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**DYNAMIC CONCEPTIONS OF INPUT, OUTPUT
AND INTERACTION:
Vietnamese EFL Lecturers Learning Second
Language Acquisition Theory**

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ABSTRACT

Although research into language teacher learning and cognition and teaching innovations oriented to communicative tasks has been abundant, little has addressed EFL teachers' learning and conceiving of SLA principles underlying task-based language teaching. The study reported in the present thesis aims to fill this gap, specifically investigating teachers' learning and conceiving of the notions of rich comprehensible language input, and authentic output and interaction, referred to as 'SLA facilitating conditions'. The study explores three issues: teachers' conceptions of the SLA facilitating conditions based on their practices in the tertiary English classroom; teachers' perceptions of implementing the conditions, including factors affecting the implementation; and teachers' perceived learning or change as a result of the process.

Data for the study were obtained from six Vietnamese EFL lecturers who voluntarily participated in two short professional development workshops focusing on language input, and output and interaction. The data collection process was cumulative, beginning with pre-workshop interviews, followed by collection of lesson plans, lesson-based interviews, reflective writing, observation of lesson recordings, and a questionnaire. Analysis and interpretation followed a process of triangulation, and drew on the author's knowledge of the context and the teachers' backgrounds.

The results showed that the six teachers held contextualised conceptions of language input, and output and interaction. Although they believed that these conditions are important for language learning, their conceptions based on their implementation of the conditions reflected a synthetic product-oriented view of language learning and teaching. The teachers demonstrated an accommodation of the notion of comprehensible input into their existing pedagogical understanding, and revealed a conception of language output oriented to accuracy and fluency of specific target language items. Tasks and activities for interaction were mainly to provide students with contexts to use the target language items meaningfully rather than to communicate meaning. Most teachers delayed communicative tasks until their students were acquainted with the language content of the day. Such conceptions and practices had a connection with both conceptual/experiential and

contextual factors, namely their prior training and experience, time limitations, syllabus, and students' characteristics.

The study also showed that although the teachers' perceptions of the feasibility of promoting rich language input and authentic output and interaction were neutral, they thought promoting these conditions was relevant to students' learning, congruent with their pre-existing beliefs about teaching English, and this granted them a sense of agency. The teachers also reported they became more aware of input, and output and interaction in teaching, confident, and purposeful in actions, and some reported a widened view of English language teaching.

The study confirms that teacher learning and cognition is conceptually and contextually conditioned (Borg, 2006). In terms of this, it provides a model of how EFL teachers' learning SLA is constrained by prior pedagogical beliefs and contextual conditions. In conjunction with previous research, the study provided evidence to suggest that communicative and task-based language teaching would appear to run counter to existing beliefs about teaching and practical conditions in Asian EFL situations. This lends support to a more flexible organic approach to employing tasks, perhaps considering the extent to which and in what ways communicative tasks are pedagogically useful to the EFL classroom. An implication is that for any new approaches like task-based language teaching to be incorporated into teachers' existing repertoire, teachers' conceptions of language input and interaction, and the conceptual and practical constraints influencing their thinking and practice should be considered and addressed. In a broader sense, approaches to teacher education and development should take a constructivist perspective on teacher learning, taking into account the local context of teaching and teachers' existing cognition.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter outlines three strands of motivation for carrying out the current study. It begins with a background description of the status of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Vietnam, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in schools and universities. The status quo initiated a need for educational innovations to enhance ELT quality. Following this description is a critical presentation of recent attempts at ELT innovation in response to this status. One of these responses involved my personal experiences and observations, which gave me an initial impetus to conduct the present study. The chapter proceeds to present the objectives and questions of the research, which are further justified in terms of two major issues: teachers' cognition in innovation and professional development; and the interface between second language acquisition (SLA) research and teacher cognition. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1. Contextual motivation

The background initially driving the present study covers the status quo of ELT practice in mainstream Vietnamese education, and recent attempts at innovation in which I was partially involved.

1.1.1. The status of ELT practice in Vietnam

As stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam, English is a compulsory subject at both secondary schools (Years 6 to 12), and tertiary institutions (first two years of undergraduate programmes). Approximately 90 percent of Vietnamese students chose to learn EFL (Nguyen Loc, 2005; Huy Thinh, 2006), but researchers, educators, and teachers in Vietnam agree that the outcome of EFL education is far from effective (Canh, 1999, 2000; Huy Thinh, 2006; Nguyen Loc, 2005; Pham, 1999; Phuong Anh & Bich Hanh, 2004;). In a survey of 925 third-year students from five big universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Phuong Anh and Bich Hanh (2004) found that the mean score of the students was between 360 and 370 out of 677 (TOEFL), or 3.5 out of 9 points (IELTS).

Comparing this score against the Common European Framework, they concluded that students were only able to comprehend simple information in familiar situations; they could hardly take part in basic daily communication. Projecting the students' competence up to their time of graduation, they estimated that the students would only attain 4.0 (IELTS), an insufficient level for attending foundation programmes abroad. A recent survey conducted by an Educational Testing Service (ETS) representative in Vietnam, using a standardised Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), also found that first-year students from 18 universities generally attained a limited level of English proficiency; their scores ranged between 220 and 245 out of 990 points (VietnamNet, 2008c). In the most recent review of reports from 59 universities, Tran Thi Ha, Deputy Head of the Department of Higher Education under MOET, concluded that 51.7 percent of the graduates were unable to meet the English proficiency required for their work (Thanh Ha, 2008). The ETS, educators, and teachers likewise contend that there are great discrepancies in the English levels of Vietnamese students; while some have achieved an advanced level (probably due to external variables), a great number of students are just at low levels of proficiency (Hong Nam, 2008; Tuoitre, 2004). Compared with other students in the Asian region, Vietnamese students generally have lower proficiency; most can hardly communicate or pursue a study programme in English, and thus experience disadvantages in the international work force (Nguyen Loc, 2005). All the studies mentioned above reveal that ELT practice at both secondary and tertiary levels has been inefficient and ineffective.

As in other Asian countries such as China (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Liao, 2004), South Korea (Li, 1998), Japan (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008), and Uzbekistan (Hasanova & Shadieva, 2008), ELT practice in Vietnam has been predominated by traditional models of instruction oriented to knowledge about the English language at the expense of developing communicative competence overall. Such classroom practice is widely believed to be the immediate cause of the learning outcomes described (Canh, 1999, 2000; My Hanh, 2005; Nguyen Loc, 2005; Pham, 1999). However, the practice has its roots in a complication of influential factors including the socio-cultural and educational environment, existing conceptions of educational processes as well as institutional restrictions. These

challenges have confronted and will continue to confront future educational reforms and teacher change (see Chapter 2 for details).

1.1.2. Recent innovative responses and personal experience

In response to the learning outcomes and ELT practice described above, a few recent attempts at innovation have been undertaken at both secondary and tertiary levels. There has been a persistent call to adopt instructional ways of fostering a more active role for learners. Innovation has appeared to be more macro and structured at the secondary school level than at the tertiary level, with the introduction and experimentation of new Tieng Anh textbooks claiming to adopt the task-based communicative approach, in terms of teaching four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Canh, 2008). To support teachers to change their practice toward a more learner-centred approach to language teaching, over a period of eight years (2000-2008), the British Council, commissioned by MOET, has trained key English teachers and teacher educators for 20 provinces across the country, who in turn have delivered workshops for secondary teachers (British Council, n.d). Although the training project was evaluated as being successful, MOET has not yet evaluated the effects of the curricular innovation on the teaching practices of secondary teachers and students' learning outcomes. Change in assessment towards adopting a model multiple-choice in nature still stresses linguistic knowledge of the target language rather than an overall communicative ability. As a result, the textbook change and professional development workshops seemed inadequate to lead to change in the teachers' practice towards a more communicative orientation (Canh, 2008).

Meanwhile, endeavours in tertiary institutions to improve ELT practice are less formal and structured, with seminars or conferences organised to discuss and share problems, experiences and ways of improving tertiary English teaching effectiveness. For example, a recent review conference hosted by the Teacher College of Ho Chi Minh City in 2005 reiterated numerous problems of tertiary institutions across Vietnam in delivering effective EFL education. Many factors constraining tertiary teachers' practice and seemingly resulting in the failure were cited as teacher lack of English proficiency, student mixed proficiency levels and low motivation, large class sizes, time pressures, and a form-oriented assessment

policy (Dai hoc Su pham, 2005). The conference arrived at disparate suggestions for improving the educational situation. Some of these were pedagogical, involving implementing learner-centred instruction (e.g., Kim Anh, 2005; Thanh Thao, 2005), retraining English teachers, standardising the tertiary EFL curriculum, using a standardised assessment tool (Huy Thinh, 2005), and even designing a set of textbooks for tertiary English (Nguyen Loc, 2005). Other suggested measures were related to logistic issues such as improving and increasing educational facilities, and raising teacher salary (Dai hoc Su pham, 2005). In most recent years, a number of universities (21 out of 136) have attempted to improve students' learning outcomes by adopting TOEIC as a standardised instrument for testing the entry and exit levels of undergraduate students; some have already begun to develop their own materials or use TOEIC materials for preparing their students to meet TOEIC standards (Thanh Ha, 2008). Although such discussions and attempts have not come up with any formal research or educational agenda, they have highlighted an urgent demand for restructuring ELT policy and practice to ameliorate the current educational situation.

With the same goal of improving students' English proficiency, a large university in the Mekong Delta (henceforth called WU) where data gathering for this study took place has also implemented change (see details in Chapter 2). Since 2004, WU began to renew its English curriculum with a detailed syllabus specifying a number of objectives, the most innovative of which was to develop students' basic communication and academic presentation skills. Assessment incorporated four language skills, and speaking and listening accounted for 40 percent of the total score. To support the teachers at the English Department of the university to teach the new curriculum, workshops were conducted for three days with a view to enabling the teachers to apply two methodological models believed to be applicable to the context. These models were the present-practice-produce (P-P-P) procedure for teaching vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, and the three-stage procedure for teaching integrated language skills.

Engaged in that new curriculum as an implementer, workshop assistant trainer as well as colleague, I had an opportunity to observe the teachers' reactions to such an innovation. This experience, I believe, initially drove me to do the present

research. The experienced teachers, who were not engaged in the training but knew about these instructional models, argued that the P-P-P sequence was neither desirable nor suitable for the university students. They also complained about the elementary knowledge provided by the new syllabus, which was based on two elementary-level textbooks. A senior lecturer lamented that texts in the books aimed to serve communicative purposes, not to improve students' reading ability, and that the books only covered very basic grammar points such as simple present, simple past, present perfect tenses, and other basic structures. This comment perhaps reflects a viewpoint of teaching linguistic knowledge. The younger and less experienced teachers who participated in the workshops reacted in a different way. Among the teachers who had fewer than five years of experience, I observed that some seemed to enjoy the challenge of techniques in presenting and drilling language, while others went through them with inhibition. Many of them, for example, were not accustomed to eliciting questions to check a concept; they tended to explain it. Such reactions to some extent reflect Vietnamese EFL teachers' familiarity with explicit instruction rooted in traditional conceptions and ways of teaching and learning. After the workshops, the teachers were expected to apply the models in the general English classroom. However, there was no evaluation of the impact of the innovation upon students' learning outcomes, nor was there any serious concern about how the teachers taught, what they thought about the innovation, and how these were linked with the learning outcomes. The programme lasted for a few years but stopped in 2008, shortly after the data collection for this study had been finished. Although I was not primarily motivated to examine the effects of this innovation, it was taken as a starting point for exploring issues associated with educational change and teacher development in the context of Vietnam.

It is clear from the attempts at introducing innovations that there has been a pressing demand, motivation and attempt for educational reforms across Vietnam in order to improve ELT practice and EFL learning outcomes. However, it appears that innovation is top-down, and that scant attention was afforded to research-based evaluation of changes and effects, and importantly the teacher's role in the process of change. To improve the educational situation, there must be thorough and systematic restructuring not simply in classroom practice but also in curriculum design, assessment policy, and especially teacher education and

development. If these are not systematically done, possible ways of improving English education in Vietnam will remain undocumented and unsubstantiated. The current thesis looks at the angle of teacher development, and claims that there is value in understanding teachers' conceptualisation and interpretation of pedagogical ideas and factors affecting their professional development and implementation of new ideas. This very point seemed to have been ignored in the change events described. It was apparent that the adoption of CLT and TBLT at secondary schools and the curricular innovation at WU have run counter to teachers' attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs. This aspect of teacher behaviour, in effect, is a central issue for exploration in the present study. In this regard, the present study was conducted with an aim to informing future educational innovation and teacher development in the context.

In the following sections of the chapter, I will continue presenting the research objectives and questions. Then I will outline justification for the study, and finally briefly describe the organisation of the dissertation.

1.2. Research objectives and questions

The research reported in this dissertation had an overall goal of creating an opportunity for a group of Vietnamese EFL university teachers to construct meaning from second language acquisition (SLA) theory, especially the concepts of rich language input, and authentic output and interaction that I have roughly termed 'SLA facilitating conditions'. Through this opportunity, the three following issues were explored:

- a. Teachers' conceptions and practices of the SLA facilitating conditions;
- b. Factors influencing the implementation of the SLA facilitating conditions in the tertiary English classroom; and
- c. Teachers' changes related to knowledge and practice, if any, as the result of working to promote the SLA facilitating conditions for students' learning

These objectives are parallel with three following research questions, the first of which is broken down into two sub-questions:

- i. In what way(s) do the Vietnamese EFL teachers at a university interpret and

implement the SLA facilitating conditions introduced to them?

- a. In what way(s) do the teachers interpret and implement rich comprehensible language input in the tertiary English classroom?
 - b. In what way(s) do the teachers interpret and implement learner output and interaction in the tertiary English classroom?
- ii. What do the teachers think about the feasibility, relevance, compatibility, and agency associated with promoting the SLA facilitating conditions?
 - iii. What changes related to knowledge and practice, if any, do the teachers report from working to promote the SLA facilitating conditions?

1.3. Justification for the study

The research questions above will be justified in terms of two themes. The first one addresses how instructional innovations may run counter to contextual features and teachers' prior beliefs and practice. The second discusses how research on teachers' cognition of SLA issues is a worthwhile underpinning of studies such as this.

1.3.1. Instructional innovations and teachers' reactions

Following CLT, English teachers in many Asian countries have more recently been pushed to adopt task-based language teaching (TBLT) for their English classrooms (Nunan, 2003). This is because proponents of TBLT advocate that it has a sound theoretical basis in SLA research, and as such can advance second language learning more effectively than traditional approaches (Long, 1990; Long & Crookes, 1992; Shehadeh, 2005; Skehan, 1996; Van den Branden, Bygate & Norris, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). It seems sensible from such an assertion that modifying classroom practice toward the orientation of TBLT will possibly improve ELT effectiveness in the context of Vietnam. In reality, the powerful influence of TBLT has touched the secondary English curriculum on paper only. The writers of the new Tieng Anh textbooks maintain that the books follow "two currently popular teaching approaches, i.e., the learner-centred approach and the communicative approach [and] a focus is on task-based teaching as the leading methodology" (Van Van et al., 2006, p.12). At tertiary level, although almost no

universities have yet developed any EFL course books that adopt concepts of CLT and specifically TBLT as in the case of secondary schools, the call for and possibly the adoption of these approaches in some form might have taken place here and there, as exemplified by the context of WU.

Nonetheless, at least two issues must be considered in espousing a new approach. The first thing is a substantial amount of empirical evidence required of the approach adopted. Regarding TBLT, there remains doubt as to the adequacy of empirical evidence for the link between this approach and L2 development (Ellis, 2003; Foster, 1999, 2009; Swan, 2005). It was also shown to produce learners who lack language use accuracy (Lopes, 2004; Richards, 2002). Richards and Rodgers (2001) cautioned, “The basic assumption of Task-Based Language Teaching - that it provides a more effective basis for teaching than other language teaching approaches - remains in the domain of ideology rather than fact” (p.241). This message has been reiterated most recently: “Evaluative studies of full-scale task-based programmes along task-based lines are not much in evidence to date” (Van den Branden, Bygate & Norris, 2009, p.8).

Secondly, the critical role of teachers and socio-cultural context in mediating the spread of a new methodology such as the case of CLT has been well recognised (Bax, 2003a, 2003b; Ellis, 1996; Harmer, 2003; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 1999), which has driven the idea of methodological appropriateness (e.g. Holliday, 1994). In this respect, TBLT has raised contextual concerns associated with teachers’ attitudes toward the approach and its practicalities, for those seeking to integrate it into classroom practice (Foster, 1999). The integration of CLT and TBLT in some East Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, China, and Hong Kong has encountered barriers. Littlewood (2007) has provided a recent review of how practical issues confronted Asian teachers in these countries in implementing communicative tasks. Briefly, these issues comprised teachers’ concerns for classroom management, students’ avoidance of English, little demand on English use in completing a task, lack of congruence with public examinations, and clashes with Asian educational values. These difficulties seem to echo the caution against an extremist position taken by much of the past work that stresses teaching skills without considering teachers’ cognition (Clark & Yinger, 1977; Freeman, 1996; Freeman, 2002). Indeed, failure

to consider the power of the teacher's existing beliefs and practices has been one of the major reasons why educational reforms have achieved low success (Fullan, 1993; Trigwell, Prosser & Taylor, 1994). The view many TBLT proponents seem to be promoting - that tasks alone mediate language acquisition - seems defective and probably misleading. It appears to have been challenged by context in both a narrow and broad sense.

Due to the significant impact of teachers' beliefs and context, the present thesis is premised on a context-responsive standpoint in teaching and teacher development. Instead of adopting a particular model of instruction like TBLT as a major drive of teacher development, the view taken here is that knowledge of SLA can be a tool for teachers' learning, development and possibly changes (MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2001). The particular SLA knowledge selected is an understanding of some basic concepts or conditions claimed to be conducive to second language learning, and specifically associated with assumptions underlying the task-based approach. These commonly accepted prerequisites are comprehensible rich language input, and opportunities for output and interaction (see Chapter 3); they constituted the content of the workshops delivered to a particular group of Vietnamese EFL university teachers. While TBLT proponents such as Willis and Willis (2007) have focused on the technical level, namely task features and task instructional cycles, the approach taken by the current thesis aimed to give teachers an opportunity to construct their own meanings of these SLA concepts in their teaching context. Johnson (2006), and Freeman and Johnson (1998) suggest that giving L2 teachers opportunities to make sense of SLA theories in their working settings is a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This is also supposed to be one of the ways to respond to context, the view advocated by several educators and researchers (e.g. Holliday, 1994; Hu, 2005a; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2001) such that it would allow teachers flexibility and agency to implement them selectively and relevantly in their teaching context (Johnson, 2006). It is supposed that, given a chance to do so, teachers may become more aware of SLA concepts in teaching, and explore changes in their thinking and practice. Underlying the approach is, therefore, a constructivist perspective on teacher learning and development.

Based on such a position, the current research sought to explore two issues associated with educational change and teacher professional development. The first one was concerned with teachers' conceptions and practices of these SLA facilitating conditions, including the factors that may facilitate or hinder their application of the SLA facilitating conditions to provide for optimum learning in their teaching context (research questions i and ii). The second issue involved teachers' change or growth, with relevance to using the knowledge of SLA, in which the notion of change entails a broader meaning than change in classroom practice (research question iii). The significance of researching teacher cognition in connection to SLA issues is further outlined below.

1.3.2. Teachers' cognition and SLA

Considerable attention has been paid to the power of teachers' cognition in the past two decades (Borg, 2006) because of its assumed benefits. Indeed, the cognitive aspect has become a noteworthy area of research about teachers, their learning and teaching (Freeman, 1996, 2002; Borg, 2006), and is especially required in the context "where [English] is taught by non-native teachers and where syllabuses are to various degrees prescribed" (Borg, 2003, p.98). Some scholars even suggest that research on teachers' cognition, specifically teachers' beliefs, be "a focus of educational research" as it "can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot" (Pajares, 1992, p.307). A close examination of the role of teachers' thinking about educational innovation also has informative values (Cuban, 1993). Johnson (2006) emphasizes that research on teacher cognition has made the most significant contribution in terms of informing the field of L2 teacher education that there exists "an epistemological gap between how L2 teacher educators have traditionally prepared L2 teachers to do their work and how L2 teachers actually learn to teach and carry out their work" (p.239). The Vietnamese EFL teachers' responses to ELT changes I have described draw our attention to the merit of investigating such an influential force in teacher development and implementation of innovations. While thorough innovation is necessary to support development in ELT practice and EFL education in Vietnam, it is important to understand Vietnamese teachers' learning and especially their cognition of SLA issues as

these can inform future innovations and teacher development in the context, and possibly similar contexts.

Motivated by the potential benefits of research on teacher cognition in informing English education in Vietnam in general, I also find it indispensable to concentrate on the basic knowledge of SLA concepts such as rich comprehensible input, and authentic output and interaction for two key reasons. In the first place, the knowledge of these conditions is usually introduced in SLA courses on pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes, with an assumption that ELT practice should attend to them in practice, yet little is understood about how EFL teachers think about and address such knowledge in their classrooms. Thus, an inquiry into what teachers think about them may make complementary contributions to ELT knowledge. Borg (2006) suggests that if we consider SLA research and teacher cognition as two distinctive irreconcilable domains, we will sacrifice “more holistic understandings of language teaching and learning” (p.286). Following other educators such as Ellis (2002), and Tarone and Allwright (2005), Borg (2006) argues for the position of SLA theory and research in L2 education, with respect to teachers’ trialling what SLA research suggests in their classrooms. He stresses that research on important SLA issues in the light of teacher cognition can inform understanding of the gap between what it is proposed that teachers do and what they actually do in classroom practice. Such research informs SLA proponents about how to make their pedagogical claims more realistic to teachers. Likewise, Berliner (2005) makes an important point that we need to understand why teachers, given an opportunity to learn, decide to use or reject useful skills, methods, and concepts. In his words, research on teachers’ cognition should be about “phenomena that have been found important from the perspective of the process-product research programme” (p.14). In this respect, the basic SLA facilitating conditions with their identified importance in the process-product paradigm (see Chapter 3) merit inquiry from the teacher’s perspective. This investigation is also motivated by the need to explore further the role of SLA knowledge in teaching EFL. The reason why the research limits itself to input, output and interaction is that these facilitating conditions in particular underpin task-based learning, an approach that has encountered challenges in Asian cultures (see 3.2.2). While feedback could also be a critical condition, this study excludes it because of the broad scope of the condition and teachers’

possible propensity to focus on written feedback as opposed to oral feedback in the Vietnamese context.

Secondly, despite ample research in language teacher cognition over the past four decades, research has chiefly examined teachers' cognition about teaching practice in general, and teaching particular curricular areas such as grammar, reading, and writing (Borg, 2006). A few studies have investigated teachers' conceptualisation of teaching approaches like CLT (e.g., Feryok, 2008; Manghubhai et al., 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999a, 1999b) or TBLT (e.g., Carless, 2003; Jarvis & Atsarilat, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Some have focused on facilitative conditions for SLA such as out-of-class interaction (Bunts-Anderson, 2004), or classroom input via the target language use (e.g., Bateman, 2008; Macaro, 1995, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Others have also investigated pre-service teachers' learning about SLA in terms of its effect on the content of their beliefs about second language learning (e.g. MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Peacock, 2001). Importantly, in the context of Vietnam, research on teacher cognition is sparse (Canh, 2008), let alone research on SLA theory from the teacher's perspective. Little research has been concerned with in-service EFL teachers' conceptions and practice of the SLA facilitating conditions and changes in their thinking after using that knowledge, as examined in the present study.

1.4. Thesis structure

To report the study conducted in 2007 and 2008, this dissertation is organised into nine chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 will present a detailed description of the context in both a broad and narrow sense and the nature of Vietnamese EFL teacher education to highlight the potential impact on the EFL teachers' conceptions and practices in relation to the SLA knowledge. Chapter 3 foregrounds the theoretical and pedagogical foundation of the SLA facilitating conditions, underscoring that they should be explored and researched from the teacher's perspective. Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on teachers' cognition and learning for examining and interpreting how the Vietnamese EFL teachers make sense of SLA knowledge. It also reviews related past research. Chapter 5 explains the methodological approach underlying

the data generated for the thesis, and describes the research methods, data collection and analysis process. Chapters 6 to 8 report the results for each research question. The thesis ends with Chapter 9, which discusses findings, suggests implications and draws conclusions for the thesis.

1.5. Summary

The research reported in this dissertation inquires into Vietnamese EFL university teachers' learning and conceptions of SLA facilitating conditions such as rich comprehensible input, output and interaction. It will present evidence on three questions: how Vietnamese EFL university teachers conceive of the SLA facilitating conditions, what they think about influences on the implementation of these conditions in their tertiary English classes, and what perceived changes they have experienced from working to promote these conditions in the English classroom. In this introductory chapter, I have outlined three strands of motivation to highlight the significance of the study. First, the ineffective EFL teaching outcome in Vietnam initiated attempts at innovation, but these efforts failed to consider teachers' cognition including their existing beliefs and practice. My personal experience with the ELT practice and innovation at a large university in the Mekong River region initially inspired me to investigate the issues associated with Vietnamese EFL teacher learning and cognition. Second, the challenges faced by the task-based approach in Asia mainly in terms of contextual influences and teacher beliefs further motivated me to look at how SLA concepts associated with assumptions underlying the approach are perceived from the teacher's perspective. In this way, I wish to explore further constraints of SLA research in general and TBLT in particular as they are translated into the EFL classroom in Vietnam. Last, whereas teachers' cognition plays a central role in their development, teaching, implementing innovation, and in informing the task of teacher education and development, there is still a gap in our knowledge about how teachers, especially Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers, make sense of SLA knowledge, specifically the concepts of comprehensible language input, and authentic output and interaction.

The research is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in two major ways. Findings of how the Vietnamese EFL teachers conceive of and respond to

selective SLA knowledge, specifically associated with the task-based approach, are likely to inform understanding of how to bring SLA theory closer to foreign language teaching classrooms. In particular, the research is expected to expand understanding of the practicality of TBLT, providing implications for an approach to TBLT to be more flexible, sensitive and relevant to the local practitioners of Vietnam. It is also hoped that findings of what the teachers think and do in response to the concepts of SLA such as input, output and interaction, and why they do the way they do, will inform future ELT innovations, EFL teacher education and development in Vietnam and possibly similar contexts.

2. ELT PRACTICE AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

In Chapter 1, I emphasised that several factors may have combined in reinforcing Vietnamese EFL teachers' practice. This second chapter will discuss these factors in detail. It will firstly provide readers with an overview of the historical background to ELT to highlight the status of English and ELT in Vietnam. Following this, the chapter will analyse the socio-cultural, educational and institutional and classroom factors that may have exerted influence on the Vietnamese EFL teachers' practice. The chapter then continues to discuss the nature of ELT teacher education as having a potential impact on the practices of the Vietnamese EFL teachers in general and the participant teachers of the study specifically.

2.1. A brief historical background of the English language policy

The position of the English language in Vietnam's language education policy has significantly changed in accordance with an over-five-decade history of the country starting from 1954. English began its route, with the arrival of the American Army, into South Vietnam, and, together with French, became one of the two required foreign languages in both secondary and tertiary education (Huy Thinh, 2006). Meanwhile, in the North, the Communist party took over the French colonial government, established relationships with Russia and China, and emphasised the Russian and Chinese languages in its language education policy. Not until 1972 did the then Ministry of Education decide that English were a compulsory subject from lower secondary up to university levels, being taught between two and four hours a week (Xuan Vang, 2004). Since the two parts were reunified in 1975, Vietnam has undergone profound political and economic changes, resulting from a strong relationship established with socialist countries especially the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Russian language became the prioritised foreign language in the national education system, downplaying the position of English, Chinese, and French (Huy Thinh, 2006). Even though English was introduced to secondary schools, students preferred Russian, and in particular,

ELT at university during the 1970s was given scant attention mainly because of the shortage of qualified English teachers and teaching materials and facilities (Xuan Vang, 2004).

With the Economic Renovation, called *Doi moi* policy, from 1986 onwards, English has regained its ascendancy. After years of economic slowdown, “[t]he country witnessed a new change at the top of central power and an attempt to abolish bureaucratic centralization” (Huy Think, 2006, p.1). Together with the breakdown of the Soviet Union and Eastern European nations in the late 1980s, *Doi moi* made a significant diplomatic and economic renewal. Vietnam started to implement a market-oriented economic scheme, calling for cooperation and investment from any country regardless of ideological differences. As the result of such changes, the national economy no longer operated singly with countries of the same ideology, but with a number of other countries as well, including English speaking countries and others that use English as the key foreign language for communication in cooperation and business. The Russian language gradually gave way to English as more and more investors, businesspersons, and tourists arrived in the country, and a wide range of cultural and economic collaborations have been established and developed over time. As Huy Think (2006, p.1) puts it, “social demands have forged the re-emergence of English as the language for broader communication and cooperation.” English has indeed regained its predominance in the national educational system and in the wider community since the economic reform.

To date, English is still the preferred option in schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organisations in the wider society, with 93 percent of students preferring to study English (Nguyen Loc, 2005; Xuan Vang, 2004). English instruction is mandatory from the secondary (years 6 to 12) to tertiary level (first two years). The total time is 1,000 forty-five-minute classroom periods for the secondary level, and between 180 and 300 periods for the tertiary level, depending on each institution.

With such an amount of time devoted to English education, MOET has set a number of goals that target three types of personal development: cultural knowledge, linguistic competence, and learner autonomy (Lap, 2005). In the first place, ELT aims to equip students with the English knowledge and skills to enable

them to learn about other cultures by establishing cultural links with people of different cultures. Second, ELT aims at developing an overall linguistic competence, enabling students to be able to use English effectively, and from that to appreciate and develop their mother tongue. Finally, English instruction has an aim to educate independent, confident and strategic learners and users of English so that they can access and update scientific and technological knowledge as well as communicate in their academic disciplines. This objective is particularly emphasised and developed in the tertiary English programme.

Despite the recognised crucial role of English both in educational policy and in real life, the learning outcome is still limited as shown in Chapter 1. Classroom practice has ironically placed greater emphasis on linguistic knowledge and comprehension of the English language. Such practice has its roots in many factors including not only a broad socio-cultural and educational environment, but also institutional features and classroom conditions. The nature of EFL teacher education may also partly contribute to it.

2.2. The socio-cultural and educational context

The term ‘context’ involves two levels of interpretation: context is “the particular occasion on which the language is being used,” or “a culture with particular assumptions and expectations” (Gibbons, 2002, p.2). The latter is precisely the one discussed by many educators in translating a pedagogical approach into a particular context. Much discussion about exporting English language teaching approaches developed in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts to non-English speaking countries has often involved the challenge of socio-cultural factors related to these EFL contexts (Anderson, 1993; Holliday, 1994; Mitchell & Lee, 2003; Prabhu, 1990). For example, Prabhu (1990) argues that no single teaching method is effective for all contexts, and that no particular single method works best for a particular context. Holliday (1994) has also cautioned that it is not easy to transfer a teaching method or approach directly from one context to another. Many educators and researchers (e.g. Fotos, 2005; Liao, 2004; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Tomlinson, 2005) assert that an ESL context differs very much from an EFL context. It follows that the socio-cultural and educational environment of Vietnam has a crucial role to play in its ELT practice. Key factors

as reviewed below consist of a non-facilitative English learning environment, the lack of an effective curriculum including assessment measures, and entrenched conceptions of teaching and learning and roles of teachers and students in the educational process.

Firstly, in Vietnam, the social environment for studying English is not facilitative. English language use is restricted to classroom activities, as Vietnamese is the language of daily life and work. Not until recently have there been some mass communication media in English, namely a few newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, and the Internet, but they are far from affording an input-rich environment as long as the English classroom is disconnected from the outside. In many rural areas, the lack of access to those media is a reality. The Vietnamese English classroom is described as a ‘cultural island’ where the teacher is supposed to impart knowledge of the target language (Canh, 2000). In the past decades, the English teacher has chiefly prepared students with the linguistic knowledge to cope with the national secondary education examination. Particularly in tertiary institutions, there has been a common belief that ELT should be oriented to reading and grammar skills to develop students’ ability to read English materials in their academic disciplines (My Hanh, 2005). Put simply, the main purpose of teaching and learning English has been largely limited to reading English-medium science journals and books. Given the absence of an English communication environment, ELT practice has undoubtedly prioritised preparing knowledge about the English language rather than developing ability to use English. Most Vietnamese students study English chiefly for instrumental purposes, the first and foremost of which is to pass the national examination.

In relation to examinations, perhaps the assessment policy has additionally exerted a substantial effect on classroom practice (Canh, 1999, 2000). Assessment delivered by representatives of the Ministerial or Provincial Departments of Education has largely stressed linguistic knowledge. Consequently, school English teachers have had to prioritise class time to prepare their students for heavily grammar-based and norm-referenced tests, acting as high-pass-rate guarantors (Lap, 2005). The change toward using multiple-choice testing format recently still cannot affect English teachers’ practices (Canh, 2008). Likewise, given the right to have their own EFL programmes, tertiary institutions have

hardly placed importance on assessing students' ability to use English. Only a few universities (14.4 percent) have lately implemented the assessment of graduates' proficiency, using TOEIC, which includes reading, writing, and listening (Hong Nam, 2008). Such a testing and assessment policy, to a certain extent, has constrained teachers to teach beyond the confines of testing and evaluation (Canh, 2008; Pham, 1999).

Parallel to testing and assessment is the problem of curriculum design. Teaching English in Vietnam is largely textbook-based. Brogan (as cited in Pham, 1999) has noted that educational institutions in Vietnam use textbooks and teachers' books as curriculum, and that the teachers have no other role than following the mandated textbooks. In fact, the learning outcome has partly, if not largely, stemmed from secondary English instruction. This instruction was based mainly on a series of MOET-mandated English textbooks that stressed linguistic and academic mastery (Nguyen Be & Crabbe, 1999; Pham, 1999), and the predominant adoption of the Grammar Translation Method. Tertiary English education has also accounted for the outcome because teaching has similarly paid less attention to the development of communicative competence overall (Pham, 2007). Despite the right to design their own programmes, tertiary institutions usually select a set of imported English textbooks and mandate a number of units for teaching within the amount of time stipulated by MOET as mentioned above. Their programmes, therefore, usually lack relevance and context-responsiveness, and teachers seem unaware of adapting the textbooks or developing materials relevant to their local contexts (Pham, 1999). Although some of the selected books such as *Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1993) and *Lifelines* (Hutchinson, 1997) have an integration of language skills, teachers are disinclined to create opportunities for developing communicative skills not only because of their familiarity with traditional methods, but also because of the assessment practice and other influences such as mixed-ability and low proficiency students.

Embedded in the entrenched ELT practice across Vietnamese schools, colleges and universities are also conceptions of educational processes deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition. Brought into Vietnam in the first century B.C. (Institute of Philosophy, 2009), Confucian ideology has exerted a great influence on societal and educational aspects of Vietnam. The fundamental purpose of Confucianism is

to promote social order and discipline rather than individual development (Shen, 2001). To maintain discipline and order in society, Confucianism proposes an observation of hierarchical respect structure. In this regard, power distance, as Hofstede (1986) reveals, affects interpersonal interaction. Accordingly, power inequality is perceptually normal, and people of lower ranks must submit to and respect those of higher ranks. In particular, children assumedly have to show reverence to parents, or the younger are expected to show a reverential attitude to the elder. Educated scholars such as teachers are therefore highly respected and honoured. As in China (Hofstede, 1986), teaching is the most respected and honoured profession in Vietnamese society. In education, such a cultural belief has resulted in explicit and didactic approaches where children and youth should submissively listen to and learn from what the teacher preaches. The hierarchical principle has led to an unequal teacher-student relationship in which the teacher is an absolute authority (Brownrigg, 2001), whose power is reinforced in a popular motto at almost all schools: Learn to behave well first; learn subjects later. Thus, listening, memorising, and reciting lessons are daily routines and good behaviours. Any questions challenging teachers may run the risk of being disrespectful (Canh, 1999, 2000). Any instruction breaking this hierarchical relationship may challenge traditional cultural values. In the English classroom, such thinking has resulted in “rote learning of rules, with little or no encouragement of using English for communicative purposes and little development of creative or independent thinking” (Canh, 2004, p.29). This may have underpinned the widely held perception of Vietnamese students as passive learners.

Influenced by the notion of discipline and order, most teachers want to exercise control of their classroom. It is unsurprising to find quietness along with choral repetition and response as a daily practice in the English classroom. This exercise of control also closely relates to face consciousness, which is characteristic of a collective and large-power-distance society like Vietnam (Hofstede, 1986). Teachers may risk losing face when confronted with difficult questions from students, and students may have the same risk when saying something inaccurately. In addition, the classroom arrangement with fixed seats and tables and students sitting in rows, make the classroom atmosphere formal. This further reinforces the notion of order and hinders mobility required for more dynamic

teaching and learning activities.

Pham (1999), nevertheless, has further added that besides Confucian influence, the philosophy of “French and Soviet education that focuses on academic studies of grammar, literature, and in-depth knowledge of literary texts” (¶19) has also had an impact on current classroom practice in Vietnam. Such educational concepts have shaped teachers’ understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning, resulting in the dominant lecture-based practice, through which the central power of teachers is reinforced in almost every classroom, including EFL classrooms. The educational process is largely conceptualised as transmitting and receiving knowledge (Lap, 2005; Pham, 1999). As a result, ELT classroom instruction tends to be explicit to facilitate mastery of linguistic and academic skills rather than practical skills. It is no wonder that teacher-centred methods like Grammar Translation still dominate the language classroom, and why the development of communicative ability has been given scant attention.

In summary, the socio-cultural and educational factors as described above have had an overarching effect on the ELT practice and teaching outcome of Vietnam’s educational institutions over years. They seem to challenge and conflict with the learning activities proposed by a learner-centred approach such as initiating a discussion, negotiating, and turn taking. With a growing demand for English use for work and study abroad (Huy Think, 2006), changes are urgently required for the situation to be ameliorated. This necessarily involves change in teachers’ classroom practice toward encouraging a more active learning style. The obstacles underlying the traditional practice, however, remain unchallenged and appear to continue to confront the English teachers and ELT practice in Vietnam. The immediate constraints within institutions also exacerbate the effect. These factors include limitations of syllabus and time, large class sizes, and other institutional rules relevant to EFL Vietnamese teachers’ work and personal life, which will be presented next.

2.3. The institutional context

This section describes in detail the context of WU, where the participating English teachers work. Assuming that institutional rules may vary, I believe that the following description to some extent characterises some shared situational

features encountered in any other Vietnamese tertiary institutions. Some features may be unique to the situation of WU. The goal here is to outline potential influences on the Vietnamese English teachers' conceptions and practices, including, certainly, the participant teachers.

2.3.1. General features of WU

Public universities dominate the higher education system of Vietnam. WU shares all the characteristics of a typical public university in Vietnam. It runs under the MOET guidelines, recruits students through the national university entrance exam, and is allowed a certain admission quota, approximately 5,000 undergraduate students per year. In fact, it is the largest public university and centre of culture, science, and education in the Mekong River provinces of South Vietnam.

According to the webpage of the university (www.ctu.edu.vn), the institution currently offers 112 training programmes, comprising 76 undergraduate, 28 postgraduate, and 8 doctoral. In 2009, the enrolment in undergraduate programmes alone was more than 21,000 students. These students come from both urban and rural areas of eleven provinces and cities in the Mekong River region. With such a huge population, class sizes vary according to the courses students take, but are usually large, with an average number of 50 students. This means that the English teachers at the university usually have to teach large classes. Large class sizes have been cited as one of the hindrances of effective English teaching (Canh, 1999; Pham, 1999).

Like other public universities, the institution follows the national curriculum framework stipulated by MOET. According to its prescription, any undergraduate programme must offer two components of knowledge: professional knowledge and compulsory general knowledge. For example, according to Decision No. 01/2005/QĐ-BGD&ĐT, regarding the national curriculum framework for Social Sciences and Arts, the former component takes up at least 135 learning units (64%), and the latter at least 75 units (36%), with each unit equivalent to 15 forty-five-minute classroom periods. Each university, depending on specific training, designs and structures the professional knowledge base, while MOET prescribes a number of papers on general knowledge required of almost all training programmes. These papers comprise Marxism-Leninism, Socialism, and History

of the Communist Party, Military Education, Ho Chi Minh's ideology, Informatics, and foreign languages. In the latter, English, French, Chinese, and Russian are options. MOET prescribes a minimum of 10 learning units of foreign languages, and each university is responsible for its own foreign language curriculum. In practice, most universities and colleges prefer to offer English and reserve more time for English instruction than specified. At the time of data collection, WU was implementing a 20-unit syllabus, equivalent to 300 classroom periods. The English curriculum at WU has had a history of changes.

2.3.2. The history of ELT practice at WU

Students entering WU usually have mixed backgrounds, but have received a common English curriculum delivered by the English Department over many years. There have been changes, the turning point being the year 2000.

2.3.2.1. *ELT practice before 2000*

Before 2000, the university conducted a 320-session programme based on different series of textbooks. The first series was four textbooks titled *English for Today* (Cook, 1964), ranging from *English for Today One* for level 1, to level 4. These books contained mainly academic literary texts and grammar knowledge, and some controlled practice exercises in the form of substitution tables and controlled dialogues focusing on structures or patterns of English. Writing focused on sentence combination and was mainly grammar-based; there were no listening and speaking texts and tasks. The books served to teach reading comprehension. Alongside the books, grammar was taught as a separate syllabus. There was much emphasis on providing knowledge and practice of grammatical rules through exercises such as filling gaps, conjugating verbs, and transforming sentences. The programme aimed to develop linguistic competence *per se*, so that students could use English for reading materials for their major study. Most teachers followed explicit instructions, mainly the grammar translation method, which appeared to be appropriate for large classes, and for facilitating students to cope with tests oriented to text comprehension, grammar knowledge, and text translation.

2.3.2.2. *ELT practice after 2000*

Between 2000 and 2003, the newly appointed rector advocated that English instruction at WU should incorporate a listening and speaking component. With his demand, the English Department decided to produce a course package. The package consisted of three core textbooks: *Headway Elementary* (Soars & Soars, 1993) for levels one and two, and *Headway Pre-intermediate* and *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 1993) for levels three and four, and a separate grammar package. Class sizes were still large, ranging from 70 to 100. It was noticeable that the textbooks were selected to meet the requirements of WU leaders for adding listening and speaking. In practice, the listening tasks were assigned for students' homework and teachers seldom checked whether students did them; little speaking was done in the classroom because class time was reserved for reading and grammar skills necessary for testing which did not include oral skills. Teachers taught only grammar and reading comprehension again.

2.3.2.3. Recent ELT practice

In 2004, ELT practice began a more radical innovation. As a new managing board was appointed at the English Department, and under the leadership of a new rector board, the ELT programme was reformulated. Motivated to improve ELT, the new leaders urged the Department to redesign the ELT programme for WU. Just before that time, a British expert's project had found its way into the Department with the assistance of MOET. The purpose of this project was to upgrade secondary school teachers' English proficiency and teaching skills. It sought collaboration from the Department in training secondary school teachers in the Mekong Delta region. To do this, the project expert provided initial training for a number of senior English lecturers through a series of workshops. She also sent them to Britain for one month to work on methodology training manuals for subsequent use in Vietnam. These trainers in turn provided training for young lecturers at the university as well as secondary school teachers in the Mekong River region. The focus of the training was how to implement the present-practice-produce model in teaching grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and an integrated skill model in teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing. The advent of this project had an impact upon the Department managers' decision to use these models in the implementation of the new English curriculum at WU, and

it was during this change that data collection for the study took place. Therefore, it is essential to understand how this change happened.

The new curriculum introduced in 2004 consisted of five levels (one to five). Each level had 60 forty-five-minute sessions of classroom. According to an internal document of the English Department, the programme had three major goals: (1) developing students' English communicative competence up to the pre-intermediate level, (2) developing students' academic presentation skills, and (3) developing students' ability to read specialised English materials in their majors. In other words, the programme sought to teach students not merely general communication, but also academic skills required for their future study and work.

In an effort to attain these three outcomes, the managing staff decided to choose a new series of textbooks titled *Rewards*. They selected *Reward Elementary* and *Reward Pre-intermediate* (Greenall, 1997, 1998) and the books were translated into five levels, with each level covering ten units. The elementary book was for levels one to four, and the first 10 units of *Reward Pre-intermediate* were seen as equivalent to level five. As claimed by the writer, the books incorporate multiple strands of syllabus covering grammar, functions, sounds, topics, and skills, with "each strand justified by communicative purpose" (Greenall, 1997, p. iv). The Department managers justified for their choice of the books in three ways. First, the books contained basic topics relevant to students' life and especially cross-cultural content. Second, they covered basic listening and speaking skills appropriate to WU students' levels. Third, they especially facilitated the methodological models promoted in the workshops. From my perspective, these textbooks use tasks to support communicative opportunities; these tasks mostly serve to provide practice of certain grammatical structures, the type of focused tasks as defined by Ellis (2003). As regards assessment, the university decided that test papers covered speaking (25% of total score), listening (20%), reading and grammar (30%), and writing (25%).

The university also worked to facilitate the implementation of the new curriculum. First, classes were downsized to a minimum number of 50 students because the teachers complained they could not teach speaking and listening with classes of from sixty to sometimes ninety students. This reduction, however, caused some problems. It created pressures on both the university and individual teachers. On

the side of the university, downsizing classes meant increasing the number of classes and teachers, and hence financial pressure. Such pressure had an impact on the English teachers. On the one hand, WU leaders demanded that the teachers worked in the evening, which interfered with their teaching shifts at private foreign language centres. On the other hand, the university equalized credits for those lecturers who taught the evening shift with those who taught the daytime shift. Such a decision caused a number of lecturers to feel unhappy and unfairly treated. Alongside this, several cuts in credits produced a negative attitude among WU English staff toward teaching tertiary English classes.

In addition to the downsizing, to facilitate the curriculum implementation, the English Department held similar workshops for a number of permanent young lecturers and those who worked on a contract. The workshops took place for four days and engaged around 40 young teachers in professional activities such as cross-group reading, discussing, designing lesson plans or activities, and microteaching. I was involved as an assistant trainer, and the experience gave me an initial impetus to conduct the present study, as described in Chapter 1.

In brief, apart from the broader socio-cultural and educational factors, the English teachers at WU are subject to institution and classroom conditions such as the mandatory textbooks, time limits, large class sizes, and even the financial policy of their own institution. ELT at the university and its changes to some extent might have shaped their thinking and practice as well. Its shift into more communicative goals with assessment oriented towards communicative skills, as contrasted with the previous focus on grammar and reading, is significant for understanding how the participant teachers constructed meaning in their practice. This is, in turn, important for unpacking the meanings they attach to the SLA concepts as introduced in Chapter 1. Their professional training backgrounds may also have contributed to their thinking and practice, which in turn may affect the meanings they attach to new pedagogical ideas (Borg, 2006; Tsui, 2003). The nature of ELT teacher training, which may have shaped their pedagogical thinking, is outlined in the next section.

2.4. ELT teacher education in Vietnam

Two separate systems train EFL teachers in Vietnam. Three-year colleges are

responsible for training lower secondary ELT teachers (years 6 to 9), whereas four-year universities educate upper secondary ELT teachers (years 10 to 12). A number of universities across the country have engaged in the latter training. ELT teacher education programmes vary according to institutions given that they have the right to decide their own curriculum based on the national curriculum framework mentioned in 2.3.1. Nevertheless, there are also significant similarities across the institutional curricula.

2.4.1. Variations of ELT teacher education programmes

English secondary teacher training across higher education institutions differs in many respects such as content, structure, materials used, and assessment. Lap's (2005) observation and classification offer a useful look at the training. According to the author, two main variations have existed, as illustrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Two main variations of English teacher training programmes (Reproduced from Lap, 2005, p.16)

Semesters	Types of courses offered	Variation 1	Variation 2
Semesters 1 to 3	Language skills	√	√
	English grammar	√	√
	Courses in Vietnamese	√	√
Semesters 4 to 8	Language skills	Not offered	√
	Courses in Vietnamese	√	√
	Linguistics, Literature, Culture and Society and Translation	√	√
	English Language Teaching Methodology	√	√
	School visits	√	√
	Teaching practicum	√	√

The table shows that English secondary teacher training programmes are structured into two stages. In the first stage, the training focuses on basic language skills and grammar. In the second stage, the professional knowledge base comprising linguistics, literature, culture and English language teaching methods

is delivered. In semester 6, students begin to visit schools for a period of time, and in semester 8, they begin their teaching practicum. The difference is that advanced courses in language skills may be offered in some institutions, while not in others. The programme at WU as described below fell into the second variation.

2.4.2. ELT teacher education at WU

WU has been the key trainer of upper secondary ELT teachers in the Mekong River region. Each year it admits around one hundred students of ELT from various provinces in the region through a national university entrance exam. Since evidence for the present study came from the data collected with the participation of the English teachers whose training background has originated from WU, this section of the chapter will describe the teacher education programme of the university up to the time of data collection. I should note here that the EFL teacher education programme, as will be described below, differs from the new curriculum currently implemented at the institution, which best fits the first variation; it is credit-based and the total amount of classroom time has been substantially reduced.

The programme up to 2008 was a four-year one with several prescribed goals, two of which were central: (1) a good understanding of the English language, and (2) good pedagogical knowledge and skills with a focus on learner-centred pedagogy (English Department, 2009). ELT pre-service teachers had to complete 149 learning units (also called credits) of the English language knowledge and skills, including four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), pedagogical English grammar, Anglo-American cultures, British-American literature, and courses on linguistics such as syntax, morphology, semantics, and phonology. The pedagogical knowledge component consisted of 30 compulsory learning units for five pedagogic knowledge papers: History and Roles of English Teaching Methods, Teaching Language Skills, Teaching Language Components, Teaching Observation, and Teaching Practicum.

The first pedagogical paper introduced the theory of different teaching methods, with a view to enabling pre-service teachers to be aware of adopting appropriate teaching methods. The second and third papers trained the prospective teachers in practical skills in designing lesson plans, teaching a language lesson (grammar,

vocabulary, and pronunciation), and teaching an integrated skill lesson (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Two methodological models promoted were the P-P-P procedure for teaching a language lesson, and the pre-while-post model of teaching integrated skills. In the latter, for example, prospective teachers were taught skills in preparing their secondary school students for reading or listening to a text: introducing new vocabulary, predicting and brainstorming ideas, designing and carrying out activities to support learners to complete tasks, usually provided in the textbook. They also learned how to design and manage language-related activities their students do to comprehend or produce language. Furthermore, they learned how to design and handle activities in the post stage of a skill lesson, where their potential students were given opportunities to practise speaking or writing, using the language having been taught. There was no claim anywhere in the course as to whether or not the models were actually manifestations of communicative language teaching, but from what is described, it can be seen that they reflect general communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Teaching Observation was another essential part of the training programme when prospective teachers went to observe instruction at upper secondary schools for 15 forty-five-minute class periods. They then wrote up a report on their observation. For Teaching Practicum, the teachers had two months on site both to observe mentors' teaching and to teach ten periods for evaluation.

It is necessary to note a few things here. Firstly, traditional approaches, largely the Grammar Translation, have been dominant, and because school mentors usually follow them, prospective teachers are often too constrained in trialing the models they have studied. Another thing is that those methodological models have been well recognised in pedagogical training courses only since 2003. Before that time, training mainly concentrated on how-to skills in teaching reading, grammar, and vocabulary because secondary schools during that time emphasised those skills. Currently, there may be some change. Another noticeable point is that all of the teachers in the study were educated in a setting when Communicative Language Teaching had been popular in the world, but was only introduced into the university in 1990 through a series of American English textbooks. These books, which integrated four language skills with language functions and themes, were used as core textbooks in the training programme until 2004. The ELT staff at WU, including all the participants in this study, had been exposed to traditional

models, which mostly featured explicit instruction and controlled practice such as drilling and repetition. As the new books arrived, they had an opportunity to understand CLT in the way prescribed by the books, with the training of two American experts whose specialisation was not TESOL. Their influence, however, was crucial to most of the staff. That history partly contributed to the interpretation of the participating teachers concerning their ELT practice and their conceptions of SLA concepts.

2.5. Summary

The chapter has outlined contextual features and the ELT teacher education programmes that potentially had an impact on Vietnamese ELT teachers and specifically on the participants of the study. The teachers are under at least three sources of influence. The first source is the socio-cultural and historical environment in which language pedagogical ideology largely features memorisation, academic skills mastery, teacher-centredness, and a conception of teaching as information transmission. Second, the teachers have been constrained by the institutional and classroom factors, including a textbook-based syllabus, limited time budgets and mixed student characteristics and backgrounds, as well as other institutional rules. Lastly, their educational experiences may have established their conceptions of second language teaching. Such educational experiences were seven years of schooling, chiefly through the Grammar Translation method, four years of undergraduate training in the English language, and training sessions of pedagogical knowledge and skills. All those sources of impact are considerable for comprehending how EFL teachers, especially the participant teachers in the present study, come to terms with the SLA concepts of language input, and learner output and interaction as mentioned in Chapter 1. The following chapter will outline the SLA theoretical underpinnings of these concepts in detail.

3. SLA FACILITATING CONDITIONS AND TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION

The current chapter first reviews key literature in second language acquisition research to highlight the SLA facilitating conditions of input, output and interaction that second language teachers are advised to promote in their teaching practice. It will present the concepts and functions of language input, output and interaction in second language learning. Then the chapter will continue to discuss the rationale for conducting an inquiry into these conditions from the perspective of teacher learning and cognition. The discussion will highlight the remaining problem of adopting task-based language teaching in Asia, and argue for the possible benefits that a study of teacher learning and cognition about the SLA facilitating conditions may contribute to closing the gap between SLA research and classroom practice, and informing teacher education and development.

3.1. Basic SLA facilitating conditions

Second language learning is an intricately complex process of language acquisition, involving the complexity of contributing and hindering factors. SLA researchers have developed models to describe this complexity. For example, with a sociolinguistic view on SLA, Spolsky (1989) explains this complex process as being influenced by the interaction between the social context and individual learners. Spolsky's model describes an overall relationship among clusters of interactive conditions assumed to play a significant role in SLA. These clusters of factors include the social context, learner attitudes, motivation, other personal characteristics (e.g., age, personality, capabilities, prior knowledge), and learning opportunities or situations. According to Spolsky, the social environment shapes learners' attitudes and provides learning opportunities. Motivation manifested in learning attitudes join with other personal characteristics in influencing how learners make use of available learning opportunities. The interaction between learners with all their characteristics and learning situations determines the learning outcome. Gass (1997), on the other hand, draws on cognitive theories, to account for the SLA process. According to her model, input first needs to be apprehended by learners; it is then apperceived as relevant before being taken into

the long-term memory (intake), which in turn produces output. Gass's cognitive model of SLA, according to Block (2003), is the most popular one that many researchers, applied linguists, and educationalists have discussed. Following this model, other scholars have focused specifically on pedagogy by proposing principles teachers can follow to promote optimal conditions in the classroom in order to foster second language learning. Many of them (e.g. Doughty & Long, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Nunn, 2006; Verhelst, 2006) have consistently identified three most essential contextual and pedagogical conditions. They include (1) extensive rich and personalised language input; (2) sufficient opportunities for output, especially in the context of interaction; and (3) corrective feedback on learners' comprehension of language input and production of output (Van Loi & Franken, 2009). The current thesis focuses on conditions (1) and (2). Each of these will now be presented under the headings of language input, and learner output and interaction.

3.1.1. Language input

The concept of language input will be discussed in terms of how it is interpreted, and how it fosters second language acquisition.

3.1.1.1. Conceptions of language input

The entity of language input invokes a variety of interpretations. Corder (1967), for example, described language input, from the environmental perspective, as "the language in the learning environment" (p.165). Chaudron's (1985) definition is more concrete: "The input available to second language learners is the raw data from which they derive both meaning and awareness of the rules and structures of the target language" (p.3). Ellis (1990) similarly refers to input as "the target language samples to which the learner is exposed, [and] it contains the raw data which the learner has to work on in the process of interlanguage construction" (p.96). This way of defining input represents a common understanding among SLA researchers. As Carroll (1999) states, perceiving language input as raw data, as compared with analysed data, is popular in SLA studies. Such a conception resonates with Krashen's (1985) notion of comprehensible input as discussed later.

Another way of perceiving language input represents a more inclusive perspective. According to Saleemi (1989, p.173), “linguistic data from a potential target language to the learner are cumulatively known as input,” but the author also suggests that input may refer to any one or more of the following aspects of language:

- Linguistic: consisting principally of grammatical forms and the principles underlying them;
- Functional: comprising categories of use language is put to in real life and their relationship with linguistic forms;
- Interactive: pertaining to the norms and strategies of interpersonal interaction; and
- Sociocultural: the conceptual and social matrix within which a particular language functions.

(Saleemi, 1989, p.174)

According to the author, from a holistic perspective, input comprises all these levels of language or more. In accordance with this view, input may be taken to refer to cultural content embedded in the target language (Saville-Troike, 1985). Cultural content, as Saville-Troike posits, involves “new cultural artifacts, new verbal routines with new expectations in role relationships, and new rules for appropriate usage with new cultural values, attitudes, beliefs” (p.52). Saleemi further notes that language input is “an amorphous and ambiguous entity,” (p.174) depending on two things: the researcher’s resources and interests, and more importantly, his/her view of language. In the latter, he explains, “one’s view of input is inevitably circumscribed by one’s view of language: what one means by optimal, learnable input will undoubtedly reflect some theory of what it is that will be learnt as a result (or in spite) of input, i.e. a theory of language” (p.174).

Regarding theories of language, there are fundamentally two ways of understanding language and therefore the language input for second language learners. One represents a traditional discrete perspective, and the other a more integrated view. These two conceptions of language underpin the two syllabus types that Wilkins (1976) proposed, and Long and Crookes (1992) further

discussed in relation to task-based language teaching. Wilkins (1976) distinguishes between two types of syllabus: synthetic and analytic. The former presents language as compartmentalised linguistic pieces that teachers work to present one at a time, and that learners work to master and assemble for use in communication. Wilkins (1976) states:

Different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up.... At any one time, the learner is being exposed to a deliberately limited sample of language. (p.2)

According to Long and Crookes (1992), a synthetic syllabus sees the target language as a static product or structure; it views language learning and teaching from a linguistic perspective according to which language is an object of learning and teaching, and the aim of this activity is learners' mastery of the whole language structure through accumulating learned discrete elements. Accordingly, traditional approaches such as Grammar Translation, Audiolingualism, Lexical Approach, and even the Situational Language Teaching method, embody this restricted view of language because they similarly seek to preselect and isolate particular linguistic elements for teaching and learning (Long & Crookes, 1992).

Conversely, analytic syllabuses present language as "integrated chunks at a time," without any attempt to control discrete structures or lexis for teaching and learning, although the language input "may have been modified in other ways" (Long & Crookes, 1992, p.28). Teachers provide target language samples, and learners work to analyse and discern rules or patterns in the input. Language is primarily viewed in terms of functional uses or "discourse in use" that "integrate various sub-skills and different kinds of linguistic knowledge" rather than a complex system broken down into bits for manipulation and acquisition (Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009, p.2). Such a holistic analytic approach to language, as Long and Crookes assert, manifests a psycholinguistic rather than linguistic process. Wilkins (1976) classifies notional, functional, and situational syllabuses as the analytic type, but Long and Crookes (1992) label them as the synthetic type, arguing that they all isolate discrete linguistic units for instruction. The authors maintain that even the situational syllabus is a disguised synthetic type, functioning as a carrier of pre-determined or planned structures or lexis. In

contrast, the authors argue, only Task-based Language Teaching pertains to an analytic approach to language course design and teaching (see also Markee, 1997). This approach adopts task as the unit for presenting “appropriate target language samples to learners - input which they will inevitably reshape via application of general cognitive processing capacities - and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty” (Long & Crooke, 1992, p.43).

The two ways of conceptualising language and language teaching described above are currently debated for their relevance to effective second language teaching. While the traditional view of teaching discrete linguistic elements is still dominant especially in Asian contexts, there have been attempts, in the past three decades, to promote the other across the contexts (Van den Branden, 2006). Embedded within this view is an assumption about the central role of communication tasks in providing comprehensible language input and opportunities for negotiation of meaning to foster second language development.

3.1.1.2. Functions of language input

According to Saleemi (1989), there are three dominant approaches to the functions of input in SLA literature. They include the Chomskyan notion of Universal Grammar (UG), comprehensible input, and negotiable input. The two latter approaches, which have practical relevance to second language pedagogy, will thus be discussed in this section.

Krashen (1985) proposed a hypothesis of the role of language input:

Humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages, or by receiving ‘comprehensible input’. We progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structures at our next ‘stage’ - structures that are a bit beyond our current level of competence. We move from i , our current level, to $i + 1$, the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing $i + 1$... We are able to understand language containing unacquired grammar with the help of context which includes extra-linguistic information, our knowledge of the world, and previously acquired linguistic competence. (p.2)

As stated by Krashen above, for acquisition to occur, second language learners

need to understand the language or message addressed to them and have yet to process some linguistic data (e.g. words or structures) beyond their existing language competence. Krashen advocates a subconscious process of acquiring language instead of conscious learning. He maintained that comprehensible input is “the only causative variable” for acquisition (Krashen 1981, p.57). Krashen (1985), however, reclaims that comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition. He describes two ways of achieving input comprehension: by the learner using contextual clues or prior knowledge of the world or linguistic competence to make sense of input, and by the teacher supplying simplified input. Simplified input, according to Krashen, is achievable through one-way and two-way interaction. Krashen, however, holds that simplification is not necessarily a prerequisite of comprehensible input.

Krashen’s hypothesis has inspired a number of empirical studies to test the validity of input in second language acquisition (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Although research has indicated that comprehensible input is only an essential and not sufficient condition, research into the role of input has confirmed that the nature and amount of input are crucial for second language learning.

Regarding its nature, the language input with some form of modification has been indicated to be useful for second language learning especially for lower proficiency learners (Wesche, 1994). Input modification means phonological or syntactic simplification, lexical elaboration, adaptation of speech rate, or even speech elaboration (Wesche, 1994). One of the particular types of modified input that has practical relevance to classroom practice is teacher talk (Ellis, 1985; Wong-Fillmore, 1985), which can be understood as teacher use of the target language (TL) in the classroom (Ellis, 1985). Teacher elaborative speech has been shown to increase comprehension of written and oral texts (Chaudron, 1985, Long, 1985, Ghahremani Ghajora, 1989, Paker & Chaudron, 1987, as cited in Wesche, 1994). Further, teacher language containing shorter sentences, reduced syntactic complexity, slow rate, repetition or redundancy has been proved to be useful to second language learners (Wesche, 1994). An important finding is that teacher use of TL in the classroom correlates with learners’ improvement in foreign language proficiency (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Given this finding and the fact that classroom language learners are primarily exposed to the language of

the teacher, namely over 65 percent of classrooms talk (Chaudron, 1988), it is strongly advised that teachers maximise their TL use in the language classroom (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Some scholars (e.g. Cook, 2001; Macaro, 1995; Turnbull, 2001), nonetheless, caution that the idea of maximal TL can be misinterpreted. In spite of agreeing with the benefits of using TL in the classroom, they advocate the relative role of the first language (L1) in enhancing input to facilitate intake (Turnbull, 2001) and in making a resource on which learners rely for cognitive development (Cook, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

In addition, purposefully enhanced input with particular forms or structures made salient can increase learners' comprehension and uptake (Harley, 1998; White, 1998). Harley (1998), citing a number of instructional experiments in French immersion and intensive English programmes in Canada, concluded that input enhancement has a positive effect on the L2 proficiency of older children in grades 4 to 8. Following this, she conducted a five-week classroom experiment on six classes ranging from 19 to 26 L2 children each in a French immersion school in Canada, focusing on the instruction of gender articles. Using children's games with coloured cards to highlight the gender articles that require the children to attend to gender differences, she found that such enhancement promoted learning evident in the children's "significant long-lasting improvement in accuracy of gender attribution" (p.169). Ellis (2003) also asserts that tasks designed to enhance input most likely promote noticing, which in turn facilitates second language acquisition although the effect is more likely with some linguistic features than others (Ellis, 2003; Harley, 1998). In general, three useful features of useful input consist of the salience, occurrence frequency of linguistic features, and its relevance to the learner (Krashen, 1985).

Exposure to an extensive amount of comprehensible language input potentially promotes second language learning as well (Elley, 2000; Tudor, 1989; Mangubhai, 2006). Elley and Mangubhai (1983) provided evidence of the positive effect of "Book Flood" on 10 to 12 year-old children, where the children had a regular 20-30 minutes of reading. Furthermore, contact with enriched language input through extensive reading was indicated to improve general language proficiency (Grable, 1991), and motivate and engage students in learning (Bamford & Day, 1997). Particularly when linked with a communicative task,

extensive reading becomes more meaningful and purposeful to students, because sharing what they read is an opportunity for learners to encounter gaps in understanding how the target language functions, and for recycling language input, which is “vital in consolidating and extending learners’ knowledge” (Green, 2005, p.309).

Nevertheless, it has been noted that exposure to comprehensible TL input alone does not necessarily induce effective second language development (Ellis, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1986). Swain and Lapkin (1986) observed that although French immersion students in Canadian schools were immersed in an extensive amount of comprehensible input, they did not develop a high level of syntactic complexity. Ellis (1994) further noted that there was insufficient evidence for the direct relationship between comprehension and acquisition. Thus, to conclude that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for acquisition is less tenable than to say that a substantial amount of comprehensible input may facilitate second language learning (Ellis, 1994; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). It is important for learners to comprehend and notice the language input before internalising it into their interlanguage.

Although the role of comprehensible input has been challenged by Swain’s (1985) output hypothesis, Krashen (1985) maintains that output, especially two-way interaction, particularly provides learners with contextual clues and linguistic modifications to comprehend input. In Saleemi’s (1989) term, this input is interactive. Such a view embodies an extended notion of the nature of language input, which is subsumed in the discussion about output and interaction in the next section.

3.1.2. Learner output and interaction

In addition to language input, SLA researchers support the crucial role of learner output and interaction in fostering second language learning. Learner output and interaction, understood as language production and conversational negotiation of meaning where interlocutors attempt to achieve understanding by adjusting their language, play a more active role in promoting second language learning (Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, 1994; Shehadeh, 1999; Swain, 1985).

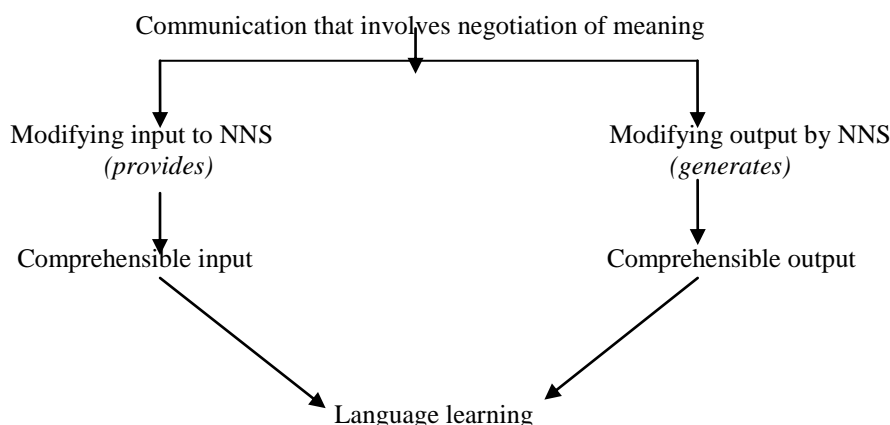
Various functions of language production have been recognised. On the one hand, when learners are encouraged or required to produce language in the context of interaction, they will actively contribute to generating, instead of being passively exposed to, comprehensible language input (Long, 1983, 1996; Markee, 1997), which, as Krashen advocates, is necessary for second language development. On the other hand, when producing language, learners will have opportunities to contextualise language use, to test out what they know about the target language (Swain, 1985, 1995), to turn their existing L2 knowledge automatic, and to extend their language discourse (Skehan, 1998). Most importantly, language performance is useful for learners to stretch their interlanguage syntactically, moving “from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it” (Swain, 1985, p.252), through a process of gap noticing (Ellis, 2003; Swain, 1985, 1995). This will occur when learners, in producing language, are signalled by other interlocutors or become aware themselves that they have failed to express a comprehensible message. Such noticing will push them to modify their language output toward greater comprehensibility (comprehensible output), and thereby they “on occasion may be forced into a more syntactic processing mode than might occur in comprehension” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, p.372). During the process of modifying output, learners may also “internalize new linguistic knowledge,” or “restructure existing knowledge” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995, p.374). Language production offers learners opportunities to reflect on their linguistic problems, which in turn can raise a deeper awareness of “the forms and rules and the relationship of the forms and rules to the meaning they are trying to express” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p.69).

The connection between negotiated interaction, input, and output in second language learning has been summed up by Long (1996) in his refined hypothesis below, and charted by Shehadeh (1999) in Figure 3.1.

...negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutors, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways. (Long 1996, p.451–2)

Figure 3.1

A model of second language learning adapted from Shehadeh (1999, p.664)



Task-based research has found convergent evidence about the relationship between learner output and interaction and learner development of second language (Ellis & He, 1999; Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Gass & Torres, 2005; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Mackey, 1999; McDonough, 2004; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). For example, Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) showed that learners of English understood the content of a native speaker's lecturette better when given an opportunity to negotiate with the speaker than when just listening to the same but simplified and redundantly made lecturette. Ellis and He (1999) pointed out that ESL learners learned new words more effectively as they had opportunities to use them in negotiation with other peers than just listening to them in the pre-modified input. Izumi and Bigelow (2000) indicated that ESL students used counterfactual conditional sentences more successfully when asked to write and reconstruct texts than just reading and answering questions from texts that contain the target form. Regarding EFL learning, Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki (1994) reported better comprehension and acquisition of English words among high-school students of English in Japan due to interaction. Likewise, McDonough (2004) illustrated that the Thai university students who were engaged in information gap activities in pair and small group modes outperformed their peers in the control group in the use of conditional sentences. Reviewing task-based interaction studies between 1980 and 2003, Kech, Iberri-shea, Tracy-Ventura, and Wa-Mbaleka (2006), conclude that it has a certain facilitating impact on the development of lexical and grammatical features. The effect is especially salient in task essentialness (the type of tasks requiring the use of certain linguistic

features for task completion), and task utility (those tasks where a certain linguistic structure is not required but is useful for task completion). With empirical evidence from a large body of task-based research, learner language production has been established as crucial in second language learning. The importance of language production, as claimed by Ellis (2003), provides a strong rationale for task-based language teaching. Parallel with that recognition, there is also research on whether which types of tasks or activities are productive in promoting optimal conditions required for second language learning.

A body of work has investigated the types of tasks in optimising negotiated interaction. Convergent tasks, which require learners to reach a common outcome, have been indicated to result in more conversational adjustments than divergent tasks (Long 1989, Duff 1986, as cited in Ellis, 2003). Pica and Doughty (1985) have also pointed out that two-way information exchange tasks produce more conversational modification than teacher-fronted tasks. Pica, Kagan and Falodum (1993) have summed up four variables that best encourage learners to negotiate for meaning. They are (1) *an information gap* for each participant that needs to fill in; (2) *a two-way exchange of information*: request and supply, (3) *a convergent goal* that the learners aim at, and (4) *only one task outcome* achieved from communicative attempts.

Research has also indicated that manipulating task design and implementation can improve certain aspects of learner language production (Skehan, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1999). Skehan (2003) summarises the effect of task characteristics and conditions on the language performance of learners in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity. Regarding task characteristics, for example, he reports that tasks with a clear structure and time line result in greater fluency and accuracy; tasks containing familiar information or topics enhance fluency and accuracy; and interactive tasks markedly shape accuracy and complexity, whereas monologue tasks induce more fluency. The conditions under which tasks are performed can influence learner output aspects as well. According to Skehan (2003), most studies show that pre-task planning has a clear effect on complexity and fluency: “these performance features are almost always improved,” while “the situation with accuracy is not so clear” (p.6). Giving learners a post-task activity to perform the task they have done privately or a chance to transcribe “one minute of their own

task performance subsequent to the task itself” (p.6) also increases their language accuracy (Skehan, 2003).

In summary, though generalisations about the link between tasks and language learning are not yet possible since most quantitative task-based studies are small-scale and cross-sectional (Foster, 2009), there is a theoretical case and empirical evidence to suggest that learner language production, though not determinative, contributes in part to the process of learning. For linguistic performance (an aspect of second language acquisition) cannot be improved effectively without opportunities for using the target language in some form of communication, learner output and interaction or language production constitutes another essential condition for second language classrooms. This is particularly true of foreign language settings (Green, 2005) where exposure to a new language input is often too inadequate to render a rich environment conducive to subconscious learning process. Therefore, from the perspective of SLA research, it is advised that ESL and EFL teachers not only provide rich comprehensible target language input, but also generate many opportunities for learners to use the target language (Ellis, 2005). One way is to create activities that engage learners in meaningful or authentic interaction, including both task-based peer interaction and teacher-learner exchanges. Another possible way is to provide tasks that can push learners to improve accuracy, fluency and complexity (Foster, 2009). The nature of language input and opportunities for learner interaction “clearly play a major role in language learning, in- or out-side the classroom,” as Schulz (1991, p.22) has argued.

The question is in what way and to what extent they are relevant to and realistic in EFL classrooms such as those in Vietnam. This question will be discussed in the light of the challenges of adopting task-based language teaching.

3.2. The remaining problem of task-based language teaching

Although SLA research is considered to be an integral part of ESL teacher education programmes (Tarone & Allwright, 2005), the value of and way in which it contributes to foreign language teaching practice and teacher education remain an area for further research (Ellis, 1997a; Lightbown, 1985; MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001). A demanding task for teacher educators and developers is

to bridge the gap between “two different forms of discourse” on which SLA research and classroom practice operate (MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001, p.950). One well-known example of such division is associated with the diffusion of a communicative view of language teaching, represented by the task-based approach, in foreign language classrooms. Even though this approach is claimed to have a sound basis in psycholinguistics and SLA research (Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009), adopting the approach for educational innovations has encountered practical obstacles especially in Asian settings, where the social, cultural, and educational features very much differ from the ones in which it was developed. This poses the question of the importance of context in teaching, and puts forward a reconsideration of possible ways of bridging the gap.

3.2.1. The nature of task-based language teaching

In order to understand the challenges TBLT has encountered, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of this approach.

As an approach underpinned by a theory of language as communication, and a theory of second language acquisition fundamentally based on input-output processing and psycholinguistic processes (Ellis, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001), TBLT has developed “in response to a better way of understanding” how people learn languages (Foster, 1999, p.69). As mentioned in 3.1.1, unlike most previous approaches to language teaching that advocate the assimilation of discrete elements through successive steps of controlled practice and fluent performance, TBLT is predicated on the contemporary view of language as communication, presenting the target language as integrated, holistic discourse (Foster, 1999; Holliday, 1994, Long & Crookes, 1992; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009). It assumes that learning does not take place in the order the target language segments are broken down and presented as in traditional syllabuses no matter how carefully teaching is organised, simply because learners follow their own natural order of acquiring a new language (Ellis, 1994; Foster, 1999; Van den Branden, 2006). TBLT advocates a natural, organic, process-oriented view of language learning, as opposed to a mechanical, behaviourist view of learning underpinning many traditional methods such as Grammar Translation,

Audiolingualism, and Situational Teaching Method.

Such a view of language learning has led many scholars to identify TBLT as a perspective (Brown, 2001), logical development (Littlewood, 2004), or family member (Nunan, 2004) of communicative language teaching or, as Littlewood (2004) called, “communication-oriented language teaching” (p.326). It has also resulted in the development of various task-based approaches (e.g. Long, 1983, 1996; Long & Crookes, 1992; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). At a broad level, TBLT represents language instruction by using tasks as units of syllabus or curriculum (e.g. Long & Crookes, 1992; Prabhu, 1987). At a more specific level, TBLT incorporates task sequence in a cycle of instruction through specific stages such as pre-task, task, and post-task (e.g., Willis, 1996). Although these approaches differ from one another, they are typically “based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.223). A task-based approach “seeks to engage learners in interactionally authentic language use by having them perform a series of tasks, [enabling] learners (1) both to acquire new linguistic knowledge, and (2) to proceduralise their existing knowledge” (Ellis, 2007, p.2). The most central tenet of a task-based approach is, therefore, provision of a task for transaction through which language use is contextualised, input and output are processed, motivation is generated by achieving an outcome (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Shehadeh, 2005; Willis, 1996), and knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Ellis, 2000; Lantolf, 2000). Such an understanding of language learning is usually ascribed to a strong view or version of task-based instruction (Skehan, 1996; 2003). There is also a weak version (Skehan, 1996) or task-supported teaching (Ellis, 2003), which treats tasks as an important part of language instruction, but only uses tasks for communicative practice (Adams & Newton, 2009; Ellis, 2003), preceding and following which may be a focused instruction of certain linguistic features (Skehan, 1996). This version “is clearly very close to general communicative language teaching, [and] could also be compatible with a traditional presentation, practice, production sequence, only with production based on tasks” (Skehan, 1996, p.39).

Critical to a task-based approach to language teaching is the concept of task which has provoked various interpretations (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Van

den Branden, 2006). A shared understanding, however, refers to tasks as classroom activities which have a focus on meaning, some resemblance to real-world tasks, a clearly defined outcome or communicative goal, and which engage cognitive processes and integrated language skills (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2007). Central to a task-based activity must be learner use of the TL as a medium of transaction (Van den Branden, 2006) as Nunan (2004) defines it:

A task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilising their grammatical knowledge in order to express their meaning. (p.4)

A primary focus on communicative meaning in tasks recognises a task-based approach. TBLT is classified as meaning-focused instruction as opposed to traditional form-focused instruction (See Chapter 9 for further discussion). However, there has been a concern that such a strong emphasis may risk encouraging task-based learners to pay attention to meaning at the expense of linguistic form, leading to fluent but inaccurate use of language (Foster, 1999; Skehan, 1996). This concern has prompted TBLT proponents to return to form in a less conventional way. For example, attention may be drawn to form as it incidentally arises in the context of learners communicating with each other, known as a focus-on-form (Long, 1996) as distinguished with a focus-on-forms used in traditional approaches. Another way is to manipulate task characteristics and conditions purposely and selectively to stretch learner interlanguage in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity (Skehan, 1996). Furthermore, teachers may lead learners through cycles of planning, implementing a task, and comparing it with native speaker performance (Willis, 1996) through which their attention is drawn to linguistic form. Together with these ways, the distinction between unfocused tasks which engage the learner's attention to meaning only, and linguistically focused tasks which "elicit the uses of specific linguistic features" while maintaining a focus on meaning (Ellis, 2003, p.141), has rendered TBLT less radical in the sense of paying more attention to form. It is also of note that the notion of tasks in TBLT incorporates a broader meaning than communicative tasks that are termed communicative activities by CLT proponents (Skehan,

2003).

The teacher role in task-based classrooms is also more complex than in traditional approaches (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Teachers facilitate, monitor and advise rather than dominate classroom activities, and learners mainly have to take responsibility for their learning rather than waiting to be spoon fed (Nunan, 2004), although TBLT is not necessarily learner-centred (Ellis, 2003). Nevertheless, a constructivist view of learning underpinning a task-based approach may not be familiar to students in Asian educational contexts where teaching is conceived as transferring knowledge.

There also exists a claim that TBLT constitutes a multifaceted approach, enabling creative and flexible design by deploying a diverse range of materials, textbooks, and technologies for the ESL and EFL classroom (Oxford, 2001), and thereby being able to cater for contextual demands (Leaver & Willis, 2004). Nonetheless, Ellis (2003) has reminded us that TBLT needs “to examine the social, cultural, political, and historical factors that contextualized teaching, and influence how it takes place” (p.333). Echoing his note is Kumaravadivelu’s (2006) observation that TBLT proponents refer to the term ‘context’ chiefly as “linguistic and pragmatic features of language and language use; [t]hey seldom include the broader social, cultural, political, and historical particularities” (p.72). It is in this latter sense of context that TBLT has faced reactions.

3.2.2. Constraints on communicative and task-based language teaching in Asia

As Swan (2005) notes, proponents of TBLT strongly believe in its capacity to encourage a more effective process and outcome of language learning than traditional approaches do. Indeed, research has recognised some benefits of task-based instruction. These involve increasing students’ satisfaction with learning (Kaplan & Leaver, 2004; Lopes, 2004), developing their strategic competence (Kaplan & Leaver, 2004), changing students’ beliefs about language learning (Lopes, 2004), encouraging collaborative learning of particular target language features beyond individual abilities (Muller, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 2000), and boosting fluency, accuracy, and complexity of learner interlanguage (Diapora, 2005; Johnston, 2005).

The remaining, and perhaps most important, issue is the extent to which TBLT is applicable or relevant to non-Western contexts such as Asian countries, where CLT (arguably a close relation to TBLT) has faced challenges over the past decades (e.g. Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Holliday, 1994; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004), and been reduced to a weak version (Holliday, 1994; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009). Contrary to the research reported above, a considerable body of research across Asian contexts has spotted a number of practical issues of both implementing purely task-based syllabuses and integrating communicative task-based activities into the traditional EFL classroom. These studies have together highlighted constraints related to teachers, institution and classroom, and the socio-cultural and economic environment.

3.2.2.1. Teacher-related constraints

Research across Asian contexts has revealed teacher personal and conceptual factors such as their language ability to implement communicative tasks, understanding of TBLT, and beliefs about either TBLT or language teaching in general, as important barriers. Jeon and Hahn (2006), investigating the perceptions of 228 EFL teachers at 38 different secondary (middle and high) schools across South Korea, found that their lack of English proficiency, contrary to high demands on English use, was a major reason for avoiding task-based instruction. Other studies similarly found teachers' avoidance of implementing innovations due to their inadequate proficiency in English (Butler, 2005; Li, 1998). Ho (2004) identifies, from a review of research in 14 countries, teacher lack of command of English as an impediment to the dissemination of communicative teaching methods. There is no doubt that communicative teaching caters for learner needs, and conducting a communicative activity may result in unpredictable situations. If teachers have insufficient English ability, they will have no confidence to address these unpredictable needs (Littlewood, 2007). But it is necessary to note that while teachers' language proficiency is an important factor, its impact may depend upon individual teachers' ability and the academic level they teach. Most studies reported this difficulty at the primary and secondary school level. For university EFL teachers, it may not be necessarily so.

Teacher understanding is another major factor affecting teachers' implementation. The most important reason the Korean teachers provided for their reluctance to

conduct task-based language activities was their uncertain understanding of TBLT (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). This was also a major factor limiting the teachers' implementation of curricular innovations in Hong Kong (Clark et al., 1999, as cited in Adams & Newton, 2009), Mainland China (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Zhang, 2007), and South Korea (Li, 1998).

Teacher beliefs also play a crucial role in their practice and innovation implementation. Watson Todd (2006) reports three reasons why Thai EFL teachers at a university switched from a pure task-based English-for-academic-purpose syllabus to a mixed methodology that involved traditional explicit instruction. Two of the reasons were concerned with teacher beliefs in teaching grammar and in the lack of relevance of TBLT to limited proficiency students in the programme. Jeon and Hahn (2006) found that one of the reasons for secondary school teachers in Korea not to implement TBLT was their lack of trust in the effectiveness of language learning via tasks.

It is noteworthy that while teacher understanding plays a role, it seems to be outweighed by contextual constraints and particularly teacher beliefs about language teaching. Although many Korean teachers in Jeon and Hahn's (2006) study had a good understanding of TBLT, they preferred not practising it because of time pressure, classroom management issues, and especially their beliefs as mentioned above. Jarvis and Atsilarat (2006) found in the Thai context that the EFL tertiary teachers in their survey had an understanding of the central tenets of the communicative approach, but attributed a number of contextual constraints related to educational system, learners, and culture, to not doing communicative teaching. In the primary Hong Kong context, Carless (2003) concludes that both teachers' understanding of and attitudes to TBLT are possibly highly significant issues. However, he observes that as teachers' understanding and attitudes are outweighed by external factors such as time availability, textbook materials, teacher preparation, and examinations, teachers may be less likely to conduct task-based activities. It is noticeable that teachers' beliefs about language teaching have a clear effect on their practice, and it interacts with context-related factors.

3.2.2.2. Institutional and classroom constraints

An issue that confronts EFL teachers across Asia in implementing communicative

and task-based instruction is concerned with policy-related and institutional constraints. One important barrier is the psychological burden of form-focused examinations. Making a choice between the need to prepare students for examinations and the top-down policy to conduct communicative tasks in the classroom is usually a dilemma for Asian teachers. Many studies have pointed out that the pressure to prepare students for norm-referenced, form-focused semester examinations as well as national high stakes examinations prevented teachers in Mainland China (Hu, 2005a), Hong Kong (Carless, 2003, 2007; Deng & Carless, 2009), South Korea (Li, 1998; Shim & Baik, 2004), Japan (Gorsuch, 2000), and Vietnam (Canh, 2008) from teaching communicatively. Carless (2007) notes that multiple-choice testing formats administered by external assessors make Hong Kong teachers return to explicit instruction. This echoes what Canh (2008) observed from a case study about curricular innovation at the secondary level. Canh indicated that the use of multiple-choice tests in the General Education Diploma Examination and University Entrance Examination limited Vietnamese secondary teachers in their implementation of the new English textbooks. Hu (2005a) likewise found the effect of high stakes examination more salient in less developed areas of China. Teachers in these areas had to adopt explicit teaching approaches to prepare students for standardised testing, whereas institutions in developed areas had the right to build their own curricula to meet the increasing demands for English proficiency, and their teaching was more communication-oriented. Littlewood (2007) identifies this issue as a failure of assessment policy “to keep pace with other developments in the curriculum” (p.245). It is important, however, to know that even though testing is oriented to communication skills, this will not necessarily lead teachers to enact tasks in language classrooms because they may still think old ways of teaching are more appropriate (Adams & Newton, 2009). Carless (2007) has pointed this out in a case study about curricular innovations in Hong Kong secondary schools. This suggests that the washback effect of testing seems to be a complex matter, and that teacher conceptual understanding, skills, and beliefs are important mediating factors for researchers, teacher educators and developers to consider.

Textbook-based teaching is also another educational and institutional matter concerning teachers in task-based teaching although a task-based textbook may not necessarily guarantee the enactment of task-based teaching. The teachers in

Jeon and Hahn (2006) reported that materials in their textbooks were not supportive of task-based instruction, and this was one of the reasons for their non-use of tasks. Carless (2003) concludes that the content or theme in the textbooks is one of the factors that Hong Kong teachers should consider in implementing tasks. While it is observed that textbook-based instruction is popular in the educational system of Asian countries such as Vietnam (Canh, 1999; Pham, 1999), there is evidence that using textbooks as an agent of change may not be effective. Canh (2008) reports that even though the new English textbooks focus on four language skills, the teachers in his study strongly stated that the books did not transform their old ways of teaching. Likewise, though task-based syllabuses were implemented as in the study of Watson Todd (2006), teachers still returned to explicit teaching. This study showed that in the process of implementation, the Thai teachers mediated a purely task-based syllabus with the need for teaching grammar rules by reducing the number of tasks given to students, and supplying further language preparation in the pre-task phase or separate lessons on grammar. These two studies along with others (e.g. Jeon & Hahn, 2006) imply that teacher existing beliefs about learning and teaching seem to have a strong influence, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Another matter of concern of many teachers is the time factor, which is both personal and institutional. Time relates to both teacher preparation time for tasks and class time available for conducting tasks. In some countries, teachers are underpaid, leading them to “taking a second or even a third teaching job” (Yu, 2001, p.196). This may discourage them from preparing and enacting tasks in the classroom because doing so means they have to spend more time and energy (Hui, 1997). Hasanova and Shadieva (2008) indicate that because of economic instability and low salaries, many English teachers in Uzbekistan invest less time and energy in understanding new methodologies. Carless (2003) has referred to Hong Kong primary teachers’ heavy schedule as an impediment to their preparation of tasks and teaching materials. Carless, however, concludes that this is overall not a main hindrance, given that textbook publishers have supplied suitable task-based materials. Likewise, for the Korean teachers in Jeon and Hahn’s (2006) study, the lack of preparation time was not a major reason for their reluctance to use TBLT. In contrast, a heavy workload for both teachers and students under the pressure of time was a main reason for the Thai teachers to

return to explicit teaching approaches (Watson Todd, 2006). Class time in EFL classrooms, usually restricted to three to four hours a week (Swan, 2005), is a barrier as teachers are under pressure to teach the linguistic knowledge necessary for students to pass examinations. As a result, teachers may feel discouraged from providing communicative tasks that they believe are neither worthwhile nor satisfactory for the concerns of parents and students about the importance of national examinations (Carless, 2003; Cheng & Wang, 2004; Gorsuch, 2000; Li, 1998). The time factor, in other words, seems to be a noteworthy issue given that it has links with teacher income and effort in some countries.

Classroom factors additionally contribute to the influence on teacher decisions to enact task-based teaching. The need to manage classroom activities confronts teachers with the new way of teaching. Many studies have indicated that this is an important matter in primary and secondary schools. Control for discipline and order is necessary in Asian schools, where many teachers feel that noise from a task-based activity may affect neighbouring classrooms (Carless, 2004; Li, 1998). In this respect, Littlewood (2007) argues, the P-P-P sequence not only allows the teacher to teach the language but also gives them a sense of control over the classroom interaction. Carless (2009) also notes, "It appears to be more easily understandable, more manageable, and provides a clearer teacher instructional role" (p.62), and this was why the teachers in his study preferred this sequence rather than TBLT.

Classroom management is associated with large classes, which usually contain approximately 50 students (Li, 1998; Yu, 2001). In several studies across contexts, teachers have voiced this concern (Bock, 2000; Carless, 2002; Li, 1998; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). There is an inherent challenge for teachers to manage large classes (Li, 1998), and this makes it especially difficult to conduct task-based lessons because of the difficulty in controlling the interaction and noise generated by the task-based activity (Littlewood, 2007). Adams and Newton (2009), however, suggest that large class size may be a problem of pair and small-group interactive work rather than listening, reading comprehension and writing tasks.

Along with large classes, the multi-levels of proficiency mingled in the same class make it worse for teachers. It is common to find that classes are organised in

volume and age rather than proficiency levels (Adams & Newton, 2009). Consequently, the unequal levels of proficiency among students greatly challenge teachers to choose, design and organise communicative activities to meet the variety of student needs. This has even posed challenges to expatriate teachers teaching English in Vietnam (Bock, 2000). While there is a suggestion to encourage students of different language abilities to help each other in learning (Tinker Sachs, 2007), this needs further research, as it is pointed out that competition is characteristic of Asian cultures (Hofstede, 1986), which may challenge the notion of cooperative learning. Not only mixed, Asian students also lack proficiency, which poses difficulties for EFL teachers to enact communicative tasks. Just as the Thai teachers' concern about the relevance of task-based instruction to low-proficiency students (Watson Todd, 2006), so have other studies documented the same worry about integrating communicative activities (Jarvist & Atsilarat, 2004; Li, 1998). Student lack of proficiency was one of the two major constraints reported by the Vietnamese secondary teachers in implementing the curricular innovation (Canh, 2008). It might explain why a Mainland Chinese teacher was frustrated and returned to grammar exercises as "many students just sit there idling their time" (Li, 2003, p.76). It might also account for the excessive use of L1, which also worried the teachers in South Korean (Lee, 2005), Hong Kong (Carless, 2004), and Mainland Chinese (Li, 2003) schools. Eguchi and Eguchi (2006) observed that their students even used Japanese for simple verbal exchanges, which they should have been able to do in English. This does not count the poor and minimal use of English generated during a task, a concern reported in several studies (e.g. Carless, 2004; Lee, 2005). Lee (2005) has noticed two important things among many South Korean students when they were engaged in tasks. First, instead of trying to make full use of their language resources, they just produced a minimal level of language required by the task. Second, instead of negotiating for meaning by using communication strategies as predicted by the interaction theory of TBLT, they only tended to use such simple strategies as prediction that involved little demands on language, a point also made by Seedhouse (1999) in arguing against the potential of TBLT. As Adams and Newton (2009) remark, "learner reluctance to speak in class may then undercut the value of interactive and production tasks for language development" (p.8). Teacher belief in the language output generated through task

use is, thus, worth noting.

3.2.2.3. Socio-cultural constraints

Teachers have additionally voiced a concern about constraints at the level of broad socio-cultural features. One of the difficulties for them is the lack of a social environment motivating Asian students to learn to attain communicative competence. Nishino and Watanabe (2008) indicate that, much as in other Asian contexts, Japanese EFL teachers face many difficulties, of which a major is the absence of a communicative environment outside the classroom. Other cultural factors that researchers have cited as impediments to a communicative view of language teaching involve teacher-student relationship and a clash in conceptions of education (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Many Asian cultures place importance on hierarchical order and respect (Hofstede, 1986), leading students to hold a deferential attitude to teachers, which seems to undermine their confidence to take initiatives (Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004). Together with an authoritative teacher attitude, the conceptions of learning and teaching as transmitting and receiving knowledge rather than “using knowledge for immediate purposes” (Hu, 2005b, p.653) have also led many Asian teachers to prefer the teacher-fronted mode of teaching. This conflicts with the learner-centred concept of learning assumed by CLT and TBLT (Hu, 2005b; Rao, 1996), a concern many native-speaker English teachers in Vietnam also expressed (Bock, 2000; Ellis, 1996). Although one may argue that the underlying concepts of education need to be changed before change to CLT may successfully take place, it is advisable that teachers and practitioners should adapt rather than adopt the new approach (Bax, 2003a, 2003b; Canh, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Li, 1998; Lee, 2005; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004). Carless (2004) suggests that there is a need for “adaptation and a flexible situated version of task-based teaching” (p.595). This adaptation should take account of the socio-cultural context (Butler, 2005), exploring possible factors affecting three stages of an educational process: (1) planning to use tasks, (2) task design characteristics, and (3) task implementation, all of which should be weighed to decide the extent to which communicative tasks can be inserted into classroom activities (Carless, 2003).

The results of research across Asian contexts have underscored the confrontation of both conceptual and contextual constraints as noted by critics (e.g. Foster,

1999; Swan, 2005), and in a broader view, underscored the challenge of reconciling SLA research and theory with classroom practice, particularly with regard to the notions of optimal language input, and authentic output and interaction. The assumptions and values underlying TBLT are likely to conflict with the prior knowledge, conceptions and experiences of EFL Vietnamese teachers who are, as mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, still accustomed to the view of transmission-based teaching and a synthetic perspective on language and language teaching. It has been suggested that to bridge this gap, TBLT should be more responsive to specific social cultural situations, taking into account factors influencing it. Although a large body of research in EFL contexts has informed this influence, most have concentrated on task pedagogy or curriculum at primary and secondary levels. Little research has been undertaken in the tertiary context, especially with a focus on how the SLA concepts underlying TBLT are conceptualised and practised by EFL teachers. In other words, there remains a gap in research, from the teacher's perspective, into what meanings and values EFL teachers attach to these concepts in their teaching conditions.

One of the goals of the research in this thesis was to fill this gap. An inquiry into this may contribute to an understanding of why and in what ways SLA theory is either relevant or irrelevant to a specific context. This will inform the development of an appropriate approach to English teaching and teacher education. To this end, the present study sought to examine the responses of a particular group of Vietnamese EFL lecturers by looking at the ways they conceptualised and implemented the facilitating conditions, and conceptual and contextual constraints on their conceptions and practices in the EFL setting. In doing so, another goal of the current research was to explore teachers' perceptions of a flexible way of supporting English teaching by drawing on the well-recognised concepts of SLA facilitating conditions. The study also sought to understand teachers' perceived changes resulting from the process of implementing them in the EFL classroom.

3.3. Bridging the gap and teacher change

Researchers, applied linguists, and educators have proposed various ways of reconciling research and practice. Some are concerned with the role of context and teachers' existing beliefs and practice in language teaching and teacher training

(e.g., Bax, 2003a, 2003b; Breen, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Jarvist & Atsilarat, 2004; Johnson, 2006). Others have maintained that it is imperative for teachers to reflect on theory from their perspectives. Lightbown (2000) posits that SLA findings will reshape teachers' expectations for themselves and the students, but suggests, "It is only when they have tried out some of the pedagogical applications suggested by SLA research that they will understand what it really means for their own teaching context" (p.453). This is an indirect way of bringing SLA theory closer to classroom practice - informing, instead of changing, teacher behaviour (Lightbown, 2000). Ellis (2002) similarly advises teachers to trial SLA knowledge in their classroom since such trials have the highly practical value of informing their teaching and second language pedagogy. Markee (1997) also argues that SLA can be a resource for teachers to develop their professional knowledge of L2 teaching. These scholars advocate a constructivist view of teacher learning.

In a similar view, Borg (2006) argues that research on teacher cognition about key SLA issues "may shed light on the gap that often exists between what teachers do and what SLA theory suggests" (p.286), and will be useful for SLA theorists in making their pedagogical claims more realistic and relevant to classroom practices. Like Borg, Berliner (2005) supports the idea of research on "teachers' thinking about practices we think are important, but do not yet have much understanding about, [or] phenomena that have been found to be important from the perspective of the process-product research programme" (pp. 13-14). He makes the important point that we need to understand why teachers, given an opportunity to learn, decide to use or reject useful skills, methods, and concepts. Nunan (2005) particularly proposes, with regard to the challenges of adopting TBLT, that language educators should work from the underlying principles for SLA, and be able to comprehend and apply these principles appropriately in their specific classroom contexts. This idea is in line with what Ellis (2005) proposes, and others support (e.g. Doughty & Long, 2003; Franken, 2005; Nunn, 2006)

Most of attempts at disseminating TBLT have been top-down (Van den Branden, 2006), theory being developed, curricula designed and implemented. It may sound sensible to situate TBLT in a broad curriculum, instead of viewing it as a teaching method, as Nunn (2006) suggests. Perhaps, this is the quickest way to diffuse an

innovation (Markee, 1997). Schools and universities in Vietnam usually rely on mandated textbooks, and teachers are to follow the mandating. Innovation is usually top-down, and teachers' voices are ignored in the process, but it does not follow that teachers are submissive recipients of new pedagogical ideas. The study of Canh (2008) in the secondary school context has illustrated this. If any change is to be successful, understanding what teachers think is required. Nunan's (2004) note about the need for shifting from the idea of one best top-down method "that will work for every conceivable learner in every conceivable context and learning situation" (p.167) to a bottom-up one associated with classroom-oriented research recently has strongly re-acknowledged the crucial role of teachers as change agents; teaching is never teacher-proof. Although a top-down approach to diffusing innovation is more likely to succeed in the short term, especially in a centralised social and educational system such as that of Vietnam, a bottom-up approach is more likely to enable long-lasting change in classroom practice (Markee, 1997). This way is associated with giving teachers agency in implementing new ideas, and acknowledges their existing pedagogical knowledge and beliefs. As Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and Thwaite (2001) propose, "Any innovation in classroom practice - from the adoption of a new technique or textbook to the implementation of a new curriculum - has to be accommodated within the teachers' own framework of teaching principles" (p.472).

What has been discussed implicates the importance of empowering teachers by supporting them to teach instead of imposing an ideal model on them. This is because teachers are constructors of their own knowledge in their learning and development (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Hargeaves & Fullan, 1992), and they should take an active part in the process, instead of acting as empty vessels waiting to be filled (Veenman et al. 1994, as cited in Hayes, 1997). The present research, therefore, does not attempt to adopt a model of TBLT *per se*, but rather an organic view of teaching and teacher development grounded in an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the approach, specifically the concepts of rich comprehensible language input, and authentic output and interaction outlined earlier. The approach results from an intention to raise an awareness of these essential conditions for SLA, from which the teachers can manage, by all means, to affect English learning, instead of merely focusing on task features and procedures. It is to explore a responsive approach to teaching

and teacher development in the context of Vietnam, one of the attempts to work from the bottom up to empower teachers by negotiating propositional knowledge with their “personal practical knowledge” (Clandinin, 1985). Based on such a position, the researcher introduced to a group of Vietnamese EFL lecturers the concepts together with some ways of optimising the conditions, including tasks, to facilitate English learning (See Appendix J). The teachers were encouraged to take an active part in using the concepts in planning, teaching, and reflecting on some lessons. The process is supposed to provide them with opportunities to articulate and reflect on their implicit beliefs, to construct and reconstruct their understandings, thereby possibly adapting or changing. In introducing the concepts, the study sought to explore the learning of the Vietnamese EFL lecturers by examining their conceptions and practices in relation to the introduced knowledge. By doing so, the study aims to gain further insight into the gap between theory and practice, and to suggest possible ways to close the gap.

Moreover, whether teachers accept or reject some pedagogical idea depends on its attributes (Ellis, 1997b; Markee, 1993; Markee, 1997; Stoller, 1994). Markee (1997) summarises ten features that can facilitate teachers’ acceptance of an innovative idea. These involve the relative advantages for teachers in implementation, its compatibility with existing practice and beliefs, a moderate extent of complexity, adaptability, trialability, observability in practice, explicit rationale, moderate originality, concreteness, and feasibility or “logistically doable within the existing constraints of the social system within which they operate” (Markee, 1997, p.86). Others include initial discontent, “the level of dissatisfaction that teachers experience with some aspect of their existing teaching,” relevance, “the extent to which the innovation is viewed as matching the needs of the teachers’ students,” and ownership, “the extent to which teachers come to feel that they ‘possess’ the innovation” (Ellis, 1997b, p.29).

Among the attributes mentioned, Stoller (1994) pointed out in a comprehensive study of 43 language curricular innovations that initial dissatisfaction, relevance, compatibility, and feasibility were particularly important for successful implementation. Stoller also emphasised that the most important was feasibility. This attribute was also found important in Beretta’s (1990) evaluative study about the degree of teachers in Indian schools adopting the task-based methodological

approach proposed in Prabhu's (1987) Communicational Teaching Project. According to Beretta, there was a failure in implementing it because of problems related to feasibility such as the fact that the teachers were short of English proficiency required for communicative teaching. He also noted that the teachers lacked a feeling of owning the innovation, and this seems to reflect the importance of agency in changing their own behaviour along with implementing innovations.

In light of the attributes above, it is arguable that the challenges associated with communicative and task-based language teaching reviewed in section 3.2.2 are associated with its feasibility, compatibility, and possibly its relevance. Although the approach adopted in the current research to support teachers to teach from the underlying SLA principles is not precisely an innovation, it can be taken as something different from the way Vietnamese EFL teachers traditionally approached teaching. Thus, the study also aims to explore teachers' perceptions of some of the attributes associated with implementing innovation as mentioned above in order to provide understanding of the teacher's uptake of the SLA concepts. In particular, the research explores four important features just reviewed: feasibility, compatibility, relevance, and a sense of agency in implementing the SLA concepts.

Although changing teacher practices was not the primary goal of this research given that change in practices and especially in pedagogical beliefs are far from being successful (Markee, 1994), the issue of teacher change was explored from the perspective of teachers' self report, resulting from working with the concepts of SLA. It is essential to re-emphasise that in this study change does not necessarily involve transformation in teaching practice (Freeman, 1993). Teacher change here may entail development in many other aspects such as teacher beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and self-awareness (Bailey, 1992; Jackson, 1992; Pennington, 1995).

3.4. Summary

I have discussed three major reasons why it is essential to conduct an inquiry into core SLA principles, comprehensible rich input, and opportunities for output and interaction, which I have called SLA facilitating conditions, in the light of teacher learning and cognition. First, the theoretical, empirical and pedagogical grounds

of these facilitators in the field of SLA research constitute one of the rationales for the inquiry. Comprehensible rich input, and learner output and interaction have for long been suggested as essential conditions for second language learning, and L2 teachers are advised to apply them in the classroom. Second, I have pointed out that a communicative language teaching approach such as task-based instruction, fundamentally underpinned by, though not restricted to the theory of language input, and output and interaction, has run counter to existing teacher beliefs and the context of practice. Importantly, the approach appeared to have raised an assumption that tasks alone can foster second language acquisition, while a caveat was made against its shortage of empirical evidence. Added to this, there has existed a concern not only for bridging the gap between SLA research and classroom practice in general, but also for improving English teaching and teacher education in contexts such as Vietnam. Although much research has informed the gap of adopting TBLT in Asia, most has focused on primary and secondary contexts at the level of task pedagogy and curriculum implementation. Little research has been undertaken about the ways teachers perceive the SLA principles underlying TBLT and how these are implemented in their teaching conditions. Finally, although research on teacher cognition has already been ample, a paucity of studies in the literature has explored the conceptions language teachers, especially Vietnamese in-service teachers of English, hold about language input, output and interaction, and the factors constraining their implementation. Understanding this can be expected to make informative contributions to foreign language pedagogy and teacher development. Besides, by exploring teachers' perceived changes from learning to apply some SLA concepts, the study also aims to offer insights into issues about teacher change and development in the context of Vietnam and broader. To such ends, the research draws on a socio-cultural constructivist framework of teacher learning and cognition, building on established research methods for investigation as Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 will outline.

4. TEACHER LEARNING AND CONCEPTION

The previous chapter has discussed why there is a need to research teacher learning and conception in relation to the concepts of language input, and learner output and interaction. The current chapter will now discuss in detail the theoretical and conceptual issues relevant to teacher learning and cognition. Teacher learning constitutes a broader process in which teachers' conceptions and practices are developed and enacted. Thus, I will firstly give an overview of perspectives on teacher learning and development, and propose that a socio-culturally constructed perspective on teacher learning and development is appropriate for understanding how the teachers in this present study learned and conceived of the SLA knowledge introduced to them. Within that perspective, I will then present a conceptual framework of the teacher conceptions the current study draws on for theorising findings in Chapters 6 to 8. The framework involves factors shaping teachers' uptake of new ideas or concepts in their process of learning and development. These include teachers' prior established beliefs, their educational and practical experiences, the interaction between teachers' conceptions and classroom practice, and the role of context in mediating conceptions and practices.

4.1. Theoretical framework of teacher learning and development

The concept of learning is extremely difficult to define (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005), and the difficulty has generated a variety of views and theories of learning. Nevertheless, theoretical perspectives on learning have almost exclusively focused on explicating children and teenager mental and cognitive growth; few theories explain adult learning, particularly in the case of the teacher as an adult learner (Sprinthall, Reiman, Thies-Sprinthall, 1996). Ultimately, general learning theories entail two epistemological questions: what the nature of knowledge is, and how knowledge is acquired. The various theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature often underline separate human aspects: action, thought, emotion, and social environment (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005). The early behaviourist approach accounts for learning behaviour in terms of actions as separate from mental processes, attributing learning to behavioural changes through reinforcement and

repetition of stimuli and responses. Adopting an outcome-oriented view of learning, behaviourism has become obsolete. Later theorists see the acquisition and growth of knowledge as a more complex process (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005) in that they take account of either internal cognitive processes (cognitivists), or external social and cultural influences on the learning process (socio-cultural or social constructive theorists). Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) have maintained that the different explanations of learning tend to stress a certain aspect of human learning, and that we can fully encapsulate the nature of learning if we take into account all the aspects of a person. For research purposes, however, the utility of a theoretical perspective depends upon whether it constitutes a useful tool to theorise the research phenomenon. The study described in this thesis investigates adult learning, specifically teachers' learning in terms of their constructing a type of professional knowledge. Regarding this, given that no single theory of learning is applicable to all learning situations, I will draw on two theoretical perspectives to examine and account for the conceptual development of the participating teachers. This theoretical framework draws on a personal constructive perspective and a socio-cultural one on learning.

4.1.1. A personal constructivist perspective

Unlike the behaviourists who regard the mind as a passive receiver of external stimuli that produce responses, a cognitive approach to learning views learning as a conscious active mental process (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005). Two common cognitive theories usually discussed in the literature involve information-processing theory and constructivism (Williams & Burden, 1997). The former overlooks the levels of concept abstractness and personal differences in acquiring information (Williams & Burden, 1997). The latter views learning in more complex manner, accounting for how abstract concepts are acquired. Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) point out that consciousness or conscious experience of the world results from the brain's capacity to transform received information, but that such factors as "beliefs, values, needs, and attitudes also embellish our consciousness" (p.272). Conscious experience determines human behaviour. "Learning is based on an understanding of the underlying nature of the problem, and comes from within the individual and is not imposed by someone else" (p.281). A constructivist perspective of knowledge maintains that learning,

especially of abstract concepts, does not occur through mere exposure to the world because some inborn abilities or ideas unfold as children's brains mature. Rather, through exposure to the world and experience, learners gradually and continuously build more insightful and sophisticated ideas, adapting and reconstructing existing ones. According to Byrnes (2008) and Hergenhahn and Olson (2005), constructive processes occur in two ways: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of incorporating new information into the existing knowledge structure or schemata, whereas accommodation describes the process of rearranging existing knowledge to come into closer conformity with new contradictory or dissonant ideas. These two processes, according to the authors, account for the growth of both understanding and misconceptions. From this perspective, experiences are organised, and prior experience affects contemporary experience (Byrnes, 2008; Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005; Kennedy, 1991). In devising an agenda for research on teacher learning, Kennedy (1991) advocates the same constructivist stance, which he claims to be a more advanced theory of teacher as learner, that "teachers, like other learners, interpret new content through their existing understandings and modify and reinterpret new ideas on the basis of what they already know or believe" (Kennedy, 1991, p.3).

From the perspective of constructivism, therefore, learning is a complex process that entails meaningful and insightful development of conceptual understanding. Individuals play a central role in, and vary on, the process of organising and re-organising their understandings. Learning is not a passive process of transmitting and receiving information, but a dynamic one of making meaning or constructing one's own understandings. Following this, in teacher professional development, teachers are not passive recipients but active constructors of new knowledge or concepts. This view of teacher learning underpins a framework for making sense of how the teachers in the current study conceptualise the SLA knowledge presented to them. An activity such as teacher learning is also situated in a socio-cultural context. In this respect, a socio-cultural perspective on learning can also contribute to the framework in terms of contributing an understanding of contextual influences on the participant teachers in the process of acquiring the propositional knowledge of the SLA facilitating conditions.

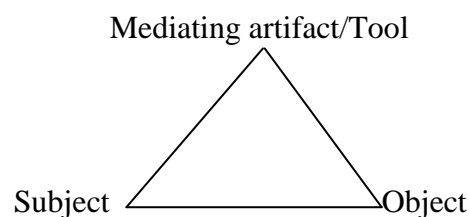
4.1.2. A socio-cultural perspective

A socio-cultural view of human learning has received its greatest impetus from Vygotsky's (1978) theory. Developers of socio-cultural theory include Leont'iev (1981) and Engestrom (1987), among others, who established the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) or the often-called Activity Theory. The socio-cultural perspective offers useful insights into teachers' professional learning in that a cognitive activity is framed by historically, culturally and socially determined expectations, tools, roles of engagement, and actions. In this respect, the current study also draws on it to account for how teachers' professional activities, including teaching and learning to teach, are mediated by their conceptual framework and the socio-cultural context in which they engage, which in turn affects the meanings they attach to the propositional knowledge of input, output and interaction introduced to activate their implicit knowledge.

Fundamental to the socio-cultural view is Vygotsky's (1978) idea that human cognitive development is derived from a mediated relationship between the human mind and the world. According to Vygotsky, we come to experience and make sense of the world in a mediated or indirect way. An individual (subject) is engaged in an activity with a goal (object), which refers to an individual or thing that the subject aims to transform, or the purpose of the subject's action (Bakhurst, 2009). Mediating this process of cognitive development is some tool, which can be represented as in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Vygotsky's basic mediated cognition



The mediating tool consists of both mechanical and psychological tools such as physical objects and signs or conventional symbols such as language respectively (Vygotsky, 1978). The latter also includes conceptual tools (ideas, documents, etc) and, as such involves “prior knowledge of the subject” (Yamata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009, p.508). The latter understanding of the mediator particularly

sheds light on the process of teachers acquiring new knowledge in that prior established knowledge or beliefs of teachers mediate the acquisition of new information or concepts.

Another important point made by Vygostky (1978), which is relevant to the current study, is the crucial role of language in the development of cognition. According to Vygotsky (1978), language is internally directed at the subject. It not only serves to mediate and regulate the subject's relationships with others, but also regulates and transforms the subject's own mental processes (Vygostky, 1978). As a higher mental process, learning is shaped by individuals integrating language into their thinking (Lantolf, 2000). Thus, in the process of making sense of new concepts, language is essentially functional. The knowledge, beliefs and conceptions of people are thus reflected in their language use, and are themselves confirmed and reinforced by their articulation. By using language to talk about their teaching, teachers may transform their thinking. This view also underlies the nature of data generated for the research (see Chapter 5).

One other useful aspect of the socio-cultural theory consists in the idea of an interaction between different levels of an activity aimed at achieving an outcome. Leont'iev (1981) and Engestrom (1987) extended Vygostky's idea of mediated activity to an activity system, which is composed of three levels of analysis: activity, actions, and operations. At the highest level, an activity refers to a series of actions, which, according to Lantolf and Appel (1994), is situated in a social and cultural environment in which participants operate. Any engagement in an activity begins with a true motive or goal, and motives can distinguish one activity from another. Actions are defined as specific acts or processes, for example, planning a lesson and organising a discussion are acts of teaching. The overall goal of an activity can be broken down into sub-goals subordinated to specific actions. As maintained by Engestrom (1987), "one and the same action may accomplish various activities and may transfer from one activity to another. And one motive may obviously find expression in various goals and actions" (p.50). The final level of an activity is identified as operations or "the means, physical or mental, through which an action is carried out, [and] are bound to the actual circumstances and conditions under which a goal is realised" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p.20). Examples of operations are giving instructions, modelling language,

or correcting errors. In the words of Engestrom (1987), “actions are related to conscious goals, operations to conditions not often consciously reflected by the subject” (p.50). Operations are developed and established through practice, becoming unconscious routines (Knight, 2002, p.231).

Knight’s (2002) observation regarding the described levels can shed light on teacher professional learning. He sees teacher professional activity as an “orchestration of different levels of knowledge,” and “[t]he ways in which learning occurs vary with the level of interaction involved” (p.231). According to Knight, learning and cognition of declarative knowledge occurs at the conceptual level, while technical learning involves change in procedural knowledge at the operational level. That is, procedural learning takes place when there is change in teacher routines. He continues to explain that conceptual learning must involve a constructivist approach in which individuals are supported to re-orchestrate their conceptions to accommodate propositional knowledge. Knight (2002) justifies how a change to declarative knowledge is more difficult than a change to procedural knowledge as follows:

While operational learning takes some time, activity learning takes longer, especially if it involves fundamental reappraisal of assumptions which have hitherto governed operations and activities (double-loop learning).... New operations may be taught, whereas new activities require much more of learners, who are better seen as constructors, not recipients, of understandings. (p.231)

It follows that the conceptions and practices of the Vietnamese EFL teachers regarding the propositional knowledge or concepts of language input, and learner output and interaction, as examined in the current study, involve learning at the conceptual level. It is thus only possible to understand the acquisition of such concepts from a constructivist standpoint.

That a cognitive activity is contextually (historically, socially, culturally, and politically) framed is perhaps the most significant part of the socio-cultural theory in informing teacher professional learning and development. According to the theory, an individual activity interacts with the community in a complex way. Individuals operate under social rules, and the norms and expectations of a

community of practice (Engestrom, 1987). Accordingly, teachers' professional activity is not only goal-directed, but also subject to social, cultural, historical, political, and institutional rules. An examination of such relations is necessary for revealing teachers' professional learning, and is consonant with the view that teacher cognitive activity is contextually conditioned as will be presented in section 4.4.

To sum up, a socio-cultural perspective on cognition implies that teachers' professional activity, including their cognitive activity such as learning represented by their classroom actions and instructional techniques, is a mediated interaction and engagement, subject to formal and informal rules and responsibilities within a community to which they belong. A cognitive activity is always situated in a specific socio-cultural environment, and is mediated by cultural, psychological and conceptual tools (e.g. documents, language, prior concepts or beliefs). These mediating tools shape the way in which teachers work to transform the object of their teaching activity, which in turn reflects the way they interpret professional knowledge (Vygostky, 1978). By considering social and cultural influences on teachers, and the mediating tools in their activities, we can come to understand how their cognition develops, and how the process of integrating new professional knowledge is constrained both conceptually and contextually. The socio-cultural perspective in relation to human learning activity thus examines how external social factors and internal conceptual constraints affect the cognitive process. Combined with a constructivist viewpoint, the socio-cultural view constitutes a theoretical framework for scrutinising higher cognitive processes such as teacher professional learning. The framework is thus useful to look at how the Vietnamese EFL teachers in the present study respond to the SLA concepts such as input, output and interaction. Such learning cannot be divorced from examining how they conceptualise and address the knowledge in their classroom activity.

Before discussing conceptual issues related to teachers' cognition and practice, it is necessary to understand approaches to language teacher education underpinned by different views on teacher development. Understanding these views and approaches is part of making sense of the ways the Vietnamese EFL teachers in the study conceptualised and addressed language input, and learner output and

interaction in their classroom practices.

4.2. Approaches to second language teacher development

Approaches to second language teacher preparation are grounded in the emergence of various conceptions of how teachers learn professionally (Freeman & Richards, 1996), or how teachers develop their skills, knowledge and understanding about language teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The two regularly distinguished notions in the field of second language teaching are teacher training and teacher education (Richards, 1990; Widdowson, 1993). Tarone and Allwright (2005) differentiate these two from a third concept they call understanding or development.

The *training* view of teacher preparation (Richards, 1990, p.14) has a greater concern for practical skills than teachers' knowledge and understanding. The approach prepares language teachers for effective teaching behaviours or skills such as questioning, explaining or presenting new language items. According to Richards and Farrell (2005, p.6), this skill learning model trains teachers to master "a range of different skills or competences" to ensure effective teaching, and with the immediate goal of preparing teachers to teach, it therefore places a primary emphasis on trainable and usable skills. Widdowson (1993) similarly sees its prime focus on a set of routines, techniques and tactics. Such an approach to teacher preparation is consistent with the positivist epistemological belief according to which effective teaching behaviours are the determinants of effective learning (Freeman & Johnson, 2005). Although this approach has practical value in preparing teachers given its comprehensibility and usability, it overlooks the mental scripts that teachers operate with in their teaching performance, and numerous other forces shaping how they conceptualise teaching and actually teach. The approach ignores the active role of teachers as learners. In Widdowson's (1993) terms, teacher training "calls for relatively non-reflective submission to authority" (p.269). In the view of Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), such an approach does not acknowledge teachers as agents who develop themselves. Teachers are seen as people in need of transformation.

The view of *education* in preparing teachers (Richards, 1990, p.14), on the other hand, acknowledges teachers as active learners. Widdowson (1993) defines

teacher education as a way of equipping language teachers with the ability to solve problems. Tarone and Allwright (2005) view teacher education as the provision of a knowledge base to enable teachers to make informed decisions in their teaching practice and context. Implicated in the concept of teacher education is the recognition of teachers' personal theories, dispositions, attitudes, or cognition in their process of professional learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Widdowson, 1993). Teacher education acknowledges that language teachers are active, thinking decision-makers of their classroom instruction, and are active builders of knowledge in the process of developing understanding of teaching (Borg, 2003, 2006; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Freeman and Johnson (2005) identify this approach as underpinned by a cognitive view of teacher development and learning, and as the one that stresses developing in language teachers the capacity to deal with their cognition. That is to say, language teachers need to be educated to have conscious, deliberate, or reasoned actions to attain successful teaching.

A more recent approach to language teacher preparation is termed 'teacher development' (Tarone & Allwright, 2005). The approach is associated with reflective teaching, which takes into account the intentional meta-cognitive aspect of learning. Richards and Farrell (2005) explain that teachers can act as reflective practitioners who can develop self-understanding of their teaching from critically examining "the nature and meaning of their teaching experiences" (p.7). The focus of teacher preparation, according to this model, therefore falls on developing in teachers a critical understanding of their teaching practices. Teachers, in this model, for example, are encouraged to reflect on theories or principles of language teaching to develop an understanding of the process of second language development. Teachers gather information by self-monitoring, observing their own classroom practice, or using case studies, to examine their teaching effectiveness and to learn from their teaching experiences (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In this way, teacher development is concerned with self-regulated learning, what Richards and Farrell recognised as "a move away from the authoritarian organisational structure in schools toward more democratic and participatory forms of teacher development" (p.13-14). In addition, this approach emphasises the development of a context-sensitive knowledge of teaching, and may produce the most insightful understanding of teaching. Nevertheless, it

requires the pro-activeness, commitment as well as persistence of individuals in the process of learning to teach. Since this approach assumes much of teachers' personal responsibility in their own development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992), seeing experience as a central tenet for reflection and development, it implies the notion of voluntary and personal construction of knowledge, which is in line with a constructivist view of learning. It also fits squarely in a socio-cultural perspective in that the teacher's goal of professional activity is not solely to transform the object of teaching, but to transform her/himself as well. It is dualistic: to improve both student learning and teacher teaching (a manifestation of learning). Such learning and development is also certainly inseparable from the social and cultural settings in which the teacher works.

The differentiation of the approaches above to teacher preparation in fact amount to three general ways of understanding teacher development proposed by Hargreaves and Fullan (1992). The first way of interpreting the concept is more restricted to seeing teachers as people in need of transformation. Teacher development is defined as knowledge and skills training. The second way of defining teacher development acknowledges the teacher's personal development process in which self-understanding develops over time and stages of development. In this way, teacher development will involve classroom-based reflections and learning or collaboration with colleagues or researchers. In this process, the voice of teachers is taken into account. The third way considers contextual conditions in the development of teachers; it indicates that teacher development is inseparable from the context of teachers' work, and therefore approaches should be realistic and appropriate to local working circumstances.

The present study does not advocate that teacher learning and development is a linear process in which theoretical input is transferred directly to intake. It instead draws upon the view of teachers as active learners who have a substantial role in the process of constructing and personalising new knowledge. That process of development is mediated not only by their history of learning and established beliefs, but also by the social, cultural, and institutional context in which they are operating. The introduction of the SLA facilitating conditions in teaching English to the Vietnamese EFL teachers in the current study was an opportunity for learning and constructing knowledge. Teacher development and learning in the

study is thus seen as a move away from the authoritarian view because it acknowledges teachers' established teaching styles and beliefs or knowledge. The latter psychological constructs are subsequently discussed.

4.3. Teacher knowledge

The following section discusses the importance of research on teacher knowledge and the diversity and nature of teacher knowledge.

4.3.1. The importance of research on teacher knowledge

Nearly two decades ago, Kennedy (1991) noted,

We must design research that examines *both* what teachers bring with them to new experiences - what they already know, believe, or value - *and* the experiences themselves - the features that are likely to promote learning the new ideas or practices offered to them. (Original emphasis, p.3)

Freeman (2002) has more recently suggested that teacher learning and teacher knowledge form the central concepts of research on teaching and teachers. He maintains that "teacher learning is the core activity of teacher education and therefore that any improvements in the professional preparation of teachers, including those who teach English and other second languages, need to be informed by this research" (p.1). The author continues to argue that it is impossible to understand how teachers learn to teach (teacher learning) without referring to what it is they are learning (teacher knowledge), which means that teacher learning is inseparable from teacher knowledge.

Research on teacher knowledge arises out of an interest in a better understanding of teaching. As researchers and educators propose, to expand our insights into teaching, it is vital to shift from an exclusive focus on teachers' behavioural patterns to investigating the issues of what is going on in their minds, and how that influences their practice (Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Yinger, 1977; Freeman, 1996, 2002; Johnson, 1994). Such a proposal is based on an awareness of teachers, not as passive recipients and practitioners of new knowledge, but as "active, thinking decision makers who make instructional choices by drawing on

complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (Borg, 2003, p.81). Over the four decades, research in this field has substantially increased our understanding, and yet much remains unstudied and needs to be complemented by further research in a wide range of social contexts, especially with respect to second language education (Borg, 2003; Borg, 2006; Freeman, 1996).

Interest in teacher learning, including teacher knowledge, is also derived from assumptions about the potential benefits this research tradition brings. Clark (1988) outlines some important contributions research in this area can make to the practice of teacher education. One of these contributions involves insights into understanding and justifying established practices in teacher education programmes. Another assumed benefit is the potential of such research in informing teacher educators on ways of effecting possible changes and improvements in the content and process of teacher education although Clark admits that it cannot prescribe how to educate teachers. Johnson (1994) similarly maintains that research on teacher cognition contributes to improving teaching practices and teacher education and development. Johnson (2006) further reveals that research on what teachers think and how they learn sheds light on the gap between the traditional focus on classroom behavior in teacher education programs and how teachers are constrained by socio-cultural factors, and therefore behave in a different manner than proposed by training programs. Freeman (2002) sums up the vital role of understanding second language teachers’ learning as follows:

There is a rich, varied, and complex process of learning to teach on which teacher education must build. Focusing on this learning process, as distinct from the delivery mechanisms, is changing our understanding of teacher education in important ways. Basic questions of how language teaching is learned and therefore how teacher education interventions can best be organised to support that learning will, hopefully, shape our work moving forward. (p.12)

Assumed values given to research on teacher learning and knowledge have motivated ample research, and consequently, the field has flourished with a proliferation of psychological constructs and terms in describing the ‘cognitive

space' of teachers. The following subsection will give an overview of some of the ways in which teacher knowledge has been conceptualised and the nature of the knowledge.

4.3.1. The diversity and nature of teacher knowledge

In mainstream educational research, Clark and Yinger (1977) identified four areas of research on teachers' thinking or mental processes: teacher decision-making, teacher planning, teacher judgment, and teacher implicit theories or beliefs. These so-identified areas represent different ways of how teachers know. With reference to teacher knowledge, it is necessary to refer to a common distinction between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. The former is propositional, and entails knowing concrete facts, abstract ideas and principles, whereas the latter is practical, and involves knowing how-to skills. The knowledge base first described by Shulman (1987) is largely propositional. Shulman (1987) detailed seven knowledge components required of teachers for their teaching practice. They are knowledge of subject matter (e.g. English), general pedagogic knowledge (an understanding of general principles and rules of pedagogy), pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of instructional principles, rules, or techniques specifically relevant to teaching a subject), curricular knowledge (knowledge of materials and programmes), knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational purposes, values and philosophies. In practice, how teachers operate on different components of knowledge remains a question (Knight, 2002). Researchers on teachers' knowledge and beliefs agree that these aspects are often implicit. Terms have proliferated to try to encapsulate the tacit or implicit elements teachers rely on in their teaching practice.

In particular, the concept of *beliefs* has attracted a huge body of work. It has often been compared with the construct of *knowledge*, and the distinction between them has constituted a controversial issue in educational research because of the unclear borderline between them (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Pajares (1992) contends that closely linked, if not identical, to beliefs are attitudes, values, preconceptions, and images, but the differentiation between knowledge and beliefs is controversial. Some scholars (e.g. Abelson, 1979; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Nespor, 1987) regard beliefs as distinct and unrelated to

knowledge in some ways. These authors often draw on the personal, subjective, and emotion-laden nature of beliefs to distinguish the concept from knowledge. Abelson (1979) pointed out that beliefs are uncertain or non-consensual in principle, evaluative and affective, episodic or experiential. In contrast, knowledge is objective, emotion-free, requiring critical assessment and communal consensus (Nespor, 1987). According to Pajares (1992), the distinction between beliefs as “based on evaluation and judgment,” and knowledge as “based on objective fact” is a common one (p.313). Other scholars, on the other hand, refer to these two concepts as interchangeable or overlapping (Kagan, 1992; Lewis, 1990; Richards, 1998; Woods, 1996). Taking a constructivist stance, they advocate that one’s own understandings are personally, subjectively, and actively interpreted and constructed, and that beliefs may form part of this understanding or knowledge. Lewis (1990) posits that beliefs filter knowledge, and therefore are inseparable from knowledge. Kagan (1992) also equates knowledge and beliefs, viewing teacher knowledge as personally achieved understanding. In the same vein, Woods (1996) sees them as intertwined and overlapping in practice, incorporating them with assumptions, and coining an acronym ‘BAK’ (beliefs, assumptions, knowledge) to express the interconnected mental framework that the teacher brings to their professional work. In Richardson’s (1996) observation, the delineation of knowledge and beliefs as set out above “is not evident in much of the teaching and teacher education literature” (p.104). Yet she holds that beliefs differ from knowledge in terms of “epistemic warrant” (Richardson, 1996, p.104), which is, as referred above, a regularly used distinctive feature. To conclude, Pajares (1992), by asking the question “What truth, what knowledge, can exist in the absence of judgment or evaluation?” (p.310), suggests that the task of delineating knowledge and beliefs failed to reach any agreed conclusion, given that they are intertwined.

Scholars have also explored various other constructs or terms closely related in meaning. The constructs reflect the origin of teacher knowledge. *Practical knowledge* is one of the popular terms and concepts. According to Elbaz (1981), “teachers hold and use their knowledge in distinctive ways” (p.47), and that knowledge is contextualised, experiential and implicit. Elbaz (1981) has also pointed out five forces that may shape a teacher’s knowledge: the various classroom situations teachers make sense of and react to, their personal wish to

use knowledge meaningfully, the social constraints of the work place and their active role in structuring them, their collective experiences, and their reflection on theory. Clandinin (1985) argues that a teacher's knowledge is also built up from personal teaching experience, and hence proposes the term *personal practical knowledge*, a term which has been subsequently employed by a number of authors (e.g. Golombek, 1998; Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999).

Tsui (2003) sees teacher knowledge as originating in reflective practice in which declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge are inseparable in a teacher's action. They are intuitively and automatically driven, and developed from reflections. According to the author, teachers reflect on their experiences to project and plan for future actions. On encountering problems or unexpected situations in teaching, teachers reflect on them and arrive at new understandings or immediate solutions to the problems. Tsui (2003) reasons that while Elbaz's 'practical knowledge' entails the operationalisation of theoretical knowledge in a specific social context of work, it, therefore, filters that knowledge through practical experiences. The role of teachers' deliberate reflection is equally important in their development of understanding. She continues to point out that Clandinin's (1985) acknowledgment of the personal nature of teacher knowledge highlights the crucial role played by the teacher in living experiences, constructing and reconstructing knowledge through processes of reflection (Tsui, 2003). Such views of teacher knowledge are consistent with a constructivist and socio-cultural perspective as outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Another way of defining teacher knowledge has originated from social practice, referred to as *situated knowledge*, meaning that knowledge is "contextually developed as practitioners respond to the specific context in which they operate" (Tsui, 2003, p.48). Knowing how to teach, in this view, stems from participating in teaching. Through engaging in teaching, teachers develop their understandings and skills of teaching. This view of teacher knowledge, according to Tsui, seems to neglect the role of theoretical knowledge. However, I believe it is hard to reject the role of reflection on experiences in the process of developing knowledge. The conceptualisation of situated knowledge similarly recognises individuals' activeness in their learning and cognitive development, and the importance of context and practice in developing one's own knowledge.

Another term used in researching teacher knowledge is concerned with the notion of *pedagogical content knowledge* (Shulman, 1986). Shulman (1986) advocates that the ultimate questions of research lie in how teachers' comprehension of the subject matter to be taught influences their teaching quality, and how teachers transform their understandings of the content into forms comprehensible and accessible to learners. Although teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is central to successful teaching (Tsui, 2003), this way of understanding teacher knowledge becomes complicated in language teaching and teacher education where language is both the content and medium of instruction (Freeman, 2002).

Some other researchers have tended to use new labels to describe the complexities of teacher knowledge and beliefs, including teachers' *pedagogic principles* (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 2001), *maxims* (Richards, 1998), *expertise* (Tsui, 2003), and *conceptions* (Shi & Cumming, 1995), among others.

Although the diverse terms and ways of expressing teacher knowledge reflect an explosive growth of research on teachers' cognitive processes, the problem remains as to their overlap (Borg, 2003; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). In spite of the variable overlapping interpretations, the consensus seems to be that the knowledge teachers hold is personal and tacit (Borg, 2006; Freeman, 1996, Freeman, 2002), and can only be observed indirectly (Johnson, 1994). In practice, such knowledge is coherent and integrated as a whole (Calderhead & Miller, 1986; Feiman-Nemser & Folden, 1986; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990; Tsui, 2003; Woods, 1996), complex and dynamic (Borg, 2006; Feryok, 2010). Furthermore, the knowledge of teachers is socially and culturally conditioned (Borg, 2006; Elbaz, 1983; Freeman, 2002; Tsui, 2003). In language education, Borg (2003, 2006) has recently proposed the inclusive term of 'teacher cognition' in an attempt to embrace all the previous terms and to build a coherent conceptual framework that guides research in the field. Borg (2006) puts forward a model, charting forces that interact with language teachers' cognition as will be discussed in 4.4. In this thesis, I use the term *conceptions* to describe the ways teachers interpret new knowledge or ideas. I maintain that the concept resides within such a framework of language teacher cognition, and therefore captures the complex, dynamic and contextualised nature of teacher cognition in general. The next part will discuss this concept in detail.

4.3.2. The definition and nature of teacher conceptions

The notion of teacher *conceptions* specifically of teaching and learning has attracted frequent interest in educational inquiry (Kember, 1997), but the term has been utilised in different ways. Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle and Orr (2000) note that whilst the school-based literature has shown a considerable interest in beliefs and knowledge, the higher education literature has focused substantial attention on conceptions of teaching and learning. The authors further point out that the school literature in North America has often used the term ‘conception’ to refer to “researchers’ ways of describing different aspects of teaching” (p.8). Freeman and Richards (1993) adopt the term in this way to examine views of second language teaching. Drawing on Fishl and Hoz’s (1991) synthesised definition, which denotes conceptions as “conveying connotations of comprehensive, organised, and unified bodies of knowledge about an object, idea, or phenomenon” (as cited in Freeman & Richards, 1993, p.194), they identified three categories of conceptions about second language teaching: scientifically-based conceptions, theory and values-based conceptions, and art or craft-oriented conceptions.

In the European literature, on the other hand, the term tends to denote “teachers’ own ways of thinking and their beliefs about teaching” (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle & Orr, 2000, p.8). This interpretation of the term seems to be more common in research about teacher knowledge and learning. In higher education, according to the same authors, a teacher’s conception is usually associated with personal views of teaching and/or learning (Entwistle et al., 2000). The concept reflects the underlying epistemological understanding of how knowledge grows. For example, higher education research has pointed out that underpinning a teacher-centred view is transmission and reproduction of information, while underlying student-centred conception is a constructivist view of learning (Kember, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

A commonly cited definition of a conception is that of Pratt (1992). Pratt, who studied conceptions of teaching in adult education, defines the term as follows:

Conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena, which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world, and in doing

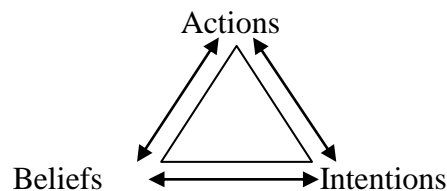
so, use those abstract representations to delimit something from, and relate it to, other aspects of our world. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world. (p.204)

Pratt's definition suggests that individuals impose different personal meanings on or construct their own understandings of phenomena, and through such understandings respond to the phenomena in their own ways. Conceptions, in Pratt's sense, represent one's learning from a constructive perspective.

Pratt describes conceptions as "a dynamic and interdependent trilogy of *Actions, Intentions, and Beliefs*" (p. 206). As illustrated in Figure 4.2, a person's beliefs, intentions and actions are intertwined or inseparable, and together they express his or her personal conception or way of interpreting the world. Anchored in a person's conception is his or her belief. The framework suggests that a person's conception can be understood by examining the person's beliefs, intentions, and actions.

Figure 4.2

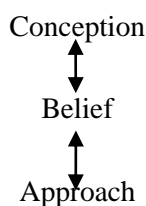
Aspects of conception of teaching (Adapted from Pratt, 1992, p.206)



Posner, Strike, Hewson, and Gertzog (1982) in science education share a similar view. Posner, Strike, Hewson, and Gertzog (as cited in Pajares, 1992,) suggest, "Beliefs and concepts are central to a conception" (p.320). Likewise, although Benson and Lor (1999) examined conceptions of language and language learning, their distinction between conceptions, beliefs and approaches appears to align with Pratt's ideas. Benson and Lor observe that conceptions represent thinking at a higher level of abstraction than beliefs. Beliefs, according to the authors, can be "inferred more or less directly from data, whereas conceptions...call for a further level of analysis" (p.464), and constrain beliefs. Conceptions and beliefs, for them, are made manifest in approaches which are functional in a given context. Their relationship can be represented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 2.3

Interaction between conception, belief, and approach



Teachers' personal conceptions, therefore, can be inferred from their instructional approaches, which Pratt (1992) interprets as intentions and actions, and their statements of beliefs or assumptions. In the same vein, in language education, Tsui (2003) conceptualises teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning as those that subsume personal beliefs among others such as assumptions, metaphors, images, and values. She contends that the conceptions of teachers strongly influence their classroom practices, or what and how they learn. Teachers' personal conceptions of teaching and learning, she maintains, interact with their practices.

Several researchers interpret conceptions and beliefs as interchangeable. Lam and Kember (2006), for instance, interpret Pratt's *conceptions* as "beliefs about teaching that guide a teacher's perception of a situation and will shape actions" (p.694). This understanding of the concept appears to echo Bunts-Anderson's (2003) statement that "*Conception* and *belief* refer to more developed ideas or opinions that result from reflection or experience and which are thought to be true" (p.1). It is also similar to what researchers such as Farrell and Lim (2005) appeared to intend in their article. Farrell and Lim (2005) used both terms in the title of a paper about teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching, but did not delineate the terms. Such uses reflect Pajares's (1992) and Richardson's (1996) observation about the overlapping terminology in research about teacher cognition.

On the other hand, a number of researchers in language education such as Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores, and Dale (1998), Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), Freeman (1991), and Shi and Cumming (1995), among others, look at language teachers' conceptions as their personal ways of interpreting language teaching practice. Mangubhai et al. (1998), for example, using the term

'conceptions', represent the personal ways in which 39 primary-school language teachers in Australia conceptualised communicative language teaching. 'Conceptions of teaching' by Freeman (1991) shows how four foreign language teachers in the USA made sense of their classroom practice. Likewise, Shi and Cumming (1995) represent the conceptions of five experienced ESL teachers at a Canadian university about writing instruction by tracing their responses to an ESL writing process approach introduced to them. Finding that each individual's conception was "grounded in a specific set of personal beliefs about teaching ESL writing" (p.87), the authors describe each teacher's conception in terms of three elements: an underlying guiding belief repeated throughout their reflections in interviews, their typical pedagogical practice, and the evaluative criteria used to judge learning and teaching effectiveness. Teachers' conceptions, in other words, refer to personal ways of making sense of something, the process of which may involve integrating or accommodating new information into existing knowledge or experience. This way of conceptualising the term *conception* or *conceptions* is also similar to that of teacher knowledge as having a personal nature. It reflects a constructivist perspective on how teachers develop their knowledge, and is precisely the view taken by the current study.

Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle, and Orr (2000) discuss the nature of conceptions from a constructivist perspective on teacher knowledge, using data from a study with pre-service students. The researchers identify the variable qualities of a conception. Firstly, it is personal or individualistic, as it carries personal meaning which is "built up from a wide variety of sources, including knowledge, images and experiences" (p.9). They point out that traditional cognitive theories for describing the process of acquiring concepts are in a too orderly and rational manner, that is, "by [learners] extracting the common features of experiences in which the concepts are exemplified" (p.9). Such a description, according to the authors, overlooks abstract concepts whose defining features are difficult to extract from experiences. Abstract concepts require a different process, which is a gradual formulation of understanding and which draws on a variety of sources as mentioned above (Entwistle et al., 2000). Pratt (1992) and Tsui (2003) also recognise this idiosyncratic feature of a conception.

The emphasis on the personal construction of knowledge recognises the second feature of a conception that can evolve. A conception begins with a novice status as learners try to make sense of concepts, and evolves gradually into a more coherent, organised and sophisticated one when learners gather more experiences, reflect on their experiences and integrate more information. During this process of development, experiences and knowledge serve as the core drive (Entwistle et al., 2000). The process represents a constructivist point of view on learning and development as advocated in the present study. Conceptions, in this way, are dynamic, a feature consistent with the general framework of teacher cognition as mentioned in 4.3.2.

A conception is also context-specific. It has been found that various conceptions are often “activated and potentially altered by the specific context - rather than simply existing in a person’s memory” (Entwistle et al., 2000, p.9). In this respect, it is also aligned with the view that teacher cognition is contextually conditioned (Borg, 2006).

Another related feature of a conception involves a conscious process by which it evolves. Consciousness makes conceptions different from beliefs. Entwistle et al. (2000) explain that unlike beliefs, which are emotionally laden, “conceptions are consciously constructed” (p.10), or “are conscious attempts at concept development” (p.15). The researchers illustrate the conscious process with a mind map constructed by one of their participants to express her view of what makes good teaching in response to the readings about different views of the nature of good teaching provided to her in the study. They found through the mind map that the reading extracts “did seem to provoke a serious attempt to relate that content to previous knowledge and experience, within an individually constructed framework” (p.14). Entwistle et al. also discovered that the participant created an idiosyncratic pattern of understanding. Their finding, in other words, supports a constructivist approach to learning according to which learners assimilate or accommodate new information into their existing knowledge and beliefs. Understanding, in brief, is not transmitted, but actively constructed.

In summary, to date there has been little agreement on the terminology used to identify teachers’ mental processes, especially teachers’ understandings, both in general education and language education inquiries. However, the diverse terms

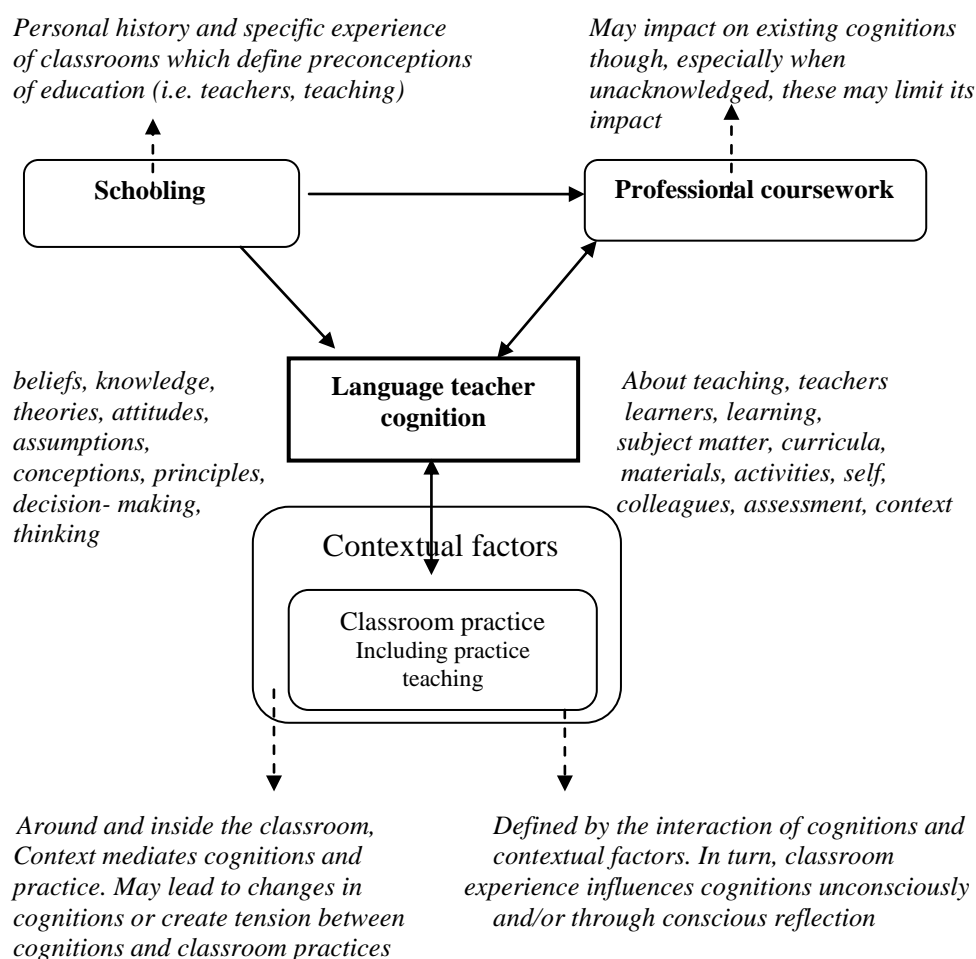
all recognise the relation of teachers' cognition to their process of teaching and learning and the context of their work. Teachers' conceptions, understood as personal ways of constructing knowledge, are among them. Conceptions represent individuals' endeavours to make sense of new concepts, information or knowledge, and reflect their personal beliefs, assumptions, values, intentions and actions. The nature of teachers' personal conceptions discussed so far represents a constructivist view of knowledge growth that stresses not only an individual's attempt to make sense of new knowledge, but also the role of prior knowledge and beliefs, and the social and cultural environment in the individual's professional learning and development. The term 'belief' itself is vague (Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988; Pajares, 1992) as it has been utilised to denote variable levels and aspects of ideology (Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988). It is used in the thesis to indicate previously established tacit conceptual understandings or values that the teacher brings to the learning and interpretation of incoming ideas or concepts. The conceptual framework as outlined so far provides the basis on which the present study focuses its data collection and analysis to examine how a group of EFL Vietnamese teachers at a university conceptualised concepts of SLA facilitating conditions such as language input, and output and interaction in teaching General English.

4.4. Understanding teacher conceptions

As mentioned above, Borg (2006) proposes a conceptual model of researching language teacher cognition. In this model, he charts the complicated connection between learning and cognitive development of language teachers with the previous schooling experiences, and the context of teaching. According to the model, as presented in Figure 4.4, language teachers have cognition, expressed in various terms, about every matter of education. The definition of conceptions as personal ways of making sense of the world also pre-supposes that teachers construct their understanding of everything. Regarding educational matters, teachers formulate conceptions of many issues such as learning, teaching, students, curriculum, and educational purposes (Borg, 2006; Kagan, 1992, Pajares, 1992, Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001) among other things. Of these matters, educational research has found that conceptions of teaching correlate with conceptions of learning (Trigwell, Prosser, Marton, & Runnesson, 2002).

Figure 4.4

Framework of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006, p.283)



Logically, second language teachers may develop their personal understanding or ways of conceptualising teaching and learning before learning to teach a second language. As mentioned, Borg (2006) identifies multiple dimensions of what teachers have cognition about and suggests investigations focus on not only generic issues of teaching and learning, but also specific topics like teaching a subject matter, and especially noteworthy issues of second language acquisition. The knowledge of SLA facilitating conditions, as discussed in the previous chapter, constitutes a significant topic for exploration. This exploration, as described in Borg’s model, necessarily takes into account their schooling experience, professional training, and the context of their work. The model, however, does not clarify the mediating position of previously established beliefs and teaching experience in shaping language teacher cognition about new knowledge. This thesis will subsume these into potential historical sources of influences on teachers in their development process and in learning new

theoretical concepts. For other influences, it will draw on the model to discuss the interaction between what teachers think and what they actually do in the classroom, and the function of context in mediating that relationship.

4.4.1. Historical influences on teachers' conceptions

The literature has identified three key potential forces shaping how teachers conceptualise new knowledge introduced to them. These factors are referred to in this thesis as prior experiences, established beliefs, and professional training.

4.4.1.1. Prior experiences

One of the sources of influence on teachers' conceptions of new knowledge is the teacher's previous experiences. One type of teachers' experience is their schooling. The widespread acceptance of this source of influence often cites Lortie's (1975) study of teachers' work. Lortie (as cited in Borg, 2006) observed that entering teacher learners spent a huge amount of schooling time, observing the teaching of their teachers in the classroom. This length of observation is sufficient to formulate what Lortie called 'apprenticeship of observation', which may have a powerful impact on entering students' ideas of teaching and learning. These early ideas are deeply set, often constitute incomplete preconceptions (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992, Brown & McGannon, 1998), and are resistant to change (Kennedy, 1991). They, in turn, filter new input received from education courses (Richardson, 1996). When engaging in the teaching profession, teachers still bring with them these experiences or preconceptions (Kennedy, 1991).

Studies confirming the impact of schooling experience in language teacher education focus on pre-service or novice teachers. One of these studies is a joint autobiographical project conducted by seven MA student teachers without prior teaching experience, and a teacher educator. In the project, Bailey et al. (1996) reflected on their own previous language learning experiences, and on how the experiences shaped their current views of language teaching. The authors identified five shared classroom experiences that remained influential to their contemporary conceptions of teaching. The experiences consisted of teacher personality and style, teacher commitment, attention to and expectations of students, teacher-student mutual respect, their learning motivation, and an enjoyable classroom atmosphere that facilitated their learning. The writers

concluded that their classroom memories functioned as a guide to their approaches to teaching in the classroom.

Johnson's (1994) work also supports the experiential influence on teachers' conceptions and practice. Johnson studied four pre-service ESL teachers who participated in an MA programme in Teaching English as a Second Language over a 15-week practicum. Using multiple sources of data, such as comments from journal entries produced throughout the period and a series of classroom observations and interviews, Johnson came to a conclusion that:

Probably the most striking pattern that emerged from these data is the apparent power that images from prior experiences within formal language classrooms had on these teachers' images of themselves as teachers, teaching, and their perceptions of their own instructional practices. This occurred in spite of the fact that these pre-service teachers were cognizant of the inadequacy of these images, and even held projected images of themselves as teachers that directly conflicted with those images. (1994, p.449)

The concluding note reasserts the effect of schooling experience, particularly language learning experience, on teachers' conceptions about language teaching theory. It additionally confirms the point that these early experientially established ideas are inadequate or incomplete.

Together with the schooling experience, teaching or classroom experience strongly shapes teachers' ideas of teaching. The experience consists of pre-service teaching practicum experience and years of working as a teacher. The study of Entwistle et al. (2000), as discussed in 4.3.2, also examined the experiential force on 55 postgraduate students, using a questionnaire. The study found that teaching experience had a more robust effect on student teachers than the input from the training course. The students in their study also reported that classroom experience exerted a stronger influence on their conceptions of good teaching than schooling experience. Research in second language education has also explored the influence of classroom experience by looking at the relationship between length of teaching experience and views and approaches to instructional practices. Richards, Tung and Ng (1992) examined the relationships between English

teachers' teaching experience, and their conceptions and practices, in the context of Hong Kong. The authors found that inexperienced teachers tended to attach more value to a linguistic view and approach to teaching, while experienced teachers expressed beliefs in a functional view and approach. The former focused more on written grammar practices, whereas the latter prioritised pair and group work, and frequently used audio tapes. Nunan (1992), studying nine ESL teachers in Australia, similarly found that experienced teachers attended more to content issues, while less experienced teachers directed more attention to classroom management. In a different way, investigating changes in conceptions of experienced and inexperienced teachers over a period of 6-30 months, Mok (1994) observed that the teachers' conceptions of teaching were modified by various factors during their professional development. Among these factors, personal teaching and learning experiences had "the strongest influence on the teachers' beliefs and theories of and about teaching" (p.107).

4.4.1.2. Prior established beliefs

The above-mentioned experiences may form teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, which in turn have an impact upon their current conception and uptake of educational ideas. Entwistle et al.'s (2000), Pratt's (1992), and Tsui's (2003) characterisation of conceptions all suggest that existing beliefs underpin teachers' interpretations of new information. It is possible to say that these beliefs are established from experiences including schooling and teaching experiences, and constitute resources they bring to teacher education programmes, staff development events or innovation implementation. Such pre-existing beliefs or knowledge affects the ways teachers interpret or filter new information.

Shi and Cumming's (1995) study of five experienced ESL university instructors in Canada is a good illustration. This study examined the teachers' conceptions of writing instruction through 48 interviews about their writing lessons and lesson observations. One of the purposes of the study was to see the teachers' uptake of a process-oriented writing approach introduced to them. Comparing their conceptualisations of this innovation, the researchers concluded that these ESL teachers interpreted and responded to the innovation in unique ways related to their prior beliefs and practices of writing. One teacher accepted the writing process approach since it was consistent with her existing belief. Another teacher

only took up those aspects of the new approach congruent with her belief; and the third teacher resisted the innovation because it was difficult for her to accommodate the new ideas into her existing belief about writing instruction, which was very much oriented to text analysis and accuracy. The study lends support to the claim that previously established beliefs may have a filtering effect on the uptake or interpretation of new ideas.

Another research study is that of Mangubhai et al (1998) focusing on how 39 primary teachers in Australia, teaching various foreign languages, conceived of CLT. The study indicated that their understandings were divergent from the conceptions of theorists and researchers in some respects. Whereas a number of teachers acknowledged the value of pair work and group work in promoting interaction and learner activeness, they had reservations about using such modes of classroom organisation because they found the modes time consuming and militating against discipline and order. In addition, more than half of the teachers emphasised a preference for students' accuracy right from the beginning. Such conceptions reflect the impact of established beliefs about L2 learning and teaching. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), examining the conceptions of ten teachers of Japanese in Queensland state schools with respect to CLT, similarly found that their understandings were individually different and in some ways divergent from the theory of CLT. In particular, they observed that traditional grammar teaching played a central role in the teachers' approach, a feature inconsistent with CLT (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2004). Together with the previously mentioned studies and others (see section 3.3.3), these implicate the diversity of teachers' conceptions in context, and reflect the fact that teachers are constructive learners, rather than recipients, of ideas proposed to them. Their learning is both conceptually and contextually conditioned.

Reviewing a large body of work on teachers' beliefs, Pajares (1992) constructed with a synthesised list of 16 findings, some of which are significant for understanding how interpretations of new information are shaped by prior established beliefs or knowledge. These include:

- The potent affective, evaluative and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted;

- The filtering effect of belief structures ultimately screens, redefines, distorts or reshapes subsequent thinking and information processing; and
- Epistemological beliefs play a key role in knowledge interpretation and cognitive monitoring. (Pajares, 1992, pp. 324-6)

The findings point to a process of formulating new ideas or knowledge mediated by prior beliefs, which is consistent with a constructive idea of individuals' conceptions. It is also in line with a socially and culturally constructed view of teacher learning in which context and established beliefs may mediate the process of cognition as discussed in 4.1.2.

4.4.1.3. Professional training and teacher learning

The influence of previously established beliefs poses a question as to whether professional training received from either language teacher education or continued professional development opportunities is likely to lead to any uptake. Research has indicated that knowledge from education programmes may be incorporated into or filtered by teachers' existing beliefs about L2 learning and teaching. Borg (2006) has illustrated this influence with various studies in language teacher education on L1 reading. Two of these studies are reported here to exemplify the differing degrees to which pre-service language teacher education affects teachers' conceptions. One study was Warry (1988, as cited in Borg, 2006) which reported no impact of the psycholinguistic view of reading on pre-service teachers' views about reading after four years of training. Several confounding factors accounted for this lack of impact. These were the teachers' shortage of practical teaching experience, the degree of difficulty in putting theory into practice, and especially their prior experiences in learning to read, and their observation of the way reading had been instructed. Grisham (2000, as cited in Borg, 2006), on the contrary, points to the impact of a constructive view of reading promoted in the training programme on pre-service teachers' conceptions of teaching reading. However, this research also revealed that the context of work mediated the teachers' implementation of the instructional view learned. Some teachers were not even able to implement practices congruent with their views because of the constraints at their work place.

With regard to in-service teacher education, Freeman (1991) has conducted the

most significant study, looking at teacher cognitive changes over time. The investigation centred on four high school teachers of French and Spanish attending an in-service teaching degree course in the USA over nearly two years. Initially, these teachers had implicit, unanalysed ideas about language teaching. Their conceptions then developed through cognitive tensions defined as “divergences among different forces or elements in the teacher’s understanding of the school context, the subject matter, or the students” (p.488). The tensions, or the teachers’ confusions, interfered with their translation of intentions into classroom actions. Freeman argues that through realising these tensions, the teachers were able to develop their conceptions and practices. He also found that the growth of professional language promoted the teachers’ changes. Initially, they commented on their own practices by means of experience-based language, but through the education programme, they developed a professional discourse on which they relied to analyse their work. Freeman points out that his study broadened the limited view of teachers’ change in behavioural terms, and thus the current view of investigating the effect of teacher education on teachers and classroom practice. His study, in other words, highlights the role of language as a mediating tool in learning activity, or in transforming teachers’ cognition, as already discussed in section 4.1.2.

Regarding training on SLA, as will be reviewed in section 4.5, research has also pointed to either the impact or non-impact of pre-service training programmes. Mattheoudakis (2007) found significant change in some beliefs, whereas Peacock (2001) found insignificant change in some beliefs. MacDonald, Badger, and White (2001), on the other hand, reported an overall change in beliefs about SLA. These and the just mentioned studies point to the importance of prior beliefs and context in teacher learning.

While Freeman’s research and several others just reviewed (e.g. MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001; Peacock, 2000) examine the role of formal teacher education in an ESL setting over a long period of time, Mohamed (2006), in a similar context, presents the relationship in a short training programme. Her study examines change in the beliefs and practices of 14 teachers of English from two secondary schools of the Maldives after they attended a 12-week professional development programme introducing an inductive grammar instruction approach.

The study showed that while the teachers raised their awareness of inductive grammar instruction, they had limited changes in terms of beliefs and practices. The author attributes this lack of change to the teachers' lack of openness and professional motivation to change, an unsupportive school culture, and external factors like large classes and difficult working conditions. In Vietnam, Canh's case study (2008), as mentioned in Chapter 1, illustrates that the short-term training for secondary English teachers to teach the new English textbooks that claim to be communicative had little effect on the way the teachers taught. The lack of change was similarly ascribed to contextual limitations and teachers' existing beliefs. His study and the others reviewed further indicate that prior established beliefs may filter new ideas or knowledge, and that context plays a crucial part in the uptake of new ideas. What teachers think, know or believe interact with their classroom practice in a context (Borg, 2006).

4.4.2. Teachers' conceptions and classroom practices

The relationship between what teachers know or believe and what they actually do in the classroom is complex to research, and it is difficult to establish the link between what teachers report through introspective thinking and observable classroom behaviour (see Grotjahn, 1991 for an overview). Teachers' conceptions may strongly affect their classroom practice (Pajares, 1992). They may also be divergent from their classroom practice (Borg, 2006). Research in higher education has accumulated supporting evidence for the correlation between lecturers' conceptions of learning and teaching and their approaches to classroom teaching (Goodyear & Hativa, 2002). For instance, it has been observed that instructors with a teacher-centred conception of teaching tend to use strategies in transmitting information, while those who possess a student-centred conception of teaching tend to create opportunities for constructing knowledge (Goodyear & Hativa, 2002).

In language education, research on the relationship between language teachers' cognition and different aspects of their classroom practices has revealed mixed results. Flores (2001) interviewed 176 bilingual educators in the USA about whether their epistemological beliefs about bilingual children's cognition had anything to do with their teaching practices, and found a weak correlation. In a

questionnaire survey of EFL Greek teachers' attitudes to CLT in relation to their reported practices, Karavas-Doukas (1996) similarly found no relationship. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), employing a combination of observations, interviews, and survey, likewise concluded that even though the ten teachers of Japanese in Australia had a positive attitude to CLT, an analysis of their classroom practices showed little evidence of CLT use.

Not all studies show a lack of congruence between teachers' conception and their practice. Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, and Son (2004) discovered that the teacher of German in their study had a practical sophisticated conception of CLT and the conception was congruent with her teaching approach. Other studies have examined the relationship through what teachers explain about their classroom decisions or the concerns they express in response to particular classroom actions. One example was manifested in personal principles or maxims of teaching. In this way, Richards (1998) points out that the teachers in his study explained their instructional practices in terms of seven maxims, which could provide links between their conceptions and classroom actions. These maxims included (1) L2 teaching needs to follow a plan, (2) L2 teaching should engage and encourage learners in learning while maintaining order and discipline throughout the lesson, (3) L2 teaching should stress accurate student output, (4) L2 teachers should conform to a prescribed method, and (5) L2 teaching needs to give learners control of their learning. Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and Thwaite (2001) illustrate the interaction between the principles and practices of 18 ESL teachers working in a similar context in Australia. Both each individual teacher and the whole group were examined for their principles and practices. The results has shown that each teacher's pedagogical principles corresponded to specific sets of preferred practices, and that despite the variety in individuals' practices, the group of teachers shared some principles in common. An example of this commonality was the principle of the importance of catering for individual differences. Some various related practices for this principle are cited below.

- Shows interest in students' personal lives; e.g. asked about a student's relative who was sick
- Accepts all students' responses without saying they're wrong: 'You would be understood, but a better way to say that is...'

- Assesses students individually when they say they are ready
- Goes from individual to individual during deskwork to check understanding or correctness. (Breen et al., 2001, p.490)

The researchers conclude that the shared principles and practices among the teachers express “a collective pedagogy” (p.496). Such a collective pedagogy is likely to express a shared conception of second language teaching among those teachers working in the same context.

To conclude, research has produced mixed evidence about the conception-practice relationship. This may be due to, as Borg (2001) notes, the incongruence between what teachers say: ‘espoused beliefs’ and what they actually do: ‘beliefs-in-action’; or as Borg (2006) further explains, it may be partly attributable to the different research methods adopted for eliciting teacher cognition. He concludes that language teachers’ cognition and their practice exist in reciprocal relationships. On the one hand, the conceptions they hold about language teaching and learning influence the ways they teach in the classroom. On the other hand, classroom teaching experience and reflections on the experience can reshape and refine their cognition. Given that teacher cognition is an unobservable and tacit aspect of teacher behaviour, this is a complex area for research. The relationship between how language teachers conceptualise their work and what they actually do in the classroom is not straightforward, but mediated by the context in which they operate, as discussed below.

4.4.3. Understanding the role of context

Context, understood as socio-cultural, institutional and classroom features, has been shown to have a substantial impact on language teachers’ conceptions and practices (Borg, 2006). Like research in higher education (Kember & Kwan, 2002; Lamb & Kember, 2006), research on language teachers’ cognition has proved that the relationship between context and teacher cognition is complex: contextual factors may not only shape language teachers’ conceptions but also change their practices without necessarily altering their conceptions (Borg, 2006).

Borg (2006) reports a number of studies to illustrate the mediation of contextual elements. In this part, I want to focus on some studies about CLT and TBLT

conducted in non-Western contexts to further reinforce Borg's claim and highlight the importance of context in teacher learning and teaching. Hiramatsu (2005) found that teacher resistance to the CLT-oriented reform in Japan could be reinforced by a cultural factor such as the fact that the Japanese culture places prime emphasis on keeping harmony, instead of change, which usually results in tensions. In the same context, Nishino and Wanatabe (2008) reported a lack of teacher change toward CLT, and cited obstacles such as no English environment, teacher-centred entrenched routines, demands on student preparation for the university entrance exam, and large class size. In Thailand, a survey by Jarvis and Atsilarat (2006) has further identified the impact of contextual features on 40 EFL teachers' practice at a Thai university with regard to CLT. The survey showed that although these teachers had a good understanding of the central tenets of the Communicative Approach, they reported practical constraints on the implementation of the approach (see Chapter 3, section 3.2.2). In Armenia, Feryok (2008) has pointed out that underlying the divergence of one EFL teacher's cognition about CLT from her practice was the context in which she worked, and that she developed a practical theory of CLT sensitive to these contextual factors. The factors found to influence her practice involved the expectations of her institution about classroom activities oriented to knowledge transmission, her students' expectations for being prepared for the university entrance exam and limited teaching resources. The impact of contextual limitations on teachers' conceptions and practices has also been documented in many Asian studies about the task-based approach as mentioned in 3.2.2. They all point to the need to consider teachers and teaching context, and so the need to develop a context-sensitive or context-situated approach to teaching English in Asia.

A good illustration of the complex impact of context on teacher change in existing conceptions and practices is Tsui's (1996) study. This study followed the way a young Chinese ESL teacher (Julie) in Hong Kong conceived of and taught writing over two and a half years. Julie had followed a product-oriented approach and felt frustrated because of three things associated with this approach: a concern for grammatical accuracy, uninteresting and irrelevant writing topics, and an unsafe writing environment. As Julie learned about process writing instruction, she found this approach attractive and applied it in her classroom. Julie focused on meaning

expression, and tried to create a safe learning environment by organising group work, and a genuine purpose for writing. The result was that both Julie and her students enjoyed the process of writing. Nevertheless, three contextual problems constrained her implementation. First, she found the process-oriented writing approach more time-consuming than the product approach, which was not relevant for having students complete the same number of compositions as traditional writing classes did. Second, she was conflicted by the exams that accentuated accuracy, whereas the innovation led students, including top ones, to produce less accurate language. Third, and most importantly, Julie's head of department did not support the process approach. Because of these factors, the teacher decided to shift back to the old way. After one year, however, she felt unhappy again and decided to modify her classroom practice in a timesaving manner. Julie only kept such elements she thought important as creating a genuine purpose for writing, supporting a safe environment, and peer feedback. She also used this modified version merely for a few writing tasks because she believed that the process approach was not so effective for good students as for weak and average ones. Tsui's study not only reconfirms the influence of institutional and curricular factors on teacher practice, but also highlights the complicated process of change in teachers' conceptions and practices due to context.

In other words, context plays a substantive role in teachers' learning and development and their conceptions of effective learning and teaching. Tsui (2003) highlights the relationship between teacher learning and context as a dialectical one. Accordingly, she states, "Teachers' knowledge and the practices in which it is embedded jointly constitute the context in which they operate, and this in turn is an integral part of the knowledge so constituted" (p.64). She thus suggests that a full understanding of how teachers learn should consider "the way they respond to their contexts of work, which shape the contexts in which their knowledge is developed" (p.64). Freeman and Johnson (1998), who espouse a similar view, argue that to understand what and how teachers learn, it is important to analyse the teacher's "activity of teaching" (p.1). By this, the authors refer to the interaction between teachers and teaching, and learners and learning, the background to that interaction, the implicit norms and explicit rules of classroom and society that govern their work, and the tools they use to perform the work. Such contextual influences are significant for understanding how teachers'

conceptions of learning and teaching develop. Together with other factors such as their existing beliefs, teaching and training experiences, they constitute a framework for understanding how the teachers in this current research took up the notions of language input, and output and interaction in their classroom practices. The following section will now review related research on teacher learning and conceptions about SLA to further highlight the need for conducting the current study.

4.5. Research on teacher cognition about SLA-related issues

A large body of work has focused on understanding how language teachers conceptualise their work. Borg (2006) reviews 180 studies about teacher cognition in L1, L2, and FL education in a wide range of different contexts. This number is probably continuing to increase. For the time being, ample research has concentrated on teacher cognition about language classroom practices in general, literacy instruction, particular content teaching (Borg, 2006) and curricular innovations (e.g., Canh, 2008; Carless, 1998). Some have also examined student teachers' beliefs about SLA in general. Little, however, has specifically explored teacher learning and conceptions of input, output and interaction as intended in this thesis. The review below centres on relevant research into aspects closely related to those investigated in the thesis.

4.5.1. Research on teacher cognition about using the target language

A body of research has investigated teachers' perceptions of classroom input in second language acquisition, especially the teacher's use of the TL (e.g., Bateman, 2008, Duff & Polio, 1990, Macaro, 1995, 1997; Turnbull, 2001) from the teacher's perspective. Most of the studies show that there are limitations of teacher use of the TL in the classroom. Macaro (1997), for example, explored TL and L1 use among experienced, novice, and student teachers of foreign languages at the secondary level in England and Wales by using surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The study had a focus on teachers' beliefs about TL use as well. In this respect, it revealed that most of the teachers found it impracticable and undesirable to use the TL (French) exclusively in all classes, although most of them perceived it as an indispensable part of good pedagogy. A majority of them reported using the TL for giving simple instructions, giving

feedback, and organising classroom activities. They indicated that L1 was useful for socialising, disciplining, building rapport, or explaining difficult grammar issues. In the interviews with the teachers, they explained that students' levels of proficiency determined how much they used the TL.

Studying the perceptions of 10 pre-service teachers of Spanish on the use of TL by means of questionnaires, journaling, and observations, Bateman (2008) found similar findings. The student teachers in the study believed that maximising TL use can provide optimal input for language learning, but they failed to do so because of a number of factors related to teachers, students, subject matter, and mentors. The factors related to teachers comprised concerns for classroom control, lack of class time, lack of proficiency in TL, fatigue from using TL, teachers' need to establish rapport with students, and challenges in explaining unfamiliar vocabulary. Concerning students, their limited language proficiency and cognitive ability, and their lack of motivation also hindered the teachers from using TL all the time. Factors related to the subject matter of teaching included the perception that grammar and culture should be taught partly in L1 (English). Most of the teachers also found it difficult to use TL because their mentors mainly used L1. Bateman (2008) compared these findings with previous research (e.g., Franklin, 1990, Polio & Duff, 1994), and concluded that student teachers often lack confidence in conducting classes in the TL, and that they lack "knowledge about and skill in using techniques for making themselves understood in the target language" (p.26). Other research, on the other hand, has indicated that L2 teachers have a stable belief in TL use. Turnbull, and Turnbull and Lamoreux (as cited in Turnbull and Arnette, 2002) showed from surveys and interviews that pre-service teachers' belief in using the TL did not change before and after their practicum. The teachers expressed a belief that it is useful to immerse in the TL. Before the practicum, they thought that L1 might be useful for a number of purposes, but after their practicum experience, a majority of them found that L1 was only useful for disciplining and establishing rapport with students. In sum, most of the studies about L1 and TL use in the L2 classroom suggest that the principle of maximal TL use to enrich input seems to be limited in the context of foreign language teaching.

4.5.2. Research on teacher learning and beliefs about SLA

Other research studies have explored teacher learning about SLA by tracking the effect of SLA and methodology courses on teacher beliefs about SLA in general. Together they point to the difficulty in changing teacher beliefs about second language learning. With a longitudinal study of EFL pre-service teachers at a Greek university, Mattheoudakis (2007) found that some of their beliefs changed significantly after a three-year programme in which they had learned about SLA and methodology. For example, the study found that most of the teachers did not think it was most important to know the grammar of L2 as they had believed at the beginning of the programme. Another change was that the number of participants who thought teachers should correct all the errors made by beginner learners decreased over time. On the other hand, Peacock (2001) following 145 ESL pre-service teachers' learning in the context of Hong Kong Polytechnic University over three years of an undergraduate programme, spotted some development in their beliefs about SLA, but this change was not significant. Particularly, Peacock found that the majority of the teachers still believed that learning a language is a matter of learning vocabulary and grammar rules. MacDonald, Badger, and White (2001) detected change in some beliefs and not others, about SLA. They investigated 55 TESOL non-native speaker students learning on an SLA course taught at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level by using a pre-and-post questionnaire. They found that overall these student teachers' beliefs about SLA shifted significantly away from the behaviourist perspective, particularly from the view of "language input which is graded on a strict grammatical basis" (p.954). Nonetheless, the researchers noted that these teachers retained a lack of trust in the idea that learner-learner interaction has a positive effect on language learning. MacDonald, Badger, and White accounted for this reluctance in terms of the culture of learning these student teachers were accustomed to before entering into the training course: "Cultural influences were still proving more powerful for them than empirical research" (p.959). McDonough (2004) reports similar findings about teacher conceptions of learner-learner interaction in the classroom context of a Thai university. Although her study had a focus on learner learning out of interaction, the researcher began with a preliminary interview of six Thai EFL instructors' beliefs about pair and small group activities. The interview data revealed that these instructors expressed the belief that interaction does not push learners to produce modified output or

provide feedback, but makes them produce less accurate target language forms. One interesting point, however, is that they perceived the pair and group work as a chance for students to practise target language structures or forms demanded by the instructional objectives. They thought that students should attend to forms in these activities. The teachers also expressed some concerns similar to those documented in section 3.2.2 that confronted them with the relevance of using pair and group work to encourage student interaction. For instance, they were concerned about the difficulty in monitoring interaction due to large class size and fixed desks, and the barrier of standardised examinations for which they were required to prepare students.

The studies above provide some understanding of teacher learning about SLA, but they concentrate largely on pre-service teachers and subscribe to an etic approach (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003), which views teacher change as being attributable to a certain specific effect or variable, and learning as a linear process in which change is the direct result of instruction. Teachers in these studies are treated as “objects rather than subjects” (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003, p.2). The study presented in this thesis instead considers teachers as constructivist learners under a socio-cultural context, and thus advocates that learning is not a linear but complex interactive process of cognitive development. Teacher change, however, was explored through an approach to teaching and teacher development based on a flexible organic combination of SLA facilitating conditions.

Perhaps a similar position is grounded in a recent study on teacher perspectives regarding Ellis’s (2005) ten instructed SLA principles. Howard and Millar (2009), taking a context-responsive perspective on teaching and teacher development, investigated the applicability of these ten principles from the perspectives of 15 South Korean English language teachers who attended a four-week professional development programme in New Zealand. The researchers predicted that contextual and personal constraints would overall hamper the teachers to operationalise some principles. Among these were the principles of rich L2 input and opportunities for output and interaction. Although the teachers graded the principle of enriched input as the third most important, over 50 percent of them expressed frustration with students’ lack of motivation to read and listen to a rich source of input outside the classroom. They also expressed a lack of language

confidence to conduct class activities in English, and reported rarely creating opportunities for oral and written output because of large classes, students' low motivation, and pressure to prepare students for examinations. Importantly, in spite of ranking interaction as equally important as input, only two teachers reported promoting it in their classrooms. Most teachers explained that their inadequate training, student lack of English proficiency and use of L1, large and mixed-ability classes, and class time limits hindered them from promoting interaction. The biggest constraint was the high school and university entrance examinations, which tested content and skills other than those encouraged by conducting communicative tasks. This finding is similar to what McDonough (2004), among others, reports above. The Korean teachers, however, admitted that the professional development programme raised their awareness of principles of instructed SLA that would strengthen their sense of agency in implementing their practices, a finding that Franken and Rau (2009) similarly reports in their professional development programme for Maori ESOL teachers in secondary schools in New Zealand.

The studies of Howard and Millar, and Franken and Rau focus on secondary teachers in EFL (Korea) and ESL (New Zealand) contexts, which differ from the context of this current study. Although their studies employ a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, which provide some insights into the teachers' perspectives, these methods cannot capture the consistency between what teachers say they do, and what they actually do in practices (Borg, 2001; Breen et al., 2001). Further research using different methods to deepen understanding is still necessary. Furthermore, Howard and Millar (2009) covers a wide range of SLA principles, and Franken and Rau (2009) focus on input, output, and interaction, and feedback. The present study concentrates on only two principles: language input, and output and interaction, and uses different methods to examine in detail the Vietnamese teachers' thinking and practice in relation to them. The study relied particularly on stimulated recall interviews and observation, among others, as means to have access to what teachers think and do (See the next chapter).

4.5.3. Research on Vietnamese EFL teacher cognition

In the context of Vietnam, research on teacher learning and cognition is sparse, with nothing specifically involving their learning and conceptions about SLA.

Thien Hiep (2009) focuses on pedagogy with a survey of the beliefs of 106 EFL university teachers about grammar instruction and error correction. His study has revealed that Vietnamese EFL teachers still give more primacy to grammatical accuracy than communication skills in their teaching. Canh (2008), in a different way, informs us of the issue of teacher change and development in Vietnam. His study examines high school teachers' beliefs in implementing the new English textbooks claimed to adopt the task-based approach. The researcher found no significant change in the teachers' beliefs and practices despite the top-down innovation at the material level. The study implies that Vietnamese EFL teachers are neither submissive recipients nor passive implementers of new ideas. Van Sinh (2003) directly addresses classroom input and interaction but has a different emphasis from the study presented in this thesis. His doctoral research measured the effect of classroom-based input and interaction training on the teaching performance of pre-service EFL teachers at a college. Whereas his study recognises the crucial role of teacher provision of comprehensible input and interaction in improving ELT skills, it reports nothing about the meanings Vietnamese EFL teachers attached to input and interaction. Further, the teachers in his study were controlled for effective operations suggested by SLA research about input and interaction, as such being seen as objects rather than subjects. Like the research on SLA learning reviewed above, the learning of teachers was examined from a positivist perspective and at the technical or operational level (Knight, 2002). Teacher cognitive framework in their process of learning was ignored, and it is this gap that the research in this thesis has sought to fill.

4.6. Summary

Variable perspectives on learning and language teacher development underpin an understanding of the process through which language teachers develop their professional knowledge. This knowledge is described in various ways, with various terms. 'Teachers' conception' is one of these terms, which is used in the thesis. Despite the diversity, teachers' conceptual development is known as a complex and tacit but conscious process shaped by a variety of forces including beliefs pre-established from their educational process, work experience, and the broad and narrow socio-cultural environment in which teachers operate. Teachers' conceptions interact with their practices and the context of teaching. In the process

of professional development, language teachers are not passive recipients of knowledge but active cognitive subjects in a specific social setting, filtering and constructing knowledge. Such a view and conceptual framework on teacher learning and cognition underpins the present study about the learning and conceptions of a group of Vietnamese EFL teachers in relation to some SLA concepts associated with TBLT. Research into language teacher cognition regarding their practices in general and teaching specific curricular content in particular is abundant. A number of studies also report the challenges that teachers in various EFL contexts have encountered in implementing curricular and teaching innovations related to CLT and TBLT. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of research on teachers' thinking and practices in response to what SLA proposes, especially in the context of Vietnam. The study presented in this thesis aims to fill this gap. It concentrates on exploring *how a group of Vietnamese EFL lecturers conceptualised input, and learner output and interaction, what they perceived of the factors associated with implementing these conditions or concepts in the General English classroom, and what perceived changes the teachers have experienced as a result of working with these concepts*. To answer these questions, the study relied on a qualitative approach, employing multiple methods as will be presented in the next chapter.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to describe the research methodology and methods used for the study reported in this thesis. To begin with, the chapter explains the nature of the study, which is mainly characteristic of the interpretive paradigm. The methodological argument is that selecting a research methodology and research methods depends upon the purpose of a study. To map the complexity of teachers' tacit conceptions, the current research adopted a case study approach in which multiple research methods were employed to obtain a holistic and in-depth understanding. Most importantly, the chapter outlines how the research quality was ensured by rigorous measures. It then continues with an account of each research method, followed by an overview of the entire process. The chapter ends with an explanation of the data analysis and interpretation techniques.

5.1. The nature of the study

The aim of this section is to discuss the research paradigms and discuss how a qualitative interpretive paradigm underpins the present research.

5.1.1. Qualitative research

The status of qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research has been well established in the literature, but as maintained by Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.53), given the “dominance of quantitative research in social science and the conservation of policy makers,” it is still necessary to justify the merits of qualitative research. One of the main strategies for justification they suggested was criticising the defects of quantitative research. Such critique need not downplay the positivist approach but rather should be used to shed light on the merits of the interpretive approach. Because of the debate over what constitutes legitimate social research in the circles of research academics, I find it crucial to justify the aspects of interpretive research relevant to the current study.

The major argument against qualitative inquiry holds that this type of research is non-scientific because of its failure to replicate the ‘scientific method’ used by natural sciences (Snape & Spence, 2003). Qualitative research has been criticised

for its restricted capacity to make generalisations of social phenomena, and for offering non-objective findings. Berg (2005) has drawn attention to this issue: “Even though the virtue of qualitative research is seldom questioned in the abstract, its practice is sometimes criticised for being non-scientific and thus invalid” (p.2). Consequently, qualitative research is sometimes regarded as supplementary to quantitative research (Silverman, 1993; Snape & Spence, 2003). Such criticism, however, reminds us of the issues of rigour in a qualitative study. I will outline how quality was ensured in the present research later in the chapter.

In contrast, several strong counterarguments have also been put forward. These have taken the view that an interpretative approach can account for what a positivist approach fails to account for. The critique of the latter began in the 1950s and identified several limitations of the research approach (Silverman 1993). The limitations involve its neglect of the influence of subjects or participants on the defined ‘variables’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Silverman, 1993; Snape & Spence, 2003), or of their apprehension when being experimented on or with, and the effect of research instruments and conditions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In other words, proponents of qualitative research claim that a purely quantitative study forgets the role of the social and cultural world of participants in constructing and pre-determining variables, and fails to take into account “the common-sense reasoning used by both participants and researchers” in providing and interpreting information (Silverman, 1993, p.20). Snape and Spence (2003) also assert, “personal interpretations are important both in terms of study participants' perspectives of reality, and in terms of researchers' understanding and portrayal of study participants' views” (p.20).

While the claimed strength of the positivist approach is its capability to generalise and obtain objective facts, its weaknesses have paved the way for more humanistic qualitative studies. Qualitative inquiry has the power to provide a rich understanding of facts defined by specific contexts from the insider perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A qualitative study can take into account such contextual factors as “physical setting and notions of norms, traditions, roles and values” and can capture a deeper insight into participants’ “feelings, beliefs, values and assumptions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.53).

Qualitative research is also able to uncover “processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3) and that are “attached by human actors to their activities” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.106) to extend understanding of human behaviour. Qualitative inquiry is better able to examine in-depth individual cases that help to expand the applicability that statistical generalisations fail to (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The status of qualitative research has been established as a distinct and legitimate one:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998, p.15)

The current study sits within an interpretative paradigm in an attempt to seek to understand the Vietnamese EFL teachers’ perspectives on some aspects of SLA research and knowledge. It maintains that research methodology and methods should be appropriate to examine the phenomenon under examination.

5.1.2. The research problem as a methodological determinant

Implicated in the discussion about the limitations of both methodological approaches is the need for methodological appropriateness, which is characterised by mutual complementation rather than exclusion. In educational research, a number of researchers have tried to resolve the paradigm conflict, proposing that the advancement of multiple alternative research perspectives makes it easier to tackle complex problems arising in education as these perspectives complement each other (De Landsheere, 1988; Keeves, 1988a, 1988b; Husén, 1988; Walker & Evers, 1988). According to De Landsheere (1988, p.15) it is now widely accepted that questions in educational research are so various and complicated that they cannot be answered by relying on only one research paradigm. Further, as asserted by Keeves (1988a, p.4), “the essentially pragmatic or problem-oriented character of educational research enables a non-foundational theory of knowledge to utilise either or both quantitative-statistical and humanistic-qualitative methods depending on the kind of problem to be investigated.” Silverman (1993) likewise establishes that it all depends upon what one aims to search for because “there are

no principled grounds to be either qualitative or quantitative in approach” (p.22). Certain methods are usable depending on the researcher’s purpose. They can “take on a specific meaning according to the methodology in which they are used” (Silverman, 1993, p.9). Silverman illustrates the way in which interviews may be used both in a random sample survey in the form of multiple-choice questions and in a small sample qualitative study in the form of open-ended questions. A similar example is that observation can serve as a preliminary step to designing a questionnaire, or as a tool for understanding a group culture. According to Silverman (1993), data analysis issues, not the methods of data collection, play a central role in the discussion of research methodology. While one can collect verbal data by employing a qualitative method like interviewing, one can still analyse the data from the quantitative perspective by counting codes developed from the data transcripts. Glesne (2005) also contends one can combine methods or techniques in collecting or generating data although she maintains that the two research paradigms pose different questions of the nature of reality. The problem of an inquiry, in other words, is a major criterion for deciding upon an appropriate methodology and methods. Research methods clearly can serve to complement each other, and such employment depends upon one’s research aims (Snape & Spence, 2003). As Morse (1994) has concluded, certain methodologies will be more suited than others to collecting information needed to answer a particular research question.

In brief, the current research maintains that appropriate methodology and methods begin with what is to be investigated. Since this research examines teachers’ conceptions, an unobservable phenomenon, the approach is premised on a pluralistic view, combining different methods in collecting data to ensure validity. A glance at research methods endorsed in the literature of language teacher cognition is necessary to foreground an understanding of the view taken to approach the teachers’ conceptions in the present research.

5.1.3. Capturing teachers’ conceptions from a pluralistic view

The literature on general teacher cognition and language teacher cognition over the four past decades has revealed a multiplicity of research methods. In language education, Freeman (1996) distinguishes between two broad research perspectives or methodologies in second language teaching: first-order research and second-

order research. The first-order educational research perspective entails a direct examination of phenomena in the world to recreate an accurate objective account of the phenomena. This point of view is predominant in studies about teacher behaviour and teaching effectiveness where the data on observable behaviours like “turn-taking, classroom language, oral or written forms of discourse, or participation” (Freeman, 1996, p.366) are generated through observations and field notes. In contrast, studies from the second-order perspective do not look directly at research phenomena, but study them through the lenses of participants. What these studies aim to achieve is to understand how people perceive, understand, or experience the phenomena, and not the phenomena themselves. Research on language teacher cognition mainly takes the latter perspective according to which multiple methods such as surveys, interviews of different types, think-aloud protocols, journals, and narratives, among others are useful.

Self-reports are most commonly used, and many studies have relied on either surveys (e.g. Agathopoulou, 2007; Flores, 2001; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; MacDonald, Badge & White, 2001; Peacock, 2001), or interviews (e.g. Hayes, 2009; Shi & Cumming, 1995) to investigate language teachers’ conceptions, attitudes, or beliefs about language teaching and learning. Nonetheless, if used alone, self-report methods carry inherent limitations vulnerable to risks of validity. According to Borg (2006), a single method such as survey or interview is inadequate to reveal the complex nature of a teacher’s mental processes. Findings obtained from a single self-report method is also likely to lack ecological validity, meaning that they cannot be confidently applicable to real contexts. Importantly, when a study aims to relate teachers’ thinking to their actions, the self-reported data may be misleading, as respondents may express thoughts of what should be done instead of what actually happens. This can lead to mismatches between reported beliefs and real practices. Questionnaires provide a convenient, quick, and cost-effective way of collecting data; interviewing has advantages in obtaining rich data, eliciting interviewees’ voices, and clarifying information that help deepen understanding (Mangubhai et al., 2004), but these methods depend largely upon respondents’ memory as an access to their thoughts, which is limited in capacity to verify the truth. These inbuilt drawbacks of using single methods have given impetus for researchers to combine different techniques in researching language teacher cognition. Such a combination represents the development and

favour of a pluralistic research perspective (Borg, 2006), which advocates a triangulation design to obtain a valid, in-depth understanding of teachers and their teaching practice.

Studies following a multi-method approach deploy diverse combinations of methods, but interviews, observations, and stimulated recall interviews appear to have been frequently used. A traditional blend of methods consists of interviews and observations (e.g., Feryok, 2008). A slightly different way involves using questionnaires and interviews (e.g., Bateman, 2008, Canh, 2008), or in-depth interviews and stimulated recall interviews (e.g., Mangubhai et al., 2004). Others triangulate three different methods such as interviews, document analysis, and observations (e.g., Freeman, 1991); interviews, observations, and surveys (e.g., Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999b); observations, interviews, and attitude scale responses (e.g., Carless, 1998); or journals, observations and interviews (e.g., Johnson, 1996), among others. Still other triangulations involve observations, interviews, comments on specific classroom events (e.g., Borg, 1999); and observations, interviews, and grid analysis judgment (e.g., Breen et al., 2001). Research also makes use of more than three techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, journals, and stimulated recall interviews (e.g., Almarza, 1996); audio-recorded observations, discussions based on lesson transcripts, semi-structured interviews, and stimulated recall interviews (Burns, 1996); and observations, documents, discussion sessions, and recall sessions (Silva, 2005).

In brief, approaches to researching language teacher cognition have tended to be mixed and multiple to ensure research validity and a rich understanding. This tendency is also reflected in research on teacher thinking and beliefs about SLA (Barcelos, 2003). The complementary use of methods reflects both the complex nature of teachers' cognitive space itself and an epistemological belief that reality is too complex to be adequately represented without complementation of various sources and forms of information. Following such a pluralist tendency, the present study, to unpack the intricate, tacit and context specific nature of teacher conceptions, particularly employed several methods such as semi-structured interviews, stimulated recalls, documentation, video-recorded observations, and questionnaires. Table 5.1 summarises the research methods deemed to be suited to

examining the research questions posed in the study. Each of the methods will be discussed later in section 5.4.

Table 5.1

Research questions and corresponding methods

Research questions	Methods
How do the Vietnamese EFL teachers at a university conceive of the SLA facilitating conditions such as input, and output and interaction?	Focus-group and individual interview Stimulated recall interview Documentation Observations
What do the teachers think about the feasibility, relevance, compatibility, and agency associated with promoting the SLA facilitating conditions?	Interviews Questionnaire
What changes related to knowledge and practice, if any, do the teachers report they have experienced from working to promote the SLA facilitating conditions?	Interviews

5.1.4. A theoretical underpinning

It is essential to note that underpinning the described methods and the nature of data is a socio-cultural view of the role of language in learning and cognition. According to the socio-cultural theory, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the process of teachers learning to teach or make sense of language teaching and learning comes under a complex network of influences, and this is reflected in the ways they respond to the knowledge they are introduced to in a specific setting (Johnson & Golombek, 2003). In this process, language both reflects and mediates teachers' cognition (Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Lantolf, 2000). This socio-cultural view in relation to the function of language underlies the nature of the variable data obtained from the teachers' recall, comments, and documents. To map the tacit mental world of the Vietnamese English language teachers in the study, it is thus important to understand their language, the means used to convey their thoughts. In order to have access to their tacit conceptions, the current study particularly

attempted to make sense of what the teachers talked about, reported and commented on their work. Furthermore, the narrow and broad socio-cultural environment in which they work and respond to new concepts is a key to the understanding of their conceptions. In this way, an examination of the context is necessary to bring to the surface the meanings they attach to the SLA facilitating conditions. Some particular measures were applied to ensure the rigour of the study.

5.2. Ensuring research rigour

The critique of interpretative research demands measures to ensure its quality. In particular, the current study is framed within guidelines to achieve the most credible findings possible. To achieve verification and trustworthiness, the research took into account not only triangulation of methods and data but also appropriate research design, analysis and interpretation.

5.2.1. Triangulation

Triangulation of methods, time, investigators, data sources, and theoretical perspectives is one of the widely known measures of ensuring rigour (Denzin, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Yin, 1993). As described in Table 2, the current research generated data by using multiple methods in finding answers to the research questions. Such triangulation is of great help in understanding the research phenomenon (Denzin, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Denzin (1988) initially recognised that triangulation can “overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single observers, and single-theory studies” (p.307). It has been further suggested that triangulation is a way of developing a detailed understanding of the research phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Yin, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) particularly stressed that the employment of multiple methods “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p.2). Yin (1994) similarly advocates using triangulation due to its capacity to address “the problems of construct validity” (p.92). The current study is premised on the view that, while it is impossible to capture objective reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), “the combination of multiple methods [and]

empirical materials” is a strategy that “adds rigour, breadth, and depth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). In the study, ensuring rigour is represented in the way data were accumulated from different data sources ranging from initial interviews and lesson interviews, documentation and observation, to stimulated recall interviews.

A broader view of research quality includes aspects of the research process other than merely method triangulation. Such aspects involve design, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 1999; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell (1999), for instance, maintains that features of a rigorous study are achievable through methods, design, analysis and report writing. Conceptualising rigour as carefulness in addressing the effect of subjectivity, Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) also distinguish between three other types or techniques of ensuring good quality research in addition to method triangulation: theoretical, procedural and interpretative rigour. Theoretical rigour concerns the consistency in research design, that is, the research methodology and methods must be consistent with the research questions. Procedural quality entails an explicit explanation of how the research was conducted, including a description of procedures in approaching participants, collecting data, recording and analysing data, and even dealing with arising problems. The interpretative type of rigour indicates the trustworthiness of interpretations. Citing Mishler (1990), Liamputtong and Ezzy propose that good interpretation is attainable by “[demonstrating] clearly how the interpretation was achieved,” or quoting participants’ voices to give readers a “clearer sense of the evidence on which the analysis is based” (p.39). As suggested by Guba and Lincoln (2005, p.205), having “community consent” to the interpreted reality also plays a key role in the interpretative process; this involves sending interpretations to the participants for checking or comments.

Some of the measures described for ensuring quality for this study were taken. In particular, the study employs a case study design as discussed below. An explicit account of data gathering is given in sections 5.4, 5.5. There is also a discussion about how ensuring quality for data analysis and interpretation was compromised by contextual conditions in section 5.6.

5.2.2. Case study research

Originating in various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history and psychology, and in legal and medical practices (Simons, 1980), the case study has been evident in educational research since the 1970s (Adelman, Kemmis, & Jenkins, 1980). There are three important issues related to the case study method: the definition of case study, the purpose of case study, and generalisation. Each of these will be addressed with reference to the present research.

There have also been various definitions of what a case study is. Cases include “specific individuals, particular events, processes, organisations, locations, or periods of time (such as an era, a year or a day in the life of...)” (Stake, 1995, p.2). Similarly, Cohen and Manion (1989) describe the work of case researchers as observing “the characteristics of an individual unit - a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community,” and carefully analysing “the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs” (pp.124-25). These interpretations resemble the reference to case study as “the investigation of an individual, group or phenomenon,” with “the belief that human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity,” and that “the interdependencies of parts and of the patterns that emerge” guarantee that an in-depth study of a single instance may be useful to predict recurrent characteristics (Sturman, 1994, p.61). Yin (1994) draws upon contemporariness, real-life context, and boundary to characterise a case study. He defines it as an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. That is when you want to cover contextual conditions believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (Yin, 1994, p. 13).

Yin draws attention to the term ‘boundary’, which is hardly clearly discernable in a case study. As David (2006) remarks, “The problem in defining case results in the method being placed in a tension of exploring unique characteristics in a situation or identifying regularities, [and] charting complexity or explanations is also a tension that shows no signs of being resolved” (p. xi). However, he contends, “working with all these tensions productively and reflexively is certainly the only workable strategy in case study research in social sciences” (p. xi). Because of the tensions, David (2006) suggests that the strength of a case

study lies in exploring and describing phenomena. His suggestion is also resonant with Jocher's (2006) argument that, "the unit of a case study depends on the interest of the researcher and the purpose of the research" (p. 40). In the present study, to obtain both a holistic and in-depth understanding, six individual teachers are treated as sub-cases within a specific institutional case, a university. The cases have two functions: first to reveal a holistic pattern of teacher conceptions and learning by a cross-case analysis, and second to provide an illustration of the use of the SLA facilitating conditions as constrained by the context of their tertiary English classrooms.

According to Yin (2003), the case study method is particularly appropriate for research questions such as 'how' or 'why' "when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Yin especially highlights the context in which a case is particularly suited: "The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 3). The study reported in this thesis aims to provide a holistic and in-depth picture of how six university teachers teaching EFL respond to the knowledge of SLA facilitating conditions in a particular real-life context of Vietnam. The study aims especially to depict the teachers' conceptions of the knowledge, constraints in taking up the theoretical concepts, and their perceived changes from using the concepts. Such matters constitute a complex "hidden side" (Freeman, 2002) which can only be revealed by employing multiple sources of data and a rigorous interpretation. To depict the complexity of their thinking requires an in-depth investigation. It is thus reasonable that a case study approach is suited to the goal.

Researchers like Cohen and Manion (1991), and Sturman (1994) all point to the goal of generalisation from a thorough investigation of a single example. Scientific generalisation, however, is one of the debated issues of case study research (Yin, 1994), and a glance at writings about case study research reveals two major ways in which the term 'generalisation' has been interpreted. In fact, the usual understanding of generalisation stems from the positivist research perspective according to which a representative sample is obtained to seek to extrapolate assertions derived from the sample to a parent population by means of statistical probability. This type of extrapolation is termed 'statistical

generalization' (Yin, 1994), which is not appropriate for case study (David, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) cautions, "A fatal flaw in doing case studies is to conceive of statistical generalization as the method of generalizing the results of the case" (pp.30-1).

A second way of interpreting the notion of generalisation is more plausible for a case study and is useful for the current research. For Yin (1994), cases are similar to experiments in the way research accumulates evidence to modify or establish theory. He argues, "case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions, and not to populations or universes" (p.10). Yin refers to this as 'analytical generalization' and suggests that its use in case study research can lead to generating theory.

In conclusion, although the status of case study research is still deemed problematic, for the current study, it aligns with the research goals, and is, therefore, appropriate. The cases have been defined, and the purposes of the research have been analysed for relevance to a case study approach. Concerning the issue of generalisation, I would like to borrow Stake's (1995) reminder about the need for cautious interpretation to conclude this part of the chapter:

It is not uncommon for case study researchers to make assertions on a relatively small database, invoking the privilege and responsibility of interpretation...Good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view of the case. An ethic of caution is not contradictory to an ethic of interpretation. (p.12)

5.3. Sampling and sample

This part of the chapter discusses the strategies used in sampling and describes in detail the research participants.

5.3.1. Strategies

Unlike quantitatively oriented research where random sampling is favoured to arrive at generalisations, the current research, with its purpose to provide a detailed account of teachers' learning and conceptions with respect to selected SLA concepts, involves a small selected sample. I used strategies of purposeful

sampling (Glense, 2005) in approaching and selecting the participants. First, I opted for convenience sampling since the project arose in the context where I have been working, and hence the sample was available for access. Unlike those researchers whose important task has to be establishing rapport and trust in order to gain valid information from participants, I had this advantage available. The strategy afforded me the most advantages in approaching the participants, but ethical procedures such as voluntariness, respect and confidentiality were ensured in the process of approaching. Second, I attempted to select typical but diverse individual cases to ensure the lesson learned from the research is both typical and unique. Procedures for approaching the participants are described in the data collection process.

5.3.2. Participants

With the sampling strategies described above, I approached nine teachers (seven females and two males) at the English Department of a university in the Southwest of Vietnam over a period of six months (from September 2007 to February, 2008). The first four months involved seven teachers (Period One), and the remaining time involved two further teachers (Period Two). In Period One of the project, one male teacher withdrew early. Two others (one female and one male) could only complete part of the process. Therefore, the data used for the thesis were gained from the six remaining teachers.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show the teachers' profiles, using pseudonyms. All the teachers teach tertiary English at different levels and have different years of teaching service in both the English teacher education programme and the General English programme. In terms of education background, they have completed a four-year English teacher-training programme at the same university where they are working. In their training, they have all finished courses or papers in linguistics and teaching methodology as described in Chapter 2. All of the teachers graduated with good grades, and were recruited as staff members at the English Department. Five of the teachers (Table 5.2) have qualified as lecturers after having passed a probation practicum period of at least one year, paper tests on education law and staff ordinance, computer skills, undergraduate teaching methodology, and a teaching demonstration test of one English lesson. Three teachers (Kim, Hoa, and My) have earned Master's degrees from universities overseas: one majoring in

American Studies, one in TESOL, and one in Educational Studies. Two younger teachers (Phuc and Thu) were looking forward to furthering their study at Master's level in Australia. During the project time, they had to take IELTS proficiency tests to prepare for their study. The youngest one had only started her career six months prior to the project. Their age ranged from 22 to 35, and the average age of the group was 28. The years of teaching experience ranged from 6 months to 12 years, with an average of six years. An obvious discrepancy is observed between the more experienced teachers (Kim, Hoa and My) and the less experienced ones (Phuc, Thu, and Sinh). The mean year of experience of the former group was 9.6, while that of the latter group was 2.5.

Regarding their relevant professional background (Table 5.3), the younger teachers had experienced more time of training in English teaching methods from the undergraduate programme than the older teachers, due to some changes in the programme. These teachers also had had an opportunity to learn about Second Language Acquisition as one 45-hour paper. Among the experienced teachers, only Hoa had received no education or training in SLA. Kim had studied SLA in her MA programme, which is more formal than My, who only had access to SLA by writing her MA thesis about factors that influence second language learning. She acknowledged that she did not take any course specifically focusing on SLA.

Table 5.2

Profiles of six Vietnamese EFL teachers

Teacher	Age	Gender	Years of service	Qualifications	Status	GE periods/ total time
Kim	35	Female	12	BA in TEFL; MA in TESOL	Lecturer	45/175
Hoa	34	Female	11	BA in TEFL; MA in American Studies	Lecturer	135/360
My	29	Female	6	BA in TEFL; MA in Educational Studies	Lecturer	135/270
Phuc	26	Female	4	BA in TEFL	Lecturer	175/330
Thu	24	Female	3	BA in TEFL	Lecturer	180/330
Sinh	22	Female	0.5	BA in TEFL	Apprentice lecturer	225/225

Table 5.3

Professional experience of six Vietnamese EFL teachers

Teacher	ELT methods (hours)	Second language acquisition	Task-based teaching	P-P-P and integrated skill models	Experience of study abroad (months)
Kim	68	yes (MA course)	yes	Yes	Australia (18)
Hoa	68	no	no	Yes	USA (24)
My	80	yes (self-study)	no	Yes	Belgium (12)
Thu	80	yes (BA course)	no	Yes	no
Phuc	80	yes (BA course)	no	Yes	no
Sinh	80	yes (BA course)	little	Yes	no

In her research, she investigated only issues related to learners' characteristics. Most of the teachers had no training or education in task-based language teaching, while all of the teachers were familiar with the present-practice-produce model, and the pre-while-post skill procedure.

5.4. Research methods

Four methods utilised in the study were interviewing, questionnaire, documentation, and observation. These methods were chosen with the belief that they were suited to explore teachers' perceptions, as explained earlier.

5.4.1. Interviewing

As the key technique in this current research, interviewing was opted for because, by providing access to what is "inside a person's head, it makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)" (Tuckman, 1972, p.309). It was also helpful for gathering data that bear directly on the research objective (Cohen & Manion, 1989), which is to capture teachers' thinking about the proposed conditions for facilitating SLA. As mentioned in 5.1.3, interviews provide rich data and offer opportunities to clarify ideas (Mangubhai et al., 2004).

The semi-structured interview (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Gay & Airasian, 2000) was chosen because this type of interview not merely allows the researcher to build a frame of pre-determined questions but also provides the opportunity for probing (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). Some guiding questions were designed for stimulating the participants to talk about their understanding, experiences, and thinking with regard to teaching and learning English, including their responses to the use of SLA facilitating conditions. Interviewing, however, always produces bias, and attempts were made to minimise the bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Apart from an interview protocol that added reliability, some procedures were taken to minimise sources of bias arising from imposition on respondents, seeking expected answers, miscomprehension of interviewees' response, and respondents' misinterpretation of the interview questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The interviews were conducted in the language the participants felt the most comfortable with - Vietnamese. The choice of the language could help to reinforce an equal relationship between the interviewees and the researcher, and to minimise misunderstanding. For the technical terms like 'input', 'output', 'interaction', we used English since no equivalent terms in our language can express the concepts accurately. In addition, because one of the intentions of the research was to understand how the teachers conceived of the SLA concepts, using English for the terms made it easier to capture their understanding precisely. Moreover, the research set out to explore, with a view to providing a detailed understanding of what teachers think and learn from their perspectives, so the researcher had no expectation of the intended answers. During the interview process, clarifications were made mainly by rephrasing questions when the participants showed misunderstanding, or requesting clarifications when they provided vague responses. However, bias can never be eradicated, but only minimised.

Interviews in the study were conducted in three ways: focus group interviews, individual interviews, and stimulated recall interviews.

5.4.1.1. Focus group interview

Focus groups are suitable for eliciting participants' experiences, attitudes, and opinions (Wilson, 1997). In the present study, a focus group discussion was conducted before the workshop in Period One of data collection (see section 5.5)

to gain an initial insight into the teachers' experiences and notions in regard to effective second language learning and teaching, including the SLA facilitating conditions. The discussion was conducted, using a discussion guide (see Appendix A), in two small groups of three to four teachers, which is an ideal number to prevent group fragmentation and focus loss (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). These teachers are also acquaintances, and the discussion suited the purpose of understanding their experience (Wilson, 1997). The group discussion format was selected also because it is time saving (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gay & Airasian, 2000). In fact, it took the two groups about 90 minutes to finish three discussion tasks focusing on the topics of essential conditions for effective second language learning. This type of interview is less intimidating than one-to-one interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000), which was especially crucial for encouraging the participant teachers in the study to share their ideas and experiences. Most of the participants openly discussed the topics given, and there was no pressure of being interviewed. There was even a great deal of laughing during the discussion, and in fact, the noise sometimes made it somewhat difficult for me to do the transcription.

One issue was concerned with the participants' status. The difference in experience might have prevented less experienced teachers from sharing their ideas (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Although I attempted to manipulate the problem by grouping together the participants of similar teaching and educational backgrounds (e.g. participants with a BA degree and less than four years of experience were assigned to one group, and participants with an MA degree and more than four years of experience to another), dominance still occurred in the former group. The youngest and least experienced teacher in the group could not say much not only because she is a quiet type, but also because the more senior teachers were inclined to take the floor. Attempts were made to invite her to share ideas from time to time. This participant, however, was excluded from the report, as she could not finish all the sessions due to the institutional re-structuring, which caused her classes to be eliminated. Among the uses of a focus group, the present study used it as additional source of data for triangulation.

5.4.1.2. Individual interview

The individual interview was also a way of collecting data for the project. It was used both in collecting data about the initial conceptions of two teachers in the Period Two (see section 5.5), and data about each participant's lesson plans. After some teachers dropped out of the project, I decided to call for collaboration of more teachers from whom I gathered additional data. At this point, I made a decision to conduct individual interviews, instead of focus groups because these teachers could not arrange to meet, given their non-negotiable schedules. The individual interviews showed that there was some confusion and nervousness although I clearly emphasised that the interviews were merely an opportunity for sharing thinking before we started the workshop sessions. The confusion and nervousness was more pronounced in the newly graduated teacher than in her experienced colleague. The problem was due to the pressure to answer interview questions, and the lack of time to think and reflect on others' ideas as compared with the focus group. However, given the absence of conversational competition, there was more individual talk, and hence more information.

Lesson plan interviews were also conducted individually with each participant. The interviews aimed to obtain information about the participants' interpretations of the SLA facilitating conditions as manifested in their plans. One can argue that the lesson plan interview was a form of stimulated recall (see next section) with the stimulus being the lesson plans (Gass & Mackey, 2000), or a type of in-depth interview. In the study, it was employed as an opportunity to clarify what the teachers planned to do. In each interview, I did not ask questions that required the interviewees to recall their thoughts when they were planning the lessons. Instead, based on the lesson plans, I asked the teachers to describe and explain their planning activities or tasks explicitly. I also encouraged them to clarify their intentions or decisions in planning each lesson (See Appendix B). The interview can be seen as an informal conversation, which in fact created a relaxed atmosphere in our meetings. It also guaranteed that the teachers did not feel that I was checking their lessons. The data from such meetings contributed towards the corroboration process.

5.4.1.3. Stimulated recall interview

Although the stimulated recall interviews in the study were conducted individually, they are not categorised as the individual interview type in the study.

Stimulated recall interviewing is a special technique because it involves participants watching themselves, recalling and reflecting on their actions. It is an introspective method to elicit data about “thought processes involved in carrying out a task or activity” (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p.1). Bloom (1954, as cited in Gass & Mackey, 2000) first used audiotapes as a means of stimulating university students to comment on lectures and discussions in an attempt to explore their thought processes. The stimulated recall technique has been used successfully in a number of classroom studies to examine the thought processes of participants engaging in L2 learning and teaching situations (e.g., Calderhead, 1981; Fogarty, Wang, & Creek, 1983; Wear & Harris, 1994). Researchers (Clark & Peterson, 1981; Peterson & Clark, 1978) have also adopted stimulated recall as a tool for training pre-service and in-service teachers and for evaluating teaching effectiveness.

In accordance with Bloom (1954), the stimulated recall can help avoid the disadvantage of entire dependence on memory without any stimulation, as found in post-hoc interviews, and the time spent on training participants in think-aloud protocols. As maintained by Gass and Mackey (2000), stimulated recall in particular can provide access to how knowledge, especially declarative knowledge, is organised in a specific way. It was thus a useful technique for gaining insights into the teachers’ perception of the SLA facilitating conditions as enacted in their classroom lessons. As mentioned, the semi-structured format was chosen for all the interviews, including stimulated recall, because it has been shown to be especially useful for interpretive research (Nunan, 1992).

A stimulated recall interview focuses mainly on encouraging interviewees to recall and report what they were thinking while engaged in a certain pedagogical action. However, as the present project aimed to unpack teachers’ conceptions, this technique was not only limited to the usual recall of interactive decisions or thought processes, but also involved prompting the teachers to explain, evaluate, or reflect on their lesson events. Given that recall may sometimes fail, eliciting them to do so helped produce a substantial amount of data necessary for the process of corroboration and exploration within the data.

Two important issues on the reliability and validity of a stimulated recall interview were addressed in the data collection process. First, timing before

prompts may affect what participants recall, and hence the trustworthiness of the information reported. According to Bloom (1954), recall after less than 48 hours can enable participants to produce 95 percent accurate events. In the present study, all the interviews were conducted one day after each lesson was performed to ensure that the participants' recall was as accurate as possible. Another crucial issue is the influence of prompt questions. It is advised that questions should prompt respondents to report on their thinking at the time a classroom event happened (Gass & Mackey, 2000). Such questions as *What were you thinking?* or *What was in your mind at that time?* were used to ensure relevant recall prompts. In addition, an interview protocol was prepared and followed. The questions and instructions for the interview procedures provided a general frame on which specific questions were designed with relevance to each recorded lesson. The schedule was adapted from a sample used by Mackey, Gass and McDonough, as attached in Gass and Mackey (2000) for task-based interaction. (Refer to Appendix C).

However, due to the nature of stimulated recall, in some cases, the teachers failed to recall their thoughts in action. This is perhaps because they were unaware of their actions or these behaviours had become automatic routines or skills. In these cases, the interview questions moved away from the time of the classroom events in order to elicit their explicit justifications and evaluations. To elicit these thoughts, questions such as *What would you say about...?* *What do you think about...?* *What did you aim at?* were posed.

As mentioned in 5.1.3, self-report data have inherent limitations that may compromise validity. Borg (2006) argues that ideally beliefs should be elicited following what teachers actually do in the classroom. In this way, the data most closely reflect reality. In the current study, the use of stimulated recall partly mitigated the limitations. The teachers commented on their classroom actions or events, and this provided the data that most closely reflected what they think, know and believe about input, output and interaction. Gass and Mackey (2000) further indicate that stimulated recall can serve "as a means of triangulation or further exploration" (p.19) in conjunction with other methods. Stimulated recall in the present study served the same purpose. It constituted a data set against which

lesson plans and observations were corroborated to bring to surface the participants' conceptions of the SLA facilitating conditions.

5.4.2. Documentation

Documents employed for the research consisted of two sources: pre-existing documents used in the institution that might have relevance to teacher learning, and teacher-created documents including lesson plans and reflective sheets. The former can be described as secondary data, and the latter primary (Wellington, 2000). The immediate documents included eighteen lesson plans, which contributed a data set for corroborating the teachers' conceptions of the facilitating conditions. The documents provided information about their planned goals, intentions, and instructional activities, which was useful in interpreting the meanings underlying the planning of each of the facilitating conditions (Refer to Appendix D1-2 for samples). Eighteen reflection sheets were another type of document that elicited the teachers' reflections on their classroom lessons. The questions used on these sheets were open-ended to enable them to write their reflections as freely as they could (see Appendix E) after each lesson. They completed a reflective writing sheet before going to each stimulated recall interview, so the writing could have reinforced the recall as well as their general thinking about the lessons, which assisted them in the stimulated recall interviews. Documentary analysis in the study is an adjunct (Wellington, 2000, p.110), the documents being used as a source of data for triangulation.

5.4.3. Post-lesson observations

Post-lesson observations based on video recordings were to see how the teachers implemented the facilitating conditions in their English classes. As a type of ethnographic observation, it provides "complete objectivity" and has "the potential of capturing the essence of the classroom" (Day, 1990, p.4). It is often, in any qualitative research, a method triangulated with interviewing, and as such, it was useful in this study for generating triangulating observable data. Observations in the study focused on the teachers' actual actions that had direct relevance to addressing each facilitating condition and were linked with what they intended to do in their lesson plans as well as their commentaries on the enacted lessons.

5.4.4. Questionnaires

Another research tool utilised in the study was the questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed to elicit teachers' perceptions at the end of the implementation in regard to the feasibility, practicality, usefulness, and teachers' agency in using the facilitating-condition framework. Usually, the technique is employed particularly in quantitative studies to obtain information about "the preferences, attitudes, practices, concerns, or interests of some group of people" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p.11). With questionnaires, researchers can collect a huge quantity of data to obtain generalisations for research results. The questionnaire in the current project is not for the purpose of generalisation, but for gathering information on the teachers' general perceptions of using the facilitating conditions to achieve an understanding of factors that could have facilitated the teachers' uptake.

The questionnaire was based on the important attributes reported in the literature of language pedagogy innovations as mentioned in section 3.2.3 (see Appendix F1-2). I followed the constructing procedures described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000). Beginning with the constructs defined in the literature, I designed related direct statements that elicited responses on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Perceptions of each construct were elicited with two or more statements, which allowed for checking the internal consistency of the responses as well as eliciting their perceptions of specific factors. Space was also provided to elicit further comments on or explanations of each statement, for the purpose of clarification. The questionnaire was then trialled for readability with four individuals, including two researchers.

5.5. Process for data collection

I use the term 'process' to imply procedures in data collection. The whole process will be described first with a general overview of the process, and then the specific procedures used in the data collecting methods throughout the process. Attempts were made to guarantee the process addressed ethical issues. In particular, the participants were made aware that they should participate voluntarily and they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

The data collection was conducted in two independent periods. The first period extended over fifteen weeks and involved the participation of eight teachers, some of whom dropped out. The second phase lasted six weeks and involved three teachers, one of whom withdrew. Both periods contained three sessions. Each session involved the introduction of one facilitating condition, followed by a lesson plan interview, videotaping, reflective writing and a stimulated recall interview. The last session did not include a workshop, but consisted of a follow-up lesson and a questionnaire administration (see Appendix G for an overview of the whole process).

For each of the periods, the first session involved an initial interview. In this session of Period One, the focus group interview was conducted as a lead-in to the workshop on language input, whereas in the second period, the session began with an individual interview as a lead-in. The second session in both periods focused on output and interaction. The difference was that in the first, I worked with a group, whereas in the second period, I worked with each individual on the workshop content. In the latter, I did not demonstrate activities or tasks as a way of generating optimal conditions for students' learning, as did in the first period. The process is described below.

Period One

- Approach eight participants.
- Conduct focus group interview, and workshop on input.
- Conduct pre-and-post lesson interviews on input (lesson 1).
- Conduct workshop on output and interaction.
- Conduct pre-and-post lesson interviews on output and interaction (lesson 2).
- Conduct interviews on follow-up lessons.
- Deliver questionnaire.

Period Two

- Approach three further participants.
- Conduct initial interviews and workshop on input.
- Conduct pre-and-post lesson interviews on input (lesson 1).
- Conduct workshop on output and interaction.
- Conduct pre-and-post lesson interviews on output and interaction (lesson 2).
- Conduct pre-and-post lesson interviews on follow-up lessons (lesson 3).
- Deliver questionnaire.

5.5.1. Approaching participants

The process of approaching participants, as mentioned, took into account the ethical principles of voluntary participation and guarantee of confidentiality. After obtaining permission from the managers of the School of Education, and English Department of WU, I began to call for collaboration by contacting individual teachers who I thought had trust in me, given our collegueship. The process began with a brief explanation to potential participants about the project. Then, if the participants expressed any interest, they were asked for their collaboration. After this initial stage, all the potential participants were invited to a meeting where they had an opportunity to get to know the project requirements in detail through the letter of information and clarification with the researcher. The participants were given a consent form (see Appendix H), and one week to think carefully before making a final decision.

5.5.2. Workshops and initial data

5.5.2.1. *The role of workshops*

Before describing the workshops (please refer to Appendices I and J for workshop outline and content), it is necessary to justify their role in the study. As part of the project, they were introduced immediately after the initial interviews and at intervals of three or four weeks. This might lead people to believe that the workshops were a treatment of some form. In fact, they were not intended to be an intervention in the classic sense with a pre-test and post-test to track effect as in an experimental design. Rather, the main purpose was to introduce to the teachers the knowledge of the basic SLA facilitating conditions. By supplying the teachers with an overview of what basic conditions were, and why they could be effective, and by introducing some task types that promoted the conditions, the workshops positioned the teachers to respond to the conditions. In other words, they provided a platform to elicit the teachers' reactions to the knowledge through which their conceptions and perceptions could be captured and documented. They also established a common discourse between the informant and the researcher, which helped to establish shared reference. The focus of this research was to explore how the participants conceptualised and employed these concepts, how they perceived the way of teaching English using the concepts, and how they perceived whether they had changed in any way, and not the workshops themselves.

The process of presenting workshops could be regarded as collaborative work between the researcher and teachers to bring some pedagogical ideas into the classrooms, and reflect on them as in action research (Cohen et al., 2000). However, the study does not seek to test the effects of the knowledge of the SLA facilitating conditions on teaching effectiveness, but rather aims to understand how the teachers understood or took up the concepts. The workshops were not intended to shift the teachers' existing practice, but acknowledged it as particularly constituted by their teaching context.

The workshops were necessary for several reasons. Without the workshops, the participants may have felt uncomfortable being observed, and they may have lost agency in implementing their teaching, which in turn may have caused them to feel loss of control over what they needed to do. This is especially true for the Vietnamese culture where fear of face loss or criticism of one's weaknesses is to be avoided. Furthermore, as this research attempts to document teachers' responses, particularly their conceptions of the SLA facilitating conditions, it would have been hard to explore these without positioning the participants to work with the knowledge of the SLA conditions. Without the workshops, it would have been impossible to gain insights into the issues of uptake or professional development. Through the implementation of the concepts, the teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions were revealed and that was likely to enrich understanding.

The workshop content (see appendix J) were based on the material developed and used by Dr. Margaret Franken for training teachers teaching Māori bilingual students in New Zealand. In one sense, therefore, the material had been piloted, but in a different context. Most of the content was retained, with some information, proper names, and examples adapted to suit the context of the research. For example, on page 282 "explain in te reo" was adapted as "explain in Vietnamese". On page 285, a question related to the difference between Vietnamese and English was inserted to elicit a discussion. On page 297, a different example of decision making tasks was utilised.

5.5.2.2. Data collection Period One

At the first workshop session conducted on the last week of August 2007, the initial data was collected through a focus group discussion. The teachers were

engaged in a discussion where they could share their thinking on topics related to the workshops. I clarified that the purpose of the discussion was to help me understand what ideas they had of the content they were going to be introduced to in the workshops. The discussion was guided by question prompts shown on slides, which were presented successively. The participants had a few minutes to look at the questions and begin the discussion. While they were discussing, I monitored and facilitated their participation.

A major problem was that the participants sometimes interrupted each other to take their turns. This might have resulted in the insufficient time for some participants to report their thinking. Nevertheless, this reflects authentic interaction, which is encouraged in focus groups (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Although the data obtained did not “go into sufficient depth to allow [the researcher] to gain a good understanding of the participants’ experience” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.79), the data did provide an overall look into their initial shared ideas. In addition, as mentioned, this data set constituted a source for triangulating with others in seeking a cumulative understanding of the teachers’ conceptions. The method was suitable for the sensitive issue of exploring teachers’ understanding (Wellings et al., 2000, cited in Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.78). The trade-off for sensitivity to ensure an elicitation of an authentic conversation was to some extent worthwhile.

Workshop 1: Focus on input

Following the discussion about input, output and interaction, the workshop content presentation began with a focus on language input. The presentation began with some studies related to this condition, highlighting the importance of input in language acquisition. Then the input hypothesis and its implications were introduced with some explanations about ways to make language input richer and comprehensible to learners, as presented in the material. An emphasis was made on the idea of being creative and flexible in techniques in implementing what was proposed. The session ended with a demonstration of a task where a short text about language input was dictated, and the participants had to take notes and reconstruct the text in a group. At the end of the illustration, the participants were invited to give comments on the purpose of the task, which was then brought up as the notion of revisiting input, one of the ways to optimise the learning of

language. The workshop closed with the idea that rich comprehensible language input is one of the essential conditions for language learning, and that teachers are encouraged to think about and apply it in their lessons.

Workshop 2: Focus on output and interaction

The second workshop ran after all the data related to the first session was obtained from all the teachers. This happened four weeks later. The session commenced with a discussion about the concept of tasks before the knowledge of ‘output and interaction’ was introduced. Some findings about the impact of output and interaction on learners’ learning were presented first. Then the theory of output and interaction was introduced by a cross-group sharing task in which one group read about output, the other about interaction and shared what they read. Following this, the researcher summarised and added to ensure they understood the concept, and emphasised the importance of promoting output and especially interaction to facilitate second language learning. Then the researcher demonstrated two tasks of output and interaction, using ‘strip story’ and ‘text dictation’. After the demonstration was a discussion about the roles of these two tasks in the concepts of output and interaction. Before ending the session, the researcher brought their attention to some of the task types in the handout they could use for promoting output and interaction and explained briefly about the tasks. The teachers were encouraged to read the material more closely at home since the time did not allow us to move on.

5.5.2.3. Data collection Period Two

This period of data collection, which took place in mid-December 2007, involved two teachers: one was a beginner and the other experienced. The researcher attempted to collect further data because two of the participants in Period One could not complete the whole process, and another one withdrew from the project right from the beginning. The procedures for collecting the data in this phase were slightly different. The researcher conducted two information workshop sessions with the two teachers separately since one of them had to work around family commitments, so could not arrange to meet with the other.

For the beginner and inexperienced teacher, the researcher separated the initial interview into two parts, each included in each workshop sessions. The first part was to interview her about input, the second about output-interaction. Using the interview schedule from Period One, the interviewer elicited the teacher's thoughts about each condition. After the teacher shared her ideas, the researcher presented or added details, using the information from the workshop material. Then the researcher delivered the material and talked briefly about each section in it, encouraging her to read the material more carefully at home. The researcher stressed that the tasks introduced in the material were only examples and that the teacher had her own choice to adapt or create tasks or techniques to promote each condition. The sessions ended with a conclusion about the importance of each condition and the need to create learning opportunities through each condition.

Because the second teacher was more experienced and confident than the first, the initial interview with her was approached in a slightly different way. In the first session with her, the researcher elicited a discussion about both input and output and interaction. Following the interview schedule, the researcher prompted the teacher to share her thinking about and experience in teaching English, then about each facilitating condition. Since the participant had learned about second language acquisition from her MA programme and had extensive experience in teaching, she proved to be confident in her reporting. The researcher then briefly talked about each condition, reminding her of the key idea of what is advised to do in regard to language input, following the material on language input delivered to her. The researcher also encouraged her to read the material more carefully at home, concluding that language input is important and needs to be enriched. Since the session about output-interaction did not include any interview, the researcher delivered the materials and explained the concepts and the task types only. The final message was similar to the previous workshops.

Overall, the workshops did not focus much on task features and types, but on the concepts of language input, output and interaction. The idea behind the workshops was that the teachers are encouraged to be flexible in using the concepts, and tasks or techniques depend upon the classroom contexts.

5.5.3. Lesson plan interviewing

After each workshop session, each teacher prepared to teach a lesson focusing on the relevant condition introduced, which would be video-recorded (three lessons altogether). The first and second lessons focused on input, and output and interaction. The last lesson followed up for integrating all the conditions, so each participant prepared and taught three lessons for the study. The researcher suggested that they prepare ninety-minute lessons focusing on optimising each condition. Before each lesson, we met personally for the teacher to talk about the lesson plan. The interviews were very loosely structured. Some began with very open questions like *Can you tell me what you plan to do?* or direct questions like *What do you plan to do for input/output and interaction...?* Probes were mainly clarification such as *Do you mean...?* continuation like *Uh hmm*, or elaboration like *What do you want to achieve? How?* (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The prompt questions mainly pushed them to report about their lesson goals and their intentions. Sometimes, some participants had difficulty understanding the checklists, so we clarified any misunderstanding of questions from the checklists, and they corrected the information on the checklists either immediately or later and these were handed back to me before the lesson was video-recorded. Each interview lasted an average of fifteen minutes.

5.5.4. Video recording and reflective writing

After planning, each lesson was taught in the class the teacher selected, and the researcher himself video-recorded it. His presence in the classroom somehow made the teachers nervous, but as a rule, this soon disappeared as the lessons proceeded. The teachers or the researcher negotiated with the students about arranging seats for those who did not want to be recorded. However, very few students did reject the filming. As a result, there was little nervousness or tension in being watched and video-recorded.

The important thing was to reduce intrusion as much as possible. Sometimes it was not easy to record the students' interaction or teacher-student interaction. However, the focus was on the teachers, and the attempt was to reduce disruption to students' behaviour to the minimum by, for example, not filming their faces directly or keeping an appropriate distance from them.

At the end of the recording, a reflection sheet was given to each teacher with an instruction eliciting reflections on the conditions that the lessons optimised. The teachers were asked to complete three sheets for three lessons at home before returning them at each stimulated recall interview.

5.5.5. Stimulated recall interview

After each of the three lessons described above, a stimulated recall interview was conducted with each of the teachers. The interviews were conducted in a quiet place, a seminar room in the Department. Only one teacher suggested doing the interviews at a teaching staff room, which was convenient for her moving, right after her teaching shifts, and one of her interviews took place at a quiet street café.

In the stimulated recall interview, the researcher first explained the procedure of the interview, following the schedule attached. Then he showed the teachers a short episode from the recorded lesson, and tried one question to see if they understood. Some participants sometimes asked questions and these were clarified before the interviews began. The researcher also encouraged them while watching the selected segments to pause the recording and give any comments or report any thoughts they could recall. However, only one teacher chose to do that once or twice. Most of them waited for the questions.

The researcher asked the prompt questions that focused on classroom incidents relevant to each condition (see some example questions in Appendix C) and tried to use probes suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005). The probes were mainly to clarify or confirm the responses. The ‘why’ and ‘in what ways’ questions were also used to elicit elaboration. On average, each interview lasted from one hour to one and a half hours.

5.5.6. Questionnaire administration

At the end of the fourth lesson, each teacher received a questionnaire and was asked to complete and return it one week later. In Period One, the researcher initially administered printed versions of the questionnaire to three of the participants who finished their lessons earlier. However, it became apparent there was not sufficient space for one of the teachers’ responses. As a result, an electronic copy was forwarded to her for re-completion. For the remaining

teachers, each received an electronic version in their emails. All of the questionnaires were returned completed. After reading all of them, the researcher found it necessary to go back to two participants to clarify the comments they made. This was done by emailing them their original answers, together with clarification questions.

5.6. Data analysis and interpretation

Table 5.4

Data obtained for each research question

Research questions	Data obtained
How do EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university conceptualise the facilitating conditions for SLA such as input, output and interaction?	2 thirty-minute focus group interviews 18 fifteen-minute lesson plan interviews 18 lesson plans 18 reflection sheets 18 one hour stimulated recall interviews (SRI)
What do the teachers perceive of the facilitative factors namely feasibility, relevance, practicality, and agency in using the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions to approach teaching?	6 questionnaires Follow-up comments embedded in the last SRI
What changes related to knowledge and practice, if any, do the teachers report they have experienced from working to promote the SLA facilitating conditions?	Follow-up comments embedded in the last SRI

Most of the data was in qualitative form, so the common data analysis procedures described in Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006), Gay and Airasian (2000), Tesch (1990), Grbich (2007), and Creswell (2003, 2005) were used. The three main steps observed in the study were preparing and organising the data, coding and categorising the codes, and finally interpreting and reporting the data. Table 5.4 presents a list of raw data obtained from the data gathering process. For each

research question, different sources of data were necessary for triangulating interpretation.

5.6.1. Preparing and organising the data

The preparation and organisation of the data involved transcribing and translating the interviews, transcribing some classroom conversations, and tabulating summaries of the lesson plans.

5.6.1.1. Transcribing and translating

The researcher himself transcribed and translated all the interviews. Translating and transcribing were done simultaneously, with the facilitation of transcription software. As a result, there were only English transcripts intended for some access if necessary. In addition, keeping records of both languages is very time consuming. The original-language raw data remained on secure computer audio files.

Since the researcher conducted all the interviews, it was easy to ascertain the context in which the interviewees talked. Numerous ellipses and references required a re-construction of contextual cues to ensure the translation as being accurate and comprehensible. After the translation, the transcripts were checked for readability by the researcher and a colleague. Simply for the reason of convenience, the transcription did not include non-verbal features such as pause, laughter, or hesitations in the participants' talk. Comments given in Vietnamese on all the questionnaires were translated into English.

5.6.1.2. Labelling and identifying data

Transcripts and questionnaires were assigned labels, and pseudonyms were used, to protect identification of the participants. Following is the list of labels used to identify the participants and sources of data for the purpose of recording and retrieval.

- K = Kim; H = Hoa; T = Thu; P = Phuc; S = Sinh; My = M
- GI: Group interview
- InI: Initial individual interview
- LPI: Lesson plan interview

- SRI: Stimulated recall interview
- Q: Questionnaire
- Refl: Reflective sheet

5.6.1.3. Preparing summaries of lesson plans

The main documents in the study were 18 lesson plans that needed documenting. Together with transcripts from lesson plan interviews, this source of information served to examine how the teachers' understandings and interpretations of the facilitating conditions manifested in their planning. A descriptive summary of each lesson was written and tabulated to illuminate how the teachers interpreted and exercised each facilitating condition. This sort of data largely supplied a preliminary look which was extended and clarified by further interview data sets from both planned and enacted lesson interviews.

5.6.2. Coding and reducing the data

Coding was performed mainly for the interview transcripts. Coding in the project followed a procedure suggested by Tesch (1990), Creswell (2003, 2005) and Grbich (2007). The process began with segmenting units of analysis. It was hard to identify chunks of data for coding since breaking the interviews down into exchanges might have been likely to cause a loss of contextual cues. To resolve the problem, the researcher decided to take meaning as the basis for segmenting units as proposed by Tesch (1990) in the process of de-contextualising the data. In the interviews, any "segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information" (Tesch, 1990, p.116) was a unit for coding. As a result, one unit may contain more exchanges than another may. To facilitate access to and retrieval of the data sources, each unit or chunk of data was numbered and any quotes used for reporting evidence were assigned a label and number. Below are two examples of meaningful units (No.5 and No.26) from the transcript of the first stimulated recall with Sinh identified as SSRI1:

5. In this lesson, I mainly gave input through three ways: from students, teacher and the textbook, the material handouts. I gave them time to discuss first; that means the first activity was vocabulary brainstorming. Then the activity for output was based on the reading; when they [students who acted

as interviewers] interviewed 'journalists' [students who acted as journalists], they had a chance to reproduce phrases about her [a journalist in a text] daily activities. They would remember those new phrases. (SSRI1-5)

26. Why did you want them to identify rules? All the rules?

Because in the reading text I included all of the grammar points, so I wanted to generate input, so they could know and understand and later would use them in the interview, and more output later. (SSRI1-26)

Where to begin from in the process of coding was a question. Tesch (1990, pp.141-42) describes four ways a researcher can begin the process of coding from the research question; the theoretical concepts or categories already developed in the literature; the instruments, which usually provide handy categories; and the data itself if the researcher has no idea in mind. My research, however, aimed to document how the participants conceptualised the proposed concepts such as input, output and interaction, so the coding process could not help involving these concepts. In other words, the questions were the starting point. Each lesson interview series (an interview about a lesson plan followed by a stimulated recall) focused on one SLA condition (e.g. input), and the follow-up lesson interview series focused on both input and output and interaction. Therefore, coding was done separately for each condition across the relevant interview data items and across the six cases, but coding was also performed for any pieces of data that might be relevant to the condition in question.

Coding, however, began from the data itself, a grounded analysis procedure which has been increasingly used and suggested in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To code the data, I first read the material to obtain a general sense. Next, I read participants' commentaries closely and decided upon the topics the commentaries represented, described these using brief phrases, and wrote the phrases next to the commentaries. Bearing in mind the research questions and the theoretical concepts of each facilitating condition, in reading through each transcript, I tried to focus on the relevant data that could reveal the participants' conceptions of these facilitating conditions. As a result, not every utterance or piece of data was coded (Creswell, 2005). Some examples of extracts of data and their codes are given below.

Extracts	Coded for
<p>KSRII-6. R: Then you asked them “How do you go to school?” and then pointed another student and said, “She goes to school by bicycle,” what did you aim at?</p> <p>K: I called upon one student to make output, and from that to generate input for another. That was a sample for them to build on; for example, one student said “I go to school by bicycle,” then I repeated, “She goes to school by bicycle, and how do you go?” they would base on that sample. That was a chance for them to recycle the language and then more and more input and repeating it several times, they would be able to speak.</p>	<p>Opportunity for input recycling through eliciting students’ production</p> <p>Input as a language sample/model</p>

After the coding, similar codes were collated into a different set and reduced into categories or themes for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Grbich, 2007). For example, regarding input, some categories such as what was conceived as input, teacher use of English as input, and peer input, were formulated.

Interrater reliability for validating categories argued by Gass and Mackey (2000) was not attempted for the same reasons Woods (1996) outlines. Gass and Mackey claim that the coding of stimulated recall transcripts might be affected by a high-level involvement of the researcher because of the complexity of the recall procedure. The interpretation of the researcher, who often knows about the recall stimulus and is overwhelmed with expectation for desirable data to answer the research questions, can mismatch that of an independent rater who only relies on the transcribed comments (Gass & Mackey, 2000). However, as Woods (1996) posits, raters’ insufficient training and misunderstanding can result in disagreement in coding. In the current research, it was also difficult to find a person suitable for the rating work. Importantly, the study relies on the triangulation strategy, and this could help to reduce subjectivity and enhance the internal validity.

5.6.3. Questionnaire analysis

The numerical data was analysed by counting frequencies of the scales reported by the participants to obtain the pattern of teachers’ perceptions of the attributes related to the implementation of the proposed facilitating conditions. Points for items of each factor were counted and averaged within cases and then across cases. The means were calculated to uncover common patterns of attitudes and

perceptions. Any further comments provided in the questionnaire were further examined to explain and clarify the patterns.

5.6.4. Interpreting, validating and reporting data

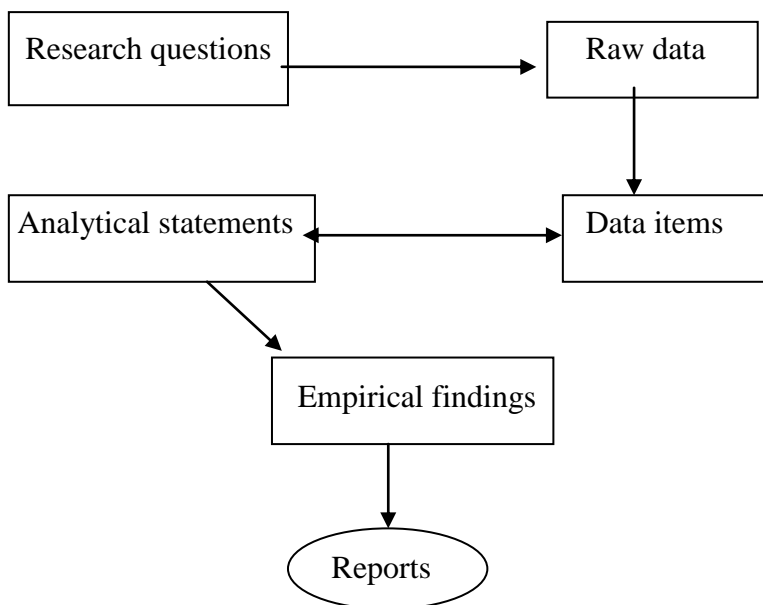
The process of interpreting data to arrive at empirical findings is most likely to cause bias (Sowden & Keeves, 1989). Therefore, to guard against that risk, the process of triangulating evidence as advanced by the interpretative tradition (Denzin, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1984) wherein evidence was tracked and obtained from a variety of data sources, was applicable to this research. Community consent as mentioned in 5.2.1 as one of the measures for validation could not be performed thoroughly. In effect, three of the participants were initially pursued for validation during the process of interpretation, but it turned out that they returned the descriptions sent to them without any useful comments. I also found that it was an imposition on their time, so I finally decided not to continue the process. As a result, the study drew largely on triangulation as a measure for ensuring credibility in interpretation.

The process of analysis was iterative with an examination for consistencies in self-reports and observed practice from across the participants for common patterns, and individual participants for particulars. The whole process follows what Bassey (1999) suggests, as in Figure 5.1. In this process, an assumption or what Bassey (1999, p.70) called an “analytical statement” of how participants conceptualised each of the conditions was formulated from examining one data item. Then the statement was checked across other data items for confirmation, rejection or revision. In particular, to capture teachers’ conceptions of each of the SLA facilitating conditions in the study, the different data sources such as initial interviews, lesson plans, lesson plan interviews, and stimulated recall interviews were examined with relevance to each condition. Themes were first generated from their initial reports, and then an analysis of their lesson plans were performed to establish the intentions in which the teachers could be predisposed to act upon. Reports in lesson plan interviews and stimulated recalls were coded for themes about their real practice. Observation notes were generated from video-recordings concerning teachers’ classroom actions which have link with the condition under examination. All of these were compared for consistencies in

order to arrive at patterns. The process also involved searching for particular features reported by individuals.

Figure 5.1

From research questions to empirical findings and case reports (adapted from Bassey, 1999, p.85)



The reports on findings were written up in two main separated sections for the purpose of highlighting the process of making sense of the SLA facilitating conditions represented by the teachers. The descriptions of teachers' conceptions of input, and output and interaction as presented in chapters 6 and 7, begin with initial conceptions. They are then followed by detailed descriptions of themes or patterns reflected in the teachers' practice, including a presentation of their plans, their reports on the lessons in practice and observed actions. Constraints on practice varied among the teachers. Consequently, where there was divergence among most of the teachers, a theme was reported, but where a certain constraint was particularly reported by an individual participant, this particular case was used to enrich the descriptions.

5.7. Summary

With the purpose of examining teachers' learning and conceptions in relation to some SLA concepts associated with second language learning, and in particular TBLT in the particular context of education in Vietnam, the current project has

been designed as a qualitative case study with multiple methods employed for data collection and analysis. In terms of methodology, the study is within an interpretative paradigm. Underlying the methodology is the epistemological view of language as a mediating tool of cognition. This means a case study was an appropriate choice for exploration and description, and the use of particular methods was based on an argument that they were suited to the purpose of describing and exploring a complex research issue, which is teacher cognition and learning.

The study was reliant on interview, questionnaire, documentation and transcripts from classroom lessons to generate the data. Each method contributed to the process of corroboration of data in a cumulative way. The initial data provided a first look into the teachers' understandings of teaching and learning English including the concepts of facilitating conditions; then the lesson plans and the lesson interviews assisted in mapping on the teachers' conceptions in planning. Evidence was further accumulated by examining the stimulated recall interview data which reflected the teachers' understandings in action. Analysis of some lesson episodes also provided an insider perspective. Follow-up comments embedded in the last stimulated recall interviews contributed data about the teachers' explicit reflections that shed light on their general attitude and changes brought about by using the facilitating conditions. The questionnaire provided an overall view of their perceptions regarding factors that influenced their uptake of the concepts: the feasibility, practicality, relevance, and agency. Analysis and interpretation also followed an iterative and triangulated procedure to develop empirical findings.

The quality and validity of the research was thus ensured by redundancy in data, and analysis procedures that made use of comparison and contrast to minimise subjectivity. Findings resulting from the process of analysis and interpretation are presented in Chapters 6 to 8.

6. TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE INPUT

This chapter presents findings in relation to the research question “How do the Vietnamese EFL teachers at a university conceive of and implement language input?” The chapter presents the data analysis following an accumulative process. The results are described in two main parts: (1) the initial conceptions of language input, and (2) the conceptions of language input in practice. Beginning with a description of the teachers' initial notions of language input, the chapter then presents an analysis of their conceptions based on their practices, revealing how such notions affect their interpretations and practices of language input. It continues with the teachers' perceptions of their use of English as input and factors influencing it. Finally, the teachers' thinking about the capacity of student language as input is presented.

6.1. Teachers' initial conceptions of language input

The data from initial interviews, which consisted of individual and group interviews, showed that the six Vietnamese teachers' conceptions of language input primarily represented a mixed pattern in which language input was interpreted at both a macro- and a micro- level. The data analysis showed three dimensions of the teachers' understandings of what language input is. It also revealed five features of good input as perceived by the six teachers.

6.1.1. Dimensions of defining language input

Table 6.1 presents the three ways in which the six teachers defined language input. The table shows that as a group, these teachers held mixed understandings of what language input is. The marked tendency was their interpretation of language input as the linguistic knowledge, specifically discrete linguistic elements taught in a language lesson. Three of the teachers also interpreted language input as any material or information unrelated to the linguistic aspect of the target language. Only one teacher (Kim) had a view of input as language data, a perspective consistent with SLA.

Table 2.1

Three dimensions of defining input

Teachers	Dimensions of defining language input		
	<i>Discrete linguistic elements</i>	<i>Language data</i>	<i>Other knowledge</i>
Kim	√	√	
Hoa	√		√
My	√		√
Phuc	√		
Thu	√		√
Sinh	√		

6.1.1.1. Language input as discrete linguistic elements

This dimension indicates a synthetic view of language input, an instructional perspective in which the target language is segmented into discrete linguistic elements as discussed previously in Chapter 3. All the teachers had a marked tendency to conceive of language input as the pedagogical focus of their lessons. The pedagogical focus refers to mainly grammatical items and vocabulary taught in a language lesson. In one way or another, they indicated that language input refers to what the teacher selects for teaching in a lesson. For example, Phuc defined language input as “the language that we [teachers] teach students, the language that is active” (PGIBa-1). In her subsequent discussion with other teachers, Phuc clarified her idea, stressing the crucial role played by the teacher in selecting new language forms or lexis, and working to help students to acquire and apply the new language forms outside the classroom. Phuc justified the concept of language input in terms of the lexicon:

You should decide which words you teach students and which words are active and passive words, so there should be careful choice of the lesson or the language to teach. (PGIBa-5)

Hoa also displayed the same view of language input in terms of grammar. In her sharing how she addressed language input in her practice, she made a point that clearly revealed her conception that language input consists of grammatical structures or forms selected for instruction:

To address the language input in my class, I give my students some drills so that they can kind of practise and practise the same structure, for example about tense or so, but a lot of drills. (HGI1Ma-4)

Kim and Sinh similarly represented the same understanding. Sinh described language input as “the knowledge the teacher provides for students,” and that knowledge entails grammar and vocabulary (SInI1-3-4). Kim presented the same understanding in a less discernible way. She particularly stressed, “The language [teachers] pick out to teach must be real life,” (KInI-4) which seems to suggest that in her mind, language input may entail particular aspects of the target language which should be taught in a language lesson. Her understanding of language input in this way can only be discerned when we look at her practice. Kim, however, also expressed a conception of input as the target language data from which learners can infer useful language patterns or rules as presented below.

6.1.1.2. Language input as language data

Out of the six teachers, only Kim initially represented thinking about language input from the SLA perspective which was discussed in Chapter 3. According to such a conception, language input is perceived as the target language samples or environment presented or exposed to learners. In the initial interview, Kim consistently expressed this understanding, with her belief that it is necessary to have an English environment for effective English learning. She explained, “If the learners have a very natural environment of English outside the classroom, and then that will be a very good condition for the learners to develop the language” (KInI-3). The teacher continued to explain that with a rich language environment, learners can “pick up” whatever language they need for their learning. She expressed the belief more or less that exposure to environmental input helps trigger language acquisition. Believing in the importance of the English environment for effective English learning, Kim advocated that the crucial task of

English teachers is creating “the English input in the classroom and [trying] to motivate or encourage students to use English as much as possible in the classroom” (KInI-4). Her view of learning from processing certain language input was highlighted in the following extract:

So first of all you have to provide them with some language input and they must pick up some language and they themselves can process how to learn the language, because the students learn the language very differently, and if we provide them with an English input they can pick up the language to some extent... (KInI-4-5).

6.1.1.3. Language input as other knowledge

Four of the teachers, Sinh, Hoa, My, and Thu, also presented an initial understanding of language input as inclusive of other non-linguistic knowledge related to the target language. Sinh expressed a vaguely holistic view of input, thinking that it means knowledge in general, and in this sense, she said, it involves students’ existing knowledge.

S: Who would help the students have that input or what input have the students got? That’s important. What input can a teacher provide the students in that period of a lesson, and the teacher should know what input the students have got, and then he or she can know what he or she should provide them more and have a better input, maybe they can have a...

R: What do you mean by language input?

S: From what I have known, I think the knowledge that the teacher provides the students and the knowledge that the students have, and they can perceive the language and they can... when they perceive and they can produce.

R: You mean knowledge in general?

S: Yeah.

(SInI-3)

Hoa was more specific when she interpreted the concept as encompassing cultural content embedded in the target language that the teacher needs to communicate to students: “Grammar point and moreover related cultural aspects” (HGIMa-1). Thu similarly expressed a holistic view when she talked of language input as not only

the knowledge obtained from reading, but also the reading sub-skills such as skimming or scanning.

I think language input is something more than the knowledge; it also includes some skills, and when teaching reading, I expect the students to acquire not only the knowledge from the reading but also the skills in reading. (TGIBa-8)

Unlike the other teachers, My appeared to see the concept as too broad to be definable, and she tended to hold a mixed view of language input. She appeared to show reluctance in articulating her personal understanding of the concept. The teacher said:

In fact, this question is not very clear to me, so language input if you mean by grammar and pronunciation or some techniques in doing skills like skimming, scanning and by understanding that way, we mean it's important, right? (MGIMa-2)

Overall, in terms of the definition of language input, the dominant view among all the teachers initially was a synthetic one. Only one teacher held a view of language input congruent with SLA, seeing it as the target language data or samples to which learners have exposure for language acquisition. Four of the teachers ascribed language input to any content, skills or material other than the linguistic knowledge of the target language.

6.1.2. The nature of language input

Table 6.2 shows five features perceived by the six teachers as characteristic of good language input that surfaced from the initial interview data. The teachers understood good input in a variety of ways manifested in the various features they described.

Two teachers (Hoa and Thu) showed a better understanding than the other teachers did, as they identified more characteristics of quality input. A significant aspect of their conceptions is that they could all identify the requirement of language input appropriate to learner levels.

Kim believed that good language input should cater for “learner needs.” She said that, depending on learner levels, the teacher could decide how to provide appropriate language input or the input that meets the learner needs:

For example, if you are teaching English for a child, and then the language that you pick out to teach a child is very different from the students whose major area is mathematics or science. (KInI-4)

Table 6.2

Good input features perceived by six Vietnamese EFL teachers

Teachers	Features of good input				
	<i>New</i>	<i>Useful/real-life</i>	<i>Appropriate</i>	<i>Repeated</i>	<i>Interesting</i>
Kim		√	√		
Hoa		√	√	√	√
My			√		
Phuc	√		√		
Thu	√		√	√	
Sinh			√		

The phrase “learner needs” implies that the input provided should match learners’ demands for language and their existing levels. In her account of the way to make language comprehensible to a mixed level class, Kim said this could be done by “increasing the language difficulty level” gradually from one part to another within a lesson (KInI-2).

Likewise, Sinh appeared to articulate a clear explanation of the comprehensible input:

If we provide something for the students, that must be to the students’ level. I think that the input is good if we provide the students the material, the listening text, reading material or other things that are up to their level.

(SInI-5)

Thu and Phuc added the feature of newness alongside appropriateness. Thu especially expressed this idea as she repeatedly said that language input is something new and added to the students' level. Phuc similarly stressed the role of teachers in providing language input, saying that "the teachers themselves should know where [at what level] the students are, so they can add something new to language" (PGIBa-3). Phuc elaborated on how she decided on selecting new language: "We can look at the students' books before we know what students have to study, and we can design something new based on that level" (PGI1Ba-3).

Hoa seemed to have a broader view of good language input, stating that it should also be interesting and repeated regularly for students' internalisation (HGIMa-2). This teacher also identified usefulness for out-of-class use as one of the features of good language input. However, she was likely to hold the view of language input as the linguistic content pre-planned and presented in an instructional syllabus. She said:

We need to provide useful language input for each lesson so that the teaching goal can be achieved, so it's good if it's useful in the short term and in the longer term, too. (HGIMa-3)

In general, all the six teachers initially had various understandings of the nature of language input, but they tended to agree that the input supplied for learners should be appropriate to their level. This shared conception is in line with Krashen's (1985) point of view. Nevertheless, it possibly implies the notion of language input from a synthetic rather than analytic view of language and language instruction. Further examination of their classroom practice regarding the language input will illuminate this interpretation.

6.2. Teachers' conceptions of language input in practice

The present section will now present an analysis of data derived from the teachers' first lessons: their lesson plans and verbalisations about the lessons before and after video recording, and their reflections. The data sets revealed that while all the teachers maintained a synthetic view of language input, they also incorporated the analytic concept of language input in quite a similar way.

I will first describe how the synthetic concept of language input featured in their pedagogical intentions manifest in the lesson objectives and structures. I will then illustrate how the view of input as target language data was incorporated with that which refers to targeted linguistic elements by highlighting how the teachers exploited language input forms to achieve their instructional goals.

6.2.1. A synthetic view of language input in the lessons

Language input as the linguistic content aimed at in a taught lesson surfaced in the ways the teachers planned their lessons. Evidence emerged in the objectives, structures of the lessons and the teachers' accounts of their plans and classroom actions.

6.2.1.1. Lesson objectives and structures targeted at linguistic content

All six participants presented different lesson plans summarised in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4, but an analysis of the instructional objectives and activities of their lessons showed that they targeted particular linguistic content relevant to the topic of the textbook units they were teaching. Table 6.3 shows the teachers' lesson plans designed for students of different levels. Two teachers prepared their lessons for level-three students (second-year students in first semester), three had level-two lessons (first-year students in second semester), and one presented a level-one (first-year students in first semester). The duration of each lesson varied according to each teacher, ranging from 50 to 270 minutes. Three teachers (Phuc, My, and Sinh) seemed to have a clearer focus on language input, whereas the other three teachers appeared not to consider this focus. Their presented plans were rather for the whole units, which could be broken into different mini-lessons. All the teachers presented their lesson objectives in terms of learning outcomes, what students were able to master after the lessons. Phuc did not specify her lesson objectives, but her designed activities revealed her pedagogical focus on linguistic content relevant to the unit she was going to teach.

Except for Phuc, who did not present her lesson objectives, most of the teachers expressed a clear emphasis on the linguistic goals in their plans, including the functional, formal, and lexical aspects of the target language directly relevant to the topics of the units. The lesson plans of Hoa, My, and Sinh clearly stated that

after the lessons, their students would be able to use specific discrete linguistic elements to perform some functions of communication. For example, Hoa indicated her instructional goal to be the students' ability to use the simple past tense after the lesson. The goal was further confirmed in her written reflection after the lesson. She wrote that she found "the input of the *-ed* ending" very helpful for students (Hrefl1). In the same vein, the goal of My's lesson was to promote practice of the use of personal information questions. She also wrote in her reflective sheet that she had provided all the input necessary for the students to talk about their personal information (Mrefl1). Sinh similarly stressed the linguistic knowledge that her students would be able to achieve with relevance to the topic of Daily Routines they were studying. Kim's lesson appeared to place a focus on the topical content, students learning to talk and write about their daily routines, and the linguistic focus appeared to serve to achieve this goal. Thu's lesson specified a number of objectives, encompassing the practice of a variety of skills such as listening, reading and speaking. Her plan for instruction seemed to centre on skills practice and topical content. A close analysis of these teachers' lesson activities further revealed their instructional focus. For reasons of space, Table 6.4 only presents the lesson procedure of three teachers (Kim, Thu, and Phuc) whose lesson objectives were not reported or appeared to be vague (Please refer to Appendix E1 for the full version).

From Table 6.4, it seems that Kim's planned activities focused on the topical content "typical day" and she wanted her students to "pick up" useful language from a reading text "My Working Day" so that the language would help them talk and write about the topic. In contrast, in Thu's lesson procedure, she began with a presentation of the form and function of a grammatical structure "I'm going to...", then provided practice of the structure. Thu first provided drilling practice, and then less controlled speaking and writing tasks that she called "grammar production." In the checklist, she wrote that the aim of the grammar production was to provide practice of the grammar point she was going to teach, and to generate input from peers (TChklist1). As earlier mentioned, Phuc did not describe any objectives, but the activities she wanted to implement in the lesson revealed her intention to promote the learning of the modal verb 'can'. She structured the activities in a way that concentrated students' attention on the verb.

Table 6.4

Procedures of input lesson plans of six teachers

Teacher	Lessons & Levels	Lesson procedure	Type of focus
Kim	Unit 11: A day in my life (Level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the passage My Working Day and complete exercises 1-3, and a chart - Work in pairs and groups to ask and answer about their typical working day, using the language they have just picked up. - Report what has been discussed. - Listen to texts in the book. - Read further texts (external source). - Listen to further texts (external source). - Write about someone's typical day. 	Topical content (typical day)
Thu	Unit 24: I'm going to save money (Level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guessing game - T presents 'I'm going to...' - T pre-teaches vocabulary. - Read the text in the book - Combine sentences using 'because' - Listening (activities 3 & 4/ p.56) - Say what you are going to do this weekend through a drill. - Do homework: write sentences about your weekend plans. - Work in pairs and discuss solutions to given problems. - Present your solutions to the whole class. 	Linguistic (Be going to, because)
Phuc	Unit 13: Can you swim? (Level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher teaches vocabulary - Read the text and work out the form of 'can' and 'can't'. - Listen to a short oral description by the teacher and answer questions. - Listen to an interview with a man applying for a job and tick the abilities of the applicant. - Role-play the interview. - Interview a friend based on the checklist about their abilities. - Listen and match sentences. - Teacher explains the use of 'So Can I' and 'Neither Can I'. - Role play the conversation with your friend talking about your real abilities - Teacher corrects any mistakes. 	Linguistic (forms and functions of 'Can')

6.2.1.2. Actions directed at the linguistic content instructed

The lesson plans appeared to indicate a conception of language input as the targeted linguistic content to be promoted through a variety of input forms which the teachers interpreted as different skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The pedagogical linguistic content constituted a focal point to which these forms

of input were directed. Further evidence from the teachers' recall sessions and reflections on their classroom lessons demonstrates this. The first stimulated recalls further revealed that the teachers attempted to integrate the different skills in a lesson that sought to teach the linguistic content useful for communicating the topic under study. Thu and Phuc were the most representative examples. The following section will present further data about their recall to illustrate this point.

As observed in her enacted lesson, Thu initially presented the structure 'be going to' and intentionally repeated it in her talk to give students an opportunity to hear it.

R: What do you think about your repetition here?

T: I have counted the times I repeated that structure for now, several times 'I am going to' to ensure that everyone knew that the new structure that day was 'be going to' (TSRI1-4).

In order to confirm students' understanding of the target structure, she even used Vietnamese to explain it explicitly and meta-linguistically.

At that time, I used Vietnamese the last time to talk about that model, to make sure everyone could get the model structure into their mind by repeating it, although they might have got it before. There I used Vietnamese to ensure they understood it. (TSRI1-5)

Thu further considered pre-teaching new vocabulary as the provision of optimal language input, and believed the provision facilitated students' practice and use of the structure in focus. She mentioned this idea in her reflection on whether an optimal environment had been created for students to be exposed to English. She said:

One thing I forgot was pre-teaching them some more words, so if I had done it, in this production stage, they would have had more detailed ideas, and I would not have had to spend time on drilling them. Any way, they were exposed to the reading, speaking and listening, so they were exposed to *that structure*. (TSRI1, emphasis added)

Likewise, in her lesson, Phuc presented her students with a text describing the abilities of a student, with the modal verb 'can' highlighted. The students then

answered some questions to identify the form and functions of the verb. Then they listened to a native speaker on an audio recording talking about his abilities. After that, the students listened to her and their peers talking about their abilities. All of these opportunities aimed to optimise exposure to the grammatical form in focus. Phuc explained:

I have made it optimal. I have created all the opportunities such as audio, story, my written text for them to recognise *the structure*. (PSRI1-13, emphasis added)

The manipulation of language input as described above might be reflective of the process in which the teachers consciously constructed understanding of the concept. It could manifest personal attempts to incorporate the concept into their schemata. The following section will illustrate this by presenting tensions reported by some of the teachers.

6.2.2. Conflicting views of language input

It was shown in the post-lesson data that all the teachers appeared to incorporate the idea of language input as the target language addressed to learners in the classroom. In attempts to make optimal language input for students' learning, they thought of language input as texts, audio, video, or teacher talk. Hoa reported in the reflection on her first lesson that she regretted neither speaking English all the time nor using it effectively to provide an opportunity for implicit learning, while she initially talked about input in terms of cultural and linguistic knowledge that needed to be taught as mentioned in section 6.1.

I tried to use English in my instruction, but frankly speaking, in most of the time I had to rely on the mother tongue to make sure students understood the instruction before they could do the exercises. (Href11)

My hesitated to articulate her view of the concept initially, but did show her uptake of the concept in an attempt to apply it in her lesson. Her evaluation of the input from the English textbook she was teaching represents this.

In fact, the book follows the integrated skills, it focuses on skills, so listening and speaking are okay, but reading is not. The texts are so short, and not every unit has a text. The tasks are not various. (MSRI1-1)

The teacher even interpreted input as inclusive of language tasks as well. Her reflection on whether rich input had been created for her students' learning gives evidence of an analytic conception of input:

I think if talking about the objective of the lesson, it [input] was generally rich. For example, the teacher's instruction was in English, the students listened to the audio tape, and then they practised speaking with a given situation related to their real life, and not given in the book. (MSRI1-6)

Nevertheless, the reflection above also suggests that she incorporated the analytic view of input with the synthetic one, the targeted linguistic items in a lesson. While My clearly demonstrated an analytic conception of input in her lesson, she interpreted it in the light of her existing practice represented by the present-practice-produce procedure. She still held on to the view of linguistic elements, as indicated in her statements about whether it was necessary to incorporate more texts (input) for students' learning. She said:

For example, if they read to develop reading skills, it will be okay, but if reading is to develop other skills, I think instead of that, why should we not provide vocabulary directly? For example, for listening and speaking, if students want to know more information or ask further for new language, we can tell them. (MSRI1-1)

The teacher interpreted that further texts provided a context in which students could develop reading skills such as skimming and scanning, rather than providing a source of language input. In her understanding, teachers could directly provide language input by which she meant an explicit supply of discrete vocabulary items, suggestions of ideas whenever the demand for them was initiated. It is usual that when working in pairs or groups, Vietnamese students ask their teachers for new words or grammatical forms that they need for completing the work. In this respect, My thought of her role as transmitting knowledge of the target language forms. In her thinking, teachers can cater for whatever language

items, namely lexical or grammatical items that students require for completing their task. The following quote confirms this.

R: So you mean through each activity like speaking you can provide input by supplying vocabulary directly?

M: Yeah vocabulary or some situation [idea] rather than giving them a text, because what they need is the ability to use the language in real life, while a text is just something artificial. (MSRI1-1)

The very reason she gave was that because students needed to develop competence to speak English in real life, the emphasis of instruction had to be placed on language output. Such a conception might result from her perception of language teaching and learning driven by the local context. It might stem from her observation that most Vietnamese students cannot use English although they have learned a great deal at school, and that one of the goals of her university's English programme was to develop basic communication skills.

The teacher's attempt to provide for practice of the target structure as described in her lesson plan (Table 8) further shows her incorporation of the view of input as language data into the P-P-P procedure. In this procedure, the teacher presented a linguistic form, and then provided practice of the form in a controlled manner namely through drills. In creating pair or group work, the teacher not only wished her learners to re-use the desired form, but she also possibly acted as a source of further language such as vocabulary and linguistic forms required by the students for completing the work. Such an understanding of input underpinned her intention not to incorporate additional texts into her lesson.

Hoa's approach generally reflects such a tension as well. In the lesson plan interview, when asked how she wanted to provide language input, Hoa responded that she would like her students to do pair listening, an activity where each pair had a short text about Agatha Christie (the story they were studying) with some missing information including the verbs. Each student had to listen to the other reading the text, and complete it. Hoa explained,

I want them to do pair listening and when they listen they will..., they listen to their friends and they will write down the words they hear and on

purpose, these words are verbs in simple past tense, and some of them are regular verbs, some of them are irregular verbs. (HLPI1-1)

In the enacted lesson, the teacher began to give a brief oral introduction about the story (See Table 9). She explained that the introduction was to give students an opportunity to hear some target words and phrases that they would encounter when they read the text. She did mention the notions of repetition and revisiting presented in the workshop. However, her understanding implied a pre-planned goal, the target words her students should pay attention to and learn. This represents a tension between her dominant understanding of language input as the discrete linguistic pre-planned elements to be taught and the idea of integrated language input provided for implicit learning. She explained:

When planning my lesson, generally for almost all lessons, I often speak English in the introduction or summary, because it is related to the lesson; so some words I use will appear in the lesson, and that is the chance for them to listen to the words in speaking, and then later they will read and see them again. (HSRI1-1-2)

During the lesson, Hoa asked her students to read the story text aloud. She said, in that way, the opportunity for input was optimised because the students could revisit the language. It was apparent in this case that Hoa interpreted language input as oral and written texts.

The cognitive tension was most articulate in the case of Phuc. This teacher expressly articulated the tension in her thinking before the lesson interview, which indicated her conscious interpretation of the concept. She asked:

P: If I ask them to match the pictures and words, does it mean that I add more language input?

R: Before you let them listen to the tape?

P: No, when I teach them vocabulary, because in the listening, there were some words like 'scarf' or 'shorts' which the students didn't know. They asked me after the lesson. Then I thought I should have taught some more words about clothes, jewellery or so, and that I would have found

pictures and typed words on them so that the students could match them. In that case, would you say that I have incorporated more input? (PSRI1-1)

In this cognitive dissonance, her existing conception of language input as discrete language structures, rules or lexical items that require pre-planning and explicit presentation interfered with her interpretation of the meaning of input as target language samples for implicit learning. Alternatively, that might reflect a process of accommodating the new meaning, which is essential to elicit change at least in the teacher's conceptualisation.

In summary, all the teachers initially ascribed various meanings to the term language input - from particular linguistic items, integrated language samples, to cultural knowledge and even general knowledge. All of them, however, had a tendency to interpret language input from a synthetic point of view on second language teaching and learning. Their demonstration of language input in practice displayed a cognitive dissonance between the analytic and synthetic perspectives. Holding on to the synthetic view on language, seeing input as particular linguistic items required to focus on in each lesson, they attempted to facilitate students' mastery of some linguistic items by maximising opportunities for students to have access to various forms of input (in the analytic view) through which the students can develop their command of the items. Such a way of interpreting and making language input optimal highlighted that the teachers were constructing their own understanding.

6.2.3. Teacher input

The conception of teacher input was documented mainly through two sources of data: the stimulated recall interviews and the teachers' discourse in their classroom interaction. The description of this type of input conceptualised by the teachers represents a further step in their response to the notion of making optimal input in terms of realising it in their particular lessons with particular students.

6.2.3.1. Understanding teacher use of English

All the teachers reported their understanding of teacher use of English as a source of language input in the classroom. They all expressed a belief that teacher use of

English in the classroom was beneficial to student learning. Thu admitted that her use of Vietnamese in her lesson was sometimes unnecessary and reduced input in English, which is a good illustration of this conception. Hoa showed her awareness of and determination in using English. In fact, her intention and use of English was most fully realised in her final lesson. In the comment below, she reflected on her insistence on speaking English and use of cues to aid students' understanding:

....I kept on speaking English, and then they began to lose understanding of the word 'photo' so I had to show the picture, but I just kept speaking English. They were busy copying the words down, but I kept using English because some students understood this English and some did not. If I had spoken Vietnamese then it would have been boring, not like a language classroom, but I just ignored them, and carried on. I supposed if they had not understood it, they would still have listened and then I would have found another way to help them. After that, I used Vietnamese. (HSRI3-3)

She reported doing so even though she felt that her use of English would not benefit limited-proficiency students at all. She stated:

It is a source of input, but just for good students; there is no way for weak students to understand it. But not because of these students, I stopped using this source of input. It is not like a language classroom except when you are so tired. (HSRI3-3-4)

In terms of making their English easily comprehensible, the six teachers reported a number of ways of achieving it. The most common way was to use paraphrase for explaining new words. Thu, for example, explained that this could be done by "[using] another word in English to explain or a synonym, a paraphrase to relate what they had known to what was new to them" (TSRI1-2). Another common way was adjusting speech rate especially for students of low proficiency. Most teachers reported that they attempted to slow down their speech in the classroom. Only Hoa acknowledged that she could not slow down her speech because she would easily make mistakes. Instead, Hoa reported that she would rather employ simple language and a lot of repetition (HSRI3-8). Kim acknowledged that slow

speech rate was necessary, but sometimes teachers should speak as naturally as possible, to provide authentic input. Thu, especially, accounted for her slow speech rate in light of not providing optimal input but saving energy. When asked whether she adjusted her speaking speed, she responded:

I did not because in my teaching, I usually speak slowly, much more slowly than when I talk to an ordinary person.

Why?

Because when I speak slowly, they still do not understand me; and if they do not understand, I will have to repeat several times. (TSRI2-1)

Another way of making input accessible was the use of cues or aids for comprehension. Most teachers showed this understanding in their lessons. Phuc, for example, explained how she would help students to understand the meaning of the word *model*:

I could have found and showed their [models] photos, and then it would have been easier for them [students] to understand the word I spoke. (PSRI1-1)

Hoa reported her clear understanding of using cues to aid comprehension; she wrote down some key words while speaking to support poor students to listen to her talk. She also used body gestures to explain new words:

I described it by using the body language. I said, “There is an airplane in the sky and you hang on to the airplane and you fly in the sky,” while I moved my hands. That helped them figure it out. (HSRI3-9)

Incorporating redundancy by repetition was further reported as a way to make language comprehensible to students. Phuc did this when she assumed her students had difficulty in comprehending what she said. In the following event, the teacher attempted to make her instruction understood.

It seemed that it took the students long to understand it. Yeah. I asked them to match the explanations with the pictures, and I had to explain several times, then they understood. (PSRI3-1)

My had an intention to incorporate redundancy in her instructions by speaking more than normal, asking several questions to check students' understanding. She said:

Actually, my instruction was rather clear; I mean if I had talked Vietnamese, I would have needed only one sentence, but when I used English, I had to check again whether they understood it, and I had to speak more, such as 'How many blanks?' 'How many sentences?' (MSRI1-2)

The teacher also talked about her intention to elaborate language when she elicited and explained new vocabulary in order to prepare students for listening to recorded native speakers:

...our purpose was to provide more information, as I presented in the lesson plan, it was 'elaborate language', because the book simply says 'learn a language' so I elaborated it by asking 'Learn a language but what languages students can learn?' so I made it clearer to make the listening task easier for the students. I also provided more vocabulary to help. (MSRI3-5)

In this respect, My perceived teacher input as being limited to pedagogical purposes such as explaining vocabulary and suggesting cues to guide students in doing a task.

6.2.3.2. Purposes for using English in the classroom

All the participants were aware of using the target language as a source of language input in the classroom. The teachers attempted to speak English in the classroom as a way of supporting learning. However, their use of English was limited to a few purposes. Table 6.5 presents the reasons for using English derived from the data.

Table 6.5 shows four reasons for using English, three of which were shared by all the teachers. The three common purposes involved presenting new language material, eliciting responses from students, and giving simple instructions and

explanations. Four of the teachers also shared the purpose of using English to facilitate understanding English.

Table 6.5

Teachers' purposes for using English in the classroom

Teachers	Purposes for using English			
	<i>Present new language</i>	<i>Elicit student responses</i>	<i>Give instructions and explanations</i>	<i>Facilitate understanding English</i>
Kim	√	√	√	√
Hoa	√	√	√	√
My	√	√	√	√
Phuc	√	√	√	√
Thu	√	√	√	
Sinh	√	√	√	

The first dominant reason for using English in the tertiary English classroom was to present a new language material such as grammar or vocabulary. Thu, for example, consciously used English to explain a structure. In the following extract, she reports that her language contained the new intended structure for students' acquisition:

R: What do you think about the language you used at that time?

Th: There was something old and something new there.

R: What was new?

Th: It was *going to move*. They are going to. (TSRI1-6)

Similarly, Phuc had an intention for students to listen to English. In the beginning of her lesson, she asked her students some questions in English, using the structure she taught them 'What's she/he wearing?' and reviewed some words related to clothes. She reported that she employed the grammatical structure in her talk to give her students a chance to listen to and acquire it:

They would remember and have a chance for revisiting the language as mentioned in your material. That means the structure was repeated and they would acquire the structure. (PSRI1-3)

All the teachers also limited their English use to giving simple instructions or explanations. My especially had a flexible principle in using English. The teacher explained that she used English for explaining something familiar to students:

It depends on what I teach them. For example, if it is familiar to students, I will use English, and if it is so abstract, I have to speak Vietnamese to save time; so later in the lesson, I spoke Vietnamese. (MSRI1-1)

She further reported that her attempt to speak English was determined by the necessity to use English (MSRI3-3), that is, whenever she found speaking English “simpler, less time-consuming and confusing” than using Vietnamese (MSRI3-4).

Asking questions to elicit students’ responses was also done in English. Observation of their lessons showed that all the teachers frequently asked questions in English to elicit the students speaking.

Lastly, most of the teachers attempted to speak English to facilitate students’ understanding of the target language and to prime them for future focused language items. In lesson one, Phuc read aloud a modified listening script in English to facilitate students’ listening to the same text in a subsequent task. Her aim was to help students recognise particular words to which she intentionally directed their attention, and to familiarise themselves with the words before listening to an audio tape.

R: At this time, you read out the listening text; did you modify it?

P: Yes. I made it simpler.

R: Why did you choose to do that?

P: because I thought that when they listened to the tape script, it would be difficult for them; they would be discouraged when they did not understand the listening, so I made it simpler so that they could do it, and get some words, and later when they listened to the tape, it would be easier for them to recognise the words and understand them. (PSRI1-3)

Likewise, in the follow-up lesson, before a listening task, My elicited in English all the necessary language, mainly new words, and explained them to support students' comprehension of what was said on an audio tape. She acknowledged that such an elicitation familiarised the students with the phonological and orthographical features of new words. She said, "In fact when they listened, they got used to the sound and then spelling written on the board" (MSRI3-5).

Hoa added, "[Students] would get used to the English sounds, at least something" (HSRI3-3). The account of her purpose in telling the story in English as mentioned so far would also seem to support this.

6.2.3.3. *Factors influencing the use of English*

The teachers' limitation of English use to certain purposes in their general English classrooms is explainable in terms of the reasons they gave for switching back to Vietnamese. The data across all the cases revealed that several factors mediated the code switching from English to Vietnamese (Table 6.6.).

Table 3

Factors influencing the teachers' use of English

Teachers	Factors					
	<i>Student proficiency</i>	<i>Ensuring comprehension</i>	<i>Time pressure</i>	<i>Complicated explanations</i>	<i>Mood</i>	<i>Motivating students</i>
Kim	√	√	√		√	√
Hoa	√	√	√	√	√	√
My	√	√	√	√		
Phuc	√	√		√		
Thu	√	√	√	√		
Sinh	√	√		√		

All the teachers were concerned that speaking English all the time could not ensure students' comprehension, and this was particularly related to student English proficiency. Because of their generally poor level of proficiency, the teachers chose to switch back to Vietnamese some times to ensure that the

students understood the lesson content. For example, Phuc expressed this worry when she explained a task her students were going to do:

Vietnamese, I spoke English and then Vietnamese because I was afraid they did not understand. (PSRI1-5)

Thu expressed a similar concern for comprehension of the structure she was teaching:

At that time I used Vietnamese the last time to talk about that model, to make sure everyone could get the model structure into their mind although they might have got it before. There I used Vietnamese to ensure they understood. (TSRI 1-3)

The concern for poorer students' ability to understand English emerged as a worry for Hoa. This teacher "felt afraid that the students did not understand" although she believed, "If I had paused and waited, the students could still have guessed. However, I am often afraid that the poor proficiency students cannot understand" (HSRI1-1).

This belief, in fact, underpinned her purposeful use of English. She reported that she used English merely to address good proficiency students who she believed could understand it. She had little confidence in the poor proficiency students comprehending her English at all. The following statement supports the fact that the teacher had a very clear purpose in speaking English versus Vietnamese:

At this time, I wanted to target other students because if they understand it in English then they will develop a thinking habit in English. I wanted to direct to good students and thought they could answer the question. For weak [poor proficiency] students they would have no response whether it be Vietnamese or English. In such a mixed level class, I wanted to have a variety [switch between English and Vietnamese] to meet different needs; and I really tried to speak English to make the class more active after I started in Vietnamese. If I had spoken English right from the beginning, it would have been too difficult for them. (HSRI1-1)

Her experience with the general students' limited ability to understand English in communication might be a source of her belief in switching languages, which she called "a principle of teaching general English." At the heart of such code switching was a concern for students' comprehension. She recalled:

...At that time, I felt that the students did not show comprehension, so I saved time by using the mother tongue, if I had spoken English as I planned, I was afraid they would have lost me, so I stopped to use Vietnamese; then I spoke English again later. Often this is just like a principle in teaching general English classes. That is, sometimes I speak English and sometimes Vietnamese. Mostly I have to do translations. If I want to tell them something in English, I have to tell them in Vietnamese in advance, or I speak English and then translate it into Vietnamese. It may be a summary of what I speak in English. That is, I really want my students to understand the lesson. (HSRI1-3)

The following extract from a recall session with Kim strongly confirms the fact that the level of students and a concern for comprehension mediated the teacher's action to switch code.

R: Yeah! You were asking him three times.

K: [Laugh] I gave up. Maybe I could have done something else to simplify it. However, I thought the whole class were just listening and using these questions, but he could not understand, so the only way was to speak Vietnamese. How can you simplify that question? (KSRI2-5)

Explaining complicated concepts was another reason why most of the teachers wanted to switch to using Vietnamese. One teacher admitted, "Usually for something hard to understand, I use Vietnamese" (TSRI 1-3). Another teacher would use Vietnamese whenever she found that "using English would confuse students" (MSRI3-4). Another one would also translate into Vietnamese what she said if it was difficult or complicated to understand in English: "Of course, for some simple things I do not translate, but for some difficult things I have to translate" (SSRI1-6). For Hoa, grammar is something complicated, so when teaching it, she tended to use Vietnamese. When proceeding to a grammar section

in her lesson, Hoa started to speak Vietnamese, and when asked why she did so, she answered:

That was when I began to teach grammar. Usually when I teach grammar I use it. It would save time. (HSRI3-10)

Time pressure seemed to be a factor mediating her use of English. It was also found to creep in other teachers' decisions to use Vietnamese. When asked about switching between English and Vietnamese in her lesson, My explained:

In fact, speaking English all the times would be good, but in some cases the focus was not on giving instructions, so like in this task, I wanted to save time for their listening to the tape...in saying 'you' I would have to check again 'Who is you here?' Then it would take time and they would get confused, so I asked in Vietnamese. (MSRI3-3)

Thu also used Vietnamese to save time in her presentation of new vocabulary. In the presentation, she first explained new words in English and then switched to Vietnamese.

For the presentation, I don't want to spend much time. At that time, I used English and anyone who could understand the word 'reservation' did catch it. Then I used Vietnamese to save time. (TSRI3-2)

Teacher mood was another factor affecting some teachers in their use of Vietnamese instead of English. Two teachers reported tiredness or expense of energy due to speaking English. Kim had an idea that speaking English would exhaust teachers: "Just imagine this way of teaching requires a lot of energy" (KSRI1-7) or "You have to spend a lot of energy speaking out the same thing five times, and they still do not understand, so instead you would rather speak Vietnamese" (KSRI1-8). Comparable to Kim, Hoa's code switching also depended upon her mood of the day. The teacher expressed this in her second lesson:

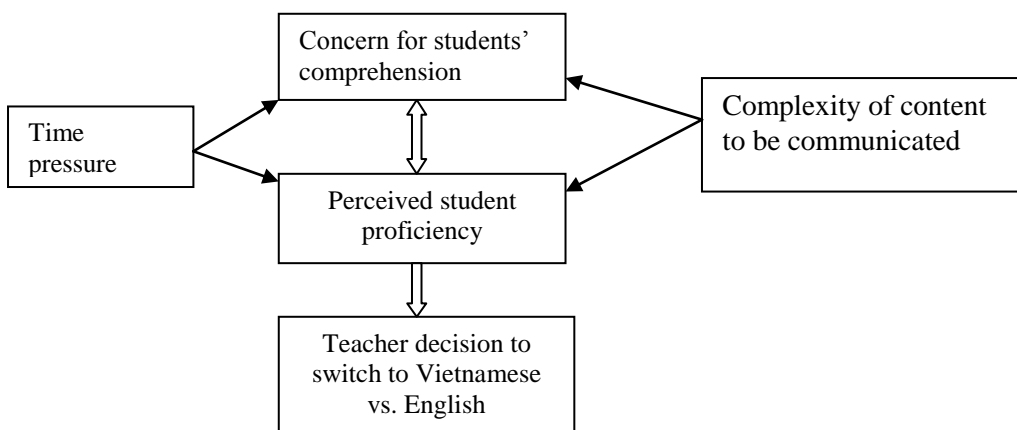
I felt tired and I did not follow what I planned, but the atmosphere was passive so I did not feel motivated to speak English as I planned, so I told myself to go directly to the lesson. (HSRI2-1)

Besides, these two teachers mentioned another reason for using Vietnamese related to motivating students. Kim expressed her feeling, “Strange that they like to hear Vietnamese. If you keep talking English, they will fall asleep. What a misery!” (KSRI2-7). Hoa similarly wanted to use English to reduce the tension in the class, to make the class atmosphere less stressful.

From the analysis above, a hypothetical relationship of the factors mediating the teachers’ decision to use English versus the mother tongue could be established. Figure 6.1 shows that a concern for comprehension and students’ level of proficiency, are at the heart of the relationship. Time pressure to finish prescribed textbook units and the complexity of what is to be said appeared to contribute to the teachers’ decision to switch to Vietnamese or maintain speaking English.

Figure 6.1

Factors underlying teachers’ use of Vietnamese vs. English



In short, the six Vietnamese EFL teachers in the current study generally conceptualised teacher input as a beneficial source of language although there were some slight differences in their conceptions. They attempted to increase speaking English in the classroom in a variety of ways comprehensible to their students. However, all the teachers had an orientation to limit its use to certain purposes such as giving simple instructions, explaining new simple linguistic rules or forms, eliciting responses, and facilitating access to spoken English. The teachers’ code switching back to the mother tongue, Vietnamese, had its root in their concern for student comprehension particularly poor proficiency students, the belief that General English students overall have limited proficiency to comprehend English, and other factors such as class time limits and the

complexity of what was to be conveyed seemed to play important contributing parts. The teachers used Vietnamese to ensure or facilitate comprehension, and translate or explain abstract concepts. Their use of Vietnamese in this way delimited optimal opportunities for students' exposure to the English input in the classroom. However, the use of L1 and translation helped the teachers to promote students' comprehension.

6.2.4. Peer input

The sense made by the six Vietnamese teachers of the language input received from classroom peers was also slightly different. Most of the teachers believed that the usefulness of peer input was limited, while the youngest teacher expressed the belief that learners provide a useful source of input. Table 6.7 shows the five aspects of peer input conceived by these teachers. It reveals that the teachers all believed in the benefit of learning new vocabulary from peers, but this depends on their proficiency levels or the quality of their interlanguage. Most were also concerned about erroneous learning due to students' lack of accuracy in using English.

Table 6.7

Conceptions of peer input across six teachers

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Aspects of peer input</i>				
	<i>Erroneous learning</i>	<i>Idea learning</i>	<i>Vocabulary learning</i>	<i>Level of proficiency</i>	<i>L1 use</i>
Kim	+		+	+	
Hoa	+		+	+	
My	+	+	+		
Phuc	+		+	+	+
Thu	+	+	+	+	
Sinh	-	+	+	-	

Kim, for example, only acknowledged the capacity of peer input under certain conditions and that it was quite dependent upon the learner's language ability. While she had the idea that mistakes from peers could harm learning, she agreed

that the students could learn good language from each other. The bottom line, she explained, was whether the students have achieved an acceptable level of English proficiency, so that their input could be optimally beneficial for generating learning opportunities. In her stimulated recall interview, she clarified that the language proficiency level of students played a role in influencing mutual learning. For Kim:

It depends on their levels. For example, if students make many mistakes, then that output is not good. If the student level is okay, they may learn from their partners besides what the teacher inputs to them...They would still pick up the language, such as new words or structures that their friends use and that they have never thought out. (KSRI1-14)

Other teachers had their views of peer input approximately resembling that of Kim. Thu, for example, appreciated the value of peer input in terms of content learning more than language learning. She said:

Usually the input is mainly the idea they can learn from each other, so before writing or speaking I would ask them to discuss. For the language or accuracy of structures, I am not sure students would benefit from each other, because their levels are just the same. (TSRI1-10)

This teacher interpreted the term 'language' as grammatical structures or sounds, and regarding these, she was not certain about the benefits of student language to peer learning because of her concern for its accuracy. Given the relatively limited proficiency levels of students, Thu expressed her doubt about its effect. Like Kim, she took students' language ability as the central aspect of peer input, but unlike Kim, she also expressed a concern for the role of attention in the process of peer learning: "If a student has good language ability, and when she speaks, she will get other students' attention. They will listen to her" (TSRI1-10). In that way, Thu believed that if a student had poor English, it would not benefit other students at all because these students would not notice what s/he said.

In the same way, Phuc and Hoa, because of their concerns for the accuracy of peer input, perceived that it had limited capacity for peer learning. Phuc merely believed that this type of input was useful to students in terms of lexical learning. She said students could share and revisit the words they had learned in pair work.

In particular, the teacher expressed her worry about students' use of L1, which likely prevented her from seeing the potential of the input:

They used Vietnamese; usually they use Vietnamese; they combine Vietnamese and English.

They use Vietnamese to discuss and sometimes they pronounce words, stress or sounds incorrectly. (PSRI1-5-6)

For the same reason, Hoa's comment on this type of input showed her idea that General English students had limited ability to produce the language that could benefit their peers. She stated, "If they [some students] mispronounce a word and it is not corrected on time or immediately, other students will imitate" (HSRI1-7). That was the reason why she did not expect her students to use the target language although she created opportunities for pair work. Her main purpose was only to allow them to work together, a sense of being together:

They had worked individually, so I wanted them to have some interaction here. Such communication was not necessarily verbal, but emotional because they could not speak English. (HSRI2-3)

With a slightly different point of view, My expressed belief in peer learning in terms of vocabulary and ideas. In the first stimulated recall session, she might identify peer input as a source of information and vocabulary, as the below quote revealed:

Later they would talk about their relatives, so it [students talking about a person] was just a preparation step for them to talk about their relatives. For good classes, that activity could have been skipped, and that source of input could have come directly from other students, for example, the information about someone they knew, and the recall of words about jobs, and their relationships in family. They only had learned some words about jobs, and they could have asked the teacher for some more words. (MSRI1-5)

However, like most other teachers, she expressed a concern for the accuracy of student interlanguage: "For student talk, I am sure it would be problematic in

pronunciation” (SRI3-5). She tended to see the benefit of pair work as giving an opportunity for students to practise output, rather than to receive input. She emphasised, “in pairs they had more chance to talk than in a group, just so” (MSRI1-5). It is necessary to note here that before the beginning of the lesson, she also expressed this emphasis on language production in teaching tertiary English students, with her belief that there is a need to develop students’ communicative ability. This evidence confirms that she was less likely to conceive opportunities for pair work as those for generating peer input.

Unlike the other teachers, Sinh represented an opposite view. She perceived peer input as having much capacity to support mutual learning. The teacher had no worry about the interference of peers’ erroneous language in their learning, and for her, it can be useful for any levels of proficiency. Her first lesson practice featured the use of peer input on several occasions. One good example was the way she built up opportunities for students sharing the words they knew, the technique she called “pyramid”. Instead of teaching vocabulary, she asked students to work in individuals, in pairs, in small groups, and finally in bigger groups to share the words they knew. She reported her thinking as follows:

...The input from students, when they come to talk to each other, would be easier for them to understand because their levels might be relatively similar. Therefore, it is more comfortable for them, I think, to listen to their classmates than to the teacher, the input from their classmates will be retained longer, and it is not certain that they would copy the mistakes from each other. I think they can realise what is wrong and what is right.

(SSRI1-13)

In general, except for Sinh, who saw the capacity of students’ interlanguage as input in generating good opportunities for peer learning, the remaining teachers (Kim, Hoa, Thu, My, and Phuc) perceived of it as having limited capacity in promoting language learning. They saw it as dependent on the quality of students’ interlanguage, particularly its accuracy. The teachers tended to think that the better English the students have, the more useful their language as input is. This pattern of viewing peer input is underpinned by a popular view of second language pedagogy that stresses linguistic form and accuracy. It seems to align with an overall synthetic view of language input as discussed so far.

6.3. Summary

The analysis so far has highlighted the fact that the six Vietnamese EFL teachers in the present study shared a conception of input primarily from a synthetic perspective on language. While this interpretation was dominant, there was evidence to show that an analytic conception of comprehensible input did figure in the teachers' practice and was somehow integrated into the teachers' thinking. The integration was manifest in their cognitive tensions, and their practice demonstrated that they employed various forms of input to achieve students' mastery of certain linguistic content targeted in their lessons of the day. Such a conception of input seemed to be consonant with what they perceived about teacher input and student input. They perceived teacher use of English in the classroom as a useful source, but they limited their English use to certain purposes relevant to achieving their pedagogical foci of teaching the linguistic content. The teachers conceptualised peer input as being limited in capacity to promote peer learning, because of their concerns for accuracy. In general, the way they conceived of input was filtered by their pre-existing understanding of the concept and, more broadly, of teaching English. External factors such as the textbook-based English syllabus they were to teach, their commitment to teaching tertiary English, their students' characteristics, and time pressures mediated their conceptions and application with regard to input.

7. TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF OUTPUT AND INTERACTION

This chapter aims to answer the question: How do the Vietnamese teachers conceptualise output and interaction? The results are presented in a cumulative manner structured into two main sections: the teachers' initial thinking about output and interaction before the workshop, and their conceptions based on their practice of output and interaction. In the latter, four main themes are analysed: a focus on target linguistic content, a concern for controlling language output accuracy, constraints on implementing output and interaction, and tasks and context.

7.1. An initial outcome-oriented conception

An analysis of the data from the initial interviews showed that all the teachers initially had a tendency to perceive output as language performance and production, but they interpreted it as the end product of teaching and learning, rather than as a vehicle or process to enable learning and acquisition. The examples of this shared conception are various. Phuc thought, "The language output is what students can use, can produce after a lesson" (PGIBa-9). Kim understood it as "How much progress students make in picking up the language" (KInI-4). Hoa viewed it as a long-term outcome of learning that the learners need to achieve:

The language output here is the long-term performance of the students whether outside or inside the classroom or whether in the examination or outside the examination, right? For example, they meet foreigners asking for directions, and they can tell them the directions. That should be the output, right? (HGIMa-6)

The teachers also believed that students should achieve this linguistic competence for their real-life purposes, for example, "to describe something in English..., to communicate, or ...to read something on the Internet or English website" (MGIMa-6). In general, they interpreted language output as the outcome required of students after the teaching and learning process.

The teachers also conceptualised language interaction as negotiation for understanding. They defined effective interaction as two-way communication in which exchanging information occurs by asking and responding to questions. Hoa mentioned comprehension and questioning for clarification as the features of good interaction: “If they do not understand what the teacher says they should ask, and by asking questions to be clarified, that is a good interaction” (HGIMa-7). Besides recognising negotiation of meaning as an important element, Kim identified the communication goal interlocutors want to achieve as one of the key features of interaction. For her, mistakes can occur in interaction: “Both interlocutors...can understand each other well even though they can make some mistakes in the language and they can get the aim that they want to get” (KInI-6). Sinh also thought interaction was an essential element in creating opportunities for mutual learning and generating feedback: “They can learn from their friends’ new words..., and they can see their friends’ mistakes and help their friends; they can recognise the gap” (SInI-8-9). Like Sinh, Phuc explained:

I think good interaction means the students can work effectively with their partners and they can learn from their partners, and their partners can find out their mistakes, and they can adjust themselves and correct their mistakes themselves. (PGIBa-12)

All the teachers believed that interaction is necessary in the English classroom. One teacher particularly stressed that without interaction, “there isn’t communication” (TGIBa-1). Another teacher emphasised its importance in the classroom saying, “in a classroom you have to interact with someone; you have to speak with someone and there must be interaction in the classroom” (PGIBa-14). For this teacher, “interaction helps students to produce or to perform what they have studied,” so that they can perform the language outside the classroom (PGIBa-14). Another teacher reported that she prioritised spoken output in the classroom because the classroom is the only context for communicating in English: “because outside the classroom, they [students] have no opportunity to speak English” (MGIMa-8). Most teachers reported that they often generated opportunities for students to practise English in the classroom or at home. Phuc gave an example of using role cards in encouraging her students to make a conversation at a restaurant situation. Thu reported she conducted output activities from controlled to free practice:

I often conduct the controlled production and free production. With the controlled production I give students handouts: some information gap activities or some charts in order that I can check at least they can use English under the teacher's control and then move on to free production. There are many choices, many questions or many prompts in order that students can talk what they want to talk with their acquisition. (TGIBa-14)

My usually created opportunities for oral interaction through discussion before her students did a main task: in "pre-listening or pre-reading" but "for output like writing, I usually let my students write at home because it takes time" (MGIMa-8). Hoa often asked her students to write for ten minutes at the end of each lesson: "usually I ask them to do writing in class and if they are not finished, I can allow them to take it home and kind of improve it" (HGIMa-8).

However, one teacher, Kim mentioned some difficulties in the implementation of interaction in her classroom. She reported rarely creating opportunities for general English students to interact in the classroom because of the students' mixed backgrounds and limited levels of proficiency. She reported, "Their backgrounds are very different and the levels of English are also different" (KInI-7). Kim further explained that the students' characteristics associated with their apparent engagement in learning also impeded her implementation: "Some of the students seem very passive, and they are not willing to participate in the classroom activity" (KInI-7). These factors, together with time pressures, hindered her from maximising opportunities for interaction in the tertiary English classroom: "with only 30 or 45 hours, with that amount of lessons [ten units], how can you create interaction in the classroom?" (KInI-7).

In brief, all the teachers, at the start, shared an outcome-oriented conception of language output although they could see interaction as an important opportunity for communication and learning in the classroom context. Some contextual limitations such as time limits, and students' backgrounds, however, had an impact on one teacher's provision of opportunities for output and interaction. Cumulative evidence about their classroom practices, and their verbal recall, built up a clearer picture of their shared conceptions of interaction and the contextual influences.

7.2. Conceptions of output and interaction in practice

This section depicts a shared conception in which the teachers saw learner output and interaction in a manner that appeared to reflect the constraints in their context and their beliefs established through practical experience with the context. Although the data showed a range of differing themes, three major common themes emerged. These involved learner output and interaction focused on the targeted linguistic content within a lesson, a concern with and control for accuracy, and contextual constraints associated with the implementation of output and interaction.

7.2.1. Focus on target linguistic content

This predominant theme describes the teachers' manipulation of output and interaction to focus on a particular linguistic content introduced in the textbook they were teaching from. All the six teachers revealed this conception in slightly different ways. A preliminary analysis of their lesson plans partly illuminated this point. Further evidence from recall comments confirmed the interpretation.

The teachers presented different lesson plans in which they were requested to optimise output and interaction. Table 7.1 shows that the lesson plans contained various specified goals. The duration of each lesson also differed, some lesson plans being longer than others are. Some appeared not to place a direct focus on output and interaction *per se* (e.g. Kim and Thu), while others (Sinh and My) seemed to have a clear focus on output and interaction. Some lessons did not indicate the time to be taught, but they were actually taught within 90 minutes (for example, those of Sinh, Phuc, and My). Oral output was given in all the lessons, whereas written output was given in some.

Despite the differences, most of the lessons seemed to aim at achieving production of a particular linguistic content introduced in the unit they were teaching. Except for Phuc whose plan did not specify any objectives, the other teachers revealed a linguistic objective although its order varied in the list. Hoa, My, and Sinh clearly gave a priority to the linguistic objective. Kim's plan gave priority to the topical objective, and the linguistic objective appeared to be just supporting. In fact, she explained, "The grammar use supports all the output parts above" (KLPI2-3). The

emphasis in Thu's plan seemed to resemble Kim's. The intentions of these two teachers would be further examined in the lesson procedure and activities as presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.1

Objectives of lesson plans for output and interaction

Teachers	Lessons	Time	Objectives	Focus
Kim	How do you get to work (Level 2)	135 min.	-Read and comprehend a short passage on the topic of travel and transportation. -Talk about how they [students] get to school/work and the trip they have just done. -Listen to some people's talks on travelling. -Write a paragraph describing how they get to school/work/travel. -Use grammatical points such as articles, present tense or past tense in both writing and speaking.	Comprehension Oral & topical Written & topical Linguistic
My	There is/there are (Level 1)	N/A	Students will be able to describe things and people using There is/There are	Oral & linguistic
Hoa	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	150 min.	-Use be going to to talk and/or write about their near future plans and because plus a clause to give the reason for the plans. -Use so plus a clause to give a consequence. -Use a number of vocabulary items related to future plans (save money, buy a new bicycle/dictionary/cell phone, move out/in, take a new course, spend less money on clothes/food, invite friends to a party, change sleeping habits, etc.)	Oral/written & linguistic
Phuc	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	N/A	N/A	None
Sinh	A day in my life (Level 2)	N/A	-Use words/phrases about daily activities fluently. -Ask/answer Yes-No and Wh-questions in present simple tense.	Oral & linguistic
Thu	Can I help you? (Level 3)	135 min.	-Read and listen for specific information. -Say what they want to buy, make decisions as well as the way to express opinions at a shop. -Talk about their shopping habits. -Use the collocations for uncountable and countable nouns.	Comprehension Oral & functional Oral & topical linguistic

Table 7.2

Procedure of lesson plans for output and interaction

Teachers	Lessons	Lesson procedure
Kim	How do you get to work (Level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T introduces vocabulary on transportation and travel. -S practise in pairs, asking and answering questions on how to get to school. -S read a passage on transportation. -S notice the use of articles in the passage. -T explains and S complete practice exercises in the book. -T introduces vocabulary about vacation activities. -S listen to people talking about their vacations. -S talk about their vacations in pairs. -S write a paragraph describing how they go to school/work or their vacation.
My	There is/there are (Level 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T presents THERE BE. -S practise the structure with a transformation drill. -S practise asking and answering the questions in pairs. -S do practice exercises in the book. -S work in pairs to ask each other about the numbers of things and people in their pictures (given by T).
Hoa	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T presents vocabulary. -S read the passage "My New Year's Resolution." -S work in pairs and discuss the reasons why some people make their resolutions (given in the textbook unit). -S report the reasons and T writes them on the board. -S work in pairs to match the reasons with the resolutions -S listen to four people talking about their resolutions and take notes. -T translates the grammar points and examples presented in the unit. -S recognize the difference between simple present and present continuous tense. -S write sentences with the verbs given in the textbook unit. -S write about their plans individually. -S go around and ask each other about their plans for this school year
Phuc	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T teaches vocabulary. -S match the resolutions with the reasons (given in the textbook unit). -S do information gap task, exchanging information about resolutions of two people. -S prepare to talk about their plans for the weekend. -S share their plans with a partner. -T correct any common mistakes during pair work.
Sinh	A day in my life (Level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -S work on the meaning of new phrases given in a list, and ask each other how often and what time they do the activities in the list. -One pair of students demonstrate the practice. -S listen to Sam's activities [on an audio] and complete the table/list. -S work in pairs, ask and answer questions to complete a chart about three famous persons.
Thu	Can I help you? (Level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T teaches vocabulary, presents reflexive pronouns, expressions to say in a shopping situation. -S practise grammar activities. -S listen to a shopping conversation. -S work in pair/group to share decisions to shop something. -S role-play the conversations.

Table 14 illustrates that the lesson activities of some teachers (My and Sinh) were consistent with their specified goals, while those of others (Kim, Hoa and Thu) were not. The structure of planned events in the lessons of My and Sinh supported the objectives they set. On the other hand, in Kim's plan, the linguistic focus was inserted before the language output practice about vacation activities, which was inconsistent with her planned goals. Hoa's lesson activities seemed to proceed in the way that a focus on meaning was preferred before the form of simple past tense was introduced, which was opposite to the objectives she listed. Thu clearly focused on presenting some linguistic forms before she provided practice of them in following activities. These forms were 'self' and common expressions used for a shopping situation. On the other hand, Phuc's sequence of activities appeared to spell out her intention to focus on meaning, that is, the practice of talking about resolutions and weekend plans. A closer look at all the lesson procedures draws our attention to the fact that they all targeted the linguistic goal set by the textbook unit the teachers were required to teach.

Further evidence from stimulated recall illuminated such a pedagogical focus. In the case of My, the form 'there be' was explicitly presented. Then a drill was used to increase students' fluency and accuracy of this form through practice. Interaction followed in pair work by means of an information gap task to provide an opportunity for contextualised use of the form. Then, there was an evaluation of whether the students used this form accurately. The following commentary illustrates My's thinking of learner output and interaction in this way.

I think although it [the interaction from pair work] was a bit inauthentic: one asked and another repeated the same model. In fact, my purpose at this stage was to give them practice of how to make and answer the questions. Therefore, this was the preparation for them to do the production stage later on. It was a bit inauthentic but useful to them, I think, because they repeated the *structure*, and they would memorise that *structure*. (MSRI2-14: emphasis added)

My emphasised that the purpose of the information gap task was to provide practice of 'there be'. Her intention to focus more on the form than communication through negotiation confirmed this tendency.

M: What I wanted was they used the *structure*.

R: Ah! Not the words?

M: Yeah! and the words would serve as support for them to ask questions and the number of the things.

R: That means you focused on the structure, not the information?

M: Yeah!...I can say both but...maybe more on the structure because, for example, they might want to say eleven people, while the picture had ten, then it did not matter because their partner could not check that information.

(MSRI2-25: emphasis added)

Hoa, on the other hand, did not attend to drilling as part of a controlled practice of language output. Her lesson similarly provided opportunities for practice toward the end of the lesson with a writing task and a speaking task. The students wrote about their own plans for the weekend, and then walked around to share this with their classmates in speaking. These output activities were deemed to give her students chances to “revisit the language” (HSRI2-14) or to “apply the language they had just learned to talk about their weekend” (HSRI2-28). She emphasised that the final objective of her lesson was “they could use ‘be going to’ to talk about their weekend plan” (HSRI2-32), which was consistent with what she wrote in her plan.

Table 14 also shows that the first output activity Kim gave was students’ pair work practice in asking and answering questions on how to get to school. She pointed out that this activity, given in the textbook, was one opportunity for students to produce output and interact with each other. In the lesson plan interview, she reported, “this section is possible because they can make a small conversation, for example, they will ask about how to go, how long it takes, why they like to take a certain transport, or so” (KLPI2-1). The comment reflected a focus on some particular questions she wanted her students to practise asking and answering. A more authentic task, she said, was that her students were required to talk about their own vacations in pairs, but the task also reflected the same linguistic focus. Following is her reflection about the pair practice of the four questions:

Any way it was a chance for them to improve English, and in pairs, they more or less had a chance to speak English, but in terms of using these questions in real life, I am afraid that this activity was not enough. There should be another situation so they could use these questions in daily life. So in the next lesson, I planned to give them another situation where they would role play going to a travel agency to ask, for example, if they want to go to Dalat City, 'How can I go there?' or 'How far?' or 'How much?' so they can know how to ask questions. (KSRI2-20)

Language output and interaction presented in Sinh's lesson occurred in what she called two "tasks". The first one required students to interview each other about the time they did particular daily activities given in a table. The focus of this task, according to Sinh, was twofold. First, it provided an opportunity for recycling the learned language or practising the learned structures. She shared this in the stimulated recall interview:

First, they asked about the activities, asked What? second about How often. Those who asked would learn how to ask, and those who answered would use adverbs of frequency, and third focusing on time, they would use prepositions of time to answer questions. (SSRI2-24)

Sinh's explanation evidently indicated a focus on linguistic forms including lexical and grammatical items targeted in her lesson. The second aim of the task, she explained, was to generate more authentic language use than the one proposed in the textbook that required students to work in pairs, reciting a person's daily activities. By authenticity, Sinh referred to the use of language to address one's own real need for communication. She believed that language use should directly bear on personal real-life activities, instead of those introduced in the textbook. That was why she incorporated into the task further words about daily routines relevant to her students' life, to generate authentic language use practice. The teacher pointed out that there was already an opportunity for output and interaction in her first lesson, where the students had played the role of a journalist and a character named Tanya to practise speaking English, recycling taught phrases about daily routines. Therefore, in the output task of this second lesson, she created a new context for the same language use. She said, "That is about their

own day, a typical day of students” (SLPI2-2), and “They could choose to ask and answer about their daily activities” (SSRI2-3).

The second task, which she called “jigsaw” as mentioned in Tables 14 and 15, was aimed at promoting student interaction as well. In this task, each pair of students received two different cards with information gaps to fill in. The cards were designed to focus on three categories of information: what daily routines some given famous persons did, how often, and when the persons did each of the activities. The pairs had to ask each other to complete the missing information. After working in pairs, some students were requested to report briefly about the typical daily activities of those celebrities. Sinh emphasised that with this task “students can both ask and answer and finally come to the same outcome” (SLPI2-5). Her reflection also revealed that the task aimed to provide students with an opportunity to practise the target language items they had been introduced earlier in the lesson. She commented, “I like this task because it reviewed what they had learned, and it helped students communicate with their friends and they learned together” (SSRI2-8). The practice is clearly associated with the kind of focused task (Ellis, 2003) where the students concentrated on utilising particular linguistic items both lexical and grammatical in describing someone’s daily activities.

Overall, there was strong evidence that the teachers tended to focus output and interaction opportunities supplied to students on the linguistic content targeted in the textbook units they were required to teach. This focus is also related to their concern for controlling language use accuracy, which is now described.

7.2.2. Concern for controlling language output accuracy

The concern for controlling the accuracy of student language output was another tendency found among the six teachers. This tendency was reflected in the various ways they attempted to ensure accurate language use.

First, the teachers helped students prepare accurate language output by providing or presenting necessary vocabulary items or grammatical structures. Presentation of new language items was even stressed as being “necessary” for learning by Thu, who explained why she needed to present some expressions for use in a

shopping situation, “Usually they say ‘I need’, it is acceptable but they can say ‘I am looking for or I’d like’ ” (TSRI2-10). Sinh’s expectation of accurate language use appeared in pre-task planning, where Sinh reviewed some grammar structures to guarantee her students’ accurate linguistic output. Sinh explained:

I wanted them to do it [make questions] by themselves before the task, because I heard some students asking inaccurate questions. They omitted the auxiliary. Instead of asking, ‘What does he do?’ they just said, ‘What he do?’ (SSRI2-7)

The second way for ensuring accurate language production involved the teachers’ manipulation to teach pronunciation of essential language items before leaving students to work in pairs. They believed that pronunciation practice would help students become both fluent and accurate in using taught forms in subsequent output practice activities. When asked about her intention to make her class read aloud some words, she answered.

I did it because I wanted to..., and prepare them for the speaking activity. It trained them to get used to the pronunciation of the words so that they could speak more fluently later. (HSRI2-5)

Sinh shared the same concern in her recall session on the follow-up lesson, “I wanted to ensure they had correct pronunciation before they produced output” (SSRI3-2).

In other words, well preparedness was part of these teachers’ conceptions regarding language output. It reflects a concern for accuracy and even a cost-benefit analysis view in teaching English to students of mixed ability. Hoa explained why she did not allow her students to make presentations as a task without preparing them for language use accuracy.

You would be very tired to correct them. Here they were all prepared, and they just needed to speak. (HSRI2-10)

Hoa expressly stated her concern for students’ making mistakes if she were not to prepare them for language use by providing them with a dialogue model. Her

concern reiterates a view of product-oriented learning where experimentation and making errors are discouraged.

They knew the right way to begin from the start, or at least they knew a way to follow. They did not have to trial and make mistakes. I was afraid they made mistakes...For General English students I think we should introduce the correct form right from the start, so they could follow the track. (HSRI3-16)

Another manifestation of the belief in the importance of language use accuracy lies in the intention of initiating interaction. My saw her interaction with students not as an opportunity for them to use language and learn from negotiation for meaning, but as a way to check their work, for the purpose of classroom management. She articulated this intention in her comment on an exchange with some of her students after these students worked in pairs asking each other about their daily routines:

It was not to get information about what their peers did [as their daily routines], but to check whether they had worked and whether they could use accurate grammatical structures, or pronounce accurate final -s. (MSRI3-11)

Delaying students' extended language output until the end of a lesson also underlies the teachers' desire to control student output for accuracy. As described in Table 7.3, except for Phuc who seemed to promote language output earlier in her lesson, the other teachers delayed output activities provided to encourage what they called 'free production' until the last stage of their lessons, suggesting that there was a concern for controlling language production for accuracy. These output opportunities were delayed until after students had been well prepared through teacher presentation of language, elicitation of necessary useful language, and delivery of controlled practice of language. Pair work was used, for example, in My's lesson, not to promote genuine interaction, but to "give them a chance to review the vocabulary and ...find [doing the exercises in the book] more meaningful" (MSRI3-1). She stated that real interaction was promoted "mainly in the later stage" (MSRI3-1).

The belief in controlling student output and interaction has become established in the thinking and practice of Kim, and this has resulted in her conception as articulated below:

It is a fact that any activity should go from control to less control. So initially, I controlled the students, but when they made the dialogue, I could not control them any more because it was when they might have created new ideas or sentences, and that is part of language acquisition; they can create utterances by themselves. (KSRI2-2)

Table 7.3

Tasks used for freer output and interaction

Teachers	Tasks used	When
Kim	- Students talk about their vacations - Students write about their vacations	End-of-lesson
My	-Students work in pairs to ask each other about the number of things and people in their pictures (given by T).	End-of-lesson
Hoa	-Individual writing about own plans -Asking around the class for future plans	End-of-lesson
Phuc	- Information gap task: pairs of students exchange their own resolutions. -Students share their own weekend plans with a partner	Mid-lesson
Sinh	-Jigsaw task: Students work in pairs, ask and answer questions to complete a chart about three famous persons.	End-of-lesson
Thu	-Decision making task in pairs and groups: students complete decisions for some shopping situations given -Role play: Students act as a shop assistant and buyer with a situation given.	End-of-lesson

Teachers' power in controlling how students want to say is also of particular relevance to such a conception. In this respect, the teacher-student relationship in the cultural context of Vietnam (as described in Chapter 2) has entitled Hoa to enforce authority to ensure that her students followed the track she wanted. Hoa recounted:

This morning I crossed out a sentence a student said. I wrote a clear model introduction: ‘Hello, everyone, I would like to tell something about a US holiday.’ The student began with ‘Today I introduce to you a holiday.’ I wrote it on the board, crossed it out, and told him never to use it again.

(HSRI3-23)

In short, although from the beginning, the six teachers exhibited an understanding of the importance of language output and interaction in the English classroom, they tended to view it from an accuracy-oriented perspective of language teaching and learning. The belief in language use accuracy was manifest in their practice in different ways, and mediated their interpretations and practice of language output and interaction. The common thread was that they manipulated learning activities to achieve the accuracy of language output, and especially oriented activities and tasks for output and interaction towards the accurate and fluent production of particular target linguistic forms prescribed in the textbook. Such a shared conception was also shaped by contextual constraints as following presented.

7.2.3. Constraints on implementing output and interaction

Constraints on implementing language output and interaction emerged throughout the teachers’ commentaries about their lessons. These constraints fell into two major groups of factors: institution-related factors, and students’ characteristics.

7.2.3.1. *Institutional factors*

The institutional syllabus based on the textbooks in use restricted what the teachers taught, and how long they should spend on teaching a textbook unit. These had an impact on how they implemented output and interaction. The lesson plans they presented directly addressed the prescribed units and the linguistic content relevant to each unit. Evidence from interviews showed that the prescribed content in the textbook influenced the way the teachers taught in relation to making optimal opportunities for students to produce output and have interaction. Kim, for example, gave an explanation about why she decided to ask a question related to a question-answer matching exercise in the unit she was teaching. In this explanation, we can see how the textbook dictated her teaching;

From the title ‘How do you get to work?’ when you introduce the lesson, you can ask a question, so the students would have to notice the question and how to answer it. The question lies in exercise 3. I turned this exercise into an oral practice. If you were asking such a question but turned to ask about advantages and disadvantages, it was not flexible and logical. For example, the advantages and disadvantages may be done in section 2 of the lesson. (KSRI2-2)

In addition, time pressure to finish the syllabus created difficulties for teaching in general and optimising output and interaction in the General English classroom in particular. The syllabus prescribed ten units to be completed within 45 class sessions or periods. This time quota somehow affected the teachers’ intentions to structure their instructional plans in, for example, four sessions per unit. A particular opportunity such as pair discussion where students could have shared their opinions about some statements was assumed to be beyond their level and potentially time-consuming. It was thus replaced with whole-class elicitation by Hoa. This teacher reported:

It was ‘What do you think?’ Before listening there is a discussion section ‘What do you think about these statements?’ so I prepared them for this discussion. Here in the book there was ‘work in pairs’ but I did not do that because they cannot do that. No! If I had had time I would have let them do that. I only asked the whole class because I did not have enough time. (HSRI3-11)

Also because of the time limitation, effectiveness in terms of accuracy was expected right from the beginning of a lesson:

My purpose was to let them listen first, so that they could imitate the conversation, so they could be correct from the start. If I had let them think and do the work by themselves, they would have used Vietnamese or asked me, and it would have wasted time. (HSRI3-11)

7.2.3.2. Student characteristics

There was also evidence that the teachers conceived of student characteristics as being an impediment to promoting output and interaction. This factor included the

limited and mixed levels of proficiency, students' lack of an active attitude to learning and communication skills or strategies.

First, the limited and mixed levels of proficiency among the majority of students made the teachers cautious in generating opportunities for language use. As mentioned, they all believed in preparing students carefully for language output practice. They mostly controlled students' use of the target language by giving a model or a guide, or delaying output opportunities until the later phase of a lesson. This is because of the teachers' belief that their students had limited ability to complete a language output task without being well prepared. Kim said, "For this *level*, if you do not give a model and just give a task and ask them to talk...even though you gave them a model, you see, their output was so bad" (KSRI2-4, emphasis added).

Students' lack of an active attitude to learning to speak English was an additional reason for the limitation of language interaction implementation. This perceived factor figured in the teachers' assumption that the Vietnamese students in General English classrooms at university were often passive in learning. Thu said, "If they had been more active, I would have got them to talk in front of the class and make their decisions" (TSRI2-7). Students' passiveness was described as "they just listen and wait to be asked to give an answer, but they seldom ask questions...; they listen passively; they do not interrupt, argue, or protest" (TSRI3-13). Thu perceived this was because "they did not take time to practise speaking, and were not used to speaking" (TSRI2-10). Kim interpreted such a learning attitude as "the students' culture of learning," an established habit of learning which was still not "learner-centred" (KSRI2-4-5). In this culture of learning, Kim said, "you [teachers] have to give them a model and then give them time to practice," or "teachers need to scaffold them and can't release them completely" (KSRI2-4-5).

Another factor perceived as hindering interaction was the incompetence in handling a conversation believed to be popular among the Vietnamese students of General English. Hoa believed, "They can't communicate or start a conversation. They do not know it yet. They will get confused and begin to speak Vietnamese" (HSRI2-8). She believed that initiating or asking questions was of great difficulty for the Vietnamese students because of their limited stock of vocabulary and the cultural value which Hoa described as "people do not like to ask questions"

(HSRI3-17). Such perceived constraints resulted in an orientation to model interaction for students by “[taking part] to ask questions, so...they would know how to maintain a conversation” (TSRI3-13), or by “[interacting with them] to give them an example so that they could work together later” (HSRI3-12). Such modelling is very much similar to what Kim mentioned so far.

The contextual limitations discussed thus far above constituted part of the teachers’ conception regarding the idea of promoting student output and interaction for learning English. They also shaped the meanings construed for communicative tasks and TBLT in the context of Vietnamese tertiary English classrooms. To examine this, I will now turn to describe Kim’s conception as a starting case and accumulate evidence from other cases to back up the description.

7.2.4. Tasks, TBLT and context

Kim’s discussion about tasks and TBLT with direct relevance to teaching tertiary English is interesting since it not only sheds light on her conception of output and interaction, but also reveals her perception of the limited potentiality of communicative tasks and TBLT. The description below addresses three themes: authentic language use and linguistically focused tasks, and TBLT and context.

7.2.4.1. *Authentic language use and focused tasks*

Kim perceived of tasks in a range between more control with less authenticity and less control with more authenticity. Her interpretation of information gap tasks can illuminate this point. Kim viewed information gap on a range from the less to more meaningful gaps. She explained how the concept was applicable in a pair practice where her students asked each other about the transport they used for travelling to school:

In fact, they practised the structures [questions] but still there was a gap like the price, or so, but this gap was not very meaningful, still under control; this gap was not very important for them because they have similar backgrounds, for example, they mostly use bicycle and in general they know how much they spend. This task is different from other communicative tasks where they need to know more information about their partners. (KSRI2-4)

Her labelling of the question-answer practice described above as a minor task distinguished from the type of “communicative tasks where they [students] need to know more information about their partners” reveals that tasks, in her mind, can have a wide range of functions from practising grammatical structures or forms to communication for meaning.

Despite her understanding that communicative tasks generate meaningful negotiation or exchange, what she provided for in this practice was “still under control.” This was because her focus at this stage was “they practised the structures.” The data indicated that Kim actually focused this practice on four questions: *how to go*, *how long*, *how far*, and *how much*. Her manipulation of the topic for practice was to create a little information gap, which, she said, made it less rigid or more meaningful to students. Kim explained that because her students came from different towns, “It was a chance for them to ask each other where they come from, how far and how long,” and the topic ‘hometown’ she wanted them to ask each other was “a new context to motivate them to talk,” but ultimately “they had to use those four questions” (KSRI2-7).

Another example of a less meaningful task was a vocabulary practice in which one student had to name the job that matched a description given by another. Kim also labelled this practice as a “minor task”, which aimed to promote language use even if it was a reproductive output, “they knew what they were saying” (KSRI2-9). This task stimulated students to recall the learned language, as she intended in the comment below:

They had a chance both to remember the words and to give a description in English. They also could learn to use verbs and some collocations, such as deliver letters, or serve drink, phrase by phrase. (KSRI2-9)

Her conceptualisation of a more authentic task was evident in her reflection on the controlled practice mentioned above. In the following comment, we can clearly see her pedagogical intention to focus on the four questions.

Anyway, it was a chance for them to improve, and in pairs, they more or less had a chance to speak, but in terms of using these questions in real-life, I am afraid that this activity was not enough. There should be another

situation so they could use these questions in daily life. So in the next lesson, I plan to give them another situation where they will role play going to a travel agency and ask questions; for example, if they want to go to Dalat City, 'How can I go there?' 'How far?' or 'How much?' so they can know how to ask questions. (KSRI2-7)

Kim attempted to generate more authentic and less controlled situations for language interaction through which her students could practise to consolidate the linguistic forms she wanted them to learn. She thought the controlled practice was insufficient to enable the students to use those intended questions if they were to respond to a real-life situation. A role-play task, she believed, would promote the most authentic use of the target questions, which in turn helped her students to develop a command of using the questions taught.

All the examples mentioned above suggest that Kim conceived of tasks on a range from less to more authentic. Nonetheless, she tended to provide the kind of tasks that oriented her students towards the output practice of some targeted linguistic content (the questions and how to answer them), rather than the kind of authentic communication tasks that stressed meaningful communication. The teacher structured and conducted her lesson in a way that gave a sense of a focus on the topic of transportation and travelling experience, but the interview data showed that her pedagogical focus was in fact more than that. It revealed her explicit purpose to contextualise the learning of some linguistic forms aimed at in her lesson. This dual focus resembles the type of linguistically focused tasks as described by Ellis (2003).

Such a dual focus in providing tasks for output and interaction was, in fact, dominant among the remaining teachers in the study as well. For instance, Sinh set up a task in which her students received a list of daily routines and were put in pairs to ask each other what routines they did, what time, and how often they did these. She explained that through this task, she wanted to create authentic language use, and focused students' attention on the practice of some linguistic structures such as adverbs of frequency and prepositions of time. Likewise, an information gap task My described in her lesson was pair work which engaged her students in asking and telling each other about two different rooms. In pairs, the students had to ask and tell about the things and people in given pictures. My

recounted that this task purported to promote interaction, but it had a dual pedagogical focus: the linguistic form ‘there be’ and the missing information that needed to be filled. She stated, however, that focusing on the form took priority. In the same way, Phuc promoted interaction by putting students in pairs to tell each other about their weekend plans. She thought this task created an information gap, which could promote real-life interaction in a way that one asked and another answered questions. Nonetheless, the task was intended not only for asking each other for information but also for providing practice of the linguistic structure that Phuc aimed to teach. This task, in her mind, generated a context, so that her students could realise when to use the taught form. The provision of focused tasks with dual purposes was likely to have relation to some contextual factors as outlined below.

7.2.4.2. Teacher beliefs and context

Kim stated that the application of TBLT depends upon multiple factors, including “the topic you teach in a lesson, [student] level, [and] the difficulty level of the language of the unit” (KSRI2-5). She claimed, based on those things, “you will decide the extent to which teachers guide [students], or give them complete freedom” (KSRI2-5). Kim continued to explain, “For students of English, you control them less because first, their language ability is relatively acceptable, and second, they are used to what way to learn from the initial year” (KSRI2-5). However, for the students of General English, she said, there should be a control of their language output practice since their levels and backgrounds are mixed.

The best way is to give them some model, and if you release them, it should be at the last level. Then, when they have achieved a certain acceptable level of English, more tasks should be introduced and they would have more independence, and so it depends on when they are ready to get on that track of learning. (KSRI2-5)

It was, therefore, clear that the question of when to insert a task for communication was important for Kim, and this, she believed, depended upon two major factors: learners’ levels of proficiency and their readiness for independent learning. Kim perceived the latter factor as a clash with “the culture of learning,”

which she saw as the learning habit established from the traditional teaching practice that Vietnamese students had previously experienced.

Other teachers additionally provided back-up evidence. My, Hoa, and Thu also agreed that the tasks provided had to depend upon students' levels of proficiency. My acknowledged that 'Strip Story' was a difficult task, and that it only suited higher-level students. Thu designed an activity called 'Find someone who...,' which she referred to as a task, for her students to merely practise asking and answering yes/no questions. She said she did not expect her low-proficiency students to be able to extend their answers. In the same vein, Hoa commented she did not believe in her students' ability to communicate or initiate a conversation in English. That was why she still found teacher-centred instruction, which she called "the culture of teaching," necessary for some classroom activities such as eliciting the whole class to talk about a picture, instead of putting them in small groups to practise talking about it. This culture of teaching appeared to be reinforced by the belief that General English students are passive and lack communication skills (Thu), which is congruent with what Kim called "the culture of learning." This, in turn, accounts for the importance of learner readiness in active learning required by TBLT.

Apart from those two major factors, the belief in good preparation was found to have an effect on Kim's decision to insert a certain type of task into her instructional sequence. Kim explained:

I cannot say exactly when to insert it. It depends on the task type. For example, if I had inserted this task [the role-play] before the oral practice activity when they could not understand these questions and had not used them a few times yet, then I wonder if that task would have been successful. Therefore, when you give a task, you have to ask whether the students have been well prepared. (KSRI2-8)

Kim, from this comment, clearly indicated that the grounding for inserting a task was when students were already taught necessary language items: "They should have enough vocabulary," and prepared with some ideas: "They understand what they need to say" (KSRI2-8).

In addition, time limits required to finish a prescribed number of units and to prepare tasks for students' learning partly prevented the teachers from providing tasks. My said that it took much time to prepare an information gap task, whereas Phuc contended that she did not have enough time to prepare a 'Strip story' even though she had an intention to trial it in her lesson. Their perception reinforced what Kim strongly believed regarding the time pressure that limited her in promoting output and interaction opportunities:

R: Would you say you have maximised opportunities?

K: To some extent, I think it was okay, with the class time allowed.

R: And if you could do something more?

K: Impossible. (KSRI2-11)

The analysis above has shown that the teachers were cautious and somewhat reluctant in employing tasks for meaningful communication in their English classrooms. They attempted to control output opportunities to achieve a desired learning outcome. Their conception of communicative language use was mediated by various factors including student levels of proficiency, student readiness for active learning, their beliefs in traditional ways of teaching and their concern for language use accuracy. Classroom interaction and communicative tasks to promote communicative output appeared to have limited applicability in the General English classrooms in the context of a Vietnamese university.

7.3. Summary

Overall, the EFL teachers in this current study had an orientation to manipulate learning opportunities, through output and interaction, mainly for the sake of language use accuracy. Their response to the optimisation of output and interaction was consistent with their shared view of output and interaction as being outcome-oriented. Factors in the educational context, including both institutional limitations and students' characteristics had an impact on the teachers' conception and implementation of output and interaction. These factors particularly shaped their thinking about tasks for communication as having limited capacity for the tertiary English students in the context of a Vietnamese university. A crucial question emerged - At what stage of teaching and learning is the insertion of communicative tasks into the teaching process appropriate for

students? The orientation of the teachers in the study is likely to have its roots in their experience in teaching tertiary English established through their years of teaching as well as professional backgrounds. The next chapter will provide an overall view of the teachers' perceptions of implementing language input, and learner output and interaction, and their perceived changes from working to think about teaching from the angle of these concepts.

8. TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTING THE SLA FACILITATING CONDITIONS AND THEIR CHANGES

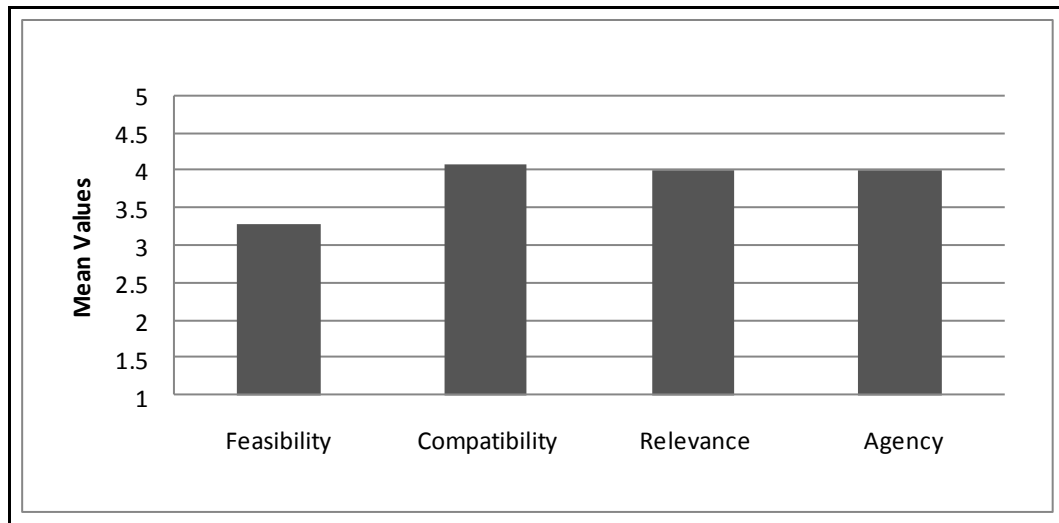
The two previous chapters have offered a detailed understanding of the teachers' conceptualisation of language input, and learner output and interaction. This chapter, taking a step back, describes an overall pattern of their perceptions and reflections on implementing these SLA enabling conditions in the General English classroom. It will present the results to the two remaining research questions: "What do the teachers think about using the facilitating conditions in terms of feasibility, compatibility, relevance, and agency?" and "What changes do the teachers perceive they have experienced from applying the concepts?" Two sources of data, questionnaire and the follow-up comments during the stimulated recall of their final lessons, were analysed to answer these questions. To answer the first question, the main data was from the questionnaire including the numerical data and verbal comments. First, the overall results of the teachers' responses including the group tendency and individual divergences will be presented. Next, each of the attributes mentioned will be analysed, with the teachers' comments inserted to justify or expand understanding. To answer the second question, of what the teachers perceived they have changed from using the concepts of language input, output and interaction, the study largely drew on follow-up commentaries embedded in their last stimulated recall interviews.

8.1. Perceptions of implementing the SLA facilitating conditions

The attitudes of the teachers toward the feasibility, compatibility, relevance, and agency in implementing the SLA concepts in General English classrooms were decided by averaging the points rated for corresponding statements related to each factor (Five-point Likert scale). Figure 8.1 presents the overall results of the six Vietnamese EFL teachers' attitudes. The graph shows that the teachers agreed that implementing the SLA facilitating conditions was compatible with their beliefs about teaching English ($M \geq 4$). They also perceived that promoting the SLA facilitating conditions was useful or relevant to the students' learning needs ($M=4.0$), and gave them a sense of agency in implementing the concepts ($M=4.0$).

Figure 3.1

Teachers' perceptions of innovation-related factors on Likert scale



(1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5= strongly agree)

Further detailed analysis is required to reveal the meanings underlying the patterns, and this involves a consideration of individual cases and qualitative comments. Following is the analysis of the teachers' perceptions of each factor. Responses to specific statements will be analysed to inform understanding.

8.1.1. Feasibility

It is evident from Figure 8.1 that the teachers, as a group, would slightly agree on the implementability of the SLA facilitating conditions within their working circumstances. Table 8.1 presents the results of each teacher's responses to four statements designed to elicit their attitudes to the contextual factors influencing the implementability of the SLA enabling conditions.

It is shown that the teachers contended with the possibility to promote the SLA facilitating conditions in their teaching circumstances ($M=4.16$). However, an analysis of their responses to each contextual factor from statements two to four reveals a more detailed picture. They disagreed that time pressure, big class, and students' lack of proficiency constrained them to implement the SLA facilitating conditions ($M \leq 3.0$). Individually speaking, some considered time pressure, big

class size and students' limited English proficiency practical constraints to their implementation, while others did not.

Table 8.1

Individual teachers' responses to feasibility statements

Statements	K	H	M	P	T	S	Mean
S1. It is possible to implement the SLA facilitating conditions within my teaching circumstances.	3	5	4	4	4	5	4.16
S2. Time pressure makes it hard to optimize the SLA facilitating conditions.	4	2	4	2	3	2	2.8
S3. Big class size limits the effective use of the SLA facilitating conditions.	1	1	4	4	3	4	2.8
S4. Students' lack of proficiency makes it difficult to promote the SLA facilitating conditions.	4	3	3	2	2	4	3.0

Time pressure was an important factor for Kim and My, while it was not a problem for Phuc, Hoa, and Sinh. Thu held a neutral attitude. As mentioned, Kim was the predominant case who asserted that contextual constraints made the implementation of the proposed conditions more challenging. Among the several particular hindrances she named, “a heavy syllabus [to be] finished in a limited time” was a difficulty (KQ). The application of the SLA facilitating conditions also meant a greater workload for teachers. According to Kim, it required teachers to expend much energy and time on preparing lessons. Given her busy schedule, including that for private evening classes, the teacher invested less commitment to teaching General English. These limitations have been already identified in the previous chapter as affecting Kim in adopting a type of ‘cost-benefit analysis’ attitude to providing optimal input and opportunities for authentic output and interaction in the classroom. My also stated the same thing: “There are not many constraints.... However, it takes teachers more time to plan their lessons before actual teaching, and sometimes, teachers are so busy with so much work” (MQ).

The mediating factor that influenced Kim to perceive negatively of the practicality of optimising these SLA facilitating conditions appeared to be her lack of willingness. She several times mentioned in the interviews about how promoting a supportive English learning environment for students depended upon each teacher's motivation. This factor was reiterated in the follow-up interview where

she commented, “When students are motivated and the teachers themselves feel motivated to teach, they will create an interesting class, and their career can also be upgraded if they are really concerned about those conditions, and that depends on each teacher” (KSRI3-5). In the questionnaire, she wrote, “even though the proposal is useful, [and] it can change the teacher methodology for the better to a certain extent, it depends on how willing the teacher is to apply this” (KQ). This teacher, in other words, appeared to exhibit a negative attitude toward the applicability of the SLA concepts due to both contextual factors and her lack of willingness.

Large class size was more a difficulty for My, Phuc and Sinh than for the other teachers. Observation revealed that there were more students in these teachers’ classes than in the others’, and it could be the reason why it was a problem.

Students’ limited English proficiency also made it hard for Kim and Sinh to implement the SLA concepts, especially interaction, effectively. My and Hoa had an unclear decision, and for Phuc and Thu it was not a problem. Kim wrote in the questionnaire that along with the time limit, the student characteristics such as their limited, unequal levels of proficiency, and their lack of activeness, hindered them from “participating in group work and other forms of interaction” (KQ).

In brief, while some contextual factors were constraints for some teachers rather than others in implementing the SLA facilitating conditions, as a group, the teachers tended to take a slightly positive attitude toward the feasibility of implementing language input, output and interaction.

8.1.2. Compatibility

Figure 8.1 reveals that most of the teachers found the proposed idea to be harmonious with their existing principles of teaching English. Table 8.2 shows their perceptions in detail.

Most of the teachers perceived that the use of the SLA conditions was consistent with their prior principles in teaching General English (M=3.8). Accordingly, teaching English, they believed, needs to create optimal conditions for second language acquisition in the classroom (M=4.3). Phuc stated, “This is a very necessary thing to do because students should get the best from the lesson” (PQ).

Table 8.2

Individual teachers' responses to compatibility statements

Statements	K	H	M	P	T	S	Mean
S5. Promoting the SLA facilitating conditions fits my principles of teaching General English.	4	4	4	4	3	4	3.8
S6. Teaching English needs to maximize the conditions for second language acquisition in the classroom.	5	5	4	4	3	5	4.3
S7. Opportunities for using English in interaction should be increased in General English classes.	5	5	4	4	5	5	4.6
S8. Teachers should provide General English students with extensive comprehensible input.	5	4	3	4	3	5	4.3

Hoà also added that without the use of English in the classroom, it is difficult to improve student English given the lack of English environment in the socio-cultural context (HQ).

The nature of compatibility varied from one teacher to another. Phuc emphasised that one of her principles of teaching English was to enable students to use the language after each lesson, and admitted that the proposal worked to support her students in studying English more effectively (PQ). In contrast, Hoà explained the compatibility of promoting the SLA facilitating conditions with her belief in terms of provision of comprehensible input. She said, "I always think that teachers need to provide models of language and prepare students carefully about language and structures before they produce output, so I always try to optimise input by using different presentation techniques to ensure it is best presented" (HQ). Although the comment revealed a synthetic view of language input as reported in Chapter 6, working with the idea of providing rich and comprehensible input seemed to allow the teacher an opportunity to construct her own understanding of language learning and teaching, which may have been useful for her development. Kim's overall belief fit the idea underlying the SLA concepts as well. She said, "They fit my principles of teaching English," but she admitted that there were constraints on applicability: "To do this, it requires a big reform not only in teachers' methodology, curriculum, but also in students' learning styles and strategies" (KQ). She explicitly acknowledged, "Due to the constraints..., I actually used some parts of the proposed, not all" (KQ). Thu specifically stressed that her

teaching principles placed a greater emphasis on language output, “the condition for second language use” than the others (TQ). She reported that in her previous practice, she had tried to design activities for pair work and group work and language production (TQ). This comment may account for why the teacher did not strongly perceive the idea of optimising the SLA facilitating conditions to be consistent with her personal principles of teaching English. My also rated neutral for the idea of providing rich comprehensible input, and this seemed to coincide with her idea of feeding vocabulary to the students during tasks instead of creating an input-rich exposure by means of texts as mentioned in Chapter 6.

8.1.3. Relevance

Regarding the relevance of optimising the SLA facilitating conditions, Figure 8.1 shows that the teachers tended to contend that the idea of promoting facilitating SLA conditions was relevant to their students’ learning needs and was able to engage the students in learning English. Table 8.3 shows that, as a group, they agreed that if opportunities conducive to SLA are promoted, this will better meet the student needs, and that their students want to improve their English communicative ability.

Table 8.3

Individual teachers’ responses to relevance statements

Statements	K	H	M	P	T	S	Mean
S9. Promoting the SLA facilitating conditions can meet the learning needs of General English students better.	3	4	4	4	5	4	4.0
S10. My General English students want to develop communicative ability.	4	3	4	5	4	5	4.1

In particular, Sinh clarified, “since the students’ needs when studying English are to communicate, the proposal helps me meet their demands” (SQ). Phuc also admitted, “Students were actively engaged in and showed their interest in those activities,” or “the facilitating conditions brought positive results and good responses from students” (PQ).

Kim and Hoa, on the other hand, held divergent views. Both teachers were not very strongly convinced about the benefits of optimising these facilitating conditions to their students' learning although they tended to perceive more positively of the benefits to student learning. Their perceptions of the benefits were related to practical circumstances and student levels. Kim said, "If all of the constraints were minimised," the optimisation of those conditions would help promote the students' learning (KQ). She specifically observed that student proficiency levels constituted one of the constraints: "Students who are not able to communicate in English seem to be relatively de-motivated since they cannot catch up with their peers and grasp what the teacher explains in English" (KQ). This comment finds support from Hoa, who, despite her agreement with the usefulness of the idea, admitted that it was more beneficial to the learning of good students than poor ones. She said, "The poor-proficiency students would feel bored because they would not be able to catch up" (HQ).

8.1.4. Agency

Figure 8.1 further illustrates that the teachers had an absolute agreement on the agency they owned in promoting the SLA facilitating conditions in their English classrooms. Table 8.4 below shows their responses to statements 11 to 14 in detail.

Table 8.4

Individual teachers' responses to agency statements

Statements	K	H	M	P	T	S	Mean
S11. The proposed idea of promoting SLA enabling conditions imposed on my way of teaching.	3	3	2	2	1	1	2.0
S12. The proposal still allowed me to retain my own style of teaching.	4	5	4	4	4	4	4.1
S13. I had control over what and how I was teaching in applying the concepts of SLA enabling conditions.	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
S14. The proposal allowed me to take an active part in improving my teaching practice.	4	5	4	5	4	5	4.5

As a group, the teachers disagreed with statement 11, which elicited their perceptions of the extent to which the proposed idea imposed on their way of teaching (M=2.0). Logically, they agreed with statements 12 and 13 that they

were still able to keep to their preferred ways of teaching and that they had control over how to apply the idea of SLA facilitating conditions (M=4.1, and M=4.0 respectively). They were also content that it allowed them to participate actively in the process of improving their teaching (M=4.5).

The teachers concurred that they could still keep to their same routines of practice while working to maximise opportunities for SLA. In particular, Sinh reported, “My teaching style was still not different when I optimised the facilitating conditions” (SQ). Sinh added, “I could find ways to implement the proposal without changing my teaching style” (SQ). Sinh clarified that she followed “two main teaching approaches: P-P-P and task-based to help students develop their communicative competence, [and] the proposal worked well without interfering with my teaching style or forbidding me from applying the two main approaches” (SQ). For Thu, the proposed concepts were not an imposition on her way of teaching, but “offered me more techniques and ideas in teaching” (TQ).

The results mean that they were in a position to have a strong sense of agency in exercising the SLA concepts, a point made in the study and carried out during the process of data collection. Except for some controlled conditions under which they had to, for example, produce lesson plans, and write down their reflections, which most of them had seldom done after one or two years of teaching, the teachers were encouraged to implement the SLA knowledge, as they felt appropriate. The self-report about the total agency they had in implementing the innovative ideas appear to suggest that the six Vietnamese teachers might not change their practice. However, we cannot deny something might have happened in the process. The question is whether there was any impact on the teachers as they worked to apply the SLA concepts of language input, output and interaction? In what ways did the teachers learn from working with the SLA concepts? The subsequent section will address this.

8.2. Teachers’ reported changes

Concerning the question on teacher learning from using the SLA facilitating conditions, the data from interviews revealed some changes the teachers perceived to be attributable to the process of attempting to apply the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions. One thing was that all the teachers became more cognizant

of these conditions in classroom practice. Another thing was the raised awareness reported to have links with the stimulated recall sessions and application of the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions. There was also evidence that the teachers became more reflective of their work, and they broadened their views on teaching English.

8.2.1. Becoming cognizant of SLA facilitating conditions

The most prominent theme from follow-up comments embedded in the last stimulated recall interviews was that working with the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions provoked their thoughts of and raised their attentiveness to them in teaching. Attempts at applying these concepts prompted one teacher to think extensively about her lessons. Thu noted, “Teachers have to be thoughtful of their lessons because the classes are various and mixed. Teachers have to think a lot, and if they keep doing that, they will improve their teaching” (TSRI3-16). Hoa said that she was unaware of having applied them in her previous practice: “Before this project, I also taught in such a way, but I could not figure out whether something was input, output or feedback and their importance in a lesson. I only finished my duty [lesson] and did not reflect on it” (HSRI3-22). The process of engaging in the project, she stressed, did assist her to become more conscious of the SLA concepts in teaching; she even became more reflective: “I am more aware of them, and I should try them and pay attention when applying them to see if they work” (HSRI3-22).

Similarly, My noted that she had applied the concepts before but was unaware of them. Having an opportunity to learn and apply the concepts boosted her practice in a way that she became more conscious of applying them in her teaching: “I think I have used these conditions before but kind of unaware of them, and now I have used them with more consciousness” (MSRI3-12-13). For Sinh, working with the concepts stimulated her to ponder on the nature of the facilitating conditions: “how input should be, how output and feedback should be to benefit students the most” (SSRI3-14). She believed that the conditions were compatible with what she knew about the P-P-P model. However, Sinh acknowledged she became better aware of the important role of input, what she noted to be her new experience when using the concepts. She said, “Through your workshop and the

first lesson I prepared and taught, I have learned how important input is” (SSRI3-14), and she continued to remark, “When we teach according to a textbook...we may forget the role of input,...an important condition to enable students to produce output” (SRI3-14).

Becoming more reasoned and purposeful in actions was one of the important findings emerging from the data. It shows how the teachers changed conceptually. My noted this.

To some extent, they [the concepts] have made my activities more meaningful and effective. Before, I only thought I had to do this and that, but did not think about why I did so... but now knowing these conditions, I will do something more purposefully. (MSRI3-12-13)

Thu added, “I have a reason to do something...I know what to do where, and I have a strong argument for it” (TSRI3-16).

8.2.2. Broadening views on teaching and learning English

Broadening views of teaching and learning English is another perceived change the teachers reported from working with the SLA concepts. Sinh reported evidence about her broadened view of input in terms of looking at the concept from the perspective of SLA. She recognised that, “Our input means giving students a reading or a listening text and doing a task, but the presentation in P-P-P is only teacher talk...but this talk is kind of boring” (SSRI3-12). Sinh’s report also finds support from other teachers though in a different way. Thu explicitly stated, “It [the application] has given me a broader view, for example, why I should choose one task instead of another” (TSRI3-16). This widened perspective of Thu is in much the same way as teaching became more conscious as reported by My. The change in viewing their teaching is likely to be the result of becoming aware of the SLA concepts in practice. My shared her reflection in which she commented on thinking about her lessons in a way not merely restricted to the present-practice-produce model:

...before when I planned a lesson I did not pay much attention to them. I only thought a lesson would have to follow stages like P-P-P or so, but I did not

pay attention to these conditions. When you pay attention, I think, no activities you create are redundant. (MSRI3-13)

8.2.3. Promoting teacher consideration of using tasks

The application of the SLA facilitating conditions has also led to consideration of applying tasks to promote learning although this was not common across the teachers. Thu pointed out what she learned from the workshop sessions was “what we try to do to optimise it [each condition],” and the idea of optimisation provoked her rationalized decision on “what task was appropriate to select” (TSRI3-16). Similarly, Sinh wrote in the questionnaire that the idea of promoting SLA facilitating conditions motivated her to “design more communicative tasks for the students” (SQ).

To sum up, the most obvious effect of using the SLA facilitating conditions on the teachers was their higher attentiveness to SLA in practice. Learning the SLA concepts also helped them to perform more purposeful classroom actions. Some teachers also began to look at English teaching and learning from a broader perspective, particularly toward viewing language teaching from the SLA perspective. Importantly, working from the concepts encouraged some teachers to think about selecting appropriate tasks to provide optimal learning opportunities. In general, as Kim concluded, “Those principles can be used in class, and the teachers would professionally become more expert” (KSRI3-17).

8.3. Summary

This chapter has so far presented the results for research questions ii and iii of the study. For question ii regarding the teachers’ perceptions of issues related to promoting the SLA enabling conditions such as rich comprehensible input, and opportunities for output and interaction in teaching tertiary English, the data analysis offers evidence to conclude that the teachers had an overall positive orientation. They perceived positively of most of the attributes facilitating the implementation of a new idea. First, and most importantly, approaching teaching from promoting SLA facilitating conditions granted them agency in applying the knowledge. Second, the teachers perceived that this way of approaching teaching worked along with their personal principles of teaching tertiary English. They also

perceived working to promote opportunities for SLA such as providing comprehensible input and output and interaction would help their students learn better. In terms of feasibility, the perception was not very positive. It seemed possible for the teachers to maximise opportunities for SLA in their teaching context although for some teachers, time pressure, student proficiency and big class size were practical hindrances. Especially, the most experienced teacher expressed a negative attitude toward the feasibility of the idea. What hindered her from making an optimal use of the SLA facilitating conditions were some contextual limitations she experienced and her underlying unwillingness to adopt the idea. Concerning research question iii, teacher perceived changes in their knowledge and practice, if any, from working to promote the learning conditions, three findings emerged. One important finding was that they all became thoughtful and more aware of the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions in teaching. Another finding was that they became more rationalised in planning and teaching their lessons, and some teachers had their views on learning and teaching English broadened toward a more holistic SLA perspective. Finally, promoting learning from the perspective of promoting SLA facilitating conditions made some teachers think carefully about the type of tasks selected for use in their lessons.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will address the research questions in the light of the theoretical framework and previous research set out in Chapters 3 and 4. It first restates the research questions with their corresponding findings and raises some questions for the discussion that centres on three major issues: what view of language learning and teaching underlies the conceptions of SLA held by the six Vietnamese EFL teachers, what factors shape their conceptions, and what enables their perceived change. Then, the chapter continues to discuss theoretical and pedagogical implications for second language and EFL teaching and teacher development in Vietnam. The chapter then points out the limitations of the study and suggests directions for further research.

9.1. Research questions and summary of findings

Each of the research questions and corresponding findings are presented below.

Q ia: How do the teachers interpret and address language input in the tertiary English classroom?

- The notion of comprehensible input was conceptualised in the light of a synthetic view on language in which language input entails the discrete language items to be instructed.
- Teacher use of the TL (English) was perceived as a useful source of input, but its implementation was limited to some pedagogical purposes. Switching to Vietnamese was related to contextual factors rather than teacher proficiency.
- The more experienced teachers mainly saw peer input as having limited capacity in language learning, depending on learner levels of proficiency. In contrast, the youngest teacher embraced its capacity.

Q ib: How do the teachers interpret and address learner output and interaction in the tertiary English classroom?

- Language output was interpreted as both language production and outcomes achieved after learning, and interaction was understood as two-

way communication in which students negotiated, asking and answering each other's questions.

- Learner output and interaction were perceived to have an important role in second language learning, but language production in the teachers' practice was instantiated in a way that encouraged students to practise focused language items.
- Both learner and institution-related factors constrained the provision of authentic language interaction.

Q ii: What do the teachers perceive of the feasibility, compatibility, relevance, and agency in implementing SLA facilitating conditions in the tertiary English classroom?

- Overall, the teachers agreed that promoting conditions conducive to SLA was feasible, compatible, relevant, and gave them a sense of agency. However, some teachers had some difficulties in implementation, and the most experienced teacher was not convinced about the feasibility.

Q iii: What changes, if any, do the teachers report they have experienced from working to promote the SLA facilitating conditions in the tertiary English classroom?

- The teachers reported raised self-awareness and professional expertise as they worked to apply the SLA concepts.

The results listed under each research question above raised the following questions for discussion.

- 1) What view of L2 learning and teaching might underlie the way the Vietnamese EFL teachers interpreted and addressed the SLA facilitating conditions?
- 2) What factors mediated the teachers' conceptions of the SLA facilitating conditions?
- 3) What possibly enabled the changes reported by the teachers?

The discussion of these four questions will be situated within the wider literature about teacher learning and thinking in general and about aspects of SLA or

approaches associated with aspects of SLA theory as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

9.2. Teachers' conceptions of L2 learning and teaching

This part of the chapter first discusses the findings of the teachers' views on each SLA facilitating condition in relation to the literature reported in Chapters 3 and 4. The discussion then is extended to include consideration of a broader conception of L2 learning and teaching that underlie.

9.2.1. Teachers' conceptions of language input

The results reported in Chapter 6 and summarised under Question ia above have revealed that the teachers initially shared an overall conception of language input from a synthetic or linguistic point of view on language. Accordingly, they all had an orientation towards interpreting input as the pedagogical focus of their lessons, or the predetermined discrete linguistic material such as a grammatical or lexical item intended for learning and mastery. The teachers brought such a view with them in the process of making sense of the principle of comprehensible rich input from an analytic view on language, which refers to language as a means of communication, or integrated language samples used to address the message. The study showed that the teachers attempted to assimilate the latter meaning of input into their existing understanding in such a way that they mobilised the various forms of input (e.g. texts, teacher talk, audio recordings) to prime the learning and mastery of certain predetermined linguistic elements presented in the textbooks. In this respect, the teachers appeared to have encountered a cognitive restructuring in which their previously dominant understanding of input from a synthetic standpoint shaped their attempts to interpret and implement the notion of rich comprehensible input introduced to them. This way of making sense of language input, as Saleemi (1989) posits, reveals the impact of a structuralistic and synthetic view on language. It also points to a process of learning from a constructivist perspective underlying the current study as mentioned in Chapter 4.

The value the teachers attached to teacher use of English based on their practice in the classroom and their reported thinking, which was constrained by multiple factors, resonates with previous research. In particular, the study confirms that the

use of TL in the foreign language classroom is often restricted due to both personal and contextual constraints (Bateman, 2008, Duff & Polio, 1990, Macaro, 1995, 2001, Turnbull, 2001). However, unlike previous research which showed teacher lack of proficiency as an impediment to teacher use of the TL to provide for optimal learning (e.g., Howard & Millar, 2009; Gorsuch, 2000), the current study indicated that the six Vietnamese teachers' English proficiency was not a barrier, given their English education background (Table 2, Chapter 5). Rather, according to the data, factors such as class time pressure to finish lessons, student limited English proficiency, and teacher concern for weak students' comprehension collectively influenced the teacher to switch to Vietnamese. It also appeared that class time played a significant role in mediating the teachers' use of English. The limitations of teachers using English in the classroom echo a caution made about the notion of maximal TL use in foreign language classrooms as previously noted in section 3.1.1.2 (e.g., Cook, 2001; Macaro, 1995, 2001).

With respect to peer input, the more experienced teachers tended to hold a selective view on its usefulness, seeing the benefits of the input as dependent upon student levels of proficiency. They admitted the potential of peer input in promoting lexical learning, while they expressed a concern for grammatical and phonological accuracy and especially the insertion of L1 in the learner interlanguage. Such a view reflects a common worry that peer work generates a type of poor interlanguage input, which is not as useful for learning as that of a native speaker. This may be also because the teachers have developed a strong belief in form and accuracy and experienced years of teaching university students whose English proficiency is usually lacking, as mentioned in Chapter 1. On the other hand, the fact that the least experienced teacher had confidence in the capacity of peers to facilitate language learning was perhaps conceivable in terms of her novice experience with teaching General English students. In addition, her training in SLA and task-based methodology (Table 3, Chapter 5) could partly shape her initial pedagogical ideas regarding the effectiveness of pair and group work. The teacher asserted, "I use the P-P-P and the task-based approach in my teaching" (SQ).

Teacher conceptions of language input could be associated with their response to the principle of generating exposure to rich and comprehensible input. In

particular, from my observation, some teachers brought into their classrooms further input resources in the form of written texts and audio recordings. These sources, however, aimed to promote the recurrence of intended language items for learning and mastery, or introduce more vocabulary items to students. Although such attempts reflect a way of incorporating further language input, they are far from affording an input-rich environment as can be seen in the exploitation of extensive reading (e.g., Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Green, 2005). In other words, their interpretations and responses to the use of rich comprehensible language input conformed to a synthetic perspective on language, which the teachers exhibited before the workshop on input.

9.2.2. Teachers' conceptions of output and interaction

The teachers' views on peer input described above seem to have links with the ways they conceptualised and addressed learner output and interaction in practice. The findings under Question 1b above suggest that, contrary to the Greek pre-service teachers' perceptions reported in MacDonald, Badger, and White (2001), the Vietnamese teachers in the current study expressed an understanding of and belief in the importance of learner output and interaction for promoting second language learning. The perception was more like that of the teachers in the study conducted by Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores, and Dale (1998). However, their orientation to conduct output and interaction activities with a clear focus on the linguistic content intended for mastery is reflective of a product-oriented conception of teaching, and is quite comparable to what was found in previous research. In particular, to promote learner output and interaction, the Vietnamese teachers in the study inserted communicative activities to create a context for communication, and the activities designed and conducted pertained to the type of linguistically focused tasks (Ellis, 2003). These tasks were used to support meaningful practice of language use described as a weak approach to tasks (Skehan, 1996), which has been indicated in some studies on curricular innovations in Hong Kong primary schools (e.g., Carless, 2003, 2007), and the Thai tertiary context (Watson Todd, 2006). Such a view is also in line with the conception that learner interaction in pair work is to serve the purpose of practising target language forms reported by Thai instructors of English (McDonough, 2004). Although the Vietnamese teachers in the current study did

not explicitly express the view that peer interaction induces learners to produce inaccurate target language forms as the Thai instructors did (McDonough, 2004), they, in quite a similar way, expressed doubts about the learning opportunities contributed by student talk in pairs and groups, given their concerns for student language accuracy. This reflects what Thien Hiep (2009) observed regarding Vietnamese EFL teachers' concern for grammatical accuracy over communication skills.

9.2.3. Teachers' conceptions of English learning and teaching

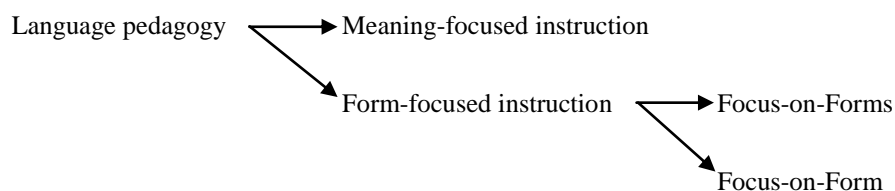
It could be argued that if we see language input, and output and interaction as essential conditions for fostering SLA, the Vietnamese EFL teachers' conceptions of them may represent their perspective on L2 learning. As mentioned in Chapter 4, since conceptions of learning correlate with teaching approaches (Goodyear & Hativa, 2002), the teachers' perspectives on L2 learning may manifest the pedagogical approach they believe in and use. Furthermore, an approach defined by a theory of language and a theory of learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001) is underpinned by a conception of language teaching (Benson & Lor, 1999; Freeman & Richards, 1993). Therefore, it is possible to infer the conceptions of the Vietnamese EFL teachers about English learning and teaching from their conceptions of the SLA facilitating conditions. In line with the idea that discussions about language pedagogy need to examine the conceptions of teaching to inform language teacher education and development (Freeman & Richards, 1993), this section will attempt to reveal the pedagogical view of these Vietnamese EFL teachers in relation to the conceptions of language teaching proposed in the literature.

In the light of perspectives on language and language syllabus (Long & Crookes, 1992, Wilkins, 1976) mentioned in Chapter 3, the Vietnamese teachers' perspective on ELT, as reflected through their conceptions of language input and output and interaction, could be aligned with a synthetic view. This view, as mentioned, represents a conception of language pedagogy primarily oriented to target language forms and accuracy, as opposed to an analytic view, which represents language pedagogy oriented to communicative meaning or fluency.

It is necessary to recall that there seemed to be a tension between these two views of language pedagogy in the development of L2 teaching methodology with regard to form and meaning. Beginning with a primary concern for linguistic forms under the influence of Structural Linguistics (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), views about language pedagogy have developed. With the introduction of CLT, primary attention is shifted to communicative meaning. According to Brumfit and Johnson (1979), during the 1970s, communicative meaning began to have a considerable influence on language teaching, with the embrace of the Communicative Approach and the concept of communicative activities. In the subsequent decade, there emerged an ongoing interest in task-based approaches (Skehan, 2003), which also stress communicative meaning. A focus-on-forms and a focus-on-meaning, as Bruton has noted, are “mutually exclusive categories” (p.3). These two pedagogical views seem to be recapitulated in the two major strands of language pedagogy suggested by Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (1999) as shown below.

Figure 4.1

Basic options for language pedagogy (reproduced from Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 1999, p.2)



In their model as illustrated in Figure 9.1, language teaching can be “directed at engaging learners in acts of communication where their attention is primarily directed at understanding and/or conveying message content,” (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 1999, p.2) without reference to linguistic form (Ellis, 2001). It can also draw the learner’s attention to “linguistic forms and the meanings these convey” (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 1999, p.2). Form-focused instruction is further divided into a focus-on-forms and a focus-on-form (Ellis, 2001). According to Ellis, a focus-on-form occurs in the context where learners concentrate on getting their message across, while a focus-on-forms engages the learner’s attention to pre-selected forms either explicitly or implicitly, isolated from the context of communication.

In light of the model above, it is possible to refer to the six Vietnamese teachers' approach as a focus-on-forms. However, it is of note that their perspective is not completely structuralistic in the sense of a mere focus on target language forms or structures with the exclusion of communicative meaning. There was evidence in the study that the teachers paid less attention to communicative meaning than to linguistic forms. They gave priority to the linguistic focus (e.g. grammatical or lexical items) in their lessons, and used it to guide their planning and teaching actions in the classroom. They also worked to increase meaningful language use practice by generating information gaps or personalising topics, so that their students could attain an accurate and fluent production of the target linguistic content. The point is that these activities were delayed until after the students were well prepared for the language and ideas. Meaning-focused activities rarely took a preferred position in the lessons of the teachers. It appeared that in their minds, authentic communication was only possible after the students were well 'fed' with adequate vocabulary, grammar and possibly what ideas to express. But this does not mean that communicative meaning never occurred in their lessons. Although the data may represent a snapshot of what the teachers think and do, their pedagogical understanding constructed and manifested in their explicit verbalisation and classroom practice reflects the reconciliation between a focus on forms and a focus on communication. Their pedagogical conception or approach, therefore, perhaps resembles task-supported teaching (Ellis, 2003).

Littlewood's framework also contributes to understanding the conception and practice of the Vietnamese EFL teachers in this study. As represented in Table 9.1, the teachers' shared conception could represent a point of progression along the continuum of a focus-on-forms and a focus-on-meaning. The table shows that the teachers progressed from a focus-on-forms approach with which they were familiar toward a meaning-focused approach represented by CLT and TBLT. On the scale, the classroom activities they conducted approached the right end although the teachers did not take meaning as the central tenet for organising classroom activities. Among the five types of language activities as described below, the teachers can be seen to have reached the fourth (structured communication). Authentic communication, as they perceived it, remained inapplicable to the levels of their students. The teachers considered that way appropriate given the constraints they encountered. The utility of communicative

tasks would be dependent upon many factors as has been already documented (See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2, and Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4).

Table 9.1

Vietnamese EFL teachers' view on English teaching on Littlewood's framework (Littlewood, 2004, p.322)

←----- X -----→				
Focus on forms	←		→	Focus on meaning
Noncommunicative language learning	Precommunicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structure of language, how they are formed, and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. question-and-answer practice	Practising pretaught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap activities, or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit prelearnt language but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion
'Exercises'	←	(Ellis)	→	'Tasks'
'Enabling tasks'	←	(Estaire and Zannon)	→	'Communicative tasks'

The next questions to discuss are 'what factors could shape such a view on L2 learning and teaching?' and 'what factors were perceived to be significant in mediating the teachers' conceptions and practices of language input and output and interaction?'

9.3. Conceptual and contextual constraints

In the light of the theoretical framework of language teachers' learning and cognition set out in Chapter 4, the six Vietnamese teachers' interpretations of the SLA facilitating conditions might be shaped by at least two major forces of influence. The first refers to conceptual constraints derived from their pre-established pedagogical knowledge and beliefs about teaching English, and the second is the contextual constraints derived from their working environment.

9.3.1. Conceptual constraints

The conceptual constraints discussed here comprise the teachers' educational experiences, namely schooling and pre-service teacher training. These experiences could have established their beliefs and knowledge about teaching English, which, in turn, shaped the meanings they construed for the SLA facilitating conditions.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, upon entering the teacher education programme, these teachers had spent a long period of schooling (seven years), observing English instruction in the traditional way, particularly the explicit instructional approach. Four years at university was also a considerable amount of time when they had an opportunity to study and observe English being taught in the curriculum in separate language skills such as grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These learning experiences, which have been described in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, possibly contributed toward formulating their pedagogical thinking about English teaching, a point identified in research into teacher learning and cognition as reviewed in Chapter 3 (Bailey et al., 1996; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Kennedy, 1991).

In addition to that, the teachers' conceptions were likely to be shaped by the methodological and pedagogical training received from the teacher education programme they pursued, as already documented in previous research (Freeman, 1991; MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2001; Mattheoudakis, 2007). To elaborate, it was possible that these Vietnamese EFL teachers were strongly influenced by the instructional models they had contact with in the teacher education programme both in theory and in practice through observing their teacher educators. As mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the pedagogical courses they took aimed at informing student teachers of a smorgasbord of methods and approaches to enable them to be eclectic. However, the training later proceeded to concentrate on developing a repertoire of practical skills associated with two methodological models: the present-practice-produce procedure and the pre-while-post integrated skills procedure. The influence of such pedagogical thinking on their interpretations of the SLA facilitating conditions was obvious in the lessons of most teachers. For example, My and Thu strictly followed the P-P-P procedure and integrated skill format in planning the lessons they taught. Phuc explicitly acknowledged that as working with the notions of language input, learner output and interaction, she "was [still] influenced by the P-P-P" (PSRI3-17). Similarly,

Kim's comment confirmed the impact of prior training experience upon her belief about teaching. She said that learning activities must proceed from control to freedom, and that English teachers generally "have to follow general steps of a lesson such as pre-while-post" (KSRI3-18). Importantly, the impact on the teachers was also apparent in the discourse they relied on to describe and reflect on their lessons, a similar case to that reported by Freeman (1991). In particular, in the present study, such an effect emerged in the language reported in interviews and in lesson plans. Words such as 'presentation,' 'controlled,' and 'free practice,' 'production,' or 'pre,' 'while,' and 'post' stages were mingled with the new discourse like 'input,' 'output,' and 'interaction.' To exemplify this, the following reflection of a teacher on her second lesson is illustrative.

M: I think in most of the activities, from *practice* to *production*, I have made them concentrate on the language but with different degrees.

R: In general, what would you say about your lesson?

M: I think it had *input*, *output* and *interaction*, but what I achieved much more than the previous lesson was *interaction*.

(MSRI2-10: emphasis added)

Richards (1998) identifies the impact of the present-practice-produce methodology as originating in what he called the "*noncompatible view*" to teacher education in which "teacher trainees are expected to assimilate and be able to replicate in their own teaching" according to a "received methodology" (p.48). This impact seemed to have taken root in the way the six Vietnamese teachers conceived of language teaching. Such pre-existing knowledge or beliefs, in light of a socio-cultural constructivist framework of learning and cognition mentioned in Chapter 4, can function as a mediator in the process of cognitive development (Alanen, 2003; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Following this, the way the Vietnamese EFL teachers in the current research constructed their understanding of the SLA facilitating conditions was confounded by the received methodology established from the professional training to which they had been exposed. That process of constructing new knowledge is further conceivable as it parallels an observation made in past research about teacher development and innovation: teachers tend to mould innovative ideas in line with their implicit theories of L2 teaching and learning and the context in which they work (Carless,

1998, 2003; Lamb, 1995). Nevertheless, the process of approaching teachers and teaching from the conditions underlying SLA and TBLT has given the teachers an opportunity to make their implicit theories explicit, a similar result to that found by Freeman (1991). Contextual constraints might further mediate this process of learning.

9.3.2. Contextual constraints

Although an overall attitude across the six Vietnamese teachers towards the feasibility of implementing the SLA concepts was positive, some contextual factors were found to have limited some teachers in optimising learning opportunities by provision of rich language input, and learner output and interaction in their tertiary English classrooms. These contextual influences, as revealed in the study, included the institutional and classroom conditions.

In the first place, the textbook-based syllabus prescribed by the university constrained some teachers in their creation of optimal opportunities for English learning. The influence was particularly salient in the case of Kim. This teacher, for example, raised her concern about maximising provision of rich language input under the pressure of class time. She mentioned the prescription of 11 units to be completed within 45 classroom periods as a factor in making it impossible for her to supply further input texts (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3.3). In promoting student output and interaction, she also stressed the impossibility of generating opportunities to engage her students in authentic language use, which she delayed until the students had attained a command of the language content, because of the time limit and student characteristics (Chapter 7, Sections 7.2.3.1, 7.2.3.2). Apart from that, the change of her university policy reducing teacher pay somewhat affected her attitude to enriching input opportunities for learning in her lessons. Kim admitted that she felt unable to talk English all the time, not only because of the students' limited proficiency and time limit, but also because of her wish to complete the teaching programme with less effort.

The teachers' perception and use of English, which was restricted to a few pedagogical purposes, also appeared to reveal the effect of the institutional goal. Seedhouse (1996) explains that because the dominant goal of institutions is to teach the language, teachers' thinking tends to be framed within such a view, and

hence they focus on teaching the TL as subject matter. This is particularly true of the context of Vietnam, where, unlike other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, English has not yet become an official medium of instruction in higher education, although some English-medium undergraduate programmes are underway at some large universities. At WU, English is still taught and learned as a subject. Thus, it is possible the teachers in the current study limited their English use to explaining vocabulary and grammar rules, eliciting student responses, and giving instructions because they might think their work was to teach the language.

Classroom elements (Holliday, 1994) partly mediated the teachers' thinking and implementing of the SLA facilitating conditions. These comprised large classes and student characteristics such as their limited ability, mixed backgrounds, and passive learning attitudes. There was evidence that these factors contributed to the way the teachers chose to conduct activities to promote learners' interaction. As said, a common pattern in the teachers' lessons was that they controlled their students' learning activities in the first place for form accuracy, and then gradually released control by personalising topics or supplying situations to make practice of language use more meaningful. To render practice meaningful, the teachers largely subscribed to communicative practice and structured communication activities (Littlewood, 2007) to encourage students to interact and attend to the use of the language items in focus, thereby achieving mastery (both fluency and accuracy) of the items. According to some teachers, this was due to the lack of student English proficiency to handle communication and their passive learning attitudes, which hindered them from taking initiatives in communication (Section 7.2.3.2). This finding resonates with previous research regarding the implementation of CLT in different contexts (e.g. Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; Li, 1998) including Vietnam (e.g., Bock, 2000). The meaning the Vietnamese teachers attached to learner output and interaction in this way further reinforces a previous claim that classroom interaction is far from being authentic because of the constraint of the institutional discourse of teaching the TL, and any approach relying exclusively on communication tasks to promote genuine interaction seems unrealistic in foreign language contexts (Seedhouse, 1996, 1999). The view on L2 learning and teaching advocated and proposed by TBLT, therefore, would seem to be challenged by the view the teachers in the current study held.

The constraints of context in mediating the teachers' conceptions and practices of input, and output and interaction described above are conceivable in the light of a socio-cultural constructivist framework on teacher cognition as outlined in Chapter 4. In particular, teacher thinking interacts with context reciprocally (Borg, 2006). In a certain sense, the interaction between contextual elements, teacher pedagogical beliefs and knowledge, and classroom practice can be described in terms of a psychological tension between the requirement to work for optimum learning and the teacher's wish to carry it out realistically and economically, given the environment in which the teachers work. The notion of psychological cost-benefit analysis is likely to further cast light on such a conflict.

According to Ekehammar (1978), in economic terms, a decision on any course of action is made by weighing expenses (costs) against gains (benefits). The rule is that an alternative will be chosen when the difference between benefits and costs associated with that alternative is maximal. In a psychological sense, the concepts of costs and benefits are extended to mean "personal sacrifices" and "personal rewards" respectively (Ekehammar, 1978, p.22). Accordingly, an alternative is selected to satisfy a psychological status or goal, for example, to avoid or reduce tension or pressure on the decision maker. In this way, evidence in the current study suggested that at least one teacher reported a perceived balance between costs and benefits in an attempt to promote optimal learning opportunities. To elaborate on this, Kim admitted that she implemented the SLA conditions to a certain extent: "Just at a relative extent. It is impossible to maximise all of those conditions and doing it depends on specific contexts, specific classes, and students' levels" (KSRI3-14). Her wish to invest less time and effort in the General English classes was likely to have stemmed from her weighing up of the time and effort against the benefits she wished to have. These benefits could have involved the bonus and incentives from the university where she works, less tension and workload, and more broadly an increased teacher salary and other supportive working conditions. Kim felt that the time and pay cut regarding the General English programme was discouraging as it meant downplaying the task of teaching General English. She commented if teachers were to change their practice toward improving the learning outcome, there should be systematic changes from the top down, including "syllabus, teaching methodology, number of students and time allocation for the syllabus,...and that's not only the teacher's

job” (KSRI3-14-15). The changes, in her words, should contribute towards creating a working environment more conducive for teachers to do the best of their work.

My interpretation is that the time factor seemed to play a significant part in the teacher’s decision-making. This is not to say that it is the decisive factor. In this study, time available for planning and conducting communicative activities for General English classes, and for teaching other types of English classes, appeared to be a central factor since it involved not only costs but also benefits in both senses: economic and psychological. In Vietnam, teacher salary is low, and this results in teachers having to work extra time to earn a living (Pham, 2001; VietnamNet, 2008c; VietnamNet, 2009), a point also made by researchers in other contexts as mentioned in Section 3.2.2 (e.g., Hasanova & Shadieva, 2008; Yu, 2001). A vice-rector of a large Vietnamese university identifies this situation as a vicious circle: “Universities all want high-quality but low-cost training,” and he asserts, “high-quality training is never obtained at a low cost” (VietnamNet, 2008b, ¶. 8). As the demand for English language learning has mounted, foreign language centres or institutes, especially in urban areas, have mushroomed (VietnamNet, 2008a). English teachers then can “supplement their modest salary” by teaching evening shifts at these places; many teachers work like a “teaching machine” (Pham, 2001, ¶. 10). The heavy workload requires the teachers to share time for planning and teaching different classes, and may lead them to consider which English courses or classes they should prioritise time and effort investment. The teachers in the current study had a high workload schedule; besides the official class time (See Table 2), they all taught some evening classes. Some of them even travelled to teach in other provinces. Such a workload would have put more time pressure on them, and thus anything demanding further time would mean more personal sacrifices, and therefore would be weighed up and probably rejected. Because of the heavy workload, as Carless (2003) indicates, teachers may not want to implement innovations. Together with this, other situational factors such as the type of learners, large class size, and institutional policy, possibly contribute to their decisions and choices.

Although Kim was convinced about the pedagogical potential of the SLA knowledge, she was hesitant to embrace it due to the practical difficulties she

described. There was evidence that Kim did not invest much time and effort in teaching General English: “I never plan [General English lessons], to tell you the truth. With this workload and time limit, a teacher can only think in mind what she will generally do” (KSRI3-18). Such a lack of commitment of time and effort to teaching General English might stem from her thinking that it was second to priority in her work. The fact that she had a larger proportion of time on teaching students of English (see Table 3) could further shed light on this. Given the non-supportive working conditions, she may have opted for not providing optimal learning opportunities for the General English students. To illustrate this is one of Kim’s comments highlighting her concerns:

I suppose if we have more time and very good conditions for the English teachers to design the lesson, I believe that it will be much better, but now we face a lot of problems, I mean financial problems, and now we have to teach the evening classes, and then how can you find time to design such a lesson even though you know that it is quite good? (KInI-5)

The change at her university, including a pay cut and time reduction for the English classes, appeared to confront her with the wish to have more supportive working conditions as described in the comment above. Besides, the practicality of implementing pedagogical initiatives could further shed light on why the teacher expressed concerns and reluctance to work for an optimal learning environment. As pointed out in the literature, teachers will easily implement a new idea when they perceive it to be advantageous (Markee, 1993, 1997). In the case of Kim, the idea of promoting an environment conducive to SLA was perceived to have no benefits for the implementer. She shared her thought:

Using these conditions would benefit students more than teachers because it requires much time and energy from teachers; very much; they will have to spend very much time and energy. (KSRI3-16)

Interestingly, it is clear from the extract that her perception of the practicality of promoting conditions facilitative of SLA outweighed that of the benefits for student learning. Consequently, even though the teacher thought it was useful for students, she did not implement the idea to a full extent. This observation is consistent with what was reported in the contexts of Malaysia and Thailand.

Involved in teacher training in these countries, Hayes (1995) has concluded that teachers only change their practice when the change is perceived to benefit both themselves and the students.

Kim's pondering about the cost-benefit difference in realising SLA theory also bears some resemblance to what Carless (2003) observed about one of the Hong Kong primary teachers, who implemented communication tasks to a rather low degree. Carless (2003) suggests that although teacher beliefs and understanding are "highly significant issues" (p.496), factors such as time, textbooks, resources, and learner language proficiency appeared to outweigh the teacher's understanding of, and attitude to, TBLT. Together with the study of Carless (2003), the present study points to challenges faced by EFL teachers in putting into practice pedagogical ideas associated with SLA theory. Carless suggests that teacher factors and contextual practicalities collectively, but not necessarily equally, mediate the implementation of TBLT. In the current study, it appeared that among these factors, time (due to a heavy workload) seemed to play a significant role in mediating teacher decision making and actions. I would add that while syllabus time limits as well as personal time can be a common issue across EFL classrooms, their influence might be different across individuals and cultures, and the example in this study may be similar to or different from that in other countries where teacher incomes are still low.

One further finding is that not only student limited levels of proficiency (e.g., Carless, 2003, 2007; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004), but student learning styles and attitudes, which was called learning culture by a teacher in the study, also limited the Vietnamese teachers' ability to promote students' interaction by means of communication tasks. These factors were indicated as barriers to implementing CLT in Asia in previous studies (e.g., Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; Hu, 2005b; Rao, 1996).

Furthermore, assessment was not a significant factor influencing these Vietnamese teachers' ways of teaching. While much research has pointed to teachers' returning to traditional teaching due to the washback effect of form-oriented examinations (e.g., Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2006; Gorsuch, 2000; Li, 1998; Shim & Baik, 2004), the present study found that incorporating communicative skills into assessment did not strongly push the teachers to enact communication-

oriented teaching. As mentioned in Chapter 2, testing in the English programme at the teachers' university involved both comprehension and performance skills. The teachers also had authority to conduct semester exams themselves. But the current study revealed that they followed a weak approach to using communicative tasks; their teaching was not strongly focused on communication. This observation resembles what Carless (2004) found in the Hong Kong secondary school context where the communicatively oriented assessment in the new English curriculum did not enable the teachers in his study to implement TBLT. The difference is that the teachers in his study still cited examinations as one of the reasons for not implementing TBLT, while the Vietnamese teachers in the current study did not mention testing as a barrier to implementing the SLA concepts. The role of assessment in interaction with other factors in implementing an innovation such as TBLT is a complex issue that needs further research.

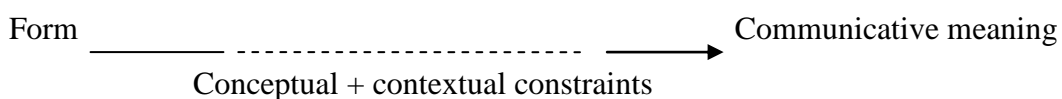
In short, the teachers' views of the SLA facilitating conditions in the present study represent a process of constructing knowledge of SLA theory specific to the context of Vietnam. In this process, the teachers integrated the SLA concepts into their existing beliefs and understanding. Their reactions to promoting the SLA enabling conditions for tertiary English learning, especially through communicative tasks, as illustrated in the present study, embodied the mediation between their prior beliefs and knowledge about English teaching formulated through schooling, pedagogical training, and teaching experience on the one hand, and practical factors, namely time pressure, workload, and student characteristics, on the other. It also appeared that the time factor, including class time and preparation time, could be significant in mediating when and to what extent teachers decide to enact communicative tasks. A socially and culturally constructed view on teacher learning as in the case of these EFL teachers, and a psychological cost-benefit analysis view of decision-making can partly account for the question posed by Berliner (2005) of why teachers accept or reject new knowledge, skills, or concepts introduced to them. It was not within the scope of this study to explore the individual teachers' motivations or aspects of their personalities that may have played a part in orientation to change. It is very possible that personality and affective factors such as teachers' willingness or motivation to change played a role in their conceptions and practices of SLA

facilitating conditions. The role of these factors and the interaction between them can be further explored by future research.

As mentioned in 9.2.3, the teachers' way of thinking about and practice of English teaching appears to illustrate the reconciliation between a focus-on-forms and a focus-on-meaning. On the one hand, in L2 (ESL) contexts, the compromising tendency has been to integrate form into communicative classrooms with an intention to improve language use accuracy. This tendency is manifested in the notion of focus-on-form associated with TBLT, which, according to many SLA researchers and educators, is currently the most effective pedagogical option for L2 teaching (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002; Fotos, 2005; Nunan, 2003; Pica, 2005; Skehan, 2003). On the other hand, CLT and TBLT proponents have sought to integrate communicative meaning into FL (EFL) classrooms, attempting to render these settings more communicative as has been reported in many studies in Asian countries (See Chapter 4). In this process, the meaning-oriented conception of language teaching has tended to be weakened by the impact of contextual constraints and beliefs about teaching, suggesting quite a similar trend. Figure 9.2 below illustrates this move. The arrow indicates that the Vietnamese teachers' approach is progressing towards adopting certain aspects of a meaning-based approach. As discussed so far, this process is mediated by the background factors such as conceptual and contextual constraints indicated by the broken line.

Figure 9.2

The trend of Vietnamese EFL teachers' approach



Such a way of viewing the L2 pedagogical approach and conception held by the teachers is informative in terms of not only what position and value communicative tasks should take in foreign language teaching contexts like Vietnam, but also what professional training and development should be like to enable Vietnamese EFL teachers to develop their pedagogical content knowledge.

The next issue I will discuss is what enabled the changes reported by the participant teachers.

9.4. Teacher change

One of the goals of the current study was, as set from the beginning, to understand how teachers respond to core concepts of SLA, instead of measuring the effect of the concepts on teacher change in beliefs and practices. Teacher change was an exploratory issue in the study, and examined through their perceptions. The findings under Question iii “What changes do they perceive have they experienced from working to promote SLA facilitating conditions in the General English classroom?” reveal that the teachers all acknowledged some effects of thinking about teaching English from the concepts of SLA facilitating conditions. One of the perceived impacts was that it raised their awareness of the SLA concepts in their teaching practice. Another was the growth of their pedagogical understanding in terms of strengthening their teaching decisions with a rationale. These suggest that the teachers have undergone changes in awareness about teaching.

One of the teachers even reported a widened view of input. She acknowledged that her understanding of input was no longer restricted to the presentation of linguistic items, and that she now thought of input as the target language addressed to learners in various forms. Although her pre-existing linguistic view of language and English language teaching shaped the meaning she construed for input, as represented in the input lesson she conducted, her report on expanded understanding embodies development or change in the way of viewing the target language. The introduction of input forms such as texts, teacher talk, audio, and the ways of making input repetitive, salient and rich, and her attempt to make sense of the notion of optimal language input clearly have pushed her towards seeing input as resources to achieve her pedagogical focus. In this respect, it is possible that the teacher will restructure her thinking of the role of language, including that of communication.

Given an opportunity to construct meanings of, and implement, the SLA concepts, the teachers brought in their ‘sense of plausibility’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Prabhu, 1987), and through that, they became more reflective in their practice. Teachers becoming more reflective and aware also appeared to be the result of not only considering and applying the SLA facilitating conditions, but also the

reflective opportunities prompted through stimulated recall sessions (Reitano & Sim, 2005; Wear & Harris, 1994). Hoa identified this impact in her commentary, “You observed, interviewed, guided and asked questions, to make me more aware; it was very useful. Although you only asked questions, that was still a kind of help” (HSRI3-13).

The teachers’ report on a strong sense of agency they had in implementing the ideas of SLA facilitating conditions, as indicated in Chapter 8, seemed to have linked with their raised awareness of SLA in their practice, as previously indicated in Howard and Millar (2009), and Franken and Rau (2009) in the New Zealand context. Together with these studies, the present study suggests that a constructivist approach to working with the teachers on core SLA concepts and providing opportunities for trial and reflection has empowered them. The approach to teacher development through selected aspects of SLA theory gave them a sense of agency, enabling them to negotiate the knowledge with their existing beliefs and practices, thereby potentially expanding their professional understanding of and skills in L2 instruction, and especially fostering a sense of professional identity (Franken & Rau, 2009). This is a promising avenue of teacher development, given that the notion of change does not necessarily involve only behavioural change (Bailey, 1992; Freeman, 1993; Jackson, 1992; Pennington, 1995), and that changing teacher long-held beliefs and ingrained practice is not easy (Pennington, 1995), as already documented in a large body of research about adopting CLT and TBLT across Asia. Although the changes reported are only self-perceived, the study provides evidence to suggest that change may occur if approaches to L2 teaching and teacher development take a constructivist perspective on teacher learning and cognition, as a number of researchers advocate (e.g. Hayes, 1997; Kennedy, 1991; Richardson, 1996). It is essential to understand and accept where the teachers are, and then provide them with necessary support to move along or reach where they need to (Franken & Rau, 2009). Approaching teacher development from understanding and implementing theoretical concepts and skills in SLA can be one of the potential ways to achieve this. As Markee (1997) posits, SLA can be potentially a resource for “promoting change in teachers’ methodological beliefs and practices” (p.80). Teacher perceived change in this way also seems to reflect what Lightbown (2000) suggests as an indirect way of changing teacher behaviour, which other

researchers further support (e.g. MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2001).

Some practicalities may have mediated the practice of some teachers in promoting opportunities for SLA in the classroom context of Vietnam. However, the perceived compatibility, relevance of the proposed idea, and a strong sense of agency in taking it up, as reported in Chapter 8, may have facilitated their learning and implementing the SLA concepts (Markee, 1997; Stoller, 1994) in a way that brought a sense of plausibility. Following is a discussion of some implications for the theory of teacher learning and cognition, second language pedagogy, and methodological limitations.

9.5. Implications

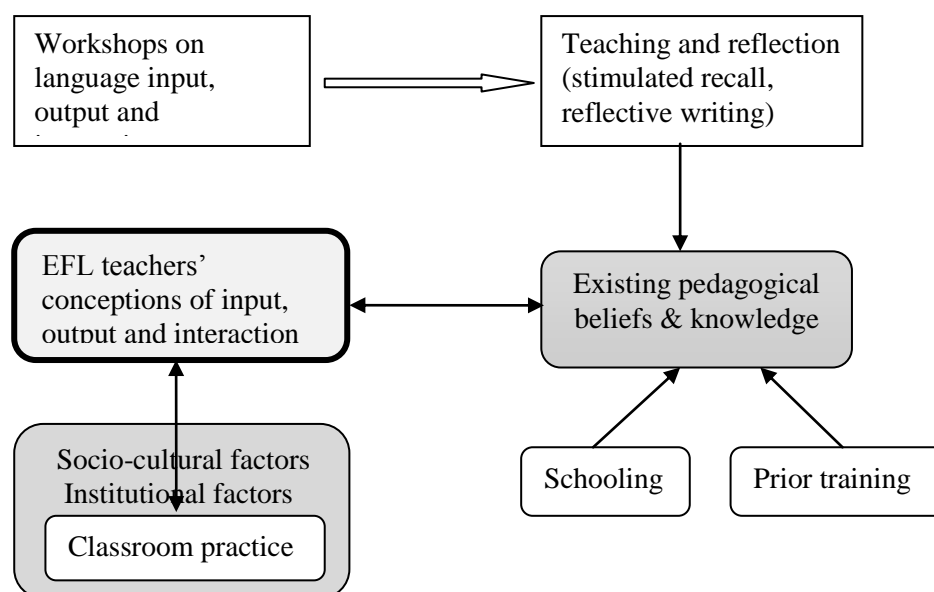
This section presents the theoretical and pedagogical implications in terms of teacher learning and cognition (9.5.1.), language pedagogy (9.5.2), and teacher development (9.5.3). The results of the study reported in this thesis point to two crucial things that suggest implications for theory of language teacher cognition, EFL pedagogy and teacher development (TD) in Vietnam and in similar contexts. The first point is concerned with constraints in teacher learning and development. The study revealed both conceptual and contextual constraints on the teachers' interpretation and practice of comprehensible input and authentic output and interaction. This contributes to the development of a model of language teacher cognition and learning. It also suggests that a more flexible approach to TBLT is necessary. The second point is concerned with the increased self-awareness of classroom actions, a way of theorising practice, which implies that a flexible way of approaching TD is useful.

9.5.1. A model of teacher learning and cognition in relation to SLA

Chapter 4 presents a theoretical framework of teacher learning and cognition from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective on which the thesis draws, and the discussion above highlights how the six Vietnamese EFL teachers' conception of language input, and output and interaction were mediated both by their conception of second language learning and teaching and factors in their context. Borg's (2006) model regarding language teacher cognition introduced in Chapter 4 provides a useful framework for a more specific model accommodating these

Figure 9.3

A model of Vietnamese EFL teachers' learning in relation to Second Language Acquisition theory



factors revealed by the current study in the Vietnamese context (see Figure 9.3). This model is an attempt to unpack how Vietnamese EFL teachers' learning SLA (with the illustration of input, output and interaction) is affected by both conceptual (psychological) and contextual constraints. The upper boxes indicate professional learning opportunities given to the EFL teachers for access to the concepts of SLA through workshops, reflecting on the knowledge through planning, teaching, recall sessions, and reflective writing as used in the current study. This process presents an opportunity for the teachers to construct their own meanings for the SLA knowledge (the middle left box). Two main sets of factors or constraints shape this process. First, the teachers' existing pedagogical beliefs or knowledge (indicated in the lower right box) affects the process. This knowledge has evolved from their schooling experience (seven years of studying English at school), and prior professional training (four years of training in English skills and pedagogy). Second, the contextual constraints, namely socio-cultural and institutional factors (in the lowest left box), also mediate the process, especially their classroom implementation in relation to the SLA concepts. According to this model, teacher learning and development is viewed from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective in which teachers build their own understanding of the SLA knowledge in the context of work in which they engage

(Freeman & Johnson, 2005b). The process of constructing the SLA knowledge may result in some change in their existing knowledge or beliefs (for example, awareness of SLA concepts in teaching).

9.5.2. A flexible approach to tasks

The present study showed that the Vietnamese EFL teachers interpreted and addressed the concepts of comprehensible input, and output and interaction in line with their existing beliefs, practice, and the specific situational conditions at their work. The study has furnished further evidence to support the argument for an appropriately contextualised ELT pedagogy, which a number of educators have advocated in response to the ideas of the Communicative Approach (e.g. Ellis, 1996; Holliday, 1994; Jarvist & Atsilarat, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). It particularly lends support to the need for a culturally and contextually appropriate approach to EFL teaching in Vietnam as suggested by some Vietnamese scholars and educators (Canh, 1999; Pham, 2005a, 2005b), and specialist outsiders (Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). In particular, it is aligned with the idea of a flexible version of TBLT Carless (2003) has advocated in the Hong Kong school context. Carless (2003) has attempted to justify the consideration of personal and external factors mediating TBLT that an appropriate approach should weigh up. Teachers' attitudes to and understanding of TBLT are highly important issues. Based on evidence from the current study, it would seem that an organic, flexible pedagogical approach including adapted TBLT better suits the educational and social context of the tertiary education level in Vietnam. That context-responsive approach may begin from the SLA theory underlying TBLT, as presented in Section 3.1. Based on that framework, teachers should be encouraged to experiment and reflect on it in order to develop their own personal theory of teaching, a way similar to Ellis's (2005) and Brown's (2002) principled approach. That model would certainly need to take into account and address not only teacher prior understanding and beliefs about L2 teaching and learning, but also the local contextual features which potentially hinder the use of communicative tasks. The current study suggests that teacher beliefs in accuracy and teaching linguistic forms, learner characteristics, time for teacher preparation, and workload might be important factors to acknowledge and consider. Tertiary English programmes may be designed in ways that can negotiate teacher prior

beliefs and external factors with the introduction of communicative tasks. To elaborate a little, programmes may need to be resourced with a bank of language activities or tasks; the type of activities or tasks should range from meaning-focused to form-focused tasks for teacher choice, depending on their classrooms and student levels. The framework of activity communicativeness proposed by Littlewood (2004) could be a good reference point for design activity. The framework also provides options consistent with a more organic flexible approach to EFL teaching in that it allows a gradual inclusion of communicative tasks into an instructional sequence. As Littlewood (2007) maintains, “in this way [teachers] can grow but retain a sense of security and value in what they have done before” (p.247).

Importantly, to implement an appropriate model of EFL pedagogy, it is essential to localise and contextualise the language delivered in the programmes (Widdowson, 1998) if the goal is to prepare students for communicative competence. By doing so, learning and using English will become realistic, not in the sense of authentic texts or discourse derived from native speaker language use, but in the sense that learners will become community members or insiders of the discourse, being able to authenticate the language, and thereby engaging in the discourse and meaningful learning (Widdowson, 1998). Nonetheless, doing so, Vietnamese EFL professionals should be mindful of balancing local and global needs. Researchers on ELT in Vietnam have put forward the following distinction: “While authentic pedagogy tries to apply native-speaker practices across multiple contexts of use, irrespective of local conditions, appropriate pedagogy tries to revise native-speaker language use and make it fulfill both global and local needs” (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996, p.211). Although this is a dilemma (Ho, 2004; Wong & Ho, 2004), it seems to be a possible way to deal with the existent problem in ELT in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, and to address the gap between theory and practice.

9.5.3. An appropriate approach to teacher development

Regarding the continuum of a focus-on-forms and a focus-on-meaning, to implement a strong task-based approach means to work at the right hand end of the scale under an analytic perspective on language and L2 teaching. This, in turn,

requires a re-conceptualisation of EFL teachers toward a communicative orientation. If we agree that teachers' conceptions have an effect on their learning and classroom teaching, then in order to switch towards skills embedded in a new pedagogical approach, Vietnamese EFL teachers need to re-conceptualise their thinking towards adopting the communication-based conception. If this were successful, the underlying conditions proposed by TBLT would be more likely to surface in the EFL classrooms. This, however, seems unlikely because the greatest challenge, not only for Vietnam but many other East Asian countries, is that "the formal education structure remains unchanged" (Wong & Ho, 2004, p.256), and because belief has a stronghold in the teacher's practice. The results of the present study have illustrated this. The participant teachers tended to conceptualise interaction and communicative tasks in line with their preferred values attached to accurate language use.

One way to encourage teachers to move towards the meaning-based conception could be to shift the institutional goal toward using English as a medium of instruction. Seedhouse (1996) has observed that in foreign language teaching contexts, the primary goal of educational institutions is to teach the target language as a subject matter, and this may restrict the way teachers conceive of the target language, and hence the way they teach it. It follows that to alter teachers' thinking and practice would require the universities' goal to be modified toward treating English not only as a subject matter but also as a medium of instruction as has been done in some Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. With that alteration, Vietnamese EFL teachers and students would probably see English as a tool for communication, and possibly transform their practice or focus of instruction, given the fact that English is not yet a means of communication outside the classroom. Some English-medium undergraduate programmes are now delivered in a few Vietnamese universities, where teacher resources are thought to be adequate, with subject teachers having sufficient English proficiency, and the student level of English is relatively good. This implementation is encouraged by MOET in some areas of study such as information technology, finance and banking, business administration, tourism (VietnamNet, 2008b). Such a move provides a potential way of improving ELT in Vietnam. However, content teachers would need support in the English language

knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge to ensure that students could benefit from both content and language achievement.

Alternatively, it is the case that the L2 teaching conception constructed by the Vietnamese EFL university teachers in the current research represents a gradually expanding view towards communication-oriented instruction, given the fact that English instruction in Vietnam has long been completely form-oriented. Although it is impossible to extrapolate the view to the whole population of Vietnamese EFL teachers, such a constructed pedagogical understanding offers a contemporary picture of what goes on in the tertiary English classroom. It illustrates that the Vietnamese EFL teachers are well on the way to incorporating meaning-oriented learning activities in the EFL classroom. One way to interpret such a response is saying that they have filtered out the idea proposed associated with SLA research, and specifically with TBLT, as has been mentioned. Another way could be saying that given the opportunity to make sense of and use SLA theory from a socio-cultural constructivist standpoint, they have actively constructed their own pedagogical views. Such a process of learning and development provides an implication for using SLA research as a resource in teacher development (Markee, 1997).

In the view of Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), successful teacher development should begin with a clear idea of the notion, which should involve not simply an understanding of the skills the teacher should acquire, but also an acknowledgement of the personal conceptual development of teachers and the context of their work. The results of the present study suggest that future teacher development programmes may have to acknowledge and address both conceptual and contextual constraints on the teacher's development. Conceptually, it has been recommended that teachers' experiences be acknowledged for theory building (Clarke, 1994), and that their prior beliefs and knowledge be articulated and analysed for conflicts with the teaching conditions and learner beliefs in order for the uptake of new ideas to be facilitated (Lamb, 1995). One challenge to this recommendation is that teachers may tend to think it is criticism, and hence reject the new input. Confrontation of existing routines and values should be handled cautiously. Acknowledging teachers as constructors of knowledge in this way will certainly allow teachers to take an active part in integrating what is new into what

they already believe and know, thereby reconstructing their pedagogical understanding. It has been observed that “models of teacher education which depend on knowledge transmission, or ‘input-output’ models of teacher education, are essentially ineffective...[because] they depend on received knowledge to influence behaviour and do not acknowledge - much less encourage - teacher-learners to construct their own versions of teaching” (Freeman, 1991, p.19). Further, implementing change does not necessarily entail a replacement of traditions with new ideas, but it should build on traditions (Canh, 1999).

Contextually, it has been aptly noted that, “the seeds of development will not grow if they are cast on stony ground” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 13). The success of teacher development depends very much on how supportive the context is to the developmental process. As revealed in this study, multiple factors such as time, programme, learner characteristics, and institutional policy, had a potential effect on the process of teacher change toward adopting some aspects of SLA theory underlying TBLT such as the notions of rich language input and authentic output and interaction. Understanding these factors “should therefore be an important priority for teachers, administrators, and researchers alike” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 14). Clarke (1994) has also noted that the translation of SLA theory into practice is to be supported by conducive working conditions and educational policies, but that this seems to have been underestimated. Teacher development programmes will need to address this issue if they are to be successful. To change teachers’ existing beliefs and practice, it is necessary to create a favourable environment in which teachers can actively participate in developing themselves (Veenman et al., 1994, as cited in Hayes, 1997).

An important issue, however, is whether context and traditions should be the departing points for appropriate training of language pedagogy and teacher development. Bax (2003a) has strongly argued for the priority of context over teaching methods, considering it as “a crucial determiner of the success and failure of learners” (p. 281) although he regards methodology as one important factor in successful language learning. In what Bax called the Context Approach, context is placed at the heart, and teachers should be “explicitly empowered, educated, and encouraged” to pay “fuller attention to the contexts in which [language teaching] operates” (p. 285). Although I agree that context plays a

significant part in teaching and teacher development, I am not of the view that context determines methodology. Many scholars agree that methodology should take precedence in training and development (Canh, 2004; Harmer, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Widdowson, 1993), and context should serve as a mirror to reflect it so that appropriate methodology may evolve. According to Harmer (2003), failure to see methodology as a priority “threatens to damage an essential element of a teacher’s make-up – namely what they believe in and what they think they are doing as teachers” (p.290). Larsen-Freeman (1999) likewise posits that methodology could contribute to teacher education and ongoing professional development by “moving from ideology to inquiry” (p. 4) wherein teachers will be able not only to benefit from new pedagogical ideas appropriately but also to avoid blind adoption of them. In the same vein, Widdowson (1993) has cautioned against an improper treatment of the role of context, including teacher identity. He clearly refutes the context-centred view, arguing that “taking local conditions into account in devising appropriate programmes is not the same as conceding to them as determinants of what can be done” (p. 271). Teachers, according to the scholar, should be educated to mediate new ideas effectively and appropriately or reflect on and appraise them for relevant application. Consequently, to nurture continuing professional growth, teacher development activities or teacher education should be conducted “with a view to helping teachers theorise and conceptualise their own practice, as a basis for articulating, examining, and revising their perceptions and beliefs (Canh, 2004, p.32). Such activities may begin from SLA concepts or principles such as those examined in the current study. This is also the point made by Knight (2002) if the goal of professional development is to enable conceptual change. Knight argues that new technical skills can be taught and learned directly, but this learning does not guarantee conceptual change, whereas shifting toward new conceptions or values requires much of learners to make efforts to construct their own understandings. In this way, not only can teachers grow professionally, while maintaining their sense of plausibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Littlewood, 2007), but together with it, personally appropriate approaches can also be developed, and that is where the gap between theory and practice will possibly be closed.

9.6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

This qualitative case study has provided some insights into the learning of the Vietnamese EFL in-service teachers at a university with respect to some aspects of SLA theory, namely the notions of comprehensible input, and authentic output and interaction. It has tentatively suggested some implications for the theory of language teaching cognition and learning, developing an appropriate approach to language pedagogy and teacher preparation and development. Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the limitations associated with the research.

One of the limitations of the research is concerned with its extrapolation. Since this is a case study, naturally small in scale, findings deduced from only six EFL in-service teachers at a university are therefore limited in terms of generalisation to other EFL contexts as well as other EFL teacher populations such as secondary and primary teachers of English. Although an attempt was made to maximise variation by selecting participants with a range of variables, namely age, teaching experience, overseas learning experience, and qualifications, the sample is not necessarily representative of the Vietnamese university teachers of English. But given the range of the teachers' characteristics, the sample may be typical in the context of Vietnam. Although the case study provides a detailed understanding of a local context of Vietnam, with the findings aligned with what has been found in the literature, it remains informative in terms of providing lessons that are necessarily to be confirmed and corroborated in similar and other contexts. Aside from that, all of the participants are female, and the data were based on a few lessons, so the findings of the study can possibly be restricted. The data only provides a snapshot of what the Vietnamese EFL teachers think and do.

Another limitation of the study regards the bias derived from the researcher as an insider. On the one hand, my familiarity with the context and the participants helped me to win trust from the participants and achieve collaboration that contributes to the data validity. On the other hand, this familiarity could have posed the risk of bias in the process of data collection and interpretation. Although being aware of this pre-conception, adhering to ethical principles such as voluntariness, confidentiality and anonymity to reinforce trust, and using triangulation strategies in collecting and interpreting data have helped reduce this

limitation, it is impossible to obtain complete objectivity as mentioned in Chapter 5.

Finally, a question may be asked about why this was a case study rather than action research. It is first necessary to emphasise that the study did not intend to change teacher practice but had the purpose of exploring issues related to teacher change and development, and constraints on their change to adopt theory in their practice within the local conditions of a Vietnamese university. The purpose of action research is teacher development, but in the present study, TD was an issue of exploration rather than the end product of an intervention. Second, the notion of teachers doing action research in the context of Vietnam seems to be less realistic because working conditions are not conducive to the concept in practice (Pham, 2006). Thirdly, action research must always begin with identifying a practical problem in own practice. This was not the case expressed by the teachers in the study. Not only has the case study design, together with the way TD was approached at the level of SLA principles, offered the teachers an opportunity to articulate their understandings and beliefs, but also through that opportunity, the data were generated. Although the study design, aimed at exploring the issue of teacher change, is more appropriate and practical than if an action research had been employed, an action research design that engages teachers extensively in the cycle of using what SLA suggests, identifying practical problems, and adjusting practice to solve the problems, would produce more sustained insights into teacher learning.

Following are some suggestions for further research. The first thing is obviously a replication of research on the same issues in wider and more diverse EFL contexts than that investigated in this study to confirm or expand upon findings of this study. For example, future researchers could explore the thinking of EFL teachers in universities, colleges and high schools located in various central cities, local provinces, and remote areas. Such investigations may contribute to a fuller picture of contextual factors affecting teachers in their implementation of principles of instructed language acquisition, and may therefore make fully informed contributions to the development of EFL pedagogy in the context of Vietnam and possibly similar EFL settings. In this respect, the model proposed in section 9.4.1 could be refined and further developed. Prospective projects could also engage

both male and female teachers coming from different types of ELT training programmes. Another important area that follow-up research could build on is further probing teacher development from an uptake of the SLA principles on that, due to limited time, the study could not do. To probe such effects, future researchers may need to follow teachers, observing and interviewing them over an extended length of time. Future experimental research can also be conducted to test the effect of a similar approach on teachers' change in practice and beliefs about ELT. Besides, as mentioned above, action research that involves teachers in the process of studying (e.g., reading research on SLA), trialing, reflecting on the trial, and adjusting practice can be a direction although practical issues such as teacher lack of time and willingness or commitment to professional development must be carefully addressed.

9.7. Conclusion

The current study set out with a motivation for a culturally and contextually appropriate approach to EFL pedagogy. Based on such a position, the study approached TD by providing some basic concepts of SLA theory (input, and output and interaction) to a group of Vietnamese EFL university teachers, with a view to exploring their perspectives on the theory, and constraints on the theory in context. It also attempted to explore change and development derived from the way teachers were prompted to work with the concepts. The results of the study are not able to be statistically generalised and should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive. Nonetheless, the study supplied contextual evidence aligned with the literature, thus suggesting some of the following conclusions.

First, traditional perspectives and external as well as internal factors still dominate and constrain the Vietnamese EFL teachers' teaching, learning and their classroom practice. The constructed views of the SLA facilitators represented by the six Vietnamese teachers in the current case study reflect the influence of factors such as the teachers' educational background and the context of their work. The study showed that the teachers' conceptions and practices of input and output and interaction were oriented to teaching and mastery of linguistic content and accurate production of such content. Such an orientation was perceived to have relation to some contextual influences such as syllabus, time, and students'

characteristics. In considering these constraints, it seemed appropriate for the teachers to have contextualised the practice of linguistic forms or create 'meaningful practice' (Prabhu, 1987) and delayed free production of output until the learners have achieved confidence with the linguistic forms. The study furnished further evidence to justify that contextual features mediate language teachers' cognition and learning to teach (Borg, 2006). The study also suggested that the principles of maximising opportunities for rich input and genuine output and interaction in the EFL classroom be more realistic in terms of taking account of the context including teacher beliefs in form and accuracy. The immediate implication is that there should be an appropriate and gradual inception of communication tasks, depending upon learners' needs and levels, and teachers' working conditions. The broader implication is that a culturally and contextually appropriate approach is required and probably key to the development of effective EFL pedagogy and education in Vietnam.

Second, the Vietnamese EFL teachers' perspectives on L2 instruction seem to have gradually expanded to incorporate newer ideas of teaching given the fact that the view in the context has been largely form oriented. The expansion was illustrated at least in the meanings the teachers attached to the SLA enabling conditions, involving those attached to communication tasks. Instead of seeing the teachers' conception as conflicting with a meaning-based conception underlying TBLT, it would be more amenable to position it as progressing towards a meaning-oriented conception of L2 instruction. The conception reflected a process of constructing pedagogical knowledge and understandings in the teachers' process of learning to teach. Such a way of understanding offers insights into the development of language pedagogy and teacher education and development in Vietnam. According to this way of understanding, teacher educators, researchers, and TD experts should understand teachers' existing knowledge and beliefs in order to provide the support required to enable them to grow professionally. Any innovation or TD programme oriented to communicative teaching should be appropriately undertaken, that is, in ways that negotiate the gradual incorporation of communicative tasks with teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs. This is because "teachers can draw on the ideas and experiences of others but cannot simply adopt them as ready-made recipes" (Littlewood, 2007, p.248). Such programmes may provide opportunities for teachers to theorise and re-

conceptualise their personal pedagogical knowledge about teaching, and SLA theories or principles should be a starting point. Parallel to that, the programmes necessarily take into consideration the affordability of local working conditions. With favourable conditions, the “seeds of development” will grow (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p.13).

Lastly, the teachers’ raised awareness of SLA processes in teaching and rationalisation of instructional decisions as found in the present study could be the result of the approach advocated in the study that sought to underscore teachers’ conceptions of SLA facilitating conditions in the development of teacher professional knowledge. Given an opportunity to interpret and use some aspects of SLA theory from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective, they have taken an active part in constructing their own meanings. In this way, it is possible that teachers’ pedagogical reasoning skills will become stronger (Richards, 1998). Teachers will benefit more from opportunities that engage them in developing an understanding of SLA theory and principles underlying their teaching.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Guide for focus group interview

Purpose: *to collect initial data about how teachers understand second language teaching, the enabling conditions for second language learning, and the concept of tasks.*

Used for groups of 3 or 4 participants

Prompt task 1: Key enabling conditions for second language learning

In a group, share your ideas with your colleagues on the following questions

1. What do you think is an effective English lesson?
2. Would you describe your classroom lessons as effective? Why?
3. What conditions are needed for effective second language learning and acquisition? Why?

Probes

1. What do you think about input? What is the term meant to you?
2. How important is it in language learning?
3. What is good input?
4. How do you address it in your lessons?
5. What about output? What is the term meant to you?
6. What role does it have in language learning?
7. What is good interaction? What role does it play in language learning?
8. To what extent do you create opportunities for interaction in your lessons? Why?

Prompt task 2: Conceptualisation of tasks

Discuss and share your understanding with your colleagues on the following questions

1. What is the building block of your lessons?
2. What do you think is a language learning task?
3. Can you give an example of a good language learning task you have used?
4. What features are characteristic of a good language learning task?

Appendix B- Guide for lesson plan interview

Purpose: The interview is to understand how the participants plan to use the SLA facilitating conditions in their lessons

Instructions

Start with a daily chat
Ask the following questions

Questions

1. Can you tell me about your plan for this lesson?
2. What do you think about input/output and interaction in the unit?
3. What do you plan to do with input/output and interaction?
4. Do you plan to incorporate more input/output and interaction? How?
5. How do you plan for input/output and interaction? Do you adapt activities in the book? How?
6. Do you insert any tasks for interaction? What tasks? Where in the lesson?

Appendix C- Protocol for stimulated recall interviews

This protocol is adapted from a sample used by Mackey, Gass & McDonough, as attached in Gass and Mackey (2000) for task-based interaction. The protocol is adapted for two purposes: to stimulate participants to recall what they were thinking in their lesson actions and to reflect on aspects of their lesson as related to conditions for effective second language learning.

Instructions

1. Engage in some chitchat for about 1-2 minutes
2. Give the following directions for the task

What we are going to do now is watch the video. I am interested in what you were thinking at the time you were talking or giving an activity. I can see what you were doing by looking at the video, but I don't know what you were thinking. What I'd like you do is tell me what you were thinking, what was in your mind. I am also interested in what you think or perceive about some aspects of your lesson, or your reflection now.

So I am going to pause the video where I want to have some questions. If you are not sure about my questions, please ask me to clarify. If you want to pause at any time and talk about what you were thinking, please feel free to do so.

1. Demonstrate stopping the video and asking a question for them.
2. If the participant stops the video, listen to what he or she says.
3. Ask the questions on the next page
4. Focus on each condition first; then ask them to tell what they think about/evaluate their practice or lesson.
5. If their response is that they don't remember, do not pursue this because "fishing" for answers that were not immediately provided increases the likelihood that the answer will be based on what the person thinks now or some other memory or perception.
6. Try not to direct participant responses.
7. Try not to react to responses other than providing backchannelling cues or non-responses: *Oh, Mmh, I see, uh-huh, alright.*

PROMPT QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

These indicative questions are based on the question frame employed by Clark and Peterson (1981). Some of them are taken from the researchers (*). Others are adapted (**) and created, but depending on the specific activities in each lesson, they will be adapted.

INPUT

What were you thinking when you gave this activity? **
What were you aiming at in this task/activity?
How was the students' response? **
What would you say about the students' reactions to the activity?
What would you say about the task/activity?
I saw you teaching this grammar point/vocabulary, why was that?
What were you thinking at that time?
Were you thinking about any alternative actions or strategies at that time? *
How did you feel about the activity/task?
I saw you speaking English up to now, what do you think about your English?
Why did you switch to Vietnamese here?
What do you think about students' interaction here? Do you think students can provide a good source of input?
What is your general comment about this lesson? Why?
Do you think you have created opportunities for rich input? Can you clarify?

OUTPUT AND INTERACTION

What were you thinking when you gave that task/activity? **
What were you aiming at when you gave this task/activity?
How was the students' response? **
Were you thinking about any other alternative actions or strategies at that time? *
What were you thinking about students' interaction here?
Do you think students had good interaction? Can you justify that?
What would you say about students' reactions? Why is it so?
What would you say about the activity/task?
What is your general comment about this lesson?
Do you think you have created optimal opportunities for output and interaction?
How?

FOLLOW-UP (embedded in the last lesson stimulated recall interview)

Having tried to promote input, output and interaction, what do you think about them?

Did you have any difficulties in applying them?

What advantages did you have?

Have you ever thought about these conditions in your teaching before?

Do you have any suggestions for applying these conditions in English teaching?

Appendix D1: Lesson plans 1 – Language input

Teachers	Lessons & Levels	Time	Objectives	Lesson procedure
Kim	Unit 11: A day in my life (Level 2)	180 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read and comprehend someone's working day. - Listen and comprehend main points of speakers' talks in forms of monologue and dialogue. - Talk to their friend about their typical day. - Write a paragraph about a typical day. - Use simple present tense, adverbs of frequency, prepositions of time, and vocabulary on people's jobs and daily activities in their description of a typical day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the passage My working day and complete exercises 1-3, and a chart - Work in pairs and groups to ask and answer about their typical working day, using the language they have just picked up. - Present their talk and listen to each other. Report what has been talked. - Listen to texts in the book. - Read further texts (external source). - Listen to further texts (external source). - Write about someone's typical day.
Hoa	Unit 21: Mystery (Level 3)	150 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make negative sentences in the simple past tense. - Make Wh-questions in the simple past tense. - Notice the unstressed sound of the auxiliary DID. - Use the simple past tense to talk/write about their short autobiography. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at the picture of Agatha Christie and listen to the teacher briefly talking about Agatha. - Ask questions about her. Use Wh-questions. - Read the text about her, and answer questions in the book. - Work in pairs or individual to underline the simple past verbs in the text. - Repeat the underlined verbs in chorus after the teacher. - Work in pair, one reads out and one listens. - T reminds S of the simple past tense form. - Give examples of the tense in different forms orally. - Do the exercises in the book about the tense. - Listen to the tape for the pronunciation of the ED ending and repeat in chorus after the tape - Do the writing and speaking exercises 1,2,3 in the book.
Thu	Unit 24: I'm going to save money (Level 3)	270 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read and listen for specific information. - Talk about what they are going to do on the nearest weekend. - Write sentences and then a paragraph about their weekend plan. - Present their solutions for problems given. - Write about their resolutions for the coming semester. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guessing game - T presents 'I'm going to'. - T pre-teaches vocabulary. - Read the text in the book - Combine sentences using 'because' - Listening (activities 3 & 4/ p.56) - Say what you are going to do this weekend through a drill. - Do homework: write sentences about your weekend plans. - Work in pairs and discuss solutions to given problems. - Present your solutions to the whole

				class.
Phuc	Unit 13: Can you swim? (Level 2)	90 min.	(Unavailable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher teaches vocabulary - Read the text and work out the form of 'can' and 'can't'. - Listen to a short oral description by the teacher and answer some questions. - Listen to an interview with a man applying for a job and tick the abilities of the applicant. - Role-play the interview. - Interview a friend based on the checklist in the book about their abilities. - Listen and match sentences. - Teacher explains the use of 'So Can I' and 'Neither Can I'. - Role play the conversation with your friend talking about your real abilities - Teach correct any mistakes.
My	Unit 3: Personal information (Level 1)	50 min.	- Ask and answer questions on personal information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brainstorm vocabulary on personal information. - Do prediction exercise on page 6 of the book. - Listen and check answers - Read the conversation in the book and fill in the given chart. - Play the game 'who is he?' - Work in pairs, ask and answer questions about the person in the photos (given handout). - Role-play their conversations.
Sinh	Unit 11: A day in my life (Level 2)	90 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use words/phrases about daily activities - Use adverbs of frequency and prepositions of time - Scan information in a reading text - Ask/answer Yes-No and Wh-questions in the present simple tense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brainstorm vocabulary about daily activities (individually, group of 2, group of 6) - Predict true or false for the statements given. - Read the text in the book to check. - Fill in the activities with the time points given in the chart. - Present adverbs of frequency and prepositions of time. - Practice the rules with drill cues. - Role-play being a journalist asking Tanya about her working day. Try to include adverbs of frequency in your answers.

Appendix D2: Lesson plans 2- Language output and interaction

Teachers	Lessons	Time	Objectives	Lesson procedure
Kim	How do get to work (Level 2)	135 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Read and comprehend a short passage on the topic of travel and transportation. -Talk about how they get to school/work and the trip they have just done. -Listen to some people's talks on travelling. -Write a paragraph describing how they get to school/work/travel. -Use grammatical points such as articles, present tense or past tense in both writing and speaking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T introduces vocabulary on transportation and travel. -S practise in pairs, asking and answering questions on how to get to school. -S read a passage on transportation. -S notice the use of articles in the passage. -T explains and S complete practice exercises in the book. -T introduces vocabulary on vacation activities. -S listen to people talking about their vacations. -S talk about their vacations in pairs. -S write a paragraph describing how they go to school/work or their vacation.
My	There is/there are (Level 1)	N/A	Students will be able to describe things and people using There is/There are.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T presents THERE BE. -S practise the structure with a transformation drill. -S practise asking and answering the questions in pairs. -S do practice exercises in the book. -S work in pairs to ask each other about the numbers of things and people in their pictures (given by T).
Hoa	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	150 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use be going to to talk and/or write about their near future plans and because plus a clause to give the reason for the plans. -Use so plus a clause to give a consequence. -Use a number of vocabulary items related to future plans (save money, buy a new bicycle/dictionary/cell phone, move out/in, take a new course, spend less money on clothes/food, invite friends to a party, change sleeping habits, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T presents vocabulary. -S read the passage "My New Year's Resolution." -S work in pairs and discuss the reasons why some people described in the unit make their resolutions. -S report the reasons and T writes them on the board. -S work in pairs to match the reasons with the resolutions given in the unit. -S listen to four people talking about their resolutions and take notes. -T translates the grammar points and the examples presented in the unit. -S do an exercise recognizing the difference between simple present and present continuous tense. -S write sentences with the verbs given in the unit. -S write about their plans individually. -S go around and ask each other about their plans for this school year

Phuc	I'm going to save money (Level 3)	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T teaches vocabulary. -S read the resolutions and match them with the reasons given in the unit. -S do information gap task, exchanging information about resolutions of two people. -S prepare to talk about their plans for the weekend. -S share their plans with a partner. -T correct any common mistakes during pair work.
Sinh	A day in my life (Level 2)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use words/phrases about daily activities fluently. -Ask/answer Yes-No and Wh-questions in present simple tense. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pre-listening task: students work on the meaning of new phrases given in a list, read aloud, ask each other how often and what time they do some activities in the list, and then one pair performs. -While-listening task: S listen to Sam's activities and complete the table/list. -Post-listening jigsaw task: S work in pairs, ask and answer questions to complete a chart about three famous persons.
Thu	Can I help you? (Level 3)	135 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Read and listen for specific information. -Say what they want to buy, make decisions as well as the way to express opinions at a shop. -Talk about their shopping habits. Use the collocation for uncountable and countable nouns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -T teaches vocabulary, presents reflexive pronouns, expressions to say in a shopping situation. -S practise grammar activities. -S listen to a shopping conversation. -S work in pair/group to share decisions to shop something. -S role-play the conversations.

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

5

S5. The proposed idea of promoting the SLA facilitating conditions fits my principles of teaching English.

Please write further comments/explanations if you have any.

.....
.....
.....

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

5

S6. Teaching English needs to maximize the conditions for second language acquisition in the classroom.

Please write further comments/explanations if you have any.

.....
.....
.....

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

5

S7. Opportunities for using English in interaction should be increased in General English classes.

Please write further comments/explanations if you have any.

.....
.....
.....

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

5

S8. Teachers should provide General English students with extensive comprehensible input.

Please write further comments/explanations if you have any.

.....
.....
.....

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

Strongly agree

5

S9. Optimizing the SLA facilitating conditions can meet the learning needs of General English students better.

Please write further comments/explanations if you have any.

.....
.....
.....

Appendix F2- RESULTS OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Statements	K	H	M	P	T	S
S1. It is possible to implement the SLA facilitating conditions within my teaching circumstances.	3	5	4	4	4	5
S2. Time pressure makes it hard to optimize the SLA facilitating conditions.	4	2	4	2	3	2
S3. Big class size limits the effective use of the SLA facilitating conditions.	1	1	4	4	3	4
S4. Students' lack of proficiency makes it difficult to promote the SLA facilitating conditions.	4	5	2	4	5	4
S5. Promoting the SLA facilitating conditions fits my principles of teaching General English.	4	4	4	4	3	4
S6. Teaching English needs to maximize the conditions for second language acquisition in the classroom.	5	5	4	4	3	5
S7. Opportunities for using English in interaction should be increased in General English classes.	5	5	4	4	5	5
S8. Teachers should provide General English students with extensive comprehensible input.	5	4	3	4	3	5
S9. Promoting the SLA facilitating conditions can meet the learning needs of General English students better.	3	4	4	4	5	4
S10. My General English students want to develop communicative ability.	4	3	4	5	4	5
S11. The proposed idea of promoting SLA enabling conditions imposed on my way of teaching.	3	3	2	2	1	1
S12. The proposal still allowed me to retain my own style of teaching.	4	5	4	4	4	4
S13. I had control over what and how I was teaching in applying the concepts of SLA enabling conditions.	4	4	4	4	4	4
S14. The proposal allowed me to take an active part in improving my teaching practice.	4	5	4	5	4	5

Appendix G- Schedule of data collection

Phase 1 (Aug. 2007-Dec. 2007)	Focus group (initial)	Work-shop	Lesson plan interview	Video-record Stimulated recall interview	Questionnaire
Week 1	X	Input			
Week 2			X (1)	X (1)	
Week 3			X (1)	X (1)	
Week 4			X (1)	X (1)	
Week 5		Output-interaction			
Week 6			X (2)	X (2)	
Week 7			X (2)	X (2)	
Week 8			X (2)	X (2)	
Week 9			X (2)	X (2)	
Week 10					
Week 11			X (3)	X (3)	
Week 12			X (3)	X (3)	
Week 13			X (3)	X (3)	
Week 14					X
Phase 2 (Dec. 2007- Feb. 2008)	Individual interview (initial)	Work-shop	Lesson plan interview	Video-record Stimulated recall interview	Questionnaire
Week 1	X	Input	X (1)		
Week 2				X (1)	
Week 3	X	Output-interaction	X (2)	X (2)	
Week 4		Follow-up	X (3)	X (3)	
Week 5			X (3)	X (3)	
Week 6					X

Appendix H- Research Project Participant Consent Form

Tentative title of project: Teachers' responses to a proposal to optimize enabling conditions for effective second language learning in a Vietnam context of tertiary English classrooms

Researcher: Nguyen Van Loi,
Insitution: Arts and Language Education Department
School of Education, Waikato University

Research Description

I am doing my doctoral research project to learn about how teachers respond to a proposal focusing on enabling conditions for second language learning to render effective English classroom lessons. The project objectives are

1. to explore how teachers optimize enabling conditions for effective second language learning in the context of English tertiary classrooms at Can Tho university after participation in a series of workshops.
2. to provide more understanding of language pedagogical innovation, particularly to understand how a second language acquisition-based proposal can be brought into classroom practice

Participant consent

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that,

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw myself and any information traceable to me, at any time up until 01 February, 2008 without giving any reason.
3. I can refuse to answer any particular question.
4. Any data I supply to the project will be stored securely and accessed only by the researcher.
5. All data collected will be coded to ensure that institutional participants remain anonymous and confidentiality is maintained at all times.
6. A summary of the study's findings will be published to the online website at <http://www.waikatoresearch.co.nz>, and I will be given access to this material if requested.

I agree to take part in the project titled "Teachers' responses to a proposal to optimize enabling conditions for effective second language learning a Vietnam context of tertiary English classrooms" under the conditions in the information sheet.

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

Appendix I- WORKSHOP OUTLINE

OVERALL GOALS

to raise participants' awareness of the facilitating conditions for effective second language learning

to raise participants' awareness of tasks as one of the mediators to integrate the enabling conditions for learning

CONTENT

Session 1: Lead-in discussion and Input

Purposes

-to raise awareness of input as one of the necessary conditions for second language acquisition

-to identify features of input that can promote language acquisition

-to identify features related to a good language learning task

-to introduce some techniques and tasks that promote the noticing of input

A. Discussion of facilitating conditions for second language acquisition

Task 1: In a group, share your ideas with your colleagues on the following questions. Then make a list of the conditions that you all agree are necessary for effective second language learning and list the reasons.

1. What do you think is an effective English lesson?
2. What conditions are needed for effective second language learning and acquisition? Why?

Task 2: In a group, discuss the following questions (Shown on slide). Make sure all of you share your ideas. Make a list of notes of all the ideas of your group.

1. What do you think about language input? Is it important? In what ways?
2. What is good language input?
3. How did you address language input in your lessons?

Task 2: In a group, discuss the following questions (Shown on slide). Make sure all of you share your ideas. Make a list of notes of all the ideas of your group.

4. What is language output? What role does it play in language learning?
5. What is good interaction? What role does it play in language learning?
6. To what extent did you create opportunities for output and interaction in your classroom lessons? Why?

B. Presentation of input

- The concept
- The nature of input
 - + Comprehensible
 - + Salient for noticing
 - + Frequent for learning
- Strategies for generating rich input
- Some techniques and tasks to promote noticing of input

C. Reflection on input

Dictation - The participants in two groups compete in dictation and taking dictation. Members in each group take turn to dictate sentence by sentence on a text put afar on a table to one of their group members, who takes the dictation. The group who completes the text first will win.

Discussion- What do you think the activity aims to? (Guide the discussion to the point that input is frequently revisited, and that the teacher can select a text students have already worked on for a similar activity that enables them to revisit input)

Session 2: Output and interaction

Purposes

- to raise awareness of the role of output and interaction in second language acquisition
- to identify how output and interaction facilitates second language learning
- to identify tasks that can best promote output and interaction

A. Discussion about the concepts of task

Task 1- Write down your own definition of a language learning task. Put it in a quotation and write your name below it.

Task 2- In a group, share your definitions with your colleagues. Give an example of a task you have used. Then discuss the question below.

What are the characteristics of a good language learning task?

Task 3- Read the questionnaire on the good language learning task (Nunan, 2004). Rate each statement from 0 to 4 according to whether these statements are characteristic of a good task. Then work in groups to select five characteristics that you consider essential to a good task.

B. The concept of output and interaction

1. Presenting rationale: Why should teachers promote output and interaction?
2. Reading and sharing about output and interaction

Task 1- Separate into two groups. One group reads about language output. The other reads about interaction. Then form into pairs (one from each group), share what you read with your colleague. Listen to your colleague and make notes.

Task 2- Return to your group and report briefly what you understand from what your colleague shared. Together make a list of important notes about what people form the other group shared.

3. Reflecting on tasks for output and interaction

Task 1- Strip story

Group 1

You each will be given a sentence from a short text. First, memorize the sentence. Then put the sentence aside. In a group, work from memory to repeat your sentence to each other and arrange all the sentences in a correct order to make a whole text.

Group 2

Observe the other group doing the task. Give your comments on the task goals, activities, learner roles.

The Strip Story: Jim Burney, aged 24, was out of work and out of money and all alone in New York over Christmas. He decided to kill himself by jumping off the Empire State Building. He took the lift to the top floor, the 86th, where he held on to the safety fence for a moment. He said a quick prayer, then threw himself off and fell towards the hundreds of cars moving along the Fifth Avenue, over 1,000 feet below. When he woke up half an hour later he found himself on a narrow ledge on the 85th floor, outside the offices of a television station, where the strong wind had blown him. The young man was so relieved that he decided to give up the idea of committing suicide. (From Willis and Willis, 2007, p.39)

Language input

Language input refers to all sources of language that a learner can be exposed to both inside and outside the classroom. The sources can be oral ones like listening to a TV programme, or listening to an English interview on the radio. TV programmes of course are also visual sources of input. Oral sources of input in the classroom include the teacher's instructions, their explanations, reading aloud, and anything else they say.

Quantity of input

The research tells us that learners need lots of input. One researcher (Stephen Krashen) even went as far as to claim that input itself was enough to learn a language. He called this the **Input Hypothesis**. We know that that's not the case – but we do know that input is one of the essential conditions for language learning.

Krashen based his Input Hypothesis on some of the following evidence:

input is the way children learn their first language

a lack of input slows down both first language (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition

the fact that younger learners of a second language learn faster than adults can be explained by the greater amount of input that younger learners get.

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

This means that as a teacher you need to make sure that you are providing lots of different kinds of input. Think of where you can use opportunities to fill your lessons with more input. For instance, if you are going to get your students to work with a reader, before giving it to them, explain in Vietnamese what the reader is about, read it aloud to the class (one or even more times), and then let them read it. You could also do a retelling in your own words after they have read it.

To monitor how much and how varied the input is in your classes, make a list. In the course of one lesson, make a note of all the different forms of input that your learners are exposed to.

Strategies for generating more input:

- add an oral text to a written one; add a written text to an oral one
- write a simpler version of a text; write a more complex version

¹ The workshop content was based on the material developed and used for professional development with teachers teaching Pasifika bilingual students in New Zealand (Please refer to <http://leap.tki.org.nz/>)

- add information to supplement a recount e.g. information about a character
- re-tell a recount or narrative from the point of view of a different character

Comprehensible input + 1

Not only is the amount of input important, the type of input is also critical. Krashen had something to say about that too. He said that input should be just beyond the learner's level of proficiency. He called this **comprehensible input + 1**.

Krashen based his ideas about the nature of input on the fact that:

- parents, caregivers and adults in general naturally speak to children in special ways adjusting their language to the children's level
- people naturally speak to L2 learners in special ways, also adjusting their language to the learners' level

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

The language that you use with your students either in spoken form or in written form should not be too easy or too difficult. It should be just beyond their level so that they use what they already know to understand the little that they don't know. One way to find out is to ask them to rate the language that you use. This is really good with spoken input, although you can include written forms as well. Ask your students in the course of a lesson to assess the input that you use in different parts of your lesson on the scale in the example below.

Forms of input	Too difficult: <i>I don't understand most of what you're saying</i>	Just right: <i>I understand almost everything that you're saying and I can almost work out the rest.</i>	Too easy: <i>I understand everything that you're saying and I don't feel challenged.</i>
Greetings at the beginning of the lesson.			
Instructions about what we'll do in the lesson.			
Explanation about the story we're going to read.			

Focusing on language in input

Once you realise that input is a major source of language learning, you can begin to think about how often you use particular language items such as new

vocabulary or grammatical structures in your input. Learners need many repetitions of language items before they learn them. For instance to learn a new word and its meaning may take 16 or more repetitions. These repetitions also need to be spaced appropriately. At first there needs to be quite frequent repetitions, say within days. Then the repetitions can be spaced out a little more. Remember that the learning of a new word or other language item can be lost if no repetition is carried out.

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

One way to do this is to keep a checklist of words or grammatical structures that feature in your learning outcomes for your students. Over the period of a week, keep a tally of how often you use them in your spoken input and how often they feature in the written input that learners are exposed to.

A teacher can make learning more successful and much more efficient by helping students to **notice** language items in the language they hear and read (the input). This is best done in a way that does not interrupt a learner's attention to meaning. One simple example of a way of helping students to notice vocabulary is when a teacher, while reading a story aloud to students, selects words for attention in passing and writes them on the whiteboard without interrupting the flow of the story

Another way in which teachers can draw students' attention to aspects of language is by what we call **enhanced input**. This is when we take a written text that students are reading and highlight a particular feature of grammar that we have selected for attention. The following are some examples of features and the way in which they can be highlighted in English.

The shovel felt heavy in Stanley's soft, fleshy hands, He **tried** to jam it into the earth, but the blade **banged** against the ground and **bounced** off without making a dent. The vibrations ran up the shaft of the shovel and into Stanley's wrists, making his bones rattle.

or

The shovel *felt* heavy in Stanley's soft, fleshy hands, He tried to jam it into the earth, but the blade **banged** against the ground and **bounced** off without making a dent. The vibrations *ran* up the shaft of the shovel and into Stanley's wrists, making his bones rattle.

or

The shovel felt heavy in Stanley's soft, fleshy hands, He tried to jam it into **the earth**, but **the blade** banged against the ground and **bounced** off without making a dent. **The vibrations** ran up **the shaft** of **the shovel** and into Stanley's wrists, making his bones rattle.

or

The shovel felt heavy in **Stanley's soft, fleshy hands**, He tried to jam it into the earth, but the blade **banged** against the ground and **bounced** off without making a dent. The vibrations ran up the shaft of the shovel of the shovel and into **Stanley's wrists**, making **his bones** rattle.

(excerpt taken from Chapter 7, *Holes*, by Louis Sachar)

Students read texts marked in any of the ways above. The marking helps them to **notice** the language pattern – almost incidentally. This is so because they are really focused on understanding the text.

© Try this out in the classroom

In a text that your students will read (and better still that you will first read to them), select one feature for attention. Mark it in a way that students will **notice** it, e.g. by using a highlighter.

After focusing on the meaning of the text, work briefly with students to see the pattern and try to understand how it works. You might like to check the next day how many items (examples of the pattern) they can recall.

Look at the **Tasks that promote noticing** for further ideas.

Summary

- Students need lots of input.
- The input should be at the just comprehensible level ($i + 1$).
- Input should provide for spaced significant repetition.
- Input should provide for opportunities for students to notice aspects of language form.

Tasks that promote noticing

The inquiries **Language Input, Interaction** all mention the importance of **noticing** in language learning. There are some important things that language learners must notice.

1. They need to notice **language patterns and items** – particularly those that are different from their first language. For example,

English speakers often hear and use Maori words without noticing that there are two different sounds at the beginning of Maori words - /n/ and /ng/ - na and nga. They may not notice differences in vowel length, and that pronouns make different distinctions from English – e.g. mātou / tātou, tapi / tāpi, nāku / naku.

What patterns or rules in Vietnamese differ from those in English?

2. They need to pay active **attention to meaning** and notice when meanings are untrue or incorrect in some way, or do not match what they expect. This is a means of noticing the unexpected patterns mentioned above, as well as new words, and new aspects of meaning in words or phrases they think they already know.

3. They need to notice gaps or differences between what they produce and what teachers, students and other models (such as written texts) produce. They also

need to notice what further **language items they need** in order to express their ideas fully.

The following tasks all promote noticing in different ways.

Task or learning activity	What learners notice
Identification – highlighting items (discussed in Language input) Simon says	They notice the patterns of forms and meanings in the items that the teacher highlights. Instead of listening for “Simon Says”, learners do the action described only if they hear particular language items that the teacher wants them to notice – e.g. the new words for the week, particular sounds.
True-false/identify errors/listen to pictures	Learners notice differences in meaning at a detailed level. Some of these differences may be expressed by grammatical items. They can also be subtle differentiation between words of similar meanings. Noticing at this level helps students to move up a level in the complexity of their language.
Correct errors/make it right	With this activity, students may notice that although they have identified an error, they have to search for the language items they need to correct it. They notice a gap between what they want to say and what they are easily able to say (or write).
Preparation for output	When your students are given some time to prepare for speaking or writing they notice a gap between what they want to say and what they are easily able to say (or write).
Reciprocal reading/teaching – Predict, clarify, question, summarise	This is a very powerful way of getting your students to work because it provides most of the conditions needed for language learning- including noticing language items and meanings. A lot of research has been carried out on this activity and it has been found to help a wide variety of students in a variety of ways.

Further ways

Listen to pictures

The students look at a poster (or a picture in a book) that has quite a lot of detail in it.

The teacher talks about what they are looking at in the picture.

Most of what she says is a correct description of the picture but sometimes she says something which is not correct.

If she says about 20 sentences to describe the picture, only about 3 or 4 sentences should be incorrect.

The students work individually and write a note to remind them of the wrong statements.

Then the teacher repeats her description and the students stop her when she makes an incorrect statement.

As a class, they **correct the error** in the statement so that it describes what is in the picture.

For example,

There is a girl sitting on a chair under a tree. She is playing a guitar. She is wearing black trousers and a blue T-shirt. There are some younger children playing with a ball. The sun is shining and the wind is blowing the leaves of the tree. There is a car near the tree.

The wrong statement might be about the younger children. They are sitting down, not playing with a ball. The students write *sitting* or *ball – no* to remind themselves of what is wrong.

This is a variation of an informal game adults often play with children to tease them by making incorrect statements. It is an enjoyable way of getting students to monitor a description to see if it is correct. It feels more like a game or a challenge than the common class activity where students have a list of true or false statements about a reading or a listening passage.

Variation

When your students are used to this activity, you can get them to work in pairs or small groups. A student can take the role of the teacher and describe the picture. It does not matter if the students make mistakes (in addition to the intentional ones). It is still a good way for the speakers *and* the listeners to develop their language knowledge and skills.

Preparation for output

Giving your students a chance to prepare is very important. Why? Because they search for the language items they need to express themselves. While they do this, they notice various language features and evaluate their usefulness for expressing what they want to say. Researchers have found that students learn words better when they *need* a word, have to *search* for it, and have to *evaluate* its suitability (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Preparation can be as follows.

Extended wait time - allow more time before you speak or ask a class member to speak. Count to 10 before continuing.

Individual/Pair/Group or Think/Pair/Share – Your students work on a task in three stages – first **individually**, then in **pairs**, then in small **groups**.

Collecting language resources – tell your students a topic they will work on later (or select it with them). Ask them to look up, collect, and share words and phrases that could be useful.

Information transfer – making graphic representations from reading or discussion is a good preparation for writing or speaking (see Tasks that make use of Text Structure).

Reciprocal reading/teaching

Predict, clarify, question, summarise

Reciprocal teaching develops in students the ability to lead and take part in an exploratory discussion around a text. Students have roles which rotate. The roles are:

- managing the discussion
- predicting
- questioning
- clarifying
- summarising

(Ministry of Education, 2003, p.101; Palincsar, 1986 a & b; Palincsar & Brown, 1985)

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Language output

In the inquiry **Language Input**, we talked about the importance of input, sources of language that learners are exposed to. The **Output Hypothesis** (Swain, 1985) states that while comprehensible input is necessary for learning a second language, learners also need to engage in output. Language output refers to learners using language in speaking and writing.

If we just think about oral language in the classroom, we know that teachers engage in a lot of talk, but often learners engage in very little themselves. Teachers must set up the opportunities for students to use language in their classrooms.

We know that learners benefit from just using the language i.e. just speaking and writing. Learners have to have opportunities to produce newly learned language

forms so that they can correct and adjust their hypotheses about how the language works. This is called **hypothesis testing**.

We also know that there are particular language benefits from interacting with others. If they are using language in the context of an interactive activity conducted in the second language, learners struggle to make their output comprehensible to their listener or listeners. Therefore we say that interaction in particular is a productive context in which learners produce output which is made comprehensible to others (**comprehensible output**).

When learners are speaking either in a more formal situation with little or no interaction, or in an interactive activity, there are two things which may push them refine, adjust or repair their output. One is their own sense of having produced something that doesn't make sense or sound right; the other is the response they get from those they are interacting with to suggest that they have produced something that doesn't make sense or sound right. This is explained more fully in the inquiry **Interaction**.

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

Teachers can support learners to engage in more output by:

giving them enough 'wait time' if asking for a response

focusing on supporting **fluency** and not worrying too much about **accuracy** or **complexity**

encouraging them to make use of prefabricated chunks of language like greetings or other formulaic expressions

allowing them to practise language before having to use it in a public setting.

Teachers can support learners to try to use new language by:

allowing them to be supported by cues, or language prompts (see **Scaffolding**; and **Tasks that scaffold output**)

providing them with other forms of support like a diagram, picture, or table.

setting up interactive activities (See **Tasks that promote interaction**)

One interesting task that both provides **practice** and encourages **fluency** is the **4/3/2** technique. This has been researched by Arevart and Nation (1991).

In this technique, learners work in pairs with one acting as the speaker and the other as the listener. The speaker talks for four minutes on a topic while her partner listens. Then the pairs change with each speaker giving the same information to a new partner in three minutes, followed by a further change and a two-minute talk.

Ⓒ Try this out in the classroom

Try out this task with a topic and **text type** that students are familiar with such as a **recount** about something they have done over the weekend. You might like to reduce each of the time allowances depending on the ability of your students. However, remember to keep these features intact:

- the time should reduce
- each learner should repeat the content 3 times
- on each occasion the learner gets a new partner.

Joe outlines two other helpful re-telling activities (Joe, 1996).

In simple **Retelling**, the learners read a text (usually about 100 to 200 words long), and when they feel they understand it well enough, they attempt to retell it. They should do this without looking back to the text. In this way it helps them to retrieve the vocabulary and other language items they were exposed to and learned, to some extent, in the text.

The **Read and retell** activity involves re-telling a written text, but the listener has a set of guiding questions to ask the reteller so that it seems like an interview. The teacher can design the questions so that they are at the right level for the students and their understanding of the text. The teacher can also design the questions so that learners have to use key vocabulary. Both the listener and the reteller study the text and questions before the retelling, and they can rehearse the retelling to perform before others. This activity has been researched by Simcock (1993).

See **Tasks that scaffold output** for further ideas.

Summary

1. Students must have opportunities to produce output i.e. to use the language they have learned.
2. Practice is useful.
3. Even more useful is having to use new language in the context of interaction with others.

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Tasks that scaffold output

The inquiries **Language output**, **Interaction** explain important principles in scaffolding output.

They describe the following classroom activities that can scaffold student output:

4/3/2

Retell

Read & retell

Information gap / split information / Jigsaw activities

Problem solving activities

Other classroom activities that can help scaffold student output are below.

The first group focus on expressing meaning but also provide or prompt some aspects of the language the students will need to use. They also provide for the type of **interaction** and **negotiation** of meaning which play a major role in language learning.

The second group focus on fluency in forms of the language. These language forms then become available to students as pre-fabricated chunks to use later in more meaning-focused ways.

Focus on meaning - Say It; Strip story; Giving instructions

Say It

The Say It activity is like a number of mini role plays. It is usually based on a story, newspaper article, or other reading. The story gives the content and the language for the students to draw on as they speak during the Say It.

Strip story

Students are given a part of a short text and work in a small group. First they memorise their sentence (or part of a longer sentence). Then they put the written sentences aside, and work from memory to repeat their sentences to each other and arrange them in the correct order to make a whole text.

The students repeat the sentences many times with the result that they become familiar with the whole text and with saying it and listening to it.. They also discuss the order of the sentences and the reasons why

Giving instructions

There are two easy ways of doing this activity. One way is to have a map with a number of different streets and a number of locations marked – e.g. the school, the swimming pool etc. The student who is going to give the directions also has some words and phrases that will be needed in giving directions, e.g. turn first left; go straight ahead....The other student has the same map. The first student describes a route from one location to another and the other student has to follow the directions and say which location they have arrived at. The students change roles so they both have a turn at speaking. The language cues provided help to scaffold language output. So does the map which reduces the complexity of the task to the

small number of possibilities allowed by the map. The information gap arrangement of the activity means that feedback and negotiation between the students also help to scaffold their output to become comprehensible. Because the map limits what is going to be said, there is a lot of repetition of similar items and phrases. This helps the output to become more fluent, and more permanently learned.

Another variation is for one student to describe a picture, or diagram, while the other student draws it.

Focus on form – Substitution; Memorisation and Reconstruction

These activities are ones to use for 2 or 3 minutes with the whole class when they are first becoming familiar with a new sentence pattern. Later they will use these patterns and words in more meaning focused activities.

Substitution

If you draw your students' attention to a useful sentence which is quite complex for them, they can use the same sentence pattern many times by just changing one or two words. In this way, they use important sentences which are a little more complex than they would say or write on their own.

It is better to do this in speaking because the repetition can be boring in writing, but is a challenge in speaking. Numerous repetitions are usually necessary before a learner can use a new sentence or new word fluently in speaking.

Rhythm and repetition: If you and your students enjoy rhythms, this is a way to use this interest in language learning.

The teacher says the sentence several times, setting a beat going and then the students have to try not to lose the beat when they say the sentences. You can start off with the whole class together, and then choose individuals or pairs of students to speak, then another student, and so on around the class or group. Make sure you say the sentences in a normal way – they should not become a chant but they should become fluent with normal stresses.

An example in English is as follows:

Ferns are usually very easy to identify from their leaves.

To begin with you can supply the words:

grasses

Grasses are usually very easy to identify from their leaves.

flaxes

Flaxes are usually very easy to identify from their leaves.

Next you can then ask your students to change 2 items

flowers

Flowers are usually very easy to identify from their petals.

conifers

Conifers are usually very easy to identify from their needles.

trees

Trees are usually very easy to identify from their trunk and bark.

Finally, the students may be able to supply their own words for the slots of the sentence pattern without losing the beat:

e.g.

Spiders are *usually very easy to identify from their eight legs*.

Activities like these can form part of an oral language programme.

Memorisation & reconstruction

Students can work in pairs to help each other memorize words, or sentences

e.g. using a picture dictionary

The teacher works with the class on a short passage so that they all understand it. Then the teacher erases more and more of the passage from the whiteboard and the class continues to repeat the whole thing supplying the missing words from memory.

© Try this out in the classroom

Try out one of the activities described above with your students.

Observe one group closely.

Compare their fluency when they begin the activity to their fluency when they have been doing it for several minutes.

Can they speak with

fewer hesitations

longer sentences

more variety in their vocabulary

fewer errors?

Interaction

The importance of providing opportunities for interaction in the classroom is an idea understood by most teachers in the curriculum. However, language teachers and their students would benefit from understanding how interaction particularly helps language learning.

Classroom interaction as practice for the real language use

Probably the most common view of the role of interaction is one that proposes that it contributes to language development simply by providing opportunities to practice language. Through classroom interaction activities, involving various forms of more or less 'realistic' practice, learners can become skilled at actually doing the things they have been taught about (turning 'knowledge that' into 'knowledge how').

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

This means that teachers should provide exercises that are close to the way in which language is used in the real world. These could be dialogues, interviews, retelling activities (For example, see **Read and retell**, in **Language output**).

Classroom interaction as another source of comprehensible input

Interaction is a way of providing learners with more **input**, and input that is gained from other students. Research shows us that, contrary to common belief, students will not pick up errors from other students.

Classroom interaction as a way of trying out new learning

In teacher-led classroom, we know that students have few opportunities to talk. When engaged in talking with peers, learners can try out new language forms – this has been called **hypothesis testing**. In trying out newly learnt language items, learners may **notice** a gap between what they have said and what the target language form is, and thereby realise they then need to gain control over a particular feature of grammar or a particular vocabulary item.

Hypothesis testing and **noticing** a gap have been mentioned in **Language output**.

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

This means that teachers need to move beyond task where students are merely repeating language items, grammatical structures and sentences. They should set up opportunities in which learners have to try to retrieve language items they have previously been exposed, and conditions in which learners have to use those in different contexts.

Classroom interaction as the context in which negotiation happens

Classroom interaction, in the target language, can now be seen as not just offering language practice nor just learning opportunities, but as actually constituting the language development process in itself.

In this, a stronger view of interaction, two-way person-to-person communication is crucial to language learning – it's where language learning happens. In this view, not all communicative activities are equally worthwhile for language learning. For a task to be productive, it needs to encourage **negotiation of meaning**. This occurs when there is a breakdown in the communication, partners in the interaction fail to understand what the other is saying, and there is an interruption in the interaction in order for them to gain understanding.

The speakers can do a number of things:

- check the understanding of their partner e.g. OK?
- check their own understanding e.g. Did you say ... ?
- request clarification e.g. What did you say? Pardon?
- request repetition e.g. Can you say that again?

This type of feedback

is focused,

is at an appropriate level for the speaker

is timed just after the speaker's error

lets students know if they are using incorrect or inappropriate or unclear language;

pushes learners to provide alternative forms and modify their output

Certain tasks are likely to result in more negotiation. The two types are:

Two-way tasks rather than one-way tasks

Convergent tasks rather than divergent tasks

Ⓟ What does this mean for practice?

An example of a **two-way task** is an **information gap activity**, in which students exchange information. An example of a one-way task is telling a story; one partner is largely silent in the process. In a two-way task, each partner, or group member, holds a different piece of information, which must be exchanged and often manipulated to reach the task outcome.

Convergent tasks have one possible outcome. Convergent tasks (such as problem solving tasks) in which students focus on a solution may produce more negotiation of meaning than divergent tasks in which participants offer different points of view (such as a debating task), and the participants are not obliged to agree with one another. There is typically more topic and language "recycling", more feedback, and more precision in convergent task, i.e. students get a better language workout with convergent tasks.

Tasks that promote negotiation gives many examples of tasks you can try out.

Summary

Interaction:

allows students to practise newly learned language items.

it allows them to try out hypotheses, and to notice a gap

encourages negotiation.

Through negotiation, students should notice aspects of form in their own language by receiving cues in interaction such as clarification requests, etc.

Interaction tasks are important in a classroom but some (two-way and convergent) are more productive in that they encourage more negotiation.

Tasks that promote negotiation

Inquiry **Interaction** describes how **negotiation** leads to noticing, hypothesis testing, feedback, and metatalk. These are the processes which cause new language to be learned. Below are 5 communicative tasks which teachers can use in many different ways to promote **negotiation**².

For each communicative task, the task is described an example is given the way it promotes negotiation is described, and further work based on the task is suggested

Jigsaw tasks

In a jigsaw task, students work in pairs or small groups. They each have different information and they have to exchange their information so that they each have all the information. Often they then have to answer questions or do other tasks based on the complete information.

Example

A pair of students are each given a partially completed chart giving different information about three people – Nam, Bac, Dong. The information might be about where they come from, how many other people live in their house, how many pets they have, what their favourite sports are, and what music they like best. The students take turns to ask and answer questions regarding the three people without looking at their partner's chart. Both partners must request and supply missing information in order to complete all the details about Nam, Bac, and Dong.³

How jigsaw tasks promote negotiation

Jigsaw (or split information tasks) are two-way tasks - meaning both partners must give and receive information. They are also convergent tasks – meaning there is one correct outcome. Pair tasks with these characteristics have been found to lead to the greatest amount of negotiation because both learners must speak and they must both understand each other correctly to complete the task correctly.

Further work

Teachers often like to use this activity to scaffold further student output. The students have said and listened to sentences such as - Where does he / she come from? S/he comes from Can Tho. Next, the teacher might ask them to speak about themselves and/or each other, using the same sentence patterns.

Information gap tasks

In these tasks one learner has the information and the other member of the pair or

² *These tasks are analysed in the resource: Analysing interactive or communicative tasks by Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun.*

³ See *Effective literacy strategies in years 9 to 13: A guide for teachers*, Ministry of Education (2004) p. 123 and www.jigsaw.org

members of the group must find out about that information.

Examples

Students are given a list of questions to use to conduct an interview with a classmate to gather information on something such as the partner's views on current issues – at school, or in the media. This makes use of information which is personal to the learner.

Be an expert: this is another information gap activity where the learner is given a text or some information about a topic. This learner has to read the material to become an expert on the topic. The others in the group then ask questions until they too are expert on the topic.

How information gap tasks promote negotiation

In this task the flow of information is likely to be one way, unless the interviewer and interviewee exchange roles. However, participation of both learners is required. There may be less checking and feedback than in jigsaw tasks because the tasks are not convergent – there is no one correct answer.

Further work

Students can prepare for this activity in two groups. Instead of being given a list of questions by the teacher, they can work in pairs or small groups to prepare questions themselves. Then they join with a student from another group, and ask and answer the questions they have each prepared.

Problem solving tasks

These tasks ask students to work in groups to devise possible solutions to problems.

Example

Some problem solving tasks have only one answer – the quickest way to get from one place to another using the various bus route timetables of a big city such as Can Tho.

Other problem solving is more open ended – groups of students work together to design a list of food for sale at the school which is both healthy and appealing to students.

How problem solving tasks promote negotiation

Problem solving tasks do not require every learner to participate, and they do not necessarily require feedback and checking. For these reasons there may not be a great deal of negotiation if some learners choose not to contribute much. These tasks work best for negotiation if the problem is one that really interests the students, and one where they all have plenty of knowledge and understanding about the problem.

Further work

Students may be working in other curriculum areas on problem solving tasks and be quite familiar with them. They may like to propose the problems for discussion and solution themselves.

It is also possible to base problem solving tasks on situations such as how to escape from an imaginary location. This sort of task can be organized as a jigsaw task so that each student has some different information about the location they are in and what they have that could help them to escape. In this case the jigsaw nature of the information distribution forces all the students to participate and negotiate.

Decision making tasks

These tasks ask students to come to a decision about a particular situation.

Example

Students are given written profiles about the candidates for the position of a job. They must decide who should be chosen and rank the candidates in order of preference.

How decision making tasks promote negotiation

Like problem solving activities, decision making tasks do not require all students to participate. However, the fact that they have to come to a single choice may encourage negotiation if the learners are interested in the topic.

Further work

Instead of giving students the information on nominees, the students can prepare for this activity by writing the profiles for one nominee for selection. Then they pass their profile to the other groups for the decision making. Each group is considering profiles written by the other groups.

If you have 5 small groups, they each write one profile. Each group considers the four profiles written by the other four groups.

Opinion exchange tasks

These tasks ask students to express their views on an issue.

Example

Students are asked to give their advice to a student and his / her parents who disagree on whether the student should leave school and get a job or stay at school to get further qualifications.

How opinion exchange tasks promote negotiation

Like problem solving activities and decision making, these tasks do not require all students to participate. Opinion exchange tasks have divergent outcomes since many views and reasons are possible. For these reasons they are less likely to promote negotiation than the tasks above.

Further work

If students are given the opportunity to prepare for this activity before they do it, they are likely to participate more equally and be able to contribute more.

© Try this out in the classroom

Observe a pair of students doing a jigsaw activity to see how much negotiation occurs.

Count new language items the students try out & the amount of checking, requests for repetition and requests for clarification (see Inquiry Interaction).

You might also like to observe the same pair doing a decision making or opinion exchange task and compare the amount of negotiation.

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