CLT principles was ultimately defined by less readily visible
yet powerful drivers of the context of use (Vietnam), the culture of which is considerably different from those of the western countries from which CLT has been ‘imported’ into Vietnam. The culturally calibrated interpretation illuminates how endeavors to carry out CLT-oriented activities in the Vietnamese context can be ultimately affected by the overriding features running deep in the Vietnamese culture, including large power distance, collectivism, feminism, high uncertainty avoidance (in education), long-term orientation and restraint. With invaluable implications for the adaptation and implementation of CLT, the study recommends that local cultural context must be taken into consideration when attempting to reconcile the discrepancies that inevitably arise from the transfer of a teaching methodology from one culture to another.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This opening chapter of the thesis will firstly present the background of the study by revisiting the position of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the ELT (English Language Teaching) domain before providing the reasons for conducting the study. The chapter will subsequently elaborate on the scope of the research in reference to perspectives of inquiry and then factors of examination. In the third section, the chapter will present what the study aims to achieve with its three undertakings and will outline the significance of the research project. Finally, an overview of the chapters of the thesis will be given before the chapter ends with its summary.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As this research aims to reveal the cultural appropriateness of CLT in the Vietnamese context, it is necessary to look briefly at the status of CLT in general and in the Vietnamese context in particular (see detailed presentation in Chapter 2). Following this background knowledge, the rationale of the study will then be presented.

1.1.1 The status of CLT

CLT emerged as a popular language teaching approach in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily thanks to the socio-economic and academic developments in Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Brown & Lee, 2015; Byram & García,
Following the advent of the European Common Market, there was increased demand for foreign language teaching and learning as a result of the rapid rise in numbers of immigrants and guest workers, in the context of European countries becoming more interdependent (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Savignon, 2000). Concurrently, there were shifts in thinking about the ‘right’ ways to teach languages to the now much larger number of people seeking to learn them for practical communication purposes. There were questions such as “Are we teaching language (for communication)?” or “Are we teaching communication (via language)” (Allwright, 1979, p. 67). In the British context, language was then defined as “meaning potential” (Halliday, 1979) and language use was seen as a social activity (Halliday, 1973). In North America, there arose questions about the applicability of Noam Chomsky’s generative grammar in language classrooms (Brown, 2007a, p. 45) as Dell Hymes introduced “communicative competence”, the cornerstone for the development of CLT (Savignon, 2000). According to Hymes (1979), “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (p. 15), a proposition that rendered the teaching of grammar and vocabulary without social context questionable. In addition, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean there was the influence of progressivism, which emphasised enabling progress towards self-fulfillment for individual learners (Finney, 2008) and the role of teachers in creating their own curriculum to fit their students’ needs and wants (Clark, 1987). This influence could be felt, for example, in Germany, where classroom materials began to be developed with an emphasis on giving learners choice of self-pacing (Byram & García, 2011; Candlin, 1978).

Not long afterwards, though, CLT, as a western-originated approach, was criticised even by western scholars. It was argued, for example, by Swan (1985a) that CLT’s “limited but valuable insight has been over-generalised” (p. 7). Particularly in relation to EFL education, “the ‘communicative’ theory of meaning and use, in so far as it makes sense, is largely irrelevant to foreign language teaching” (Swan, 1985a, p. 11) because, to cite the most important reason, it fails to acknowledge the learners’ knowledge of first language (L1), which can be exploited for second language (L2) communication learning. Further, Byram and García (2011) pointed out that problems would arise in applying the definition of communicative competence in a foreign/second language context, because communicative competence is based on
the competencies of monolingual native speakers in the natural setting. One such problem is that it would be practically impossible for English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to have the resources to acquire communicative competence in the second/foreign language they were learning. Citing Lightbrown (1983), according to whom a six-year-old child will have had 12,000 to 15,000 hours learning their L1, Byram and García (2011, p. 504) suggest that ESL/EFL learners would rarely have an equivalent amount of time.

Theoretically speaking, CLT has been criticized for the rational basis on which it was developed. According to Richards (1998), it was built on the theory of communicative competence rather than the outcome of empirical research, as is the case for instance with the audio-lingual method, which is based on behaviourism. As CLT is a theoretical concept rather than a scientific concept, the large body of literature on CLT is primarily about the theory of communication while there is very little written about its learning theory (Byram & García, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In other words, CLT has been formulated on the logical grounds of what scholars think would be the best methods for teaching and learning a language. Since most of the influential voices of CLT are those from British and American contexts, the validity of their argumentation is subject to questioning when the approach is to be implemented in a different context.

From the pedagogical perspective, Klapper (2003) has pointed out that CLT does not have specific prescriptions of classroom techniques and thus causes fuzziness in teachers’ understanding of it. According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), whereas “this fuzziness has given CLT a flexibility which has allowed it to endure for thirty years”, it has also presented difficulties for teachers implementing CLT because the “fuzziness” has left them less confident that they are using CLT ‘properly’ in the classroom (p. 115).

Among the critiques of CLT, the most noticeable voice is that of Bax (2003), who has asserted that CLT pays inadequate attention to the context-sensitive issues of teaching and learning. Wherever English is taught as a foreign language rather than a first or second language, the conditions and motivations for teaching and learning are radically different, typically much less favourable in the case of EFL. It is without doubt that in developing countries, EFL teaching and learning facilities are significantly more inadequate than those available in countries of the BANA bloc.
Apart from superior infrastructure conditions, BANA bloc countries have the “freedom to develop classroom methodology as a sophisticated instrument to suit the precise needs of language learners” (Holliday, 1994b, p. 4). Comparing non-English speaking nations, the most recent report on English Proficiency rankings (Education First, 2015) shows that there is not a single developing country in the list of nations rated as having “very high proficiency” and even “high proficiency” in ESL/EFL capacities. Importantly, in non-western contexts enormous cultural differences create considerable barriers to the implementation of western ‘imports’. Reviewing recent studies, Richards and Rodgers (2014) note that “[CLT] is not applicable in different cultures of learning” (p. 104). They cite Ahmad and Rao (2012) to point out that “attempts to implement CLT in non-European settings were often less than successful due to different assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning that learners in countries such as China, East Asia and other contexts bring to learning” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 104). In an earlier review of Australian-based research studies, Malcolm (2001) notes that teachers should pay attention to “cultural congruence” when providing opportunities for students to communicate. According to Nelson (1992), communicative competence is essentially “the ability to put a language to use in appropriate ways in culturally defined contexts”, and so it “may become a problematic notion when applied in the situation of such a transplanted language, because the cultural contexts that defined ‘appropriateness’ in the parent situation are not necessarily the same in the new situation” (p. 327).

1.1.2 CLT in Vietnam

CLT was officially adopted into the Vietnamese educational system in the early 2000s with the introduction of a new series of EFL textbooks for secondary education in 2002 (Hoang, Nguyen, & Hoang, 2006). In tertiary education, the position of CLT as a recommended teaching methodology was established soon afterwards with the government’s promulgation of the curricular framework for tertiary education in foreign languages (Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 36/2004/QD-BGD&ĐT, 2004). In effect, however, CLT came into Vietnam at least a decade earlier (Pham, 2005) with the influx of expatriates and teaching materials
following Vietnam’s 1986 reform policy (known as *doi moi*) and subsequently with the return of teachers sent overseas for training in ELT methodology, firstly from Australia owing to aid packages (Dang, Nghiem, & Sloper, 1995; Denham, 1992).

Nevertheless, following the embrace of CLT, the approach did not manage to work the miracle it had apparently been expected to work. The implementation of CLT was recognized to be problematic. The problems that had allegedly resulted from traditional teaching practices appear to still exist despite the introduction of CLT, and Vietnamese students’ inability to communicate in English continues to be a topic of concern in media reports (T. M., 2015; Thanh Ha, 2008). There has also arisen doubt about the significance of communicative competence in English, which is seen as “neither feasible nor desirable” (Bruthiaux, 2008, p. 145).

Reasons often cited for this failure include teachers’ limited capabilities in English and expertise in CLT implementation (G. Ellis, 1994; Hoang et al., 2006; H. C. Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2011); students’ reluctance to practise their English communication skills outside the classroom (Le, 1999; H. C. Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2013; Pham & Ly, 2013); overcrowded classrooms and poor facilities (Bui, Dinh, & Kabilan, 2012; Ngan T. Nguyen, 2011; T. T. M. Nguyen, 2007; Pham, 2005); and the exam system being oriented to testing language knowledge rather than communication skills (G. Ellis, 1994; Le, 2011; Le, 1999; Pham, 2005). It is noteworthy that CLT has not appeared to work even for students in special cohorts for whom the majority of those problems have been resolved. In selective programs, for instance, the best teachers are brought in, class sizes are small, students are streamed in terms of academic merit, and the infrastructure is sound. However, there remains something there haunting the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese classroom that renders it anything but effective (Dang, 2006b; Nha Tran Nguyen, 2011; Vu et al., 2004).

Several studies have suggested that the causes are more likely underlying problems, particularly those that are culturally rooted (Bock, 2000; G. Ellis, 1994; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Le, 1999; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006; Phan, 2004; Phan, 2009). It has been pointed out, for example, that the Vietnamese classroom is typically teacher-fronted whereas CLT recommends student-oriented lessons. In the Vietnamese context, the teacher lectures from the lectern while students listen and take notes, believing it is the only worthwhile channel of knowledge. Little
interaction takes place in the lessons. These discrepancies, along with other problems such as logistic inadequacies, prevent CLT-oriented activities such as group learning from occurring.

1.1.3 Rationale of study

Despite its problems, CLT is recognized to be “a development from previous methodologies” (Holliday, 1994b, p. 10). Apparently arriving at a similar evaluation, even one of earliest and strongest critics of the approach admits that “we have probably gained more than we have lost from the Communicative Approach” (Swan, 1985b, p. 87). Therefore, research in the implementation CLT is no doubt worth pursuing, provided the implications from such research can potentially lead to the approach really working in the classroom.

There are three major reasons why this research project was conducted. First, broadly speaking, the applicability of western teaching approaches, and of CLT in particular, in the Vietnamese context has long been a major question to which a genuinely convincing research-based answer is overdue. Policy-makers have grabbed such western ‘imports’ in the context of the nation accelerating its international integration into the world community, but few research results are available to endorse (or refute) the teachability of those approaches in reference to the reality of Vietnam. What has been done so far merely amounts to several disparate studies, and the results remain of limited relevance. Issues of conflict have been identified, but a systematic analysis of those issues is yet to be done. To use Hofstede’s metaphor (1991), culture, as the mental software of people’s behaviours and actions, is seen as the bottom-line issue in attempts to deal effectively with teaching, learning and even policy-making issues; however, it remains unclear what cultural orientation has defined and shaped the Vietnamese ELT landscape. In this way, the culturally calibrated findings of this study will contribute to the adoption and adaptation of CLT.

Second, in relation to CLT in particular, while the approach has been championed as a key to success in language teaching regulatory guides, there have emerged critical issues in terms of evidence-based conclusions regarding what facets of the approach will work and what will not in the Vietnamese classroom. In this context of CLT reception, key contextual factors such as teachers, students and
teaching and learning conditions are so different from those of the context of creation of the approach that the transferability of the imports is to be questioned. This study sets out to provide insights into the ‘friction’ that is likely to happen during the operationalization of CLT principles in the Vietnamese context. In reference to the ultimate outcome of CLT – that is, communicative competence – this study will reconsider its value for Vietnamese learners of English. In other words, it will question the worth of communicative competence for Vietnamese learners and thereby discuss its relevance to Vietnamese learners of different needs.

Finally, from a personally reflective perspective, this study has been formulated out of the issues that have haunted my mind throughout the years of my own teaching and research experience. While still a teaching assistant at the Institution where the research took place, I always tried to use CLT-oriented activities in my teaching sessions. More often than not, though, the activities did not go well, not least in terms of students’ willingness to participate or to use English in small group work. I then doubted whether I had implemented CLT properly. Subsequently, I went to Australia to study for a master’s degree in applied linguistics. During this course of one and a half years, I delved into the literature about techniques for implementing CLT, and through personal connections I visited language classes to see first-hand how CLT was actually used in Australian classrooms.

Upon completion of my overseas studies, I returned to Vietnam with high expectations of successfully applying CLT at my own institution, now that I believed I had improved my knowledge of CLT as well as my English communication. However, the yesteryear problems persisted; that is, low student participation and their reluctance to speak English. The activities I had seen working well in the Australian context were not readily implementable in the Vietnamese context. Talking with colleagues who had also studied overseas, I learned that they experienced similar problems. It appeared that we had to make context-bound adjustments for teaching in our own context and concurrently accept that students’ embrace of CLT activities would not be as strong in our home contexts as it was in the Australian classes I had visited. I really appreciated Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) remark that the political motto “think globally, act locally” has to be translated into language pedagogy as “global thinking, local teaching” (Berman,
I found myself empathizing with choices made by people in *The Little Boy and His House* by Bone and Adshead (1988), a children’s bedtime story I once read to my little daughter.

The story goes that a little boy invited nine friends from around the world to his new house, which had recently been built with bricks and mortar following his world tour to learn how to build a house. The friends were all very impressed with the little boy’s house and determined to build their own houses exactly like the boy’s when they came home. However, all nine people dropped that intention eventually. Each had their own reasons for instead continuing to follow the traditional practice of their own context, as is presented in the two final pages of the story (Bone & Adshead, 1988, pp. 45-46). Don Esteban from Spain, who was used to living in a cave, “thought that after all it was very convenient to have a cave all ready made for you”. Johnnie Faa, a gipsy from England, and Big Bear, a Red Indian from North America, who both lived in tents, “thought how convenient it was to have a house you could carry about wherever you wanted to go”. Wang Fu, who lived on a boat in China, “thought it was even more convenient to have a house that could carry you about”. E-took-a-shoo, an Eskimo from the North Pole, “saw that where he lived he would have to build with ice and snow because there was nothing else”. M’popo, who lived in a house of grass and sticks, and M’toto, whose house was made of mud, both from Africa, “saw that they would have to build with grass and mud because they had nothing else”. Mr. Michael O’Flaherty, who came from a region in Ireland where people lived in houses built of stones, “thought that if you had a lot of stones lying about the fields it was a shame not to use them”. And Lars Larsson from Sweden, who lived in a wooden house, “thought the same about the trees in the forest” near where he lived. In fact, as the story concludes, they all continued to build their houses just as they had done. They said, “It depends... It depends... It all depends on where you live and what you have to build with”.

Right, I thought, it depends; it all depends on where I (and my students) live and what I (and my students) have to build with. I then asked questions regarding the factors available and inherent in my context. The major question was: “Exactly and ultimately what is it that we have to build with for our CLT implementation, and how is it conditioned by where we live?”
I took that question with me when I went back to Australia for my doctoral study. Searching the literature, I was delighted to read Hofstede (1986), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and then Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), whose cultural orientation framework has been used as the theoretical framework of interpretation in this study. I felt that it was cultural differences that significantly affected how CLT was implemented in the Vietnamese context. I felt it was those differences that stood between our efforts to implement CLT and the success of doing so, and that they prevented me from feeling satisfied with my lessons at the end of the day. I have dedicated the past four years to my quest for the answer to the aforementioned question, which has of course evolved and reformulated over the course of my study. So, my research, as will be presented in more detail in 1.3.1 and 3.1.1, is to reveal the cultural appropriateness of CLT by examining the factors of the EFL program implementation at MTIH, the institution I used to teach at.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

In order to see whether or not a teaching methodology really works (and why it is the case), a researcher will need to take into consideration various factors for examination and perspectives of investigation. This section will justify my choices in terms of those factors and perspectives.

1.2.1 Factors for examination

Numerous factors of program implementation need to be examined in order to reveal whether the teaching methodology adopted for the program really works. Ellis (1998) suggests that for the purpose of program/project evaluation, there are two broad areas of interest under which there are multiple sub-areas to be concerned with. The first one is administrative matters, such as timetabling for the program/project under study, and the second one is curricular matters, such as materials, teachers and learners. Under each of these broad areas, there are multiple sub-areas for further examination, including course book tasks, teacher’s questioning practice, students’ level of participation, and so on. However, Ellis’ categorization pays inadequate attention to the context in which the program/project is being implemented. This is a flaw because no program/project can be operationalized in a ‘vacuum’.
Meanwhile, specifically in reference to program factors to consider for effective foreign and second language teaching, Richards (2001b) proposes that the investigation should be interested in those of teachers and their teaching, those of learners and their learning, and those of the institution where the program is being implemented and even those of society, the broad context, just to name the key factors. According to Richards, for the sake of curriculum development in language teaching, it is necessary to conduct a “situation analysis” (Richards, 2001a, pp. 90-111), which entails the tasks of investigating similar factors, including societal factors, institutional factors, teacher factors, learner factors, etc.

A further review of the literature found that the proposals of J. C. Richards (2001a, 2001b) are quite similar to those of Brumfit (1984). Discussing the implementation of CLT, Brumfit (1984) argues that the study of language teaching methodology can be conceived as “the investigation of the total process of language teaching and learning in relation to existing institutions and practices” (p. 17) with due interest to be paid to a variety of factors. Those factors, still according to Brumfit (1984, pp. 17–22) are national variables (e.g., national educational aims in general and specifically for language teaching), the local situational variables (e.g., size of class, amount of administrative support, physical resources available, etc.), pupil variables (e.g., motivation, previous experience of language learning, aptitude for language, etc.) and teacher variables (e.g., previous experience, training, attitude, etc.).

Using Brumfit (1984) and J. C. Richards (2001a, 2001b) as the conceptual framework, this study investigates and presents the factors of the EFL program at MTIH in three broad categories: societal and institutional factors (Chapter 4); teacher and teaching factors (Chapter 5); and learner and learning factors (Chapter 6). Whereas Chapter 4 deals with the contextual factors of the program under study, Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the factors of the two most important players in the field (i.e. the teacher and the learner), respectively concerned with their teaching and learning.

1.2.2 Perspectives for investigation

The cultural appropriateness of a teaching methodology can be investigated by listening to the voices of stakeholders of the program in which the methodology is
being implemented. Recent studies of Vietnamese students focusing on the experiences of research participants have been successful in achieving fresh findings, such as Bao (2014), who reveals, among many other things, how silence is used as a mode of (rather than against) learning among Vietnamese learners. According to Weiss (1983), there are two main groups of stakeholders: those affected by the program (e.g., teachers, students, parents) and those making decisions about the program (e.g., policy-makers, program managers).

Different stakeholders may of course have evaluative comments that are different, if not conflicting. In relation to the Vietnamese context, CLT is generally favored by policy-makers as it apparently has the appearance of an advanced teaching methodology. Meanwhile, in reality CLT can be covertly rejected by teachers who find it painstaking to implement in their classroom. In the same context, the grammar-translation method is more likely to be chosen by teachers as it is perceived to be more familiar to them and to be more beneficial for students’ results in decisive national exams, through which language knowledge rather than language skill is tested. From yet another perspective, though, parents might want to combine CLT and the traditional teaching method because the benefits would appear to be dual, the grammar-translation method helping their children to pass important exams and the CLT equipping them with communicative competence.

For these reasons, different stakeholders should be recruited for the collection of data on the teachability of the methodology. However, it is not necessarily the case that the more stakeholders are brought in, the more comprehensive and balanced the investigation will be. As Weiss (1983) points out, the involvement of too many stakeholders may jeopardize the appropriateness and the relevance of the information collected. Also, the complexity of data collection and analysis would create challenges for researchers, who would then have to make trade offs in terms of expertise and time budget. In this study, for the investigation of the groups of factors influencing program implementation, five types of stakeholders were consulted because of the relevance of their knowledge about the factors of the program under study: students (mainly providing information on learner and learning factors); lecturers (teacher and teaching factors); the program administrator (institutional factors); alumni (previous learner and learning factors and ongoing societal factors);
and employers of alumni (societal factors). An elaboration of the relevance of these sources of data will be provided in section 3.5.

1.3 AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This section describes the aims of the study and argues for its significance. It presents the research question and the undertakings to answer that question. Subsequently, it briefly explains what contributions the study can make.

1.3.1 Aims of study

This study aims to find out whether CLT is culturally appropriate as a language teaching methodology in the Vietnamese context. This aim is to be achieved by a case study of the EFL program implementation at a tertiary institution in Ho Chi Minh City named MTIH. By examining the factors of the program implementation under study, it reveals the cultural underpinnings of CLT operationalization. By studying a specific case (the EFL program implementation at MTIH) in order to obtain insights into an issue (the cultural appropriateness of CLT in the Vietnamese context), this study is an “instrumental case study” in light of Creswell’s definition (2012, p. 466).

The ultimate research question of the study is: “How do Vietnamese cultural factors affect the EFL program implementation?” This question is to be answered by the “instrumental” question: “What are the factors defining the implementation of CLT at MTIH-ED?” with MTIH-ED being the ELT department of the Institution. This “instrumental” question is broken down into the following interrelated sub-questions:

(1) What are the contextual factors of the EFL program implementation at MTIH-ED and how do they affect that program implementation? (to be answered by Chapter 4: Contextual Factors)

(2) What are the teacher and teaching factors of the EFL program implementation at MTIH-ED and how do they affect that program implementation? (Chapter 5: Teacher and Teaching Factors)
(3) What are the learner and learning factors of the EFL program implementation at MTIH-ED and how do they affect that program implementation? (Chapter 6: Learner and Learning Factors)

In order to answer these questions, I have carried out three major undertakings:

1. Investigating the factors of Vietnamese society and the Institution under study; its teacher and teaching factors and its learner and learning factors related to the implementation of the EFL program under study.

2. Matching those factors with the implicit requirements for the operationalization of CLT principles in order to reveal how the factors may have affected the program implementation.

3. Tracing Vietnamese cultural factors perceived as drivers of those factors defining CLT implementation at MTIH in order to interpret why CLT principles were operationalized there in the ways they were.

In brief, not only did I identify the factors, I also researched how these factors affected the program under study. The findings related to the three groups of factors affecting the EFL program will be matched with the methodological requirements of CLT. Discussion of the matching will highlight what was actually available at MTIH-ED (as shown by the case study) that rendered CLT implementation problematic. Concurrently, there will be interpretation of the underlying causes for what surfaced as problems, based on the Hofstedian cultural orientation framework (Hofstede, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; and Hofstede et al., 2010). The six Hofstedian cultural dimensions are brought into play because they are believed to help to uncover the cultural forces conditioning the program implementation at MTIH.

1.3.2 Significance of study

This study is significant for reasons related to the researching of teaching methodology in context and cultural issues affecting the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context. First, it connects language education with cultural context by deploying the Hofstedian dimensions in order to reveal how important the cultural appropriateness of CLT is through a case study of the EFL program implementation at a Vietnamese university. The Hofstedian cultural orientation framework provides a
fresh lens through which insights into the problems of language teaching methodology implementation can be gained. This study is the first of its kind in language teaching research to offer an approach of interpretation of findings from the research of teaching and learning practice using Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, a highly influential framework already used by researchers in the fields of business, management and cultural study (Holmes, 2012; Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001).

Second, the study makes significant contributions by offering implications and making recommendations for the adoption and implementation of language teaching methodologies in the Vietnamese context. It presents convincing evidence and arguments for the implicit yet powerful influence of cultural factors on the implementation of methodological ‘imports’ and thereby recommends ways to address the underlying issues. The study’s implications are insights into what may work well and what would work only with ‘right’ intervention, which will be useful for not only policy-makers or program administrators but also teachers and students in their decision-making and endeavors.

Third, the study is significant regarding its innovative research design with a rigorously rationalized bundle of research methods for an examination of language teaching methodology in practice. This research design ensures triangulation despite the wide variety and complexity of the factors of the subject under research. Indeed, classroom observation enables an on-site and evidential account of what actually happens in real-world lessons, whereas questionnaire survey and interview contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of what has been noted happening in the classroom. In addition, the involvement of a variety of stakeholders has helped to present a multi-angle investigation of the challenges of implementing CLT in the Vietnamese context.
1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS CHAPTERS

This thesis has eight chapters altogether. Chapter 1 opens with an outline of the background of the study by reviewing the status of CLT in the current literature and then its position in Vietnam as the context of use, before presenting the reasons why the researcher decided to conduct this study. Second, the chapter presents the scope of the research, explaining the coverage of factors related to program implementation and perspectives of inquiry. Third, the aims of the study are presented for an overview of the research work, followed by a brief discussion of the significance of the study. Finally, before ending with a summary, the chapter previews how the chapters are organized.

Chapter 2 is composed of four main sections. The first three are about CLT: reviewing how CLT has developed and what CLT essentially is; identifying the challenges to CLT implementation; and then focusing on CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context. In the fourth section, the chapter briefly introduces the Hofstedian cultural orientation framework and then presents the rationale for using it as an interpretation framework to reflect on the discrepancies between the ideals for CLT implementation and actual means available in the case study.

Chapter 3 explains the research design of the project. It elaborates on the nature of research and its considerations to adopt case study before discussing how research criteria were addressed for its qualitative orientation. Subsequently, the chapter presents arguments for the selection of the research site and the position of the researcher. The next section discusses data collection, describing ethics clearance, data collection procedures and instruments. Finally, the chapter gives profiles of the research participants and briefly describes the data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the broad context of study, covering the factors of the institution and of the society in which the program under study was implemented. First, it looks back at the rise of English and the ELT industry and then the adoption of CLT in Vietnam. Next, the chapter presents the challenges to CLT implementation running deep in societal configurations. Subsequently, it focuses on the situation of ELT and CLT implementation at the tertiary level in Vietnam and then the Institution
and the Department under study, paying special attention to its program and curriculum.

Chapter 5 focuses on teacher and teaching factors. Regarding teacher factors, it presents key information about the MTIH-ED academic faculty and then their perception of CLT. In relation to teaching factors, it considers how the four major aspects of CLT-oriented teaching feature in the case study: participant organization, content, lesson control and teaching materials. Furthermore, three other important issues are raised and discussed: lecturers’ use of praise, formulation of questions and nomination of students to answer their questions.

Chapter 6 is about students and their learning. Like Chapter 5, it has two major sections, but it does not necessarily present ‘the other side’ of the classroom lessons. Regarding learner factors, following a presentation of students’ background, the chapter looks back at how EFL programs are implemented in secondary schools in Vietnam. Next, it describes the circumstantial constraints facing students before focusing on their studying of communicative English. As far as learning factors are concerned, three areas of interest are presented. After describing the classroom reality with a focus on what students were observed doing, the chapter then presents students’ views of learning and their endeavors to study English.

Chapter 7 discusses and interprets the findings presented in Chapters 4 to 6 in light of the Hofstedian cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; and Hofstede et al., 2010) as well as Brown and Lee’s (2015) CLT theory. Before doing so, however, it explains culturally calibrated interpretation by elaborating the Hofstedian cultural orientation framework and then briefly comparing the index score values of the six Hofstedian creations that apply to the context of use (Vietnam) and the context of development (i.e. the countries from which CLT originated). The next section is a close-up examination of the cultural appropriateness of CLT. Based on Brown and Lee’s (2015) characterization of CLT, it first discusses the extent to which what was available at MTIH-ED could (not) help to operationalize the CLT principles, and then interprets why CLT was operationalized in the ways it was, thereby revealing the cultural underpinnings based on the Hofstedian dimensions.
Chapter 8 summarizes the key findings of the research project before it evaluates the study in terms of contributions and limitations and then makes clear what the study aims to do and not do. Subsequently, the chapter presents the implications of the study, with recommendations for practice. Finally, it makes suggestions for future research before wrapping up the thesis with concluding comments.

It should be noted that throughout the thesis, especially in the discussion and interpretation, Vietnamese is occasionally used (with English translations) because each language has its own key words and expressions that convey unique cultural meanings (Wierzbicka, 1991). Using the original language, Vietnamese in this case, can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural meaning (Wierzbicka & Harkins, 2001) embedded in the Vietnamese data.

1.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided the background of the study, starting with the status of CLT in the ELT domain and how the approach was received in the Vietnamese context and subsequently elaborating on the rationale of the study. Also, it has outlined the scope of the research in relation to coverage of program factors and to perspectives for inquiry. It has been indicated that in order to investigate the implementation of a teaching approach in a certain context, one must look below the surface problems by carrying out an in-depth inquiry of cultural drivers of those problems. Subsequently, the chapter presents the aims of the study, including its major undertakings. It goes on to describe the significance of the study in terms of the innovative lens it employs to interpret its findings, its potentially meaningful contributions and its sophisticated research design. Finally, the chapter briefly describes how the thesis chapters are organized before ending with this summary.

The next chapter will review the literature on CLT and the rationale for the choice of the Hofstedian cultural dimensions as the interpretation framework for the study.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Following a brief account of CLT’s development in Chapter 1, this chapter will elaborate on how CLT was first developed and has since evolved to what it is now; the chapter includes a detailed presentation of the models of communicative competence, the cornerstone concept of CLT. Next, the chapter will look at the challenges involved in CLT implementation with a particular focus on the EFL context. This review will foreground the problems that are likely to arise in the actual implementation of CLT. In the third section, the review is narrowed down to studies of CLT implementation in Vietnam, thereby pinpointing what remains for this research to study. Finally, the chapter proposes a theoretical framework that can apply to the interpretation of the findings from the study before it ends with a summary.

2.1 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

This section provides background information on CLT as a language teaching approach. It takes a historical look at the driving forces that led to the development of the approach. It will specifically highlight how the approach was meant to meet the demands of the times and of the contexts from which it was developed. Subsequently, the section summarizes the key teaching and learning principles of the approach as described in the current literature.

2.1.1 The creation of CLT

CLT was developed primarily as a result of driving forces in the European and North American contexts in the 1960s and the 1970s (Byram & García, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT has its
origins “in the changes in the British language teaching tradition” (p. 153). Applying these changes, the Council of Europe (an organization set up to foster cultural and educational cooperation) developed a syllabus that was based on functional-notional concepts of language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, pp. 84-85; Savignon, 2000, pp. 124–25). At the time, particularly in the British context, according to Howatt (1984, p. 280), Situational Language Teaching “had run its course” and the demand for a new teaching approach became imminent. Elsewhere in Europe there was a focus on the process of communicative classroom language learning (Savignon, 2000, p. 125). In Germany, under the influence of the contemporary philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who emphasized on learners’ personal freedom, classroom materials were developed with an orientation encouraging learner choice by, for example, letting them choose how to progress through the courses (Candlin, 1978; Byram & García, 2011). Broadly, according to Byram and García (2011, p. 495), it is Habermas who extends the notion of acceptability of language proposed by Hymes to the notion of rationality in a community of communication.

With regards to socio-economic factors, European countries at that time became more interdependent following the advent of the European Common Market (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This led to a greater need to teach the major languages of the Common Market to adult learners. Across Europe, there was a rapid increase in the number of immigrants and guest workers and therefore an increased demand for foreign language tuition (Savignon, 2000, p. 124).

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, there was movement towards developing the CLT approach in the United States. Noam Chomsky’s linguistic theory began to be criticized. According to Brown (2007a), there was concern about “how Chomsky’s generative grammar was going to fit into our language classrooms and how to inject the cognitive code of a language into the process of absorption” (p. 45). It appears that Chomsky’s competence versus performance dichotomy failed to provide an explicit place for sociocultural features in language teaching programs. As a response, in the mid-1960s (Canale, 1983, p. 2), the American sociolinguist Dell Hymes introduced “communicative competence” to “represent the use of language in social context, the observance of sociolinguistic norms of appropriacy” (Savignon, 2000, p. 125). This concept, which was based on the premise that knowing a language is (much) more than knowing the lexis and a set of grammatical
rules of that language (see, for instance, Hymes, 1972, 1979), was quickly embraced for theoretical developments of language teaching.

Developments in linguistics and socio-economic demands of the labor market were not the only factors that led to the creation of CLT. Educators in the western world were during this time being pressured to change their methods under the influence of progressivism in education (Finney, 2008), which was being felt concurrently in Europe and the United States. According to this philosophy, the purpose of education is “to enable the individual to progress towards self-fulfillment” and it should highlight the importance of learners’ needs, interests and development process (Finney, 2008, pp. 73-74). Table 2.1 lists the essential features of progressivism.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world, CLT was also considered to be an advance from grammar-based teaching practices, which had been dominant since the 1950s (Richards, 1998, p. 39). There were increased demands for more effective and more relevant language teaching methodologies now that public education had become available to a wider section of the population. All these forces led to the strong support of CLT worldwide (Richards, 1998, p. 39). Early in the 1980s, for instance, CLT made its way into Malaysia’s official national syllabus applicable for “several hundreds of thousands of students in upper secondary schools” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 85) following the introduction of the Upper Secondary English Syllabus “formulated based on the immediate and projected manpower needs of the nation” (Pandian, 2004, p. 276), a claim Vietnam also made two decades later (see 4.1 and 4.2).
Table 2.1

Features of Progressivism

- It places less emphasis on syllabus specification and more on methodological principles and procedures.
- It is more concerned with learning processes than predetermined objectives.
- It emphasizes methodology and the need for principles to guide the teaching-learning process.
- It is learner-centered and seeks to provide learning experiences that enable learners to learn by their own efforts.
- It regards learners as active participants in shaping their own learning.
- It promotes the development of the learner as an individual.
- It views learning as a creative problem-solving activity.
- It acknowledges the uniqueness of each teaching-learning context.
- It emphasizes the role of the teacher in creating his or her own curriculum in the classroom.

Note. From Clark (1987, pp. 49-90, as summarised by Richards, 2013, p. 15)

It can be observed that, according to the account of the development of CLT by Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 153–177), and also as noted by Hunter (2009, p. 11), the major influential voices to the birth of the CLT approach are British applied linguists such as D. A. Wilkins (1983), C. Candlin (1981) and C. Brumfit (1980); American sociolinguists, particularly D. Hymes (1972); and the American philosophers J. R. Searle (1969) and J. L. Austin (1962). Also being influential voices, according to Byram and García (2011, pp. 494-495), are the British-born linguist M. A. K. Halliday (with the definition of language as “meaning potential”) and Polish-born anthropologist B. Malinowski (with the concept of “context of situation”). The status and the influence of its proponents, together with the
propelling nature of its principles, are seen as the major reasons why CLT became the new favored orthodox in language education (Richards, 1998, p. 40).

In summary, CLT emerged as a response to the paradigm shift within the circles of applied linguistics as well as the emergence of progressivism in the western contexts and as a result of the increased demand for language learning presented by the western market. Although the European and American forces for the development of the approach were disparate, apparently learners in those contexts had a strong survival need for competence in the second language they were learning. In their contexts of learning, what they had just learned could have proved useful and meaningful in a not too distant future. Also, those learners apparently had an authentic need for communicative competence in their immediate environment.

2.1.2 The development of CLT

The development of CLT is rooted in the conceptualization of “communicative competence”. As this concept has served as the springboard for the development of CLT principles, it is necessary to provide a historical account of it.

2.1.2.1 The concept of ‘communicative competence’

Brown (2014) makes a comparison of the major conceptualizations of “communicative competence”, reviewing how the concept has developed over the three decades during which CLT evolved. Table 2.2 shows this comparison, incorporating as well the conceptualizations by van Ek (1986) and Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995).
Table 2.2
Models of Communicative Competence

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<td>2. Discourse</td>
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<td>van Ek (1986)</td>
<td>1. Grammatical</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Discourse</td>
<td>5. Sociocultural competence</td>
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<td>Bachman (1990)</td>
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<td>Language competence (with “strategic competence” as an ‘executive’ function)</td>
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<td>A. Organizational competence</td>
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<td>B. Pragmatic competence</td>
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<td>Celce-Murcia et al. (1995)</td>
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<td>1. Linguistic competence (= Grammatical + Lexical knowledge)</td>
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<td>3. Sociocultural competence</td>
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<td>4. Actional competence (= Functional knowledge)</td>
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<td>5. Discourse competence (= Textual knowledge)</td>
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<td>Littlewood (2011)</td>
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<td>1. Linguistic (= Grammatical)</td>
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<td>3. Pragmatic (= Strategic)</td>
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Originally, Hymes’ concept of “communicative competence” was adopted into the language teaching profession and used as the basis for developing CLT principles. The term was first elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980), and later refined by Canale (1983). According to these authors, “communicative competence” comprises not only “grammatical competence” (knowledge of lexis, morphosyntactic rules, phonology, etc.) but also “discourse competence”, “sociolinguistic competence” and “strategic competence”. In light of these distinctions, the authors maintain that in order to be communicatively competent, apart from “grammatical competence”, the speaker must be equipped with the ability to understand an individual message and how its meaning is represented in relation to the entire text and discourse (discourse/textual competence); the social rules of language use (sociolinguistic competence); and the communication strategies (verbal as well as nonverbal techniques) employed for successful communication (strategic competence). As a result of these influences, the focus in language teaching during this time was shifted to communicative proficiency rather than mere mastery of structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 153).

Still in the 1980s, “communicative competence” was extended by van Ek (1986) who added two more components: sociocultural competence and social competence. The scholar working on the Council of Europe project contended that, as were elaborated by Byram and García (2011), sociocultural competence is familiarity with the sociocultural context in which the language under study is situated and social competence “involves both the will and the skill to interact with others” (emphasis added, p. 499). Among the authors discussing “communicative competence”, van Ek stood out as the one who emphasized language learners’ will to interact with other people as one component of communicative competence.

The concept of “communicative competence” continued to be discussed in the decades that followed. One of the notable discussions is by Bachman (1990), who “reshuffled” the four components outlined by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983), added two larger nodes and upgraded the significance of “strategic competence”. The first node added by Bachman was “organizational competence”, under which he placed “grammatical competence” and “textual competence” (previously called “discourse competence”). The second node was “pragmatic competence”, under which he put “illocutionary competence” (functional aspects of language) and “sociolinguistic
competence” (with consideration of politeness, formality, metaphor, etc.). With regard to “strategic competence”, Bachman maintained that it serves, in the words of Brown (2014, p. 209), “as an ‘executive’ function of making the final ‘decision’, among many possible options, on wording, phrasing, and other productive and receptive means for negotiating meaning”. It is noted that in a later publication (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), “illocutionary competence” was renamed “functional competence”, defined as the knowledge that “[enables] us to interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of language users” (p. 69).

Around the same time, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) proposed what they claimed to be “a pedagogically motivated model” of communicative competence. This model has a great deal in common with that of Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996); however, instead of “functional knowledge”, it proposed “actional competence”. This concept “is defined as competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force” (p. 17). In relation to Canale’s (1983) model, Celce-Murcia et al. made two changes: “grammatical competence” was now broadened to “linguistic competence”, and “sociocultural competence” was broken down into “sociocultural competence” and “actional competence”.

Very recently, there was another notable discussion of “communicative competence”, the one by Littlewood (2011). According to this scholar, “communicative competence” has five components: linguistic, discourse, pragmatic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural. The fifth component refers to cultural knowledge and assumptions that affect the exchange of meaning; but the other four components are terms re-baptized from those described by previous authors. This concept of “sociocultural” emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness that was highlighted as a key sub-component of “intercultural communicative competence”, a conception developed by Byram and Zarate (1997); Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1998). Broadly, according to Ryan (2012), intercultural communicative competence is “a person’s ability to act in a foreign language in a linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically appropriate way” (p. 428).
To sum up, the concept of “communicative competence” has evolved over time. The evolution is mostly due to developments in the fields of linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology and educational research (Savignon, 2000, p. 126). With regard to this cornerstone notion of “communicative competence”, Canale (1983) raises the concern that “within applied linguistics one also finds both confusion and lack of consideration of many of the basic concepts involved” (p. 2). The evolution of “communicative competence” in the course of the development of applied linguistics might leave teachers of CLT confused about what to do on a daily basis. This confusion will be evident in the following examination of CLT principles.

2.1.2.2 CLT principles

By the early 1980s, CLT had become such a dominant theory of language teaching in ELT circles that people began talking about “communicative language teaching ‘fever’” (Spada & Frohlich, 1995, p. 2). “Communicative competence” as the cornerstone of CLT was elaborated by Savignon (1983) as “expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons or between one person and a written or oral text”. Likewise, Breen and Candlin (1980) suggest “that the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation are the essential or primary abilities within any target competence” (p. 92). With these foundations, key teaching and learning principles were developed for CLT. Table 2.3 presents the ones suggested by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983).
Table 2.3

Principles of CLT

- Meaning is paramount.
- Contextualization is a basic premise.
- Language learning is learning to communicate.
- Effective communication is sought.
- Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
- Communicative competence is the desired goal.
- Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
- Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning that maintains interest.
- Language is created by the individual through trial and error.
- Fluency and acceptable language are the primary goals; accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
- Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

Note. By Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, from Richards, 1998)

The CLT approach went on to evolve into the late 1980s, 1990s and the new millennium. During this time, according to Brown (2007b, p. 45), language teaching and learning with “authenticity, real-world simulation, and meaningful tasks” continued to be seen as essential in the classroom. Table 2.4 shows how CLT is characterized in the current literature.
**Table 2.4**

*Characteristics of CLT*

| 1. **Overall goals.** Focus on *all* of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intertwine the organizational (grammatical, discourse) aspects of language with the pragmatic (functional, sociolinguistic, strategic) aspects. |
| 2. **Relationship of form and function.** Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but remain as important components of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes. |
| 3. **Fluency and accuracy.** A focus on students’ ‘flow’ of comprehension and production and a focus on the formal accuracy of production are seen as complementary principles. At times, fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use. At other times the student will be encouraged to attend to correctness. Part of the teacher’s responsibility is to offer appropriate corrective feedback on learners’ errors. |
| 4. **Focus on real-world contexts.** Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts. |
| 5. **Autonomy and strategic involvement.** Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through raising their awareness of their own styles (strengths, weaknesses, preferences) of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for production and comprehension. Such awareness and action will help to develop autonomous learners capable of continuing to learn the language beyond the classroom and the course. |
| 6. **Teacher roles.** The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing font of knowledge. The teacher is an empathetic ‘coach’ who values the best interests of students’ linguistic development. Students are encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with other students and with the teacher. |
| 7. **Student roles.** Students in a CLT class are active participants in their own learning process. Learner-centered, cooperative, collaborative learning is emphasized, but not at the expense of appropriate teacher-centered activity. |

*Note.* From Brown and Lee (2015, pp. 31-32).
A comparison of the key CLT principles presented in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 would suggest that in recent years morpho-syntactic features of language have somehow regained their status in language teaching methodology. The focus is now on all of the components of communicative competence, of which grammatical competence is one. Also, teacher-centered activity appears to be acknowledged as being worthwhile for language teaching as long as it is “appropriate”. Indeed, CLT in the new century has apparently been inclined to reconcile with other traditional teaching methodologies wherever it can. Practices that appear to work well for students’ better learning are accommodated in a CLT repertoire of teaching principles. This inclination can be observed in the recent papers of authors who have been strong voices for CLT. For example, Savignon (2007) is now very determined that “CLT does not exclude a focus on metalinguistic awareness or knowledge of rules of syntax” (p. 213). As another example, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) state that the use of students’ first language is permitted in CLT provided such use is “judicious” (p. 125). These are obviously rather lax views of the roles of grammar teaching and L1 use in comparison with the previous ones.

Nevertheless, these apparent concessions made by influential advocates of CLT have not proved to make the approach more workable when it is actually implemented, and there still appears to be some confusion among language teachers. The challenges of the approach appear to be rooted in the contexts of reception as well as in the nature of the approach and the literature about it. The section that follows will discuss these problems.

### 2.2 Potential problems to CLT implementation

As suggested by the brief comments following the presentations of “communicative competence” and CLT principles, there seem to be major challenges to the actual implementation of CLT. These challenges are related to the lack of a sound scientific foundation for the approach, the volatility of CLT methodology, and the discrepancies between the context in which CLT has been developed and originally meant to be used and the context in which it is actually used, and in which cultural differences may also present as problems.
2.2.1 CLT as a rational approach

Strongly endorsed by mainstream ELT circles, CLT was pushed to the status of the most popular teaching approach in mainstream ELT circles. The approach was embraced not only in the British ELT networks but also elsewhere in the world as if there were at last a giant theoretical step in the field of language teaching and learning. However, little acknowledgement has been made by its advocates that CLT is not the outcome of empirical research.

According to Richards (1998, pp. 38-41), the key principles for lessons, syllabuses, materials and teaching techniques developed for CLT are justified on the logical grounds of “communicative competence”, an essential requirement for a competent speaker of a certain language. As indicated in 2.1.2.1, CLT was built up from the concept of “communicative competence” by Hymes, who, oriented to linguistic anthropology, would naturally have been inclined to see linguistic competence in relation to context of use. J. C. Richards points out that CLT is a data-free theory about language teaching and learning. This “inadequacy” is not a problem as it was for audio-lingualism, which is an established science-research conception and is “firmly grounded in the learning theory […] associated with the school of psychology known as behaviorism” (J. C. Richards, 1998, p. 39).

Table 2.5 makes a brief comparison between the two methodologies in terms of foundation.
It is perhaps because of the lack of scientific foundation that the CLT literature is highly variable in terms of what is prescribed and proscribed about the implementation of CLT in the classroom. According to Byram and García (2011), CLT still need stronger foundations in terms of research on language learning in the classroom, which is different from language acquisition in the natural settings, the context of situation from which CLT’s communicative competence was conceptualized. The next sub-section will discuss this inadequacy in further detail.

2.2.2 The apparent volatility of CLT concepts

What CLT is exactly appears to be slippery despite (or perhaps because of) the enormous amount of literature on the approach. The lack of prescription and proscription of CLT classroom techniques and the highly varied descriptions of the approach have made it difficult for classroom teachers to use it.

Essentially, CLT is seen as an approach “that aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 155). However, as noted by Richards and Rodgers, to date no-one has come up with a definitive or exhaustive description of CLT. While remarking that CLT is based on

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Audiolingualism</th>
<th>Communicative Language Teaching</th>
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<tr>
<td>• A science-research conception: derived from empirical research</td>
<td>• A theory conception: justified on logical grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mainly based on behaviorism, specifically the Skinnerian concept of conditioning</td>
<td>• Mainly built around the theory of communicative competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning takes place through habit formation and overlearning.</td>
<td>• Learning takes place through attempts to communicate.</td>
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*Note.* Adapted from Richards (1998, pp. 34-45)
a unified “position about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching”, Brown (2007a) acknowledges that it is difficult “to synthesize all of the various definitions that have been offered” (p. 241). A review of the literature shows that not only is there an enormous number of definitions of CLT in the literature, the numerous definitions are quite variable. Up to very recent years, “it is probably fair to say”, comment Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 115), “that there is no one single agreed upon version of CLT”.

According to Yalden (1983), there are as many as six different models of communicative syllabus designs, from those based on teacher-controlled communicative exercises to those favoring student-generated activities. In an apparent attempt to simplify the classification, Howatt (1984, p. 279) maintained that there were two versions of CLT, with the ‘weak’ one being “described as ‘learning to use’” and the ‘strong’ one “using English to learn it”. However, this attempt failed to clarify CLT’s applicable techniques because it only provided broad descriptions of the two extremes of the possible interpretations of CLT. Meanwhile, from the perspective of sociocultural contexts of competence, Berns (1990, as cited in Savignon, 2007, p. 211) made it a core tenet of CLT that, in light of this approach, “no single methodology or fixed set of techniques is prescribed”. The lack of unity continues to be unchanged nearly two decades later, as noted by Savignon (2007): “CLT cannot be found in any one textbook or set of curricular materials inasmuch as strict adherence to a given text is not likely to be true to the processes and goals of CLT” (p. 213).

Given the range of interpretations of CLT, there is arguably high volatility in how the approach is to be applied. It is this multiplicity of interpretations of CLT in the literature, coupled with the “pendulum effect” in language teaching, that Nunan (1998) considers “an important task confronting applied linguists and teachers”, as there are always some ‘prescriptions’ of classroom procedures that “some say should go on” (p. 1). Specifically, Littlewood (1981, p. 1) contends that CLT should take into consideration both functional and structural aspects of language, while (Savignon, 1987) suggests CLT should pay attention not only to “strategies for presenting the structures and functions of language”, but also to “the involvement of learners in the dynamic and interactive process of communication” (p. 237). As for definitions of CLT provided in the decades that followed, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei,
and Thurrell (1997, p. 143) highlight authentic communication, stating that CLT should get learners for real-life communication rather than emphasizing structural accuracy; whereas Lee and VanPatten (2003) step back considerably, maintaining that with CLT the teacher is to assume the dual roles of “providing students with opportunities for communication” and of being a “drill leader” (p. 10), a point of emphasis dictated by the audio-lingual method.

This confusion indeed moves from theory into practice as implementers of CLT are faced with the question of what to do with CLT in the classroom. As Savignon (2007) acknowledges, “when it comes to curricular design and implementation, there persists widespread confusion and debate” (p. 208). This may well leave classroom teachers confused about what exactly they will need to do in their classrooms if they are to teach using CLT. Klapper (2003) remarks that CLT is “fuzzy” in teachers’ understanding. One of the strongest advocates of CLT acknowledges the “understandable frustration at the seeming ambiguity in discussion of communication ability” (Savignon, 2000, p. 126).

Perhaps for this reason, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 172) maintain that CLT is best considered as an approach rather than a method. According to these two scholars, “method” is the umbrella term under which “approach”, “design” and “procedure” are situated. Whereas approach is based on the theory of the nature of language and language learning, design encapsulates the general and specific objectives of the method, proposes a syllabus model and specifies types of learning and teaching activities; teacher and learner roles and instructional materials and procedure are all about classroom techniques, practices and behaviours (J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 32). This hierarchy is different from that of Anthony (1963), who proposes that “the organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach” (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, p. 19).

In relation to Richards and Rodgers’ view of CLT as an approach rather than a method, this view is later taken further by Savignon (2007), who maintains that “it would be inappropriate to speak of CLT as a teaching ‘method’ in any sense of that term as it was used in the 20th century” (p. 217). Therefore, attempts to debate the pros and cons of this approach might run the risk of different parties discussing different topics, making it hard to reach useful ‘verdicts’ on CLT (Brown, 2008).
2.2.3 CLT for EFL contexts

Not long after its introduction into the landscape of ELT methodology, CLT was criticized for apparently failing to accommodate certain factors in its implementation, particularly those factors relating to EFL learners. In the case of English teaching, the approach appeared to assume that there would be little variation between teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and teaching English as a second language (TESL) and even with teaching English as the first language (Byram & García, 2011). It appears that the development of CLT has happened with an interest in language teaching in general rather than exclusively to the teaching of English to those for whom English is a foreign language.

Among the earliest critical voices of CLT, Swan (1985a, 1985b) points out that CLT does not take into account the knowledge and skills that students bring with them from their mother tongue and their experience of the world. One of this ELT practitioner’s arguments relates to the teaching of “rules of use”, highlighted by Hymes as essential to a person’s language abilities. These rules, maintains Swan, are not specific to the (English) language and EFL learners can use them with their experience of their own first language as well as with common sense. Overt teaching of the rules would appear to be unnecessary given the greater importance placed on other items on the teaching agenda (e.g., teaching lexis). Another notable argument by Swan relates to “appropriacy”, which again he thinks is simply one of the multiple features of language that language teaching should be concerned about. Swan maintains that the teaching of appropriacy should not be overemphasized and that appropriacy can be satisfactorily taught through the proper teaching of lexis. In relation to language strategies such as guessing and negotiating, which CLT also considers essentials to teach to students, Swan argues that these are what EFL learners have been doing on a daily basis in their first language before taking the English course. This point of Swan’s is later praised as “very valid” by Holliday (1994a), who further comments that failure to utilize the existing competence that learners bring to the classroom is itself not CLT-oriented.

In the late 1980s and the following decade, alarming concerns were raised about the cultural and political implications of ELT in Third World countries that received aid packages from the western world. The potential causes for the failure of
CLT implementation are said to be the differences in the configurations of society and culture of the two ‘worlds’ (i.e. the First World in which CLT was developed and the Third World in which CLT is used), with Pennycook relating outcomes of critical applied linguistics to the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language (see Pennycook, 1989, 1994; Pennycook, 1999). Phillipson (1992) carried out an in-depth inquiry into the macro-level issues and thereby condemned “linguistic imperialism” as the transfer of a dominant language to other people while at the same time demonstrating military and economic power. Following this, Holliday (1994a) closely examined classroom life and suggested changes to CLT “to enhance its more culture-sensitive features, and reduce its less culture-sensitive features” so that it can be a “becoming-appropriate classroom methodology”, a jumpstart for still further development in line with the reality and development of the local classroom (p. 177). In a later influential paper on the same topic, Holliday (1997) maintained that for CLT to be successful, it was essential to maintain “cultural continuity between traditional and innovative forms”, a view that he later reinforced (Holliday, 2008, 2009, 2012).

Similar to Holliday but with a special interest in the context in which teaching and learning take place, Bax (2003) criticizes CLT for paying undue attention to the situation in which language teaching activities take place. Bax argues that CLT as a teaching methodology is simply one of the numerous factors to be addressed in order to achieve meaningful language learning outcomes for EFL students. Maintaining that “we must consider the whole context” (p. 281), Bax proposes the “Context Approach”, which will decide what (language focus) and how (teaching approach) to teach following the apparent prerequisite of identification of the key factors of a particular context. Bax insists it is “contextual awareness” that CLT appears to lack. In light of the recent literature, Bax’s point is a reasonable reminder, especially in relation to ELT in EFL contexts.

This “contextual awareness” appears to be a critical issue to address in applying CLT in EFL contexts. In these circumstances, there are problems relating not only to incongruities in the theory of teaching and learning but also to socio-economic conditions. In countries like Vietnam, the teaching and learning conditions are by no means comparable to those of the countries where CLT was developed, including acoustics and furnishing, class size, authentic language environment, to
name just a few. Notably, in these contexts, English is mainly used for international communication and is not the official language; teachers and students all speak one and the same native language, i.e. Vietnamese, and have nowhere else to practise English outside their language classroom. These factors, among others, play a defining role in the ELT landscape of the nation in relation to learner needs, authentic practice, learning motivation and so on. Based on Krachu’s (1992) model of world Englishes, there are three concentric circles of the language: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The status of English differs in these three situations, respectively being the first, second and foreign language (although English is also used as an ESL in the Inner Circle). Vietnam is in the Expanding Circle (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 119), albeit at the farther edge of it.

In conclusion, those who attempt to use CLT in their classroom lessons will inevitably face problems relating to the foundations upon which the CLT theory was built; the highly varied interpretations of the approach; and the apparently irreconcilable differences between contexts of inception (western) and of reception (in a non-western settings). These potential problems are likely to make it difficult for teachers to use CLT confidently in the classroom. In the past decade, there have emerged a number of research findings in relation to the implementation of CLT in the context under examination, i.e. Vietnamese ELT circumstances. The next section will review these studies in terms of what has been achieved, thereby suggesting what more will need to be done.

2.3 STUDIES OF CLT IMPLEMENTATION IN VIETNAM

As indicated in the preceding section, CLT has faced quite a number of challenges since its introduction into EFL contexts. Given that the Vietnamese ELT landscape is an EFL context, it is necessary for this study to review the challenges and realities of CLT implementation in Vietnam as found through previous research. This section will therefore be dedicated to the review of studies of CLT implementation in Vietnam, particularly those that were undertaken from a cultural perspective and with the topic of inquiry into CLT implementation in tertiary level settings.
2.3.1 Cultural awareness-oriented study

G. Ellis (1994) arguably carried out the earliest study with a special interest in cultural issues around CLT implementation in Vietnam. The study has made a significant contribution by going beyond the surface problems of large-sized classes, poor furnishing and grammar-oriented exams and looking as well at the local underlying cultural forces possibly undermining attempts to implement CLT. However, the study draws its conclusions only from the accounts of Australian ESL teachers who conducted teacher workshops on CLT ‘methods’ in Vietnam. The potential problem is that no matter how familiar the interviewed teachers might have become with the local teaching practices, they were ultimately ‘outsiders’ and their recounts could not have been free from an inadequate understanding of the local ways of teaching. Furthermore, G. Ellis’s reflections are not based on evidence of classroom happenings; rather, they were merely discussions of interviewee responses incorporated with findings from a desk review of the literature of Vietnamese culture and educational philosophy.

Among several other research papers of this cultural orientation, a close-up examination of English lessons in the Vietnamese context by Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) has revealed meaningful insights into how CLT is challenged in the real classroom. One revelation from the study is that while pair and group work are typically considered as CLT’s key organizational classroom activities, they are found to be threatening to Vietnamese students because the Vietnamese classroom setting is like that of one ‘family’, where “dividing into subgroups can be divisive and inhibit learning” (p. 203). Also about cultural discrepancies, Lewis and McCook (2002, p. 147) found that teachers saw CLT as failing to incorporate teaching and learning styles that are highly appreciated in the Vietnamese culture, such as memorization and emphasis on perfection. The revelations of these studies, however, are at best the authors’ observations of the phenomena they witnessed; they may need to be further interpreted on the basis of underlying causes.

Authorship of these culturally oriented studies is not limited to ‘outsiders’; local scholars have undertaken research into issues related to CLT in their own context. One of them is Pham (2007). This local author found from his study that the difficulties facing teachers trying to use CLT in their classroom are not limited to the
‘surface’ problems of overcrowded classes, poor equipment, limited teaching expertise and students’ low motivation and ‘uneven’ abilities; the ongoing widely accepted beliefs about teacher and student roles were also contributing factors. In Pham’s view, there seems to be a discrepancy in what teachers and students are expected to do in the classroom according to sets of beliefs embedded in CLT and in the Vietnamese culture. Unfortunately, the study’s conclusions are not backed by any sound analytical framework, and interpretation of the findings from his data analysis could have been more systematic and well-founded. Further, the three research participants in his study held Australian teaching qualifications, raising the question of whether the findings would have been different if the study had included locally trained teachers.

Several notable studies with Vietnamese authorship examined particular issues relating to CLT. One of them is Dang (2010). From a sociocultural perspective, the paper discussed learner autonomy, a major area of interest in the CLT literature. However, the study’s conclusions, as admitted by the author, were mainly based on personal reflections and, according to my own evaluation, the author did not actually establish the connection between data analysis and the conclusions the study reached. Another notable study is that by Nguyen, Terlouw, and Pilot (2012), who considered “cooperative learning” and the transferability of this concept from the western to the Vietnamese context. In an attempt to argue that the concept of cooperative itself has long existed in the local tradition, the authors appear to have based their argument mainly on the analysis of Vietnamese idiomatic catchphrases and sayings laden with cultural values. In many cases, however, to my perception, the interpretations were not entirely accurate, such as the one related to “đôi bạn cùng tiến” (the duo progressing together). In fact, the phrase cited (i.e. “đôi bạn cùng tiến”) was simply a slogan created rather recently (approximately in the 1980s) and it is no longer in currency in the educational discourse; it is therefore impossible to consider the concept rooted in Vietnamese cultural traditions.

Interesting and meaningful as they are, the findings of the studies mentioned above have not been exhaustively and systematically investigated. From a methodological viewpoint, the cause for this inadequacy is the lack of a sound framework of interpretation. It appears that the researchers simply noted the problems and subsequently speculated about the potential difficulties they could
present in the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context. While CLT appears to be working well with some intervention, such as the study by Nha Tran Nguyen (2011), it remains unclear just how the intervention has helped the implementation of CLT in the classroom work and whether similar interventions would be replicable. In any case, it is essential to use a rigorous framework of interpretation when inquiring into the cultural appropriateness of the language teaching methodology.

2.3.2 CLT implementation in tertiary education

To date, there have been no studies of the application of CLT in the classroom of English majors that can provide a really satisfactory account of the cultural forces steering the reception of CLT in a Vietnamese university setting. Nowhere in any of the studies reviewed has the contextual influence been interpreted based on a sound theoretical framework that can allow for systematic understanding of causes for the existing problems. Those studies that have been undertaken at best touch on the phenomenon of the situation, rather than its underlying causes.

For example, Le (2014) carried out focus groups and interviews with teachers to consider what might have affected task-based language teaching at his home institution in Ho Chi Minh City. Although the study was conducted very recently, it is simply able at best to point out the problems that have long been known, such as class size, students’ attitudes and beliefs, and time constraints. Without a rigorous framework to investigate what makes things happen as they do, questions remain following this study regarding what problems should be addressed to thoroughly change classroom teaching and learning practices.

For example, Ngan T. Nguyen (2011) looks at the training of both English majors and non-English majors at a university in Central Vietnam. The doctoral dissertation looked as if it were a collection of all the issues identifiable in all the literature available on ELT in Vietnam; it covered as many as 26 (twenty-six) ‘themes’ ranging from those related to the institution under study to the broader socio-economic features of the issues, and then from those concerned with the teacher–student relationship to the future development of the institution. Voluminous as it was, it appears that the immense data of the case study was unmanageable for the author, who at the same time apparently struggled with the analysis of the review of comments from the media regarding the Vietnamese ELT reality that were cited in
the thesis. Further, the ‘themes’ themselves do not appear to be themes per se, as they were verbatim citations of the research informants’ interview responses that were to be interpreted in connection with their whole accounts of the situations in which they found themselves.

With reference to studies of the implementation of CLT with tertiary level students majoring in English, among the earliest studies of this category was probably that by Sullivan (1996), which looks at the reception of and resistance to CLT methodologies by Vietnamese teachers of English based in tertiary institutions in Hanoi. The study generally had a well-organized structure and was methodologically sound in its attempts to seek to learn about the major issues of ELT in the given context; and it convincingly proposed an alternative teaching approach with an oral narrative-based form. However, it remains unclear from the study what caused resistance to the CLT approach to become as strong as it was, and how to deal with the pervasive problems that the researcher herself recognized were deep-rooted in the sociocultural context. In addition, it is questionable whether the author’s proposed teaching alternatives of, just to name one, “playfulness” (Sullivan, 2000) would be regularly applicable and generalizable in the Vietnamese setting.

At a later time, Phan (2004) interviewed two teachers – one from Central and the other from Northern Vietnam – who were teaching general English and English literature in the university setting. L. H. Phan (2004) aimed to explore their teaching experiences. The study concluded that the teachers “use[d] a variety of pedagogical approaches [taking] into account the cultural context of the classroom” (p. 50). With these findings, the author claimed these teachers were contesting typically western stereotypes of Vietnamese teachers as being authoritarian and imposing. The validity of the conclusion, however, is questionable, as the study only looked at what the teachers claimed they were doing in the classroom; there was no proof that they were actually doing what they said they were. It is known that there is a discrepancy between what teachers claim they do in their classrooms and what they actually do (Nunan, 2003, p. 604).

For another example, in carrying out a study of the construction of an active language learner in EFL education in three teacher education universities, Dang (2006a) pointed out a remarkable situation in the Vietnamese context. He found that most pre-service students at the three Vietnamese universities under study “seemed
not to possess the qualities of an ‘ideal’ active language learner”, a premise for successful application of CLT. The author claimed that for this study, he had used questionnaire surveys with 234 students and 47 teacher educators, semi-structured interviews with 19 lecturers, focus-group discussions with 51 students, and case studies of three different teachers and one class of students. Impressive as the numbers may sound, one significant problem with this research was that the author was unable to demonstrate a well-connected triangulation between the findings and results obtained from such a wide variety of data sources. The large number of sources alone does not seem to increase the credibility of the findings (in fact, this could have undermined it), because the immense data collected was arguably unmanageable for the author.

More recently, Nha Tran Nguyen (2011) looked at how syllabus negotiation has helped to increase the effectiveness of lessons for cohorts of university students majoring in English. The study concluded that the intervention it experimented with saw “a wide range of positive impacts and the students’ generally enthusiastic acceptance of the approach” (p. 71). However, the study was apparently unable to dig deeper into what could have made the intervention work by, for instance, looking at the factors helping to unlock their potentials. What is more, assuming that the intervention was actually effective, the subjects of the research were from a very small group of selected students, so called “cử nhân tài năng” (meaning “high-achieving bachelor course”), leaving open the question of how to deal with the other ‘regular’ students who, making up the majority, may be faced with many more disadvantages in terms of intellectual benchmarks and inadequate learning facilities, just to name a few.

2.3.3 Other previous research

Most of the findings of the studies about CLT in Vietnam indicate that the approach either has not actually been used in the Vietnamese classroom as has been claimed, or is faced with challenges of implementation for its inappropriateness to the local conditions. In the first place, what is claimed to be CLT-oriented activities taking place in the classroom turn out to be traditional practices decorated with apparent features of CLT; they are not CLT activities per se (Le & Barnard, 2009). Hird (1995) observed that there appears to be a gap between what Vietnamese
teachers think CLT is and what it actually is, given its evolution over time. It seems that the apparent volatility of CLT along with varied comprehension of its tenets has led to different interpretations by different classroom teachers, especially with regards to classroom procedures. This is certainly not a Vietnam-specific situation; Nunan (2003, p. 604) reports that in the wider Asia-Pacific region, “despite the lip service paid to CLT, there appears to be a large gap between the rhetoric and the reality”.

Regarding the inappropriateness of CLT to the local conditions, as noted by Nguyen and Nguyen (2011, p. 225), ELT implementation in Vietnam faces an array of problems typical of an ELT landscape in a developing country. Those problems are listed as teacher supply and performance (G. Ellis, 1994; Hoang et al., 2006; Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2011); training and professional development (Nguyen, 2007; Pham, 2005); resourcing and particularly materials (G. Ellis, 1994; Nguyen & Crabbe, 1999; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2011).

The difficulty of course is not related to teacher factors alone, but to factors related to the other key type of school inhabitants, the students. Major problems found to exist in the context are students’ very limited English, poor genuine motivation and reluctance to rehearse communicative activities (Nguyen, 2003; Vu et al., 2004). In addition, there are still challenges related to the whole system and/or the broad context, such as exams testing only morpho-syntactic features of the language (G. Ellis, 1994; Le, 2011); curricula ignoring students’ needs (Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen, 2003; Pham & Ly, 2013); and serious lack of an environment for practice (Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2006).

On the bright side, there are studies with encouraging findings. For example, research by Phan (2004) suggests that Vietnamese teachers have been successful in reconciling the differences between the approach and the local conditions. Another study in this category is Nha Tran Nguyen (2011), who indicates that syllabus negotiation could be introduced at least to top-tier students to better meet learner needs and further boost the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

It should also be noted that a particular problem has been detected in much of the previous research as being a major cause for the success (or failure) of the implementation of CLT – the problem of culture. Issues relating to culture were
found to be of varying degrees of severity in different contexts: from primary, secondary to tertiary education; from public to private sectors; from formal to informal courses, etc. These are the problems that are always there in the context of reception and, unfortunately, the context of reception is not yet friendly to the implementation of CLT techniques.

Nevertheless, without a conceptual framework to investigate their topic or a theoretically sound framework for interpretation, none of the previous studies has satisfactorily elaborated on the factors affecting CLT implementation, much less the underlying drivers of those factors.

2.4 INTERPRETATION FRAMEWORK

This section will raise the demand for an interpretation framework that can be used for culturally oriented studies. It will describe the researcher’s quests for such a framework and thereby present the Hofstede theory of cultural values, which is employed for the interpretation. At this stage of the thesis, only a brief presentation of the framework to be adopted will be presented; the elaborations of its concepts will be provided in Chapter 7, where the discussion and interpretation of the findings of the thesis is located.

2.4.1 Culturally calibrated investigation

In order to understand why the implementation of a language teaching methodology takes place in the way it does, it is necessary to investigate the underlying drivers of the surface happenings. In the past decades, teaching and learning activities have long been recognized to be overtly and covertly driven by the culture and subculture of the circumstances in which the activities take place. The culturally oriented research approach has in fact proved to be useful in the recent research trends in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), with the rise of the critical applied linguistics movement led by Pennycook (1989, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2001) and critical pedagogy in language education and particularly ELT (see, for instance, Crookes, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Sung & Pederson, 2012). In relation to the interconnection of classroom language teaching and the culture in which the teaching takes place, works such as those by Holliday (1994, 1997) have
indicated that culturally oriented studies will bring about meaningful findings by identifying the roots of the issues.

Nevertheless, cultural traces are normally not readily visible and in a sense they are slippery to capture. An interpretation framework therefore will be needed to facilitate the identification of such traces. The framework is believed to unfold hidden causes for the classroom happenings and thereby highlight the intricacies of the interrelation and interdependence of a multitude of factors existing in the context of use. In the words of Anfara and Mertz (2006a, p. xxvii), the framework will function as a “lens” to study the phenomenon. In relation to qualitative research, theoretical frameworks have proved to be useful tools through which enlightening findings can be obtained in a variety of studies. Several of those studies have been described in Anfara and Mertz (2006b) as testimonials.

2.4.2 Hofstedian cultural dimensions

My search in the literature of culturally oriented academic studies for such a framework has come up with works of Geert Hofstede (as the author or key author) on dimensionalizing culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede et al., 2010). The works are arguably ground-breaking publications in cross-cultural study. The internationally known Dutch scholar, together with his co-authors, outlines six dimensions along which cross-cultural reflections can be made. Those dimensions are small versus large power distance, weak versus strong uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint. These dimensions are variables functioning as coordinates locating the defining features of a particular culture.

In the beginning, Hofstede’s dimensions numbered four – small versus large power distance, weak versus strong uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity – which, as recounted by Hofstede (2011), “formed the basis for my book Culture’s Consequences (Hofstede, 1980)” (p. 7). Less than a decade later, the Hofstede model added the fifth dimension long-term versus short-term orientation, concepts identified and originally labelled Confucian Work Dynamism by Michael Harris Bond, who later co-authored with G. Hofstede in Hofstede and Bond (1988). Afterwards, this dimension was integrated into the model
and more thoroughly discussed in the later publications (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Subsequently, the Hofstede model gained its sixth and new dimension, namely indulgence versus restraint, concepts labelled by Michael Minkov, a Bulgarian linguist and sociologist. It was with this Eastern European scholar that the Hofstedes collaborated and published the revised edition of the book just named (Hofstede et al., 2010), yielding a six-dimension model as it is known to date.

These concepts, and the theory developed by Hofstede and his co-authors, will be elaborated in a more relevant place, Chapter 7, which will do this job as a jumpstart to the discussion of the findings of the research into the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context. In the meantime, it is worth presenting the reasons for the choice of these cultural variables.

In the first place, the Hofstede theory of cultural dimensions has been widely taken as a framework basis for empirical studies in the fields of business, management, psychology and cultural studies, and thereby significant findings have been published and acknowledged in scores of journals (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006). According to Sivakumar and Nakata (2001), there is evidence that “it [the Hofstedian framework] has had far greater impact” than other cultural frameworks (as is cited in Kirkman et al., 2006, p. 285). World Wide Web citation indexes in the two decades 1981–2011 show that there are thousands of articles in peer-reviewed journals citing one or more of Geert Hofstede’s publications (Wikipedia, "G. Hofstede"). It is arguable that the Hofstede dimensions have established values that can be brought into play. If the use of these values is productive, bringing about meaningful outcomes, it is entirely worthwhile to extend the applicability of the Hofstede dimensions to the field of language education. Indeed, qualitative researchers are urged “to be alert to” the theoretical framework in social and in even natural sciences and to consider their applicability “to the research problem chosen to study” as they will “allow us to see in new and different ways what seems to be ordinary and familiar” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. xxvii). In relation to language teaching and learning, the past years have seen the use of Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions – for example, Cronjé (2011), Skinner and Abbott (2013) and Viberg and Grönlund (2013) – but it appears that the Hofstedian framework has not been exploited to its capacity in those studies.
The second reason for the choice is that the Hofstede theory has stood the test of time. It is already three dozen years since the cultural dimensions were introduced by Hofstede (1980). Up to the present, the theory has gained a reputable status in the academic literature, despite its critics. This theory has of course been refined over a considerable period of time with further research. The modifications and additions by the author and co-authors have helped to increase confidence in the validity of the theory.

In relation to this study, one major advantage of using the Hofstedian cultural dimensions is that they lay the foundations on which culturally laden principles of CLT can be put in some logical order and self-reflection of factors affecting CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context can be guided. In other words, the dimensions can be seen as points of reference to capture the slippery phenomena of culture. They can act like pivots around which discussion can revolve. Particularly, the dimensions themselves are or suggest pairs of concepts representing essential features of the two apparently opposing cultures. On the one hand, CLT is based on western culture, and on the other hand, Vietnamese teaching and learning practices are rooted in oriental culture.

The fourth reason for the choice of the Hofstede theory is the number of dimensions, which is considered to be just right for the scope of the thesis. The so-called cultural dimensions can of course be of a larger or smaller number, as suggested by other scholars in the field. For example, Hall (1976) differentiates high-context and low-context cultures, while Triandis (2004) is in favor of extending the dimensions (up to 18 in total as was done in the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviors Effectiveness project, a landmark study conceived by American management scholar Robert J. House in 1991). However, given the scope of this research, whereas a smaller number is inadequate to address the complexities of cultural influence, a larger number is too much to handle. Considering the human processing capacity, it is argued by Miller (1956, as cited in Hofstede, 2011) that “useful classifications should not have more than seven categories, plus or minus two” (p. 21). Further, the dimensions added (those by Triandis, for example) do not appear to be conceptually independent from those available. Therefore, a model with six dimensions is arguably ideal.
Finally and most importantly, the choice of the Hofstede theory is motivated by my reading of Hofstede’s 1986 journal article ‘Cultural differences in teaching and learning’. It is an influential work dedicated to the topic of teaching and learning. In that article, he develops descriptors that contrast the teacher–student and student–student interactions (one of the key areas of interest of this study) in relation to the first four dimensions in his authorship up to that time: small versus large power distance, weak versus strong uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. It can be observed that many of the descriptors along the cultural dimensions typical of western culture are well-matched with the CLT principles. Also, the descriptors of the opposing dimensions (presumably those of the oriental cultures) correspond well to the values of the Vietnamese culture. In the language teaching literature, those descriptors have been used by Brown and Lee (2015) “[to contrast] cultural expectations of teacher and student roles” (p. 305). Especially, individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity are listed atop in the list of parameters for “identifying […] how language in general and SLA [Second Language Acquisition] in particular merge into the cultural landscape” (Brown, 2014, pp. 176-177). Those comparisons were the final push for my use of the Hofstede dimensions as a theoretical framework to interpret the findings from my research work. They open up the possibility of utilizing the Hofstede theory and help to envision the possible outcomes of the research if the theory is used.

It should be acknowledged that there are quite a number of arguments against the value of the Hofstede theory. McSweeney (2002) questions the assumptions underlying Hofstede’s claims of national cultures and their differences and thereby cautions against “faith” in the absolute value of the Hofstedian dimensions. Ailon (2008) criticizes Hofstede (1980) for its “normative viewpoint and political subtext” and thereby urges a critical reading of the cultural dimensions proposed by Geert Hofstede (1980). Regarding the application of the Hofstedian dimensions, it is reminded by Gerhart and Fang (2005) that the roles of national culture differences, despite their importance and the necessity to understand them, “needs to be put in the context of other important contextual factors, including organizational culture” (p. 971). More recently, Holmes (2012) is concerned about the western bias of the data based on which Hofstede dimensions have been developed. From Australia,
Venaik and Brewer (2013) warn of the possibility of misapplication of the scores of the Hofstedian dimensions, which are intended to be used for cultural differences at the national level “in analysis relating to individuals, usually managers, and organizations” (p. 469). Particularly in the field of teaching English to non-English learners, Yang (2015) points out that the Hofstedian dimensions fail to account for the cultural complexity and variability within one and the same culture.

It is noted, nevertheless, that this study uses the Hofstedian dimensions as the theoretical framework to scaffold its discussion and interpretation of its research findings rather than as constructs for its research. The Hofstedian dimensions are simply concepts based on which the headings of the discussion and the interpretation are created and organized. It should also be noted that despite the criticisms, the Hofstedian theory has been standing the test of time over the last decades and has been recognized for its validity and importantly its applicability as a theoretical framework for culturally-oriented research (Holmes, 2012; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001), especially with regards to its use as the a “lens” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. xxvii) to examine cultural underpinnings that might present problems to the operationalization of western-originated paradigms in the Vietnamese context (Hitchcock, Vu, & Tran, 2011; Nguyen & Le, 2007).

2.5 SUMMARY

The literature review shows that CLT was developed in a context quite ‘foreign’ to the reality of Vietnam in terms of the sociocultural forces initiating the formation and shaping of the approach. It has also been revealed that CLT is criticized as being particularly inappropriate in contexts of reception where English is learned as a foreign language rather than a second language. These problems are coupled with the apparent ‘fuzziness’ of practitioners’ understanding of CLT tenets and classroom procedures. Particularly concerning studies of CLT implementation in Vietnam, it appears that the approach faces quite a number of problems that exist in, and are defined by, the local conditions, such as class size, teacher professional development (or the lack of it), knowledge-oriented exams, etc. However, there has not been a serious attempt to look beneath those surface problems and go beyond these readily visible challenges. Significant as they are, cultural factors underpinning classroom lesson implementation have received inadequate attention. Particularly
regarding CLT implementation in the tertiary sector in Vietnam, this area remains under-researched; studies that have been done so far are sparse, fragmentary and lacking in scope, thus being unable to provide a satisfactory account and interpretation of the cultural drivers of what happens in the classroom. Therefore, there remains the need and a ‘niche’ for studies that inquire into the Vietnam-specific cultural values shaping the classroom practices at the university level. At the tertiary institutions, the pre-conditions for CLT implementation appear to be better than in secondary and primary schools, but CLT still has not been successful either. This is an interesting question to which a satisfactory answer is overdue. It is this very undertaking that this study aims to carry out with the research design to be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter has six major sections, which describe the research design of the study. First, following the chapter introduction, it explains the qualitative nature of research together with the rationale for the use of case study. The chapter then explains how the study will address the central research criteria, including reliability and validity, from the perspective of qualitative research. Subsequently, the reasons for the selection of the research site are presented, followed by the arguments for the position of the researcher. In the next two sections, the chapter gives accounts of the data collection in relation to ethics issues, data collection procedure and instruments used to collect data, and then describes the research participants. Finally, it presents issues in relation to the data analysis before it ends with a summary.

3.1 NATURE OF RESEARCH

This section describes the nature of the study in terms of research methodology. It provides the reasons for the use of the qualitative approach and particularly the adoption of case study for the project.

3.1.1 Case study

This research uses a case study approach, undertaking an in-depth investigation of factors defining the implementation of CLT in the EFL department of a particular tertiary institution in Vietnam. In order to reveal the appropriateness of the western-originated teaching methodology in the Vietnamese context, it relates those factors to the implicit requirements of CLT and examines the differences arising from the comparison in light of the Hofstedian cultural orientation
framework. Specifically, the researcher seeks to learn about the reality of teaching and learning at the Institution under study and the possible reasons for and effects of implementing CLT there, taking special interest in the cultural drivers of the implementation of the program under examination. This study can be defined as a case study because its unit of analysis, the program implementation at a particular institution, is a “bounded system” Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 38).

According to the categorization of Creswell (2012), this study is an “instrumental case study” because it “stud[ies] a case that provides insight into an issue” (p. 466). It studies the case of CLT implementation at a Vietnamese institution in order to provide insight into the issue of cultural appropriateness of the methodology in relation to the Vietnamese context. Still in light of Creswell’s categorization, the case under study is not an intrinsic, unusual one; and there is only a single case under study in this research project. Figure 3.1 shows its position in relation to other types of case studies.

**Intrinsic Case Study**

- Unusual case
- Study an intrinsic, unusual case

**Instrumental Case Study**

- Issue
- Case
- Study a case that provides insight into an issue (or theme)

**Multiple Instrumental Case Study**

- Case
- Issue
- Study several cases that provide insight into an issue (or theme)

*Figure 3.1 Types of qualitative case studies*

*Note.* From Creswell (2012, p. 466).
This research can be defined as qualitative in nature because the data was gathered and analyzed (Zacharias, 2012, p. 9) using the major qualitative research strategies of classroom observation, interview and document analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 427) together with questionnaire survey. Whereas the document analysis was used to learn about the requirements of the program, the curriculum and other guidelines of program implementation as well as teaching materials, the other methods were conducted on lecturers, students, the program administrator, alumni and employers – all human subjects. The role of observation was to collect data about how CLT methodologies were operationalized in the classroom, thus providing evidence-based accounts of actual classroom lessons. The interview was designed to seek an in-depth understanding of the underlying drivers of the classroom teaching and learning activities, and to answer case-specific questions regarding a lecturer’s and students’ choice of strategies. The questionnaire survey played a supplementary role, helping to gather preliminary and general data about the research participants and the context of the study prior to classroom observation and/or the conduction of an interview.

In relation to data analysis, the study provides a rich description of the case, using themes and sub-themes to explore the factors affecting the implementation of the language program under study as well as the interrelationships among these factors (Richards, 2003, p. 270). In other words, the data analysis is a process of “classifying, comparing, weighing and combining material […] to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201).

Qualitative rather than quantitative methods have been chosen because, following the advice of Bazeley and Jackson (2013, p. 2), this study aimed to gain a detailed understanding of both the process (of the operationalization of CLT in the classroom) and the experience (of subjects of the study in the program implementation). Qualitative methods offer the best chance of answering the research question, which can only be done by conducting an in-depth inquiry into the factors driving the implementation of the program under study and then examining those factors through a cultural lens, as presented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Further, advances in postmodernist thought more broadly mean that “locally, temporally, and
situationally limited narratives are now required” (Flick, 2014, p. 12) in research; qualitative research is ideal for achieving such narratives.

3.1.2 Pros and cons of case study

For this research project, case study was adopted because, as is observed by Yin (2014), it is seen as “a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). In this study, the variables relate to a variety of program stakeholders (students, lecturers, program administrators, etc.); a range of program factors (teaching support, learning motivation, institutional regime, etc.) and an array of underlying forces existing in the societal configurations (cultural practices and customs). This study is like any case study in that “complex and dynamic interactions” between individuals and the environment, including cultural factors, can be observed (Duff, 2012), and in that it represents a multiplicity of viewpoints and offers support to alternative interpretations (Nunan, 1992, p. 78). Furthermore, this case study allows for investigations that capture the “instances in action” (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1983, p. 140), which reveal the complexities and intricacies of the factors affecting implementation of the CLT methodology and thereby trace the underlying cultural causes for what happens in the classroom.

In practical terms, case study has been recognized to be readily useful for lecturers, the target audience of this research. According to Nunan (1992), “the insights yielded by case studies can be put to immediate use for a variety of purposes”, and case study “is strong in reality and therefore likely to appeal to practitioners” (p. 78). Last but not least, case study was most suitable for the author, who was doing this research on her own for the completion of her doctoral study. Indeed, according to Bell (1993, p. 8), the case study approach is a practical choice for a truly meaningful in-depth study done by individual researchers.

In relation to TESOL, the field in which this study is situated, case study is increasingly valued for being able “to resonate across cultures […] in a field as broad geographically, socially and intellectually as TESOL, where generalizations are likely to be blandly true, suffocatingly narrow or irresponsibly cavalier” (Richards, 2003, p. 21). A review of recent literature indicates that case study can illuminate
aspects of curriculum and program implementation (the interests of this study) that are not readily recognizable using other methodologies.

Limited generalizability is often seen as a downside of case study and of qualitative research in general. However, this view has been convincingly argued to be “wrong and misleading” (Eisenhart, 2009, p. 65). According to Eisenhart, the concept of generalizability has long been unduly and unfairly defined in terms of statistical probability, an element of quantitative research that is seen as the antithesis of qualitative research. Eisenhart even suggests that the findings of statistical studies are not always readily applicable to the entire population. In fact, Eisenhart (2009) argues that case study can make “grounded generalizations” as “the researcher moves from local situation to local situation […] describing and interpreting the phenomena in each new situation in terms of the preceding ones and forming tentative hypotheses that accommodate all the previous information and anticipate what new situations will reveal” (p. 57).

Earlier in the literature, as pointed out by Bassey (1981, p. 85), relatability was nominated as an important merit of case study. Richards (2003, p. 21) defines relatability as the ability of the findings “to resonate across cultures”, and this is why case study research has strong appeal to practitioners (Nunan, 1992, p. 78) such as classroom teachers like the researcher herself. In a practical sense, as is argued by Heap (1995), qualitative research appears to provide insights rather than generalizations. In the 1980s, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed “transferability”, a concept that K. Richards (2003) was happy to apply to case study and qualitative research instead of generalizability. Generalizability is “derived from the natural sciences” and “should be set aside and replaced with an alternative approach reflecting the richly contextualized nature of qualitative inquiry” (Richards, 2003, p. 288).

### 3.2 RESEARCH CRITERIA

Fundamental to research are strategies to ensure its validity and reliability (Richards, 2003, pp. 284-286). From the perspective of recent developments in qualitative research, the key questions used to test validity and reliability can be related to the naturalistic criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 289-
Those naturalistic criteria, according to the two authors, are designed to lead the research to outcomes that have “trustworthiness”, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. As elaborated by Richards (2003, p. 286), these criteria “can be [correspondingly matched] to Maxwell’s” (1992) apparently rationalist criteria, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Naturalistic versus Rationalistic Criteria in Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of research</th>
<th>Naturalistic (qualitative)</th>
<th>Rationalist (quantitative)</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Evidence of long-term exposure to context and adequacy of data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>External validity</td>
<td>Richness of description and due interpretation (that makes the case interesting and relevant to those in other situations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Documentation of research design, data, analysis, etc. to show researcher’s decisions are open to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from K. Richards (2003, p. 286)

These ‘correlations’ have been increasingly found in qualitative research as a result of the recognition of “the postmodern turn” for “rethinking research criteria” (Delamont & Atkinson, 2009, pp. 668-669). In this study, concerning credibility, which is internal validity of qualitative research, the researcher pays special attention to the three most helpful aspects suggested by Richards (2003, p. 285), as shown in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2

Three Key Aspects of Validity in Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of validity</th>
<th>Issues to be addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive validity</td>
<td><em>Are descriptions accurate, complete, etc.?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive validity</td>
<td><em>Are interpretations adequately grounded in participants’ perspectives?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical validity</td>
<td><em>Are concepts coherently and legitimately applied to the phenomena and do the relationships among the concepts hold water?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For the purpose of descriptive validity, the researcher took measures to ensure the descriptions were accurate and complete. First, the data were collected from a variety of methods, including classroom observation, interview, questionnaire survey and document analysis. Particularly for classroom lessons, the researcher used an observation protocol to take notes of what happened throughout the lessons and a digital voice recorder to record the lessons. Next, as soon as each observed lesson was finished, the researcher would always take time out to refine her notes while her memory was fresh. At the end of the day, the researcher would again review the recordings of the lessons and refine her notes. In reference to interpretive validity, care was always taken to make interpretations from the perspectives of all five groups of research participants concerned: lecturers, students, program administrators, alumni and employers (see 3.5 for specific descriptions of these research participants). To avoid speculation, the researcher always based her notes on what was actually said by the participants, and she tried to empathize as much as possible with the participants in order to understand the issues from their perspectives. Concerning theoretical validity, again care was always taken to ensure the coherent and legitimate application of concepts to the phenomena observed, and that any perceived relationships were strictly logical.
Closely related to internal credibility of qualitative research is external credibility, or transferability. In this study, this quality is ensured by providing detailed descriptions of the case and establishing connections with findings from previous research. The researcher included in her descriptions all the relevant details in an attempt to illuminate what makes the case individually specific and at the same time what can make the case resonate in other contexts. These attempts are what Edge and Richards (1998) refer to as the representation of the researcher, a criterion essential to research in TESOL, the broad area in which this study is situated. Further, multiple perspectives were considered: those of participating lecturers, students, faculty leadership, alumni and employers. In addition, findings from the data analysis were related to the findings of studies undertaken of similar subjects and in similar contexts.

The dependability and confirmability of this study can be assessed thanks to the careful documentation of the research design (as presented in the previous section); how the data were analyzed (see 3.6); and how the researcher’s decisions were made in terms of site selection, recruitment of research participants, choice of exploration avenues, etc. (as can be seen in the next sections of this chapter). In other words, “dependability” was ensured by the measures taken “to document the logic of process and method decisions”, and “confirmability” was ensured by the traceability of conclusions from “the data and information provided by research participants” (Rodrigues, 2010, p. 191).

Along with attention to the four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) to ensure the quality of qualitative research for this study, it should be noted that throughout all the stages of research design, data collection, data check, data analysis and interpretation of the findings, the researcher paid close attention to triangulation. This involved constantly carrying out data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Flick, 2014, pp. 183-192). The study was initially undertaken by means of multiple methods including questionnaire survey, classroom observation, interview and document analysis. Second, data were collected at different times and in different venues: in the classroom to get fresh evidence of how CLT was used (or not used) in lessons, and before and after the classroom lessons via interviews and surveys in order to anticipate what was likely to happen in the lessons and to reflect
on what did actually occur. Multiple interview sessions enhanced the trustworthiness of data (Glesne, 2006). Then triangulation was carried out. The inclusion of the five stakeholder groups in the program under study helped the researcher “to learn to see events from multiple perspectives” (Neuman, 2000, p. 144). The research process described above demonstrates that the study’s findings were not simply obtained from analysis of a single source of data; rather they were cross-verified on the basis of a variety of sources while the researcher was still at the research site. The stakeholder-oriented accounts of the five groups directly related to the implementation of CLT at the university under study allowed the voices of concerned inhabitants of the research sites to be heard (Edge & Richards, 1998).

Regarding the data analysis, for the purposes of triangulation, the researcher always tried to approach the data from a variety of perspectives and hypotheses (Creswell, 2007). To sum up, it is this triangulation that has helped, again, to assure the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2007).

3.3 RESEARCH SITE AND POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

In qualitative research, selection of the research site is one of the major issues to be addressed, because “so much attention is lavished on a particular case” (Richards, 2003, p. 21). Equally important is the position of the researcher. This section will address these two issues by explaining why the study was undertaken at a tertiary institution in Southern Vietnam where the researcher had an existing association at the time the study was conducted.

3.3.1 Selection of research site

The research site for this study was the EFL department of a tertiary institution in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A description of this context of study is provided in the next chapter. In the meantime, the institution will be referred to as ‘the Institution’ or ‘MTIH’, and the department as ‘the Department’ or ‘MTIH-ED’. My choice of this research site was purposive, which is common practice in case study research (Flick, 2014), and below are the reasons for the selection.

First, issues that have been cited in previous studies (carried out in primary or secondary education institutions) as barriers to the implementation of CLT in the
Vietnamese context are students’ very limited English, lecturers’ lack of updates on teaching methodology, the pressure of grammar-oriented exams, and the apparent absence of the immediate need to use English communicatively. This study was conducted on a university campus because those often cited challenges are said to no longer apply once a student reaches tertiary-level education. The study aimed to discover if CLT implementation does actually happen at university level, and what obstacles need to be overcome. At the department under study, students had to pass a competitive entry exam in English before they could undertake study in their chosen discipline. The lecturers apparently had had more opportunities than teachers in lower levels (i.e. secondary and primary schools) to keep abreast of developments in language teaching methods owing to their post-graduate teacher training. At the tertiary level, the curriculum sets out to teach students how to use English rather than focusing on the basic rules of English and the morpho-syntactic features of the language, which students would have learnt in secondary school. Finally, given that today it is vital for students to achieve English competence in order to participate in the labor market, students need to be highly motivated to become communicatively competent.

Second, the researcher chose to study the case of MTIH, located in Ho Chi Minh City, because the city has many other comparable universities and therefore the findings from this case study can be assessed in terms of their transferability. This so-called “grounded generalization” is a merit of qualitative research (Eisenhart, 2009), and if it is achieved, the researcher will have strong grounds for making claims about the study’s value. Further, because of this situational feature, MTIH can serve as a “particularly instructive example of a more general problem”, which is a good reason for the employment of case study in this research design (Flick, 2014, p. 122).

Third, Ho Chi Minh City was chosen as the location because it is the researcher’s home town, thus reducing the time needed to familiarize oneself with the local context and culture. This time-saving advantage was significant because the researcher was doing this research to complete her scholarship-funded course within a set timeframe. On a personal level, having her family members and close friends nearby made the researcher’s relocation to do this research much easier.
Finally, the researcher had connections with the specific university and the department under study, which made it easier for her to gain access to the research site, an issue that has been noted as a challenge for researchers conducting case studies (Lichlman, 2011, p. 109). In fact, the researcher was a student in the Department, and following her graduation from the bachelor’s degree course, she worked as a lecturer in the Department. The dean of the Department was first her teacher, then one of the key gatekeepers at the site while the research was being conducted. This familiarity meant that the researcher was in an advantageous position in her communication with the research participants, potential as well as actual ones. Furthermore, logistic arrangements such as on-campus navigation, transport between the campuses, the researcher’s meal purchases, printing and photocopying, etc., were all made easier by the researcher’s history with the university.

### 3.3.2 Position of the researcher

The position of researchers is a major issue to be addressed in qualitative research, because researchers are themselves research instruments (Edge & Richards, 1998). Particularly with regards to case study, the researcher is in fact seen to be “the primary instrument of data collection [and data analysis]” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37).

As explained earlier, this research was undertaken on a site that was familiar to the researcher, which was advantageous in a number of ways. First, the fact that the researcher was a student and then a lecturer at MTIH gave her an insight into the culture of the Institution. This knowledge of the context is beneficial for any researcher undertaking a case study (K. Richards, 2003, p. 286). The researcher was on the site for six months. Although a longer stay would obviously have elicited more information, six months was a reasonable length of time for a qualitative research project undertaken for the award of a doctoral degree in a full-time course. And familiarity with the context allowed the researcher to skip the time-consuming ‘getting to know the site’ stage that many other researchers must go through.

Second, possessing all that site knowledge made the researcher a better investigator when interviewing lecturers, program administrators and students. The researcher could quickly grasp the context-specific features of interviewees’
comments, and she could readily detect any apparent inconsistencies in the interviewees’ responses and double-check those points with the interviewees on the spot.

The third advantage for the researcher was that she was both an acquaintance and a new person to the site, having studied overseas for five years by the time this research project was undertaken. The site had changed in that time, and ‘detachment’ from the Institution and her teaching role, together with exposure to the educational environment overseas, had allowed the researcher to view local issues with a fresh eye and avoid taking anything about the context for granted.

The researcher was aware that the abovementioned advantages could affect the collection of her data for the research. It could appear that the researcher was doing the study in her own backyard, but this was not the case. First, it should be made clear that the association with the Institution did not give her automatic access to the site. Prior to the commencement of the data collection, the researcher had to contact the president of the Institution and then the dean of the Department to ask for permission to access the site. The permission was not granted immediately; a long process of communication required the researcher to elaborate on what she would be doing at the Institution for her research and what measures she would take to ensure the research would not adversely affect the teaching of the classes or harm the welfare of the staff and students concerned. Second, while the researcher knew some of the lecturers, much of the research activity was done with lecturers she had not previously met. Although the researcher’s association with the Institution had helped her find potential research participants, their consent to participate in the research was not automatic.

Another possible concern about the position of the researcher is that the researcher might refrain from reporting findings that were unfavorable to the Institution’s and the department’s reputation, perhaps to avoid jeopardizing her own potential employment opportunities in Vietnam or because of a reluctance to offend her acquaintances. However, the chances of this happening are very slight.

The abovementioned concerns are arguably unreasonable because this study was never intended to be an evaluation of the EFL program at the Institution. As stated earlier, it aimed to examine the program factors and thereby to consider the
cultural appropriateness of the teaching methodology operationalized in the program. The study did not aim to point out the problems or strengths of the program under study. Also, pseudonyms are used for the Institution and the Department and all the people concerned, so the report of the study will not reveal their identities. In this way, any description of what happened in the classroom – negative or positive – would be unlikely to affect or offend anyone. Regarding future employment possibilities, the researcher is highly qualified and skilled in language education and is therefore confident of obtaining a position within any number of organizations in Vietnam. So there is no practical driver for the researcher to be biased in terms of employability.

Finally, this study was undertaken within the constraints of the ethical duties to which the researcher has committed. Any concerns about problems that could possibly arise have been addressed in the study’s ethics clearance application, as described below in 3.4.1. The study has been written up for academic purposes following a rigorous research design that minimizes potential bias. The researcher’s representation has regularly been read and checked by her supervisors and later examined by external examiners. Any bias or inconsistency would have been revealed through these processes.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

This section addresses the three central issues related to the data collection of the study. It will first present the application for ethics clearance for the study and then the procedure in which the on-site collection of data happened. Subsequently, it will describe the data collection instruments that were employed.

3.4.1 Ethics

This study was undertaken with its ethics clearance granted by the Ethics Review Committee of the Western Sydney University – approval number H10046 (Appendix A). The ethics clearance application was prepared by the researcher and approved by the committee well before on-site research activities took place. It is acknowledged that the ethics clearance application used feedback from the academic supervisors and from the ethics committee of the university.
Preparation of the ethics clearance documents was based on the university’s guidelines on ethical issues in conducting research on humans, available on the institution’s website (Western Sydney University, 2015). The researcher took extra care to ensure the research participants’ consent was entirely voluntary. Concurrently, due attention was always paid to minimizing any risk or potential discomfort to the research participants as a result of their participation in the research. This care was taken from the first step of developing questionnaire items, interview questions and classroom observation protocols through to the stages of actual data collection, including the recruitment of participants, to the later phases of data storage and management and then thesis writing as well as the dissemination of research outcomes.

As is standard practice, before the actual data collection began, the researcher gave the relevant information sheet and consent forms to the research participants. The participants were instructed to carefully read the documents, which outlined the research activities to be conducted with them as well as their rights as research participants. Those who consented to participate in the research had one week to return the completed and signed consent forms. For the students only, however, there was no specific consent form for each of them to complete and sign. Rather, they were told that they should not return their questionnaire responses if they did not consent to participate in the survey. All these measures were not designed solely to keep the researcher free from ethical and legal obligations; they were taken in the spirit of being “as open and honest with the subjects as possible”, an overriding ethical principle (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, pp. 196-199).

Another example of the researcher’s research participant-oriented approach was her use of Vietnamese translations of the research instruments with the research participants and other people concerned (e.g., university leadership). The instruments were written in English, but the researcher took time out to translate them into Vietnamese because the research participants were all Vietnamese nationals and all used Vietnamese as their first language. The same thing was done for the lecturers, because everyone communicates most fluently and completely using their mother tongue. Using their first language allowed research participants to express themselves fully and accurately.
3.4.2 Procedure

As indicated early in the chapter, four major research methods were used in this study: classroom observation, questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and document analysis. Although each method varied in degree of importance in terms of the data it helped to obtain, the methods complemented each other.

The observation of lessons played a significant role, because it provided accounts of the actual implementation of the EFL program at MTIH-ED. The observation was “descriptive” rather than “evaluative”, and was designed to try and “capture what is going on during the observer’s presence” (Zacharias, 2012, pp. 137-145). Reliance on classroom observation was appropriate given the nature of this research, as noted by Scholz and Tietje (2002): “Qualitative analysis starting from the real-world level is an indispensable part of case analysis” (p. 2). The central focus of this study was to look at how classroom lessons were taught, so it could provide an evidence-based consideration of the factors affecting the implementation of CLT. The researcher entered the classroom and observed genuine lessons with the aim of investigating the contributions of lecturers and students to the lessons. Care was taken to meet the three essential criteria of judging evidence: relevance, sufficiency and veracity (Thomas, 2004, p. 5). Each observed lesson was audio-recorded. It is acknowledged that video-recording would have better facilitated data collection, but the researcher’s correspondence with the Institution’s management demonstrates that it was impossible to get permission to do so.

Prior to the classroom observation, surveys were conducted by means of paper-and-pen questionnaires on MTIH-ED students and lecturers to capture snapshots of the situation. The data from the questionnaires were then analyzed to yield findings that equipped the researcher with a preliminary understanding of the research site, of the classroom lessons to observe and of the context of the study. The questionnaire for students included a number of items designed to identify their cultural traits by asking them about their preferences for lesson delivery and the implementation of lesson tasks in the classroom.

Following the classroom observation, interviews were conducted with selected students and lecturers to further investigate why the lessons took place as they did. If interview is a “conversation with a purpose”, as defined by Burgess
in this study that purpose was to seek to learn about the less visible factors that could affect classroom teaching and learning. These interviews were also designed to give the lecturers and students opportunities to present their sides of the stories. Interviews were also conducted with the program administrator in order to understand the challenges involved in the classroom implementation of lessons from a ‘higher’ perspective. As previously stated, the interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription. All interviews were semi-structured; this type of interview allows for greater flexibility than is available with structured interviews, and it does not present the difficulties involved in the data analysis of unstructured interviews (Zacharias, 2012, pp. 99-100).

Questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews were also conducted with people beyond the school boundaries, including MTIH-ED alumni who were at the time working elsewhere and their employers. The questionnaires were paper-and-pen ones and the interviews were audio-recorded. Alumni were asked about the impact of the EFL course they had completed at MTIH-ED in relation to what they were doing in their workplaces, and employers were asked about their perception of the relevance of the program. Findings from the analysis of all this data helped the researcher to understand the contextual factors of the CLT program’s implementation at MTIH-ED.

Apart from classroom observation, interview and questionnaire survey, this study also used document analysis to examine the curriculum and the syllabuses, the teaching materials of the program under study, as well as all the relevant guidelines and polices for English teaching and testing promulgated by the educational authorities concerned. This method proved to be helpful as it enabled the researcher to analyse the documented data closely in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the research problem (Corbin & Strauss, 2003). The researcher’s knowledge of the curriculum, the guidelines and policies concerned and their implications played a significant assisting role in her formal interviews with the research participants as well as in informal talks related to the research. Most important of all, it helped to triangulate the preliminary findings about, for example, lecturers’ teaching duties. By using documents as a means of triangulation, the researcher was able to increase the credibility of the research findings (Eisner, 1991; Glesne, 2006) and reduce the possibility of biases that may arise in a single case study (Patton, 2002). Further, the
document analysis helped to produce a rich source of an event or information, leading to adequate and accurate descriptions of the aspects of the case under study, an important step in obtaining the comprehensive descriptions essential to case study (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). In relation to the purposes of this study, when analyzing the documents the researcher was not only interested in the content; she also focused on “how documents function in, and impact on schemes of social interaction, and social organization” (Prior, 2012, p. 428). As suggested by Prior (2012), particular attention was given to “the context in which the document was produced” (p. 45), an avenue of inquiry that could help to explain a gap between the idealized program and its actual implementation.

3.4.3 Instruments

This section describes briefly the content of the research instruments. For further details, please see the relevant appendices. As argued in 3.3.2, the researcher was one instrument of data collection. The other three data collection instruments used in this study were questionnaires, classroom observation protocols and interview questions.

3.4.3.1 Questionnaires

Four different questionnaire surveys were done on four types of research participants; namely, MTIH-ED lecturers, students, alumni and their employers. The questionnaires were all paper-and-pen ones. The development of the questionnaires was based on the guidance provided by Creswell (2012, pp. 389-390) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001, pp. 257-258).

The lecturers’ questionnaire aimed to investigate the teaching of English at MTIH-ED (Appendix B.1). It first sought to learn about the lecturers’ background in terms of gender, age group, teaching experience, qualifications, and especially their exposure to western ELT teaching methodologies. Second, the respondents were asked about what they normally did in their classroom, with special interest being paid to their attempts to adapt CLT and their thoughts about the adoption/adaptation of the ‘imports’. The questionnaire then presented several statements on the topic of adaptation and asked the lecturers to respond to them. Next, the questionnaire listed statements of ‘principles’ of teaching and asked lecturers to indicate whether or not...
they agreed with the principles. Finally, lecturers were asked to comment on the possible challenges to teaching communicative competence in their EFL classroom. A unique feature of the lecturer questionnaire was that it had more open-ended questions, thus allowing the respondents to comment on their challenges in teaching.

The student questionnaire aimed to investigate their English learning (Appendix B.2). This questionnaire had three sections. The first sought an understanding of students’ demographic information and their investment in learning English as well as their motivation to study the language. The information gathered was used to write a comprehensive description of the research participants in the report (Zacharias, 2012, p. 73), an element that is needed “to ensure the validity of [a] study” (McKay, 2006, as cited in Zacharias, 2012, p. 73). The second section asked students about their English study in the classroom, specifically what they had experienced in the classroom and what they would prefer to see happening there. Of particular interest were the orientation of the lessons, the lesson tasks, classroom interaction, learning styles and students’ overall perception of the course. As for the majority of the questionnaire items, student respondents were asked to tick the relevant boxes, a design that allowed for more consistent data to be collected. Students’ free expression was enabled in the last section, where they were invited to provide their own comments on the challenges to their English learning.

As for the alumni, their questionnaire had four key sections asking them about their background information, their employment history, their previous study at MTIH-ED, and their suggestions for Vietnamese EFL education in relation to their understanding of the demands of the labor market (Appendix B.3). Unlike the questionnaire for current students, the one for alumni had many open-ended questions to allow for more self-provided responses. Since they were fewer in number, their data was manageable. Prior to the real questionnaire items, though, there were screening questions to make sure the survey was done on the targeted research participants. For example, a question asked if the respondents were or had been working in a profession where English was needed for their jobs. This question was included because the researcher had discovered that many alumni got jobs that did not require them to use English, and these alumni were thus not the best informants for the study.
Screening questions were also included at the beginning of the questionnaire for employers. It was essential that all respondents were indeed work supervisors of MTIH-ED alumni. This questionnaire had three sections (Appendix B.4). In the first section, the employers were asked to reveal the importance of English skills to their employees’ completion of their job responsibilities as defined by their organization. They were then asked to comment on their employees’ English capacity as demonstrated through their performance of their work roles. In the second section, employers were asked about the importance of English competence as a factor in their recruitment decision-making. The questions in the last section were all open-ended, asking the employers to suggest ways to close the gap between educational training and labor market demands.

3.4.3.2 Observation protocols

The protocols for classroom observation were used to record the key features of the lessons observed and to note down the researcher’s own comments on what was seen happening in the classroom as well as her reflective assessments of the lesson (Appendix C). The researcher used these notes to draft questions to be asked in the follow-up interviews. These instruments underwent several revisions following the trial of them in real classrooms at a language school not far from the university where the researcher was based.

The first part of this protocol (Part A) was adapted from the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) by Spada and Frohlich (1995), an instrument originally designed to observe second language classroom teaching and learning. For the practical purposes of this research project, however, the scheme was modified so that it focused on the key areas of interest of this study: participant organization (e.g., group/pair versus work); classroom atmosphere (e.g., authoritarian versus democratic); learning task (structured versus open-ended); student modality (listening, speaking, reading or writing); lesson materials (locally made or western); medium of instruction (English or Vietnamese); student learning style (passive or active).

The other three parts of the protocol were developed by the researcher herself. Part B prompts the observer to make firsthand comments on the lesson observed in relation to the teaching methodology, type of materials, overall teaching
and learning atmosphere, and cultural appropriateness of the pedagogical techniques that were seen used in the lessons observed. Part C lists descriptive statements that the observer could use to holistically evaluate the lesson happenings. The statements cover four major areas of key concern; namely, teaching methodology, materials, tasks/activities, classroom atmosphere and classroom constraints, together with overall comments. The final part of the protocol, Part D, contains the researcher’s intended queries about the lesson, which, as indicated, would then be used to formulate questions for the lecturer interviews. Whereas Part A and Part B were to be completed straight away in the classroom, Part C and Part D were to be done later on the same day when the observer had had time to reflect on what had happened in the classroom.

3.4.3.3 Interview questions

Interviews were conducted with five groups of research participants: lecturers, students, program administrators, alumni and employers of these alumni. Some interview questions were formulated prior to the data collection trip, whereas others were prepared based on the information collected on-site. Especially in relation to the interviews with lecturers and students, a number of the questions were formulated on the basis of the findings from the questionnaire surveys and from the classroom lesson observation. According to Zacharias (2012, pp. 105-106), this way of working is similar to the technique of “simulated-recall interview” (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Nunan, 1989b), a method that gives access to the interviewees’ cognitive domains and concurrently accommodates interviewees’ reflection on action. Unlike the questionnaires, the interview questions gave interviewees a chance to talk freely. These interview questions were simply prompts, and interviewees were encouraged to go into as much detail as they wished so that hidden factors might be revealed.

For lecturers, the interviews were opportunities for them to talk in detail about their decision-making in planning and implementing their classroom lessons (Appendix D.1). This procedure is what is advised by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), according to whom “We would not want to label teachers’ methods simply by what is visible – their actions. It would only be in listening to a teacher talk about
their practice that we might be able to tell” (p. 229). The interview prompts focused on seven areas of concern.

Specifically, following the first question about their familiarity with CLT and western teaching approaches, lecturers were asked to comment on the achievability of the ongoing program in reference to the existing conditions. Subsequently, they were asked about their teaching methodology; that is, how they conducted their classroom lessons and the possible discrepancies they might have found between the desired and actual aspects of their context. The next focus of the interview was about the curriculum and lecturers’ adaptations of western teaching approaches. There was particular interest in cultural problems, seeking to learn about the cultural clashes between what was required by the curriculum and what could be practiced or implemented in the classroom. Lecturers were then invited to comment on the ‘imports’, such as teaching materials embedded with western cultural values. Lecturers were also asked to give their suggestions on the current MTIH-ED curriculum, with a special focus on ways to close the cultural gap and better serve students’ career-related aims. Especially, the notes taken during the classroom observation were used to ask why the lecturers taught in the ways they did, particularly to discover the factors they perceived as advantages (or aids) and disadvantages (or hindrances) to teaching and using CLT at MTIH-ED. The ultimate purpose was to find out the cultural challenges lecturers encountered when implementing CLT in the Vietnamese context.

Students were asked about their learning experiences at MTIH and how they felt their learning there could be useful for their subsequent career (Appendix D.2). The prompts for the interview focused on eight areas of interest. The students were first asked how they found the classroom lessons – primarily concerning issues such as whether or not the activities suited their learning styles and preferences, and whether or not they found their learning enjoyable and useful. Second, they were also asked about classroom lessons, but the interviews aimed to look further into the mode of activities (e.g., pair work versus group work). Regarding the third area of interest, the students were asked about their lecturers’ teaching in the classroom and their perception of what was taught there and how it was taught. Subsequently, the students were interviewed about the materials being used in their course. Fifth, special interest was paid to students’ comments on the cultural appropriateness of the
course they were taking. For the sixth area of concern, students were invited to
comment about their relationship with their lecturers, particularly in terms of equality
as it was and as they wished it to be. Subsequently, the seventh set of questions asked
how students felt their current study could help their future career in terms of English
competence. Finally, the interview referred to what had happened in the classroom,
as noted during the lesson observation, and asked student interviewees to comment.

For the administrator of the MTIH-ED program under study, the interview
covered six major areas of interest (Appendix D.3). First, the interviewee was asked
about the implementation of the program at their Department and their perception of
the achievability of its aims given what was possible and available at the Institution.
Second, the interviewee was asked about the support available for the
implementation of the program. The issues of interest were what had been done to
make sure that faculty members were working towards achieving the curriculum’s
aims and facilitating the implementation of the program. Third, the interviewee was
invited to comment on the Department’s preparation for CLT implementation,
particularly in terms of teacher training and logistic arrangements. Subsequently, the
interview turned its attention to possible clashes between CLT being embedded into
the curriculum and the Vietnamese teaching traditions, in terms of cultural values.
The fifth area of interest concerned the effectiveness of the curriculum, hinging on
how well it prepares students for future employment. Finally, the interview turned
very open, giving the interviewee an opportunity to comment further on the cultural
appropriateness of the EFL pedagogy regarding methodology and course content.

The interview questions for MTIH-ED alumni were basically further
developments of the items in their questionnaire and follow-up of interviewees’
responses (Appendix D.4). The interview asked about their current employment and
experience at MTIH-ED, with special interest in four areas. First, the interviewees
were asked to describe the importance of English in their employment and then
comment on how the education they received from MTIH helped them fulfil their job
responsibilities. Next, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their experience at
the Institution, particularly in relation to the appropriateness of the teaching
methodologies that were used. Special interest was paid to whether communicative
competence in English was taught at the Institution and how it was later needed in
their workplaces. Finally, the alumni were asked to suggest ways to increase the relevance of MTIH-ED’s training programs to the labor market.

The last group of interviewees was employers of MTIH-ED alumni. Once again, the interview questions were essentially further developments of the items in their questionnaire (Appendix D.5). The interview covered four areas of interest. First, employers were asked first how well they knew the employees who were alumni participating in the study, then about the importance of English within their organization. Regarding the second area of interest, the employers were invited to comment on their employees’ work performance, especially regarding their English competence. Next, the interview inquired about the significance of English competence as a factor in the employer’s recruitment decision-making. Last of all, the employers were asked to suggest things that could be done by training institutions and by students to better prepare students for future employment.

3.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There are two major categories of research participants, the ‘internal’ and the ‘external’ stakeholders of the program under study. In the first category there are three types of participants, located within the school boundaries: students, lecturers and program administrators. The research participants of the second category were located beyond the school boundaries. They were graduates from MTIH-ED who were working in fields related to the three streams of training of the Department (alumni) and the management of business entities who employed those graduates (employers).

3.5.1 ‘Internal’ research participants

The ‘internal’ research participants in this study include students, lecturers and program administrators, all of whom obviously played an important role in the implementation of the EFL program under study. Whereas the lecturers and students were direct implementers of the program in the classroom, the administrators held a significant status in their roles of managing the program and providing support for its implementation.
### 3.5.1.1 Lecturers

As described earlier, three research methods were conducted with lecturers: questionnaire survey, observation of classroom lessons and interview. With regard to the survey, questionnaires were handed out to 30 lecturers, 21 of whom responded, achieving a response rate of 70%. There was a good gender balance among the lecturer participants, with 10 of them being female and 11 being male. The majority of the lecturers (76%) were in the 26–45 age group. The numbers 26 and 45 were seen as meaningful cut-off points in terms of age for lecturers, because those who were 25 or younger were new to the teaching profession and those who were 46 or older would typically have gained their university education many years ago and thus had limited exposure to the introduction of CLT. Two-thirds of the lecturers participating in this research had five years or more of teaching experience. Regarding qualifications, three lecturers had a bachelor’s degree and 18 had a master’s or doctor’s degree.

Following the questionnaire survey, the researcher entered the classrooms of eight of the 21 lecturers who had responded to the questionnaire to observe their lessons. The eight lecturers had been selected largely because of the subjects they were teaching, the age group they were in, their responses to the questionnaire and other considerations like the timetables of their classes. Some other lecturers who had originally been selected for observation had to be excluded for a number of reasons. For example, the classes were due to do their tests on the days scheduled for the classroom observations.

In the end, five lecturers were interviewed. They were among the eight lecturers who had had their classroom lessons observed. These five lecturers were chosen for interview because the researcher had perceived in their classes a number of issues to follow up for in-depth discussion to gain further insights. The duration of the interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. This variation was mainly due to the interviewees’ time availability.

### 3.5.1.2 Students

Together with lecturers, the students were arguably the best informants because of their direct knowledge about classroom-specific teaching and learning
activities. The three methods conducted with the lecturers were also conducted with
the students. First of all, questionnaires were given to 240 students at MTIH-ED, and
218 of them responded, yielding a very high response rate of 91%.

Next, ten students were interviewed following observation of their classroom
lessons. These students were from the five ‘lecturer interview’ classes. The student
interviews, conducted with their consent, of course, were about their levels of
participation in the lessons observed. Specifically, the researcher asked them to
explain their reasons for being proactive (or not) in a number of instances she had
noted while observing classroom lessons. Each interview lasted for 30-60 minutes,
depending on the student’s available time, the likelihood of further exploration and
the degree of their willingness to discuss the issues raised by the researcher.

3.5.1.3 Program administrator

One of the deputy deans as the program administrator was also interviewed
about the implementation of the EFL program at MTIH-ED. This interview was to
understand the issues relating to program implementation, particularly institutional
factors, from the perspective of the program administrator. The Department had three
deputies, one in charge of finance, another in charge of student services and political
orientation and yet another in charge of academic programs. The interview was done
with the deputy dean in charge of academic programs because this person was most
directly involved in the running of the program, in the role of program administrator.

The interview with this program administrator as the representative of the
Department leadership lasted for 60 minutes. Though the interviewee was also
teaching classroom lessons, they¹ were asked to respond to the interview questions as
a member of the Department leadership. This was made clear when the targeted
interviewee was contacted for their participation consent and again just before the
actual interview started.

¹ The use of the plural pronouns ‘they’, ‘them’ and ‘their’ is intentional, in order to conceal the
gender of the interviewee.
3.5.2 ‘External’ research participants

As was indicated, the first three groups of research participants were all from within the Institution under study. The next two were those located outside the boundaries of the school at the time the study was conducted. They were termed “alumni” and “employers”. The “alumni” were MTIH-ED graduates who were currently working outside the Institution. The interviews with these research participants were designed to provide information about institutional and societal factors.

Strictly speaking, the alumni were not exactly ‘outsiders’, for they used to be students of the Department. The use of the alumni was arguably to highlight the connection between the ‘insiders’ (i.e. lecturers, students and the Department leadership) and the genuine ‘outsiders’ (i.e. employers). It was hoped that the participation of these two last groups of research participants would provide information about how well or otherwise the language program under study meets the needs of the labor market. Their participation helped to broaden the angles from which program factors could be examined by increasing the multiplicity of perspectives, since their perspectives were assumed to be considerably different from those of the ‘insiders’.

The three alumni research participants interviewed had graduated from three different streams of the MTIH-ED: English teaching and linguistics; translation and interpreting; and cultural and literary studies. Of the three employers interviewed, one was based at a language school, another at a translation and interpreting services business and the third at a tourist company. The three industries they represented were respectively language education, language services and tourism, roughly corresponding to the three streams of MTIH-ED training. These three employer interviewees had had managerial/supervisory roles over the alumni in their workplaces.

The research methods conducted with the alumni and the employers were questionnaire survey and interview. Each interview was conducted after the researcher received their questionnaire responses and could see that they would be appropriate research participants. One important criterion was that employers must have managed/supervised their employee for an adequate period of time to ensure
that they fully understood the employee’s English competence. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the research methods that were conducted with the research participants in this study.

Table 3.3

Research Methods and Research Participants in this Case Study

<table>
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<th>Research methods</th>
<th>Questionnaire survey</th>
<th>Lesson observation</th>
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<th>Document analysis</th>
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3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of “breaking down and recombining the data in an effort to build a picture that will respond to the aims of the research” (Richards, 2003, p. 270). In relation to this study, the “coherent narrative” or “the picture” to be built is made up of factors involving lecturers and teaching, students and learning at MTIH-ED, and the context in which the implementation of the EFL program at the Institution is played out. These factors will then function as sketches that can be used to discuss the cultural appropriateness of CLT methodology in the Vietnamese context. With this purpose, according to the classification of Flick (2014, pp. 369-370), the primary aim of this data analysis is to look for explanations.

Following Silverman’s (2000, as cited in K. Richards, 2003) advice, the researcher did a rough analysis of the data as soon as the first data was available. The
researcher did so by looking through the questionnaire responses, reading the lesson notes and/or listening to the audio recordings of the observed lessons and the interviews. This initial analysis used the approach of holistic-content analysis, which involved choosing the major themes to focus on when analyzing the data (Zacharias, 2012, pp. 123-124). However, this early analysis was preliminary, intended to indicate possible avenues of further exploration for the data collection coming after it. The main focus at that time was data collection, not data analysis.

The ‘official’ analysis was not done until the transcriptions of all the data were ready for use after the data collection ended. The data transcription basically aimed to produce ‘clean’ transcripts because, given the topic of this research, the focus was on the content of the interview (Zacharias, 2012, pp. 119-120). The transcription did not focus on transcribing “the way the narrative is conveyed”, such as the interviewees’ fillers and stylistic characteristics. It is acknowledged that detailed transcription including those details would have provided useful information, but such an aim was beyond the scope of this study and would have been an impractical choice in terms of time and cost constraints, the two factors researchers are entitled to take into account (Lee & Fielding, 2009, p. 533).

With the transcripts ready, the ‘official’ analysis commenced. Central to this analysis are the tasks of “segmenting” the data (Tesch, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 154), developing “coding categories” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and “generating categories, themes, or patterns” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). First, the researcher read and reread the data “to get the ‘feel’ of what the data says” (Zacharias, 2012, p. 122). Subsequently, the researcher decided on the themes or categories emerging from the data. At this stage, the coding was designed to “generate a set of labels from which categories can be derived” (Richards, 2003, p. 273) and “allow the themes to ‘emerge’ from the data” (Zacharias, 2012, p. 123).

As advised by Zacharias (2012, p. 122), the use of these themes was informed by existing theory. This conceptual basis is needed because, according to Mills (1993), it functions as an “analytical and interpretive framework that helps the researcher make sense of ‘what is going on in the social setting being studied’” (cited in Anafara & Mertz, 2006, p. xxv). The use of the conceptual framework is not at all against qualitative research principles, which advise researchers to carry out data analysis with an open mind, not with an empty mind. Schwandt (1993) “contended
that it is impossible to observe and describe ‘the way things really are, free of any prior conceptual scheme or theory… without some theory of what is relevant to observe, how what is to be observed is to be named, and so on”’ (as cited in Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. xxv). In this study, what is taken as the conceptual framework is the factors of curriculum and program implementation by J. C. Richards (2001a, 2001b) and the variables of investigation of the process of language teaching and learning by Brumfit (1984, pp. 17-18). In this study, however, there is some modification; the major themes to be studied are grouped under the following three headings: contextual factors (i.e. institutional and societal factors); teacher and teaching factors; and learner and learning factors.

Next, the researcher again read the data and the themes in order to make ‘firmer’ decisions on the themes. According to Zacharias (2012, p. 124), this aspect of data analysis is usually called “categorical content” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) or “content/thematic analysis” (Riessman, 2008). Themes were assigned to the transcripts, not only on the basis of what was said by the each of the research participants but also in relation to what was said by all of them. This means that the coding was done after the initial analysis of all transcripts was completed so that some across-transcript interrelation and interdependence of the themes could be revealed.

It was noted that numerous themes emerged from the first readings of the transcripts, and many of them overlapped. However, following the subsequent readings and grouping sub-themes under their ‘umbrella’ themes, as is advised by Corbin and Strauss (2003), the themes became increasingly better ‘organized’ and their interrelations were gradually ‘stabilized’ for the writing up of the findings. The reorganization of the themes and their sub-themes was made easier by paying attention to the similarities and differences between the themes or categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2003; Creswell, 1994). The process of data analysis was not linear, yet the steps were recurrent and overlapping throughout the actions of sorting data and conceptualizing data into analytical codes (Saldaña, 2009).

Throughout the process, though, the researcher always kept an open mind when generating, assigning and reorganizing the themes, as the data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process. Also, the repeated readings allowed for frequent revisits of the data, an approach that allows the researcher to maintain the
“distance from and closeness to the data” that is necessary and typical of qualitative data analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 68). The two references that the researcher found most useful were Zacharias (2012) and Bazeley and Jackson (2013). While Zacharias provides practical concrete steps to follow, Bazeley and Jackson give useful tips on working with NVivo, a computer software package designed to assist the qualitative analysis of research data. It should be noted that NVivo proved to be a helpful research tool for the researcher given the enormous amount of data that was generated from a variety of research participants. Manually analyzing such a volume of data would have been unmanageable.

3.7 SUMMARY

This research project is a study of the cultural appropriateness of CLT. It adopts the case study approach, examining relevant factors in the implementation of the language program in which CLT was used, particularly those related to the teaching and learning processes at MTIH-ED, the EFL department of a tertiary-level institution in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The data were collected by means of questionnaire survey, classroom observation, interview and document analysis and were subsequently analyzed qualitatively. Taking in multiple perspectives, including those of lecturers, students, the program administrator as well as those of MTIH-ED alumni and their employers, the study strives to provide a comprehensive description of the context of study, focusing on classroom factors (related to lecturers and their teaching and learners and their learning) and those of the broad context (related to the Institution and its society). The next chapter explores the broad context of the language program.
CHAPTER 4: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the factors related to the context in which the case study was undertaken. The factors include “national variables” and “local situational variables” to be investigated, according to Brumfit (1984, pp. 17-18), or societal and institutional factors to be examined, according to Richards (2001a, pp. 93-95; 97-99; 2001b, pp. 374-396). With such orientations, the chapter starts with accounts of broad factors, firstly those related to the resurrection and then the exalted importance of English and along with it those related to growth of the ELT industry in Vietnam. Next, the chapter identifies the time when CLT was adopted in the Vietnamese ELT landscape together with its circumstantial factors. With such background information, the chapter proceeds to present the potential challenges to the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context. Subsequently, the focus is directed to the specific context of the case study. In this section, there is a presentation of the position of ELT and CLT in the Vietnamese tertiary education sector and a description of the research site. That description aims to illuminate the factors deemed to influence the EFL program implementation at the Department and the Institution under study. The chapter ends with a summary.

4.1 THE RISE OF ENGLISH AND THE ELT INDUSTRY

In this thesis, the interest is in EFL education in Vietnam over the last 30 years. The development of ELT in Vietnam can be conceived in two consecutive stages. In the first stage, the status of English was restored following the government’s promulgation of the doi moi policy in 1986. In the second stage, the role of English as the key to Vietnam’s industrialization and modernization was
enhanced owing to landmark trade agreements between Vietnam and other nations, especially with the United States.

4.1.1 The resurrection

English language learning in Vietnam was resurrected following the government’s introduction of the *doi moi* policy in 1986 (Do, 1999; Pham, 2014; Truong & Tran, 2014). Prior to that political landmark, ELT was arguably in ruins as a result of the collapse of the status of English following the downfall of the American-backed government of South Vietnam. After that 1975 event, there was almost no need for English since communication with the West was minimal and the learning of English was generally regarded as nostalgia for an association with the enemies of the past (Wright, 2002, p. 235).

With the introduction of the *doi moi* policy, Vietnam vowed to establish trade ties with the western world after more than a decade of separation following the American War (or the Vietnam War from the perspective of the ‘other’ side). The term *doi moi* “literally means renovation and refers to the process and consequences of pursuing an open-market orientation while maintaining the principles of socialism as interpreted by the CPV [Communist Party of Vietnam]” (Le & Sloper, 1995, p. 3). *Doi moi*, which has been dubbed the policy of neo-communism (X. P. Nguyen, 2006, p. 15), saw Vietnam’s foreign policy change from “maintain[ing] peace, tak[ing] advantage of favorable world conditions to be[ing] friends with all countries (Thayer, 1999, p. 5, as cited in L. H. Phan 2009, p. 183).

As a result of the *doi moi* policy, the Foreign Investment Law was promulgated two years later (1988). Within half a decade, “more than forty countries [had] made direct investments in Vietnam with the registered licensed capital being over $US4 billion” (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995, p. 31), an amazing business record for the nation at the time. This foreign investment led to a boom in foreign-run and Vietnam–foreign joint ventures in Vietnam that sought to employ local workers with English competence. As the local workforce was then still limited in terms of English competence, the government began to open the door to the influx of ELT expertise and materials. These government directives officially gave English an enhanced status over other foreign languages, because English was assumed to be the key to success in education, business and global integration.
According to Do (1999), with Australia resuming direct bilateral aid with Vietnam, which happened in late 1991 (Denham, 1992, p. 67), there came the first waves of Vietnamese officials and ELT professionals being sent overseas for English language training. In fact, this movement had already begun a few years earlier, with Australian assistance going through a less direct route. As noted by Dang, Nghiem, and Sloper (1995, p. 153), in the late 1980s, “in the absence of bilateral programs Australia provided assistance through the UNDP [United Nations Development Program] until 1991 in areas such as postgraduate English language research and training”. During this time, the United States (and its close ally Great Britain) had not been a “big player” Denham (1992) in the Vietnamese ELT field due to their involvement in the American War.

Subsequently, the government determined that, to assist the nation’s integration into the global community, priority should be given to the education of foreign languages, the mastery of which is considered a driver of national development (Vietnamese Prime Minister Executive Order no. 422-TTg, 1994; T. G. Nguyen, 2006, p. 12). This recognition gave the green light to even more impressive ELT growth, and the “English language movement underwent explosive growth during the early 1990s” (Do, 2006, p. 8). The whole nation appeared “to be embracing English as energetically as other countries despite the fact that [Vietnam was] initially introduced to the language of Americans under especially violent conditions” (Bruthiaux, 2008, p. 140). At the time, foreigners arriving in Vietnam to teach English perceived the English learning movement as a phenomenon (Lamd, 2000; Mydans, 1995).

The demand for English competence increased following President Bill Clinton’s decision to lift the US trade embargo against Vietnam in 1994, which led to a significant increase in Vietnam’s transactions with international companies and organizations (Luong, 2003, p. 2). The influx of these foreign entities, who set up representative offices and began to run their operations from Vietnam, pushed Vietnamese people to quickly learn English. Proficiency in English soon became a listed prerequisite in job vacancy advertisements. From this time, English began to be spoken of as the key language of international business in Vietnam (Wright, 2002, p. 239).
Throughout the rest of the 1990s, the need for English communication ability continued to grow with Vietnam’s establishment and extension of foreign relations. The nation joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1996, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998, all of which had adopted English as the primary means of communication. The ASEAN Charter in particular “promotes a linguistic monopoly for English stating that ‘the working language of ASEAN shall be English’” (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 214; Pennycook, 2009, p. 194). Within Vietnam, headhunting for those with English competence had reportedly become hotter than ever before in the human resources market, with candidates with a bachelor’s degree in English now being recruited over candidates without such qualifications, and being promoted to leadership positions that required communication with foreigners (Nguyen, 2003, March 7).

4.1.2 The acceleration

The development of the ELT industry continued well into the 2000s, particularly following Vietnam’s signing of the Bilateral Trade Agreement with the United States in 2000 and its World Trade Organization accession in 2007. “In Vietnam”, remarks Hill (2002, as cited in Bruthiaux, 2008, p. 140), “English is now almost universally taught at secondary level and widely at tertiary level”. By the early 2000s, the Vietnamese government arguably had fully accepted that the promotion of English language education was a key driver of national development. Singapore has been widely named as a model example for Vietnam to emulate as an economic success story owing to its successful ESL education policies (see, for instance, Ha Anh (2007); Koh (2014); Ngoc Tran (2009)). The domestic media in Vietnam, even those with highly state-controlled voices, now had almost no reservation in promoting the significance of the language of the nation’s former foe (now seen as friend) in order to accelerate Vietnam’s global integration (Le, 2007). A prominent scholar and member of parliament was even said to have boldly declared in front of the National Assembly that English was definitely to be a “savior” subject in schools even if nothing else useful were taught (Thu Hang, 2009). This apparently pro-western tone was inconceivable just a decade before. In these circumstances, by 2003 English was the dominant foreign language in general education, taken up by 98.5% of school students nationwide (Hoang, Nguyen, & Hoang, 2006, p. 17).
As for the formal education system, by the mid-2000s the government had made EFL instruction compulsory from Year 3 of the primary education level (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007, 2011). This decision means English is taught for ten years in the lead-up to university, a dramatic change from what was done in the 1975–1980 period when English was taught for three years only, years 10–12 of secondary education (Le, 2013, p. 65). Furthermore, it is outlined in the national policy that students from Year 6 are allowed to choose a second foreign language as an elective subject (Vietnamese MOET Document no. 7984/BGDDT-GDTrH, 2008; Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008, Section II, Article 2). These government directives are perceived to likely further raise the number of English language learners in Vietnam, since English appears to be the next choice for students studying Chinese, German, Japanese, French or Russian as their first foreign language (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 62). As for tertiary education, the government issued an unprecedented resolution to the education system to channel its resources into the teaching of foreign languages, stating that English is to be the first priority (Vietnamese Government Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, 2005). In effect, the status of English could not be challenged as a foreign language in both the formal schooling system and the private sector (H. C. Nguyen, 2007, p. 47).

By the end of the 2000s, the Politbureau of the ruling party issued Executive Order no. 242-TB/TW, which reaffirmed the heightened level of national commitment to foreign language education for the national causes of integration (Politbureau’s Notification, no. 242-TB/TW, 2009, Section 2, para. 4). In the Vietnamese context, this directive was taken as an unreserved green light for the full-speed development of ELT, because the Politburo is the supreme mastermind of the nation’s strategic orientations. This directive is arguably a stamp on the massive project of foreign language education approved just one year before (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008). It is no wonder that by the end of the 2000s decade, “English [had] demonstrated its political, economic and socio-cultural power in Vietnam” (Phan, 2009, p. 180).

At the turn of the 2010s decade, foreign language competence was being promoted as one of the key targets for university graduates to achieve in most of the government’s strategies for educational development for 2008–2020 (see particularly
Emphasis continues to be placed on getting young people ready for the nation’s modernization by improving their ability to use foreign languages, of which English stands out as the dominant choice (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008). Like elsewhere in Asia, English in the Vietnamese media, in the words of Sung (2012), “is touted as a must if one does not want to lag behind in the fast-changing society and ever-increasing competition in the world” (p. 24). By late 2015, this momentum has even more strongly accelerated with the signing of the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) between the 12 Pacific Rim countries, of which Vietnam is one.

So, restoration of the status of English in Vietnam came about following the 1986 doi moi policy, as competence in foreign languages was perceived as a key to the nation’s integration with the world and its economic development. The political transformations that followed, and trade agreements that came with them, have led to English being almost unchallengeable as a foreign language in the national education system. The movement of English language learning and teaching has since received unprecedented incentives from the government and consequently enjoyed very rapid expansion. Government policies favorable to the teaching of foreign languages (in effect, predominantly English) – such as Vietnamese Prime Minister’s Executive Order no. 422-TTg, 1994; Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, 2005; and Prime Minister’s Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008 – have resulted in an expectation that English will pave the way for “the national causes of industrialization and modernization”, the Vietnamese political discourse for technological advancement and prosperity. Political decisions are perceived as factors triggering the significant changes in the nation’s ELT landscape (Do, 1999; Pham, 2014). For this reason, as stated by Denham (1992), “Vietnam’s linguistic history reflects its political history” (p. 61).

However, there is no sound basis for these expectations, which, in the words of Phillipson (1992), are “inflated claims”. Essentially, according to Phillipson (1992), the arguments for those claims “are in the nature of a promise, and […] may turn out to be as unredeemable in Uganda or Nigeria as in Northern Ireland” (p. 13). Following Singapore’s example is not relevant. Although it is also located in Southeast Asia, the nation differs from Vietnam in many significant ways.
Specifically in relation to ELT, Singapore “can be classified as being Kachru’s ‘Outer Circle’” and is a country where “English retains some form of official or institutional statuses or roles” whereas Vietnam, like Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Thailand “would traditionally have been classified as being in Kachru’s ‘Expanding Circle’, countries where English was traditionally taught as a foreign language in schools” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 119). (See 2.2.3 for a brief description of Krachu’s (1992) model of world Englishes with three concentric circles.) In effect, there appears to be no doubt about the government’s serious attempts to promote the status of English as a key driver of the national causes of development and integration. However, while the politically and economically driven moves may arguably be directionally correct, it remains unclear how the ambition could possibly be realized as far as the implementation of the policies is concerned.

4.2 THE ADOPTION OF CLT

CLT was officially introduced into Vietnamese classrooms in the 2000s. The approach was required to be used when the government introduced the new series of high school course books in English (as well as in other subjects) in 2002, which were to be used nationwide in the secondary system (Hoang et al., 2006). This textbook innovation was accompanied by the organization of ELT workshops around the country in which teachers were taught how to use CLT techniques in order to use the state-sanctioned textbooks. For tertiary education, communicative competence was identified as an ultimate aim of language education a few years later in the Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT (see in particular Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT - Auxiliary for English sectors, 2004). Recently, communicative competence has been reiterated as the criteria for assessing learners’ foreign language competence in the Vietnamese MOET’s Circular 01/2014/TT-BGDDT.

However, it appears that CLT had set its foot on the Vietnamese ELT landscape at least a decade earlier, not long after the promulgation of the doi moi policy. Pham (2005) notes that “since the early 1990s […] CLT has quickly gained popularity in Vietnam” (p.2). During this time, English was regaining its top position as a foreign language in the nation’s mainstream education system as well as in the private sector. CLT appears to have come in via the expatriates from countries where
CLT was reaching its peak in terms of popularity, as well as Vietnamese teachers who were sent to those countries to study. The preliminary waves of CLT methodology most likely arrived in Vietnam in the transition period of the 1980s–1990s, as indicated earlier, owing to Australian aid packages in education through the UNDP (Dang et al., 1995, p. 153). The influx of resources and expertise that came with CLT methodologies was then accelerated with Australia’s official direct bilateral aid (Denham, 1992, p. 67). Also functioning as CLT ‘missionaries’ were Vietnamese teachers returning from overseas (mainly from Australia) owing to the aforementioned education aid packages. Subsequently, the influx became even stronger with the United States’ lifting of the trade embargo in 1994, which was recognized to have paved the way for the landing of CLT in Vietnam in packages of foreign aid.

As happened with other imports, CLT was apparently embraced in Vietnam first by the private sector. Language centres that were then mushrooming advertised CLT as the advanced language teaching methodology used in their classroom lessons (Shapiro, 1995). Also, bookstore shelves were packed with impressive glossy and multicolor course materials published by western giants such as Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Longman, Pearson, etc. who also claimed to use CLT methodologies. In the formal education system, though, CLT established its position at a point rather later. As aforementioned, the approach was not mentioned in government documents as executive orders until the 2000s, the time when teachers were being inducted to teach the new series of state-sanctioned EFL course books (Hoang et al., 2006).

It appears that CLT was not introduced as a response in Vietnamese ELT circles to developments in the research and practice of language education methodology. CLT was imposed solely at the discretion of the supreme leadership. There was almost no consultation with professional bodies such as the organization of English teachers. Rather, CLT apparently came into Vietnam in the packaged aids provided by organizations such as the British Council, the United States Information Agency and the Australia International Education Foundation. When these donor agencies arrived, they brought with them western-originated teaching materials and teacher trainers (Do, 1999; Shapiro 1995, pp. 75–76). Also, CLT was imported via returning (mainly) university lecturers who had been trained mainly in Australia, the
United States and Great Britain through projects implemented under aid agreements. The returnees were invariably affected by the popularity of CLT in the donor countries, which Swan labels “the ‘new toy’ effect” (Swan, 1985a, p. 7). At the grassroots level of secondary schools, English teachers were apparently left to struggle with “the task-based, process-oriented, student-centered pedagogy because it comes stamped with the authority of center professional circles”; they had not been asked if they wanted to use this methodology, nor had they been given the appropriate training to implement it in their classroom (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 14).

Indeed, it was as if CLT was adopted because it was then a dominant teaching approach in the donor countries and the term ‘communicative’ sounded like what the authorities wanted their growing human resources to be equipped with in order to be able to communicate with trading partners; that is, (English) communicative competence. Inadequate attention was paid to the question of whose communicative competence to teach to Vietnamese students. The supreme leadership’s decisions were not based on any evidence about the utility and applicability of CLT in the local context, a question that has been raised in other Asian countries also having “fairly ‘traditional’ school systems” (Crookes, 2013) like Vietnam’s. According to Nelson (1992), communicative competence, being “the ability to put a language to use in appropriate ways in culturally defined contexts, may become a problematic notion when applied in the situation of such a transplanted language, because the cultural contexts that defined ‘appropriateness’ in the parent situation are not necessarily the same in the new situation” (p. 327). Particularly in reference to the Greater Mekong Subregion countries, of which Vietnam is one, it has long been warned that communicative English as the ultimate goal of education is “neither feasible nor desirable” (Bruthiaux, 2008, p. 145).

In practice, there had not been genuine proactive preparations for the educational system to implant CLT into the local context. Denham (1992) was right to comment that “the spread of English in Vietnam has been largely unplanned” (p. 64). In particular, the CLT approach was brought into use as if it had been inherently compatible with the local configurations and the implementers all knew what it was and how it should be used. The training of teachers for the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese classroom was found to be inadequate and perfunctory (Le, 2011; Le, 2015; T. T. M. Nguyen, 2007).
In a study of ELT in the Asia-Pacific region, including Vietnam, Nunan (2003) points out that “the educational policies and practices have been implemented, often at significant cost to other aspects of the curriculum, without a clearly articulated rationale” (p. 609). For this reason, the problem rests with the question of how the methodologies “are amended and adapted to fit the needs of the students who come into contact with them” (Harmer, 2003, p. 292). From a wider perspective, the doi moi policy is alleged to see rapid economic growth as the overriding priority at the expense of other considerations (X. P. Nguyen, 2006, p. 25), and in education there was a possibility that what came from the western countries was accepted as something superior without reflecting on its adaptation to the local cultural context (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009).

In reference to the promulgation of the Vietnamese MOET’s Circular 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT as an example, proper care has not been taken to use the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment) in the Vietnamese context. The target students of CEFR, as pointed out by Nunan (2013, p. 19), are “a specified group of adult learners using the languages of Europe to carry out specified tasks which included not only economic and business activities, but also recreational and tourist activities”. The last two tasks, related to recreational and tourist activities, are not readily applicable to Vietnamese learners. For instance, Ton (1993) notes that “Unlike foreign nationals, who have many opportunities to travel from country to country […] Vietnamese students do not expect opportunities for actual communication in English, now or in the future” (p. 26). In relation to the broader context, Leung (2012) recently pointed out that the B1 CEFR descriptors of language levels will need to be adapted and expanded for context-specific uses, even in the British context for linguistic minority students to use English to do academic studies. It is because, argues Leung (2012), “an independent user of English as a second language in school would have to do a good deal more than what is covered in these CEFR descriptors” (p. 27). More recently, concern about the appropriateness and feasibility of using CEFR in the Vietnamese context has been raised by local voices, such as Le (2013) who argues that “the learning conditions, target language environment, the ability as well as the learning habits of the learners, their beliefs and motivation and so on are still far different from those of the learners in better developed countries” (p. 69).
4.3 CHALLENGES TO CLT IMPLEMENTATION

This section presents imminent obstacles to the operationalization of CLT in the Vietnamese classroom. These findings are based on the review of the relevant literature, the analysis of the data from alumni and employers and document analysis. There are three groups of factors presenting problems, including societal factors, cultural factors and inadequacies of logistics.

4.3.1 Societal factors

In terms of societal factors, there are three problems perceived as threats to the ‘proper’ implementation of CLT. They include the mindset of exam-oriented study, limited authentic English use and the absence of a need for communicative English.

4.3.1.1 Exam-oriented study

One of the greatest barriers to the application of CLT to the Vietnamese context is arguably the mentality of studying for exam success and the exams’ bias on testing primarily English knowledge. The causal relationship is as follows: exam success is practically the most important aim for the majority of students, and since exams mainly test English grammar, students focus on studying English grammar rather than communicative competence.

In fact, alarming concerns have been raised, pointing out how detrimental that mentality could be to any chance of successful application of CLT. Bock (2000) reports: “Most students seem to be concerned with passing exams, most of which do not test for communicative competence” (p. 25). G. Ellis (1994) makes it clear that CLT implementation in Vietnam faces the hurdle of grammar-based exams. Nearly ten years later, teaching to exams remained a problem. Commenting on ELT education, T. H. A. Nguyen (2002) asserted that English teaching in Vietnam is exam-oriented, noting that although students were required to demonstrate a level of reading comprehension, the exams were primarily about translation (bidirectional skills, English to Vietnamese and Vietnamese to English) and grammar usage. Today, the situation remains largely unchanged. Le (2013) notes that “As testing focuses only on checking language knowledge rather than language skills, the teaching and learning heavily emphasize […] grammar and writing” (p. 67).
According to CLT tenets, these areas are not within the scope of the central focus of teaching. Particularly at the tertiary level, Nguyen (2004) finds that “English language training consists mainly of improving the English proficiency of […] especially in the ability to read” (p. 450).

Further inquiry shows that the influence of exams has for many years run deep in the Vietnamese culture. As pointed out by Vuong (1976, p. 69), in Vietnamese society, learning success is conventionally equated to exam scores. Students’ as well as teachers’ performance is evaluated in terms of whether students pass important exams and if they do, with what scores. This reality is coupled with the problem that academic success is greatly valued due to the influence of Confucian traditions and also of the ongoing political ideologies (Li, Du, et al., 2011, p. 126; Salomon & Vu, 2007, p. 347). What academic success means to most Vietnamese people is basically which school the student attends, whether they have the educational degrees for their level and whether their studies are located in some ‘prestigious’ fields. All these criteria are gatekept by means of passing exams. It seems that achievements are benchmarked to ‘norms’ recognized by the society rather than to the individual interests and capabilities of students.

In Vietnamese society, exams (which have thresholds to pass) are what can lead to those society-recognized achievements. Wherever there are English exams, they focus on testing students’ knowledge about morpho-syntactic features of English. Particularly concerning important exams designed to filter students for entry into university or special programs, the exams are almost always in the multiple-choice and pen-and-paper formats. A review of university entrance exams over the past decade shows that exams are primarily interested in testing students’ knowledge of English including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and reading comprehension (that is, they are text-based), all in written form (Le, 2011). This format will typically frame students into developing their recognition skills rather than any genuine form of communicative competence.

Exam pressures, unfortunately, do not decrease once students reach university level. It was reported by one of the alumnus interviewees that ultimately they had all had to “stick to the lesson notes, especially what was said by the lecturers in the classroom”. One of them even revealed that his friends and he would “consult” the exam questions that had been administered in previous years in order to “feel” what
would be asked in their own exams. He explained the underlying reasons for this practical approach:

We had to study to the focal points because it was very pressing for us in the lead-up to the exams. By the end of the semester, we were faced with consecutive exams and for several of them we had to do a lot of rote learning, especially as for the Vietnamese subjects. So we would normally go and look for the exam papers that were administered in the previous years and then had a group meeting to decide what would likely be tested in the upcoming exams.

With regards to English communication practice, according to the same alumnus, he and his classmates thought they would possibly do it when they had more time later on. But what actually happened was that, as was admitted by the alumnus, once the exam season was over, many other things would occupy them and they would simply forget all about it.

This exam-oriented mindset is a setback for efforts to use CLT in the classroom, because it is obvious that communicative competence does not appear to be immediately relevant to students’ needs and motivation. Achieving good exam scores is a more meaningful outcome and a genuinely worthwhile investment for themselves and other stakeholders in the educational system including their parents, their teachers and their school management, to name just a few. For this reason, exam reform has been identified as a key issue to be addressed when it comes to the question of how to increase ELT effectiveness for Vietnamese learners.

### 4.3.1.2 Limited authentic English use

Another barrier to CLT’s chances of being applicable in the Vietnamese context is limited authentic English use (G. Ellis, 1994). There is almost no chance for daily use and practice of English outside the English classroom, in speaking or writing, because there is no “English-speaking environment to reinforce much of what is taught in the classroom” (Nguyen, 2004, p. 451). Given that English is a foreign language in Vietnam, it is not easy to find instances in everyday life in which English communication is genuinely needed, even in commercial cities. The use of English is more or less restricted to Vietnamese–foreign business negotiations and meetings and conferences, where professional interpreters and translators are always on hand. It should be noted that English as a foreign language in Vietnam is different from English as a foreign language in other contexts, such as in European countries.
One reason for this difference is the percentage of English-speaking people in the population. According to Yano (2009, p. 217), nearly half of the European Union’s population speak English (47%), and 16% of them are native English speakers. Especially in Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, “at least 65 per cent of the population fluent in English” (McKernan, 2015). In the Vietnamese context, although exact figures are not available, it is estimated that these percentages are considerably less. Kirkpatrick (2010) quite reasonably notes that “while English is becoming more widely used in Vietnam, it is still only spoken by a small minority of the population” (p. 64).

English stands little chance of becoming an essential language of communication in the Vietnamese classroom. As Pham (2005) observes: “In Vietnam, students learning English have no immediate need to use English in the [classroom; they] all share the same mother tongue” (p. 5). Rarely do students see English as a handy language for them to use in their everyday communication. English communication is merely artificial, for students “do not feel a real need to [use it]” (Pham, 2000, p. 12). This English interaction, again, primarily arises from artificial situations created purely for the teaching of the language, making it harder for learners to find it relevant to learn English communicatively. As a result, the interaction normally consists of two or three relatively short exchanges at best, which hardly constitutes a genuine driver of effective learning. Further, both learners and teachers inevitably feel much more comfortable communicating in their shared mother tongue, Vietnamese. While teachers have much more urgent tasks to attend to than insisting students only speak English in the classroom, in a vast majority of cases, they would not have adequate resilience to sustain scenarios of English-only communication. As a result, English interaction, if any, is mainly between the teacher and a few of the best students (Le, 2015; Le & Barnard, 2009).

This issue was raised in the interviews with alumni, and it was revealed by one of them that her communicative competence had not improved after leaving university. The interviewee, who was a teacher of English, said that in her job she typically taught to the textbooks prescribed by the curriculum, covering not only the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) but also the knowledge areas of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. However, she said that communication in English took place “not often” in her class; it happened mostly when she was
teaching spoken English and acting as a model for students to repeat a conversation consisting of a few short exchanges. The interviewee explained that she “had to spend her time budget on the other things as well”. Asked if she had opportunities elsewhere to use her English communicatively, the teacher said she did not, even at the occasional teacher workshops she attended where, she said, “the trainer lectured most of the time in Vietnamese for the sake of convenience”. Further, the interviewee said that it was unfortunate that the workshop attendees would be reluctant to speak English to each other for fear of being sneered at for “showing off”. This teacher’s lack of opportunity to use English communicatively is a case of non-native teachers undergoing “erosion in their English language performance through its restriction to classroom discourse”, as noted by Roberts (1998, p. 97).

4.3.1.3 Absence of a need for communicative competence

Another major barrier to the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context is absence of a need for communicative competence. According to Bachman (1990), communicative competence is composed of organizational competence (including grammatical competence), textual competence and pragmatic competence (including illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence). These competences, it seems, are not all required in the Vietnamese context. At present, English teachers in Vietnamese classrooms focus on organizational competence; it is taught and tested most frequently from basic to advanced levels of learning. This may be due to a lack of market needs surveys and analysis. Consequently, there is a gap between teaching and learning and market demand, with students focusing on grammatical features, which always form the key part of English exams. One alumnus interviewee recalled that in her literature class good writing first of all meant good command of grammar. “An exam paper that is free of grammar errors”, she said, “would earn you at least eight marks”. (In the Vietnamese scoring system, ten marks is the highest score, equivalent to a high distinction in the Australian system, for instance.)

It is noted that a distinctive feature in relation to the position of English in Vietnam is that what is seen as a tool for career advancement is a tangible degree or certificate in English, rather than English competence itself. The society appears to have a mindset of overemphasis on degrees and certificates “at the expense of
quality” (He et al., 2011; Li, Du, et al., 2011, p. 126). This dependence on certification, again, is rooted in the Confucian traditions, which still run deep in Vietnamese people’s beliefs and behaviours. If English competence plays any role in recruitment, the job applicant does not necessarily possess excellent English communication skills, but rather degrees and certificates in English education as is often described in job vacancy advertisements. Take high school teachers for example, they are required to show a bachelor degree in English studies for employment purpose. However, following that, applicants are selected or rejected according to a range of other factors, the key one being relationship and connection with the leadership. In order to keep their job, these teachers would simply have to teach the state-sanctioned course books that, as noted earlier, focus on teaching English knowledge. In terms of general communication, English communicative competence arguably remains out of reach for the vast majority of Vietnamese people.

The surveys and interviews with alumni and employers indicate that Vietnamese employees need some context-specific communicative competence. The representative from the tourist company suggested that students should have been taught communication strategies specifically designed to deal with their clients, many of whom came from South Korea and Taiwan. “Our tour guides,” she said, “had difficulty in understanding these clients, who would be apt to lose patience if their queries were not adequately attended to.” This comment resonates with a remark by Kirkpatrick (1997) that “those in East Asia learning English in terms of speaking to each other (e.g., Vietnamese to Thais or Indonesians) do not need culturally western language teaching materials… The culture of the person they are speaking to is more important than any culture associated with native speakers of English” (as cited in Wong & Kam, 2004, pp. 463-64). A point worth considering here, as further explained by Wong and Kam (2004), is the need for interlocutors as contextualization cues by which “[i]n the dynamics of a conversation carried out in English between two non-native speakers, each attends to the other’s proficiency in the language, and meanings are negotiated moment by moment through various means, including facial expressions” (p. 464). This issue raises the question of teaching English as an international English, which recognizes English variations as
part of the Expanding Circles and additional to the native English of the Inner Circles.

One of the interviewees, who was working as a translator and interpreter, reflected that he felt his capacity to use English to engage in small talk with foreigners was seriously deficient:

When I do my translation or interpreting, I will already have had what to say with the text in front of me or with the content spoken by the persons for whom I do the interpreting. But when faced with a foreigner in person, I would stop short after several greetings like “How are you?” and “I’m very well, thank you”. I was not too sure what to say next.

The alumnus went on to explain that he would often find it difficult to keep the conversation going. This apparent non-existence of English communicative competence is related to the status of English as a foreign language in the Vietnamese context. As long as people can survive well using Vietnamese, the need for English communicative competence remains a chimera. This factor, the place of English in society at large, will negatively affect the purposes of English language education (Roberts, 1998).

4.3.2 Cultural factors

Regarding the cultural factors, there are two major problems perceived as barriers to the implementation of CLT. They are the age-old tradition of students’ knowledge accumulation and the large power distance between the teacher and students.

4.3.2.1 Tradition of knowledge accumulation

There are several reasons why Vietnamese exams focus on testing English knowledge rather than English communication, such as the logistical difficulty of organizing concurrent exams for tens of thousands of candidates that are scheduled to take place only once a year. Further inquiry reveals another underlying reason: knowledge, rather than skills acquisition, is considered the ultimate aim in education. As for any subject, the learning of English is expected to take place through the accumulation of specific knowledge. The Confucian traditions, together with ongoing communist ideologies, “share an insistence on the importance of assimilating a body of knowledge received in a few reference books” (Salomon &
Vu, 2007, p. 347). Indeed, the directive documents issued by the Vietnamese government always emphasize teachers’ duties to provide students with knowledge, while skills, if mentioned at all, are of secondary importance. Notably, the knowledge to be provided to students has to come from government-approved textbooks. In Vietnamese schools, it is regulated that only state-sanctioned textbooks may be used. This way of selecting learning resources is certainly uncommon in CLT countries of origin. For example, in Australian universities the unit coordinators or teachers delivering the units are authorized to select the unit textbooks and relevant reading lists in the unit learning guide.

Still regarding the emphasis on knowledge, T. T. M. Nguyen (2007) found that the EFL textbook series currently in use offers mainly lessons in English knowledge, though they claim to adopt the communicative approach. Further, T. H. A. Nguyen (2002) found that learners still generally thought of English language learning in Vietnam as a process of accumulating knowledge. In the broad context, it seems that people aim to learn about English rather than learn to speak it (H. T. Nguyen, 2002). According to Li, Du, et al. (2011), this mindset is apparently conditioned by the traditions of the age-old Confucian culture, which continues to have a profound influence on the Vietnamese people. In such Confucian heritage countries, depth of knowledge is more highly valued than the application of such knowledge for a particular purpose (Li, Du, et al., 2011, p. 126). Indeed, according to Confucian thinking, the learning process is one of gradually accumulating knowledge (Yu, 1984). This belief, however, does not seem to gel with CLT principles by which learners should learn what to do with language rather than simply learn about language (Brown, 2007a, 2007b).

Emphasis on the importance of English knowledge is not limited to the education system. The results of the questionnaire survey of this research project showed that this position was held by employers as well. While reporting that English communication was very much needed in their workplaces, the employers also suggested that mastery of English grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation was also necessary for their employees to adequately perform their jobs. They explained that they wanted their employees to be equipped with sound knowledge of English, because it would be the basis for them to further develop their communication skills. The employer in translation and interpreting services explained:
Speaking, listening, reading and especially writing are certainly indispensable for our translators and interpreters. Considering their long-term career development, however, I would say that those skills would definitely need honing. Further developments would be impossible if they had poor foundation of language knowledge. Students would need to master the rules before they can produce language on their own. To use a metaphor, I suppose they would need a strong base to make a multistory building.

This ‘knowledge’ mindset was shared by another employer, who was operating in the tourism industry. The tour guide manager interviewed said that EFL students would need to be equipped with knowledge about the Vietnamese culture. “Our students”, she said, “have difficulty describing in English the Vietnamese cultural artefacts. They will typically have problems in getting the right words to express themselves when some interested clients make in-depth queries about the things they are giving the presentation about”. The comment by the manager seems to assume that the provision of knowledge would then solve the problem.

4.3.2.2 Teacher–student power distance

According to Brown (2014), power distance, which is also known as “status differentiation”, is “the extent to which the culture fosters equality versus inequality in power among members of the group” (p. 176). A research project on the appropriateness of CLT in Vietnam (G. Ellis, 1994) found that the student–teacher relationship is the major area to be addressed if CLT is to stand any chance of being successfully implemented in the Vietnamese classroom. Influenced by the Confucian culture, the Vietnamese teacher is very authoritarian and students are expected to be submissive to the teacher (Vuong, 1976). In the Vietnamese context, teachers are considered the main source of knowledge, and thus are to be highly respected by the students (G. Ellis, 1994; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). With the teacher being given the ‘guru’ role, it is quite normal for classroom lessons to be teacher-led (Bock, 2000; G. Ellis, 1994; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Le (1999) notes that “what the teacher or the textbook says is unquestionably standard norms” (p. 30). The teacher typically plays the role of the director of classroom activities rather than that of a learning facilitator as recommended by CLT. Students will usually be reluctant to speak and act in a way that transgresses this boundary, because that could be seen as a challenge to the teacher (Nguyen, 1988). They do not dare to express their own
opinion unless they are asked to do so, or show their disagreement with their teachers for fear that their teachers might lose face.

It is interesting to note that Vietnam is among very few countries in which one day of the year is dedicated to celebrating teachers’ work. That day, called “Vietnamese Teachers’ Day”, falls on November 20th and has been a tradition since the issuance of Vietnamese Council of Ministers Decision no. 167-HDBT (1982). In the current Education Law ("Luat giao duc [Education law]," 2005), it is stipulated that one of the duties of students is to respect their teachers (Article 85, Point 2) and that students must not insult the human dignity or the honor of teachers nor cause them bodily harm (Article 88, Point 1).

Framed by this mentality, Vietnamese students are often reserved in their classroom interactions. They will think twice before speaking for fear of being seen as challenging their teachers (Vuong, 1976). Under the influence of Confucianism, those in a lower position tend to adopt a policy of silence, remaining humble and simply smiling as a way of responding even though they do not fully understand what they are being told. This may explain why Vietnamese students are found to be passive, obedient, insincere and even stupid from the western point of view (G. Ellis, 1994). For the same underlying reason, the open and direct learning style of the western culture is seen by the Vietnamese as “rude and uncouth” (Bocher, 1986, as cited in G. Ellis, 1994).

The interviews with all the alumni revealed that they wished they had been more proactive in the classroom when they attended university. In hindsight, they thought that they should have, for instance, initiated discussion about topics they were intrinsically motivated to talk about and/or that they thought would possibly be more relevant to their future jobs. However, they all said they had let the teacher lead the way in terms of selection and discussion of topics. “Even when the topic was out of our interest”, the translator alumnus said, “and we felt as if we were dragged [along] without internal motivation to talk, we held our breath and waited until the session was over”. The reason cited by the alumni for this tolerance was that students did not want to challenge the teachers’ decision-making, which would do more harm than good to their relationship and thus the outcome of their study. The alumnus who was now a teacher said metaphorically that the choice of lesson content was “the teachers’ own sovereignty”.
4.3.3 Inadequacies of logistics

The last group of challenges to CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context relate to inadequate infrastructure conditions for teaching and learning (Hoang et al., 2006). They involve class size, teaching and learning aids and classroom furniture. Large classes are often the first cited problem (Dang, 2006b; Nguyen, 2004). The average class size in this case study was 45–50 students, and teacher shortages meant that classes for some subjects, such as literature, cultural studies and teaching methodology, were even larger than that. This goes against the “current wisdom” of industry standards, which suggest that “class size should not exceed 15 for most language classes” (Richards, 2001b, p. 387). According to CLT standards, as described by Holliday (1994b), the classroom should have “fifteen or fewer students” so that the teacher can be there “to hear what students say and to be able to provide repair where necessary” (p. 6). Large classes no doubt present difficulties for the teacher in terms of classroom management and reduce the students’ interactions with teachers and each other.

The next most common problem related to classroom conditions is inadequate teaching and learning aids (Dang, 2006b; Tran & Nguyen, 2000). In Vietnam, national exams for high school graduation and university entrance do not test the two spoken skills of listening and speaking, which are essential for communication, because of a serious lack of audio-visual equipment available for foreign language teaching at high schools located in rural regions. The authorities chose not to include listening and speaking because, as they claimed, they did not want to disadvantage rural students in the race to the university gate. This standpoint can be seen in the exam papers used several years ago in which the test instructions for English exams were all in Vietnamese. Regarding the case under study, which occurred in a major city location, it could be seen that visual aids were rarely used in classroom lessons. Regarding listening lessons, the only classroom equipment available was a CD player, which teachers used to play CDs for students to listen to, and one single microphone, which was always monopolized by the teacher. Laptops and LCD projectors were available on same-day loans, but they were used mainly for presentation of lectures (in place of a chalkboard) rather than actually utilizing the advantages of these information and communication technology devices (Bui et al., 2012).
In addition, the classroom fittings and furniture can be an impediment to CLT implementation (H. C. Nguyen, 2007; H. V. Nguyen, 2006). In most Vietnamese public schools, there are no rooms exclusively for language learning. In well-equipped schools, there may be a language laboratory, but it must be shared by all the students of the institution and access to it is therefore very limited. English is taught in the same classrooms where other subjects are taught. Typically, the classroom has a chalkboard hung on the wall in the front and two rows of tables and benches arranged close to each other with an aisle in the middle. The tables and benches are made of wood and metal and are fixed together, thus very heavy. In effect, only the teachers can move around the classroom. Meanwhile, students seated in the middle or towards the ends of the tables next to the wall find it troublesome to wait for their classmates to leave the table before they can get out of their seats. Therefore, it is almost impossible for students to engage in communicative tasks such as role play that require high mobility.

In summary, the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese classroom is faced with an array of challenges rooted in the society, culture and educational infrastructure. The combined consequences of these problems are definitely larger than the simple sum of the consequences of each problem. Naturally, there are other challenges, such as the shortage of teachers willing and able to use CLT, but they will be discussed in a later chapter as this section sets out to highlight the most imminent challenges only.

4.4 CONTEXT OF STUDY

This section describes the context of the case study. Whereas the preceding section outlines the societal context of ELT education in Vietnam, this one focuses on the Institution (MTIH) and then its English Department (MTIH-ED). Not only is the presentation of the context of study necessary as a convention of case study, it also pinpoints the features that are typical of the “small culture” of the context in which the case study took place that might be out of sight in the presentation of the broad context of society (Holliday, 1994b, 2011). First, however, this section provides a snapshot of the ELT situation for university education in Vietnam as a lead-in to the specific context of study.
4.4.1 ELT and CLT at the tertiary level

If the 2012 Tertiary Education Act is recognized as having created a landmark legal space in which Vietnamese colleges and universities can operate, the government’s approval of the project of foreign languages teaching and learning for the period 2008–2020 (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008) arguably played a comparable role for the ELT movement in Vietnam. This government document, which paves the way for their masterplan for foreign education, commonly called ‘Project 2020’, apparently enthrones English as a number one foreign language in the national education system. Article 1 of Section I of the decision reads:

By 2020, the majority of Vietnamese young adults graduating from colleges and universities shall have adequate capabilities to use foreign languages independently and confidently for daily communication, study and work-related purposes in an environment of integration, multilingualism, and multiculturalism; capabilities in foreign languages shall be made a strength of the Vietnamese people’s for the good of the causes of their industrialization and modernization.

(Vietnamese Prime Minister’s Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, Section 1, Article 1)

The decision itself also states at the beginning that “the foreign languages that shall be taught in the national educational system should be English [emphasis added] and a number of other languages” (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, Section 1, Article 1). This highlighting of English is unprecedented in government discourse, in which the significance of English had never been articulated so unreservedly. Within three years of the 2005 Education Law defining the required foreign languages in educational institutions broadly as those that are “commonly used in international transactions” (Article 7, Clause 3), the role of English was being even more strongly emphasized in this by-law legislation. In fact, the gear-changing towards English education was already detectable in 2005 in another by-law document. That influential document was the government resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, which urges tertiary institutions “to implement the teaching and learning of foreign languages, to start with English first and foremost [emphasis added]” (Vietnamese Government’s Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, 2005, Section 3, Point g). Once again, English was specifically named as a point of emphasis in a government document. Now, for the first time, a government document has set the
goal of getting by 2020 “100% of the college and university faculty to be proficient in a foreign language” (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 711/QĐ-TTg, 2012, Section V, Point 1, Sub-point c). According to the document, to realize this ambition, 100% of the academic faculty of foreign language education, from tertiary institutions and even teachers from high schools, will have to be sent overseas for in-service training (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008, Section III, Measure 5).

Still regarding the realization of this ambition, the government recently announced its plan to conduct a national review of English language proficiency in the English departments of all non-state-run tertiary institutions across the nation (Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 4080/BGDĐT-GDDH, 2014). The decision to undertake such an unprecedented stock-take has arguably rocked the circles of EFL teachers, because lecturers would accordingly be required to take an English exam (the passing of which would presumably guarantee their employment). The mere requirement for teachers to sit such a test brought shame on their university education and lowered their self-esteem, not to mention the worst-case scenario of a teacher failing the test. The university leadership was faced with the hard problem of insisting their faculty members take the exam. To add insult to injury, the expertise of teachers in other academic disciplines has never been questioned in this way.

As is the case in secondary education, CLT is recommended to be used in the tertiary classroom where communicative competence is to be highlighted as the ultimate aim (Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 36/2004/QĐ-BGDĐT - Auxiliary for English sectors, 2004). This appears to signal a focus move by policy-makers towards the practicality of learning. It is reasonably remarked by Vu and Burns (2014) that “recent ELT innovations in Vietnamese university settings are shifting the focus towards English as a means of communication for study, and subsequently, for work” (p. 10). A record budget of US$450 million has reportedly been made available for the landmark Project 2020, which, it is estimated, will affect 200 million students (Parks, 2011) and spend 85% of the allocated budget on the overdue task of teacher training with the aim of improving teachers’ and lecturers’ capacity to apply communicative-oriented teaching techniques in their classroom (Le, 2013; Le, 2015). Also as part of the ambition to increase the status of English, the newly appointed minister of education and training has recently directed his 61 universities
and institutions to make English a second language on campus. That means, a major newspaper reports, “students would be required to make all presentations and hold all discussions in English, while staff would speak English at all of their meetings” (Minh Tuyet, 2016). This push will undoubtedly even further exalt the status of English in Vietnam and highlight the need for strengthened teacher development in the coming years.

4.4.2 Context of situation

This section is dedicated to the Institution and its English Department, where the case study was conducted. The discussion will outline the context of situation. Through the descriptions of MTIH and its MTIH-ED, in the words of Holliday (1994b, p. 6), there will be revelations regarding the “institutional regime” of the research site.

4.4.2.1 The Institution

This case study was undertaken at a major tertiary institution located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, referred to as MTIH for short. Generally speaking, MTIH is a university that teaches the liberal arts with more than two dozen departments covering a variety of fields such as social work, education, sociology, etc. Like many other universities across the country, MTIH has EFL education as one of its strengths. The reasons for placing special importance on EFL education will be made clear in 4.4.2.2.

In relation to the Institution’s organizational culture and approach to quality, the two key areas that make up institutional factors, it can be seen that the management style at MTIH is more of the organic model. According to this model, there is high flexibility in the management of teaching staff (Richards, 2001a, 2001b). It was found that lecturers have almost complete freedom in their classroom in terms of what to teach and how to teach it, as long as the lesson content is not politically incorrect. Classroom observation does happen occasionally, but it is designed for mentoring (for junior staff) rather than quality control. Staff appraisal is done annually. It is primarily calibrated to the number of classroom hours taught and to the administrative assistance and research works lecturers have undertaken. In terms of channels of communication, lecturers can take their concerns directly to the
top, to the president of the Institution. However, typically they will first raise issues with their team leader and sometimes with their department dean.

This study discovered that in recent years there has been institution-wide pressure for many MTIH lecturers to study for a master’s degree, and then a doctorate, if they want to be assured of continuing employment at the Institution. This had been clearly stated at the Institution’s annual staff meetings as well as at the Department’s quarterly meetings. The push was made in response to the document recently promulgated by the government, which states that lecturers must at least hold a master’s degree (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 58/2010/QĐ-TTg, Article 25). This qualification criterion was later elevated to the level of doctorate by the president of the university in an attempt “to increase the teaching expertise of academic faculty”, a catchphrase in fashion in the context of Vietnam striving to get an extra 20,000 doctorates for universities and colleges (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 911/QĐ-TTg, 2010). Since he began his first term of office in late 2000s, the MTIH president had held face-to-face meetings with those lecturers who held a master’s degree to discuss their plans for further study; lecturers were given five years in which to arrange their personal life and to commence their doctoral studies. The same urge also applied to current teaching staff simply having a bachelor’s degree. It was expected that lecturers without a doctorate would commit to this further study and the commitment would form part of their yearly performance appraisal. The push, together with the then availability of government’s funding (mostly owing to the so-called 911 program) to develop teachers’ capacity, had resulted in MTIH’s approximately a hundred academic faculty either having completed or pursuing doctoral studies overseas (and an equal number for master’s degree) by 2016.

According to the Institution’s statement of mission and vision, MTIH defines itself as a research-oriented university by basing its development on the modern models of world-renowned tertiary institutions. It has declared its mission “to become a major quality research and training institution in Vietnam and in the region”. The Institution aims to provide human resources of a high calibre and distinctive identity in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Further, the Institution envisions that its research output will be needed for planning social policies. Particularly in relation to the 2011–2015 period, MTIH vowed to make
breakthroughs in tertiary management, training and research, all seen as a jumpstart for the Institution to become a leading university in the liberal arts in Southeast Asia that can provide the Vietnamese economy with high-quality services in education and research.

The above stated aims will entail the Institution’s teaching and learning undergoing quality accreditation and assessment – internal and external. The Vietnamese MOET has made institution accreditation mandatory in recent years, as Vietnam is attempting to be on par with regional nations. Tertiary institutions – of which MTIH is one – are expected to fulfill MOET’s determination to conduct quality assurance with an array of executive orders, such as Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 76/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT (2007) and Vietnamese MOET Directive no. 46/2008/CT-BGDĐT (2008). As for MTIH, the Institution has had 11 of its curricula qualified by the AUN (ASEAN University Network) standards.

4.4.2.2 The Department

As mentioned before, the case study took place in the English Department, called MTIH-ED. MTIH-ED is the Institution’s flagship faculty, at least in terms of the quality of incoming students and in terms of the size of student enrolment. The past decade has seen the Department’s entrance exam score cut-off point for student recruitment consistently ahead of other departments in the Institution and EFL departments of other universities in Southern Vietnam.

In terms of student enrolments, in its golden era in the 1990s–2000s, when the private sector was not comparable to the state-owned institutions in terms of quality teaching staff, MTIH-ED had an enormous enrolment of just under 25,000 students with campuses for evening classes located in a variety of places across Ho Chi Minh City and even in other provinces. This incredibly ‘super-sized’ enrolment was quite normal at that time when, for instance, the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies had “nearly 20,000 students currently studying English” (Nguyen, 2004, p. 453). It is no wonder that MTIH-ED was once dubbed the ‘cash cow’ of its Institution. In recent years, though, MTIH-ED’s student enrolment has shrunk. It is understood that at the time this study was conducted, the Department’s student enrolment was about 4,000 in total, comprising students from all modes of training. In relation to students of the “chính quy” (full-time) mode, the target students of this
research, the number was approximately 1,000. Despite the decline, such an enrolment remains sizeable in comparison with other faculties of the Institution.

In terms of teaching staff, at the time this study was conducted, MTIH-ED’s academic faculty had 42 full-time members including one associate professor, nine senior lecturers and 32 lecturers. The lecturers were all Vietnamese citizens; none of them were native-English speakers (but there were a few in the next semester). At MTIH-ED, the key criterion for the faculty to reach the next level of lectureship was seniority. In terms of qualifications, nine of the faculty members held doctorates, the level of education that lecturers are required to achieve to be fully qualified to do their job of teaching at the university level (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 58/2010/QĐ-TTg, Article 25). However, half of those doctorates were awarded by domestic institutions via courses in contrastive linguistics. It was disclosed that in such courses, Vietnamese was the medium of instruction and students’ research projects were typically to compare and contrast the Vietnamese and English languages. Regarding the lecturers having completed post-graduate study overseas, the rate was one-third (14/42 faculty members). It should be noted, though, that, as further inquiry found out, many of those lecturers did their courses in a non-English-speaking country in the Southeast Asian region, such as Thailand and the Philippines, where English is also a foreign language like in Vietnam.

Concerning MTIH-ED’s staff development, the lecturers were said to have opportunities to attend ELT conferences and workshops held at MTIH and other institutions in Ho Chi Minh City as well as other cities. The interview with the program administrator showed that certificates of attendance of such events were considered pluses for staff’s performance appraisal, Based on the certificates submitted as evidence for their own professional development, still according to the interviewee, the academic staff at MTIH were believed to have “rather good” opportunities of teacher development. In addition, each of the departments of the Faculty had their monthly “professional development meetings”, informal occasions when they got together to talk about each other’s classroom lesson observations and with visiting scholars about ELT trends in the world.
4.4.2.3 MTIH-ED program and curriculum

MTIH-ED adopts CLT as the teaching methodology, and has three streams of training: cultural studies and literature; translation and interpreting; and English linguistics and language teaching. This aim is evident in the institutional documents and departmental curriculum. It is stipulated in those documents that MTIH-ED’s aim is to “output” graduates with bachelor’s degrees in English whose studies are oriented by one of those three central focuses.

Below is an excerpt from MTIH-ED’s description of its own program, which outlines these objectives for the program under study.

- A general knowledge of Vietnamese language, history, culture, and society which helps them to effectively communicate and grasp current historical, cultural and social features and events, and the ability to compare and contrast them with those of Great Britain and the United States.

- A strong fundamental knowledge of English language skills and English for Specific Purposes which help them to communicate in English effectively and understand and make use of English terminologies in different fields.

- A profound specialized knowledge of English language teaching, English linguistics, translation and interpretation, American-British literature and culture, and the ability to apply and integrate the knowledge in (i) working as interpreters and/or translators, (ii) working as teachers, (iii) working as researchers, and pursuing further studies in areas of English language teaching, linguistics, translation and interpretation, literature, and culture.

- The professional skills necessary to work effectively and successfully in the modern working environment, including communication skills, digital competences, critical thinking skills, resolving arising problems, and the skills to uphold standards of ethics and professionalism.

It can be seen that ability in English language use forms just one of MTIH-ED’s four major targets of training. Ranked number one in the four targets is “knowledge of Vietnamese language, history, culture, and society”, which is expected to form the basis of students’ studies of British and American societies and cultures. Further inquiry into the curriculum gives the impression that too much of classroom time is apparently dedicated to non-English units, which mostly contain political content. This distribution appears to be driven by the regulations that define Vietnamese tertiary education. Indeed, according to the Tertiary Education Law, the
so-called “political quality” is ranked at the top of the list of required training outcomes, while expertise including knowledge and skills of the field under study are further back in the queue ("Luat giao duc dai hoc [Tertiary education law]," 2012, Article 5, Clause 1b). Even in the post-
doi moi era, the primary aims of the new education curricula are to eventually strengthen students’ pride in Vietnamese people and in socialist ideals (Prime Minister Executive Order No. 14/2001/CT-TTg, 2001 [emphasis added]). For this reason, Ngan T. Nguyen (2011) maintains that “the most problematic area of Vietnam higher education is the curriculum: [...] too heavy stress on Marxist–Leninist philosophy and Marxist–Leninist politico-economics, socialism, history of the Vietnam Communist Party and so forth” (p. 78).

Specifically, as outlined in the curriculum, classroom contact hours for English-related units are apparently squeezed for the sake of non-English units. Indeed, of the total 143 credits for the training program, only two-thirds (97) of the credits can be conducted in the medium of English. The rest shall be conducted in Vietnamese (except perhaps for second foreign language credits). Of these non-English units, as many as 17 credits are saved for political and national defence education, including such subjects as “Basics of Marxism and Leninism”, “Processes of Vietnamese Revolution” and “Ideologies of Ho Chi Minh”.

In relation to the English units, only 24 credits are reserved exclusively for teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. That means, language skills and knowledge account for just under 17% of the total time for classroom contact. In terms of time, one credit is 15 periods, so the teaching of English skills and knowledge for the first two years is covered in approximately 270 hours. In addition, the teaching of English knowledge and skills happens in the first two years only; apparently, students are presumed to be able to perform these skills well enough after completing the prescribed 24 credits. In the third and fourth years, students move on to introductory and subsequently advanced courses in linguistics, literature, translation and teaching methodology, and politically-oriented subjects.

It should be noted that MTIH-ED students’ English entry threshold is pre-intermediate at best, and they are now expected to reach the intermediate level by the time they begin their third year. It is perceived that such an expectation is too ambitious given that the time allowance for classroom English learning is only 270 hours. The Vietnamese-defined “pre-intermediate” is assumed to be 3.5, in reference
to the IELTS (International English Language Testing System). This assumption is based on the Vietnamese MOET’s recent guides (e.g., Vietnamese MOET Notification no. 5633/BGDĐT-KTKDCLGD, 2014 and Decision no. 538/QD-BGDĐT, 2014) to exempt students from taking high school graduation examinations in English while still awarding those students the maximum score for the subject (10 marks) if students have a certificate of an IELTS score of 3.5 or higher. It is noted that students can of course use other benchmarks, such as 400 for TOEFL-ITP (Test of English as a Foreign Language – Institutional Testing Program); 32 for TOEFL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language – Internet-based Test); 400 for TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). The assumption is also based on the finding that only a handful of MTIH-ED students scored 10 marks at their high school graduation exam.

Another point to note about the MTIH-ED curriculum is that it appears to be of the “backward design” according to the classification of Richards (2013), because the curriculum design starts with “a specification of learning outputs”, which are used as “the basis for developing instructional processes and input” (p. 20). However, the curriculum has skipped the task of diagnosis of students’ needs, the very first and significant undertaking for the steps that follow for a backward design curriculum, including formulation of objectives, selection and organization of content, selection of learning experiences, etc. Instead, the MTIH-ED curriculum has to base itself on the MOET’s directives, the most important of which is Decision no. 36/2004/QĐ-BGDĐT – Auxiliary for English sectors (2004). According to this document, students’ “good political qualities” are the top training priority of the program and skill, like knowledge, is simply one of the four areas required of the curriculum (Section 1). Such an approach is quite legitimate in the Vietnamese context where education aims to serve the country’s journey towards socialism. It is perhaps in this relation that the MTIH-ED curriculum has been recognized as meeting the AUN accreditation.

From the methodological viewpoint, the backward design curriculum has long been criticized for many reasons, one of which is that it focuses on objectives and neglects the provision of meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences (Richards, 2013, p. 21). In this respect, the criterion of learner-centredness that CLT consistently emphasizes runs the risk of being left unattended in the implementation
of MTIH-ED’s curriculum. In other words, there is some mismatch between the methodology the MTIH-ED curriculum claims to use (i.e. CLT) and the curriculum design it actually adopts.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the contextual factors crucial to the examination of the EFL program implementation of the case study. It was pointed out that although CLT had set foot on the Vietnamese ELT landscape a quarter of a century ago, there remain critical challenges to the operationalization of CLT in the Vietnamese higher education sector. First, the resurrection and development of ELT in Vietnam was enabled by socio-economic orientations, all initiated by political transformations. The adoption of CLT into the Vietnamese classroom happened without proper consideration of local context, especially cultural appropriateness. CLT came in as part of packages of development aid via teacher training programs and the influx of expatriates and materials. The inflow of CLT methodology was made easier owing to its status as an advanced teaching methodology. Second, in the broad context of use, a number of factors were perceived to be unfavorable to the implementation of CLT, including the exam-oriented mentality, limited authentic English use, the absence of a need for communication in English as societal factors; the tradition of knowledge accumulation and the teacher–student power distance as cultural factors; and the inadequacies of classroom conditions as the infrastructure factor. Finally, both the Institution and the Department were oriented more towards research and knowledge teaching rather than communication capabilities. The time allocated to teaching communicative competence was to be squeezed to allow for the teaching of theoretical courses in cultural studies and literature. Further, a major amount of the time budget was taken up by Vietnamese subjects related to ideological education.

The next chapter will discuss the second category of issues, the teacher and teaching factors, another key area of concern in language program investigation (Brumfit, 1984; Richards, 2001a, 2001b).
CHAPTER 5: TEACHER AND TEACHING FACTORS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data related to teacher and teaching factors. The analysis is drawn from lecturers’ responses to the survey questionnaire, the observations of their classroom lessons and in-depth interviews. Also incorporated in the discussion are the responses of the MTIH-ED program administrator. The analysis based on these data will address the research question in terms of how the teachers and teaching as key players might affect the actual implementation of CLT in the classroom. Apart from this chapter introduction and a summary, the chapter has two major sections: teacher factors and teaching factors.

5.1 TEACHER FACTORS

While an array of factors will influence the effectiveness of the implementation of a language program, teacher factors play the crucial role of ultimately determining the success of that program (Richards, 2001a, p. 99; 2001b, p. 388). At varying degrees, those factors can compensate for the deficiencies of other factors and, conversely, aggravate their severity and thus have an impact on the effectiveness of the program. In this section, two significant areas will be brought out for discussion: the context-bound factors defining teacher factors and lecturers’ perception of CLT.
5.1.1 MTIH-ED academic faculty

The factors considered in this section are the background information on the academic faculty at MTIH-ED and their opportunities to thrive professionally at their Institution. Also included are the profiles of the five lecturers with whom in-depth research methods were used.

5.1.1.1 Background information

At the time this research was undertaken, most MTIH-ED lecturers had a master’s or a doctoral degree, a prerequisite for them to be fully qualified to teach at the tertiary level according to a government regulation (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 58/2010/QĐ-TTg, 2010, Article 25). Eighty-five percent of lecturers held post-graduate degrees, indicating an impressive improvement throughout the previous decade. However, further inquiry revealed that nearly two-thirds of these lecturers undertook their post-graduate studies in Vietnam and therefore had not been exposed to an authentic English speaking environment where they could have had sustained hands-on experience of the essential features of communicative competence in daily life and improved their English communicative competence, a condition considered necessary for their confidence in operationalizing CLT in the classroom (Kleinsasser, 1993). As mentioned in 4.4.2.2, among the lecturers who undertook their post-graduate studies overseas, many of them did their course in a regional country such as Thailand and the Philippines, which is an ‘Outer Circle’ country according Krachu’s (1992) model of world Englishes with three concentric circles.

It should be noted that none of the MTIH-ED’s academic faculty was a native English speaker, not even the lecturers teaching on a contractual or voluntary basis. All the lecturers were all been born, raised and educated to university level in Vietnam. Most of them had never been to an English-speaking country. Exposure to “authentic native language environments” has been found to improve non-native language teachers’ proficiency and confidence in the native language (Reves & Medgyes, 1994, p. 364). Regarding the curriculum for English teacher education in Vietnam, Nguyen (2013) strongly advises that a greater amount of time be dedicated to teaching language skills to student teachers to improve their English competence. This would put these students almost on a par with native speakers, and lecturers
could then focus on capitalizing on pedagogic competence rather than spending valuable time developing competence in the target language (Cots & Díaz, 2005, p. 218). It was also found that many lecturers at MTIH-ED had taken a degree purely in contrastive linguistics courses. In these courses, the instruction medium was Vietnamese; the primary areas of studies related to pure linguistics rather than applied linguistics; their theses were about contrasting linguistic features between Vietnamese and English; instruction was mainly given in the lecture mode; and the study was research-based. These courses did not have a single unit in language teaching methodology, giving the students no chance to be exposed to English use and CLT implementation.

According to the survey results, however, lecturers indicated there were several channels through which lecturers said they had an opportunity to learn about CLT. The most common opportunity cited was the ELT units they had recently undertaken for their post-graduate studies. The lecturers had completed master’s studies, most of which were in TESOL, and those courses had compulsory language teaching theory components. Those master’s courses were provided either by MTIH or by other institutions that undertook joint training programs with overseas universities, most of which were in Australia, such as La Trobe University and Victoria University. In addition, the lecturers surveyed reported that other useful channels were available to them. For example, 86% of the lecturers said they had been sent to conferences and workshops as part of refresher courses. Lecturers also reported that they found it helpful to discuss CLT with their colleagues. Finally, 81% of surveyed lecturers said they had been doing their own research into CLT and its related concepts and thus were familiar with the buzz words used in language teaching circles over the past decade.

5.1.1.2 Lecturers in focus

As indicated in 3.5.1., this case study focused on five lecturers, all of whom participated in the research methods of questionnaire survey, classroom observation and interview. Table 5.1 provides brief profiles of those five lecturers: Ly, Bich, Sinh, Tet and An. In terms of education, two of those lecturers had a post-graduate

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2 The names of research participants presented in this thesis are all pseudonyms.
degree awarded by an overseas institution in addition to their locally-awarded
degrees in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)
while the other three had only been trained locally (also in the field of TESOL).
Their teaching experience was in the range of four to seven years.

Table 5.1
Profiles of Lecturers in Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blocks of subjects</th>
<th>Lecturers</th>
<th>Qualification &amp; experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening &amp; Speaking</td>
<td>Ly</td>
<td>MA in TESOL (local); teaching at MTIH-ED for seven years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, Writing &amp; Grammar</td>
<td>Bich</td>
<td>MA in TESOL (local); teaching at MTIH-ED for five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years 3 and 4</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
<td>Sinh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFL &amp; Linguistics</td>
<td>TEFL</td>
<td>Tet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation &amp; Interpreting</td>
<td>Sinh</td>
<td>Tet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Literature</td>
<td>An</td>
<td>Tet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lecturers named taught different subjects from the MTIH-ED curriculum
in the four-year program. The MTIH-ED curriculum has two blocks of English
subjects. The first one includes subjects related to language skills (listening,
speaking, reading and writing) and knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary and
grammar), taught in the first two years. In the years that follow, year 3 and year 4,
the subjects aim to teach content of subject matter. In this second block, the
curriculum specializes into three streams: Linguistics and TEFL; Translation and Interpreting; and Culture and Literature. It should be noted that the voice of the program administrator, whose name is At, can also be heard in the discussion of teacher factors.

5.1.1.3 Professional development

Opportunities to be exposed to CLT methodologies were apparently abundant for the academic faculty of MTIH-ED. One of the interviewees said:

Regarding CLT training for our teaching faculty, lecturers have lots of opportunities to attend different workshops and conferences relating to communicative language teaching. They also have had opportunities to hear a lot about this method, so I think that they are knowledgeable enough to apply that method in their classroom. (At)

However, that claim was made by the program administrator. According to the classroom teachers, ongoing opportunities for lecturers to develop their teaching were reportedly not readily available at MTIH, a common problem in the Vietnamese ELT profession (Nguyen, 2004; Pham, 2007). Interviews showed that internal on-the-job-training opportunities were not readily available. One of the lecturer interviewees reported that he had never received CLT training during his employment at MTIH-ED. The opportunity had been given to him, he said, during his previous roles at a private institution where he taught basic English. In the meantime, he said, he was drawing on what he had learned from that course, using a trial-and-error approach in the search for a teaching method that might best work for his current classes, which were of a higher level.

Most of my knowledge of CLT actually comes from reality. The workshops that I attended to a certain extent were admittedly about CLT, but they were mainly designed for teaching at lower levels. As for the tertiary level, there was not much relevant, but in general I can adapt that [CLT] knowledge [for the tertiary level]. In some classrooms where CLT did not prove to be effective, I later on sought to find why, and then [was] trying to make adjustments I thought would help CLT to work. (Tet)

The unavailability of CLT training at MTIH was verified by another lecturer interviewee. “We don’t have any chance to learn about CLT at our university”, said Bich, “nor is there any practical course about the application of CLT available here”.

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This lecturer said her knowledge of CLT was drawn from the master’s course she had recently completed. It can be noted, however, that CLT was simply one of the many topics under study in one of the many units of that master’s course. According to Ly, in her master’s course, she studied about language teaching methodology in general and there was no CLT-specific component at all. “We learned about a variety of teaching methods, such as the grammar translation method, the audio-lingual method and CLT”, Ly recalled, “and we compared and contrasted their potential advantages and disadvantages”. This lecturer explained that teaching methods were taught in only one session where the professor-in-charge was simply presenting a review of key teaching tenets and they had very little time for discussion. Consequently, “we have had to rely on self-study by reading about things like task-based teaching”, this lecturer said, “and to be honest, we are not really confident of what we are doing as we have never seen how CLT should take place in the classroom”.

It was interesting to learn that for the lecturers who were trained overseas, their knowledge of CLT was basically derived from the post-graduate courses they had taken in Vietnam. Sinh and An credited their knowledge of CLT to their study for the (master’s) degree in TESOL undertaken prior to their overseas study. “I learned about CLT when I was taking the TESOL course in Vietnam”, stated An. This lecturer said she did not think she gained adequate familiarity with the CLT methodology through the classes she had attended at her American university. “Back then over there”, An said, “we had a lot of discussion time in the class and the professors were very open minded, but I am not sure whether CLT was used”. The same story was revealed by the other overseas trained lecturer:

I didn’t have any training unit about CLT because it was a course in general linguistics. Right, I did not learn anything about language teaching methodology when I was there. However, when I studied for my Master of TESOL in Vietnam before that, I had learnt some theoretical things about teaching methodology and got some knowledge about CLT. (Sinh)

Sinh’s mention of “some theoretical things” is significant in two ways. First, with the “some” (“máy” in Vietnamese), she indicated that the learning (of CLT) was not systematic, and it was random. Second, “theoretical” (“lý thuyết” in Vietnamese) implied that the study did not have a practicum component during which some
demonstration of CLT teaching should be given. In fact, the lecturers who had attended the master’s courses in TESOL reported that the course lessons had all been conducted in the lecture mode.

As a result of inadequate career development opportunities, Vietnamese teachers of English are among the three most “vulnerable” groups feared to be poorly equipped with teaching expertise (Li, He, et al., 2011, p. 72; the other two groups are teacher in physical education and in computer literacy). Further, English teachers in Vietnam take private classes, which pay better, and this only adds to their already heavy workload. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) remark that these teachers “have the opportunity to work mornings, afternoons, and evenings” (p. 211). Unfortunately, two decades later, this busy life continues to be the norm for these English teachers.

In summary, in the context of this study, the lecturers did not receive consistent and adequate training in CLT. While they said there were a number of ways for them to learn about the methodology, they received no teacher support from the Institution. Their experience of CLT implementation proved to be very limited. Lecturers’ understanding of CLT was rooted in a variety of sources, and therefore their interpretation and implementation of the approach was apt to vary greatly from one lecturer to another.

5.1.2 Lecturers and CLT

In this section, three key issues relating to lecturers’ perception of CLT will be addressed: the extent to which lecturers appreciate the significance of CLT in the Vietnamese context; how confident they were in implementing CLT in their classroom; and their knowledge of CLT.

5.1.2.1 Endorsement

In this case study, lecturers supported the use of CLT in their own classrooms. This support is theoretically and empirically considered an important precondition for successful implementation of the teaching methodology in the classroom (Benson, 2012; Carless, 2004; Mai & Noriko, 2012; Richards, 1990; Roberts, 1998), particularly in the Vietnamese classroom where the teacher controls how the teaching (and hence the learning) should take place (Nguyen, 2002; Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2000). One lecturer claimed his support was realized by action:
I apply CLT in most of my classrooms. CLT is the main and official teaching methodology that I use in classrooms. Actually, in my classroom, at all of my teaching periods, at the basic levels such as teaching basic skills or at teaching major subjects, it is important to consider learners the central point. Hence, most of the time, my teaching approach is the student-centred approach, rather than teacher-centred approach. (Tet)

The same claim was made by other lecturers. Sinh said she applied CLT in her lessons: “I lay special emphasis on using this communicative language teaching methodology”, claimed the lecturer of syntax. Likewise, Ly claimed she used CLT in her classroom, adding that “most of the students like studying with this methodology”.

The lecturers gave several reasons for implementing CLT in their classrooms. First, as Tet stated, students’ eagerness for communicative activities encouraged the lecturers to adopt CLT in his classroom:

To tell the truth, whenever I apply this method [CLT], it can be said that, firstly, students are motivated a lot. Students are very eager when they are given opportunity to study with this method. The reason is that when I use this method, I use a variety of activities rather than presentation only. Therefore, they [students] are very eager; and secondly, maybe they learn something from that method. I can say that in my classrooms, my students show their strong motivation and support for all activities of CLT. (Tet)

Second, the lecturers believed that CLT would help students to acquire fluency. Tet resorted to CLT because “after a period of teaching, I realize that my students need to focus on fluent communication”. Third, the lecturers apparently held the view that CLT could provide their students with activities that would liberate them from mechanical learning such as repetition drills and translation. As Bich said, “Activities done in CLT ways relieve students from the drills that will quickly cause boredom”. This lecturer remarked that her students welcomed the change of atmosphere that could be brought about by the use of CLT-oriented activities. “They can then do something other than sitting still”, she remarked.

5.1.2.2 Confidence

Despite such claims, also in the in-depth interviews, lecturers said that they had limited knowledge of CLT and thus less confidence in making CLT happen in
the classroom. “The way I am currently applying CLT in the classroom is based on my limited knowledge of CLT”, said Bich. This lecturer admitted that her use of the CLT methodology was totally based on her own speculation: “I apply it as the way I think how it is”. This self-doubt was shared by another lecturer, Sinh, who said: “I have just a rough understanding of CLT. […] I am trying to use this method in the classroom myself [but] I’m not sure whether I am using it properly”.

It is interesting to note that Sinh was among the lecturers who had studied for their master’s degree overseas, at an American institution. In relation to Sinh’s response, it appears to be unwise to assume that lecturers trained in western countries will automatically be exposed to CLT and will therefore have the confidence to adopt it in their classroom on their return. CLT is not necessarily commonly used there despite their very strong claims of CLT. Leal, Bettoni, and Malcolm (1991) found that although 75% of the language departments in Australia they surveyed claimed they used communicative methodologies, the graduates from such universities reported that they perceived the primary aim of the courses they had taken was to teach literature, writing and reading.

Even if lecturers were exposed to western teaching methodology in their overseas programs, they would still have to be professionally ready to make a “laudable transition from awareness to awakening”, which would require them to know how to “change the practice of everyday teaching” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 76). The need for such a transformation is documented by other scholars such as Matsutani (2012), Pham (2004) and Phan (2008), who remark that the teachers coming from Krachu’s Expanding Circle are by no means in a position to adapt western methodologies to their classroom although they have a chance to expose themselves to western teaching methodology.

With limited confidence in using CLT and inadequate teacher preparation in the methodology, lecturers indicated they would embrace any opportunities that were offered to them. One of the lecturers said:

I think we need to undergo those CLT training courses. We need to learn how to organize [a] communicative classroom effectively. I once learned about it, but it was perfunctory. They told us such things as the teacher should be the facilitator. However, as I told you, how to be an effective facilitator is another issue. (Bich)
In the meantime, Bich believes she has been unsuccessful in implementing CLT. “I try and try”, she said, “but it is still a failure”.

5.1.2.3 Interpretation of CLT

While some lecturers spoke confidently about their familiarity with CLT, many did not seem to have a complete understanding of the approach. For example, even the program administrator believed that CLT is primarily about teaching speaking. “This method”, At said, “can help students to talk to each other, not to translate books, which can be done with the Grammar Translation method”. Unfortunately, At was not the only interviewee equating CLT with teaching speaking. Sinh, one of the two overseas trained lecturers, said using CLT, she prioritized fluent communication. “It means”, she elaborated, “I focused on helping students to speak whatever they can speak”.

Such a view (that CLT is to teach speaking) is listed by Thompson (1996, pp. 11-12) as the second of the four most common misconceptions about CLT. Put in the Vietnamese context, this misconception might be due to the loss in translation of the term “communicative” (i.e. “giao tiếp” and its related words). The Vietnamese phrase “tiếng Anh giao tiếp” (communicative English) commonly translates as ‘conversational English’. In fact, in everyday discourse, the Vietnamese term “giao tiếp” normally denotes oral communication, although strictly speaking its meaning covers written communication as well.

Another biased conception of CLT held by the lecturers is that they insisted lesson tasks take place in the medium of the target language only, i.e. English. An maintained that “The use of Vietnamese shall be limited to the minimum level in my class […] My policy is that they will have to use English only”. This lecturer further revealed that one of the tricks she had used to get students to speak in English was to explain the requirements of the assignments, topics that students could not afford to ignore, in English only. An said she would refuse to answer students in Vietnamese in all circumstances, even when they came to talk privately to her (about the requirements) after class.

In theory, however, absolutely avoiding L1 is never the best policy or practice according to CLT principles. Instead, it is quite common in recent versions of CLT that “a judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible” (J. C.
Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 156). This contention has been stated in more recent textbook materials about CLT, such as Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 125). The reason is simple: The use of L1 will facilitate the teaching and learning of L2 in the classroom. Without any use of Vietnamese, both students and teachers would encounter problems in maintaining the flow of communication.

Among the lecturers’ interpretations of CLT, there is one noticeable comment:

To my understanding, CLT means that we should create an environment for students to communicate freely. It means that we should create a friendly and comfortable environment for students to speak freely. It is the time for them to practice necessary communicative oral skills. (Sinh)

The solemn classroom atmosphere appears to Sinh to hinder the effective implementation of CLT. Creating a situation in which students speak without reservation, as Sinh suggested, requires that students be freed from the Vietnamese classroom traditions by which they are expected to sit still and listen. In this apparently stuffy ambience, most students will not feel comfortable enough to speak up, let alone challenge their teachers, because of the socially fixed hierarchical nature of the relationship between teachers and students (Phan, 2001). There always exists a great power distance between teachers and students in the Vietnamese classroom, and students are not allowed to voice their opinions (G. Ellis, 1994; Nguyen et al., 2006).

Sinh’s revelation suggests that lecturers should think of specific ways to build their students’ confidence, to increase their willingness to talk, and they should “give careful consideration in their lesson plan to the balance between student talk and teacher talk” (Brown, 2007a, p. 170). In fact, in most Vietnamese classrooms, one of the thorny issues is that teachers talk too much and their topics are not always interesting enough to motivate students, a problem also found in other contexts (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, to make CLT a reality in the classroom, more time should be allocated to student talk and communicative activities such as group work and pair work (although strictly speaking, classroom group or pair work is not “an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts” (Savignon, 2007, p. 213)). However, realizing this in the Vietnamese classroom is still a big endeavour.
for teachers, because every day they have to deal with large-sized classes, a heavy focus on textbooks and examination pressure ahead.

In summary, whereas the lecturers appeared to be faced with a number of challenges in implementing CLT in their classrooms, they thought it was advisable to use the approach. In fact, they all claimed they were using CLT in their lessons. However, it was evident in the lessons observed that this was rarely the case. This problem can be partly attributed to the limited relevant training they had received and perhaps also to their lack of practice in using CLT. In the section that follows, the analysis of the data will show how CLT was actually used in the lecturers’ lessons.

5.2 TEACHING FACTORS

Together with teacher factors, teaching factors play a crucial role in the success of methodological implementation. In focus in this section will be lecturers’ actual implementation of CLT in the classroom. The case study’s findings about teaching factors were drawn from classroom observations; showing how the five selected lecturers conducted their lessons reveals whether and how CLT was actually implemented in the case study. The evidence-based data were derived from two sources: the audio-recordings of the classroom sessions and the notes taken on the classroom lessons observed. Subsequently, the data were analysed in conjunction with the lecturers’ responses in their in-depth interviews together with the information gleaned from the student interviews.

The findings of the teaching factors presented in this section are organized firstly according to the major features of classroom activities in reference to COLT (Spada & Frohlich, 1995, Part A). The classroom observation protocols were used in this case study as “sensitizing concepts”, because “it is not possible to observe everything” (Patton, 1987, p. 82, as cited in Lynch, 1996, p. 123). The four features to be presented are: participant organization, content, lesson control and teaching materials. Then, there is a sub-section named “Other issues”, which deals with anything that does not fall into those four categories.
5.2.1 Participant organization

Participant organization is a key factor in how well CLT operates in the classroom. Unfortunately, in the classes observed for this study, participant organization was teacher-centred, which is not conducive to CLT-oriented teaching taking place. In this section, three significant issues will be discussed: few opportunities for interaction, dominance of lecture mode and lack of student learning support.

5.2.1.1 Few opportunities for interaction

Although advocates of CLT insist that “genuine” or “natural” classroom interaction is essential, Seedhouse (1996) has convincingly argued that achieving this is likely to be beyond the capabilities of many teachers. Indeed, very little interaction was observed between students in the classes of all five lecturers in this study. What typically happened in all classes observed was that the lecturers talked and the students listened. Once in a while, students responded (typically when invited), but their responses were brief, usually no more than five words. The classroom was often primarily teacher-focused, with the lecturers standing either on the elevated base in front of the chalkboard or at the lectern, even in the skills-based lessons. Meanwhile, students, seated in rows, appeared to listen to the lecturers and sometimes to their classmates who were responding to the lecturers’ questions. Whatever happened in the classroom, the activities were always teacher-led. It is estimated that 90% of observed classroom activities were teacher-centred. This happened even towards the end of a two-hour or longer session when the lecturers were speaking more quietly and with longer pauses between their utterances and appeared to be tired. One lecturer explained her efforts to keep talking:

When the student-centred approach takes place, students don’t understand their lesson, so I have to go back to the role of the knowledge transmitter. Or when they feel bored in their discussion group, I still have to go back to the position of lecturing. I know that it is not good for students, but I don’t know how to change the situation. Another point is that those students striving for good academic records tend to prefer the teacher-centred approach because they want to have something to bring back home after every class. (Bich)
With the lessons being conducted in this way, there was little pair or group work taking place, hence negotiation of meaning did not happen. There were few attempts on the part of the lecturers to frame the student activity into communication-oriented practice, a common problem in the Vietnamese classroom (Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring, 2014). It was observed that interaction between students was minimal. Interactional activities as the “fundamental organizational tissue of learners’ experience” (Mondada & Doehler, 2004, p. 502, as cited in H. D. Brown, 2014, p. 206) rarely took place. Even in the lessons of Tet, who was teaching how to teach English communicatively, only a total of ten minutes was allocated to student group work. Even then, allowing for several minutes of teacher instruction, students really only worked together for about seven minutes, and unfortunately student talk was all in Vietnamese. Further, in the group work there was no genuine discussion of the topics under study because group members simply listened to group leaders, who appeared to be more eloquent than the rest of the group. Throughout the activity, most group members only listened, although in this scenario they were listening to their group leaders instead of to their lecturer. When interviewed, one of the group leaders said he would have let his members talk if they had liked to, but since he could see nobody willing to do so, he felt he had to talk to let the lecturer see that his group was really working.

The classroom ambience, however, was not always solemn, and there were instances when students were very excited. They happened in a speaking lesson during a competition between two groups of students. Students were divided into two teams in order to compete with each other to provide definitions of terms, which were said aloud one by one by the lecturer. The rule of the competition was that students’ answers were to be spoken through the group representatives only. Still, the students paid energized attention to the teacher’s terms and tried to help their representative who was competing on their behalf. Some of the students were seen putting their hands together in front of their chest as a sign of praying for their team to win. Being able to engage the students in the lesson activity was a sign of having a successful lesson. Particularly, the lecturer’s use of flash cards to which students responded was arguably a piece of tangible evidence of CLT being implemented.

However, student excitement alone is not enough; the ultimate aim should have been to engage students in communicating in English, or in practising doing so.
During the competition, except for the two players representing the two groups, the rest of the class were not doing much other than watching their spokesperson. The teacher could have encouraged greater student participation by changing the competition rules, empowering all students to give their own definition of the terms rather than each of the two groups appointing one representative. Their cheering is not a substitute for their having a chance to speak English. In the interview that followed, the lecturer explained that if students knew the answer, they could have made it known via their group representative. She went on to explain that if everyone had been allowed to speak, the class would have become chaotic several minutes into the competition. It turns out that the competition was designed “more as a management device than as a means of developing communicative competence” (Brumfit, 1984, p. 76).

5.2.1.2 Dominance of lecture mode

It could be seen that the lecture mode was dominant throughout the lessons observed; the lecturers certainly did not follow the CLT-oriented practice of “withdrawing completely from an activity once it is in progress” (Littlewood, 1981, p. 93). In An’s classes, for example, teacher talk took up almost the entire lesson. There were many instances in which the teacher lectured non-stop for more than ten minutes. During the lesson on “the causes of the American Revolution”, for example, the lecture talked for just under 15 minutes. It could be seen that halfway through the lecture, students’ attention was beginning to wane, but the lecturer kept on talking. By this stage, many students appeared to be hearing rather than really listening to the lecturer (“one can hear a sentence without listening to its communicative import” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 61)). The lecturer was not playing the role “of facilitator and guide” for students’ learning as recommended by CLT principles; instead she was assuming “an all-knowing font of knowledge’ (Brown, 2007a, p. 47). According to Whong (2013), CLT, with its humanistic emphasis, “[promotes] the idea that active learning through doing and discovery is more effective than the passive absorption of bodies of knowledge” (p. 125). Nevertheless, it was interesting to learn from a student later that she had found the lecture informative. “The lecture,” she said, “established the key points of the lessons, which would then the [be] basis for us to study further in our own time”.
Another example was the lessons by Sinh. Again, lecturing took up most of the classroom time. It seems that classroom activities fell into two categories: lecture and non-lecture. Take, for example, the lesson on grammatical structure in which the lecturer presented for more than ten minutes on the subject. Not only was that teaching deductive, it left students unoccupied and unattended as the lecturer was busy with presenting. Some inductive teaching would have better engaged the students. For example, students could have been provided with grammatical and ungrammatical fragments of language and, working together, could have been asked to discover the rules on their own. Sinh’s lecturing happened as well at the end of the sessions. The last five minutes were taken up by the lecturer restating the rules for making grammatically correct sentences. In the interview that followed, Sinh said, “I have to admit that my lecturing time takes place most of the time, yes, because I don’t let students talk much in the classroom”.

In the lessons observed for this study, it looked as if all five lecturers mainly relied on their own lectures and explanations to teach students. This approach, however, would have been suitable only for “authority-oriented learners” who “preferred the teacher to explain everything, liked to have their own textbook, to write everything in a notebook, to study grammar, […]” (Nunan, 1998, p. 170). Such traditional teaching neglects the other types of students, including “concrete” learners, “analytical” learners and “communicative” learners (Nunan, 1998, p. 170). Pair and group work, with the benefits of opening up for students “possibilities of interaction which are not normally available in the whole class approach” (Brumfit, 1984, p. 74), rarely took place.

However, the lecturers appeared to maintain their belief in the value of being a knowledge transmitter. The lecturer of the listening and speaking lessons said:

If we [lecturers] play that role [facilitating role], I am afraid that it is impossible. We can only do this at a certain point. The reason is that Vietnamese students are not active enough and they need more guidance from their lecturers. Actually, Vietnamese students are very passive, they are not active in pursuing knowledge by themselves, so they still need the guidance and help from their lecturers a lot. (Ly)

The role of knowledge transmitter was also highlighted by An. The American Studies lecturer said her lectures were especially useful to finalize and restate key
points of the lessons for students to master. After several hours of lessons, she said, students need to be sure of what knowledge to memorize. Regarding this point, the students interviewed said that lecture was an indispensable teaching mode. “Lecture,” said one of them, “is a must at this level of tertiary education, as we are no longer high school students. We will not be able to go deeper into the issues under study unless there is ample time for lectures to happen”.

The lecturers certainly had reasons for maintaining the tradition of viewing teachers as authorities in the class. The lecturer in syntax said:

> If tradition is maintained, students will still show their respect towards their teachers. Regarding foreign language lessons, students tend to assume that the atmosphere can be democratic. If the teacher gives students too much freedom, they will be too free in the classroom, and their behaviour might become inappropriate in light of the traditional culture. Therefore, in my opinion, the teacher will take control of the classroom. (Sinh)

This view is shared by her colleague:

> Considering the teacher–student relationship, even when the teacher assumes the facilitating role, it is necessary the roles be clearly defined. I mean, teachers are teachers, and students are students. Only by doing so can serious learning really happen. If we insist on leaving teacher–student relationship to be equal, the situation would be very difficult. (Bich)

The emphasis on the authority of lecturers’ knowledge was also made by by Tet, who said, “In reality, lecturing from the teachers is indispensable to students. At a certain extent, I still have to guide and teach them in their language learning”. It can be assumed that this view is typical of Confucian philosophy; similar findings are also found in the Chinese context (see, for example, Yang, 2013). According to Roberts (1998), “language teaching behaviour cannot be separated from pedagogic models inherited from the mother tongue culture” (p. 97).

### 5.2.1.3 Lack of student learning support

There were instances where pair/group work happened. In those cases, students had a chance to study in a seemingly more communicative way. In the syntax lessons, for instance, Sinh’s students were designated to work in groups to find out whether or not a number of sentences that were provided were grammatical.
However, there was little teacher support for student negotiation of meaning to take place effectively. The facilitating role of the lecturer had hardly been seen here. CLT principles state that “teachers are in the classroom to facilitate learning and to help students with what they want to say” (Harmer, 2007, p. 69) and, metaphorically, “teachers must prepare learners with tools they need to act” (Savignon, 1987, p. 240). Sinh, for instance, was not seen to give the students practical opportunities to learn about syntactical analysis nor did she use positive comments to encourage students in their discussions. According to Hall and Walsh (2002), the two versions of classroom exchange commonly found in teacher–whole group interaction include “initiation > response > evaluation” and “initiation > response > follow-up”, but in those lessons observed, the last elements (i.e. evaluation/follow-up) were not in evidence. The lecturer appeared to take this student discussion as her time for a mini-break, sitting at her own table and waiting. The lecturer was not seen playing the roles of “prompter”, “participant” or “feedback provider” (Harmer, 2007, pp. 347-348).

Further, the students mostly spoke in Vietnamese when lecturers were not around. Although the “judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible” in the CLT approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 156), the lack of monitoring let students’ excessive use of Vietnamese happen, a factor that would in turn “reduce the number of learning opportunities” (Leeming, 2011, p. 375). Even scholars who recognize the importance of L1 use in L2 learning warn that overuse of L1 will soon discourage “target language practice and communication” (Carless, 2008, p. 336). It can be seen that putting students into groups will not necessarily make them work together and communicate with each other in the target language. Teacher supervision and support could have been given to ensure that each and every student was a proactive participant and very little of the mother tongue and off-track chatting took place. The two students from this class who were later interviewed argued that since the focus of the lessons was syntactical issues, their use of Vietnamese helped to make it easier for everyone in the class to participate in the discussion. “If we were to speak in English only,” one of them hypothesized, “I am not sure how long the discussion would last before we could finalize our answers”.

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5.2.2 Content

It could be observed that all lessons were heavily knowledge-focused. The knowledge that was focused on was either that of the subject matter or that of English language. Meanwhile, the integrated teaching of skills was not commonly emphasized.

5.2.2.1 Exclusive coverage of subject matter

As indicated earlier, two of the five selected lecturers taught language skills and grammar whereas the other three taught syntax, language teaching methodology and American studies. As for the three latter classes, observations showed that the lesson content was all about the subject matter and no teaching was seen taking place in terms of function, discourse or sociolinguistic use of English. According to Nunan (2004, p. 52, as cited in Harmer, 2007, p. 69), students being “involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks” is key to the successful implementation of CLT. The lessons observed for this study did have instances where teaching was “meaning-focused”, but the activities were not at all communicative.

Students did not seem to be able to respond to the lecturers’ discourse. In Sinh’s lessons, students’ attempts to communicate appeared to be inhibited by two problems: their knowledge of the topics under study was limited, and there were too many difficult questions for them to cope with. The lecturer started the lessons with “What does ‘structure’ mean?” The students’ response was silence, with open eyes directed to the lecturer as if the lecturer had asked the question as a lead-in and students were waiting for the lecturer to go on to provide the definition of ‘structure’. This waiting time was noted to last at least two minutes, yet no further action was taken by the lecturer. Subsequently, the lecturer asked, “Have you read your book on page eight?”, a question that could be taken as a reprimand. Some students then looked away from the lecturer, and they all remained tight-lipped. In this particular case, the teacher could have been more flexible, changing from the ‘big’ question, the definition of ‘structure’, to smaller questions that would have been easier for the students to handle. This could have been done, for example, by providing a mix of sentences, phrases, words and sentence fragments and then asking “Do you think these are structures?”
In effect, what the lecturer did was close to that suggested approach, but she asked too many questions in succession. First, she asked students to explain the meaning of the following three definitions of syntax:

(1) The study of how sentences are structured.

(2) The part of grammar that represents a speaker’s knowledge of sentences and their structures.

(3) The system of rules and categories that govern the combination of words into phrases and sentences.

Without waiting for the students to mentally process that question, the lecturer immediately asked students a new one: “What do you think about the grammaticality of these two sentences?”

(a) I go to school to cry.

(b) I like, I want, I need.

Not surprisingly, the student did not answer either question. They may have been overwhelmed, which was apparently a problem for many students, as was explained by one of student interviewees. “I have to accept that my chances to speak up in the class are limited”, he said, “because my high school teachers all spoke in Vietnamese and during the two years prior to this course, my English study was exam-oriented practice”. It appears that communication got stuck because of questioning techniques rather than of the nature of the aims of the lessons (i.e. teaching knowledge). Not only will asking questions in this way greatly discourage student talk, it could deter average (or below) students from speaking at all.

5.2.2.2 Form-oriented lessons

The strong interest in teaching knowledge was seen not only in the classes in syntax, language teaching methodology and American studies; it was also there in the two classes that taught listening and speaking, and reading, writing and grammar. It could be observed that the two lecturers had a much stronger focus on form than on language function. In the lessons of both Ly and Bich, the time spent on students’ skills practice was estimated to be less than 10% of the total lesson time. In those infrequent instances, meaning negotiation almost never happened. The classroom activities did not take place or progress in relation to the key principles of CLT.
listed, for example, by Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 172). First, students were not seen to have opportunities to learn English through using it to communicate; instead, the lesson time was spent on lecturers teaching new vocabulary. Vocabulary teaching was done by means of definitions and translations, and there was no authentic environment for students to practise English communication. Second, meaningful communication was not seen taking place as students were generally expected to get the right answers to the questions in the course books. Students were seen taking notes of the answers provided by the lecturers rather than negotiating meanings through interaction. Third, the time allocated for students to speak English was so short that fluency was unlikely to be achieved. Fourth, the four skills were not taught in an integrative way. The lack of integrated skills teaching had arguably let pass opportunities to enhance students’ communicative competence (Renandya & Jacobs, 2008, p. 299).

Regarding communicative competence, the key concept of CLT, it was seen that only grammatical competence was emphasised while the other competences were overlooked. Even textual competence was rarely seen being taught. Unfortunately, lecturers did not draw students’ attention to, for example, cohesive devices in the numerous texts they worked on. This neglect was more serious regarding sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, illocutionary competence and sociocultural competence.

It seems that lecturers always favoured the teaching of grammar. Problem-solving tasks, role-play and games as key CLT activities (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122) had to give way to the teaching of grammar. The TEFL lecturer offered the following reflection on the necessity of grammar teaching:

As for grammatical, I think that it is necessary for us to provide our students with such knowledge. If teachers enter the classroom and create fun with games, they will be hailed as being successful in applying CLT in the classroom because their student participation is high. However, at the end of the day, what students have acquired from the lesson will be another story. (Tet)

Insistence on teaching accuracy rather than fluency can be found in other interviewees’ responses. The syntax lecturer said:

I can see that no matter how much students can talk, if we don’t focus on accuracy, students can’t talk well. Therefore, the teachers need to help students with
regard to accuracy. To my perception, CLT’s principles focus on fluency only. However, if we only focus on fluency, students will think that they can talk a lot, but their quality of speech is not good, they still make grammatical mistakes and lack vocabulary to express themselves with. (Sinh)

No doubt this accuracy-oriented view was not exclusive to lecturers teaching language knowledge; it was taken, for example, by her colleague who taught American studies. “Whenever talking to anyone”, said An, “if [students] encounter basic pronunciation mistakes, it is necessary for the teachers to correct their mistake”.

5.2.3 Lesson control

In all five classes where lesson observation took place, the content was primarily under the control of the lecturers; when lecturers relinquished control, the lesson was determined by the texts. These realities were obviously not congruent with the principles of CLT that say learners must take responsibility for and have authority over their own learning.

5.2.3.1 Teacher-controlled

As mentioned earlier, classroom activities were all teacher-led. Leading the activities, the lecturers arguably monopolized the control of classroom. Of the many teacher roles promoted in the CLT approach (Littlewood, 1981, p. 19; 92), lecturers simply played the one of being an instructor while the others (like overseer of students’ learning, classroom manager, consultant, adviser, etc.) were not seen demonstrated in the lessons observed. The lecturers were seen to be such dominant speakers in the classes that the classes were all quiet when they did not speak. The progress of the lessons depended on the lecturers’ lesson plans rather than being oriented by the students’ needs or interests. An example of failure to follow up the personalized aspects of students happened in the TEFL classes. As a lead-in to the topic of teaching English to young learners, the lecturer asked who had experience of tutoring young children. Although several students raised their hand, the lecturer did not ask for details of those students’ teaching experience. Instead, he rushed to the next question, “What are the differences between teaching adults and teaching children?” Not only was the second question more challenging and abrupt and thus
likely to inhibit students’ willingness to speak up, it was unfortunate that the lecturer had missed a good opportunity to let students take some control of class activities.

Interviews with lecturers showed that teacher control was maintained intentionally. An, for example, resisted the idea that there should be a democratic learning environment for fear that her power in the classroom would be challenged and that the teacher would no longer be respected by her students if they enjoyed an equal relationship with their lecturer.

The teacher also needs to have certain authority in the classroom. The teacher still needs to control her classroom. I think that, for example, if students communicate to their teachers so informally, teachers may think that it goes against the social norm and they even think that students are not respecting or even being rude to their teachers. Hence, the teachers will feel uncomfortable and unsatisfactory with their students. I notice that sometimes the learners raise their opinions which the lecturer dislikes, for example, the learners criticize their teachers strongly by using insensitive words. In this case, the lecturers will be hurt. Therefore, I think that the social norm should be observed in the classroom. There should be a certain distance between lecturers and students. Students should not consider their lecturer as their friend. It is against the norm in the academic environment. (An)

This viewpoint does not actually agree with CLT, which says that “the teacher’s role as a ‘co-communicator’ places him on an equal basis with the learners” (Littlewood, 1981, p. 94). Meanwhile, students were not seen taking a proactive role in making creative language constructions, and they seemed reluctant to risk using trial and error. Even when lecturers asked questions and appeared to wait for students to respond, very little student response was observed. When students did respond, it normally took them three, four, five and even ten seconds just to start doing so, and their responses were usually very tentative. Nevertheless, students’ unwillingness was not because they did not have the answer or because they were uncooperative. This could be seen, for instance, in the reading, writing and grammar classes. The lecturer asked about a single dad’s life challenges following the presentation of a video clip, and students remained silent until some of them were nominated to answer the questions. An interviewee student revealed that in these instances, he preferred to wait and see if the lecturer was actually expecting the students to answer the question or if the questions were simply intended as a lead-in for the lessons. Another student said that it was not worth answering such questions because “there
would have been a wide variety of answers and you would have been unable to know which of them was being expected by the lecturer anyway”.

5.2.3.2 Textbook-bound

Observations for this study revealed that when lecturers did let go their control of classroom activities, the lesson would then rely on the textbook. This would happen when lecturers stopped lecturing and asked students to read handouts or course book pages and answer the questions there. Instead of being a jumping-off point for lecturers and students, texts controlled the classes, which inhibited “the spontaneous interaction in the class and the development of that interaction” (O'Neil, 1990, as cited in Crawford, 2008, p. 87). On these occasions, the lecturers simply waited while the students read the texts or worked on the tasks they had been asked to do.

An example of textbook-controlled time happened in the listening and speaking classes. Ly had the students read three pages of the textbook and then do the vocabulary task based on the text, named “Getting the meaning of the word from the context”. Students worked on their own in this activity. When their time was up, the lecturer read the questions and students gave their answers aloud. This was done with the lecturer as one party and the whole class as the other. There was no sign of the teacher facilitating students to do the task or to collaborate with each other to work out the answers. The teacher appeared to be preoccupied with finishing the tasks with little regard to how well the students could use English for real communication. The lecturer could have asked follow-up questions about why (not) another of the choices provided could have been selected as the answer. Giving the correct answers is not as important as leading the students to the correct answers.

In the interview, the lecturer explained that the vocabulary tasks were already there in the book and many students could have consulted the answer key. Their work on the tasks, in her opinion, would therefore be not genuine anyway.

They [the tasks] are there in the course book, so we had to cover them. If you wanted to see how they really perform, you would have had your own handouts that had exercises they had not done before. As you can see, I did have my own handouts for them but in that instance, I wanted to make sure the course book’s
tasks were done by all students. If I had not asked them to do the tasks in the classroom, many of them might have skipped doing them. (Ly)

One of the students interviewed admitted that many of his classmates had already known the answers and they were just waiting for the lecturer to confirm that their answers were correct. Personally, he found the time spent on the tasks useful anyway because it gave students a second opportunity to go through the tasks.

5.2.4 Teaching materials

According to CLT principles, teaching materials should be composed of a variety of sources of authentic language. These materials should include not only written texts but also audio-visual and realia to accommodate the needs and preferences of a variety of learners including “concrete” learners, “analytical” learners, “communicative” learners and “authority-oriented” learners (Nunan, 1998, p. 170). While appropriate use of teaching materials is a helpful scaffold for the lessons, misuse of them can turn them into a “debilitating crutch” (Crawford, 2008, p. 81) thus steering the lessons off the preferred tracks.

5.2.4.1 Text-only materials

The materials used in the observed lessons were simply texts. The input of information was all done by means of texts, with the students being given handouts to read. Realia as teaching aids were not seen employed in the lessons observed. According to CLT principles, learners should be offered the possibility of working with media other than text (Breen & Candlin, 1980). This problem of teachers’ limited use of teaching aids and technology has been found in other studies, such as (Nguyen et al., 2014). It is interesting to note that laptops and projectors were used quite often in the classes observed. However, the devices were used mainly for the presentation of lectures rather than providing input for students to learn to communicate in English. Lecturers had their files of lesson notes, normally in the PowerPoint format, and played them on those devices to present their lessons. In other words, as is noted by Bui et al. (2012), laptops and projectors were merely used in place of chalk and board rather than as an innovative way to enhance the communicativeness of the lessons.
However, in one activity in the reading, writing and grammar classes, the laptop and projector were used as a teaching aid, which proved to enhance the quality of the lesson. It was a lead-in activity for the reading text about single fathers. In this task, the teacher divided the students into two big groups. Then the teacher played a video clip about a single dad. Students took notes as they watched the video. After that the students discussed among themselves the daily tasks a single dad is faced with. The use of the video clip could be seen to have positively changed the lesson atmosphere. Students became more animated when the video clip started. Following the clip, students were seen to have good ideas and the English vocabulary required to discuss the topic with their classmates. It was all thanks to the words they managed to pick up from the narrative in the clip, such as “parenting”, “dual role”, “childminding”, etc., which they would unlikely have otherwise known.

In the interviews, the lecturers said that now that the students were at university, the use of realia was no longer necessary. “At this level, classroom contact time,” said Tet, “should be a time to get ideas that will then become springboards for students to study further in their own time”. However, the two students interviewed said they embraced the enjoyable time watching the video. “If the lecturer had not played it [the video clip] for us,” one said, “we would have been unable to get one and watch ourselves”. One student interviewee added that the use of video clip was among the factors that make classroom lessons different from self-study.

5.2.4.2 Lack of locally produced materials

The materials were all western-made. As a result, many of the materials appeared to be very new to the students. Not only did students have difficulty with the lexicon, they had problems understanding what the texts were all about. This happened in the American Studies lessons in which the lecturer asked the students about their impressions following their reading of a text on the Civil War, the House of Representatives and Abraham Lincoln. Students were seen to quickly turn on their digital dictionaries to look up words and expressions they didn’t understand. Even with the help of dictionaries, some students had to ask their classmates about terms such as “Puritans”. For many students, who had grown up in an Oriental and
Buddhist culture, even the Vietnamese translation they found in their bilingual dictionary did not prove helpful.

The lecturer also seemed to experience this culturally rooted difficulty, as is clear in the definition of “Puritans” she offered to the students: “Puritans were those who wanted to reform and purify the Church of England”. Interestingly, many students were seen to be hesitant to write down this definition and appeared to be waiting for further explanation, but unfortunately the lecturer stopped short there and moved on to another term. Students’ hesitancy may have been due to their difficulty in understanding the new concept “the Church of England” and inexplicability of replacing “Puritan” with the verb “purify”. Certainly, the lecturer did not appear to have invested enough time in lesson planning, a teacher-related problem commonly found in Vietnamese higher education (Nguyen et al., 2014), but this instance shows that ultimately the lecturer’s low level of cultural awareness could have been part of the problem.

Regarding this definition, the students said they would not have exclusively relied on the lectures to work out the meaning of “Puritans”. However, one of them said, “I am quite confused with the meanings of many terminologies that cannot be looked up in the dictionary. This is an introductory course in American Studies, so everything is new to us”. Regarding the use of materials in the classroom in general, the students all said they were basically happy with what they had to study with. “We are learning English, so authentic materials help us to be exposed to the real English that is actually used”. Another student, nevertheless, said she wished there had been more materials about Vietnam for students to study. “They would have been useful,” she said, “because we want to learn the words that can be used to talk about Vietnam”. Regarding this point, recent developments in CLT suggest that instructional materials, together with activities, should incorporate local contexts “that are familiar and relevant to language learners’ lives” (see, for instance, Alptekin, 2002, p. 63).

5.2.5 Other issues

Following are the findings from the observation of the classroom lessons that do not neatly fall into the categories outlined by COLT. The researcher was alert to such issues. According to Lynch (1996, p. 110), this alertness is needed in classroom
observation because COLT, being a structured instrument, might miss important instances.

5.2.5.1 Thrift of praises

It could be noted of the lessons observed that the lecturers were not very generous in praising their students. When a student gave a good answer, the lecturers tended to respond, “Yeah, and what else?” This happened even early in lessons when the lecturers were still feeling fresh and encouragement could have changed how the lessons proceeded to the next stages. As an example, in the lead-in activity to his lesson on teaching English to young children, Tet asked his students what important factors teachers working with such learners should take into consideration. His students did not respond straight away, but after a while at least two good responses were heard from the rows of tables, including “attention span” and “more patience”. However, Tet barely acknowledged the students’ contributions to the lesson. He went on to ask “What else?” He paused, the students remained silent, then he burst out, “Using visual aids, flash cards, repetition…” It is well known that “teacher behaviour has a direct influence on student behaviour” (Day, 1990, p. 153), and this lecturer influence was not positive in this case. His lack of praise and encouragement meant the students were reluctant to respond to his second question, and their attention was diverted from what he was saying when they hurried to note down his list of items. It seemed as if the lecturer was trying to compete with his students and was determined to look for something that the students did not know.

In the same lesson but during a later activity, the lecturer asked his students what they might need to do when dealing with teaching passages to young children. In response to this ambiguous question, the classroom fell into silence. The next minute, however, one student said in a soft, tentative voice, “We take turn[s] to teach sentence by sentence”. The lecturer again said, “Yeah, and then?” He did not positively acknowledge the student’s response, which in fact had ‘saved’ his question. In fact, the students looked perplexed, and it became apparent that they were not sure if the lecturer was referring to a reading passage or to a children’s story, which is the wording he used later in the lesson. It is unfortunate that the lecturer did not openly, emphatically and honestly acknowledge the students’ contributions, which is highlighted by CLT as being a positive indicator of students’
learning (Littlewood, 1981). In addition, students’ answers could have been seized upon to expand and elaborate on what the lecturer had just said. This tactic would have served multiple purposes, two of which are to encourage the students and to scaffold the lesson content (Crawford, 2008). Further, according to recent research findings (Bao, 2014), silence is not always negative; it serves “to rehearse linguistic accuracy”; with appropriate teacher’s talk, it can be “applied to produce meaningful silence” (p. 147).

Obviously, according to CLT, due consideration must be given to the affective factors of learners (Harmer, 2007, p. 78; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 123-124). Learning is assumed to be more effective when students are given the “opportunity to express their individuality by having them share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 124). Crawford (2008, p. 87) asserts that learning needs to engage learners not only cognitively but also affectively. From the pedagogical perspective, teachers are urged to seize opportunities “to reduce inhibition in the L2 classroom by creating a ‘safe’ atmosphere for students to take risks” (Brown, 2014, p. 148). To address students’ classroom fears about speaking up, Dufeu (1994) recommends that teachers “establish an adequate affective framework” so that students will feel they can step out of their comfort zone and get involved in the classroom interaction (p. 89).

5.2.5.2 Formulation of questions

A second observation related to the lecturers’ formulation of questions, an indicator of effective teaching (Richards, 1990, p. 5). Typically, they asked very broad questions to lead into the lesson topics thus allowing for a variety of answers. However, the questions did not seem to work well for Vietnamese students, who were seen to be confused when confronted with this type of question. Students were overtly hesitant to answer mainly because they worried that their answers would be incomplete, as was revealed in subsequent student interviews. With their limited English, it would not be easy for them to provide an answer that required no addition or further adjustment. Again in relation to the TEFL lessons, students were seen to be particularly unresponsive to the lecturer when he asked general questions. When the lecturer asked what important factors teachers working with such learners should take into consideration, his students were silent and some were even seen looking
away from the lecturer. Also in this lesson, a similar thing happened when the lecturer asked why peer correction was a good way to teach children vocabulary. This question was asked following the lecturer’s presentation, which stated that peer correction is one method of teaching vocabulary to children. Again, the classroom fell silent, perhaps because the term “peer correction” is difficult to understand, as one of the students said in the follow-up interview. Another student interviewee suggested that the silence may have been due to the general nature of the question.

In many of the lessons observed, following the broad questions, to which the students did not respond, the lecturers were not flexible enough to rephrase their questions or, better still, break their questions down into more specific questions that would have been easier for students to answer. Instead, lecturers simply provided the answers themselves, and so teacher talk continued to dominate the classroom. It seems the lecturers did not utilize “the advantages of providing longer wait-time after questions”, a technique that could have significantly “affected student participation” (Richards, 2008, p. 20). Meanwhile, CLT is about motivating students to communicate, not necessarily to obtain the correct answers. Effective communication is the end goal for students; the tasks they are given to complete are simply the means of achieving that goal.

5.2.5.3 Nomination with name list

In an attempt to get students to respond, the lecturers were observed using a method often used by Vietnamese teachers across all subject areas: looking at the class name list and choosing one student to answer the question. Instances of this were quite frequent. In the TEFL lessons, when no students responded to his question about peer correction as a technique for teaching vocabulary to children, the lecturer selected specific students to answer the question. These students responded in a voice that could not have been softer (in fact, it was inaudible). This showed they were willing to cooperate with the teacher, but they did not know the answer. In the reading, writing and grammar lessons, the lecturer used the name list to choose respondents to her question about the possible challenges that single fathers might be faced with (after no students answered her question). Again, the students were unable to answer the question. There is nothing wrong with the use of name lists; in fact, they can be used effectively to enhance fluency by, for instance, “showing them
photographs or introducing topics at any stage of a lesson and nominating students to […] say the first thing that comes into their head” (Harmer, 2007, p. 350). However, in both of the instances cited, the lecturers had opted for the name lists instead of looking for students who might have had better answers but were hesitant to speak up. The lecturers could have used nonverbal techniques, such as making eye contact and monitoring facial expressions, which are valid and meaningful in student–teacher interaction.

One lecturer later explained that one of the “advantages” of using name lists to nominate students is that it guards against perceptions of bias. Bich explained that she would use name lists to nominate respondents when it came to difficult questions, and that by picking the names rather than the faces, she would appear to be more impartial. It should be noted that at the tertiary level, it is not uncommon for Vietnamese lecturers to know very little about their students. Some lecturers even said that sometimes they were unable to match their students’ names and faces. Although knowing student profiles enhances student–teacher rapport and facilitates individual learning pace, this practice is not very much in evidence in the Vietnamese context of higher education. Second, Ly said, the use of name lists makes all the students concentrate on the question. “During the time you glance through the list for a name to pick”, she said, “students would then be working very hard down there”. One of the student interviewees agreed that many of them would not fully concentrate on the lessons until they knew they might be called to give answers in front of the class. The student explained, “Many of us get very scared when the lecturers are reaching for their name lists; none of us would have liked to lose their face in front of the class for being unable to answer the lecturer’s questions”. However, this may create the impression that answering teacher’s questions are seen as a burdensome duty to perform rather than an opportunity to seize.

In brief, it was observed that genuine CLT teaching did not actually take place in the classrooms of the lecturers in this study. Essentially, there was lack of communicative purpose and communicative desire in the activities, the focus was on form rather than on function or content, and teacher intervention was constant, all of which are indicators of “non-communicative activities” (Harmer, 2007, pp. 70-71). These problems were aggravated by the teacher talk and then the text controlling the
lesson content, along with other issues related to the lecturers’ use of classroom techniques. In reference to the “criteria for evaluating how communicative classroom activities are” (Ellis, 1990, pp. 31-32), the purposes of lessons were not seen to be communicative, nor were the students’ desire; in the activities, students did not appear to have real messages to say; the language used was not of variety; the lecturers did most of the work; and there was high control of materials. With reference to earlier authors such as Canale (1983) who propose “the five guiding principles”, CLT was not put into action because the observed lessons did not integrate the different communicative competences; learners’ needs were not attended to; the interaction was not meaningful and realistic; learners’ native language skills were not brought into use; and there was no curriculum-wide approach.

5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has reported the findings from the analysis of the teacher and teaching factors. In relation to teacher factors, it was revealed that the lecturers did not have a sound knowledge of CLT. Also, the lecturers did not prove to be confident in using CLT in their classroom, and their interpretations of CLT varied. Lecturers’ knowledge of CLT was arguably based on a shaky foundation, mainly due to their inadequate formal education in the approach and their lack of opportunities for self-improvement throughout their career path. These inadequacies made it hard for them to adapt the approach to their own context.

In relation to teaching factors, it was evidentially shown that very little CLT-oriented teaching actually happened in the classroom. In the majority of lessons, the teachers lectured while the learners sat and (perhaps) listened to the lecturers. Communication was primarily one way, from the lecturers to the students, therefore negotiation of meaning could not take place. When there was no lecturing, the students usually worked on their own without any real interaction with their classmates or the teachers. There was little interaction between the lecturers and students and even less between students themselves. When students were assigned into groups for topic discussion, there was little teacher support in terms of input and discipline supervision. As a result, English interaction between students did not happen and group discussion was monopolized by a few students. Regarding the
lesson content, it was seen that lecturers were more interested in covering subject matter than creating opportunities for language use and practice. The lessons were often under the control of the teacher, and when this was not the case, the textbooks dominated. Regarding materials, the primary sources were western-oriented. Throughout the classroom observations, several other major issues emerged, including lecturers’ failure to praise students for their contribution; lecturers’ limited capabilities in using questions to lead the lessons; and lecturers resorting to traditional practices such as use of name lists. The students looked like spectators watching the lecturers acting out what lecturers thought they should be doing without much consultation or consideration of the students’ interests or other affective factors.

It must be noted, however, that the findings presented above do not necessarily suggest that the lecturers were poor performers. Rather, what is implied is that their teaching practices did not follow the principles and practices of CLT, a teaching approach that is “highly contextualized” (Savignon, 2007, p. 217). Investigating possible discrepancies between CLT and the Vietnamese culture, brought problem areas to the fore. Ultimately, this study is not an evaluation of the lecturers, either in terms of “subject matter knowledge” or in terms of “action-system knowledge” (Leinhardt & Smith, 1984, as cited in Day, 1990, p. 43). It could be that the lecturers were conducting their classes appropriately for their particular cultural context. The next chapter will look at another group of factors that can be seen as the mirror image of the teacher and teaching ones: learner and learning factors.
CHAPTER 6: LEARNER AND LEARNING FACTORS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the investigation related to learner and learning factors that were found to be significant in the implementation of CLT in Vietnamese classrooms. The findings will help to address the research questions in terms of how students and their learning might have affected the actual implementation of CLT in the classroom. The data are drawn from students’ responses to the questionnaire survey, the observations of their classroom lessons and also from their responses to interviews.

6.1 LEARNER FACTORS

This section deals with the key issues related to learner factors. First, it provides background information about the students under study. Second, it looks back at students’ high school experience of studying English. Third, it investigates students’ current motivations for studying English and their time commitment to it. Finally, the section specifically touches on students’ communication-oriented study of English.

6.1.1 Student background

In terms of gender, the ratio of male/female students at MTIH-ED was approximately one to three. This proportion is representative of ELT departments in Vietnamese tertiary institutions where female is always the dominant gender in the student population. Studies have long shown that in second language learning females generally perform better and have more positive learning attitudes than males (R. Ellis, 1994, p. 202). According to the results of the questionnaire survey for this case study, 72% of the student respondents were females and 28% were
males. In terms of age, the students were born and grew up well after the promulgation of the doi moi (reform) policy in 1986, the year seeing the resurrection of the status of English in Vietnamese education and society (Do, 1999). Also, according to the survey, 97% of the students were born in 1992 or later. That means, as presented in 4.1 and 4.2, the majority of students grew up at a time when English was embraced as the number one foreign language in Vietnam and CLT was beginning to set foot in the Vietnamese ELT landscape.

Regarding the location of the high school the students came from, one-sixth (17%) of the students studied English in a rural school, whereas nearly a quarter of them (24%) came from a semi-urban institution and noticeably nearly two-thirds (59%) of them were from an urban one. The cumulative percentage of students from urban/semi-urban schools was sizeable, at 83%. This rate is perceived to be quite common in ELT departments in major Vietnamese cities. Students from rural schools would naturally experience more disadvantages in the years of English study leading up to the competitive university entrance examination, so fewer of them were selected to go to university.

Based on the majors that students had chosen to study at MTIH-ED, it can be seen that proficiency in English communication would be of great importance. According to the survey, 47% of the respondents indicated that they were or would be undertaking the program specializing in translation and interpreting. This means, for nearly half of the students, they would like to become translators and interpreters, jobs in which fluent communication would be key to their employability following their graduation. Still according to the survey, more than one-third of the students (35%) revealed that their choice of major was English language teaching and linguistics, meaning that typically they would like to become EFL teachers following their graduation. Although the responsibilities of this job do not necessarily require outstanding communication ability, fluency in English would surely be a ‘flagship’ strength the teacher–students should possess in order to gain employment and be successful as classroom teachers. Noticeably, very few students took culture and literature as their major, with just 17% of the students surveyed saying it was their choice.
6.1.2 English program in high school

Most of the students under study reported that they had undertaken the seven-year program of English study in high school. Up to 91% of the surveyed students studied English from year 6 to year 12. (The remaining 9% took the three-year English program, meaning they studied English in the years 10-12 of high school.) According to the current Vietnamese education system, secondary education is composed of seven years, starting with year 6 and ending with year 12 (Nguyen, 2006; SarDesai, 2001). When students began their year 6, they were 11 years old, an age well after the ‘golden’ time for second language learners to acquire a native-like accent, which is six years of age according to Long (1990). Even if they had started learning English earlier, achieving a native-like accent would have been too ambitious a target given the circumstantial constraints of learning English in an EFL environment where there is hardly any chance or need to use English on a regular basis and the classroom English learning is limited.

Regarding classroom English instruction, as reported by Nunan (2003), in years 6–9 (junior high school), Vietnamese students have four ‘periods’ (“tiế̂t”) of English learning per week in the classroom, with one period being equal to 45 minutes; in years 10–12 (senior high school), the time allowance is reduced to three periods. On average, according to the curriculum allocation (Institute of Educational Strategies and Programming, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), by the time students finish high school, they have completed approximately 500 hours of English schooling. This is clearly significantly less than the total time children growing up in an English-speaking country would typically have devoted to the learning of L1, which is estimated by Lightbrown (1983) to be between 12,000 and 15,000 hours for a child up to the age of six (as cited in Byram & García, 2011, p. 504). For the students who took part in this study, upon leaving school they were required to reach the level of “pre-intermediate”, a concept whose interpretation has been highly variable in the Vietnamese context. More recently, however, this achievement level has been internationalized, requiring that high school graduates obtain the B1 level in reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Vietnamese MOET Document no. 7972/BGĐĐT-GDTrH, 2013).
There was variation in the high school English programs undertaken by the students under study. For the senior high school years, years 10–12, students had the option of ‘intensive’ English study. This program applied to students entering the ‘social sciences’ and ‘D’ streams. Students following the ‘intensive’ English program received 140 periods of English study per year compared to the 105 periods per year for those following the regular stream. In relation to the students under study, English learning was ‘intensive’ for more than half of them in (senior) high school: 53% of the surveyed respondents reported taking ‘social sciences’ or ‘D’ stream in senior high school. For these students, the total time spent studying English at school was around 580 hours. Students did, of course, spend additional hours learning English at private schools or classes and at home, but the data on this commitment was unavailable.

6.1.3 Circumstantial constraints

There are two important circumstantial constraints perceived to influence students’ English study at university: their time commitment and their motivation for learning English.

6.1.3.1 Time budget

According to the survey, whereas one-third of the student respondents (34%) reported that they studied English because they enjoyed learning it, just under a quarter of them (23%) said they spent all their available study time learning English. Nearly two-thirds of the surveyed students (63%) said only part of their time commitment was allocated to English study. For these students, their time commitment was shared between their study of English and of other competences deemed necessary for gaining employment following their graduation. Still according to the survey, 12% of surveyed students said that they only spent a small share of their time on learning English because they had been occupied with other preparations for their future employment. Students reported that as the labor market was becoming increasingly competitive for job seekers, English competence alone would be inadequate for their employability.

Considering the responses according to the year the MTIH-ED students were in, it is evident that the further into the course students were, the more time they
spent learning something other than English. Table 6.1 below shows that students’ time dedicated to English study shrinks as the year goes by (32%, 25%, and then 19% and 19%). Concerning year 3 and year 4, whereas the percentage for “All time” available remained almost unchanged, there was a decrease in terms of the second choice “Part of time” and then an increase in terms of the third choice “A bit of time”.

*Table 6.1*

**Students’ Use of Time for English Study after School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All time</th>
<th>Part of time</th>
<th>A bit of time</th>
<th>(Almost) No time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further inquiry shows that in addition to English study at MTIH-ED, students had other classes to attend. They reported they had to take vocational courses in office skills, import and export accounting, customer service, to name just a few. As said, the student interviewees revealed that English knowledge and skills alone would not give them all the skills required to obtain work. Even in relation to such jobs as teachers, translators, interpreters and researchers, there would be such additional vocational requirements as computer literacy, classroom teaching experience and customer service. “When I finish my university study”, one of them said, “I would stand fewer chances to get a job in an office if I do not have these additional diplomas”. With that mindset, the student disclosed she had been taking courses in business skills, accounting and office management. Remarkably, it was found that several students were enrolled in courses for bachelor’s degrees in finance, business administration and foreign trade at other colleges and universities also located in Ho Chi Minh City. Those full-time courses undoubtedly took a large proportion of students’ time.
6.1.3.2 Motivation

Student motivation is a significant factor in program implementation (Brumfit, 1984; Richards, 2001a, 2001b). It is considered “a star player in the cast of characters assigned to L2 learning scenarios around the world” (Brown, 2014, p. 158). The questionnaire survey undertaken as part of this study revealed that the students’ motivation to learn English was distributed almost equally across these three drivers: (1) They enjoyed learning English; (2) they wanted to increase their opportunities for further study; and (3) they wanted to have better employment opportunities in the future. Each of the drivers accounts for approximately one-third of the total percentage, at 34%, 32% and 31% respectively. If communicative competence was what students actually wanted to develop (while they enjoyed learning English) and/or if communicative competence was one of the factors helping students to fulfil their dreams of studying further or getting good jobs, students were likely to embrace CLT teaching in the classroom and strive to develop communicative competence for themselves.

In practice, however, communicative competence was not necessarily embedded in any of those three drivers of students’ English study. With regard to the first driver, according to the Vietnamese tradition, students’ focus would possibly tend to be the study of English as a subject of research. This means, the English language would become an object of research for students. If this approach were taken, students would study to learn about English rather than to learn to speak English. As for the second driver, unless the students were planning to study overseas where English was a medium of instruction, communicative competence in English would not be a central target. If, for instance, students were to pursue postgraduate studies at a domestic institution, their bachelor’s degree in English would exempt them from the English selection exam to their program; in other words, communicative competence would not play a decisive role. Considering the third driver (i.e. studying English for employment opportunities), in most cases (being employed by a foreign-invested company being an obvious exception), a degree in English studies rather than actual capabilities in English communication would be required.
An interesting revelation in the results of the analysis of the survey responses is that there is a noticeable difference between the first- and fourth-year cohorts in terms of the first and third reasons for their English study, as shown in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2

Drivers of English Study: First- versus Fourth-Year Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-year Drivers of English study</th>
<th>Fourth-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41% Enjoying English study</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38% For further study opportunities</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16% For employment opportunities</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Other reasons</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 shows that freshmen appeared to be strongly motivated by the enjoyment of learning English and, to a lesser extent, by the need to pursue further studies. However, for senior students, employment opportunities came top among the key drivers of their English study. In the last year at university, the first and second drivers appeared to give way to the third driver, which was deemed more practical. This mindset difference is understandable given that the fourth-year students were about to enter the labor market whereas the first-year students were focusing more on enjoying their studies rather than being practical.

6.1.4 Communicative English study

As presented in Chapter 4, by the mid-2000s, CLT had established its position as an official teaching methodology in state-controlled educational institutions in Vietnam. It was then stipulated in government documents and official teacher guides that CLT be promoted in the classroom in order to teach English communicative competence to Vietnamese students (Vietnamese MOET Decision no. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT, 2004). In the broad context, by this time CLT had been
widely championed as an ‘innovative’ teaching methodology in the teaching profession. In these circumstances, it can be assumed that the students under study, who started to study English in school in the mid-2000s, had been taught with CLT in their high school classroom.

However, follow-up interviews with students indicated that CLT had not necessarily happened at school, as was presumed, and that they were not very confident in their communicative capabilities. Recalling their experience at high school, the student interviewees said the lesson activities were all about teaching knowledge of English including grammar rule memorization, drill exercises, discrete vocabulary teaching, etc. English communication, they said, was not the area of concern as they had to focus on studying for exams, which were mainly grammar-oriented. What happened, they reported, was that in the classroom the teachers taught them the new words and grammatical structures prescribed by the course books, and at home they had to make sure that for the next lesson they would be able to recite the grammar rules and the vocabulary items. One student interviewee traced the reason for students’ “passive” learning style to their experiences of English learning in high school:

> We students have been passive and unwilling to talk since the time we were in the earlier years of schooling. I think this inertia originated from high school. The teachers were then not at all keen on encouraging students to communicate in the English classroom. There was very little interaction back then between the teacher and students, much less between students. (Vinh Quoc)

It can be noted that this student interviewee, Vinh Quoc, came from a high school located in an urban region, where ELT resources were generally better than those in rural areas. Also, as a selected contestant for the annual inter-city English competition, Vinh Quoc himself had the privilege of attending advanced English classes for the competition. However, he said, the lessons were all oriented to test-taking strategies to win the competition. The problem of limited communication in the classroom, in Vinh Quoc’s words, “has continued to be as it was into the time the students are already at university”.

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3 As noted in 5.1.1.2, the names of research participants presented in this thesis are all pseudonyms.
The classroom observation also showed that communication-oriented lessons were far from common at university level. Many student interviewees indicated that they were not very confident with the modest communication skills they developed at university. One student was quite straightforward in her evaluation, saying that MTIH-ED’s teaching was mainly about morpho-syntactic knowledge:

> At our institution, given this curriculum, we have been taught mainly grammar and vocabulary. Any other things about communication, we have had to learn them by ourselves. We do not have an opportunity to develop our communication skills, not at our institution, not at our department. There have been few occasions when we could develop our communication capabilities. (Ngoc Thanh)

According to this student, as communication skills were not well attended to in the classroom lessons, students would need to develop those skills in their own time. Ngoc Thanh said, “They give you the foundation there and you have to teach yourself the communication skills you might need”. Sharing this view, another student interviewee revealed that at MTIH-ED she had been provided with language knowledge but had had to work out herself how she could increase her communicative competence. She said the following when asked to comment on the communication-oriented components of the curriculum:

> I think I should be rather confident with the knowledge I have been provided. It is certainly rather good in comparison with the knowledge students from other English-teaching institutions may have received. For we have been taught a wider and firmer foundation of knowledge. (Nhat Khanh)

This interviewee intentionally only spoke about the knowledge she was given, suggesting that she did not greatly appreciate the communication-oriented teaching at MTIH-ED. On the other hand, Nhat Khanh praised the course she was taking for their provision of knowledge for students. In her interview, she went on to say that the knowledge gained from the TEFL lessons would, for instance, be very useful for students who ended up becoming teachers. Nhat Khanh did not appear to blame anyone in particular for the scarcity of communication-oriented lessons. In fact, she held a very positive belief in the implementability of CLT in a context broader than that of MTIH-ED:
Most of the students, I think, have now had a chance to study with a variety of learning conditions by which the new methodology [CLT] is used. Also, in this modern time, you are supposed to be proactive and to demonstrate that you can do this or that. CLT, therefore, is an appropriate methodology. (Nhat Khanh)

One of those “learning conditions” was the extra English classes available for students at private language centres. Nhat Khanh explained that attendance at these classes was voluntary, and that they were all about preparing students for English tests that would certify their standard of English competence. In fact, the survey revealed that more than half of the students (54%) had already scored rather well in internationally renowned tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC as well as in Vietnam-recognized tests. In reference to the IELTS score bands, many of their scores were reported to be 5.5 points or above. Another learning condition mentioned by Nhat Khanh was the MTIH-ED’s own library, where abundant English resources were available for students’ self-study. However, the departmental library policy dictated that materials could not be borrowed and used at home. Still regarding learning conditions, it should be noted that there was no English-speaking club on campus.

In summary, communicative English did not appear to be the central focus of the English lessons students had received, in high school or more recently at university. The time allowance for English study was limited in high school, and it was not really much better at university. Students were unable to be wholly dedicated to English study as they were occupied with other items on their agendas that were presumably vital for their employment in the future. Particularly in terms of their motivation to study, communicative competence was reportedly not the ultimate goal; many students would eventually need a bachelor’s degree in English studies, a springboard for them to join the labor market.

6.2 LEARNING FACTORS

This section presents the learning factors in the MTIH-ED’s program implementation. First, it describes the classroom reality of the lessons observed. Second, it presents students’ views of learning as revealed through the interviews. Finally, it explores students’ endeavors that may present challenges and favorable conditions for CLT implementation in the classroom.
6.2.1 Classroom reality

This section focuses on learning factors. It has areas of concern that are different from those of the corresponding section of Chapter 5 (i.e. 5.2), since “learning is not the mirror image of teaching” (Richards, 2001a, p. 223; 2001b, p. 407). However, cross-references are made between learning and teaching factors wherever relevant.

6.2.1.1 Interaction and negotiation of meaning

CLT principles state that students’ learning of language happens when they interact with each other in the target language and through such interaction they negotiate meanings with each other (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 223). However, very little student–student interaction was seen taking place in the observed lessons. With lecture being the dominant teaching mode, little time was left for student-oriented activities. As described in 5.2.1, the classroom was teacher-fronted rather than organized in small groups. This was particularly common in the lessons on TEFL, Syntax and American Studies, which were all oriented to teaching knowledge of subject matter. In those lessons, student interaction happened when the lecturers talked to the whole class following their lectures. The interaction was mainly teacher-initiated, and students simply responded to the lecturers’ questions rather than genuinely interacting with lecturers. Perhaps partly because of their aims (i.e. mainly teaching content), the lessons were characterized by “a transmission model of learning” by which students were “passengers, being carried forward in the learning experience by the teacher” (Nunan, 2013, p. 69).

Also, in such instances, students did not all have equal chances to respond, because speaking opportunities were seized by more confident and verbose students, typically occupying the front seats closer to the lecturers. Meanwhile, the more reserved students did not seem to be proactive in seeking their own opportunities. Usually these students would not have a chance to speak until they were asked to by lecturers (using name lists to nominate; see 5.2.5.3). These findings are not surprising given that the results from the questionnaire survey on lecturers showed that as many as 60% of the lecturers admitted that they used CLT in only one-third of their classroom time.
In relation to target language use, students were seen using some English in their responses to lecturers. However, as indicated in 5.2.1.1, the interaction was hardly ever sustained with multiple exchanges and students’ utterances were quite short. Also, interaction in English was rarely observed. Between students themselves, interaction happened only in the few team-work activities during which, as aforementioned, verbose students monopolized the discussion. Particularly towards the end of the activities, students were seen using primarily Vietnamese. This L1 use happened most often when students did not seem to have the right English terms or when they appeared to struggle to express complex ideas. The reliance on Vietnamese was especially evident as students used bilingual (English–Vietnamese) dictionaries to look for words they would need to express themselves.

During the classroom observations, negotiation of meaning between students happened infrequently. As indicated earlier, meaning negotiation occurred mainly between lecturers and the whole class. Now and then, negotiation happened between lecturers and a small number of more confident students. In such instances, the lecturers did more of the talking. It was noted that more genuine negotiation of meaning appeared to take place in the lessons of TEFL, perhaps because students really were seeking information. In other words, there were genuine information gaps to fill in those lessons. For example, students in TEFL lessons appeared to be interested in finding out what factors they would need to pay special attention to if they were to teach young children. In the Syntax lessons, it seemed that students simply wanted to list the factors that make a particular combination of words grammatical or ungrammatical. Meanwhile, in the lessons on skills and grammar, genuine information gaps did not appear to exist and thus students’ negotiation of meaning did not actually happen. For example, students did not seem interested in talking about single parents’ life challenges as it was not much relevant to young Vietnamese students.
6.2.1.2 Student modality

Student modality – that is, “whether [students] are listening, speaking, reading or writing, or whether these skills occur in combination” – is a key indicator of whether CLT-enhanced learning actually happens in the classroom (Spada & Frohlich, 1995, p. 18). The classroom observation undertaken for this study, however, showed that the student modality in the lessons observed was basically (students) listening (to lectures) most of the time. Students’ listening, though, was not followed by activities requiring students to respond accordingly to what they had been listening to. Nor was it designed as a follow-up task for another previous task connected with it. Essentially, students’ listened to lecturers’ lecturing. The lessons were normally three hours long, and towards the end of the lessons many students appeared to listen to the lecturer rather than comprehend everything they heard. Such were instances in which, in the words of Widdowson (1990), “one can hear a sentence without listening to its communicative import” (p. 61).

An example of students having to listen too much to the lecturer was the lesson about “the causes of the American Revolution”. The lesson was dominated by teacher talk, with the lecturer lecturing on the topic for almost the entire lesson time. It was noted that none of the students raised a question in the instances when the lecturer stopped talking for a short while, and there was no Question and Answer session at the end of the lecture. Ten minutes into the lecture, students’ attention was seen to begin to dwindle, and some of them looked out of the window apparently daydreaming. One reason for students’ reduced attention in this instance was that the topic was simply too difficult for them to grasp; they were not given the tools to understand the socially and culturally embedded reasons for the events leading to the revolution. It is unfortunate that no relevant video clips or other realia were used.

In relation to the lessons of Bich and Ly, the student modality was seen to be complex, indicating its learning purpose through integrated language skills. In Bich’s reading comprehension lesson, students were seen to be involved in activities that required not only reading but also listening and speaking. In Ly’s lesson, students were asked to read texts about single parents’ lives and then talk to each other about the challenges single parents’ faced in raising their young children before they were invited to watch a video clip on the same topic, single parents’ challenges.
Comparing the five lecturers, it could be seen that communicative-oriented activities were used more often in the lessons of Bich and Ly (but students’ communication in these classes was not necessarily more authentic). This difference could well have been due to the nature of the lessons they were teaching. While the primary aim of Bich and Ly’s lessons was making language use happen, Sinh, Tet and An (teaching Syntax, TEFL and American Studies respectively) had to meet two aims: teaching the subject matter and teaching communication. Unfortunately, Sinh, Tet and An were all occupied with teaching the content, neglecting teaching language. It was observed that there was no attempt to use content language integrated learning, a technique that has proved to be effective in achieving the dual function of teaching language competence and subject matter knowledge (Georgiou, 2012; Llinares, 2015). All in all, despite the wider variety of activities available, students in the skills lessons were not seen having opportunities to use the skills in an integrated way.

That said, Ly’s lessons could have been made more communicative. One way of doing this could be to make the participant organization more student-centred so that, in the warm-up activity as an example, each and every member of the two groups could have been given the opportunity and the motivation to speak. What actually happened in that activity, however, was that only the representative of each group was engaged in the vocabulary-defining competition. Also, the content could be customized to students’ needs so that the students genuinely feel part of the lesson. Further, students could be given control of the lesson so that, again, learning would be more effective with students talking and writing about issues related to their own experience (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). With this in mind, teaching materials could have been modified to better suit the readers’ areas of interest.

In summary, the teaching of skills in the lessons observed was not integrated to reflect an authentic use of language. Instead, students passively listened to the lecturers; they were not engaged in interactive activities that would require participants to utilize the information they received to produce English.

6.2.2 Views of learning

The extent to which students embrace CLT techniques will determine how successfully CLT is implemented in the classroom. “The ultimate success in learning
to use a second language”, Savignon (2007) notes, “most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner” (p. 107). This section looks at students’ views of the roles of lecturers, their assumptions about lecturers’ status, their perception of their own learning and their preference for L1/L2 use in the classroom.

6.2.2.1 Students’ expectations of their teachers

Prominently emerging in the interview data was the theme of students’ expectations of the roles of lecturers. The student interviewees talked quite a lot about what roles they wanted their lecturers to play in the classroom. Generally, there were two ‘camps’, with one expecting lecturers to be both a knowledge transmitter and an activity facilitator and the other wanting them to fulfil only one of the two roles.

6.2.2.1.1 Dual roles

According to the survey, there was little difference between the percentage (54%) of students who wanted lecturers to be facilitators to their learning and the percentage (46%) of students who wanted lecturers to be an authority in the classroom. The difference was slightly larger when students were asked about their choice of student-centred versus teacher-centred lessons. The rates were 60% versus. 40% respectively. These results could suggest that CLT teaching would be embraced by the majority of the students surveyed.

According to the interviews, however, there was variation in what students expected of their lecturers in the classroom. The majority tended to prefer their teachers to play a dual role, undertaking both traditional and CLT-recommended roles; that is, to be a facilitator of classroom activities and also a transmitter of knowledge. Van Danh, one of the student interviewees, said: “I think that the lecturers should of course be facilitators, but at some point, when students have queries, or when they need ideas, then lecturers should provide students with what they are in need of”. In this student’s view, lecturers would need to jump in to provide input for students in need.

A similar view was held by another student interviewee, Bich Loan, who indicated that she was able to learn more from lessons where the teacher was a
facilitator, but that her knowledge would be more complete if she were taught in the traditional way; that is, by means of lectures:

At first, I felt lots of pressure, but after some time I was able to cope with the work load. I can now feel that lecturers as facilitators would be able to help me to study more than those taking traditional roles. In group discussion, I am for a multidimensional approach. Nevertheless, lecturers’ lectures are indispensable after all. Thanks to the lectures, I have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the lessons. (Bich Loan)

Regarding the “pressure”, Bich Loan disclosed that at first she did not know what to do when she was put in groups and asked to discuss things with “other people”. The problem for her, she said, was either that she did not have anything to say or that her thoughts were too “complicated” to be understood by her group members. However, after some time, she was no longer uncomfortable with the collaborative work.

When asked about her “multidimensional approach”, the student explained that it means that classroom activities should be conducted and organized in such a way that she could learn from both her classmates and the lecturers. On the one hand, she said, the lecturers provided students with key points of the lessons and on the other hand, her knowledge was enriched by contributions from team members in the discussion. Considering these benefits, it can be noted that students appeared to place significance on lecturers’ summarizing “the key points of the lessons”. This preference can be seen in another student’s interview response:

I prefer lecturers to be both [the facilitator and the knowledge transmitter]. Lectures, however, are still very important. When the lecturers finish their lectures, they will ask whether their students have understood the lessons. It will then be time for us to ask questions if anything remains unclear. During this time, interaction between the lecturers and the students will happen as well. (Ngoc Thanh)

It can be seen from Ngoc Thanh’s response, and the responses of other interviewees, that students were ultimately more interested in “the key points” of knowledge rather than opportunities to interact with their classmates. Indeed, in the lessons observed, student participation was greatest during the “summary” times at the end of the lessons. Lecturers were then seen standing in front of the class, typically from the lectern, recapitulating what they had been lecturing. Now and then
the lecturers would pause for students to finish their sentences with one or two key words, as if they were doing a cloze test. If students were unable to do so, lecturers would provide the words themselves by saying them aloud.

6.2.2.1.2 Polarized views

There were also students who stated a clear preference for a single lecturer role. Among the proponents of teachers as knowledge transmitters, one said:

Personally, I still prefer the teacher-centred approach. As I mentioned earlier, lecturers have more experience than we do. They will provide us with knowledge that will be more reliable. If lecturers let us work on our own, we will not be completely focused on what we need to study. Take group discussion as an example. I think only a certain amount of time should be allowed for this activity. If there is too much time, we will spend time chatting privately instead of discussing the lesson. During activities of this type, I can see that if students study by ourselves, we will find it hard to understand the lesson clearly and thoroughly; and misunderstanding and feeling lost will be very likely to happen. (Thuy Nu)

This preference for teacher-centred lessons was shared by another student who argued that classroom lessons were the time for students to listen to the lecturers and that “other things” could be done in students’ own time. “Students cannot compare with lecturers in terms of knowledge”, Phuong Dung said, “and it would not be a very worthwhile use of time in the classroom to talk to your friends who are of your level given the fact that classroom time is very limited”. This student is suggesting that peer talk could take place after school and the lesson time should be wholly saved for lecturers’ instruction. Like Thuy Nu, this student believes that the student-centred teaching approach will not work for students like her who will learn more by listening to lectures and taking notes than working in collaboration with other students.

It can be noted that the two interviewees with unequivocal support for traditional teaching practices were both first-year students. Apart from other factors, their mindsets might be defined by the learning ambience in high school where, more often than not, students are spoon-fed. In those circumstances, students are expected to conform to their teachers and have been conditioned to see their teachers’ knowledge as the most reliable resource to help them learn well and pass examinations.
However, not all student interviewees rejected the idea that lecturers should be facilitators in the classroom. Three of them were strongly supportive of the CLT ‘commandment’ that the teacher should play a facilitating role. The key benefit of that teaching mode, one of the three students said, is the relaxing and friendly learning atmosphere it creates:

I completely like this [facilitating role] of the teacher. I feel very comfortable when we are allowed to do teacher-assigned tasks with our classmates. When that happens, I feel that firstly my studying is not so much heavy, and secondly, that the teacher is not someone who is so terrible. In those circumstances, I can enjoy a friendly relationship with the lecturers. (Nhat Khanh)

Another student spoke metaphorically when she said that the classroom had to be a “playground” for students and that lecturers ought to be there to make sure the learning “games” take place smoothly. “Lecturers should be judges”, Thuy Hoang said, “and students are to play the games themselves”. In a similarly metaphorical expression, yet another student noted that if lecturers were unable to withdraw from the centre stage, then it would be hard for students to perform. “I would prefer the teachers to create an environment [that allows students] to communicate in the classroom”, said Vinh Quoc, “and they should then enjoy watching us doing the work they have told us to do”.

To sum up, the student interviewees held different opinions about the roles of the teacher in the classroom. Some were polarized, indicating their preference that teachers play the role of either a knowledge transmitter or a facilitator only. However, the majority wanted their teachers to undertake the two roles concurrently. In these views, lecturers were still mainly considered the key source of knowledge and students chose to rely on them as the only trustworthy providers of knowledge.

6.2.2.2 Assumptions about teachers’ status

It was noted earlier that even the better and/or more verbose students did not have (in-class) interaction per se with lecturers. Their exchanges with lecturers were more answers to lecturers’ questions rather than fair and square negotiation of meaning. Follow-up interviews reveal that many students, while they knew that they needed to be proactive in the classroom, would typically refrain from being so bold,
citing the reason that the lecturers would normally be the unchallengeable authority of knowledge:

The teacher remains the person who directly hands down knowledge to us students. Well, as students we will ask them something, but it is normally a mere question. It should never be a direct argument against anything in what the teacher hands down to us. (Tien Thanh)

Tien Thanh elaborated that in the course of talking with lecturers, he would prefer not to push them to give more satisfactory answers to his questions if he perceived lecturers were not yet ready to do so. Deep down, however, he still felt that this hesitation on his part was preventing the exchanges with the lecturers from being as fruitful as they could have been. “There have been explanations from the lecturers that I was not really convinced of”, Tien Thanh revealed, “but I suppose I should not go too far”. With the same precaution, another student interviewee, Ngoc Thanh, said she would really appreciate being considered a key player in the implementation of classroom tasks, although she would refrain from asking too many questions even when there remained something unclear to her in lecturers’ answers. She said she feared that her continuing to ask questions might be misinterpreted as challenging lecturers. In many instances, Ngoc Thanh and her friends would have liked to contribute comments, but they always chose to listen silently because “I sometimes think that the lecturer is highly experienced while we students are simply novices. Our ideas therefore are apt to contain errors”.

Another student interviewee admitted that there was always a quiet atmosphere in the classroom. However, she explained that she was not ‘submissive’ to the authority of the teacher; her degree of class participation was basically the same as that of her school mates, but they chose not to speak up for ‘political’ reasons:

In my opinion, Vietnamese students often refrain from discussing in the classroom, because they sort of want to keep the classroom peaceful rather than plunging into arguments. I mean these are simply academic arguments or something like that, but in many cases, arguing might damage the relationship between the students and the teacher and also between students. (Phuong Que)

Not only were students reluctant to criticize or to challenge lecturers, they were unwilling to ask for clarification even if they were not clear about the lecturers’
instructions. “My friends will not ask; rarely will they do so”, said Thuy Nu, “they will refuse to do it even though they may mutter, ‘Oh, gosh, who can understand what you [the lecturer] would like [us to do]’”. This is an issue of communicative competence. Asking the other party to repeat the question is a socialization and negotiation skill in English. However, these students were brought up in a Vietnamese cultural context and influenced by Confucian philosophy, which taught them not to question a teacher’s authority.

The classroom observation captured several instances in which students had different answers from their teachers, yet they did not dare raise their hand to offer their contributions. An example of this happened in the reading lesson on a literary text (for first-year students). After students had read the text and answered the comprehension questions that followed, the lecturer asked students to comment on the opening sentence of Ernest Hemingway’s short story, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”, which reads, “It was very late and everyone had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light”. She asked the open-ended question: “What is the significance of ‘shadows of the leaves’?” However, not a single student said anything, perhaps because they were confused by the terms “significance” (which was meant to be metaphorical) and “shadows of the leaves” (which the lecturer had reduced from “the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light”). After several minutes, the lecturer provided her own answer, saying, “It means that the old man wants to find protection under the shadow of the leaves”. At that time, the researcher then could overhear a student sitting not too far from her whispering to her classmate: “I think it is better interpreted as ‘the old man is in a vicious circle’”. In her follow-up interview, this student explained that in her opinion the old man was locked in the invisible ‘cage’ of the shadow made by the leaves of the tree but she had thought it was wiser to keep silent at the time.

6.2.2.3 Learning styles

It has become clear from the data analysis of student learner styles that the students under study embraced classroom lessons with an authority-oriented ambience and preferred to work individually. In the lessons observed, it was quite
common to see students looking comfortable listening to lecturers and taking notes and then doing the exercises on their own.

6.2.2.3.1 Authority-oriented learners

According to Brown (2014), pair and group work as interactive activities are strongly advocated in current L2 teaching methodology because they “can potentially provide social support” (p. 147). However, students in this study did not participate well in team-work activities in the classroom and instead appeared to be more comfortable with lecture-dominated lessons. The analysis of the data from interviews and questionnaire surveys provided many relevant insights. According to the questionnaire survey, nearly three-quarters of the student respondents (72%) said they could learn more from lessons that were conducted in the lecture mode. Regarding the students who preferred to learn by means of team work, the rate was just 28%, accounting for slightly more than a quarter of the students surveyed. This outnumbering indicated that team-work activities were not favored by the majority of the students and that lecture stood out as a predominantly preferred mode of teaching. In fact, as shown by subsequent interviews, students believed in the authority of lecturers and of textbooks as the ‘official’ channels of knowledge transmission.

The strong preference for the lecture mode was perhaps rooted in students’ authority-oriented learning style as a result of the collectivistic cultural impact. As is defined by Nunan (1998), such learners “preferred the teacher to explain everything, liked […] to write everything in a notebook, to study grammar, […]” (p. 170). The student responses contain many references to this preference. As an example, Bich Loan said “lecturers are indispensable” for students’ learning. The reasons cited for this acknowledgement of the lecturers’ authority were all about lecturers’ supposed ‘superiority’ in terms of knowledge and teaching experience. The student interviewees said that lecturers “have more experience than we do” (Thuy Nu) and that “the lecturer is highly experienced while we are novices” (Ngoc Thanh). It seems as if students’ mindset carries the fear that without the teacher being there, students’ ideas are “apt to contain errors” (Ngoc Thanh).
6.2.2.3.2 Inclination for individual work

Little collaborative work was seen among students, but it was not just because lecturers kept on lecturing. When the lecturers were not speaking, more students would turn to work on their own rather than work with their classmates. According to the survey, more than half of the students (56%) said they felt more comfortable with individual study than with group/pair-work activities. Also, it is noticeable that as many as 38% of the student respondents reported that they felt lost in lesson activities requiring significant interaction between team members. These students’ reluctance to participate in group/pair work may have undermined efforts to make the classroom lessons communicative. Given such feelings of being lost, the classroom activities led by the lecturers determined how students learned. Student-initiated or student-controlled activities almost never happened in the lessons observed.

An example of this happened in a lesson on “Culture clash”. Students were asked to form into groups of four and discuss this topic and subsequently to report their findings about “culture clash” in front of the class. It was observed that the students spent the first five minutes trying to write down on paper what they thought about culture clash; and during this time there was no interaction between them. For the next five minutes, one or two of them presented to the group their ideas while the others sat silently listening. For the last five minutes, students sat idly, appearing to have finished their work. It was recognized that the situation changed slightly when the lecturer came to the groups. When she was present, students became less inactive and looked at the lecturer as if they were waiting for her questions. The lecturer then asked what they had done so far; the group leader expressed his thoughts about “culture clash”, repeating what he had recently presented to his group members. During this time, the other group members remained silent. Then, when it came time for each group to present their findings, it seemed that the interaction was primarily between the lecturer and the presenters representing the groups, while the rest of the class were merely observers.

In the follow-up interviews, one student interviewee unreservedly showed her dislike for the use of communicative-oriented activities such as group/pair work in the classroom:
I prefer listening to lectures rather than doing team work. The reason is that in group work, many people tend to do nothing. Following the team work, only the best students will be representing the whole group to present the answers to the lecturers. Normally, those answers are not the outcome produced by all the group members. They are often the presenters’ only. (Phuong Que)

Phuong Que’s response indicates that she was concerned about equity in classroom participation and the recognition of student contribution to the lessons. From her perspective, the duty to ensure students’ participation apparently rested with the lecturers. “As you know”, Phuong Que said soon after, “lecturers do not assign specific to-do tasks to each student in the group, so many students do not really know what they need to do. Still, they sit patiently in the group mainly to show the lecturers that they are not uncooperative”. Phuong Que’s comment suggests that students do not tend to take a proactive role in classroom activities and instead assume the role of passive recipients of what is assigned by the lecturer. Considering Phuong Que’s response, it could be assumed that she believed team work would have been more effective if lecturers had been more specific in defining the tasks for individual students to do in their groups. If lecturers had done that, however, they would have been trespassing learner autonomy. It seems that the students needed to become independent learners before they could cope with and reap the benefits of team-work activities. Until they could achieve this independence, they would still need lecturers to be directors of rather than facilitators for the classroom activities.

One of the student interviewees made the interesting point that care should be taken to balance the ratio of team work and lecture-only. Phuong Dung asserted that the lecture mode should be conducted along with team work so that struggling students could be more engaged in the lessons:

I also prefer group work, but I think there should be a balance [between group work and teachers’ lecture]. You know, in group work, weaker students tend to let the better students do the tasks on their behalf. When that happens, they are not actually studying. (Phuong Dung)

Many hours of classroom observations showed that in the team-work time, once the classroom activities were monopolized by the minority of students, the majority did not attempt to speak. They sat with their group, but they were doing virtually nothing except for waiting for the time when the lecturers summarized the key points of the lessons. And when lecturers did so, these students promptly would
take notes of what the lecturers said, while they had previously ignored what their team members said in the team-work activities.

In summary, there were two main orientations of students’ learning preference. First, they wanted to listen to lectures that could provide them with the knowledge they needed (for exams, as will be mentioned in 6.2.3.2). The value of such knowledge was based in the status and position of lecturers – being authorities in the classroom. Second, students typically chose to work on their own because they would not move out of their comfort zone to work in teams.

6.2.2.4 Vietnamese/English use in the classroom

Despite their attempts to communicate in English, many students were heard to break into Vietnamese not long after they were left on their own in team work. This reliance on L1 happened particularly when students apparently found it difficult to express themselves in English and when they were in their groups without the lecturers’ presence. When allowed to work together, students did not take it as an opportunity to strive to speak English; they appeared to be more interested in working out the correct answers. Students’ use of Vietnamese was perceived to be rooted in two major difficulties. First, their English was lacking. They did not appear to have a good command of the vocabulary needed to talk about the topics under discussion, nor did they have the fluency needed to keep a conversation going on. Second, students were seen receiving inadequate support from lecturers. There was very little teacher-provided input of ideas and vocabulary that could have helped students.

The need to use L1 has, in fact, been validated in the literature of EFL education (Blyth, 1995; Cook, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). “Allowing both student and teacher codeswitching [using two or more languages interchangeably] in the classroom”, note Dailey-O’Cain and Liebscher (2009), “can support learning through scaffolding” (p. 142). The key issue, according to Macaro (2009), is to identify “optimal use” of L1, the instance in which “codeswitching in broadly communicative classrooms can enhance second language acquisition and/or proficiency better than second language exclusivity” (p. 38). This scholar even warns that “too much focus on teacher target language use, with long periods of input modification, may result in teacher-fronted lessons in which individual learners may only be speaking the second
language for limited amounts of time […], which goes against the very nature of communicative classrooms” (Macaro, 2000, p. 184, as cited in Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009, p. 5).

This study’s questionnaire survey found that 58% of the students felt that English was the language mainly used in the classroom. Regarding their preference, a comparably larger percentage of students (71%) wanted Vietnamese to be the primary language. The reasons students cited for their preference of L1 use were all about facilitating students’ learning: that by speaking in Vietnamese they could understand the lessons more easily; that they would have more to say; that they could be more confident in expressing themselves, etc. According to Brooks-Lewis (2009, p. 234), similar reasons were cited by students in studies about the role of L1 in the EFL classroom; respondents expressed the belief that L1 should be fully incorporated into the EFL classroom. It has long been acknowledged that L2 learners are “constantly seeking to facilitate [their] task by making use of previous knowledge”, of which their knowledge of L1 is an important resource (Ringbom, 1987, p. 33). Particularly in relation to Vietnamese learners, this reliance on L1 use has been empirically proven to be an indispensable support for students learning English given the fact that limited English proficiency is a problem for both Vietnamese learners and teachers (Kieu, 2010; Nguyen, 2012; Nguyen, 1999).

6.2.3 Students’ endeavors

This section looks at students’ learning efforts. It begins with a description of the extent to which they were seen to be willing to communicate in the classroom. Next, it focuses on students’ perception of pair and group work. Finally, there is a brief presentation of students’ autonomy.

6.2.3.1 Willingness to communicate

It was seen through classroom observation that many students did not appear to be willing to communicate. Although willingness to communicate does not necessarily determine communicative ability (Brown, 2014, p. 147), it is arguably a precondition for students to involve themselves in language interaction by rehearsing their language practice. The lack of willingness was particularly noticeable when students were assigned to work in pairs and groups. Although at these times there
was less pressure to talk in front of the class, students did not prove to be more verbose. Let us consider a task that was apparently intended as a warm-up activity in one of the reading and writing lessons. To begin the lesson, the lecturer asked the question: “Who can give me the definition of the word ‘single dad’, ‘single parent’?” So students were given a general invitation to respond. However, the whole classroom was silent despite the lecturer patiently waiting for students to say something. After a few minutes, the lecturer resorted to the student name list to nominate one of them to answer the question. The nominated student gave a rather good answer, “A man who looks after his child by himself” (although he spoke in a very low and soft voice, indicating hesitation). Following his answer, another student (also nominated by the lecturer) added, “He has no wife”. So it was not that students could not answer; it was more that they were unwilling or did not have the courage to speak up in the class.

Students’ lack of willingness to talk, as mentioned earlier, might have been rooted in students’ preference to work individually rather than in teams. In fact, they looked hard-working when they worked on their own (to answer the questions raised in the lessons), but they were not seen to be concentrating as well during collaborative work. According to the survey, more students (56%) reported feeling comfortable with working individually than students saying they felt comfortable working in pairs or groups (44%). The difference in the two percentages was especially marked for the third-year cohort; for these students, the preference for individual study (69%) was more than twice as much as that for team work (31%).

Students’ lack of willingness to communicate may be attributed elsewhere:

The reason for us students being passive, I think, is that we are now university students and our character as a result is no longer like what it was before. In high school, we used to be quick to put our hands up when teachers raised questions to contribute to the lesson. Doing so, we would normally feel excited and energized. However, now that we are at the university, that excitement is no longer felt. (Thuy Hoang)

This student interviewees’ interpretation asserts that there had been a change in student behaviours when they moved from high school to university level. It is no surprise that such a change would take place, because willingness to communicate is part of a “dynamic system” (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011), which
means it can change over time. Thuy Hoang explained that the apparent reticence was due to peer group pressure: “If you are too excited”, she said, “your friends would say that you are showing off”. The reluctance to be at the front of the class was aggravated by the fear that the answers could be incorrect, which could lead to great embarrassment for the student. For this reason, Thuy Hoang said, “If we are not confident enough in our communication skills or in our language command, then we do not have the desire to raise our hands to contribute to the lesson”. According to Yorio (1976), peer group pressure is an important age-related variable to consider in second language teaching. Reviewing previous studies (for instance, MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001), Brown (2014, p. 147) notes that friends have long been found to have a strong influence on learners’ willingness to communicate.

6.2.3.2 Perception of collaborative work

While the lesson observations revealed little evidence of students’ preference for collaborative work, the interviews with selected students indicated that there was some level of support for this learning style. Naturally, some students felt more strongly than others about the issue. Nhat Khanh was among the students who whole-heartedly supported collaborative work:

I like it [pair/group work] one hundred per cent. I like it because there is good mutual talk between teacher and students while we are doing the tasks together. It is the time for everybody working together. At those times, we can also have discussions with other people who would provide you with their own ideas. In addition, I like pair and group work because it is the time that I can raise my own opinion. (Nhat Khanh)

According to Nhat Khanh, the advantages of team work include the interaction between students and lecturers and between students themselves that comes with collaborative work; the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of ideas from other students participating in the team work; and the opportunity to speak up. The researcher’s personal evaluation is that this student was very active and energized in the class. She appeared to embrace the working-together time, seizing it as a chance to discover her classmates’ ideas and to express her own.

Another student valued studying in groups because it gave him a chance to be exposed to a greater variety of ideas. Besides, he said, it allowed the students to use
their receptive and productive skills rather than idly listening to what the lecturer told them:

It was the time to talk and write what students might be actually thinking of. We have the ideas, mostly in Vietnamese, and we work together to put them into English. It is a challenge, as our vocabulary repertoire and expression capabilities are sometimes inadequate, but we will have our own production of English and the challenges are worthwhile. (Van Danh)

Yet another student in favor of team work was Vinh Quoc, who reported looking forward to pair and group work:

It is really a change of atmosphere for us. After ten minutes or so listening to lectures, group-work activities are really refreshing. Now and then, our discussion gets exciting when two or more group members cannot agree with each other on a certain point and they debate the point as energetically as they can. (Vinh Quoc)

Nevertheless, many students were concerned about the drawbacks of communicative activities. Phuong Dung believed “that there should be a balance in the classroom between students’ work in groups and the lecturer’s lecturing”. One of the key problems they cited was the risk that the knowledge needed for their examination could be ‘distorted’ if CLT activities were used too often. They stated that it would be better to have a combination of the communicative-oriented activities and the traditional lecturing and note-taking activities. “It could be that the lecturer delivers the lecture first, and then students work in groups for a discussion based on the ideas emerging from the lecture”, Phuong Dung suggested.

Thuy Hoang suggested that pair-work and group-work activities should only be used in lessons of skill. As for lessons of knowledge, such as semantics, which can be difficult for students to understand, she insisted that it would be better to resort to the traditional teaching method. In her opinion, by doing so, the knowledge required would be most efficiently transferred from the lecturers to students, who would need to be confident they understood what was taught in order to do well in their exams:

I think that group work and pair work is useful because sometimes I cannot come up with good idea on my own while my classmates can. My knowledge will increase as a result of listening to and talking with other people. However, now that I am in year 4 and most of the subjects are about specialized knowledge such as
semantics, activities of that type [group/pair work] should take place less often in the classroom. We prefer listening to lectures and taking notes of the key points that will likely be tested in exams. If we were allowed to discuss in groups, I’m afraid we would run out of time. [There is also] the possibility that we might get off track and [then] we would get even more confused about the already difficult content. (Thuy Hoang)

Van Danh claimed that group-work activities would be effective only if students were equipped with enough knowledge and experience for the discussed topics:

I can say that in my classroom, group discussion or team work is only rather effective in only one subject, namely TEFL methodology. Most of my friends work as private English tutors, so they will find the discussion time rather informative and enjoyable. They have experience in teaching. So when the TEFL lecturer gives topics relating to teaching methodology for discussion, they [my classmates] can then talk by drawing on their own teaching experience. As a result, we can learn from each other a lot in group discussion. As for other subjects, it seems that we don’t know anything, so it [group discussion] is not effective. (Van Danh)

Van Danh’s comment was in line with what happened in the classroom. In most cases, students remained silent in team-work activities because they did not appear to be knowledgeable about the topics under discussion. This problem was apparently aggravated by their fear of losing face in front of the class if the idea they expressed was corrected by other students or even by lecturers.

6.2.3.3 Learner autonomy

Autonomy is “the ability of individuals to take responsibility for their […] language learning” (Nunan, 2013, p. 104). To be specific, the autonomous learner initiates “language, problem solving, strategic action, and the generation of linguistic input” (Brown, 2014, p. 367). According to Palfreyman (2003, p. 3), there are several basically synonymous terms for this concept, including “learner independence”, “self-direction”, “autonomous learning” and “independent learning”. There is evidence in the literature that “good language learners are autonomous” (Griffiths, 2013, p. 170). In reference to the CLT principles, “students are seen as more responsible for their own learning” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122).
While the findings from the classroom observation appeared to suggest that students did not have strong learning autonomy, several of the responses from the interviews indicated something different. One of the student interviewees said that learning to be independent is the key reason why she prefers lecturers to take the facilitating role:

Maybe I value learners’ self-study skills highly, so I think that students should be taught more about how to learn and practise language on their own. Teachers should teach students learning tips and methods. I remember that some time ago my teachers taught me presentation skills, and they have helped me a lot in my study. I think that no matter how much we are taught, if we do not do it by ourselves, we cannot master it. (Nhat Khanh).

Noticeably, many students were able to draw a distinction between the roles of the lecturers and the students. One student interviewee was quite clear about who should do what for effective teaching and learning:

In my opinion, now they are at the tertiary level, students should be taught methods rather than knowledge. Lecturers should teach students how to learn by guiding them step by step how to do so. As for knowledge, students should learn it by themselves. (Vinh Quoc)

Defining lecturers’ and students’ roles in that way, Vinh Quoc supported lecturers’ adopting the facilitating role. In his opinion, lecturers should focus on providing students with the skills they need and students should pursue knowledge on their own. However, Vinh Quoc quickly qualified his comment, pointing out that if the role of facilitator was to be capitalized on, learning resources and other supporting conditions should be made available to students:

I personally think that I support lecturers to be facilitators, but this preference is my own. For I can study at home on my own, and I have access to a wide variety of learning sources for my self-study. However, other students who rely on teachers will not think the same. They will possibly feel disappointed because their lecturers in the new roles do not teach them anything and lecturers do not transfer enough knowledge to them as they have expected. (Vinh Quoc)

These findings suggest that there was an opportunity for MTIH-ED to implement team work in its classrooms. Students who supported the approach could have been used as catalysts for interaction to happen in the classroom. They could
have broken the ice, so to speak, thus encouraging other students to embrace and participate in communicative lessons.

Outside the classroom, however, students reported they had little time or opportunity to ‘brush up’ their English. Students dedicated much of their time to other studies that they said would increase their employability (see 6.1.3.1), and they did not appear to be proactive in seeking opportunities to further practise their English. The questionnaire survey showed that nearly half of the students (48%) had no extracurricular activities related to English study. Those who did participate in such activities did so infrequently. The most common thing students reported they had done was to go to English-speaking clubs. Yet, they did not do this on a regular basis because, as one student said, it was hard to find a speaking partner in the club whose English was as good as that of students majoring in English like her.

Still in relation to students’ autonomy, it was seen that they appeared to have no voice in selecting what the lessons should cover, in deciding how the lessons should be conducted and in determining how their learning should be assessed. According to the survey, the vast majority of students reported that the reality was that it was lecturers who chose what students would learn (95%), how students would learn (89%) and how students should be assessed (97%). When asked about their preferences, the percentages did not change greatly. Students preferred that lecturers should continue to decide on the content (82%), the methodology (84%) and the assessment (90%). The interviewees all said that these were the duties and privileges of the lecturers and that, in the words of one student interviewee, students “must not interfere”. They were in a situation similar to that of the Hong Kong students described by Farmer (1994): “Learners are conditioned to believe that in order to learn one must be taught and that the teacher holds a monopoly over the transmission of knowledge” (as cited in Nunan, 2013, p. 105). According to student interviewees, there was no end-of-the-semester student feedback on units and/or student feedback on teaching, which denies lecturers an invaluable channel of communication with students to make adjustments that might be needed for their teaching.
6.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the key issues related to the learner and the learning factors of the EFL program implementation at MTIH-ED. It was revealed that the students were faced with quite a number of challenges in their English study. The goal of students becoming communicatively competent did not seem to be realistic or readily realizable. Students would simply need to complete their bachelor course and be equipped with extra vocational competence to be prepared for the competitive labor market. In learning English, the central focus was mainly on studying about the language rather than learning to communicate in English. Importantly, in the ongoing classroom, students were still locked in the traditional mindset by which lecturers were considered the only reliable and worthy source of knowledge. Lecturing continued to be viewed as an indispensable and effective way of teaching, and lecturers were given an almost unchallengeable and irreplaceable position in the classroom. Focusing on lectures was seen as the reassuring way to pass exams and be awarded the course degree. Noticeably, not only was CLT implementation problematized by the authority-oriented learning ambience, it was aggravated by students’ inclination to work individually. Students were rarely seen to be enthusiastically participating in collaborative work activities, and their willingness to communicate was hampered by factors such as their own inhibition and a lack of teacher support. In fact, students resorted to Vietnamese quite often, and an English-only approach presented many difficulties for them. The case study found, though, that students did have some learning autonomy, so if the right conditions were put in place, CLT could be successfully implemented in the classroom. The survey results offered encouraging signs, as quite a number of voices were heard that were supportive of implementing tasks that are more student-centred and can engage their active participation through team work. Many students expressed a preference for learning how to learn, a feature of CLT and a validation of its philosophy of progressivism. Students indicated that their teacher could guide them to develop their learning independence and instruct them to make sure they are on the right track in terms of their knowledge learning.

These findings about learner and learning factors will be further discussed and interpreted in the next chapter. Chapter 7 will put together all the findings of the investigation into the three categories of factors – those of the context of situation, of
teacher and teaching and of learner and learning – and relate them to the major tenets of CLT and subsequently illuminate their intricate implications in light of the Hofstedian cultural framework.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Apart from the chapter introduction and the chapter summary, this chapter has two major parts. First, it presents the cultural orientation theory that is used as the framework for interpretation, and includes elaborations of the key concepts of cultural dimensions. Along these cultural dimensions, it compares Vietnam with the countries from which Vietnam has imported CLT. Subsequently, the chapter will discuss the cultural appropriateness of CLT. It will do so first by comparing the facts of the MTIH-ED program implementation with the implicit requirements of CLT, thereby revealing the extent to which CLT was implemented in the case study. Based on those findings, culturally calibrated reflections will then be made along the cultural dimensions, thus pointing out cultural issues related to CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context.

7.1 CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS

As was argued in Chapter 2 (see 2.4), it is necessary to employ a culturally calibrated framework in order to effectively interpret how CLT was implemented at MTIH-ED. It was explained in 2.4.2 that for this case study, the framework of cultural orientations proposed by Hofstede and his co-authors was adopted (Hofstede, 1980, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede et al., 2010). This study is based on two important publications, Hofstede et al. (2010) and Hofstede (1986); the former is their most up-to-date book on the six cultural dimensions that are deployed in this interpretation, and the latter focuses on teaching and learning.

It is acknowledged that despite its popularity the cultural orientation framework proposed by G. Hofstede and his co-authors has its drawbacks. “These
cultural dimensions are criticized”, Yang (2015) points out, “for their essentialism failing to acknowledge increasing cultural diversity and complexity in the workplaces and classrooms within cultures due to migration and globalization” (p. 330). However, as noted by Samovar et al. (2011), the framework studies the values of deep structures of culture that are resistant to change. Also, it is stated by the authors of the dimensions that they focus on the difference at the societal level by conducting country-level correlation analysis (Hofstede 2011, p. 6). In relation to the practical purpose of this study, the dimensions, in the words of Hitchcock et al. (2011, p. 87), “do serve as a broad indicator” for the interpretation.

7.1.1 The Hofstedian dimensions

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), there are six values along which culture can be dimensionalized, and societies can be differentiated by those cultural orientations. A cultural dimension, as defined by Hofstede et al. (2010), “is an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other countries” (p. 31). In simple terms, cultural dimension is composed of “key features or characteristics that differentiate various cultural groups” (Zhu, 2011, p. 421). The six cultural dimensions described by Hofstede et al. (2010) are: power distance (abbreviated as PD, ranging from small to large); individualism (IND) versus collectivism (COL); masculinity (MAS) versus femininity (FEM); uncertainty avoidance (UA, from weak to strong); long-term orientation (LTO) versus short-term orientation (STO); and indulgence (IDG) versus restraint (RST). To use Jackson’s (2012) term, these dimensions are referred to as “Hofstedian dimensions”.

For each of those six dimensions, there is an index score value for each of the countries under study, indicating their cultural orientations. The values cited in this thesis are based on Hofstede et al. (2010), according to whom those for the first four dimensions (i.e. PD, IND–COL, MAS–FEM and UA) are available for 76 countries and those for the last dimensions (i.e. LTO–STO and IDG–RST) are available for 93 countries. The difference in the availability of the scores for countries lies in the data sets upon which their calculations of the values were based. Still according to the authors (Hofstede et al. 2010), whereas the calculations for the values of the last two

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4 These abbreviations of the six cultural dimensions and their full terms can also be found in “List of Abbreviations”, pages x-xi of the thesis.
dimensions were based on the World Values Survey (WVS) databank, the values of
the first four dimensions were based on the IBM (International Business Machines, a
multinational corporation) data set and the replications of the IBM research. The
WVS databank covers more than 100 countries all over the world with a
questionnaire containing more than 360 forced-choice items about a wide variety of
issues including ecology, economy, education, emotions, family, government and
politics, health, happiness, etc. (Hofstede 2011, p. 14). Meanwhile, the IBM data set
was smaller in terms of the number of countries it covered; at the time G. Hofstede
used it to develop his paradigm of the first four dimensions, the IBM dataset had
100,000 questionnaires covering the values and related sentiments of people in over
50 countries around the world working in the local subsidiaries of IBM (Hofstede
2011, p. 6).

The following section will present definitions of the Hofstedian cultural
dimensions and the index score values (and the rankings) for each of those
dimensions for Vietnam and for Britain, Australia and North America, the countries,
as will particularly be elaborated in 7.1.2, in which CLT has developed and from
which Vietnam has imported CLT. It is important to remember that the scores and
the rankings aim to consider the position of Vietnam in relation to those of Britain,
Australia and North America. As is noted by Hofstede et al. (2010), “because of the
way the scores were calculated, they represent relative, not absolute, positions of
countries: they are measures of differences only” (p. 56).

7.1.1.1 The ‘original’ dimensions

PD, IND–COL, MAS–FEM and UA are the four ‘original’ dimensions. They
appeared together in Hofstede’s earliest publication about cultural dimensions (i. e.,
Hofstede, 1980). According to Holmes (2012), these four cultural dimensions
together have become “perhaps the most widely cited value orientation framework”
(p. 466).

7.1.1.1.1 Power distance

According to Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 61), “Power distance can be defined as
the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations
within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”. PD is
elaborated by Foster (1992, p. 265) as: “In some cultures, those who hold power and those who are affected by power are significantly far apart (high power distance) in many ways, while in other cultures, the power holders and those affected by the power holders are significantly closer (low power distance)”. The dichotomy of high versus low PD “represents the level of dependence upon authority that a culture practices as opposed to the levels of interdependence” (Hitchcock et al., 2011, p. 89). In relation to educational settings, Samovar et al. (2011) remark that “in schools that are characterized by high power distance patterns, children seldom interrupt the teacher, show great reverence and respect for authority, and ask very few questions” (p. 53). In the field of language teaching, according to Nunan (2013, p. 50), power relation is a dimension to differentiate between traditional education (highlighting teachers’ authority) and experimental model (teacher as ‘learner among learners’).

Table 7.1 shows the differences in teaching and learning between cultures of small and large PD (Hofstede 1986, p. 313). These differentiations will be referred to in later discussions.
Table 7.1

Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the PD Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small power distance societies</th>
<th>Large power distance societies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• stress on impersonal “truth” which can in principle be obtained from any competent person</td>
<td>• stress on personal “wisdom” which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students</td>
<td>• a teacher merits the respect of his/her students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• student-centered education (premium on initiative)</td>
<td>• teacher-centered education (premium on order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher expects students to initiate communication</td>
<td>• students expect teacher to initiate communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher expects students to find their own paths</td>
<td>• students expect teacher to outline paths to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students may speak up spontaneously in class</td>
<td>• students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students allowed to contradict or criticize teacher</td>
<td>• teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication in class</td>
<td>• effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• outside class, teachers are treated as equals</td>
<td>• respect for teachers is also shown outside class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student</td>
<td>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• younger teachers are more liked than older teachers</td>
<td>• older teachers are more respected than younger teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. From Hofstede (1986, p. 313).*

According to Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 57-59), Vietnam has an index score value of 70 for PD, ranking 22 among the 76 countries and regions for which the PD scores are listed. This ranking is considerably higher than those of the United States, Great Britain and Australia, whose scores are 40 or lower. With that ranking,
Vietnam is considered to be a country whose hierarchical social relationship is based on “unequal relationship” and “authoritative leadership structure” (Nguyen et al., 2006, p. 5). According to Nguyen and Le (2007), previous studies (such as Quang, 1997) suggest that Vietnam has high PD, being described as having “hierarchical relationship and position of authority, control and forbearance” (p. 26). At the school level, the unequal relationship is manifested in the relationship between teachers and students (Nguyen et al., 2006). An evident indicator of inequality in this relationship is the almost compulsory use of honorifics when addressing or referring to teachers.

7.1.1.1.2 Individualism versus collectivism

Also among the four ‘original’ Hofstedian cultural dimensions is IND–COL, concepts that are “directly connected to the East–West cultural differences” that “much of the early scholarly work focused on” (Martin, Nakayama, & Carbaugh, 2012, p. 20). At one end, “individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 519). At the other end, “collectivism”, as also defined by Hofstede et al. (2010), “stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lives continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (p. 515). Regarding this dimension, Schwartz (1992) and Triandis (1995) explain that in collectivistic countries, the interest of the group is given greater priority than that of the individual, while the reverse is true in the individualistic societies. It is noted that when IND–COL is related to PD, both collectivistic and individualistic countries may recognize either the horizontal dimension which highlights equality or the vertical one which stresses hierarchical disparity (Chiou, 2001; Gardner, Reithel, Foley, Cogliser, & Walumbwa, 2009).

According to Hofstede (1986, p. 312), there are are important differences in the teaching and learning cultures of collectivist societies and individualist societies. Table 7.2 presents those differences, which will be referred to in later discussions.
Table 7.2

*Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the IND–COL Dimension*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectivist societies</th>
<th>Individualist societies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition</td>
<td>• positive association in society with whatever is “new”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the young should learn; adults cannot accept student role</td>
<td>• one is never too old to learn; “permanent education”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students expect to learn how to do</td>
<td>• students expect to learn how to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher</td>
<td>• individual students will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• individuals will only speak up in small groups</td>
<td>• individuals will speak up in large groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on particularist criteria (e.g., ethnic affiliation)</td>
<td>• subgroupings in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g., the task “at hand”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times […]</td>
<td>• confrontation in learning situations can be salutary: conflicts can be brought into the open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• neither the teacher nor any student should ever be made to lose face</td>
<td>• face-consciousness is weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• education is a way of gaining prestige in one’s social environment and of joining a higher status group (“a ticket to a ride”)</td>
<td>• education is a way of improving one’s economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls</td>
<td>• diploma certificates have little symbolic value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence</td>
<td>• acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g., based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)</td>
<td>• teachers are expected to be strictly impartial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* From Hofstede (1986, p. 312).
According to Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 95-97), Vietnamese society has an IND index score value of 20, ranking 58 among the 76 countries and regions for which the IND scores are listed. This score is significantly low in comparison with the United States (91, ranked 1st), Australia (90, ranked 2nd) and Great Britain (89, ranked 3rd). Along this IND–COL continuum, Vietnam can be classified as a collectivist society according to the Hofstedian framework, proposition confirmed by Nguyen and Le (2007). This character of COL has long been established in the literature on the Vietnamese culture. Pham (1994), for example, maintains that Vietnam has “a strong collectivity-oriented spirit” (p. 116) over its history facing foreign invaders. It is elaborated by Tran (1996) that Vietnamese people have a very strong sense of in-group belonging as, residing in an agricultural country, they have had to collaborate well with each other to harness natural elements in order to yield the best rice-crops. In the Vietnamese culture, according to Smith (1971), “there is nothing in the classics about the person as an individual” and the order of the person, the family and the nation is ensured by “the fulfilment of obligations: that of the son to his father, that of the pupil to his master, that of the subject to his ruler” (p. 14). The collectivist spirit is evident in such folk songs as: “Bầu ơi thương lầy bì cùng. Tuy rằng khác giòng nhưng chung một giàn” (Love one another, gourd and pumpkin. You both share the trellis, despite being of different species).

7.1.1.1.3 Masculinity versus femininity

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), “masculinity stands for a society in which emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (p. 519). In contrast, still as defined by the authors, FEM “stands for a society in which emotional gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (p. 617). Regarding MAS–FEM dimension, Gudykunst (1997) explains that in high masculine culture, people emphasize power, money, performance and assertiveness whereas the reverse is true in feminine cultures where people tend to pay attention to “quality of life, service and interdependence” (p. 334). Essentially, UA is about “gender role differentiation”, which is “the degree to which
gender roles are specific and distinct \textit{(masculinity)} as opposed to relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes \textit{(femininity)}” (Brown, 2014, p. 177).

According to Hofstede (1986, p. 315), there are considerable differences in the teaching and learning cultures of MAS and FEM societies. Table 7.3 shows these differences, which will be referred to in later discussions.

Table 7.3

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
Feminine societies & Masculine societies \\
\hline
• teachers avoid openly praising students & • teachers openly praise good students \\
• teachers use average student as the norm & • teachers use best students as the norm \\
• system rewards students’ social adaptation & • system rewards students’ academic performance \\
• a student’s failure in school is a relatively minor accident & • a student’s failure in school is a severe blow to his/her self-image and may in extreme cases lead to suicide \\
• students admire friendliness in teachers & • students admire brilliance in teachers \\
• students practice mutual solidarity & • students compete with each other in class \\
• students try to behave modestly & • students try to make themselves visible \\
• corporal punishment severely rejected & • corporal punishment occasionally considered salutary \\
• students choose academic subjects in view of intrinsic interest & • students choose academic subjects in view of career opportunities \\
• male students may choose traditionally feminine academic subjects & • male students avoid traditionally feminine academic subjects \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textit{Note.} From Hofstede (1986, p. 315).

Regarding the MAS–FEM dimension, Vietnam has an index score value of 40, ranking 55 among the 76 countries and regions for which the MAS–FEM scores are listed (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 141-143). Such a score and ranking indicates
that Vietnamese society is not very masculine and is inclined towards FEM. In relation to education, according to Hofstede et al. (2010), “in feminine countries, assertive behavior and attempts at excelling are easily ridiculed. Excellence is something one keeps to oneself; it is easily ridiculed” (p. 160). Along this dimension, MAS is stronger in the societies of Great Britain (66, ranking 11), the United States (62, ranking 19) and Australia (61, ranking 20). In other words, Vietnamese society is stronger in feminism than are those countries of the BANA bloc.

7.1.1.1.4 Uncertainty avoidance

UA is defined as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 522). Elaborating on this dimension, Brown (2014) says that “strong [UA] implies a need for security, strict rules, and absolute truths; cultures with a weak [UA] tend to be more contemplative, accepting of personal risks, and tolerant of change” (p. 177). According to Gudykunst (1997) and Samovar et al. (2011), in high UA cultures, to avoid unknown circumstances that may occur, people try to establish regulations to guide their daily behavior and interaction with other out-group members whereas people in low UA cultures have greater tolerance for a lack of clarity and ambiguity.

According to Hofstede (1986, p. 314), there are key differences between the teaching and learning cultures of weak and strong UA societies. Table 7.4 presents these differences, which will be brought into later discussions.
Table 7.4 Differences in the Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the UA Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak UA societies</th>
<th>Strong UA societies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• students feel comfortable in unstructured learning situations: vague objectives, broad assignments, no timetables</td>
<td>• students feel comfortable in structured learning situations: precise objectives, detailed assignments, strict timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know”</td>
<td>• teachers are expected to have all the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a good teacher uses plain language</td>
<td>• a good teacher uses academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students are rewarded for innovative approaches to problem solving</td>
<td>• students are rewarded for accuracy in problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students)</td>
<td>• teachers are allowed to behave emotionally (and so are students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise</td>
<td>• teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers seek parents’ ideas</td>
<td>• teachers consider themselves experts who cannot learn anything from lay parents, and parents agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* From Hofstede (1986, p. 314).

Vietnam’s UA index score value is 30, and as such, it is ranked 70 out of the 76 countries and regions for which the UA scores are listed (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 192-194). The value indicates that Vietnam has low UA. The countries of the BANA bloc have higher UA index scores and thus rank higher than Vietnam in UA: Australia (51, ranking 57), the United States (46, ranking 64) and Great Britain (35, ranking 68). However, Nguyen et al. (2006) provide deeper insights when reminding us that Vietnam belongs to the so-called Confucian heritage countries, and that certain characteristics of Confucianism “have created a set of values that represent both extremes [of UA]” (pp. 10–11). According to Nguyen et al., people from countries steeped in Confucianism tend to have weak uncertainty avoidance regarding notions of time and interpersonal relationships, and strong UA as far as moral social rules and education are concerned. In these two respects, Vietnam is a society with strong UA. This differentiation is important when examining the supposedly UA-defined features of Vietnamese society; it is an example of cultural
variations within a culture. In relation to UA and education, Hofstede et al. (2010) state that in strong UA countries “students […] expect their teachers to be the experts who have all the answers” and “teachers who use cryptic academic language are respected” (p. 205).

7.1.1.2 The recently added dimensions

LTO–STO and IDG–RST are the two cultural dimensions that were later added to the four dimensions first introduced by Hofstede (1980). The additions were made in response to the “criticism of the Western bias” of the framework (Holmes, 2012, p. 467), which was originally based on questionnaire survey items developed in the west by western minds.

7.1.1.2.1 Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation

LTO–STO was added in the late 1980s. As is recounted by Hofstede (2011, p. 7), LTO–STO was first introduced in a journal article he co-authored with Canadian psychologist Michael Harris Bond (i.e., Hofstede & Bond, 1988) following Bond’s earlier research-based findings about a factor that was strongly correlated with the economic growth of several Confucian heritage countries under study. This dimension was integrated into the Hofstedian model three years later (in Hofstede, 1991). LTO–STO was originally labelled “Confucian Work Dynanism” because the countries with Confucian heritage scored near the end that was associated with hard work. However, it was later renamed LTO–STO because most of the students participating in the survey (the findings of which led to the development of this dimension) “had never heard of Confucius” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 13).

“Long-term orientation”, as defined by Hofstede et al. (2010), “stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards – in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present – in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of “face”, and fulfilling social obligations” (p. 239). For practical understanding, according to Hitchcock et al. (2011), “these different orientations will manifest […] as either taking a longer-term view or desiring early results, and either showing a concern for personal status or a willingness to suffer some personal embarrassment to achieve the end goal” (p. 91).
According to Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 255–258), the LTO index score value for Vietnam is 57, giving it a ranking of 36 out of the 93 countries and regions for which the LTO scores are listed. It should be noted that in the latest edition (Hofstede et al., 2010), LTO index score values of the countries surveyed were recalculated due to the influence of Minkov, the ‘inventor’ of the sixth dimension (i.e. IDG–RST). That cited LTO score of Vietnam (57) is higher than that of Great Britain (51, ranking 40) and considerably higher than those of the United States (26, ranking 69) and Australia (21, ranking 77). Such a score places Vietnam in the top one-third group of the countries surveyed; that means, it has high LTO. In fact, according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 211), among the 39 countries and regions they studied based on the data available in the early 2000s, Vietnam (together with Japan) came just after China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. A different study of Vietnamese values has found that “most [Vietnamese people] expressed a future time orientation” (Rambo, 2005, p. 49). Along this dimension, LTO cultures are believed to have the primary work values of learning and adaptiveness, to be characterized by their investment in lifelong personal networks and, importantly, to demonstrate synthetic thinking – these have all been long identified as cultural values of the Vietnamese people (see, for example, Tran, 1996).

7.1.1.2.2 Indulgence versus restraint

IDG–RST is the last and the most recent of the six Hofstedian cultural dimensions. It was first announced in the mid-2000s (in Minkov, 2007) following Bulgarian scholar Michael Minkov’s findings from his analysis of the data from the World Values Survey. It was first integrated into the Hofstedian model in Hofstede et al. (2010). Given its recent introduction, this dimension has not been greatly discussed in the literature, although several studies of it are being undertaken (e.g., Yaşar, 2014). This dimension was later renamed Industry versus Indulgence by the co-author Minkov (2011); however, in this study, LTO–STO, a term used in the Hofstede et al. (2010) and in Hofstede (2011), is retained for the sake of consistency.

This sixth and last dimension is defined as follows: “Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its opposite pole, restraint, reflects a conviction that such a gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social
norms” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281). For clarification, the authors explain that “the gratification of desires on the indulgence side refers to enjoying life and having fun, not to gratifying human desires” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281).

According to Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 282–285), Vietnam has an IDG–RST index score value of 35, which ranks it 58 out of the 93 countries and regions for which the IDG–RST scores are listed. The IDG score and the ranking are significantly lower than those of Australia (71, ranking 11), Great Britain (69, ranking 14) and the United States (68, ranking 15). With that score and ranking, Vietnam is a society with high RST. According to Tran (1996), Vietnam has practised intensive agriculture, mainly water rice-growing, for thousands of years. This marries with the remark of M. Minkov, one of the three authors of the framework this interpretation is based on, that “indulgent societies do not have a millennia-old history of Eurasian intensive agriculture stretching all the way to the present” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 296). According to Rambo (2005, pp. 51-52), persistence is among one of the strongest virtues of the Vietnamese culture. It is this virtue of persistence that helps to nurture RST.

7.1.2 Cultural orientations of Vietnam versus ‘origin’ countries of CLT

Table 7.5 collates the index score values for the six Hofstedian cultural dimensions of Vietnam and its rankings along those dimensions that were cited in the previous section (7.1.1) based on Hofstede et al. (2010, pp. 57-59; 95-97; 141-143; 192-194; 255-258; 282-285). In this table, two numbers (separated by a dash) appear immediately below the name of the country: the first number indicates the index score value and the second one indicates the ranking. These figures help to locate Vietnam on the cultural dimension map of the world, because they establish the cultural ‘ordinates’ of the country.

Also presented in Table 7.5 are the scores and rankings of Great Britain, Australia and the United States. These countries are incorporated into the table because they are the ‘birthplaces’ of CLT and also the origin countries from which the CLT methodology has been exported to Vietnam. As aforementioned (2.1.1), CLT was initiated and advocated by British and American scholars. It is noted that although Australia was not among the initiators of CLT, it is included because it was among the earliest countries that, through development aid packages, helped to
develop Vietnam’s ELT expertise. Australia’s influence as an exporter of CLT has grown steadily over the past years owing to its offering of scholarships in ELT study (see 4.1 and 4.2).

In terms of ongoing influence, Vietnamese teachers and lecturers continue to undertake postgraduate studies in ELT methodology at tertiary institutions in Australia, as well as in Great Britain and the United States. According to Nguyen (2007), Australia, Great Britain and the United States are the top countries to which, to the year 2005, Vietnamese students have been sent as a result of government funding (p. 200). If self-funded students are included, Australia and the United States are the countries attracting the largest numbers of Vietnamese students going overseas to study (25% and 16% respectively, Thanh Lam, 2013).
Table 7.5

*Hofstedian Index Score Values and Rankings: Vietnam and ‘Origin’ Countries of CLT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Long-Term Orientation</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam 70.22</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Vietnam 57.36</td>
<td>Australia 71.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>66.11</td>
<td>51.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States 40.59</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>62.19</td>
<td>46.64</td>
<td>51.40</td>
<td>69.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64 Australia 38.64</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>61.20</td>
<td>35.68</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>68.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain 35.65</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.58</td>
<td>40.55</td>
<td>30.70</td>
<td>21.77</td>
<td>35.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures in Table 7.5 help to compare the cultural orientations of Vietnam and Great Britain, Australia and the United States, and thereby to understand the cultural differences that can hinder the implementation of CLT in Vietnam. According to one researcher (Holliday, 1994b), Great Britain, the United States and Australia are considered the ‘core’ countries of the BANA bloc, from which the “instrumentally oriented” part of the ELT profession originates. In those contexts, “there has been considerable freedom to develop classroom methodology as a sophisticated instrument to suit the precise needs of language learners” and “it has been possible to define and create a technology based on good classroom conditions to suit the needs of particular markets” (Holliday, 1994b, p. 4). The other part of the profession, according to Holliday (1994b), “comprises tertiary, secondary, and primary English language education in the rest of the world (‘TESEP’)” where English “is taught as part of a wider curriculum and is therefore influenced and constrained by wider educational, institutional, and community forces quite different from those in the BANA sector” (p. 4). Vietnam’s ELT industry is of this latter type. In other words, not only is the ELT profession in TESEP contexts like Vietnam disadvantaged by infrastructure conditions, it is constrained by the factors specific to the institutional and societal regime.

Comparing the figures presented in Table 7.5, it can be seen firstly that Great Britain, the United States and Australia come together as a group in all dimensions in terms of their index scores (and thus their rankings). In reference particularly to PD, IND–COL, MAS–FEM and IDG–RST, the score differences between these three countries are very small. This ‘clustering’ suggests that those countries are culturally related, a point that can be used as a jumpstart for a discussion of the cultural foundations of CLT tenets. In the literature, CLT is a product of the Anglo-Saxon ideological system (Sullivan, 2000), and the three countries Britain, Australia and North America are grouped in the category of the Anglo world (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Importantly, it can be seen in Table 7.5 that there are distinctive differences between Vietnam and those BANA countries particularly in terms of the first three dimensions (PD, IND–COL and MAS–FEM) and the last one (IDG–RST). Along those four dimensions, the score difference is always ten points or more. Regarding the other two dimensions (UA and LTO–STO), if Great Britain is excluded from the comparison, the differences between Vietnam versus the United States/Australia are still sizeable, if
not larger – 16 points in relation to UA and 31 points in relation to LTO. All of these differences indicate that there are significant cultural underpinnings to the development of CLT in the western world and to the actual implementation of CLT in Vietnam, an oriental country. It is assumed that what is culturally desirable for the implementation of CLT, as ideally conceptualized in the ‘origin’ countries, might be unavailable in the Vietnamese context. The next section will consider this assumption in detail.

7.2 CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS OF CLT

In this section, the factors related to the learner and their learning (Chapter 6), the teacher and their teaching (Chapter 5) and to the societal and institutional context (Chapter 4) will be amalgamated and compared with the major CLT tenets and then examined from a cultural perspective. The comparison is to see whether CLT was actually implemented in the case study; then, on that basis, there will be an interpretation of why the CLT implementation at MTIH-ED took place in the ways it did. The findings in Chapters 4–6 will be collated and examined on the seven tenets of CLT, as characterized by Brown and Lee (2015, pp. 31-32). Those tenets are: overall goals, the relationship of form and function, fluency and accuracy, focus on real-world contexts, autonomy and strategic involvement, teacher roles and student roles. (For further details, see Table 2.4, Chapter 2). For each of those tenets, there will first be a comparison of CLT in theory and CLT in action (labelled “Situation”) and then an examination of the differences arising from the comparison based on the Hofstedian dimensions (labelled “Interpretation”). An alternative organization of this section could be based on the six Hofstedian dimensions, but such an arrangement would adversely affect the ultimate undertaking of this research, i.e. finding out how CLT was implemented in the Vietnamese context as shown by the case study and accordingly explaining the cultural underpinnings of that reality. Besides, an organization in which the headings were the six Hofstedian dimensions could incorrectly suggest that this research was trying to prove the value of the Hofstedian dimensions.

There are several key reasons for deploying the characterization of CLT by Brown and Lee (2015) to compare the CLT ideal and the reality of CLT implementation at MTIH-ED. First, that characterization succinctly presents the key principles and captures the spirit of CLT. Second, in comparison with other characterizations of CLT, such as that by Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011),
and even Brown (2014), which have all gone through several editions to date, Brown
and Lee (2015) has a pedagogical focus, making it easier to relate the CLT principles
presented in the book to the reality of CLT implementation in the case study. Third,
Brown and Lee (2015) is an influential and classic textbook on teaching methodology
that has survived the harsh scrutiny of academics and practitioners over the past 20
years. Also, standing the test of time, it has been intensively expanded, revised and
updated over the five editions since it was first published in 1994. Last but not least is
the practical consideration in the thesis presentation. The characterization of Brown and
Lee (2015) enables the seven tenets to be neatly organized into three major categories:
(i) overall (ELT) goals; (ii) views of teaching and learning; and (iii) teacher and student
roles.

7.2.1 Overall goals

According to Brown and Lee (2015), CLT aims to teach all the sub-components
of communicative competence: grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic and
strategic competences. In the ELT literature, the numbers and the labels of these sub-
components vary over the course of time (as presented in 2.1.2.1, particularly in Table
2.2). However, basically, in view of CLT, language teaching involves teaching not only
morpho-syntactic features (grammatical) but also textual knowledge (discourse), the
ways in which utterances are used to perform speech acts (functions), acceptable social
rules of language use (sociolinguistic) and the tactics to accomplish communicative
goals including compensation for communication breakdown (strategic). In comparison
with its predecessor methods, given that language teaching is defined by CLT to be
about not teaching grammar and lexicon alone, “the most outstanding by-product of
CLT has been a change in the ‘object’ that is taught and learnt” (Byram & García, 2011,
p. 491).

7.2.1.1 Situation

One of the major discrepancies between CLT tenets and the actual
implementation of the methodology concerns the overall goal of ELT. The aim of
intertwining all the competences was not achieved in the case study. The sub-
components of communicative competence were not all taught in the lessons observed;
what was taught was normally only grammatical and sometimes discourse competences
(see 5.2.2). Little attention was seen paid to teaching the other competences such as
functional, sociolinguistic and strategic competences. In other words, what was focused on in the lessons observed remained the same as what would happen in a traditional classroom. The day-to-day teaching at MTIH-ED did not make use of what has been recognized as an “outstanding by-product” of CLT (Byram & García, 2011, p. 491). This situation is an example of a scenario that Lee and VanPatten (1995) reasonably describe as, “although CLT may have caused a major revolution in the way that some people thought about language teaching, no major revolution occurred in the day-to-day practice of most language teachers” (p. 8).

A major reason why some sub-components of communicative competence were ignored in classroom lessons at MTIH-ED was that students did not actually need all the competences for the practical purpose of increasing their opportunities for employment and further study; the most important thing they needed was the bachelor’s degree, a jumpstart for their careers. In the Vietnamese context, English competence was identified as one of the key drivers for the nation to accelerate its global integration and to boost trading relations with the rest of the world; however, it remained unclear whether all the components of English communicative competence would really be needed for that national cause. In particular, the government and educators were unsure what sociocultural knowledge of the English-speaking world would need to be taught and learned. MTIH-ED had in its curriculum courses in British and American studies, but one could not expect students to be able to utilize such knowledge in their real-world communication with people from, say, Singapore, a key member of the ASEAN bloc with which Vietnam has close communication ties.

So, teaching no competences other than those in language knowledge, MTIH-ED classroom lessons would possibly achieve outcomes no better than what would have been achieved by means of other methods. CLT has been sanctioned as an ‘advanced’ teaching methodology in the classroom with inadequate investigation of learners’ needs (see 4.3.1.3). In view of CLT, “learners’ needs and interests require careful consideration” (Byram & García, 2011, p. 502), but unfortunately, needs analysis remains “an issue which needs far more attention in the Vietnamese educational system” (Nguyen, 2003, p. 27). Indeed, almost no serious attention is paid to the indispensable tasks of learner needs analysis in order to see what communication capabilities and communicative language should be taught to students.
Even if the MTIH-ED curriculum covered all the sub-components of communicative competence (and its lecturers had the qualifications and expertise to deliver such a curriculum), the curriculum would most likely be overloaded and be impossible to deliver in practice. According to Byram and García (2011), the theoretical framework of communicative competence was “[i]nitially intended as a theoretical basis for empirical description of the competences of monolingual native speakers”, so “a simple and accurate transfer to foreign/second language teaching raises problems” (p. 504, emphasis added). One such problem is that of the time learners need to master all the competences of communicative competence. As mentioned in 1.1.1, according to Lightbrown (1983), up to the age of six, a child will have devoted between 12,000 and 15,000 hours to the learning of their first language (as cited in Byram and García, 2011, p. 504). Needless to say, as argued in 6.1.2, it would be absolutely impractical for Vietnamese students to have an equivalent time allocation for their English study. As noted in 4.4.2.3, MTIH-ED students had approximately 270 hours to learn English skills, a time budget equal to merely two per cent of Lightbrown’s six-year-old child’s time availability. Ultimately, CLT was originally developed to teach languages in a natural setting (Byram & García, 2011), and it has an “experience-based view of second language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 87), but Vietnamese students learn English in the classroom, which is far removed from the ideal CLT learning environment.

7.2.1.2 Interpretation

The issues related to the overall goals of CLT can be illuminated in relation to the PD, UA and IND–COL dimensions. First, a question that might emerge is: “How could CLT have been adopted without adequate consultation with learners and teachers and without thorough investigation of their needs and background?” This problem may well have been rooted in the PD dimension. As Vietnam is a high PD society, teachers and students were likely to accept what was imposed on them by policy-makers regardless of their consensus and readiness. They had to agree to use CLT even though it was unclear whether CLT-oriented teaching and learning would meet their needs and whether they were equipped to make it happen in the classroom. Given their place on the PD continuum, the policy-makers were in the position of power and thus it was not difficult for them to sanction CLT as a methodology to be used in the classroom. The problem is, although the lecturers appeared to accept CLT, there seemed to be implicit
resistance to implementing it in their classroom because lecturers persisted in using methods they saw as effective teaching (see 5.2.2.1). In other words, teachers continued to teach their own way in their own territory (i.e. the classroom). In the Vietnamese culture, there is a well-known saying, “Phép vua thua lệ làng” (the will of the king yields to the people’s practices). This message implies collectivism (COL). This problem of resistance, combined with teachers’ lack of communicative competence in English and the lack of adequate teacher preparation, presents practical difficulties for CLT implementation in the classroom, a causality that has been reported in many previous studies (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Bax, 2003; Hu, 2005; Humphries & Burns, 2015).

The next question that might arise is: “Why was CLT adopted when there were perhaps multiple other methodological options?” One possible reason is that CLT was in fashion at the time when Vietnam, as an emerging economy, was embracing western technology in the 1990s. CLT was introduced and then adopted uncritically. As mentioned in 5.1.2.3, the word “communicative” translates in Vietnamese to “giao tiếp”, a term that happens to closely match Vietnam’s assumptions of the preconditions for the acceleration of its communication with the world community. Therefore, communication capacity in foreign languages emerges as one such precondition. However, as Nunan (1989a) has warned, the term “communicative approach” (an alternative term for CLT) can be a misnomer because there are numerous other language teaching methods that also claim to be ‘communicative’ but which do not have the term ‘communicative’ in their naming labels. Not least thanks to its label, CLT stands a better chance of being chosen as an ‘official’ teaching methodology for a system than do other methods even though CLT is not necessarily more ‘communicative’ than the other methods. Importantly, CLT arrived in Vietnam at the same time as the influx of ELT materials claiming they used CLT from such publishing giants as Cambridge University Press, Longman and Oxford University Press and when Vietnamese teachers were returning from the BANA countries where they had trained and been excited by the ‘advanced’ methodology they had just studied. The “inflated claims” (Phillipson, 1992) of what CLT would be able to bring about in Vietnam’s ELT landscape were too tempting to resist, and people were willing to ignore its potential problems regarding implementation. This has been noted by Widdowson (1989): “The influence of ideas does not depend on their being understood in their own [terms; usually], it depends on their being recast in different terms to suit other conditions of
relevance” (p. 128). Up to that time, there had been inadequate research on the adaptability of western-originated teaching methodologies to the Vietnamese classroom. It turns out that the adoption of CLT took place in the midst of ambiguity regarding its applicability. When such ambiguity was tolerated, there appeared to be the contributing factor of UA. Since Vietnamese society has low UA in general terms (not in education or moral values) – that is, citizens are more willing to accept uncertainty – CLT was readily adopted in Vietnam.

Another question concerns lecturers’ increasing their English competences, especially their sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge. In the Vietnamese context, however, lecturers’ teaching calibre does not seem to be judged on their knowledge in their field or by their pedagogical expertise, which are viewed as abstract concepts. In reality, teachers’ calibre is determined by the level of tertiary education they have achieved, and this degree-oriented mindset is strengthened in government documents on the qualifications of lecturers (see 4.4.2.1). The situation was the same for the students. Students’ primary aim was to get their degree from the course they were studying, so they accepted what was offered by the course and in the lessons. This degree-oriented mentality can be attributed to the IND–COL dimension, by which in such collectivist societies as Vietnam, “diploma certificates are important” and “acquiring certificates […] is more important than acquiring competence” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 312).

Indeed while struggling to improve their English communication skills as required by their professions, MTIH-ED lecturers also had to meet the government’s increasing standards. The following are the targets for university lecturers to achieve, as sanctioned by the government (Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 121/2007/QĐ-TTg, 2007, Article 1, Section 2, Sub-section c):

- By 2010, for university lecturers, the percentage of master degree holders shall have exceeded 40% and that of doctor degree holders 25%.
- By 2015, the corresponding targets shall have been 70% (master degree) and 50% (doctor degree).
- By 2020, the figures shall have reached the corresponding targets of 90% and 75%.

As was described in 4.4.2.1, lest they might lose their jobs or opportunities of promotion, lecturers rushed to study for a post-graduate degree of the next level (master/doctorate). The catch here is that although they were required to gain a higher education degree, it did not have to be in English studies. As a result, many English
lecturers chose to undertake doctoral courses in Vietnamese linguistics and culture, which are available at domestic institutions. By doing so, these academics were perhaps motivated by job security, a cultural feature rooted in the UA dimension of Vietnamese society (Nguyen & Le, 2007, p. 26). In such courses, the instruction medium was, of course, Vietnamese, so they had no chance to improve their English competence. Those studies were tolerated because opportunities to pursue a higher education degree in English were scarce, either in Vietnam or in an English-speaking country, and lecturers had to manage a variety of other problems such as time availability, tuition fees and their current teaching load. Consequently, although on paper they were meeting the standards set by government, in reality their English competence did not improve.

7.2.2 Views of teaching and learning

This section will discuss and interpret the four tenets of CLT as characterized by Brown and Lee (2015) that follow the overall goals. They are grouped together because they are all related to views of language teaching and learning. Those tenets are: (i) the relationship of form and function; (ii) fluency and accuracy; (iii) focus on real-world contexts; and (iv) autonomy and strategic involvement.

7.2.2.1 Relationship of form and function

According to Brown and Lee (2015), in a CLT-oriented classroom, “language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes” (p. 31). Purposefulness is seen as the essence of true communication by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), who state that “a speaker can thus evaluate whether or not her purpose has been achieved based upon the information she receives from her listener” (p. 123).

7.2.2.1.1 Situation

Firstly, the demand for “pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language” is perhaps not very relevant to the lecturers and students in the case study. In fact, they had very few opportunities to use English pragmatically or authentically. These Vietnamese teachers and students were all situated in a context where their everyday language was Vietnamese and where English was rarely used (see 4.3.1.2). In CLT, “organisational language forms are not the central focus” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 31); in this case
study, however, it can be seen that organizational knowledge was what lecturers mainly aimed to teach and what students were most interested in studying.

Particularly regarding the ability to make use of the functions of English, neither lecturers nor students were strong enough in their English communicative capabilities to perform language functions effectively and flexibly. Indeed, English was not used functionally in the lessons observed. According to CLT principles, students and teachers “need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122). However, the lesson observations revealed that English was used as if it had one single function, that of description. It was observed that English was mainly used by lecturers to present the issues under study (see 5.2.1.2). Even in the teacher talk, English was not seen flexibly used to perform other functions such as directive, commissive, expressive, and so on. It was very much like the scenario noted by Byram and García (2011): “Language has many more functions than the descriptive […] yet it is description which is the main function present in use of language in the foreign language classroom” (p. 494, emphasis added).

Regarding “meaningful purposes”, in the lessons on English grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing, students were not offered genuine purposes for using English meaningfully. There was no genuine need for them to speak or write the sentences the lecturers asked them to create. Since they were trying to speak and write English solely in order to practise using the language, they appeared to rely on their imagination of the situation when answering questions (see 6.2.1). This situation obviously goes against the requirement of CLT that “true communication is purposeful” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 123). However, it was noted that in the lessons on subject matter (TEFL, Syntax and American Studies), some communication for meaningful purpose was seen happening.

From a practical perspective, the most “meaningful purpose” for students was, arguably, to study for their exams (see 4.3.1.1). It was learned from the case study that students took notes very carefully, because they would be asked to reproduce such knowledge in their exam papers. For this reason, as is noted of Vietnamese students by He et al. (2011), “instead of cultivating creative learning, they learn to memorize everything for examinations” (p. 98). Unfortunately, communicative competence is generally not tested in exams (Bock, 2000), and given the backwash effect of testing
(i.e. teaching and learning activities tend to orient themselves to what is tested in exams), students are not very interested in developing their communicative competence. In light of the backwash effect of testing, grammar-based exams have been found to be a hurdle to CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context (e.g., G. Ellis, 1994).

7.2.2.1.2 Interpretation

The issues related to the form versus function dichotomy can be understood in light of the UA, PD and IND–COL dimensions. In this case study, lecturers were strong in language knowledge (grammar and lexicon). Apparently recognising their inadequacies in the functional and sociocultural competences, the lecturers focused on teaching grammatical and lexical knowledge. T. H. A. Nguyen (2002) notes that “one of the reasons for the popularity of the grammar translation method is that teachers are expected to know all the answers and the prescriptive grammar rules are easy to memorize” (p. 5). As mentioned earlier (7.1.1.1.4), Vietnam has a low UA index score value, yet in the field of education, under the influence of Confucianism, it has an orientation towards high UA. In high UA cultures, “teachers are expected to have all the answers” and “teachers consider themselves experts” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 314). Under this pressure, lecturers in this study had to focus on the areas they knew best; that is, knowledge of language. They could not afford to lose face in front of students, which could happen if they ventured to teach competences that they felt were not under their command. It would be very difficult for teachers to do their job (i.e. teaching) if their students no longer trusted their knowledge. This is an issue of saving face, which is very important in the highly collectivistic society of Vietnam. According to Zhu (2011), people in these societies will tend to deploy “strategies to manage one’s own and others’ face wants” (p. 421).

A similar argument could apply to students. They would not venture into the areas of functional and sociocultural competences because, like their lecturers, they were not strong in those areas. Instead, they were happy with learning about language knowledge. As mentioned in 6.2.2.4, in order to save face, students used Vietnamese. In collectivist societies like Vietnam, “students should not lose face if this can be avoided” and face-consciousness is strong (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 118). Regarding PD, students’ expectations were arguably the reasons for lecturers’ reluctance to venture into teaching competences they were not confident to teach. In cultures with large PD like Vietnam, students prefer to learn with teachers whom they perceive to be a “guru” in the field and
“effectiveness of learning [is] related to excellence of the teacher” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 313).

Since exams were designed to test language knowledge, students focused on learning this knowledge in order to be well prepared for these knowledge-focused exams. Passing exams with high scores is invariably an indicator of success in Vietnamese society. Along the IND–COL dimension, as said earlier (7.2.1.2), certificates, diplomas and degrees are considered very important by people in collectivist societies (Hofstede, 1986, p. 312) like Vietnam. It can be observed that the UA dimension is also relevant to the orientation towards testing knowledge rather than skills. As Vietnam is a society with high UA in the field of education, there is a tendency to focus on testing knowledge. Knowledge is preferred over skills as the central testing focus because results of knowledge-oriented tests are less variable between exam markers. Also, in order to reduce ambiguity, the multiple-choice format is favoured throughout the system. An investigation of significant English examination papers in the Vietnamese educational system showed that the multiple-choice questions were predominantly used in an attempt to ensure inter-rater reliability. It should also be noted that “multiple-choice” is normally viewed as “trắc nghiệm khách quan” (objective testing), an expression suggesting that the multiple-choice format would enhance objectivity and impartiality.

It was noted earlier (7.2.2.1.1) that students appeared to be better motivated to talk when they had something meaningful to say for some practical purpose, as was manifested in the lessons on subject matter. This difference was perhaps rooted in the UA dimension. In the classroom setting, UA is high for Vietnamese people, so they would be keener to talk about something that had genuine meaning to them, which was the knowledge of TEFL, syntax and American culture. Meanwhile, in the lessons on skills, students had to talk about issues that were not related to their concerns and interests, thus they were forced to rely on their imagination. Students would not get actively engaged in activities in which there was uncertainty about the usefulness and relevance of the discussion. Therefore, some form of Content and Language Integrated Learning that engages students in learning English communication by means of content that is relevant to their needs would have been more effective as students would have been able to “learn the language as a by-product of learning about real-world content” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 117)
7.2.2.2 Fluency and accuracy

According to Brown and Lee (2015), fluency and accuracy are “are seen as complementary principles” (p. 31) throughout the process of teaching and learning languages. This view is obviously a swing back from the once extreme CLT position that placed greater importance on fluency than on accuracy (Byram & García, 2011; Savignon, 2000). Nevertheless, fluency continues to be considered a high priority in CLT-oriented teaching. Generally, in the CLT classroom, teachers are advised “to use accuracy activities to support fluency activities” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 97).

7.2.2.1 Situation

Observation of the lessons in this case study indicated that fluency was a serious problem for students. Students did not demonstrate that they could communicate fluently in English; their English speech only consisted of occasional short phrases and sentence fragments that were uttered in response to lecturers’ questions (see 6.2.1.1 and 6.2.1.2). In fact, students rarely spoke, and when they did, they simply used content words as responses to lecturers’ questions. It was also observed that students used Vietnamese quite often in their group work (6.2.2.4).

Fluency was not only a problem for students, it also presented difficulties for lecturers. Although lecturers delivered their lectures in English, they were not speaking the language fluently, and this was particularly evident when they were trying to negotiate meanings with students. When they lectured in English, their language was loaded with academic terminology, making it difficult for students to comprehend meaning. In handling responses from students, lecturers found it hard to formulate and reformulate their own questions in order to make them easier for students to understand/answer (5.2.5.2). These problems are most likely rooted in their English competence. It was understood that none of the MTIH-ED academic staff was a native speaker and that many lecturers had never been to an English-speaking country, even for a short time (5.1). While being a native speaker or spending time in an English-speaking country does not necessarily lead to communicative competence, it is generally recognized as being helpful for building communicative capacity and for increasing other people’s trust in teachers’ ability to teach communicatively (Roberts, 1998, pp. 96-97). This would especially be so if lecturers had undergone teacher training in a BANA nations (Holliday, 1994b, p. 5). In this study, however, all MTIH-
ED lecturers undertook their bachelor’s education at domestic institutions where English use was very limited, and for the next levels (master’s and doctoral degrees), just a handful of them studied overseas where English was the medium of instruction.

7.2.2.2 Interpretation

Favouring accuracy over fluency in the MTIH-ED classroom can be interpreted based on the dimensions of UA, PD, LTO–STO and IDG–RST. According to Hofstede (1986), in societies with high UA, “students are rewarded for accuracy in problem solving” and “a good teacher uses academic language” (p. 314). In Vietnamese society, the orientation towards accuracy is perhaps aggravated by the fact that both lecturers and students were better at demonstrating their accuracy than fluency. Considered the “guru”, the lecturers could not have risked ruining their image by attempting to demonstrate fluency and making errors, an issue related to PD and COL (as discussed in 7.2.2.1.2). Some lecturers used jargon in their lectures, perhaps as a way of reinforcing their “guru” status. Also, with the lessons focusing on accuracy, students would more likely have something to take home after the class, an expectation that is common in cultures with high UA. When accuracy was in focus, with rules being presented and notes taken, there would be tangible evidence that students had learned something at the end of the day. Possibly because of this characteristic, Vietnamese students were keen on taking grammar-oriented lessons from which learning is evident. As was described in Chapters 5 and 6, students were always taking notes, meaning they would never leave the lessons empty-handed (see particularly 5.2.2.2 and 5.2.4.1). Alternatively, it would have been hard for students to be certain of what they had learned if the lessons had been focused on fluency instead of accuracy. The numerous notes students took home gave them a sense of security.

Further, students were found to be extremely patient listeners in the classroom; they meticulously took notes on the lessons although what they were listening to and/or taking notes on was not necessarily of immediate use to them. Particularly, the students were ready to study discrete grammar points and vocabulary items even when the lesson was not supposed to be about language knowledge. These orientations can be attributed their LTO, by which Vietnamese people from a very early age are taught to persevere in their schooling as well as in other aspects of life. “Có công mãi sắt có ngày nên kim” (If you persevere in grinding the iron bar, you’ll have the needle one day) and “Kiến tha lâu đầy tổ” (The ant will fill up its storage place eventually) are sayings which
rigorously emphasize perseverance and which every Vietnamese child should have learned and practised at home and at school.

In addition, students’ lack of fluency can be attributed to the unavailability of opportunities to speak in the class. This issue is ultimately rooted in the PD dimension of Vietnamese society. Classroom time was dominated by lecturer talk, so in a large PD society like Vietnam, “students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher” (Hofstede 1986, p. 313). Also because of this PD, Vietnamese students were not ready to speak up and thus be able to practise and increase their fluency. On the other hand, the focus on accuracy can also be explained as the result of exam-focused study. Oral fluency and presentation are seldom considered as part of student assessment. For the proud prospect of graduation, students were willing to endure studying diligently and meticulously. This mentality runs deep in the mentality of LTO and RST of the Vietnamese culture.

7.2.2.3 Focus on real-world contexts

According to Brown and Lee (2015), classroom tasks must enable students to “use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom” (p. 32). In light of this view, “students work on all four skills [listening, speaking, reading and writing] from the beginning” and the negotiation of meaning between speaker/writer and listener/reader is emphasized (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 125).

7.2.2.3.1 Situation

As aforementioned, in the Vietnamese context, there are very few situations outside the classroom where English is used (see 4.3.1.2 and 6.1.3.2). As a result, it appeared that neither the lecturers nor the students at MTIH-ED were quite certain of what they would need to teach and learn to be prepared for such situations. In light of the differentiation of “L2 user” and “L2 learner” by Brown and Lee (2015, p. 164), Vietnamese students were more English learners than English users – at all times. As soon as they stepped out of the classroom, they had almost no chance to use English for any meaningful reason. Unfortunately, the exhortation that “classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts” (H. D. Brown and Lee, 2015, p. 32) holds little relevance for the teachers and students in this study.
In relation to preparing students for “unrehearsed” contexts, CLT highlights the need to use authentic materials in the classroom. The aim is “to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 123). This requirement, however, does not seem to be embraced in ESL contexts, let alone EFL contexts. Swan (1985b, pp. 84-85), for instance, contends that non-authentic materials of good quality would serve better pedagogic purposes because authentic ones may be too difficult for students. Calling authenticity part of “the ‘real-life’ fallacy”, Swan argues that “the classroom is not the outside world, and learning language is not the same as using language; [a] certain amount of artificiality is inseparable from the process of isolating and focusing on language items for study” (p. 82).

7.2.2.3.2 Interpretation

The problems presented can be interpreted in light of the PD, UA and IDG–RST dimensions. CLT’s focus on real-world contexts entails the use of authentic materials, promotion of creativity and incorporation of unpredictability into the classroom lessons (Byram & García, 2011, p. 501). However, these requirements could threaten a teacher’s authority. Given their limited knowledge of the English language and of English-speaking societies and cultures, MTIH-ED lecturers would have difficulty understanding and teaching the culturally embedded features in authentic teaching materials and could therefore feel insecure about using them. If they taught something incorrectly, they would lose face in front of students and thus would no longer be the “guru” in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, the supposed excellence of the teacher, which is highly valued and related to effectiveness of learning in large PD societies, would be jeopardized.

The teacher’s authority and security could also be threatened if creativity and unpredictability were encouraged in the classroom, and they could lose control of their class. In a society with a strong tendency towards UA in education like Vietnam, that is, of course, an unfavourable prospect. If students presented novel ideas or used words and expressions that were unfamiliar to the lecturers, lecturers could experience a crisis of confidence and lose face in front of their students (H. T. Nguyen, 2002; T. H. A. Nguyen, 2002; Pham, 2012; Ton, 1993). Again, this problem is rooted in the large PD feature of the Vietnamese culture.
Along the UA dimension, societies with high UA are characterized by features such as students feeling “comfortable in structured learning situations” and preferring to be provided with “precise objectives, detailed assignments, strict timetables” (Hofstede 1986, p. 314). When creativity and unpredictability happens, the learning situations will likely become less structured and the learning objectives may be less precise than will the lessons on grammar and vocabulary. This variability would then be a factor that could possibly cause trespassing the comfort zones in which lecturers and students were already happy with themselves.

Still in relation to creativity and unpredictability, games, together with role plays and problem-solving tasks, are considered communicative activities through which students use the language they are learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122). However, lecturers were rarely seen deploying these activities in the lessons observed. In the ELT literature, Vietnamese learners are characterized by He et al. (2011) as follows: “They tend to […] show no interest in group work or teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving activities” (emphasis added, p. 98). Particularly regarding the lack of game playing in the classroom, a possible explanation for it can be related to the IDG–RST dimension. In the Vietnamese culture, the general mentality is that games should be used as a supplement only, for instance, when students need a break from serious study. To use a metaphor, they cannot be main courses on the classroom lesson menu, while they can be good entrees and desserts.

7.2.2.4 Autonomy and strategic involvement

According to H. D. Brown and Lee (2015), CLT should aim to develop learners’ autonomy so that they can continue “to learn the language beyond the classroom and the course” (p. 32). To achieve this goal, according to these authors, students must be given opportunities to increase their awareness of their learning styles and to develop their own strategies for production and comprehension of language. In the ELT literature, learner autonomy is considered a factor that can enable the learner-centredness of CLT lessons (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). The focus on learner autonomy is perhaps influenced by progressivism, which places greater emphasis on the learning process and learning to learn (Clark, 1987; Richards, 2013).
7.2.2.4.1 Situation

It was seen that, learner autonomy was not easily achieved in the MTIH-ED classes (6.2.3.3). Although some student interviewees indicated that they wanted to be taught the “method” rather than “knowledge”, and that they appreciated the team work activities in which they had a chance to interact with and learn from their classmates, the classroom lessons were still largely teacher-directed. Lecturers held onto control of the lessons; they were determined to decide what students should learn, how they should be taught and how they should be assessed. Throughout the interviews, no students complained about lecturers’ monopoly of those controls; on the contrary, several indicated they preferred to maintain the authority-oriented teaching and learning, an issue that will be discussed in section 7.2.3 below.

However, there was evidence of student autonomy that could help to make CLT-oriented lessons effective. As aforementioned, the fact that they carefully took notes on the lectures and lecturers’ explanations was a positive indicator that they were trying to learn. The persistence to sit and listen to long lectures was another indicator of students’ learning efforts. When they did speak and communicate, it appeared that students understood the issues under study. Most student responses to lecturers’ questions were meaningful and relevant, although many of them were not grammatically correct or fluent.

7.2.2.4.2 Interpretation

The challenges for Vietnamese students in terms of learning autonomy can be examined in the light of the PD, UA and MAS–FEM dimensions. According to Hofstede (1986), in large PD cultures, “students expect teacher to initiate communication”, “students expect teacher to outline paths to follow”, “students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher” and “effectiveness of learning is related to excellence of the teacher” (p. 313). Vietnam is a society with large PD, and these descriptors express the reality of teaching and learning at MTIH-ED. It would be very difficult for learning autonomy to occur once students were conditioned by these mentalities. If students became proactive in initiating communication, outlining their own path and speaking up, they would be trespassing the lecturers’ authority.

In light of the UA dimension, students speaking up could be interpreted by
lecturers as personal disloyalty (Hofstede 1986, p. 314), which students would want to avoid. They might also fear being sneered at by their classmates for what could be seen as showing off. Tsui (1996) argues that concerns about face-saving reinforce students’ passive behaviour. According to Cocroft and Ting-Toomey (1994), fear of losing honour in front of their classmates in their classrooms usually leads students to opt for the silence strategy at the expense of an active learning style. In this case study, students were very reluctant to speak up in the classroom, a learner characteristic normally seen as reticence. In terms of the Hofstede framework, this reticence can be attributed to the high level of FEM in the Vietnamese culture, in which “social conformity” is important (Nguyen & Le, 2007, p. 26). According to Hofstede (1986), in high FEM cultures, “students try to behave modestly” (p. 315). In fact, in the eyes of Vietnamese people, attempts to speak up in public can be seen as being boastful or showing-off. While such attempts may be praised in cultures with high MAS, such behaviour is not appreciated in Vietnam. According to traditional Vietnamese culture, the Confucian “quân tử” (Chinese chün-tzu or ‘gentleman’) is admired for his self-control and “his ability to keep silent” (Smith, 1971, p. 13). A further deterrent to speaking up is that the teacher might declare to the class that the answer offered is incorrect. Concern over possible public humiliation would further impede students’ willingness to speak in the classroom.

On the bright side, the high LTO and RST in Vietnamese culture foster resilience and persistence, and students are therefore willing to learn irrespective of adverse factors such as PD-related teacher authority. “Nằm gai nem mặt” (bearing great hardships) is considered a virtue in Vietnamese culture, as long as it eventually leads to success. Though they did not seem to pay much attention to learning the other components of communicative competence, students were learning language knowledge, which is an important component of communicative competence. Students’ diligence, nurtured by LTO and RST, was doing more good than harm.

7.2.3 Teacher and student roles

Teacher role and student role are the two last tenets upon which Brown and Lee (2015, p. 32) characterize CLT. In the 2001 edition of their work on this subject (i.e., Brown, 2001), only teacher role was used to characterize CLT; student role was only introduced in the most recent editions (Brown, 2007b; Brown & Lee, 2015). The
addition of learner role can be seen as a step forward, since CLT is a learner-centred approach and the status of learner should be highlighted.

### 7.2.3.1 Teacher roles

According to Brown and Lee (2015), “the role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing font of knowledge” (p. 32). In comparison with earlier methodologies, the role of teacher in CLT is arguably diminished in terms of power. According to, for instance, audiolingualism, the “predecessor” of CLT, “the teacher is like an orchestra leader, directing and controlling the language behavior of students” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 45). However, now, in CLT, the teacher is “a co-communicator engaging in the communicative activity along with students” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 123).

#### 7.2.3.1.1 Situation

It was found in the case study that lecturers were a long way from accepting a diminishing of the power they had been given almost unconditionally by Vietnamese teaching and learning traditions. As was indicated (5.2.1.2), lecturers held onto control of the classroom lessons. In the Vietnamese context, the teacher is seen as the primary authority, both in reference to knowledge and in maintaining classroom order (Vuong, 1976, pp. 77-78). According to Tran (1991), the teacher, together with the course book, is widely considered “the only reliable input that learners of English in Vietnam can get” (p. 182). A major feature of the distribution of teacher and learner roles in the classroom lessons at MTIH-ED was that the teaching and learning was very much authority-oriented. As aforementioned, lecturers decided the content and the methods of teaching and assessment and students simply followed the path created by the lecturers (6.2.3.3). The classroom lessons were mainly teacher-centred with lecturers being the ‘director’ and students being ‘subordinates’.

This status was maintained partly by the lecturers and partly by the students. Whereas the lecturers were unwilling to relinquish their power, the students appeared to accept the reality; many submitted to the lecturers’ authority. Perhaps because of this, in the eye of a foreigner, it appears that traditional Vietnamese education contends that students should be quiet and subservient (Jones, 1995). Many students even indicated they felt comfortable in such an authoritarian learning environment. As previously explained, lecturers lectured most of the time. Considering students’ interaction with
lecturers, it could be seen that students patiently listened to lecturers; the flow of communication was mainly one-way from lecturers to students. Students’ attitudes were humble, withdrawn and modest.

The flip side of those ‘advantages’ is that the teacher is expected to live up to the role of setting an example for students (Vuong, 1980, p. 78). This exalted status can be a problem itself. For when it comes to the need to demonstrate their ability to speak English accurately, the teacher will be feeling some burden of fulfilling the role perfectly. As discussed earlier, any errors lecturers made would leave them embarrassed and concurrently affect students’ respect for and high expectation of the teacher. The Vietnamese teacher, as noted by Kramsch and Sullivan (1996), is expected not only to be “an expert knower of the language but also to uphold the moral values of the community” (p. 206).

7.2.3.1.2 Interpretation

The roles assumed by lecturers (and accepted by students) in the case study can be illuminated by considering the PD, UA, MAS–FEM, COL–IND, LTO–STO and IDG–RST dimensions. Regarding the predominance of authority-oriented teaching and learning, it is perhaps because a large PD society like Vietnam places “stress on personal ‘wisdom’ which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)” (Hofstede 1986, p. 313). In this case study, as presented in 6.2.2.1.2, students trusted lecturers as a reliable source and transmitter of knowledge. In a large PD society like Vietnam, this authority is strengthened by parents’ sharing the belief that teachers are experts (Hofstede 1986, p. 314), a feature related to strong UA. Teachers are trusted and are believed to be indispensable in students’ success, as indicated by the common saying “Không thầy dỗ mà làm nên” (Without teachers, you can’t make your way in life). It is because of this large PD that although Vietnam society is more feministic than masculinistic, there is “patriarchal attitude” (Nguyen & Le, 2007, p. 26). This attitude can be exploited by lecturers who are in a position of power (in their relationship with their students). In addition, this situation was aggravated by the characteristic of high RST in Vietnamese culture. “In a restrained society with large PD”, note Hofstede et al. (2010), “authoritarian rule can be well accepted” (p. 295). According to Hitchcock et al. (2011), “cultures with high levels of dependence tend to accept more authoritarian style leadership, as opposed to consultative decision-making styles” (p. 89). As a result, even
when lecturers were incorrect in their teaching or unreasonable in their directives, they would rarely be “[either] contradicted [or] publicly criticized” (Hofstede 1986, p. 313).

Regarding the FEM of Vietnamese society, if considered independently of other factors, FEM would be a favourable condition for teachers to teach CLT. For the tenderness and the concern with the quality of life associated with FEM (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 617) are well matched with CLT’s requirements of teachers to be duly concerned students’ affective domain. Dealing with students’ feelings is considered an important issue to be addressed in light of CLT so that learners will feel motivated and secured in their learning environment (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 123-124).

A question might arise at this stage regarding the COL of Vietnamese society. Does this cultural characteristic in any way help to close the gap between lecturers and students as they work towards the goal of the course? To assess this possibility, it is helpful to bring in the concept of “vertical collectivism”, which is “a cultural orientation that emphasizes and promotes interdependence between members of groups, but there are status differences among all the group members” (Zhu, 2011, p. 425). In Vietnamese society, as Phan (2001) points out, there is a strong tradition of hierarchical relationship between students and their teachers. This is evident in the use of status-differentiating pronouns in addressing each other (e.g., “em – thầy/cô” = “me (lower status) – teacher/master” and other honorifics (e.g., “dạ” (please); “thưa” and “ạ” (expletives to show respect)). Recently, as observed by Huu Ngoc (1997), “efforts are being made for a return to tradition; first, again, through forms of address” (p. 187). Deep in the national traditions, it is noted by Phan (2001), Vietnamese people are “injected with ‘respect for father’s moral instructions, mother’s love and sacrifice, and teacher’s knowledge, education and training’” (p. 298). Pham (2010, pp. 66-67) stresses that together with knowledge and learning, Vietnamese people pay great respect to the teacher, who is considered the bridge of knowledge and learning.

Given that Vietnamese students’ behaviour is conditioned by the tradition of showing deep respect for the teacher, it is perhaps relevant to consider the very first characteristic of societies with strong COL like Vietnam. That characteristic is “positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition” (Hofstede 1986, p. 313). In Vietnamese traditional culture there are mentalities that go against the spirit of CLT; for example, “Questioning or reformulating knowledge is often avoided. Those who do so
may be regarded as rude or rebellious and this may result in unexpected prejudices” (Phan, 2001, p. 299). This requirement to respect the teacher is pushed even further in Vietnamese culture because of its high PD feature, by which “respect for teachers is also shown outside class” (Hofstede 1986, p. 314).

In relation to the authoritarian teaching atmosphere in the classroom, there was the observation that lecturers were thrifty in their praise for students (5.2.5.1). This issue can be interpreted based on the LTO–STO and IDG–RST dimensions. As an LTO-oriented society, Vietnam places emphasis on “perseverance, sustained efforts toward long-term results” (Hitchcock et al., 2011, p. 91). In cultures of this type, praise is to be spared and learners are expected to keep working hard without expecting immediate rewards. In teachers’ handling of student responses, it was also seen that the lecturers insisted on students producing completely correct answers instead of being able to build on partially accurate ones. The following traditional saying is a ‘standard’ in child education: “Thương cho voi cho vạt, ghét cho ngột cho ngào” (Use the rod to the child you love, give sweets to the child you hate”). Its message equates to the English equivalent “Spare the rod and spoil the child”, but the emphasis is even stronger in its advice to avoid indulging children. This advice is to be followed both in the family and at school. In Vietnamese society, partly due to the influence of Confucianism, RST is recognised as a virtue that a cultivated person should strive for (Smith, 1971, pp. 12-13).

7.2.3.2 Student roles

Regarding student roles, Brown and Lee (2015) state that “students in a CLT class are active participants in their own learning process” (p. 32). According to CLT principles, “the learner, as the individual ultimately responsible for their learning, becomes the central figure of the process” (Byram & García, 2011, p. 502). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) are equally emphatic on the significance of learner role, asserting that “students are, above all, communicators” (p. 122).

7.2.3.2.1 Situation

This study found that students were recipients of lecturers’ knowledge delivered by means of lectures, and the classroom lessons were mainly teacher-centred (see 5.2.1.2 and 6.2.1.2). In such circumstances, students had almost no say in the selection and delivery of lesson content. Further, it was observed that students’ cooperation with
each other in team-work activities was rather poor. Regarding this issue, Richards and Rodgers (2014) point out that learning activities in CLT are “based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach”, although “the cooperative learning (rather than individualistic) approach to learning stressed in CLT may likewise be unfamiliar to learners” (p. 98). In this case study, as the classroom time was lecture-dominated, there was little interaction and negotiation of meaning between students, who mainly spent their time listening to lectures (see 6.2.1).

Students were apparently happy with this situation, because most of them expected lecturers to assume the role of provider of knowledge. In the eyes of students, lecturers remained indispensable as they were believed to be the only reliable source of knowledge. Also, the general expectation was that genuine learning would take place only when knowledge was transmitted from lecturers rather than by means of interaction between students themselves. Conditioned by these beliefs, students did not take a proactive or central position in the learning and teaching process.

7.2.3.2.2 Interpretation

The underlying reasons for Vietnamese students playing their roles as described above can be interpreted based on the cultural dimensions of PD, MAS–FEM, IND–COL, UA and LTO–STO. First, Vietnam is a large PD society, so the powers of knowledge and classroom and lesson control are in the hands of the teacher. In such societies, as was shown by the case study, chances are that, in the words of Hofstede (1986), “students expect teacher to initiate communication”; “students expect teacher to outline paths to follow”; and “students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher” (p. 313). Indeed, in Vietnamese culture, it is considered rude for students (who are in a lower position in the hierarchy) to initiate communication or to speak when they have not been invited to do so. Further, it is the teacher, as the “guru”, who is considered to have the competence and legitimacy to make learning take place. All these rules have been taught to Vietnamese people from childhood. In this society, learning how to behave appropriately is much more important than acquisition of knowledge. An example of this mentality is the saying “tiến học lê học học văn” (Learning how to behave comes above learning knowledge). Also, according to the case study, students appeared to be conditioned by the belief that “a teacher merits the
respect of his/her students” (Hofstede 1986, p. 313), a characteristic of large PD societies like Vietnam.

Second, students’ modest behaviour and reservation can be illuminated by the dimension of MAS–FEM. As a society with considerable femininity, “students practice mutual solidarity” and “students try to behave modestly” (Hofstede 1986, p. 315). It was possibly because of the wish to maintain solidarity that students were reluctant to compete openly, for instance, for turns to speak when working in a team. Instead of rushing to the front to grab an opportunity to speak, many students chose to sit and listen (6.2.1.2). So, in many cases, students’ silence did not necessarily mean they had nothing to say; perhaps they were worried they might challenge the group’s solidarity. Also, in many cases, knowing how to wait is considered a virtue in Vietnamese culture. Smith (1971) provides an insightful comment: “The historical figures most admired by the Vietnamese include not only men of action […] but also men who knew how to wait. Among the most celebrated of these men of inaction was Nguyen Binh Khiem” (p. 13, emphasis added).

Regarding students’ opportunities and endeavours to speak when in groups, it was remarked that, more often than not, the group leaders monopolized the team’s conversation and then the presentation to the lecturer in front of the class. This condition is rooted in the COL of Vietnamese society. “In Vietnam, a collectivist-oriented society”, comment Hitchcock et al. (2011), “group members look to a leader who speaks on behalf of the group, with each member supporting the other” (p. 89). It seems that when group members let the group leader speak (6.2.2.3.2), it was not due to passivity; rather, it was a conscious choice influenced by the vertical collectivism inherent in the culture.

Particularly regarding students’ poor cooperation in team work (6.2.2.3.2), it appears at first that there is some contradiction, because Vietnam is a highly collectivistic society and Vietnamese students should have been able to work better in teams. However, as is argued by Sullivan (2000), “grouping in a classroom serves to divide up a class, not bring it together” and “the American notion of group work stems from a value placed on individuality” by which “students are put into groups in order to bring out their individuality” (p. 121). Therefore, when team work is implemented, Vietnamese group harmony is threatened. Nguyen et al. (2006) conclude from their case study that western models of group learning run the risk of inapplicability in non-
western contexts like Vietnam because of differences in conceptualization. As Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) state, broadly speaking, “collectivistic society members […] are simply not comfortable and will perform badly when expected to be individual-centric” (cited in Hitchcock et al. 2011, p. 86).

When students submitted to lecturers, they were possibly considering the need to maintain a good relationship with their lecturers. A dissenting voice might be interpreted as challenging lecturers’ authority. As was noted in 7.1.1.1.4, Vietnam is a society with high UA in terms of moral social rules and education as a result of the influence of Confucianism. In high UA societies, it is likely that “teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty”, and this concern likely prevented the students in this study from challenging their lecturers. Further, in high LTO societies like Vietnam, there is a “willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose” (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 243). In the words of Hitchcock et al. (2011), there is “a willingness to suffer some personal embarrassment to achieve the end goal” (p. 91). “The Vietnamese people”, comments Pham (1994), “have learned since their childhood to endure and to get acquainted with sufferings” (p. 139). This submissiveness, in respect of the behaviour of the nation in the regional arena, has even been praised as a “flexible subtle spirit”, because it is almost standard practice for Vietnam to be “willingly ready to offer the most precious presents to pay tribute to the giant loser” after defeating it (Pham, 1994, pp. 112-113).

Students’ willingness to subordinate might have caused them to be humble, modest and even withdrawn (as noted earlier in 7.2.3.1.1). Children growing up in LTO cultures, of which Vietnam is one, are shaped by “tenacity in the pursuit of their goals and humility” and have been taught that “self-assertion is not encouraged” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 242; 236). These features are rooted in the traditions of Confucianism, which treasures patience and perseverance as virtues. The preference for withdrawal is considered to be “alien to the modern Western outlook” (Smith, 1971, p. 13), but it is a common tendency in Vietnamese culture.

Finally, it has been noted that the students in the case study appeared to prefer to keep quiet and refused to be proactive in classroom interaction (see 5.2.1; 5.2.3.1 and 6.2.2.2). This problem has been noted by H. T. Nguyen (2002): “Vietnamese students usually keep quiet in class and wait until being called upon to answer the questions asked by the teachers, instead of volunteering” (p. 3). The reason for students keeping
quiet is elaborated as: “Since keeping quiet in class is to show respect to teachers as well as to create a productive learning environment; being talkative, interrupting, bragging, or challenging the teacher […] is strongly criticized and avoided” (H. T. Nguyen, 2002, pp. 3-4, emphasis added). For the sake of social harmony, Vietnamese students’ silence appears to be rational and is related to the COL dimension. Since childhood, Vietnamese students have been taught the saying “để hòa vi quý” (“It is always precious to maintain the harmony”). Indeed, harmony maintenance is the key theme found emerging from the content analysis of Vietnamese school textbooks conducted by Lucius (2009, pp. 30-33), who thereby claimed that such textbook-promoted themes had made a substantial impact on Vietnamese students’ belief and value systems (p. 28). Bao (2007) points out that Vietnamese learners are unlikely to respond in activities that challenge or undermine the ideal of social harmony. In a collectivistic society like Vietnam, its members would naturally be dedicated to the common goal and benefits of the group (Hitchcock et al., 2011, p. 88). Acknowledging this close relationship, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996, p. 199) incorporated “classroom-as-family” as an important theme in their research.

### 7.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has collated the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and then related them to the CLT principles in order to see the extent to which CLT was implemented in the case study. Subsequently, the six Hofstedian dimensions have been deployed in order to illuminate the cultural drivers of teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the reasons underlying the context-bound factors affecting the program implementation at MTIH-ED, the case under study. The culturally calibrated interpretation suggests that CLT implementation in the case study was driven by forces running deep in the Vietnamese culture. It was these cultural underpinnings that had unconsciously and subconsciously defined the actions and thoughts of teachers and students as well as those higher in the hierarchy, such as policy-makers. It follows that any attempts to address the potential problems of in-context operationalization of teaching methodology must be undertaken with recommendations based on the overriding cultural orientations of the context of the situation. The next (and last) chapter will present such culturally oriented recommendations for practice, together with other issues needed for the conclusion of the thesis.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarizes the findings regarding the factors related to EFL program implementation at the institution under study, MTIH-ED. It also restates the barriers to CLT implementation experienced by MTIH-ED in light of the Hofstedian dimensions. Based on those findings and the culturally oriented interpretation of them, it then discusses the study’s implications and makes recommendations for practice. Subsequently, the study is evaluated in terms of its contributions as well as limitations, and the scope of the study is delineated. Finally, the chapter recommends areas for future research before ending with concluding comments on the whole thesis.

8.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings about the three groups of factors related to the implementation of MTIH-ED’s EFL program. Next, it summarizes the culturally oriented reflections on how well those factors marry with the implicit requirements of CLT.

8.1.1 Factors related to program implementation

This study considers the cultural appropriateness of CLT in the Vietnamese context by studying the case of CLT operationalization in the EFL program at MTIH-ED, a tertiary institution in Vietnam. Those factors fit into three categories: the context (society and the institution); the teacher and their teaching; and the learner and their learning.
8.1.1.1 Contextual factors

It was found that the broad context gave rise to a number of problems that could hinder the implementation of CLT: the exam-oriented mentality, limited authentic use of English and the absence of a need for communication in English as societal factors; the tradition of knowledge accumulation and the teacher–student power distance as cultural factors; and the inadequacies of classroom conditions as an infrastructure factor. Meanwhile, CLT was imposed on the Vietnamese tertiary education system despite inadequate investigation of its appropriateness. In reference to the need for communicative competence, it was uncertain whether competences other than grammatical and textual knowledge (such as sociolinguistic competence, sociocultural competence and even strategic competence) needed to be learned and, no less importantly, could be taught by lecturers. At the institutional level, the regime did not have the conditions required to enable CLT implementation. First, the lecturers had to prioritize getting a higher degree to ensure their employability rather than improving their own English competence and expertise in teaching English communicatively. Second, the curriculum dedicated a considerable amount of time to teaching non-English subjects, especially those in political ideologies, thus squeezing the time budget for English lessons.

8.1.1.2 Teacher and teaching factors

This study found that lecturers at MTIH-ED had limited knowledge of and inadequate experience in implementing CLT. While they claimed they were basically in support of using CLT, their ability to make it happen in their classroom was questionable. In reality, CLT-oriented teaching did not happen consistently in teaching processes or assessment approaches. The lessons were dominated by teacher talk while students listened and took notes. There was little interaction between students and lecturers or between students themselves; communication was one way, from lecturers to students. Regarding the lesson content, lecturers’ priority was to cover subject matter rather than create opportunities for English communication practice. For most of the time, the lessons were mainly under the control of lecturers and the texts; students had little or no say in what was taught and how it was taught. Lecturers considered themselves the authority, not only in terms of classroom discipline but also in terms of knowledge, a feature rooted in the Confucian-
influenced traditions of Vietnamese culture. Most of the classroom texts came from western educational sources and therefore failed to connect with students’ interests and existing knowledge. In addition, pedagogical problems were evident, such as lecturers providing scant encouragement or praise for students’ lesson contributions and ineffectively handling questions. Particularly in small group work, lecturers provided little support in terms of input and motivation, leaving students to passively listen to group leaders speaking or turn away in order to work individually.

8.1.1.3 Learner and learning factors

CLT-oriented implementation of the program also faced multiple challenges regarding learner and learning factors. First, students’ top priority was to pass exams in order to get their degree. Since exams were oriented to testing knowledge, students neglected communication practice and instead focused on taking lecture notes, memorizing them and using them to reach their ultimate goal of passing exams. Second, students’ time commitment for English study was reduced because they also spent time pursuing vocational courses. As a degree in English studies was inadequate in the increasingly competitive labor market, students had to equip themselves with certificates in other competences to increase their employability. Importantly, students remained locked in the traditional mindset that lecturers and textbooks were the channels of knowledge transmission, so listening attentively to lecturers and taking notes were their main activities. Students were not as comfortable with communicating with each other as they were with listening to lecturers. In small group work, students were withdrawn; they failed to take up opportunities to practise communicating in English, and their cooperation with each other was infrequent. Generally, students preferred to work on their own, and learning from peers was not considered as worthy as learning from lectures. Further, students used Vietnamese quite often in the classroom, especially when the lecturers were not present at the group and the lesson focused on learning knowledge. However, on the bright side, some students were in support of the implementation of collaborative and learner-centred tasks, which they saw as opportunities to speak up, to interact and to learn from each other. Some students also indicated that they would like to learn how to learn and to take charge of their own learning.
8.1.2 CLT applicability and cultural underpinnings

This study did not simply aim to discover the factors presenting as challenges to the implementation of CLT at MTIH-ED; it went further, comparing that reality with the implicit requirements for CLT implementation. The mismatches found between reality and CLT ideals were interpreted in light of the Hofstedian dimensions. This section summarizes such findings of CLT applicability in the context of use and the relevant cultural underpinnings.

8.1.2.1 Overall goals

It was found that only grammatical (and sometimes textual) knowledge was taught; whereas pragmatic, strategic, sociolinguistic and cultural competences, which are no less important to develop students’ communicative competence, were neglected. In other words, the goal of teaching all the components of communicative competence as set out by CLT principles was not achieved. That neglect was mainly because lecturers themselves had limited knowledge in those competences and thus they were reluctant to attempt to teach them. Also, lecturers were too preoccupied with other concerns to be committed to improving their own English competence. Particularly in relation to sociolinguistic and cultural competences, it was still unclear what exactly should be taught to Vietnamese students.

Despite such problems, educational policy-makers had sanctioned the use of the CLT approach in Vietnam, which is a large PD society. The fact that CLT was introduced into the system regardless of teachers’ and students’ consensus and readiness, and amidst uncertainty surrounding its applicability, has roots in the low UA and high PD of Vietnamese culture: uncertainty about the outcomes of CLT introduction was tolerated, while teachers’ and students’ voices were not heard by policy-makers. Further, because of the society’s FEM orientation, lecturers and students did not openly protest about this; instead they implicitly resisted by carrying on doing what was deemed practical for their own aims. In this case study, lecturers simply taught what they felt confident to teach, while devoting some of their time commitment to studying for a higher education degree in fields that were not necessarily related to English language teaching. The students studied only what was needed to pass exams, knowledge of English, while simultaneously studying towards
other vocational pursuits. The concern with achieving certification of study is rooted in Vietnam’s COL, in which acquiring competence is less important than gaining proof of study.

8.1.2.2 Views of teaching and learning

The case study found that the classroom lessons were focused on teaching forms rather than functions, whereas CLT principles require that a stronger focus should have been on the latter. It has been pointed out that in a UA society like Vietnam, teachers are expected to know all the answers and to be role models for their students. Consequently, lecturers focused on what they were sure they could teach best; that is, grammar and lexicon. They simply could not afford to lose face in front of the class in the event they could not answer students’ questions if they ventured to teach, for instance, sociocultural knowledge, an area in which they were not educated. Like lecturers, students did not want to veer off into the competences they were very weak in (e.g., using English functionally). Also, because of the emphasis on certification rather than competence, students were more dedicated to what was needed for exam success; that is, knowledge rather than English communication skills.

It was also found that greater emphasis had been laid on accuracy than fluency. As aforementioned, by focusing on accuracy, lecturers and students were more confident in teaching and learning knowledge. Also, when lessons were oriented to accuracy, students would have tangible evidence of their study, demonstrated by the lesson notes they had taken. These two reasons are related to the UA dimension. Students’ taking notes meticulously for exam success is related to their LTO and RST, values that place emphasis on hard work, perseverance and resilience in order to achieve the goal of graduation. The main reasons for students’ limited fluency were the rare opportunities they had to speak English in the classroom – arguably the only place they could speak English – and their reluctance to speak. In large PD societies like Vietnam, students may speak only when invited, so in a class with 50 students or more, the chance of being invited was rare, especially when teacher talk was predominant.

The study further found that MTIH-ED lecturers neglected to focus on real-world contexts in their lessons. The reasons for this can be illuminated in light of PD,
UA and IDG–RST. First, in light of PD, the teacher’s authority and status as the guru would possibly have been threatened if authentic materials had been used and creativity and unpredictability had been promoted. No matter how well prepared lecturers could have been, they could not have predicted all the questions students might ask during such activities. This prospect would make lecturers fear losing face, because knowing all the answers is expected in large PD societies like Vietnam. Second, uncertainty, an aspect of UA, would have made lecturers hesitant to include activities that focused on real-world contexts. Apart from their insufficient direct experience with real-world contexts, teachers would be unsure of where the activities might lead and would therefore prefer structured teaching and learning. Finally, in societies with high RST like Vietnam, games – activities that CLT considers to be replicas of real-world contexts and thus highly recommended – are not considered serious enough activities for effective study to take place.

In relation to autonomy and strategic involvement, despite some encouraging signs, students remained conditioned by the mindset that sees the teacher’s status as the provider of knowledge as unchallengeable and immutable. As a result of large PD, students would still be reluctant to trespass what they believed was the power territory of the teacher by outlining their own paths for study and initiating communication. In light of UA, attempts to speak up and challenge the teacher’s knowledge can be interpreted as personal disloyalty. In addition, as a culture with high FEM, Vietnamese learners tend to be modest in behavior, being unwilling to speak up in class unless they are very sure of the accuracy of what they are going to say. Also, because of FEM, in the Vietnamese culture, speaking up and making mistakes are apt to be sneered at as showing off.

**8.1.2.3 Teacher and student roles**

The case study found that the lecturers, not the students, were the central focus in the classroom. Lecturers were given the status of director of classroom activities and the authority of knowledge, whereas the students’ learning was all teacher-led. In large PD societies like Vietnam, stress is laid on the personal wisdom of lecturers, who are considered the experts. The legitimate source of knowledge is believed to be the teacher. Coupled with the high RST embedded in Vietnamese society, authoritarian rule by the teacher was well accepted in MTIH-ED classrooms.
In addition, these Vietnamese students were reluctant to challenge the teacher’s authority due to the tradition of respecting the teacher, a key feature of collectivistic societies like Vietnam. Playing the role of a powerful authority in the classroom, lecturers were not keen to praise students and thus encourage them, even when they responded correctly to lecturers’ questions. This reluctance to praise is rooted in the cultural features of LTO and RST. In the Vietnamese school setting, students are expected to keep working tirelessly, while immediate rewards are normally inadvisable. Praise should be saved for truly exceptional excellence.

In such an authority-oriented environment, students were willing to submit to lecturers. First, the willingness to be submissive was in harmony with the Confucianism-inherited educational hierarchy of the teacher–student relationship, reasons related to the COL, UA and PD dimensions. Second, in terms of LTO and RST, students were willing to endure in their lower position for the sake of the ultimate end; that is, completing their course. In cultures with high LTO and RST values like Vietnam, self-assertion is not encouraged and patience and perseverance in people in lower positions are praised as virtues.

Regarding the group learning ideal, it was found that students were not keen to participate in small group work even though Vietnam is a highly collectivistic society. This reluctance was because small group work aims to bring out the individuality of group members, which goes against the collectivistic spirit of Vietnamese society. In other words, CLT’s spirit of small group work is a western-originated ideal, and as such it does not fit in the oriental society of Vietnam. Consequently, when in groups, most students tended to let the group leaders monopolize the group work. This attitude is rooted in their belief in vertical collectivism, by which each member of a group has their own predetermined position. In addition, fighting for a turn to speak is generally not a preferred choice in this culture of high FEM and high COL. Such behavior would be perceived as damaging to group harmony.

8.2 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

In this section, the study will be evaluated in terms of its contributions and its limitations. The delineations of the study will also be presented.
8.2.1 Contributions

This study has made significant contributions to the research of language teaching and program implementation. Its contributions are meaningful in terms of both theory and methodology research.

8.2.1.1 Theoretical contributions

The most significant contribution of this study is the deployment of the Hofstedian dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010) to interpret the cultural underpinnings of MTIH-ED’s program implementation. The cultural orientations framework has enabled an almost exhaustive examination of the cultural barriers to CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context. With this study, the Hofstedian framework has proved to be an effective lens through which insights were obtained into problematic areas ranging from the sanctioning of CLT as the ‘official’ language teaching approach to the day-to-day operationalization of CLT principles in the classroom. Along the six cultural dimensions, the interpretation can succinctly present distinctive categories of cultural influence and deal with them systematically. Prior to this study, cultural problems had been acknowledged as challenges to CLT implementation in a non-western context, but no research to date has resulted in such a comprehensive discussion of the issues.

Second, by using the Hofstedian cultural orientation framework, this study has made an important contribution by intersecting the fields of language teaching and culture. This shows how the study of culture can meaningfully inform language education and reveals the research outcomes from cultural studies language education that might warrant further study. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 385), crossovers from disciplines other than linguistics, psychology and psycholinguistics will be a source of influence in the development of language teaching methodology in the years to come; the use of the Hofstedian cultural values in this case study is an example of such crossover. To date, the six Hofstedian cultural dimensions have not been seen used for research in the field of language education in general nor particularly in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages.
The third significant theoretical contribution of this study is that it proposes a firm trifocal framework in which program implementation can be effectively examined in three sets of variables. It is acknowledged that this conceptual framework is based on J. C. Richards (2001a, 2001b) and Brumfit (1984), but its contribution consists of putting together a variety of variables into conceptually succinct groups composed of contextual factors, teacher and teaching factors and learner and learning factors. Such an organization is particularly helpful for case study reports in which, typically, the context of the situation is described before the intricacies of the case study are presented.

Finally, this study has brought together the major models of components of communicative competence available in the literature (see Table 2.2). It is acknowledged that that endeavor is based on and triggered by Brown (2014); however, this study has achieved a list of five models proposed from the early stage of CLT development to the present decade. The collation provides an idea of what communicative competence is believed to be composed of and how the conceptualizations of it have evolved over time.

8.2.1.2 Methodological contributions

This study contributes significantly to the field of research methodology. Its research design allowed it to capture the views of the key stakeholders in the language program implementation, including not only ‘school inhabitants’ (i.e. students, teachers, program leaders at MTIH-ED) but also those beyond the school boundaries yet very much related (i.e. MTIH-ED alumni and their employers), while maintaining classroom observation as a key component in the research. Particular attention was given to consulting with alumni, who were invaluable sources of information about the connections between the school setting and the society. The voices of those stakeholders in program implementation have helped to illuminate the issues of CLT implementation from multiple perspectives. To date, no research work has been done in the ELT situation in Vietnam that takes into account such a wide variety of stakeholder views, as did this study. The study has not only examined the teaching and learning based on what was visible (i.e. lecturers’ and students’ action and inaction) by means of lesson observation, but also according to what was revealed by stakeholders’ own accounts of their action and inaction by means of
interviews. Only with this triangulation of data can the factors affecting the implementation of a methodology be adequately revealed (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 229).

8.2.2 Limitations

Despite the major contributions presented in section 8.2.1, this study does have its limitations. First, its findings may be limited to the case study from which they came. In other words, there is limited generalizability of the findings, which were ‘tied’ to the research site, the time of investigation and even to the investigator in the case study. There is no real guarantee that replicate studies would come up with similar findings. However, this limitation is common to case study. For his studies of similar research design, Holliday (1997, p. 235) acknowledges that replicate studies could have different or even reversed findings because instances of teaching and learning will differ, for instance, due to the teachers’ performances and plans and the students’ interests. It should be noted that, as was argued in 3.1.2, the strength of case studies like this research work does not lie in generalizability in terms of statistical probability; the ability to make “grounded generalizations” (Eisenhart, 2009, p. 57) and be relatable is what is important (Bassey, 1981, p. 85; Richards, 2003, p. 21).

The second limitation of the study is its apparent inability to indicate the extent of the impact of cultural underpinnings on the program implementation in relation to other impacts such as lecturers’ and students’ psychology, physiology, personality. While the study was able to describe what happened and to explain why things happened in the ways they did, it was not really able to specify the strength and the breadth of the influences of the cultural factors in comparison with non-cultural ones that may have played a role in making lecturers’ teaching and students’ learning happen in the ways they did at the time the research was undertaken and particularly at the time the lessons were observed. Some lecturers and students, for instance, could have had some personal problems just before the class and the impact as a result of this could possibly have amplified (or lessened) the cultural influences. However, it would be practically impossible to conduct an inquiry of all the possible influences and to make conclusive interpretations of their influence, even with a study of a much larger scale and with a more sophisticated research design. Given
the availability of time, expertise and human resources, this case study did not aim to go that far or that deep.

The last limitation of this research lies in the interpretation framework it uses. The Hofstedian cultural dimensions have been criticized for having a western bias (Holmes, 2012); for being deterministic in dimensionalizing cultures (McSweeney, 2002); and for failing to account for complexities of cultural dimension and cultural variability within the same culture (Yang, 2015). However, the issue of western bias has been addressed by the addition of the two dimensions of LTO–STO and IDG–RST and the recalculations of index score values for the dimensions based on updated surveys together with the increase in the number of countries and regions under study. Regarding the issue of determinism, Samovar et al. (2011) reasonably argue that “although cultures change, we suggest that their deep structures are resistant to [change; the values] Hofstede studied were of those deep structures” (p. 55). Also, Vietnamese cultural orientations appear to have been relatively stable over the past decades. Rambo (2005) remarks: “[I]t seems to me that Vietnam culture as a system of values and meanings has undergone remarkably little change. By this I mean certain specifically Vietnamese patterns of thought and behavior have persisted for centuries” (p. 51). In terms of complexities of cultural dimension and cultural variability within the same culture, it is acknowledged that the Hofstedian framework will need to be refined in order to address them adequately. However, it should be noted that criticism is also directed to the other frameworks of cultural orientations such as Kluckholn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall (1976) and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1998). Meanwhile, the Hofstedian framework has been recognized as having “far greater impact” than other cultural frameworks (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001, as is cited in Kirkman et al., 2006, p. 285) and to be “perhaps the most widely cited” (Holmes, 2012, p. 466). In relation to research about Vietnamese culture, the Hofstedian cultural dimensions “do serve as a broad indicator” (Hitchcock et al., 2011, p. 87). In this particular case study, as mentioned in section 2.4.1, the Hofstedian framework has functioned well as a “lens” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. xxvii) to examine cultural underpinnings that are not readily recognizable and are difficult to capture.
8.2.3 Delineation

First, it should be made clear that this study focused on the issue of cultural appropriateness of CLT in the Vietnamese context, not on the value of CLT per se. To be specific, the study was interested in pinpointing the possible cultural causes underlying the operationalization of CLT in the Vietnamese setting, as is shown by the case study of the EFL program implementation at MTIH-ED. This study did not aim to critique CLT tenets in terms of their theoretical foundations, although wherever relevant, comments were made. It did not challenge such issues as whether language teaching should be learner-centred or language-centred (Holliiday, 1994a) or be learner-centred or learning-centred (Nunan, 1994).

Second, the reasons for implementing CLT in the context of the situation are arguably driven by a variety of factors rooted in political, social and economic underpinnings (Klippel, 2000, p. 896), yet the primary concern of this study was the cultural drivers. Causes of nature other than culture were not considered in this study, although for a more complete understanding of factors affecting the program implementation they were brought under discussion. As an example, large class size has been identified as a challenge to CLT implementation in the Vietnamese context (Chapter 4), but this issue was not examined through the lens of the Hofstedian cultural orientation (Chapter 7).

Third, it is noted that the Hofstedian dimensions that the interpretation is based on presently number six according to the most up-to-date work by the concerned authors (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In the future this number might be extended or conversely reduced, a very unlikely but not impossible possibility. It is also noted that the index scores and rankings that are cited are based on the most recent publication (Hofstede et al., 2010); they are different from the ones that were available in the previous editions of the book (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) as a result of the recalculation and addition of countries and regions as part of the authors’ continuing studies.

Fourth, as indicated in several relevant places in Chapters 5 and 6 (e.g. Sections 5.2.2.2 and 6.2.1.1), the lessons observed in this study were not equivalent in terms of lesson aims or objectives. Whereas those of listening and speaking (taught by Ly) and of reading and writing (by Bich) aimed to teach skills, those of
syntax (by Sinh) and of culture and literature (by An) were to teach content. This difference should be considered when evaluating the lessons. From her perspective, the researcher pointed out the problems relating to the classrooms activities, primarily questioning whether they had made student-centered and task-based learning happen, while bearing in mind also the lesson aims and objectives of the lessons observed were not the same.

Fifth, despite the importance of the role of policy in language program implementation, this study is primarily concerned with how actual lessons took place in the classrooms of MTIH-ED as a result of cultural influences. Whereas the study has “Contextual Factors” as one of its theme chapters (Chapter 4), it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive full analysis of the governmental decisions, ministerial decrees and other legal documents affecting the implementation of EFL programs at the Institution, an issue beyond the scope of its research. Essentially, the study is about the cultural factors rather than the all the possible factors affecting the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context. However, wherever needed, the study addresses relevant issues such as State-promulgated policies on lecturers’ qualifications (p. 122) and teacher development (p.133).

8.3 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The implications of this study are mainly about the adoption of a new teaching approach, and effective, flexible and practical implementation of CLT with reference to Vietnamese cultural values. Based on those implications, the recommendations for practice are presented below.

8.3.1 Innovating CLT

Two key issues need to be addressed in order to achieve the successful adoption of CLT in the Vietnamese context: investigation of the broad context; and a needs analysis designed to discover what preparations need to be made for the introduction of CLT.
8.3.1.1 Investigation of the context of the situation

CLT implementation at MTIH-ED was found to be problematic as a result of poor awareness of how well-matched CLT is to the context of use. It follows that thorough investigation should be undertaken to identify “the good, the bad and the feasible” (Díaz, 2013, p. 112) of CLT in order to make necessary remedial changes and be well prepared for its introduction. As methods are “representations of underlying educational values” (Klippel, 2000, p. 894), the findings from the investigation of the broad context would then be used to fine-tune and even redefine the CLT requirements so that CLT activities could become implementable in the Vietnamese context. There should be adjustments not only of the goal of teaching English but also of the orientations of teaching and learning. Key issues to be reconsidered include deployment of western-oriented teaching ideals (e.g., group learning); expectations of students’ autonomous learning and their ways of participation; evaluation criteria for student performance; and the authenticity of activities and materials. Importantly, it is necessary to redefine the roles of teachers and students, an issue found to be crucial to increase the applicability of CLT in the Vietnamese context (G. Ellis, 1994).

If the investigation finds that CLT is primarily inapplicable in the Vietnamese context, a search for alternative methodologies should then be conducted. However, this is unlikely to be the case. After all, CLT is recognized as an advanced methodology with invaluable insights into the nature of teaching and learning (Holliday, 1994b; Swan, 1985b). It would be unwise to throw the baby out with the bathwater; despite its disadvantages, CLT is a good methodological option as long as there is a filtering process to determine the aspects of CLT that could be incorporated and there are adequate preparations for its implementation. In effect, policy-makers have selected and sanctioned CLT as the program to be used, and they are unlikely to reverse their decision.

Once CLT has been adopted, in order to be well prepared for its implementation, a very important task is to conduct a needs analysis.
8.3.1.2 Needs analysis

The study found that the problematic implementation of CLT was also due to inadequate understanding of why Vietnamese students need to learn English. In the early stages of CLT development, it was stated that “identification of learner communicative needs provides a basis for curriculum design” (van Ek, 1975). Therefore, learner needs analysis is vital for determining what components of English communicative competence particular students would need to learn. In more recent years, CLT advocates have gone further, suggesting that “the selection of methods and materials appropriate to both the goals and the context of teaching begins with an analysis of socially defined learner needs and styles of learning” (Savignon, 2000, p. 127). In light of this view, the analysis should be extended to pay attention to cultural values of the context of the situation, factors that affect teaching behaviours and learning styles. Findings from such analyses should be used as a basis for developing locally suitable curriculum and teaching materials.

It is noted that the needs analysis should be done both quantitatively, via a questionnaire survey, and qualitatively, through an in-depth inquiry designed to uncover ‘hidden’ student needs. Also, there should be adequate and genuine consultation with classroom teachers and, of course, students. Simply imposing the CLT methodology on teachers and students is unlikely to work, because “at classroom level […] most teachers will pick and choose those procedures and proposals which are in tune with educational values, which coincide with their subjective theories, which are supported by a wide variety of published materials, and, finally, which prove effective and easy to use” (Klippel, 2000, p. 897). Despite high PD being an essential cultural feature of the Vietnamese society, it should be the case that “program design and implementation depend on negotiation between policymakers, linguists, researchers and teachers” (Savignon, 2000, p. 126).

Armed with the findings from the investigation of the broad context and the needs analysis, educational institutions can begin preparations for the next step, implementation. The top priorities include evaluation reforms, teacher education and institutional support, the three issues to be elaborated in the next section.
8.3.2 Implementing CLT

Based on the findings of this case study, there are three major areas to be addressed for the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context: evaluation reforms; teacher education; and institution support.

8.3.2.1 Evaluation reforms

For effective implementation of CLT, according to Savignon (2000), an appropriate testing regime will need to be in place, because “many a curricular innovation has been undone by failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation” (p. 126). This study found that exams at MTIH-ED were oriented to testing knowledge, so students studied to that testing focus and neglected the other communicative competences; earlier studies also found this mentality to be present and problematic (G. Ellis, 1994; Le, 2011; Pham, 2005). Therefore, the Institution’s evaluation system should be amended to increase the importance of testing the competences Vietnamese students will need for future employability. Particularly at the tertiary level, measures should be taken to ensure students are capable of communicating in English by incorporating in the university graduation exams all the relevant English competences.

An important benefit of such reform will be an increase in students’ fluency in English. Currently, although MTIH-ED declares English fluency to be a target, no measures have been taken to ensure it is given due attention in the classroom and that students do in fact achieve it. To use the words of Kam and Wong (2004), there is a gap between “the intended practice” and “implemented practice” (p. xxxi). To close this gap, the testing system should be decentralized so that students’ fluency could be evaluated through all classroom activities. Reliance on end-of-term exams alone exerts undue pressure on students and even teachers, in the same way that penalty shoot-outs do on players in soccer competition.

In terms of evaluation, it is also necessary to localize the CEFR descriptors of language competence (see 4.2), which Leung (2012) points out may be inapplicable in EFL contexts. Transfer of those descriptors to the Vietnamese context without adaptation has caused difficulty and ambiguity for teachers and program administrators. Take the negotiation of meaning, for example; this cornerstone
concept of CLT “lacks precision and does not provide a universal scale for assessment of individual learners” Savignon (2000, p. 126). As is the case with teaching methods, these descriptors cannot be easily transferred as a whole from one culture to another.

**8.3.2.2 Teacher education**

Teacher education is seen as the key to successful application of a methodology that is ‘foreign’ to the traditional practices of the local context (Klippel, 2000, p. 897). Based on the findings about lecturers’ inadequacies regarding English competence and teaching abilities, there are two priorities for teacher education. First, teachers without adequate CLT training must be educated in order to be able to implement CLT-oriented activities. Once informed of what should and can be done given the local conditions, teachers will be in a position to decide how to best teach their students, decisions that nobody else can make on their behalf. Such education will improve teachers’ confidence. As Savignon (2000) points out, many teachers feel frustrated when implementing CLT because of “the seeming ambiguity in discussions of communicative ability” (p. 127). Part of the teacher education will focus on the importance of teachers’ own endeavors; their investment is the very factor that makes a method successful (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 228). It should be noted that the ultimate aim is not to make teachers follow the same ‘correct’ procedures; rather, it is to create “a system where all, or most, teachers operate with a sense of plausibility about whatever procedures they choose to adopt and each teacher’s sense of plausibility is alive or active and hence as open to further development or change as it can be” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 106). Once teachers have been well prepared for the implementation of CLT, they are in a position to help with the task of developing materials to meet the needs and interests of local students. Being better informed about Vietnamese students than textbook writers from elsewhere, teachers’ contributions will be invaluable. “Curricular innovation is best advanced by the development of local materials, which, in turn, rests on the involvement of classroom teachers” (Savignon, 2000, p. 127).

Second, teacher education must aim to increase their English communicative competence. Teachers will be unable to teach communicative competence unless they are communicatively competent themselves. It would be impractical to set as a
goal for them to use English like a native speaker; rather, the threshold for them would be the ability to communicate intelligibly in English. Raising teachers’ English level may entail sending them to training courses overseas, which can be very costly. However, as explained in Chapter 4, institutions can access funding through Project 2020 (Le, 2015; Parks, 2011; Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 911/QĐ-TTg, 2010; Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg, 2008), which has allocated around $US382 million for teacher training.

Of course, teacher education is an ongoing mission facilitated by teacher development measures. Favourable conditions should be created for teachers to keep abreast of developments in the field through, for example, attending conferences. These institution-related issues will be presented in the next section.

8.3.2.3 Institutional support

The institutional regime under which CLT implementation takes place plays a significant role in its success or otherwise, because that regime has a direct impact on teachers’ and students’ involvement. This study found that MTIH-ED’s policy urged lecturers to rush to study for a higher education degree, but that the courses they enrolled in did not turn out to be very helpful in improving their English competence or ELT capacity. It follows that the Institution might need to refine its policies on educational qualifications required of EFL lecturers in order to incentivize teachers’ professional development endeavors, which are critical for successful implementation of the program (Richards, 2001a, 2001b). In the Vietnamese context of ELT, English proficiency may play a greater role in a teacher’s success in the classroom than an unrelated doctoral degree. The Institution therefore might need to provide meaningful incentives to encourage teachers to improve their English competence and ELT expertise, the two key components of teacher knowledge (Roberts, 1998, pp. 103-106). Concurrently, the Institution might send lecturers to relevant conferences, or even host seminars and workshops designed to have practical implications for their lessons. It might also encourage action research. All of the above are recognized as necessary provisions for effective teaching (Richards, 2001a, pp. 206-207). In place of a doctoral degree, lecturers’ participation in such events should be recognized as proof of their professional development. Also, the Institution might need to reallocate funding for EFL classes, because the logistics
required for these classes are different from those required for other classes. For example, a language class must be small, definitely not 50 students or over, and the classroom must be equipped with audio and video equipment and moveable furniture.

The Institution should be concerned not only with what happens internally; it needs to think about its connection with organizations beyond the school boundaries. It might consider introducing a policy of university–industry engagement, the lack of which is an ongoing problem for Vietnamese universities’ EFL programs (Pham & Ly, 2013). Engagement in ‘real world’ contexts can foster an understanding of the kinds of job-related demands students will be faced with when they enter the workforce, and the program can then readjust its aims and objectives accordingly. Such engagement would help to close the gap between in-house training and employment-specific requirements. From a broader perspective, it would also mean that the Institution is better equipped to reconcile the differences between the instrumental and educational goals of ELT, a key issue in foreign language education (Houghton & Yamada, 2012). It is proposed that while the Institution creates connections with those business entities that will likely employ its graduates, the EFL Department, with the Institution’s support, could take a more proactive role in maintaining those relationships. This might require the Institution to hand over decision-making to the department management, who, being better informed of its students’ needs, would make better decisions about how best to foster relations with external organizations.

Still regarding the university–industry engagement orientation, it is recommended that the Institution consider develop its partnerships and linkages with corporate entities in order to develop and implement custom-trained courses that can meet market-defined specific needs and demands. As beneficiaries of the training, businesses in return would provide sources of funding for student and even teacher training. This orientation will bring about more significant sweeping changes than can what the Institution was planning to do, which, as far as the researcher has been told, is to open “high quality services courses” charging higher tuitions for, as it claims, better learning conditions linking the classroom with the ‘real’ world of employment.
8.3.3 Addressing Vietnamese cultural orientations

It is imperative to consider the culturally rooted challenges that may confront local teachers and students who, having been shaped by their own culture, will now have to deal with methodological imports that differ, if not conflict, with traditional Vietnamese practices. It should be noted, though, that those recommendations are made with the awareness that not all things remain unchanged. It is sensible to look into the increasingly globalized future when cultural orientations could be more complex and overlapping.

The first Vietnamese cultural orientation to be dealt with is PD, which has extensive influence on Vietnamese people’s action (and inaction). It is because of PD that students were unwilling to speak up in lessons, to initiate communication practice, to outline their own path for learning, etc. Also because of PD, teachers were reluctant to provide feedback on the implementability of CLT to those in higher positions who held power over them. Therefore, to achieve successful CLT implementation, those in higher positions need to seek genuine consensus with students and teachers and create effective communication channels through which those in lower positions can express their opinions and ideas. Further, regular reviews to seek grassroots feedback are needed to make timely adjustments and to promote the engagement of stakeholders at the grassroot level.

The second most influential cultural value is COL. In a collectivistic society like Vietnam, people do care about degrees and certificates and thus students focus on passing exams. Reforms of the evaluation system that shift the focus to testing communicative competence will bring about tremendous “washback effects” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The positive influence of testing on teaching and learning will be exploited by, for instance, emphasis on classroom-based evaluation (Lynch, 2003). Also because of high COL, Vietnamese people tend to respect the hierarchy and submit to the teacher and other leaders. With regard to students, cooperative learning can become an efficient form of self-study if groups of students each have one well-performing student acting as the group leader.

The third cultural value to consider is FEM. Because of this orientation, Vietnamese students tend to be reserved in their lesson engagement and accepting of the traditional format of lessons and group work. They refuse to take risks when
asked to perform in public, fearing that their weaknesses will be revealed. To combat this, teachers need to build a trusting relationship with their students, which will in turn boost students’ confidence to speak up in the classroom. Teachers will, of course, need to be patient and employ various strategies such as assigning students to groups in which they feel comfortable, especially at the beginning of the term or semester, and allowing judicious use of L1. On the positive side, it is thanks to high FEM that Vietnamese students are versatile and as such, to adapt Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s idea (2011, pp. 228-229), their learning can happen despite situational constraints rather than because of them.

The fourth cultural orientation to discuss is UA. Because of it, teachers and students will refuse to be involved in activities if they lack confidence in their ability. Teachers particularly will want to be sure that the situation is under their control. It follows that teachers will need to learn how to deal with their anxieties around uncertainty, which is considered a normal part of the teaching job (Roberts, 1998, p. 107). Also, because of UA, Vietnamese students prefer to have tangible evidence of learning to take home. It is necessary therefore to clarify for students what they are going to learn and have learned, without such tangible evidence as notes. In addition, students will tend to refuse to speak up until they are sure of the accuracy of what they are going to say. This problem can be overcome by providing input in terms of ideas and language expressions they might need together with topics of special interest that provide opportunities for frequent encouragement.

The fifth cultural orientation is LTO. Generally speaking, its advantages lie in the fact that it keeps students working tirelessly regardless of adverse conditions. However, it could be pointed out to students that learning a language for communication purposes (English in this case) involves more than accumulating knowledge about that language; developing language skills also relies on regular practice of those skills. Broadly speaking, it might be explained to students that working hard is inefficient and working smarter will be more beneficial. Teachers might learn to be more generous with encouragement and praise for their students, which, as just mentioned, will encourage student contributions.

Finally, because of RST, many Vietnamese teachers and students tend to believe that only learning activities that involve serious work will lead to genuine learning; they tend to undervalue the importance of games in their lessons.
Therefore, care should be taken in allocating classroom activities. The amount and frequency of game playing in a particular lesson as well as in the whole course will have to take into account students’ learning styles. As a precaution, judicious use of games is advisable in the beginning.

In dealing with the above cultural orientations, it is important to focus on the CLT-friendly factors that are available in the context. As the study found, some students are willing to embrace small group work and learner-centred activities. These students could be utilized as ‘seeds’ in the classroom operationalization of CLT. In the spirit of psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development”, a concept that offers the step-by-step approach of scaffolding as a way of students learning incrementally based on their existing knowledge (Harmer, 2007, p. 59), strategic teaching could allow students to gradually become engaged, with the ‘seed’ students as well as the teacher providing support. Also, teachers might need to adopt an empathetic viewpoint and take the time to gain insights into students’ action and inaction, the reasons for which might not be obvious at first glance. Considering Vietnamese students’ silence as an example, despite prejudices against it as an impediment to communicative learning, a recent study has revealed that for many students, that apparent reluctance to speak “eventually leads to language output and […] supports the quality of that output” and, in terms of gains, “serves to rehearse linguistic accuracy” for talk that might happen afterwards (Bao, 2014, pp. 146-147).

8.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study indicate that there are many areas of research that are worth following up and would provide significant benefits. First, the study concluded that there are quite a number of cultural differences challenging the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese setting. Regarding this conclusion, there arise further questions to be researched: (1) How can the differences be reconciled? (2) Will the reconciliation attempts be worthwhile? (3) What measures should be undertaken to achieve reconciliation?

It should be noted that, in this so-called “post-methods era” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 384), a pluralistic view is emerging as the most effective and practical approach, because teachers would act according to the philosophy of
“principled eclecticism” once they were informed of pedagogical choices and considerations (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 229). Therefore, further research would be needed to collate a pool of methodological options that are found to be suitable for the main learning styles of Vietnamese students.

Second, the study’s findings suggest that Vietnamese students do not need all components of English communicative competence, so further research could be done to find out which components these students need and which components they do not need. Berns (1990) has noted that the definition of a communicative competence must be based on a sound understanding of the sociocultural contexts of language use. Therefore, if research findings determine that Vietnamese students do need to study sociocultural knowledge, further research will be needed to discover which English-speaking community’s society and culture (Great Britain, the United States, the Southeast Asian region, or the whole English-speaking world) the curriculum should cover. If, however, it is found that most students only require grammatical and textual knowledge, the curriculum targets should be adjusted accordingly in order to prevent waste of investment and enhance the efficiency of teaching and learning.

Third, further research might consider whether extra-curricular activities would help Vietnamese students with their English competence. For example, online resources and technological advances (e.g., Internet chatting) could be used as informal learning tools to supplement formal language learning. Recent studies have found these modes of learning to be popular, especially among young students, and effective for students’ learning in other contexts (e.g., Kassens-Noor, 2012; Poole, 2016; Sackett, 2014). Digital technological resources can help to resolve the problems of authenticity and real-world contexts; interactions with e-partners can give students meaningful and genuine purposes for communication (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 199-218). Given that 52% of the approximately 93 million people in Vietnam have access to the Internet (Nguyen, 2015), online resources are likely to be embraced by the society. For example, it has been reported that within one year of launching Youtube.vn in 2014, Vietnam was in the top 10 countries that use YouTube (Hai Yen, 2015).

Finally, future research might also be interested in studying the degree of influence Vietnamese cultural values have on practices of teaching and learning in
different geographical regions, age groups and professions. Are there any differences in cultural impact, say, between North and South Vietnam? This case study was undertaken on a site in Ho Chi Minh City, a commercial hub in South Vietnam; however, different findings would possibly have emerged if the case study had been done in North Vietnam. Located in the field of management, the study of Ralston, Nguyen, and Napier (1999) has found that North Vietnam is more individualistic than South Vietnam.

8.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The study found there were significant challenges to the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese university setting. It was pointed out that CLT implementation in the case study faced substantial disparity between what was ideal according to CLT principles and what was actually available at MTIH-ED. The differences were rooted in three sets of factors related to the contexts of development and implementation of CLT: societal and the institutional factors; teacher and teaching factors; and learner and learning factors. Along the six Hofstedian dimensions (i.e. PD, IND–COL, MAS–FEM, UA, LTO–STO and IDG–RST), interpretations have been made to illuminate the cultural underpinnings of the factors affecting program implementation in the Vietnamese context. These interpretations allowed the researcher to examine the question of why the EFL program implementation under study took place as it did from a cultural perspective. The findings have provided conceptually sound and meaningful insights into problematic areas to be addressed in order to achieve a successful adoption and implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context.

Referring back to the issue of “it depends” highlighted in the children’s story (Bone & Adshead, 1988) presented in Chapter 1 (1.1.3), the findings and culturally oriented interpretations of the case study can lead to better informed “it depends” responses to questions of how to use CLT appropriately in the Vietnamese context. It is hoped that thanks to the study’s culturally calibrated interpretation, the answer to the question whether CLT is implementable in the Vietnamese context, will “demonstrate wisdom of practice” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 230) as evidenced by the country’s recent achievements in language education.
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Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 911/QĐ-TTg. (2010). Quyet dinh phe duyet de an "Dao tao giang vien co trinh do tien si cho cac truong dai hoc, cao dang giai doan 2010–2020" [Decision on the approval of the Project "Doctoral education for university and college lecturers for the period 2010–2020].

Vietnamese Prime Minister Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg. (2008). Quyet dinh ve viec phe duyet De an "Day va hoc ngoai ngu trong he thong giao duc quoc dan giai doan 2008–2020" [Decision on the approval of the Project "The teaching and learning of foreign languages in the national education system for the period 2008–2020"].


Vietnamese Prime Minister Executive Order no. 422 -TTG. (1994). Chi thi cua Thu tuong Chinh phu ve viec tang cuong bo duong ngoai ngu cho can bo quan ly va cong chuc nha nuoc [Prime Minister’s executive order on increasing foreign language education for public servants and leadership].


Appendices
Appendix A
Ethics clearance certificate

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

Office of Research Services

Our Reference: 13/001185 | H10046

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

21 March 2013

Doctor Ping Yang
School of Humanities and Communication Arts

Dear Ping

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H10046 “Cultural appropriateness of curriculum in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Programme: A Case Study of a Vietnamese University”, until 29 February 2016 with the provision of a progress report annually and a final report on completion.

Please quote the registration number and titled as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project.

This protocol covers the following researchers:
Ping Yang, Satomi Kawaguchi, Bruno Du Biase, Thi Nguyen

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Associate Professor Anne Abraham
Chair, Human Researcher Ethics Committee

---

5 The title of the research project specified in this certificate was simply a working title the researcher used when collecting data; it has evolved following the data analysis and the writing up of the thesis.
Appendix B.1
Questionnaire for lecturers

Please check ☑ ONE appropriate box unless otherwise instructed and/or provide your own response(s) where requested.

A. REGARDING YOUR BACKGROUND
1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Which of the following is your age group?
   ☐ 25 or younger ☐ 36-40
   ☐ 26-30 ☐ 41-45
   ☐ 31-35 ☐ Over 45
3. How many years have you been into the career of teaching English?
   ☐ Less than 5 years ☐ Between 10 and less than 20 years
   ☐ Between 5 and less than 10 years ☐ 20 years or more
4. Your education: Please (1) tick your highest degree and then (2) circle the highest degree you hold that relates to English Language Teaching (ELT) qualifications.
   ☐ Bachelor degree ☐ Postgraduate diploma
   ☐ Master degree ☐ Doctoral degree ☐ Other: __________
5. What are the occasions when you have learned Western ELT teaching methodologies? (You may tick two boxes or more.)
   ☐ During my degree education ☐ At conferences, workshops, and/or seminars
   ☐ Through my own study and research ☐ Through my colleagues
   ☐ Others (please specify): __________ ☐ No occasion at all

B. REGARDING CLASSROOM TEACHING
1. Have you often adopted or adapted what you have learn about Western methodologies for your classroom lessons?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No. Why not? ____________________________ (Skip to Question B.4.)
2. If your answer is ‘yes’, then what’s the approximate extent of your adoption/adaptation in terms of classroom time? (Please tick ONE box and provide explanations for that ONE choice)
   ☐ Approximately one third of the time. Why? ____________________________
   ☐ Approximately half of the time. Why? ____________________________
   ☐ Approximately two thirds of the time. Why? ____________________________
   ☐ All or nearly all of the time. Why? ____________________________
3. Has your adoption/adaptation, if any, been _____?
   □ Your own initiative
   □ Driven by the university’s policies
   □ Due to a mix of both self- and policy-driven forces

4. Which of the following are the guiding ‘principles’ for your teaching of the class under research?
   a. **What to learn:**
      □ The teacher chooses what students will learn.
      □ Students themselves choose what they will learn.
   b. **How to learn:**
      □ The teacher chooses how students will learn.
      □ Students themselves choose how they will learn.
   c. **How to assess learning:**
      □ The teacher chooses how (s)he will assess their students’ learning.
      □ Students themselves choose how they will assess their own learning.

5. Of the following, please (1) tick the one that you think is teachable and (2) then circle the one, still in your opinion, that is taking place in the class under research.
   □ Teaching English knowledge
   □ Teaching English skills
   □ Teaching English socio-pragmatic competencies

and finally (3) explain why a particular teaching is not teachable or is not taking place:

**Not teachable:**

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

**Not taking place:**

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

6. For the following statements, please:
   (i) tick the ones (multiple answers allowed) that you think best describe the ongoing reality of EFL teaching and learning at most tertiary institutions in Vietnam; and then
   (ii) tick 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 for **EACH** of the statements (1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Uncertain) in order to reveal the ‘principles’ guiding your teaching of the class under research.
STATEMENTS

1. Normally form rather than meaning is given stronger focus.
2. Some in-depth teaching of language ‘knowledge’ such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation may take place even in lessons of skills practice (such as listening, speaking, reading, and reading).
3. The major concern of classroom lessons first of all lies with the need to ensure students’ language accuracy before their fluency is yet to be improved.
4. Attempts to conduct student-centered tasks are adversely affected by the ongoing assessment practices.
5. The constraints of ‘physical’ conditions available (e.g., class size, time allocation, and classroom facilities) render attempts to use CLT-originated techniques hopeless. (CLT: Communicative Language Teaching)
6. The differences between the requirements for ‘proper’ use of western-imported methodologies and inadequacies in the local circumstances are almost irreconcilable.
7. Assuming the role of a facilitator in the classroom is not only demeaning a lecturer but could also leave him/her being perceived as incompetent, lacking in confidence to lecture, or simply reluctant to work.
8. The most practical lecturer-student interaction mode is basically the teacher as one party interacting with the whole class as another.
9. Classroom activities are primarily controlled practice rather than open-ended discussion.
10. Given the present circumstances, highly interactive learning such as games and drama appear implausible.
11. Vietnamese after all remains an indispensable medium of instructions in quite a number of cases of need.
12. Experiential learning is rarely allowed to happen in the classroom.
13. Course materials are not necessarily adjusted to be ‘compatible’ to the local culture.
14. There is not much that actually deserves to be undertaken by the classroom lecturer to improve the teachability of the course materials.
The apparent non-existence of a genuine need of English communication in their everyday life leaves Vietnamese students devoid of opportunities to do their best to communicate in English in the classroom.

Classroom tasks ultimately are not simulations of real-life situations students might encounter.

It is almost impossible to equip students with a kind of English that they will genuinely need for their future needs.

More generally, it is not an ultimate aim of tertiary education to get students prepared for work-specific requirements.

C. YOUR FURTHER COMMENTS

Can you specify the ongoing biggest challenges to the aim of teaching communicative competences in the EFL classroom at MTIH-ED?6

1. The adoption or adaptation of CLT approaches
   a. Physical conditions such as class size, furniture and equipment
   b. Lecturers: Qualifications, mindset, and their own real life challenges:
   c. Students: English level, mindset, and their own real life challenges:

2. The compatibility of Western imports in Vietnamese classroom
   a. Irreconcilable cultural
   b. Unfavourable conditions of the broader society

3. Communicative competences versus requirements of work environment
   a. School-work gaps:
   b. Variety and variability of job-specific requirements:

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this questionnaire.

6 Pseudonyms are used in this thesis; in the research activities that were undertaken, the real names of the Institution (i.e. MTIH) and the Department (i.e. MTIH-ED) under study were used.
Appendix B.2
Questionnaire for students

Please check ☑ ONE appropriate box unless otherwise instructed and/or provide your own response(s) where requested.

A. YOUR ENGLISH BACKGROUND
1. Gender: ☐ M ☐ F Year of birth: ___ Class: ___
2. Was your high school located in a(n) ____ area?
   ☐ Urban ☐ Semi-urban ☐ Rural
3. Which of the following was the formal English schooling programme you undertook prior to your EFL university education?
   ☐ Years 6-12 ☐ Years 10-12
   ☐ Others (please specify the Years): ______________________
4. Please indicate the ban (stream) you were taking in high school?
   ☐ Natural sciences ☐ Social sciences ☐ Standard basics
   ☐ Specialised basics (Please specify the core concentration subjects): ________________
5. Would you mind indicating the range in which your university entrance English exam result fall?
   ☐ 0.25-3 ☐ 3.25-4.75 ☐ 5-6.5 ☐ 6.75-7.75 ☐ 8.0-10.0
6. Please indicate the major you (will) choose for your career?
   ☐ Interpreting & Translating ☐ Culture & Literature ☐ ELT & Linguistics
   ☐ Others (Please specify the core concentration subjects): ______________________
7. In relation to your investment of time in English study beyond the classroom lessons, which of the following applies?
   ☐ I spend all time available studying English.
   ☐ I spend part of the time available studying English.
   ☐ I spend just a little of the time available studying English.
   ☐ I spend no or almost no time available studying English.
8. Which of the following best describes the strongest motivation of your English study?
   ☐ I study English because I have strong interest in studying the language.
   ☐ I study English because English competence will open up more opportunities for my further study.
   ☐ I study English just because English competence will increase my chances of my employment.
   ☐ Others: (Please specify:) _____________________________________________
9. Apart from your school, have you done something elsewhere (e.g., studying at a language centre, going to an English-speaking club, meeting with English-speaking people, etc.) for your English study/practice? □ Yes □ No

Why (not)? ____________________________________________________________________________

What was it, if any? ______________________________________________________________________

10. What is the highest English certificate you have got so far? If and where possible, please indicate the marks/level you scored.

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<tr>
<th>English certificate</th>
<th>Marks/level scored</th>
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<td>□ TOEFL</td>
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<td>□ IELTS</td>
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<td>□ TOEIC</td>
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<td>□ National English competency tests</td>
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<td>□ Others (Please specify): _____________________________</td>
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B. YOUR CLASSROOM LESSONS

For each pair of the following statements, please

(i) tick the one that you think better describes the ongoing reality of English teaching and learning in your classroom (under research) and then
(ii) circle the one that you would prefer to see taking place in the class.

STATEMENTS

LESSON ORIENTATION

□ 1a. Stronger focus is placed on analysis of language points, i.e. how English works.
□ 1b. Stronger focus is placed on how to effectively express and/or understand the intended meaning.
□ 2a. Stronger focus is placed on how to ensure the accuracy of the language to be produced is correct.
□ 2b. Stronger focus is placed on how to make communication flow more fluently.
□ 3a. The teacher chooses what students will learn.
□ 3b. Students choose themselves what they will learn.
□ 4a. The teacher chooses how students will learn.
□ 4b. Students themselves choose how they will learn.
□ 5a. The teacher chooses how (s)he will assess their students’ learning.
□ 5b. Students choose themselves how they will assess their own learning.
□ 6a. Teaching materials being used in the classroom are mainly Western-imported materials.
□ 6b. Teaching materials being used in the classroom are mainly local written
materials.

- 7a. Teaching materials are suitable to my cultural background.
- 7b. Teaching materials are inappropriate to my cultural background.
- 8a. Teaching methodology is appropriate to my learning style and cultural background.
- 8b. Teaching methodology is not appropriate to my learning style and cultural background.

CLASSROOM TASKS

- 9a. Classroom tasks primarily aim to provide me opportunities to communicate in English.
- 9b. Classroom tasks primarily aim to provide me practice of language points.
- 10a. Classroom tasks cater for the potential gaps between my ‘built-in’ cultural values and those from foreign cultures.
- 10b. Classroom tasks ignore the difficulties arising from potential conflicts between my Vietnamese built-in cultural values and those from foreign cultures.
- 11a. English is mainly the medium of instructions in the classroom lesson.
- 11b. Vietnamese is mainly the medium of instructions in the classroom lesson.

CLASSROOM INTERACTION

- 12a. The teacher is more of a classroom coach facilitating students’ learning.
- 12b. The teacher is more of a classroom authority dictating students’ learning.
- 13a. Regarding language practice in particular, the learning activities are teacher-centred.
- 13b. Regarding language practice in particular, the learning activities are student-centred.
- 14a. Group or pair work involving bi- or multilateral communication between students takes place very often.
- 14b. Individual work involving self-study takes place most of the time.

LEARNING STYLE

- 15a. I learn much more through lectures than through discussions with my teammates.
- 15b. I learn much more through discussions with my teammates than through the lectures.
- 16a. I find it more comfortable to work on my own.
- 16b. I find it more interesting to work in pairs or in groups.
- 17a. I find myself lost during highly interactive learning such as games and drama.
- 17b. I find myself geared up during highly interactive learning such as games and drama.
‘PHYSICAL’ CONDITIONS

☐ 18a. The materials available for use at the institution’s library are acceptably good.

☐ 18b. The materials available for use at the institution’s library are below what could be said acceptably good.

☐ 19a. The equipment (such as audio and visual aids) available for use at this institution is acceptably facilitating for my study.

☐ 19b. The equipment available for use at this institution is not facilitating for my study.

☐ 20a. The classroom furniture is flexible for learning activities requiring mobility.

☐ 20b. The classroom furniture presents difficulty for learning activities requiring mobility.

COURSE EVALUATION

☐ 21a. I find the lessons linguistically appropriate to my English language level.

☐ 21b. I find the lessons linguistically inappropriate to my English language level.

☐ 22a. I find the lesson contents cognitively inappropriate to my English language level.

☐ 22b. I find the lesson contents cognitively inappropriate to my English language level.

☐ 23a. The lessons provide me with good knowledge of the English language.

☐ 23b. The lessons provide me with inadequate knowledge of the English language.

☐ 24a. The lessons provide me with good skills of the English language.

☐ 24b. The lessons provide me with inadequate skills of the English language.

☐ 25a. The lessons provide me with good socio-pragmatic competencies.

☐ 25b. The lessons provide me with inadequate socio-pragmatic competencies.

☐ 26a. The course appears to prepare me for my future goals.

☐ 26b. The course apparently fails to prepare me for my future goals.

C. YOUR FURTHER COMMENTS

What do you think is the ONE biggest challenge to your learning English at school and in what way they should be addressed?

Challenge: ____________________________________________________________

Possible solution: ______________________________________________________

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this questionnaire.
Appendix B.3
Questionnaire for alumni

Please check **ONE** appropriate box unless otherwise instructed and/or provide your own response(s) where requested.

PRE-ENTRY QUESTIONS
1. Did you successfully complete your study at MTIH-ED within the last 10 years, i.e. within the period from 2003 (inclusive) up to now?
   □ Yes (Go on to the next question.)
   □ No (Thanks very much. The survey is terminated here and please return the questionnaire to the investigator.)
2. Is or was English competence anyway needed for the fulfilment of the requirements of your work – now OR before?
   □ Yes (Go on to answer the questions that follow.)
   □ No (Thanks very much. The survey is terminated here and please return the questionnaire to the investigator.)

A. REGARDING YOURSELF
1. Gender: □ F □ M
2. Graduation period:
   □ Less than 2 years ago □ 2-4 years ago □ 5-7 years ago □ 8-10 years ago
3. Age group:
   □ 25 or younger □ 36-40
   □ 26-30 □ 41-45
   □ 31-35 □ Over 45

B. REGARDING YOUR EMPLOYMENT
1. Current employment:
   a. Industry: ____________________
   b. Position: ____________________
2. Think of a work role of yours – either past or present – which lasted at least three months and in which English competence was/is the most important to the fulfilment of the requirements of the work.
   a. Was/Is that work________? □ the ongoing one □ the one before
b. In reference to that work in Item 2a, please explain in what way English competence is/was needed for it in regard to the following areas of skills.
- general listening in social interactions: ______________________________
- general speaking in social interactions: ______________________________
- group discussion: _______________________________________________
- presentation within a group or in front of an formal audience: ______________________________________________
- general correspondence (in writing, e.g., email exchange):
- research of relevant topics, requiring critical reading skills:
- writing reports: _______________________________________________
- translation: _______________________________________________
- interpreting: _______________________________________________
- teaching: ________________________________

Feel free to add your own areas in spaces provided below, if they are not provided above.
- _____________________________: _________________________________
- ______________________________: ________________________________

C. REGARDING YOUR STUDY AT MTIH-ED

1. The following statements seek to learn about your overall experience of study at MTIH-ED. Please tick the appropriate box for each statement to indicate your response.

1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly disagree

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<th>STATEMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The materials were interesting enough for me to keep my attention on the classroom lessons.</td>
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<td>2. The materials provided opportunities for me to considerably develop my English competence.</td>
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<td>3. Given my cultural background, I did not have any difficulty participating in the tasks conducted in the classroom.</td>
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<td>4. With reference to learning styles, I found it really enjoyable to participate in the tasks required of the classroom lessons.</td>
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<td>5. The classroom tasks at the time were really good simulations of what later happened in my workplaces.</td>
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<td>6. The tasks were clearly student-centred rather than teacher-centred.</td>
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<td>7. The four-year course equipped me with the English I could immediately use as required in my employment.</td>
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<td>8. The four-year course laid a good foundation for my further career development.</td>
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</table>
9. I felt as if my classmates appeared to have learned a lot in the four-year course.

10. I felt as if there was little else my teachers could have done to reconcile the problems existing in the implementation of their classroom lessons.

2. Please tick one orientation of your studies at MTIH-ED:
   - Interpreting & Translating
   - Culture & Literature
   - Linguistics & ELT
   - None of the above

3. Of the following areas of study, with reference to your course at MTIH-ED, please (1) tick the one that you think the course arguably placed the strongest focus on and (2) then circle the one, still in your opinion, that should have been received the top priority then.
   - English knowledge
   - English skills
   - English socio-pragmatic competencies

4. Under your evaluation, your current English capabilities are mainly due to __________?
   - Your university education
   - Your on-the-job learning
   - Your self-study

D. REGARDING YOUR SUGGESTION FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

1. On which of these premises do you think the EFL program at MTIH-ED should have been formulated?
   - It should provide a general education of basic knowledge for students
   - It should be employment-oriented, preparing students job-specific skills?
   - Both

2. (a) Do you think communicative competence should have been the first priority in your EFL program?  
   - Yes  
   - No
   
   (b) Why (not)? _____________________________________________________

3. In what ways do you think improvements could possibly be done to make the course at MTIH-ED more relevant to workplace-related requirements? (Please provide your explanations to the choices you have ticked)
   - Teaching methodology: ____________________________________________
   - Study resources: _________________________________________________
   - Facilities (furniture & equipment): __________________________________
   - Increased practicum: _____________________________________________
   - Increased extra-curricular activities: _________________________________
   - Others (Please specify.): ___________________________________________

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this questionnaire.
Appendix B.4

Questionnaire for employers

This questionnaire seeks to learn your feedback about the English-related performance of your employees who are graduates from MTIH-ED. Please (1) use one questionnaire for each of those employees and (2) check ONE appropriate box unless otherwise instructed and/or provide your own response(s) where requested.

PRE-ENTRY QUESTIONS

1. Are you employing or have you ever employed any MTIH-ED graduates for at least 3 months?
   - □ Yes (Go on to the next question.)
   - □ No (Thanks very much. The survey is terminated and please return the questionnaire to the investigator.)

2. Are/Were you in a position to have been informed of that employee’s performance in English-related terms?
   - □ Yes (Go on to the next questions.)
   - □ No (Thanks very much. The survey is terminated and please return the questionnaire to the investigator.)

A. REGARDING YOUR EMPLOYEE

1. How long has that employee been or was (s)he working at your organisation? 
   (Please fill in the spaces provided.)
   For _______ years and _______ months.

2. What is/was his/her position at your organisation?
   - □ Interpreter/Translator
   - □ Secretary
   - □ English teacher
   - □ Receptionist
   - □ Research officer
   - □ Tour guide
   - □ Business liaison officer
   - □ Others (Please specify.): ______________________

3. How often is/was English communicative competence needed for the employee’s completion of the work responsibilities required of his/her role?
   - □ Every day
   - □ A few times a week
   - □ Once a week
   - □ Once a fortnight
   - □ Once a month
   - □ Less often than once a month

4. How necessary is/ was English communicative competence to employee’s completion of the work responsibilities required of his/her role?
   - □ Very necessary
   - □ Necessary
   - □ Fairly necessary
   - □ Not really necessary

5. How necessary is/was each of the following aspects of English competence is to the employee’s completion of the work responsibilities required of his/her role?
a. Knowledge of English including grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation:
- Very necessary
- Necessary
- Fairly necessary
- Not really necessary

b. Skills of English including listening, speaking, reading and writing:
- Very necessary
- Necessary
- Fairly necessary
- Not really necessary

c. Socio-pragmatic competencies such as small-talk, negotiation, presentation, etc.
- Very necessary
- Necessary
- Fairly necessary
- Not really necessary

6. How often are/were oral communication skills in the work role of employee?
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never

7. How often are/were written communication skills used in the work role assumed by employee?
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never

8. What forms of communication did/does employee typically perform in his/her role? (Please tick ALL the appropriate boxes.)
- Social conversation
- Following instruction and responding orally
- Group discussion
- General correspondence (in writing, e.g., email exchange)
- Negotiation
- Writing reports
- Teaching students
- Interpreting
- Oral presentation
- Translation
- Telephone answering
- Others (Please specify): _______________________

9. How would you rate the employee’s overall English performance as required to fulfil work-related responsibilities?
- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Below average

10. In your opinion, what about that employee’s English are/were yet to be improved for better fulfilment of his/her job responsibilities? (Please explain your opinions in the spaces provided.)
- English knowledge: ______________________________________________
- English skills: ___________________________________________________
- English socio-pragmatic competencies: _______________________________

B. YOUR ORGANISATION AND RECRUITMENT APPROACH

11. Could you please give a brief introduction of yourself and your organisation? Please tick the appropriate box and fill in the spaces provided.

Your gender:  □ Male  □ Female

Your organisation’s trading name: _________________________________

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The industry of your organisation’s operations: ______________________________
Your position at the organisation: ______________________________
Your work supervision role to the employee concerned: _______________________

12. Of the following criteria, how important are/were they in your decision-making to recruit NEW graduates to fill in positions requiring English competence at your organisation, if any?

(Please indicate your responses with numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 by which 1: Very important; 2. Important; 3. Not really important; 4. Not important at all; 5. I am uncertain.)

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<td>English socio-pragmatic competencies</td>
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C. REGARDING YOUR SUGGESTION FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

In what way do you think the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the tertiary level could possibly be improved? (Please provide your suggestions in the spaces provided.)

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this questionnaire.
## Appendix C

### Classroom observation protocols

#### A. Cultural appropriateness of EFL curriculum – classroom observation scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Year of studying</th>
<th>Visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Time</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT ORG.</th>
<th>ATMOSPHERE</th>
<th>LEARNING TASKS</th>
<th>STUDENT MODALITY</th>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>MEDIUM</th>
<th>STUDENT LEARNING STYLE</th>
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<td>Class</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
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- **Type**:
  - Teacher (T)
  - Student (Ss)

- **Medium**:
  - Western-imported
  - Vietnamese
  - Mixure
  - English
  - Passive
  - Active
B. Observer’s comments:

1. Teaching methodology being used in the classroom: .................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................................

2. Type of materials being used in the classroom: ...........................................................................
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3. Overall teaching and learning atmosphere: ..............................................................................
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4. Cultural appropriateness of the EFL pedagogy

4.1 Is it appropriate to students’ cultural background and learning style? ................................
...........................................................................................................................................................

4.2 Are students motivated by this pedagogy? ..............................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................................

5. Questions about the appropriateness of EFL curriculum: (1) ......................................................
(2) .......................................................................................................................................................
(3) .......................................................................................................................................................

C. Observer’s reflective assessment of the lesson (to be done as soon as the class ends and when the observer has at least half a hour’s peace of mind to think about what was happening in the classroom where the observation had just taken place.)

- - Rate the following statements according to how accurately they reflect what went on in the lesson observed. (Key: 1 – Does not at all reflect what went on; 2 – Only marginally reflects what went on; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Describes rather well what went on; 5 – Is a totally accurate reflection of what went on.) As for the evaluation, bear the majority in mind.

Lesson by lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher functioned as the facilitator of the learning process</td>
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<td>2. The instruction is consistently organized around thematic units.</td>
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<td>3. Instructional activities provided students with experiential and interactive learning.</td>
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<td>4. The teacher employed diverse instructional approaches with different students apparently of differing learning styles.</td>
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<td>5. Stronger emphasis was laid fluency rather than accuracy in most activities.</td>
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<td>6. Mistakes were seen natural in language learning and students were encouraged to be proactive in communication.</td>
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<td>7. Students were willing to express themselves in English and played an active role in pair/group work activities.</td>
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<td>8. A large proportion of learning materials come from Western sources.</td>
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<td>9. Course contents were perceived to be meaningful, relevant to students’ cultural background and real life.</td>
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<td>10. Course content appeared related to students’ needs.</td>
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<td>11. Course content provide students with career-related specialized knowledge and terminologies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tasks/Activities</td>
<td>12. Tasks provide communicative situations, authentic interaction for students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. Tasks are familiar to students’ culture, meaningful, and relevant to their needs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14. Tasks provide experiential and interactive learning for students to build up their learning autonomy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15. Oral-focus activities, open-ended discussion, group work, pair work were used more often than were structured, grammatical tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom atmosphere</td>
<td>16. Creativity and innovation are encouraged while subjection to teacher’s authority is pervasive.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>17. Lecture-style instruction is dominated in the classroom, and students are passive, less vocal.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18. Students never dare to interrupt their teachers or show any disagreement with their teacher.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19. Students don’t dare to be assertive in front of their teachers and their classmates.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20. Students show a deep respect to teachers and there is always a great distance between teachers and students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom constraints</td>
<td>21. Large class size and fixed tables and chairs prevent communicative activities from being taken place effectively.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>22. Limited instructional hours restrain effective communicative activities from being taken place.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23. Limited internet access and limited computer lab rooms prevent students from practising their English communicative skills.</td>
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<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>24. Students seem to be motivated in the lesson.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25. Lessons are culturally appropriate for Vietnamese students.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
D. Questions about the lesson happenings: (1) ...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
(2) ...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
(3) ...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
Appendix D.1

Interview questions for lecturers

1. Have you ever been exposed to Western culture and the Westernised models of communicative language teaching (CLT) currently in practice?
2. Do you think the prescribed aims and objectives of EFL curriculum at MTIH are achievable in reality in your actual classroom?
3. Do you think that the way English is currently taught at MTIH was frequently cited as a hindrance to effective communicative language teaching?
4. What methodology do you apply in your classroom? Why do you teach in the ways you teach?
5. How much do you adapt the prescribed Western curriculum in your classroom? Do you think Western style pedagogy is appropriate and useful for Vietnamese students?
6. Do you think that the EFL curriculum should take on all the cultural and pedagogical attributes of Western schools? If yes, why? If no, why not?
7. How do you perceive the Vietnamese cultural constraints, and institutional constraints on your adaption of the Western methodology, if any?
8. Have you found any discrepancies in the following issues?
9. Your knowledge about CLT versus your actual application of CLT in your classroom?
10. Your willingness to apply the ‘right’ way of CLT versus the reality in your classroom (constraints of the Vietnamese cultural appropriateness, curriculum’s objectives, class size, classroom facilities, students’ learning style, students’ participation, students’ English knowledge, time allowance, the teacher-student relationship, etc.)
11. The curriculum’s outcomes prescribed (skills, knowledge) versus the actual outcome obtained in the classroom
12. Do you think that the actual application of CLT pedagogical values is in conflict with a number of Vietnamese cultural, social and professional values? Are there any cultural incompatibility and the conflict of values when CLT is applied in reality in Vietnamese classrooms?
13. What would you perceive as elements of Vietnamese culture that come up against ‘Westoxication’?
14. Do you think that CLT principles (e.g., student-centre approach, democratic classroom) challenge the teacher’s role in your classroom and in Vietnamese society?

15. Do you use Western materials in your classroom? How your students react to those materials? How do you adapt Western materials in your classroom?

16. Do you see any contradictions and paradoxes in the curriculum in terms of the difference between Western pedagogy and Vietnamese culture?

17. What do you think about the adaptation and importation of Western pedagogy (including syllabuses, textbooks, instructional materials) where certain ideas, behaviours and products are privileged, while those of the learners themselves are frowned upon?

18. What do you think about the promotion of using Western pedagogy in Vietnam under the unchanging belief of Western universal applicability?

19. What would you have done differently in your classroom if you had all the things you might need in the classroom?

20. Do you think that the current EFL program will equip students with necessary communicative skills and knowledge which will be required at their workplaces in the future?

21. Do you have any suggestion for the betterment of the EFL program at MTIH in term of methodology and course content?

22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the culturally appropriateness of the EFL pedagogy (methodology and course content)?

23. 3-5 more questions will be formulated on the basis of the outstanding notes of the classroom lesson observed.

Thanks for your cooperation.
Appendix D.2
Interview questions for students

1. Do you think that the English as a foreign language (EFL) lessons you are learning at MTIH:
   a) Are relevant to your learning styles/cultural values?
   b) Are relevant to your needs?
   c) Are motivating you?
   d) Significantly help you to develop your communicative competence?
   e) Useful for your future career?
2. What about the ratio of activities (e.g., pair work, group work, discussion, memorization) have been/would you like to be undertaking in your classroom?
3. Do you think the tasks provide authentic communicative interaction for you?
4. Which skills are taught most of the time in your classroom?
5. Which type of activities do you think that will help you learn most? (e.g., open-ended discussion or structured tasks with detailed instructions?)
6. Which teaching mode:
   a) Do your teacher apply most in the classroom? (e.g., lecturing, facilitating, etc.)
   b) Do you like your teacher to apply in the classroom? (e.g., teacher as a facilitator; teacher as a main source of knowledge)
7. Are you motivated in the new role of the teacher as a facilitator? Why?
8. The teacher’s role as a facilitator contradicts the Vietnamese socially expected and felt image of the professional self of the teacher. Do you agree or disagree?
9. What type of EFL materials (Western-related materials or Vietnamese-related materials) are used most in your classroom?
10. Are those Western-style materials suitable with you? Are you interested in those materials?
11. Do you think that using materials from Western countries is beneficial? Would you like them to be suited Vietnamese students’ needs? If no, why not? By whom?
12. Do you think that EFL curriculum should take on all the cultural and pedagogical attributes of Western schools?
13. Have you ever found any problems (such as your learning styles and classroom layout) that prevent the communicative activities (such as group work, pair work) from being effective in the classroom?

14. Do you support EFL curriculum in which language is learnt naturally through purposeful use?

15. What do you think of the ongoing teacher-student relationship? Should the students enjoy an open and equal relationship with their teachers or they need to maintain a distance and show obvious respect to them?

16. Do you think that your teachers mistrust what you know about English and tend to teach you from a position of authority?

17. Fixed knowledge is less important than creativity, motivation and versatility. Do you agree?

18. Do you think that this EFL course will provide you with essential work-related terminologies? Do you think that you are well-equipped with knowledge and skills required in the job market?

19. 3-5 more questions will be formulated on the basis of the outstanding notes of the classroom lesson observed.

Thank you for your cooperation.
Appendix D.3
Interview questions for program administrator

1. Do you think that the prescribed aims and objectives of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program for students major in English are achievable in reality in the classrooms?

2. To your understanding, are there any methodologies and/or course content in this EFL program being imported and/or adopted from Western culture? If yes, why? If no, why not?

3. How flexibly can the prescribed curriculum be implemented in the classroom at teachers’ discretion? In terms of content AND importantly methodologies?

4. Do you think that (to develop students’ communicative competence), the teachers are still using the traditional methodologies they are familiar with in the classroom or they are using communicative language teaching methodologies?

5. Do you anticipate any variation between the expected and actual outcomes so long as teachers are given space to teach at their own discretion, if so?

6. Do you think that the way English is currently taught at MTIH is cited as a hindrance to effective communicative language teaching?

7. To develop students’ communicative competence, do you think teachers apply communicative language teaching (CLT) in the classrooms? How can you make sure that is going on, if so?

8. To what extent would you agree the following issues:

9. Teachers are well prepared for the understanding of the CLT theories, principles

10. Teachers are well trained for the CLT methods, techniques

11. Classrooms are well equipped with facilities for the employment of CLT

12. Do you personally think Westernized pedagogy is appropriate and useful for Vietnamese students?

13. What do you think are the current Vietnamese cultural, societal constraints, and institutional constraints, classroom constraints on the adaption of the Western pedagogy?

14. What do you think about the adaptation and importation of Western pedagogy (including syllabuses, textbooks, instructional materials, methodology) where certain ideas, behaviours and products are privileged, while those of the learners themselves may be frowned upon?
15. What do you think about the promotion of using Western pedagogy in Vietnam under the apparently unchanging belief of Western universal applicability?
16. Do you think that the current EFL program will equip students with necessary communicative skills and knowledge which is required at the workplace?
17. What measure have been undertaken to ensure your education to keep pace with the requirements of work-places your graduates might find themselves in?
18. How has the curriculum been evolving in the past decade – or at least over the time you’ve been involved in the managerial roles?
19. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the cultural appropriateness of the EFL pedagogy (methodology and course content)?

Thanks for your cooperation.
Appendix D.4
Interview questions for alumni

Regarding your current employment

1. What was the major you chose to study at MTIH?
2. How long have you been working since your graduation? In what roles?
3. How important is English communicative competence to your current work?
4. Do you feel that the education you received at MTIH has helped you to communicate well in your various work-related interactions?
5. Does the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at MTIH help you to fulfil your job responsibilities satisfactorily in terms of English communicative competence?
   a. What skills do you use most of the time at your workplace?
   b. What do you think is apparently missing from the institution’s curriculum to better prepare students for their employability?
6. Do you think that your current English communicative competence is mainly due to the university education or on the job learning?
7. How do you think your English level has been developing since your graduation?

Regarding your experience about the EFL program at the MTIH

1. Could you please provide your opinions about the following issues:
   a) Did the EFL pedagogy meet your career-related needs?
   b) Were the teaching materials appropriate to your cultural background, and your future career?
   c) Was the teaching methodology appropriate to your learning style?
   d) Did the tasks and activities in the classroom help to develop your communicative competence?
2. Were there any Westernized components in the EFL program that you studied at MTIH? If yes, do you think they were appropriate to your cultural background and learning styles?
3. To develop students’ English communicative competence, to what extent do you think that EFL curriculum should take on all the cultural and pedagogical attributes of Western schools?

4. What do you think could have been done to improve the connection between the university education and workplace?

5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the EFL program at the MTIH?

Thanks for your cooperation.
Appendix D.5

Interview questions for employers

1. Have you ever employed any graduates from MTIH?
2. How long have they been working at your company?
3. What is their current position? What about their development in your company, if any, since the employment began?
4. How important is English competence for successful completion of work responsibilities in their role? Is English regularly necessarily used for the job?
5. How would you rate this employee’s performance in these respects?
   a) Overall work performance?
   b) English competence as required by work? (Small talk versus formal exchanges; spoken versus written English)
6. How important were English capabilities regarded in your original recruitment decision-making of this/these employees we’re talking about?
7. What about the employees’ English competence do you think should need further improvement for the work they’re doing?
8. Do you think the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the tertiary level should be general or field specific? How would you suggest it should be re-formulated to ‘produce’ more potentially effective graduates?

Thanks for your cooperation.