

An Investigation of Teaching Effectiveness in Tertiary English Classes

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Abstract: *This paper reports part of a larger study that aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the EFL curriculum at the tertiary level through the investigation of the five major elements of the curriculum, including needs analysis, goals and objectives, learning assessment, course books and teaching effectiveness, and factors affecting the teachers' implementation of the curriculum. For this part of the study, eleven non-participant class observations were conducted at a non-public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study's findings show that problems exist in classroom practices: no identification and explanation of learning objectives, unreasonable allocation of time, ineffective use of teaching aids and technology, teachers' limited ability in content knowledge explanations, ineffective or unclear instructions, teachers' limited ability in classroom organisation, and poor methods of teaching language skills. Based on these results, recommendations are given to improve the quality of the implementation of the EFL curriculum at the university in particular and at the Vietnamese tertiary level in general.*

Keywords: *EFL curriculum, teaching effectiveness, classroom practices, tertiary level, Vietnam*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) has been the major concern of researchers, pedagogists and teachers. It is widely discussed and investigated all over the world. In non-English speaking contexts like Vietnam, it is necessary to investigate how the EFL curriculum is interpreted by teachers and how the teaching and learning of English has responded to the students' needs. It is expected that this paper will partly contribute to the discussion through the investigation of classroom practices.

2. TEACHING AND TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Teaching is as a limited set of activities involved in implementing a language curriculum at the classroom level (Brown, 1995). Teaching consists of those activities directly related to delivery of instruction. These activities which are organised and facilitated cause learning (Dilts, Haber & Bialik, 1994). That means teaching effectiveness is directly connected to the teachers' success in helping students to master the curriculum (Bailey, 2006), or successfully achieves the learning by students intended by the teacher (Kyriacou, 2009). In addition, Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs and Robinson (2004) state that teaching effectiveness is the impact that classroom factors, such as teaching methods, teacher expectations, classroom organisation, and use of classroom resources, have on students' performance. Teaching effectiveness requires teachers to have a lot of qualities. In the light of literature and based on the objectives of the research, the following qualities of teachers or aspects of teaching effectiveness have been determined.

2.1. Planning and Preparing for the Lesson

Planning a language lesson has been noted as important aspects of teaching effectiveness. Students think that evidence of a plan shows them that the teacher has devoted time to thinking about the class. It shows students that the teacher is professional and he or she respects them (Harmer, 1998). In addition, a well-designed lesson plan gives the lesson a framework of what objectives the students have to achieve by the end of the lesson; what the teacher and the students are going to do. A good lesson plan needs to contain a judicious combination of coherence and diversity (Harmer, 1998). That is to say, logical activities and tasks must be planned and they

must have connection with each other, and thus students will have many different things to do during the lesson to enhance their knowledge, skills and motivation.

Researchers like Ur (1996), Harmer (1998), Baker and Westup (2000), Woodward, (2001), Branson (2005), Screvener (2005), Kyriacou (2007) and Morine-Dershimer (2011) have indicated that when planning a language lesson, there are at least eight areas a language teacher needs to think about: a) the objectives of the lesson to identify what the students will learn: The objectives must focus on language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, language function, and language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing; b) the activities or tasks carried out during the class: They must be planned in accordance with the students' abilities and language needs to achieve the objectives; c) the time allocation to each part or activity of the lesson must be divided equally and relevantly for each activity; d) classroom management methods: The teacher has to think about how to organise each activity; e) solutions to unexpected situations during the class: For example, what a teacher should do if the students find the lesson is too difficult; f) the resources and technology used during the lesson including material, cassette, tape or CD, poster or pictures and so on; and g) the methods to assess the objectives of the lesson: That means at the end of the class the teacher must check whether the students have achieved the set objectives. Overall, the above factors decide teaching effectiveness, teachers should take them into account when they plan a lesson in order to meet students' needs and the curriculum goals.

2.2. Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge

English teachers need to have a broad base of subject knowledge about language in order to effectively teach a second or foreign language. This knowledge includes such things as oral and written language, grammatical structures, vocabulary, phonology, and the nature of language acquisition. This knowledge helps teachers as Fillmore and Snow (2000) state, in a) giving clear and accurate explanation; b) giving accurate answers to the students' questions; c) demonstrating knowledge of concepts and skills; d) combining different techniques to convey the language knowledge and skills; e) presenting learning content in a logical sequential order; and f) coordinating learning content with learning objectives. What is more, English teachers need to have pedagogical knowledge. That is to say, teachers must understand clearly about teaching methods, learning strategies, and teaching and learning theories (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Additionally, according to Gess-Newsome (2002) and Koehler (2011), pedagogical knowledge is not only related to classroom organisation and management, lesson plan, student assessment, instructional models and strategies, and classroom communication, but also to teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teaching, and teaching experience. Overall, teaching effectiveness requires teachers not only to have deep knowledge about techniques of teaching to be used in the classroom; the background of the students; methods of assessing student understanding, but also to provide both language support and opportunities for students' use of English, together with appropriate feedback (Hoare and Kong, 1995).

2.3. Managing the Classroom

It is important to organise lessons well and manage the classroom effectively as Baker and Westup (2000) indicate, a teacher needs to teach the syllabus and help students learn well and succeed.

In order to manage classrooms effectively, EFL teachers must be thoroughly prepared and keep their students actively involved in the teaching and learning process through a lot of tasks and techniques (Landau, 2009), including: a) Arranging the classroom for effective instruction like pair and group work because pair work and group work is a cooperative activity (Wright, 2005). They promote learner responsibility and autonomy (Brown, 2000), encourage students to participate in learning tasks to reach a goal, give students lots of practice in using the target language (Magrath, 2010), allows the weaker, and quieter students to work with the stronger to increase their talking time (Marzano et al., 2005); b) Balancing teacher talking time and student talking time is also an important element of teaching effectiveness. Teachers must talk less in class, but plan how and when students can have more speaking (Marzano et al., 2005). What is more, according to McLeod, Fisher, and Hoover (2003), the efficient use of time is an important variable in helping students achieve learning goals and making the classroom a pleasant place for teachers and students; c) Giving clear instructions help teachers save time and support students in

doing tasks quickly and effectively (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003). In the non-native speaking context, when telling students what to do, teachers should use simple, short and clear English phrases as often as possible; d) Teachers should be aware of what students are doing and how they are feeling so managing disruptive behavior constructively is of vital importance. Doing so, it allows teachers to monitor and pace instruction based on the individual needs of students. As a result, it leads to a successful and effective language lesson.

2.4. Motivating Students to Learn

Motivation plays an important role in foreign and second language acquisition. Teachers should employ different techniques or strategies to draw students' attention and to make them interested in a language lesson even when students are not initially interested in it (Harmer, 1998). Researchers indicate that teachers must make sure that they include a variety of teaching approaches in their lessons, to keep students motivated and to help them learn better and achieve learning objectives (Baker & Westup, 2000; Westwood, 2008). In addition, topics, issues, or subject matter should be interesting, relevant and intrinsically motivating, and learning experiences should take place in real-life situations where the relevant knowledge and skills will really be needed and used. Another important aspect is that, as Ushioda (2008) emphasises, teachers can effectively motivate students by encouraging them to be responsible for their own learning, maintaining a well-organized learning environment, setting high expectation and providing consolidation and encouragement during class hours. Last but not least, giving feedback, as Kyriacou (2009) identifies, is one of the most powerful modification techniques for increasing learning outcomes in students. Providing feedback in a timely manner will enhance learning. According to Harmer (1998), feedback is often considered as a vital part of the teacher's role and one of the things that students expect from their teachers. That is why language teachers should develop different techniques to give meaningful feedback to attract students' attention in the learning. Overall, getting students involved and motivated in learning requires teachers finding ways of developing and sustaining motivation through the long and hard process of learning a language. Doing so, teachers will be able to help students achieve their learning goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

2.5. Interacting and Communicating with Students

Teachers must be responsible for pulling students into participation in learning activities and for creating a warm, comfortable and relaxing classroom atmosphere. Teacher-student interaction plays an important role in ensuring the comfort and sense of belonging in the classroom (Englehart, 2009). A positive teacher-student interaction brings achievement to students. Teachers must show concern and respect to students. Other jobs teachers have to do are to make contact with students during the lesson, pay attention to what they are doing, ask the students questions and invite them to take other opportunities (Harmer, 1998). Also, Westwood (2008) indicates that teachers not only focus on teaching skills but also create a positive classroom climate in which students feel valued, trusted and supported. The teacher has to demonstrate enthusiasm, involvement, and interest in lesson presentation, in helping students acquire the target language. Language teachers not only know how to convey their knowledge to students and help them to improve their skills, but they must sometimes praise or criticise their work during the class hours (Wright, 2005; Westwood, 2008).

Overall, teaching effectiveness requires EFL teachers to have a lot of qualities. They must have knowledge of the target language, good skills and pedagogy. In addition, on implementing a language lesson, teachers have to carry out what they have mentioned in the lesson plan such elements as objectives of the lesson, content topic, and techniques and strategies of teaching, managing the class, motivating, communicating and interacting with the students.

3. THE STUDY

This paper was a part of a larger study entitled "An evaluation of the English as a foreign language curriculum at the tertiary level-A case study of a non-public university". The study was conducted at a non-public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with the participation of managers, teachers, and students. The study employed various data collection techniques, including documents analysis, interviews, class observations and questionnaires to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. This paper only focused on the data obtained from eleven class

observations that sought to answer the question: “How do the teachers implement the EFL curriculum in relation to the use of teaching methods?”

3.1. Data Collection

After getting permission of the teachers, the researcher arranged the time for observations with due consideration of their convenience. Eleven classes from different disciplines were selected for non-participant observations, and each observation lasted 90 minutes. A framework was used for the class observation in accordance with the purposes of the study (Patton, 2002). Through the performance of learning tasks or activities in the class, dimensions related to teaching effectiveness were investigated such as how the teachers prepared their lessons, what teaching methods was employed, how classes were organised and managed, what the teachers did to motivate the students and how the teachers communicated and interacted with the students. Observation notes were used to record data. To enhance validity and reliability of findings, after each observation, the researcher gave the observation sheet to the teacher to check the taken notes in order that both the teacher and the observer could reach an agreement about what took place during the class.

3.2. Data Analysis

The methods used to analyse the data collected from classroom observations were based on “Content analysis”. Categories and sub-categories were figured out based on the review of literature. Data were categorised according to the variables under investigation to the research question. The data were coded according to the categories and the content of the categories was described through subcategories. The class observations were coded in identification numbers as shown in the table below.

Table1. Coding for Class Observations

Classes observed	Identification numbers	Observation dates
Class 1	CL1	3 rd October, 2014
Class 2	CL2	10 th October, 2014
Class 3	CL3	15 th October, 2014
Class 4	CL4	17 th October, 2014
Class 5	CL5	31 st October, 2014
Class 6	CL6	10 th November, 2014
Class 7	CL7	15 th Novemebr, 2014
Class 8	CL8	20 th Novemebr, 2014
Class 9	CL9	21 st November, 2014
Class 10	CL10	Morning, 5 th December, 2014
Class 11	CL11	Afternoon 5 th December, 2014

To identify the main ideas, the researcher read the field notes from the class observation sheets. Sub-categories were grouped together and labeled to indicate the content. The findings were then interpreted in narrative passages. Some parts of the field notes were extracted and have been quoted in this paper to support the analysis of the findings. For example, the extract coded as “Observation excerpt CL1.03.10.2014.03” means that the excerpt was extracted from page 3 of the observation sheet from Class 1 observed on 3rd October, 2014.

3.3. Findings

The results from the class observations revealed that many problems existed in the implementation of the EFL curriculum in relation to the use of teaching methods. These problems included: the teachers’ preparation of lessons; teachers’ methods of teaching skills; teachers’ classroom management and student-motivating methods, and teachers’ interaction and communication with students.

3.3.1. No Identification of Objectives

Observations revealed that teachers’ preparation for the lesson was a serious problem. In most classes observed, there was evidence that the teachers did not spend much time preparing their lessons. In terms of learning objectives, no learning objectives of the whole unit and activities were identified and shown to the students. Before each activity, the teachers did not show why the students were going to do it. The teachers only introduced the title of the unit. For example, when starting Unit 2-American Headway Book 3, the teacher said to the whole class, “Today we study

unit 2 on page 10, please open your book”. He then wrote the title of the unit “The Work Week” on the board. After that he started the first task of the unit “Talk about your working day in a week” and he asked the students to repeat the title of the task. He then translated the title into Vietnamese (L1). He continued to revise some tenses learned in the previous week. Later he said, “We are going to do a listening activity.” All took place within 10 minutes (Observation excerpt CL1.03.10.2014.01). In some other classes observed, the teachers only looked at the course book and carried out their instruction.

In the above example, it might be because the teacher did not prepare that lesson carefully, so he did not write down all the objectives of the whole unit in his lesson plan. When starting the class with a listening activity, he should have introduced the listening activity by telling the students that they were going to listen to a song and why they were going to listen to it or what they could learn from the song, etc.. Doing so, it would be more interesting and thus attracted and engaged the students.

3.3.2. Unreasonable Allocation of Time

Another problem arising in the teachers’ instruction was the time allocation for each activity. It was evident that most teachers did not specify the time for the students to perform each activity or task. They did not divide the time relevantly to different activities or did not inform the students of the time they needed to complete the activities. Some activities took too long, others were not given sufficient time to finish. For example, during a 90-minute class, in order to complete grammar exercises, the teacher in Class 6 spent 42 minutes only “reteaching” grammar points which the students had already learned in secondary school. After introducing the exercises, giving the students instructions and setting time for the students, he sat on his chair in front of the class. Finally, he got feedback from the students. As observed, almost no students gave him an answer, so he answered the questions himself. After giving all the answers, the teacher asked “Do you understand?”. What he got was “Yes” from all the students. After that he moved to another grammar exercise. After 10 minutes he asked the students to take turn to write their sentences on the board and then he corrected the mistakes for the students. It took him another 10 minutes (Observation excerpt CL6.10.11.2014.02). Another example took place in Class 1 for a listening activity. It took the students 40 minutes to listen to the song entitled “Blue Monday” (Observation excerpt CL1.03.10.2014.01). Meanwhile, as shown in the coursebook (American Headway Book 3-Unit 2, p10), this song could only be used for a warming-up activity.

In other classes observed, the students did not have enough time to complete learning activities. For example, in Class 2, the teacher only spent 23 minutes carrying out 6 activities in (Vocabulary and Speaking, page 16, American Headway Book 3) in the class. These activities help the students to acquire the language input by practicing using vocabulary through listening and speaking activities. However, as observed, the teacher only showed the words on the screen and asked the students to repeat and then he described the pictures instead of organising the students to work in pairs or groups to do this activity. What took place in class might be called as in Vietnamese there is a saying “Cưỡi ngựa xem hoa”, which means “Riding on the horse and watching flowers”. That is to say, the teacher tried to do many things in a short time quickly and carelessly. Doing so is unsuitable to learning a foreign language. Students need time to practise and digest and acquire the language input. Through the class observations, it was realised that the teachers’ skills in time management were limited. Too much time was allocated for grammar and too little time for communication, which suggested that the time management of the teachers was not reasonable.

The above situations took place in the classes because of several reasons. It might be because the teachers did not have an overview of the whole unit before the class. They did not identify the focus or major objectives of each task designed in the coursebook, and thus they did not divide the time equally for each activity and when the activity was being conducted in the class, many unexpected situations might take place, at that time the activity might last either longer or shorter than expected.

3.3.3. Ineffective Use of Teaching Aids and Technology

Regarding teaching aids and technology, the results of the observations showed that almost no teachers prepared teaching aids. The only type of teaching aids used were pictures cut from the

coursebook and shown on the screen for the students to discuss or describe, but the pictures were used ineffectively. In eleven classes observed, only two teachers used pictures for the students to practise using English. For example, the teacher in Class 2 showed some pictures on the screen and asked the students to talk about ambitions and plans. However, it was found that no pair work or group work were organised for this activity. All the students looked attentively at the pictures but most of them did not say anything and when the teacher got feedback from the students, only one student volunteered to give a simple answer (Observation excerpt CL8.15.10.2014.01). The teacher in Class 3 also used pictures for the students to talk about Romeo and Juliet. However, the teacher only asked some questions and then some individual students gave their teacher some short answers. It was found that the pictures were not exploited and used effectively (Observation excerpt CL3.15.10.2014.01). What is more, all the classrooms at the university were equipped with over-head projectors. It is believed that over-head projectors are helpful to English teaching and learning. As observed, only two teachers used the over-head projectors to show pictures and designed tasks for attracting the students and saving time for the students to increase their working time. However, four other teachers used the over-head projectors just for showing some pages from the course book, or for showing some words for the students to copy down in their notebooks. Five other teachers did not use the projectors at all.

The above situations took place due to some reasons. For example, the teachers might think that everything was designed in the course book, so following it was enough, or it might be because preparing teaching aids would take them a lot of time. It is obvious that teaching quality would increase if all the teachers could use technology effectively in their classes.

3.3.4. Teachers' Limited Ability in Content Knowledge Explanations

One of the role of the teacher in the class is to explain the structures of sentences or illustrate the main points of the subject to the students. In all classes observed, there was no evidence that the teachers made mistakes about content knowledge. That might be because they followed the tasks designed in the course book and prepared the answers and meanings of words on the screen in advance. It might say that their content knowledge, especially about grammar was good enough to convey to the students. However, it was also evident that the way of explaining content knowledge of some teachers was a problem. Some teachers bilingually used both English and L1 to explain the structures of sentences as well as illustrate the main points of the subject. That is to say whenever the teachers explained something in English, they then translated it into L1. For example, in one class observed, the researcher realised that both the teacher and the students used a lot of L1 during the class. When starting the lesson, the teacher said

“Today we study unit 5” in L1. He then said “Listen, please” in L1. After that he played the CD player then he asked the question “What statement does he say?” and he translated the question into L1. When one student answered the question, she also used L1 “Thưa thầy câu 3 a.” which means “Dear teacher, statement 3”. Finally, he asked the students to look at the tapescript, read and find out the answers. The teacher then translated all the questions into L1. If the students could not answer any questions, he did himself and translated all statements into L1 (Observation excerpt CL9. 21.11.2014.02). A similar situation took place in Class 6 for a reading activity. The teacher explained the content of the passage in L1. Sometimes she read some sentences in the passage and translated them into L1 (CL6. 10.11. 2014.02).

What took place in the classes might be called “Overuse of L1” in EFL language teaching and learning. If doing so repeatedly, the students would not pay much attention to their teacher’s English but just wait for his / her explanation in L1 in order that they could understand the meaning more easily and more quickly. It was evident that the way that the teacher used to explain the content distracted students’ thinking and made them passive. Overuse of L1 could make students fail to realise how important it was that they used English in class as much as possible. Also, when an EFL teacher does not use English very often, it is difficult to encourage the students to communicate or do learning tasks in English. Therefore, EFL teachers need to explain content knowledge in English rather than L1, as by using English frequently and appropriately, students can learn a lot from their teacher talk and they can also improve their listening and speaking skills.

3.3.5. *Ineffective or Unclear Instructions*

In order to manage the class effectively, one of the techniques teachers should use is giving instructions before any activity or task. However, in several classes observed, the teachers did not use this technique very well. Some teachers did not give instructions on how to carry out activities in the classes, or if they did, the instructions were not clear enough for the students to do the activity or lacked information in the instructions. It was evident that whenever starting a new activity, the teachers only told the students what activity they were going to do and on which page it was. Then they read the written instructions of the activity in the course books. The teachers did not tell the students how many steps the activity contained. Also, some important steps in giving instructions were not included such as modelling and checking. The consequence of missing some steps was that many students did not participate in most of the activities conducted in the classes. They only talked privately about something with their friends in L1. During the observations, it was found that after reading the written instructions, the teachers translated them into L1. It seemed that the teachers were afraid their students could not understand their instructions in English. Even a very simple English classroom language phrase was also said in L1 such as “Các bạn mở sách trang 13”, which means “Open your book on page 13” (Observation excerpt CL2. 10.10.2014.01).

Doing so, it is considered to be very “dangerous” to a foreign language class. Creating a challenging learning environment in which the target language is spoken and heard as much as possible will certainly motivate and attract students.

3.3.6. *Teachers' Limited Ability in Classroom Organisation*

The results of the observations showed that the ability of some teachers in classroom organisation was limited. During the observation of the eleven classes, rarely did the researcher find any successful pair work or group work activities. Sometimes pair work or group work were conducted irrelevantly and ineffectively. In one out of eleven classes observed, the teacher asked the students to work in pairs to discuss some grammar points (Discussing grammar, p.20 American Headway Book 3). That is to say, the students had to talk about which tense was used in the sentence and why it was used. As observed, no students could explain in English. Some of them spoke in L1, some looked at the exercise quietly; some did not pay attention to the exercise. During the activity, the teacher sometimes walked around, but said nothing. After 7 minutes, the teacher explained to the students in L1 (Observation excerpt CL4.17.10.2014. 02). In another class, the researcher found that pair work was only limited to the “Question and Answer” activity. This was a grammar practice activity. The students asked each other about their likes and dislikes. However, all the questions were put by the teacher in the form of “Yes-No” questions and shown on the screen. Such questions as: -Do you like studying English?; -Would you like to know a foreign language?; -Do you enjoy listening to music?, and so on.

After 5 minutes, the teacher nominated one pair to ask and answer the questions. The students looked at the questions on the screen. One asked and the other answered, but they also gave “Yes-No” answers.

- Do you like studying English?
- Yes. (Observation excerpt CL8. 20.11.2014.02)

In another class, after the students finished reading the text “Romeo and Juliet”, the teacher asked them to work in pairs to do a follow-up activity entitled “What do you think” on page 22, Book 3- American Headway. The question raised for discussion was “In the play, Romeo and Juliet fall in love at first sight. Do you think it is too soon to fall in love?” However, pair work did not work. Most of the students did not say anything. Only some students could give some ideas but in L1 (Observation excerpt CL3. 15.10.2014.02). The activity was not successful because of some reasons. It might be because the students did not have enough time to digest the reading text in order to get information about Romeo and Juliet. It might also be because the students were not provided enough vocabulary and ideas for the discussion.

It was evident that the teacher gave a topic and then forced the students to talk about it, or after a reading text, the teacher did not check the students’ understanding and elicit ideas from them before forming pairs or groups to discuss the topic.

The above situations were an evidence to show teachers' poor ability in classroom organisation. The teachers could not manage the classes well when they wanted to form students into pairs and groups for communicative activities. When organising pair work and group work, teachers should know the objectives of each activity, give clear instructions, decide who the students work with, how long the activity lasts, how to control the class, and how to get feedback from students.

3.3.7. *Boring Learning Activities*

One of the most common phenomena in all the classes observed was that the atmosphere was not very interesting. There were not many communication activities designed to motivate students.

Learning activities and tasks were not plentiful enough for the students to acquire the language input and develop language skills. Or, learning activities were not carefully prepared for the students. The commonly-used classroom activities were taken from the course book without adaptation. Most teachers usually relied on the course book. The teachers did not care about whether learning activities and tasks could meet the objectives of the curriculum and the students' needs or not. They followed every task or activity step by step. The teachers did not decide which activities to choose or how to adapt the activities to fit the students' different levels of English proficiency. That is why the activities were simple and repetitive and inappropriate to many students in the class. It took the students a lot of time to do the exercises in the course book, and using the target language was limited in the way that the teachers called upon several students to stand up to read the answers aloud or write the answers on the board.

3.3.8. *Poor Techniques for Integrating Teaching Grammar Points into Developing Skills*

In each learning activity, teachers should employ different techniques in order to help students not only understand the target language but also acquire the language input easily. However, it was evident that grammar practice exercises were done isolatedly. Not many activities were organised for combining language and skills. One example took place in Class 9 as illustrated below.

The teacher showed 4 incomplete sentences on the screen:

- One day I want to.....
- Right now I would like to.....
- On Sundays I like to.....
- This weekend I am going to.....

Then, he asked individual students to give the answer. After four students completed the statements, they volunteered, stood up and read the answers. The other students did not do anything, then the activity finished (Observation excerpt CL9.11.2014.03). This activity was considered as a practice activity of grammar points. It would have been more interesting if the teacher had asked the students to work in pairs. They could have asked each other the four questions, so communication would have taken place in the class. For example, question 1 "What do you want to do one day?" Or, the students could have worked in groups, or a game could have been designed through the use of these incomplete sentences, or after speaking, the students could have written their complete sentences.

3.3.9. *Dissatisfying Teacher-Student Interaction*

Interaction between the teachers and the students was also observed during class observations. In the eleven classes observed, the researcher found that all the teachers were really enthusiastic and dynamic. They had whole-hearted support for the students. In fact, they really wanted the students to learn English. However, because of facing pressure from hard work and long working hours, it was not easy for them to create an active learning environment for the students.

Teacher-student interaction does not mean that only the teacher transmits knowledge to students or asks them questions, but it involves student asking teacher questions. In all eleven classes observed, the researcher found that no students asked their teachers a single question. As a matter of fact, Vietnamese teachers rarely encourage students to ask questions and Vietnamese students rarely ask their teachers questions. This situation always takes place in Vietnamese classes due to several reasons. One of the most common reasons is that according to Vietnamese culture, it has

been for long said that if a student asks his or her teacher, he or she is considered to be impolite or rude. Another reason is that Vietnamese students are shy. Or, it might be because that they were familiar with the teacher-dominated model of teaching in secondary school. Although they might not understand the lesson, they did not dare to ask questions. They tried to prove that they understood everything. That is why whenever the teacher asked the question “ Do you understand?”, all the students answered “Yes” as observed in most classes.

3.3.10. Ineffective Teaching of the Four Skills

In almost all eleven classes observed, it was found that the teachers focused too much time on teaching grammar points. During 90-minute classes, the teachers spent most of the time “re-teaching” grammar points that the students had already learned at secondary school. In five out of eleven classes observed, the teachers spent from 20 minutes to 45 minutes “re-teaching” grammar points. In these classes, the students only did written grammar exercises or listened to the teachers’ explanations about grammatical rules, and copied examples in their notebooks. For example, the teacher in Class 4 spent 49 minutes (Observation excerpt CL4. 17.10.2014. 03); the teacher in Class 5 spent 23 minutes (Observation excerpt CL5.31.10.2014.03), the teacher in Class 6 spent 42 minutes (Observation excerpt CL6. 10.11.2014.03), and the teacher in Class 11 spent 20 minutes (Observation excerpt CL11.05.12.2014.02) on grammar exercises. The course books used for the curriculum are integrated skills course books. They required the teachers to employ CLT in the implementation of the curriculum to develop both language areas and language skills for the students. However, in eleven classes observed, the researcher found that the teachers of these classes were not very successful in the teaching of the four skills.

3.3.10.1. Teaching of Listening

In eleven classes observed, only five teachers conducted listening activities. For example, in one class the teacher started a listening activity by writing 5 questions on the board. After he told the students to listen, he played the CD player the first time. It seemed that all the students were attentively listening to the CD. He then asked the students to listen again. This time the students listened to sentence by sentence. After each sentence, he paused and repeated the sentence, explained and translated it into L1. After finishing listening to the whole text, he asked the students to answer the questions (Observation excerpt CL7.15.11.2014.01). Another listening activity was conducted in Class 10. Instead of carefully organising the activity for the students to listen, the teacher repeated sentence by sentence and translated all into L1 and later asked the students to give answers to the questions (Observation excerpt CL10. 05.12.2014.02).

The above situations revealed that the teachers listened to the CD, not the students. They explained and gave all answers and then the students just answered the questions again. They did not follow the three stages of teaching listening skills, i.e. pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages. They did not do anything to facilitate the listening process to help the students to digest the ideas or information in the text. More seriously, they could not have prepared the lesson carefully. If they had done, they could have realised that the listening text was unsuitable to the students’ level, and so some adaptation could have been made to simplify the listening process and more techniques must be used to support the students. The students could not learn anything if the input was so difficult and incomprehensible. Such listening activities might lead to students’ demotivation in learning English.

3.3.10.2. Teaching of Reading

Without receptive skills, students cannot take in enough language knowledge for developing productive skills. However, reading activities in the classes observed seemed not to be paid enough attention to, or not to be carefully prepared. In one class, the reading activity lasted 57 minutes. When the students started reading the text, instead of letting the students guess the meaning of words, the teacher gave the meanings of nearly all the sub-headings of the passages and the new words in L1. It took the teacher 20 minutes to finish this job. Then he asked the students to do two more tasks. He did not set the time for the students. As observed, many students did not read the text at all. After 6 minutes, instead of getting feedback from the students, he started to explain the answers. All the class sat quietly and listened to the teacher’s explanation and copied the answers on the board in their notebooks (Observation excerpt CL7. 15.11.2014.03). It seemed that the students did not want to do anything except waiting for the

teacher's answers and copied all. The reading activity lasted rather long, however, as observed, the students almost learned nothing.

The teacher did not teach them how to read the text, what strategies they should use for reading the text. He did not encourage the students to read the text or check whether they were working or not. It might have been easier if the teacher had given the students instructions to work in pairs / groups to guess the meaning of words, to jot down interesting ideas, or to find out answers as required, giving them the chance to practise using different techniques for reading. It is advised that the teachers should know different techniques for teaching reading skills. Each reading task needs a different technique, so teaching the students how to read, why to read and what strategies to use is vitally important.

3.3.10.3. Teaching of Speaking

As observed, not many free speaking activities or discussions were conducted for the students to use the target language in communication. One of the very rare speaking activities was conducted by the teacher of Class 3 after a listening activity. She first introduced the topic entitled "Tell your friends about your first love". She then asked the students to work in pairs without any further instructions. At first the researcher thought that this topic would be interesting to all the class. However, when the activity started, it was found that it was not as interesting as expected. This was a class of second-year students aged from 18 to 19. In Vietnam these students were considered to be too young to love; especially most of them came from rural areas, so they had never fallen in love before. That is why the teacher failed in her attempt to carry out this activity. It was evident that most of the students did not have anything to talk to their friends. They looked at each other and smiled. However, some students could say something about the topic, but in L1 (Observation excerpt CL3. 15.10.2014.02). The topic was about "First love", so the teacher might think that it would attract the students. However, it was about Western culture, not Vietnamese culture, and therefore it was unsuitable for the students. If the teacher had paid attention to this issue, she might have chosen a different topic or made some changes to the topic and thus it would be better for both the teacher and the students. In some other classes, speaking activities were also organised, but as observed, most of them failed.

The above situations revealed that culture cannot be neglected in foreign language teaching and learning. It is advised to be careful with the use of Western coursebooks, especially about culture. The teachers should understand the students' different learning preferences and background. What is more, organising activities for the students to use the target language in the class requires efforts and patience. The teachers not only have to prepare the lesson carefully before class, but during the class, they have to use different techniques, control and encourage the students to engage in learning. Doing so, an English speaking activity will bring a lot of benefits to the students.

3.3.10.4. Teaching of Writing

Unlike other course books, in "American Headway", the "Writing Section" is put at the end of the course book. It may be a weak point of this course book. That is because when the teachers finished the last section "Everyday English" in each unit, they thought that they had finished teaching the unit and they forgot to do the "Writing Section". In the eleven classes observed, the researcher found that sometimes students were asked to complete sentences relating to grammatical structures or write some words on the board. However, those activities are not for practising writing skills. More seriously, although the syllabus of the course covered the "Writing Section", as observed, three teachers neither asked the students to do it, nor did they assign it as homework. It might be because the teachers did not have enough time to do this section, or it might be because the end-of-term tests did not require the students to write anything, so the teachers might think it was unnecessary to teach this section. Writing skill is one of the two productive skills. If the students only learned grammar points or structures and practised reading and listening, it would be meaningless when they could not write a correct simple sentence, or more advanced a letter or an essay. More than ever before, the teachers' classwork must be more carefully managed and organised. Only when class time is also spent on writing activities, will the goals and objectives of the curriculum be accomplished.

3.4. Discussion and Recommendations

The results of the class observations support previous studies that have found that there are gaps existing in the teaching and learning English and in the implementation of the EFL curriculum at the Vietnamese tertiary level (Do, 2000; Nguyen, 2003; Dang, 2006; Vu, 2007; Doan & Utsumi, 2008; Hoang, 2010; Nguyen, 2011; Le, 2013; Dang, 2013; Tran, 2013; Van, 2013; Vu, 2013; Hong, Warren & Fehring, 2014).

The study results raise some interesting discussions about teaching methods and techniques employed in Vietnamese tertiary English classes. Through class observations, it was found that the use of CLT in classroom practices has not paid enough attention to. Instead, traditional methods such as grammar-translation method is still popularly used. Vietnamese English teachers still spend a lot of time “re-teaching” grammar points which students have already learned in secondary school, and a little time developing students’ language skills. As a matter of fact, grammar exercises are already designed in the course book. It does not take teachers much time and effort to prepare. What teachers have to do is to ask students to open their course book and do exercises. It is recommended that teachers should ask students to do written grammar exercises at home, or they should redesign grammar exercises in advance, in class the students will have opportunities to practise writing and speaking through the use of grammar points and structures. That is to say, grammar points or structures should be taught and practised in a communicative way rather than isolatedly.

The use of traditional methods is also shown through the use of too much translation in the class. Many teachers give instructions or explain content knowledge in L1, or in English, but then translate them into L1. Teachers may think that doing so will save their time and make it easy for students to understand. Another reason is that each English class in Vietnam usually has at least 45 students, which is not easy for them to organise communicative activities for students. If they organise communicative activities, it will take them a lot of time to prepare. Meanwhile, most of them are very busy teaching many classes in several universities. However, it is the teachers’ responsibility to find ways of overcoming the negative effects of large class sizes (Englehart, 2009). According to Sharan (2003), large classes may cause no problems if they are taught with the co-operative learning method, which will achieve higher scores than those achieved by either the smaller or the larger classes taught with the lecture-recitation method.

No matter what happens, it is advised not to spend too much time “re-teaching” grammar and use too much L1 and translation in an English class in non-English speaking contexts like Vietnam. Time in class should be used for students to practise communicating in English and cooperative learning or student-centred model should be employed. Only doing so will Vietnamese students be able to improve their English proficiency level.

The study also found that the general goals of the unit and specific objectives of tasks and activities that the class teachers wanted to carry out were not explained to the students. The question raised here is “Why did the class teachers not identify and explain the general goals as well as specific objectives to their students?” Is it because they were not shown what to cover in a lesson plan?; or they thought that it was unnecessary? If so, to have teachers pay attention to the goals of a unit and the objectives of tasks and activities, the syllabus content must show them what to do in their classes. Learning objectives are the destination that every student has to reach. In the researcher’s opinion, EFL teachers’ responsibility is to identify and explain the objectives of the lesson to the students so that they will be aware of the importance of learning English and how class practices can help them. Doing so, the teachers can change the students’ thinking that they study English as just a part of the requirements for credit completion and graduation. The teachers also have to think about the student learning outcomes that will result from their instruction. Only when English teachers consider the goals and learning outcomes carefully, will they be able to determine if learning has actually taken place and to measure whether their students have accomplished their goals or not (Vásques, Hansen & Smith, 2010).

The results of the study also raise some discussions about language areas and skills integration in the process of English teaching and learning. That is because the General English courses at the university use skill-integrated coursebooks. However, through the class observations, it was evident that language areas and skills were taught isolatedly. According to Broady (2005),

integrated tasks are usually experienced by students as 'real' uses of language. They are motivating and also support students in developing 'transferable' language skills. In most of the reading and listening tasks conducted in the classes observed, the teachers only directed the students to answering questions which were already designed in the coursebooks. Learning reading and listening does not mean that students read or listen a text just for knowing some more vocabulary and structures. It is suggested that teachers should link work on different skills together in a task. Following a receptive skill activity should be a productive skill activity. In this way, vocabulary and grammar knowledge and functional language can be consolidated through students' performance (Broady, 2005). In the Vietnamese context, listening and reading activities designed in the Western coursebooks may not always be relevant to the students, so it is recommended that teachers modify the existing materials, or if possible design materials which cover aspects of life in Vietnam. Recently, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been introduced in Vietnam, it is suggested that teachers should use TBLT in teaching listening and reading, and thus at least two skills will be integrated in a task. For example, listening and performing actions, reading and solving problems and so on (Ur, 1996).

Lack of teaching students how to learn also arises for discussion. This result of the study is consistent with previous studies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) that found that teachers have little awareness of the types of strategies their students actually need to use in learning, and that learning strategies and the student's role in the learning process have been neglected in many language classrooms (Macaro, 2001). During the class observations, the researcher found that no teachers taught their students how to carry out a task, or what strategies they could use to complete the task. Learning strategies must be aligned with learning goals and objectives (Bouchard, 2005). Tasks or activities must be designed based on the three types of learning strategies, including metacognitive, cognitive, or social/affective to meet the goals of the curriculum. That requires teachers to understand clearly about learning strategies (Fillmore & Snow, 2000), and it is advised that there should be fairly major changes in teaching styles and in the use of language resources. Students have different learning styles. If the teacher's teaching method only relies on the whole class teaching, it will not cater for the diversity of the students' needs (Macaro, 2001). Western coursebooks are not designed for a specific context. Reading and listening texts in the coursebooks are sometimes sophisticated, which is not always suitable to non-English speaking contexts like Vietnam. Teachers have to teach students reading and learning strategies in order to apply in different types of texts and a variety of levels of text complexity. Vandergrift and Goh (2009) emphasise that listening activities become disguised forms of testing students' existing listening abilities if they are not taught how to listen. Follow-up activities must also be conducted. Teachers have to ask the students to apply different strategies in doing tasks such as, guessing the meaning in context, writing the summary of the text, taking notes of ideas, finding main ideas, finding specific information, and so on. A combination of receptive skills and productive skills in a language lesson is vitally important. After reading or listening to a text, students should work in pairs or groups to talk or write about something which is related to the text or applied in their real life. Teaching students how to learn, specifically how to read, listen, speak and write English requires every EFL teacher not only to apply different strategies in classroom organisation, teacher-student interaction, cooperative learning and skills teaching, but also to clearly understand different types of learning strategies and the diversity of students' learning styles.

Particularly, the results of the study lead to a discussion about the university's management of the curriculum implementation, and professional development policy. The study uncovers many problems existing in the implementation of the EFL curriculum. Most of the teachers did not explain the objectives of the unit, allocate time for activities equally, or use teaching aids and the target language effectively. The results are consistent with previous studies (Kedzior, 2004; Wang, 2007; Meng and Tajaroensuk, 2013), which indicate that it is due to lack of guidelines from the managers and lack of in-service training courses, or that in-service training courses are discontinued or inappropriate. Not everything teachers need to know, as Richards and Farrell (2005) indicate, can be provided at pre-service level. Also, according to Waxman, Téllez and Walberg (2006), integration of in-service courses with pre-service curriculum for EFL teachers should be promoted. Therefore, it is suggested that the university should have meetings, seminars or workshops for the teachers to discuss what is related to classroom practices before

implementing the curriculum and during the time of implementing the curriculum. In-service training courses must sometimes be organised for pedagogical exchanges, sharing experiences, expressing difficulties or discussing problems teachers face in their instruction. This is consistent with the point of view of Waxman, Téllez and Walberg (2006) that in-service courses encourage EFL teachers to reflect on and assess their teaching and that helps them change their attitudes and practices. Listening to teachers' and students' voices, the managers will understand what is taking place with the curriculum implementation, and at that time adjustments will be provided in time to improve the teaching and learning of English at the university.

3.5. Conclusion

This study was conducted in a non-public university which is a part of Vietnamese tertiary level. The study has provided an insight of how the teachers implement the EFL curriculum in relation to the use of teaching methods. The results of the study reveal that besides efforts that the teachers have made to improve the students' English proficiency, many negative aspects still exist in the use of teaching methods in classroom practices. Ineffectiveness of the teaching and learning of English is related to such aspects as no identification of objectives, unreasonable allocation of time, ineffective use of teaching aids and technology, dissatisfying teacher-student interaction, teachers' limited ability in content knowledge explanations, ineffective or unclear instructions, teachers' limited ability in classroom organisation, and ineffective teaching of the four skills. It is undeniable that to enhance the quality of English language teaching and learning at the university in particular as well as at the Vietnamese tertiary level in general, managers and teachers still have many things to deal with.

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