BY: NGUYEN THANH VAN

Volume 1: The Study

IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR UNDER-GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY (COT) - VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI

M. A. COMBINED PROGRAMME THESIS

FIELD: ENGLISH METHODOLOGY

Code: 60.14.10

HANOI, 2006
VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI

COLLEGE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
POST-GRADUATE DEPARTMENT

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NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỂ XUẤT CÁC GIẢI PHÁP NÂNG CAO NĂNG LỰC TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC TẠI TRƯỞNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ - ĐẠI HỌC QUỐC GIA HÀ NỘI

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Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hoàng Vân Vân

HANOI, 2006
The study examines how English was taught and learned at a college under Vietnam National University, Hanoi. In this study, observation, informal talk, and survey were used to collect data. Answers to the following research questions were searched: (1) What problems do teachers and students at the College of Technology experience in teaching and learning English? and (2) what are the possible solutions to the problems found at the College of Technology? The findings of the study were discussed; some solutions were proposed to the problems; and a 50-period pilot course was offered to test the feasibility of the proposed solutions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the combination of the talents and contribution of all the members of the research groups in Pre-doctoral Training Center, School of Post-graduate Studies, VNU. I am indebted to them for their indispensable roles in the study.

My sincere thanks now go to Assoc. Prof. Doctor Hoang Van Van, my supervisor, for his whole-hearted guidance from the beginning through every step of the way down to the very last minutes of the thesis.

Then I would like to thank the administrators, English teachers and students at the College of Technology for participating in the field study part of the thesis, and for making it easy for us to get access to the college's classrooms, facilities and equipment to conduct our investigation.

I also wish to express my thanks to the VNU's Project undertaken by Pre-doctoral Training Center, School of Post-graduate studies, VNU for their financial support to this study, without which the field part of the study would not have been possible.

I will never forget the soft manners of Doctor Duong Thi Nu when I troubled her with my ignorance at the forming of the ideas for the study. I did learn a lot from her.

Still, I should thank Assistant Professor Keith C. Hulsey for teaching in the pilot course and giving his valuable comments to the course.

Finally, and importantly, I have to thank my family for treating me with tolerance and giving me the peace I need to complete this study.
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<td>CLT</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
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<td>COT</td>
<td>The College of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>English for Specific Purposes / Professional English</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLSP</td>
<td>Foreign Language for Specific Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>General English</td>
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<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
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<tr>
<td>OHP</td>
<td>Overhead Projector</td>
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<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>VNU</td>
<td>Vietnam National University, Hanoi</td>
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<td>CFL</td>
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<td>KET</td>
<td>Key English Test</td>
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<td>high-quality students</td>
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PART 1. INTRODUCTION
1. Rationale of the Study

The beginning of this 21st century has seen nations worldwide get involved enthusiastically in co-operative activities in search of opportunities and challenges for development in a world of constant, profound and complicated changes. Although co-operation and boycotts remain intermingled, the general trend towards a peaceful, stable and co-operative environment for development plays a governing role in international relationships and development programs in every nation.

At the moment, Vietnam is carrying out its economic integration and globalization process at an ever-increasing speed. We have bilaterally and multilaterally established relations with about 170 nations and have already become a member of WTO since November 7th, 2006.

However, what we have achieved so far is still below the demand of integration and globalization. Right now we need drastic changes and a breakthrough to catch up with other countries in the region and the world. In order to do so, all areas of our society will have to get involved in and make more and better contribution to the globalization and integration process of the country. Education, being the foremost state policy and the key to development, therefore, cannot be an outsider.

Being one of the most prestigious institutions in the country’s system of tertiary education, Vietnam National University, Hanoi (hereinafter referred to as VNU) is carrying out its renovation program, mixing itself with the country’s integration and globalization progress. One of VNU’s most important missions is to develop a model of a research university whose quality can be compared with that of other advanced universities in the region, and later in the world (Vietnam National University, Hanoi - academic year of 2004-2005, p. 7). In order to step by step realize the mission, VNU has laid an emphasis on the proficiency of English as a subject in the university’s curricula. During the last several years, VNU’s intention has been for graduate students to obtain the level of proficiency in English which can be accepted by international institutions for tertiary education, and which allows the students to communicate satisfactorily in the integrated working environment later, ranging at least from 500 to 550 points for TOEFL or from 5 to 5.5 points for IELTS. Conferences on English and Globalization
have been held, and changes toward more international and effective teaching methods have made their appearance in the syllabi being used in the colleges under VNU.

However, the teaching of English to non-English majors at VNU hasn't been laid down as a policy and hasn't been properly planned as well. What students have achieved so far depends on the level of concern from the member colleges and the College of Foreign Languages' Foreign Language for Specific Purposes Department (hereinafter referred to as FLSP). Therefore, the effectiveness of the training of English for students at VNU is still far from expectation. After 420 classroom periods of English learning, the majority of the students can hardly communicate well in English, the language they have been trained, in working. Many favourable opportunities to improve their professional knowledge have been missed by VNU's under-graduates, post-graduates and even lecturers at the prospect of overseas professional training, seminars, conferences and professional activities due only to the limited use of English.

At the moment, VNU is moving with the country's trend of globalization and intends to advance by leaps and bounds so that it can be on par with other universities in the regions in the short run and over the world in the long run.

To step by step realize the mission, a project has been financed by VNU since 2005 to improve the level of proficiency in English for VNU's under-graduates and post-graduates. The aim of the project is to standardize the English output of VNU's under-graduates and post-graduates at the level at which they can reach from 500 to 550 points for TOEFL or 5.0 to 5.5 for IELTS, the score accepted at academic institutions worldwide; that is, the person reaching that score can successfully communicate in English for his studying purposes and later in his profession as he goes on studying.

As part of the above mentioned VNU's project, this thesis aims at searching solutions to improving the English language proficiency for VNU's under-graduate students and was carried out at the College of Technology (hereinafter referred to as COT), Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
2. Aims of the Study

The main aim of the thesis is to find the problems and offer solutions to improving the English language proficiency at COT - VNU. In order to achieve this aim, the thesis sets the following objectives for investigation.

+ To investigate the current state of the teaching and learning of English of undergraduate students at the College of Technology, VNU;

+ To suggest solutions to improving students' language proficiency in the light of Communicative Language Teaching approach; and

+ To carry out a 50-period pilot teaching at pre-intermediate level to see the feasibility of the solutions suggested in the study.

3. Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the search for solutions to improving the English language proficiency for under-graduate students, and was carried out on subjects at COT, VNU. The work involves firstly the investigation into the current situation of the teaching and learning English to identify problems in such areas as classroom teaching and learning, textbooks, tests, leaders' opinions, classroom conditions, etc.; secondly the suggested solutions; and thirdly the designing of a pilot 50-classroom-period-English course including the writing of the syllabus, and the organizing and teaching of the English course with the participant of 25 COT's students based on some of the suggested solutions and the designed syllabus.

4. Significance of the Study

The study claims to be of some help for the COT's students who were the target population of the study in that it helps them realize that their ability to learn English is more than what they think it is, and that there is no vanity in aiming high for English. For the educational authorities, the results of the study may encourage them to create better syllabi and implement better language policies. For the teachers, the study hopes to show them the brighter future of applying CLT approach in teaching English, both general English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).
5. Research Methodology

To achieve its aims, the study uses both qualitative and quantitative research procedures. The qualitative part involves the examination of documents relating to the issue of Globalization and its effects on the language policy at VNU, and the analysis of the key factors affecting the quality of language teaching and learning. Furthermore, it involves the study of textbooks, classroom observation, informal talks, and syllabus design. The quantitative part deals with survey questionnaires, pre/post tests, and the feedbacks obtained from the students who attended the pilot course.

6. Design of the Study

The thesis consists of three parts.

Part I is the introduction, which represents the rationales, the aims, the significance, the method, the scope and the design of the study.

Part II, the development, consists of four chapters:

Chapter 1 serves as the orientations of the study. It starts with a brief discussion of globalization and its effects to the teaching and learning of English, and then a presentation of CLT, an approach in language teaching which is currently accepted without challenges to be the appropriate approach in the context of globalization. The chapter continues with the review of the key factors affecting the quality of language teaching and learning based on which the study was carried out.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the research to identify the problems experienced by COT in teaching and learning English. It starts with the discussion of the study methodology, then with the analysis of the data collected and the presentation of the problems found.

Chapter 3 proposes some solutions to improving the teaching and learning quality of the English language.

Chapter 4 reports on the planning and carrying out of a pilot course.

Firstly, based on the recommended solutions in Chapter 1, a 50-period communicative syllabus for first-year undergraduate students at COT, VNU was designed.

Secondly, a report was written on the pilot teaching of the 50-period English course at the pre-intermediate level and on the students' feedback after the course finished.

Part 3, the conclusion, summarizes all the issues under study, states the limitations of the study and suggests some directions for further research.
PART 2. DEVELOPMENT
Chapter 1
ORIENTATIONS

In this chapter, we firstly present a brief discussion of globalization and its effects to the teaching and learning of English, especially to that at VNU. We then turn to CLT, an approach which is considered appropriate to the teaching and learning of English as a subject at VNU in the context of globalization. After that, we review the key factors affecting the quality of language teaching and learning based on which the study was carried out.

1. GLOBALIZATION AND ITS EFFECTS TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJORS AT VNU

1.1. Globalization and English Learning

1.1.1. The Trend of Globalization

Foreign languages have long been considered not only a means of communication but knowledge and a means to obtain knowledge as well. The process of acquiring scientific and technological advances requires the grasp of the language of the country possessing the advances or the international language. Also, the exchange of experts in science as well as the expansion of the market cannot take place smoothly without foreign languages.
English is the Latin of the 21st century. In the current period, the use of English is central for communicating knowledge worldwide, for instruction, and for cross-border degree arrangements and other programs. The dominance of English, therefore, is not surprising.

The society we are living in is characterized by the trend of integration, globalization, high technology, intellectual economy, etc. In order to keep up with the whirlwind of development and stay away from the risk of lagging behind, every society has to take full advantage of advances in technology and science. It is technological and scientific innovation that serves as a global trend of this 21st century, leading human to intellectual civilization.

Vietnam is in the process of integration and globalization with the aim to get the country to become an industrialized country by 2020 possessing firm competence in science and technology (Vietnamese Communism Party's IX Congress). The society therefore requires the formation of a variety of new values both socially and technically. It is not too hard to see why English, the international language, plays an ever-increasing role in the country's economical, social, cultural, scientific and technological development today.

To acquire the country's strategic aims, education in general and the teaching and learning of English in particular have to search for basic solutions to overcoming those challenges of our time. The key point to remember in education is to strike for a common standard in training programs, in administrating and especially in training quality and equivalent conditions to ensure that training quality so that the process of integration, globalization and steady development can be carried out within the country.

To compete and cooperate with the foreign partners, we need a new labour force capable of working at a much higher level, and acquiring and applying creatively scientific achievements. The quality of the new labour force needs to be improved quickly, direct toward international standards, which are normally required by the foreign partners in almost all transactions. Failure to meet these international standards will result in disadvantages in our part in accordance with the law of the open market. English, therefore, becomes a basic element in the formation of the high-quality labour
force. At the moment, the teaching and learning of English has to gain momentum in order to contribute to the country's process of globalization.

1.1.2. Language Proficiency and Language Proficiency Needed in the Context of Globalization

1.1.2.1. Language Proficiency

Oxford English Dictionary defines language proficiency or linguistic proficiency as the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. As theories vary among pedagogues as to what constitutes proficiency, there is little consistency as to how different it is classified.

A student’s English Language Proficiency (ELP), as defined by Cambridge University, is his or her level of attainment of skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension in the English language. ELP level is determined by a formal ELP assessment that identifies students with an ELP Level 1 through 5. These levels can then be used as a reference to the ELP standards.

Levels of English Language Proficiency:

Level 1 (Elementary): Students begin to demonstrate receptive or productive English skills. They are able to respond to some simple communication tasks.

Level 2 (Pre-intermediate): Students respond with increasing ease to more varied communication tasks.

Level 3 (Intermediate): Students tailor the English language skills they have been taught to meet their immediate communication needs. They are able to understand and be understood in many basic social situations and need support in academic language.

Level 4 (Advanced): Students combine the elements of the English language in complex, cognitively demanding situations and are able to use English as a means in some areas, although some minor errors of conventions are still evident.

Level 5 (Proficient): Students communicate effectively with various audiences on a wide range of familiar and new topics to meet social and academic demands. Students speak, understand, read, write, and comprehend English without difficulty and
display academic achievement comparable to native English-speaking peers. To attain the English proficiency level of their native English-speaking peers, further linguistic enhancement and refinement are necessary.

1.1.2.2. Non-English Majors' Level of English Language Proficiency Assumed by Vietnam National University, Hanoi

At VNU, English is chosen as a compulsory subject for undergraduate students who have to accumulate twenty-eight credits (in terms of hours) of English in five out of eight semesters in their study for an undergraduate degree. Students start with the elementary level of English in the first semester and are supposed to obtain the pre-intermediate level after graduation. Colleges under the university use either the *New Headway* set (John and Liz Soars, 2000) or the *Lifeline* set (Hutchinson, 2001) as their textbooks during the first two semesters. The textbooks cover four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The textbooks used in the other three semesters are English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials selected by the colleges. However, except for a presentation on the given topic in the middle of the semester, at the end of each semester, students’ assessment is based on a written test which mostly examines the reading and translating related to ESP with little or no attention being paid to the assessment of the communicative skills.

1.1.2.3. Non-English Majors' Level of English Language Proficiency Needed in the Context of Globalization

A university graduate needs to be able to use the foreign language learned at college to meet the requirement of his profession, especially the requirement to communicate with foreign colleagues and counterparts in conferences, cooperation programs, businesses, research, investigations, studies, etc; requirement to process scientific, technological and professional information using foreign languages; and requirement to manage the hand-over of advanced technologies to our country in foreign languages without having to use translators. (Nguyen, 2002). It is, therefore, necessary for university graduates to possess the advanced level of language proficiency at least.
1.2. VNU’s Foreign Language Policy

1.2.1. VNU’s Policy for the Teaching and Learning of English

1.2.1.1 VNU’s missions (Đại Học Quốc Gia Hà Nội, 2004)

1. To develop VNU into a center of multidisciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate training, scientific and technical research and application, and technology transfer of high quality, on a par with regional universities, then internationally recognized educational institutions;

2. To produce a contingent of highly qualified scientists, educators and technologists and to develop talented human resources for the country;

3. To carry out scientific research and technological development with special attention to fundamental research, education science, advanced technologies and economic fields in close combination with training and to apply the research results to production and everyday life; to participate in the development of national policies and strategy on education, training, science and technology;

4. To be a key institution in the higher educational system and to provide academic support to other universities and colleges throughout the country;

5. To be the country’s cultural, scientific and educational exchanges on an international basis.

There has been no general policy for the teaching and learning of the English language at VNU. What has been achieved so far in language education at the colleges under VNU is mostly private attempts of the English departments of these colleges or CFL (College of Foreign Languages)’s FLSP (Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes) department.

1.2.1.2 The Need for a Foreign Language Policy in the Context of Globalization

Facing the trend of globalization, a foreign language policy for the teaching and studying of the English language at VNU needs to be quickly built up and passed not only to meet the requirements of the country’s development but also to contribute to the elimination of inadequacies existing in our foreign language teaching. The building of such a policy needs the support of a firm theoretical and practical framework such that
students' needs, the society's future expectation, the consistency of the studying process and the issue of language proficiency are met. The foreign language policy should give satisfactory answers to the basic questions of how much of the language should be taught; what level of language proficiency needs to be met at each stage; what methods of teaching should be adopted, etc. (Vi, 2002).

1.2.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an Appropriate Approach in Teaching and Learning English at VNU

1.2.2.1 The Nature of CLT

Communicative language teaching began in the 1960s as a resolution against the Audio-lingual method. This is an approach to foreign language teaching which emphasizes the learner's ability to use the language appropriately in specific situations. It tries to make the learners 'communicatively competent'.

CLT views language as a system for the expression of meaning. Activities involve oral communication, carrying out meaning tasks and using language, which is meaningful to the learners. Objectives reflect the needs of the learners; they include functional skills as well as linguistic objectives. The learner’s role is the negotiator and integrator. The teacher’s role is the facilitator of the communication process. Materials promote communicative language use; they are task-based and authentic (Nunan, 1989:194).

From the above definition of CLT, Li (1998) presents the characteristics of CLT in 6 categories as follows:

1. a focus on communicative functions;
2. a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language;
3. efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations;
4. the use of authentic, from life materials;
5. the use of group activities; and
6. the attempt to create a secure, non-threatening atmosphere.
1.2.2.2 Advantages of CLT

The advantages of CLT may be summarized by Canale and Swain (1980) as follows:

1. CLT is more likely than other approaches to produce the four kinds of competence being

   a. grammatical competence: mastery of the language code (verbal or non-verbal), thus concerned with such features as lexical items and rules of sentence formation, pronunciation, and literal meaning;

   b. socio-linguistic competence: mastery of appropriate language use in different socio-linguistic contexts, with emphasis on appropriateness of meanings (e.g. attitudes, speech acts, and propositions) and appropriateness of form (e.g. register, non-verbal expression, and intonation);

   c. discourse competence: mastery of how to combine and interpret forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres by using (1) cohesion devices to relate utterance forms (e.g. pronouns, transition words, and parallel structures) and (2) coherence rules to organize meanings (e.g. repetition, progression, consistency and relevance of ideas);

   d. strategic competence: mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies (1) to compensate for breakdown in communication due to insufficient competence or to performance limitations (e.g. strategies such as use of dictionaries, paraphrase, and gestures) and (2) to enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g. deliberately slow and soft speech for rhetorical effect).
2. Learners of CLT are offered the opportunity to use the language for their own purposes, to take part in communication which,

   a. is interaction-based in that communication skills are normally both acquired and used in social interaction;
   
   b. involves unpredictability and creativity in both form and message;
   
   c. takes place in discourse and socio-cultural contexts which provide constraints to appropriate language use and also clues as to correct interpretation of utterances;
   
   d. is carried out under limiting psychological and other conditions such as memory constraints, fatigue and distractions;
   
   e. always has a purpose (for example, to establish social relations, to persuade, to promise);
   
   f. involves authentic as opposed to textbooks contrived language, and
   
   g. is judged as successful or not on the basis of actual outcomes; for example communication could be judged successful in the case of a non-native English speaker trying to find the way to Belconnen Mall, uttered the ungrammatical sentence “How to go the Mall?” to a passer-by and was shown the way to the Mall).
3. Compared with other approaches, CLT is more motivating; therefore, students are likely to put more effort into learning.

4. As CLT intends to teach what is relevant and necessary only, it is less wasteful of time and effort than approaches which attempt to teach the whole language.

5. In the long term, it should equip the learners with appropriate skills for tackling the language in a real world, since CLT is based on a close approximation to such uses.

1.2.2.3 CLT - An Appropriate Approach at VNU

With such benefits mentioned above, CLT has been introduced in Vietnam and is spreading, though on a limited scale, to meet the requirement of the process of integration and globalization.

Nevertheless, the communicative approach has its disadvantages. The suitability of the communicative approach, a largely Western language teaching approach (Reed, 2002), to other cultures and its attempted introduction with little thoughtful concern for the particular teaching environment into which it is being applied has been strongly questioned (Ellis, 1996; Hu, 2005).

Irrespective of these criticisms, the progression towards CLT is certainly evident in Vietnam where educational institutions are looking to impose a communicative approach to language teaching on the current college system in which the country's expectation for a bright future of integration and globalization is laid on the future intellectuals and in which learners typically leave college after 420 classroom periods studying English with little communicative capability in the language.

At the pressure of improving the language proficiency in English, especially the communicative competence, for its undergraduate students, VNU has recognized the need to adopt CLT in teaching and learning the English subject with the understanding that the approach's disadvantages, once they are clarified, can be modified. VNU's preference of the approach can be found in scientific conferences and seminars and is hindered in textbooks and other teaching materials being used in the colleges and faculties under VNU. But that is everything about the position of the approach at VNU: its existence in a potential form. Due to the lack of an overall foreign language policy
for English, VNU’s choice of the teaching methodology does not really reach English teachers and practitioners. English teachers and practitioners at VNU still feel free to adopt any teaching approaches they find suitable or change from one approach to another completely to their liking, and not to adopt any approaches they do not think suitable, even CLT if it presents too much difficulty to implement (Duong, 2004:24). And the sad fact is that the success of the Grammar-translation method in teaching foreign languages in Vietnam in the 70s and the 80s still has a great impact on today’s teaching of foreign languages although it has been aware that this method would not help students develop their communicative abilities.

2. Key Factors Affecting the Quality of Language Teaching and Learning

For a language course to be maximally effective and for a new approach to be applied successfully, many factors must be taken into account: teachers, teaching methodologies and media in teaching, learners, curricula and textbooks, classroom facilities, system of testing and examination, administration, etc.

2.1. Teachers

Much research on the field of teacher's effects on students' achievement has been done (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Rosenshine & Furst, 1973). Teachers play a very important role in the quality of a language course, as they are not only teachers, but also course designers and materials providers, collaborators, researchers, and evaluators. To carry out these five key roles, teachers are required to have language and language teaching competence. In the time when communication is the goal of language learning, and students need to be guided toward communicative ability in the language, a good command of the target language on the part of the teacher is necessary. Also, teachers qualified in the communicative approach are needed badly. It is understandable why qualified native teachers are normally appreciated. According to the international language centre called Language Link based in Russia, if a good teacher should understand the intricacies of the language and be capable of competent performance in its use, those who speak that language as their mother tongue are number-one candidates. Native teachers have been speaking the language all their life, and have acquired the ability to pronounce words, phrases and sentences properly, that is with the
proper accent, stress and intonation to convey correct meaning to those words they utter. Also, they have advantages over matters culturally determined. Native teachers know how and when to use the various formal and informal forms of the language in different situations to arrive at the same thing, that is they have the inherent ability to use just the right word or grammatical structure in just the right situation. Not only that, native teachers bring to class a special ambience which is best described as portraying 'living language' because they are born into the culture represented by the language being taught. Above all others, this quality is the property and domain of the native teacher.

Teachers' beliefs constitute a large part of the psychological context of teaching, within which curriculum is interpreted and acted upon. It is also where teachers teach and students learn. In other words, teachers' beliefs can substantially influence and even determine teaching behaviour in class.

Also, it is clear that teachers take on a pivotal role in the application of a new technology to the teaching and learning of English. If they lack motivation in innovation, it will be hard for the new technology to be introduced or applied. Without motivation, they cannot commit themselves to taking challenges, devoting time, and sacrificing some of their benefits.

2.2. Teaching Methodology and Media in Teaching

2.2.1 Teaching Methodology

Language teaching methodology represents a number of different techniques and strategies used to enhance a student's ability to learn the language. It is a dynamic process involving both the teacher and the students, either as a class or individually. As stated by Language Link, students learn the language best when they take an active part in this process as they don't just sit at desks, but interact with their teacher and other students through the use of role play, pair or group work, music, drama, conversation and other types of communication games and activities.

Nowadays Communicative Language Teaching has become a well-recognized approach in the language teaching profession. The CLT approach centers on communicative competence, and it has been well recognized nowadays that foreign language learners cannot really learn the target language well without paying close
attention to this aspect of competence. Take college students in Vietnam for example. They have often been criticized that their communicative competence in English is substantially limited, for having learned English for 3 to 7 years at secondary school before attending college, the majority of these EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners still show many difficulties employing this language to freely express themselves in everyday situations or even conduct a simple conversation with native English speakers. It has been suggested that the poor performance is closely related to the fact that the English testing practice most Vietnamese high school students are faced with is firmly rooted in discrete, routinized skill goals heavily based on the outdated Grammar Translation Method and/or Audiolingual Method, rather than in communicative objectives based on CLT. To complicate matters, the high school curriculum, unfortunately, is intimately linked to such practice because the school's ratings and the teacher's reputation lie mostly in students' performance on entrance-related examinations for entering good colleges. What is more, whether efforts have been made to address this problem in college English teaching programs or not has not been made clear.

2.2.2 Media in Teaching

Research on media in teaching, one of the very hot topics of today education, has been done on the worldwide scale. Media are seen as the replicable means, forms or vehicles by which instruction is formatted, stored and delivered to the learner (Schwen, 1977). Statistics have shown the ever-increasing use of various electronic media for entertainment and studying purposes among young people (Sheingold, Kane, & Enderweit, 1983). Another reason for using media in teaching is that there is a historical recurring expectation that student motivation and performance can be enhanced by them (Riccobono, 1984).

2.3 Learners

Most teachers agree that the motivation of students is one of the most important factors influencing success or failure in teaching and learning a language. There are two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is the reflection of an external need which may derive from different sources like the need to pass an exam
in the language, the need to read text in the language for work or study. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, derives from a desire on the part of the learners to learn a language in order to be members of the speech community. It is generally assumed that language programs tend to emphasize the instrumental aspect of a student's motivation. Bearing in mind this fact, teachers in their planning and managing instruction must make sure that activities employed are relevant and attractive enough to involve learners in the lesson and to heighten their learning purpose.

Another important element that also has an impact on the teaching and learning the language is learning strategies, which are defined by Rebecca, L. Oxford (1990) as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Obviously, learning strategies are concerned with actual activities and techniques, which lead to learning. Cognitive research shows that students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn and understand differently (Gardner, 1991). Thus, teachers are required to understand the multiple intelligence theory in order to structure learning to meet the diverse needs of his/her students. Teaching and learning should be constructed in a way that helps the learners build a positive attitude towards learning and increase their self-esteem, which will be strong motives to make them become more efficient autonomous learners.

2.4 Curricula and Textbooks

Materials are also another important factor. In learner-centred education, materials should be authentic, content-based, relevant and appropriate to learners’ level and age, their linguistic background, educational culture, interest and needs. That means the materials should expose learners to the target language as much as possible and they should be based on a syllabus that is taken to cover all the English language needs of the students in their present or future studies or in their future jobs. The result is that learning has greater relevance to the employment situation. In turn, this means that students will have greater interest in the course and greater learning will ensue.

Curricula and syllabi are also important since they are the framework around which a particular approach is applied. Moreover, appropriate textbooks are one of the
factors that consolidate credit for an approach. Textbooks can contribute to the longevity or the brevity of the application of an approach. If we want an approach to firmly take root then the selection of textbooks must be done with much consideration. Furthermore, once a certain textbook is selected for a syllabus, it is necessary to make full commitment in using it. Naturally, adjustments and changes can be made after a certain framework of syllabus is created.

2.5 Classroom Facilities

Second language acquisition research delineates that audio-visual aids such as flash cards, charts, pictures, models, filmstrips, tape recorders, computers, and overhead projectors facilitate successful acquisition of a second language. In general, most English language facilities should have audio-visual aids, which are proven to be conducive to language learning.

2.6 System of Testing and Examination

Tests are an attempt to construct an instrument for measuring ultimate attainment, or progress, or ability in language skills. Clearly, each of the qualities can be assessed in terms of each of the four basic linguistic skills. A test of attainment in producing the spoken language, for instance, can be used to test the learner’s command of the language in social communication. This obviously would be a test of the learner’s second language oral communicative skill. If the whole process of teaching and learning is heavily influenced by examinations, the teaching pattern is textbook-based, teacher-dominated and test-oriented, which prevents students from improving their communicative competence.

Normally, tests and examinations have to reflect what the students have learnt in the course. Therefore, if the tests do not conform to the course's syllabus, they cannot correctly assess students' achievement on the one hand and could have negative impact on the process of learning and teaching on the other.

2.7 Administration

First of all, an overall foreign language policy from the Board of Administrators serves as a guide to a systematic training program. The lack of an overall foreign
language policy can give way to spontaneous and inconsistent application of the
teaching and learning of the language.

Moreover, administrators play an important role in creating conditions both for
teachers to have access to the desired approach and for teachers to apply it. If favorable
conditions are not made, it will be difficult for collaborations to occur, workshops to be
held, and nominations to be made.

Lack of supervision also allows most English language instructors to be
complacent about their teaching, which exacerbates the existing teaching conditions.
Because of this complacency, most instructors do not take a proactive role in their
professional development and are by nature inflexible.

3. Conclusion

We have, in this chapter, talked about globalization and how it affects the
teaching and learning of English, and about CLT and how it benefits language learners
in the context of globalization. Most importantly, we have reviewed the key factors
affecting the quality of language teaching and learning. These factors set the
background for the study in the chapters that follow. It is clear that to successfully teach
and learn a language depends on a lot of factors. The lack or inefficiency of one factor
alone can cause problems of one kind or another to the language course. In order to see
if COT experiences any problems with its training of English, we turn to chapter II to
research on the current situations of the teaching and learning of English at COT.
Chapter II

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY COT IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH

This chapter firstly describes the methodology employed in this part of the study and then moves on to the report of the problems experienced by COT in teaching and learning the English subject presented in the form of the study’s data analysis and findings.

1. METHODOLOGY

This part deals with the research methodology employed for the achievement of the aims and objectives of the study and the data collection procedures. Given the purpose of this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The quantitative data were obtained by means of a survey questionnaire while the qualitative data were collected through the study of textbooks and teaching materials, classroom observation, field notes and informal talks. According to Larsen - Freeman and Long (1991), both qualitative and quantitative paradigms are not competing, but complementary, and the choice between the two is unnecessary. They also assert a combination of both research paradigms yields more in-depth data for analysis.
1.1. **Research Questions**

As the study is carried out to find out solutions to improving the English language proficiency for the students at COT, it is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What problems does COT experience in teaching and learning English?
2. What are the possible solutions to the problems found at COT?

1.2. **Participants**

The study involves the investigation of the COT’s students; teachers of English; administrators; textbooks, testing materials and official documents related to the English subject; and facilities and classroom equipment.

274 COT's undergraduate students ranging from 18 to 22 years of age were selected at random to participate in the questionnaire survey. Informal talks were carried out to 7 COT's teachers of English following the researcher’s observation of their lessons, and to 3 administrators in COT's Department of Undergraduate Study during the researcher’s working with the department. Study and investigation of the college’s textbooks, testing materials and official documents related to the English subject, and facilities and classroom equipment were conducted throughout the study.

1.3. **Research Instruments**

Four instruments - questionnaire, informal talk, observation and study of documents - were chosen and employed for this part of the study.

1.3.1. **Questionnaires**

A student questionnaire of 30 questions was designed with the first four questions concerning the students' background information; the next six questions eliciting students' needs and opinions on their self-study and classroom study of English; questions 11 though 19 giving students a chance to reflect on the way they are being taught in class and to assess their present levels of English proficiency; questions 20 consulting students on what should be done to help them learn English better; questions 21 through 26 identifying the way the system of testing and examination at
COT works; and the last four questions referring to the college’s administrative work. All the questions were written in Vietnamese to ensure students’ thorough understanding of all the questions before answering them. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain information on the reality of the teaching and learning of the English language at COT and factors affecting the quality of the teaching and learning of English. (see Appendix 2)

1.3.2. Classroom Observation

Along with the survey questionnaire, classroom observation was also conducted in order to boost the qualitative and quantitative results; that is to find out more about the teaching methodology held by the teachers, the classroom facilities and teaching equipment. It was a non-participant observation in which the researcher watched, followed, and recorded activities as they were performed in the real classroom settings. The observation was carried out and class activities were audio-recorded in one week in May 2006 in 4 classrooms. The observation form was adapted from “Classroom Observation Form” by Hoang Van Van (2005). (see Appendix 6)

1.3.3. Informal Talks

Seven teachers of English agreed to talk with us and give information about the methodological positions they were holding, the problems they experienced while teaching English at COT, and their expectations and suggestions for improving the level of English proficiency for COT’s students (see the List of Questions Used in Informal Talks with Teachers in Appendix 4). Also, talks with three of the administrators of the college were conducted to find out general information about the college, and the college’s policy and concern for the English subject (see the List of Questions Used in Informal Talks with Administrators in Appendix 5). Notes were taken during the talks and then were transcribed.

1.3.4. Study of Textbooks, Standardized Test Results and Other Testing Materials Being Used at COT

A general review of the New Headway set, (the elementary and the pre-intermediate) (John and Liz Soars, 2000) the textbook Basis English for Computing by CFL’s FLSP Department, the textbook Oxford English for Computing by Keith
Boeckner and P. Charles Brown, and the textbook *Oxford English for Electronics* by Eric Glendinning and John McEwan was conducted for information on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the textbooks to students' needs and VNU's expectation on the students' levels of English proficiency. The examination of the testing materials helped identify the appropriateness of the testing system to the above criteria and to what the students have been taught in class. The analysis of the results of the college's standardized test for the last-year high quality students also provides insight into the current level of language proficiency in English of the COT's undergraduate students.

2. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

2.1. Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was collected at random on the first, second and third year students at COT. It should have been collected on the last-year students as well; however, at the time the questionnaire was administered, the last-year students had stopped their classroom study and were in the process of preparing for the graduation theses at home. The researcher asked the teachers for permission to have personal contact with the study population in order to explain the purpose, relevance and importance of the study, as well as to clarify any questions that the students had. The participants were then asked to complete the questionnaire seriously within fifteen minutes in their classroom. Following the questionnaire, four lessons by four different teachers were observed in four different classes. The lessons were audio-recorded. The observation was recorded in the prepared form. The informal talks with the teachers were conducted right after the classroom observation. The talks with the COT's administrators were done throughout the research process. The study of textbooks, official documents, testing materials, and standardized test results were carried out several days after the observation and informal talks when we got full access to these materials.

The data collected were analyzed both descriptively and interpretatively. The findings from the questionnaire, classroom observation and informal talks were
displayed in forms of tables and figures, or presented by quoting relevant responses from the respondents.

2.2. Problems Experienced by COT

2.2.1 A Brief Description of COT

The College of Technology is an institution under Vietnam National University, Hanoi, offering undergraduate and postgraduate training programs in those fields as Information Technology, Electronics and Communication, Engineering Physics, and Engineering Mechanics.

Undergraduates at COT take the 4-year training course and are streamed according to their levels of attainment and knowledge on the subject of their choice into high-quality students and standard students. Different kinds of students study in different classes.

Like many other subjects, English is taught in a formal setting, the classroom, at COT. The teaching and learning of English is carried out in 420 lesson periods for standard students and in 510 lesson periods for high-quality students, and is divided into 2 stages. The students study general English during the first stage (2 semesters, 210 lesson periods) using the course book *New Headway* (elementary and pre-intermediate) by John and Liz Soars. Although all the four communicative skills specified in the books are practiced in class and there is a mid-semester speaking test which accounts for 30% of the total marks in the English subject of the whole semester, the actual focus is on grammar and vocabulary to meet the requirement of the final test at the end of each semester which accounts for 70% of the total marks in the English subject of the whole semester, and whose emphasis is on the mastering of vocabulary and grammar. In the second stage (3 semesters, 210 lesson periods for standard students, 300 lesson periods for high-quality students), the standard students learn English for Computing and Electronics with the textbooks *Basic English for Computing* by CFL’s FLSP Department, *Oxford English for Computing* by Keith Boeckner and P. Charles Brown, *Oxford English for Electronics* by Eric Glendinning and John McEwan; and do the mid-semester presentation of an ESP topic with the value of 30% of the total marks. The high-quality students learn ESP with the textbook *Basis English for Computing* or
Oxford English for Electronics during the third semester and prepare for either of the international standardized tests, IELTS or TOEFL using any kinds of preparing materials at all selected by the teachers themselves during the fourth and fifth semesters. At the moment, COT's students have General English classes twice a week, one lasting three periods and the other four periods during the first two semesters. In the third semester, the students have two three-period ESP classes a week. In the last two semesters, the standard students have one four-period ESP class a week while the high-quality students have two four-period classes in the fourth semester and two three-period classes in the fifth semester on preparatory English every week. This means that the high-quality students have an extra of 6 more credits for learning English.

COT is an institution which takes students of exam category A (maths, physics, chemistry) when selecting students in the university entrance exam. The students selected don’t have to take an English exam, but almost all of the students have undergone 300 periods of English if they follow the 3-year program or 720 periods of English if they follow the 7-year program at high school. The students therefore are supposed to have the basic knowledge for English. Before the new school year, the freshmen have to take an English placement test and students of similar levels are put into the same group of about 30 students. Consequently, a large class of 80 students will be divided into 3 groups called group 1, group 2, group 3 to learn English, with students of the highest scores being in group 1, and those of the lowest score being in group 3. However, classes of 50 to 60 students will be divided into 2 groups only in studying English.

At the beginning of May 2006, the College of Technology moved its classrooms from Building E3, 144 Xuan Thuy Road, Cau Giay District, Hanoi to Building E, College of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Culture and Communication, Ho Tung Mau Road, Mai Dich District, Hanoi. This is an old 4-storey building built next door to houses and flats. The sizes of the rooms vary from being able to hold 24 students to being able to hold 80 students. In large classrooms, the desks and benches are arranged in the traditional way with 2 sets of desks and benches capable to be seated by 2 students each being put together to make one long set. There are 3 such long sets 50 to 60 centimeters away from one another in each row. In small classrooms, the two
columns of desks are not put together. All the desks in all the classrooms are unmovable and are arranged so that the students sit facing the chalkboard. There is a screen used for projectors over the board which is used by teachers teaching subjects other than English in their lectures. Each room is equipped with one or more ceiling fans and enough electric lights. The doors and windows are made of wood in the forms of shutters which makes it difficult to retain sound and easily causes the students to be distracted by sounds coming from both outside the building and nearby classrooms. Teachers of English use cassette players and tapes to teach the listening skills for the students in these rooms. However, the place is said to be used just temporarily while the new place for the college is being built.

Most COT’s teachers of English go to college twice a week for 7 or 8 periods of English teaching. Still, all the teachers have extra classes to teach, and are all very busy. Some of them have classes everyday of the week, several classes a day, and consider it a normal phenomenon for English teachers. It is really a normal thing because no teachers believe they can live on their basic salary.

COT’s English teachers come from CFL’s FLSP Department. Most of them are young ones who range from 23 to 30. They were formal students in colleges of foreign languages, and either hold a master degree in English or are studying for that degree. They all have knowledge of the modern teaching methods and technology, and most importantly, they are eager to learn and improve themselves.

COT has long been aware of the importance of the teaching and learning of English within the college. The college is now hiring Pre-doctoral Training Center under School of Graduate Studies, VNU to provide English courses for the college’s high quality students. These courses aim at preparing learners for the two popular international standardized tests of IELTS and TOEFL with the expectation that their high-quality students can reach the level of proficiency in English that can be accepted by other colleges and universities worldwide. The college’s administrators are open to changes and innovation in the field of English. They make it easy for the researchers to carry out their research on improving the language proficiency of the college’s students by providing necessary documents, giving access to the classrooms, English teachers
and students of the college, and arranging a class of 25 voluntary students for the researchers to apply their pilot teaching.

2.2.2 Problems Experienced by COT in English Language Teaching and Learning

2.2.2.1 Learners

Although students taking the entrance examination to COT don’t sit for any examination in English; that is, knowledge of English is not required for their admission into the college, 94% of them have studied English either for 300 classroom periods in the 3-year program or 720 classroom periods in the 7-year program at secondary and high school. In the 2 years to come, when the new 7-year English program designed in the light of Communicative Language Teaching approach has been applied nationwide, it is expected that most first-year students will have acquired at least the basic communicative skills of the language before they are trained at college.

Surveys on COT’s students revealed their good intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards the learning of the English language. From 44% to 46% of the students wish to learn English to widen their knowledge and to further their studies. 56% hope English can help them get a good job after graduation. 28% even hope to further their studies in English-speaking countries. It is interesting to note that only 12% of the students claim to learn English only because it is an obligatory subject at college. (see Table 1 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of response</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>because English is an obligatory subject at college</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get good marks in English examinations at college</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get a good job after graduation</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to continue higher study and to improve professional knowledge</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to study aboard</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to widen general knowledge</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Reasons for Learning English
Despite the sad fact that they have to learn English in a non-English speaking environment with very little opportunity to use English for communication, COT's students express their concerns almost equally for all 4 communicative skills and other language elements such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and translation of ESP documents with the rate from the lower of 38% for pronunciation, 42% for grammar and 44% for vocabulary to the higher of 48% for the 4 communicative skills and 54% for reading and translating ESP documents. (see Table 2 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Number of response</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good grasp of grammar</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General and ESP vocabulary</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard pronunciation</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP reading and translation</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing)</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Students' response to the question "What do you pay most attention to when learning English?"

Students' motivation is made clearer when 79% of the students wish to continue learning English after they have finished the English course at college. This indicates students' recognition of the importance of the language in their life and career. Furthermore, 97% of the students claim to do the self-study besides classroom hours with the help of modern means of communication such as TV, internet, video and audio equipment (51%); with printing materials such as reference books, magazines, newspapers written in English (from 35% to 39%), and with extra English classes (26%). (see Table 3 below)
Types of off-class English learning | Number of response | Percent (%)
--- | --- | ---
doing exercises in reference books | 108 | 39
attending extra classes | 72 | 26
reading newspapers, magazines and materials written in English | 95 | 35
learning with TV, internet, audio and visual equipment | 139 | 51
joining English clubs | 8 | 3

Table 3. Students' off-class Learning of English

a) Loss of Motivation

With such good motivation toward the learning of English, it is expected that students will pay reasonable attention to the learning of English, and will not face a lot of problems in studying the language. However, the amount of time students spend on their self-study is surprisingly little. On average, students spend up to only 3.9 hours a week on their self-study of English, with 35% of the students do not learn English at home at all or only learn English up to 2 hours a week which makes it impossible for the students to thoroughly revise what they have learned in class let alone helps them acquire new knowledge and develop communicative skills.

Moreover, when asked if they have any problems in learning the language, 31% of the students claim to have no motivation to learn it. In finding the explanation as to why students lose their potential motivation, we discovered that a third of the students surveyed claim to have not enough time and necessary equipment to learn the language, 60% claim the lack of a suitable environment for language practice to take place, and 57% either believe the teachers' methods of teaching are not suitable for them or have no idea if the teachers' methods of teaching are suitable for them. (see Table 4 below)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Number of response</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lack of time</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of learning environment</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of learning equipment</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of motivation</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too big load of English content learned</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-suitability between things learned in class and students' future profession</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Problems Faced in Learning English in Class

b) Low Level of Attainment

An indication of the level of attainment of English at COT is given in the result of the test in the form of TOEFL held on May 12th, 2005 by Institutional TOEFL at VNU for a group of 26 COT’s last-year high quality college students. The result of not even half (42%) of the students reaching the score of 500, and especially only 3 out of 26 students reaching the score of 550, which is the minimum TOEFL score for admission into a fair international college or university, indicates a big gap between the reality and VNU’s expectation of its students' level of proficiency in the language. (*see Appendix 1*)

Informal talks with the college's administrators reveal that at the moment, undergraduate standard students at COT are expected to reach pre-intermediate level of language proficiency before they start their ESP study, which only pays attention to developing students' reading and translating of ESP documents. With such expectation from the college, students are really not encouraged to better their communicative skills in English to the level required in a global environment.

In addition, while nearly 70% of the students surveyed claimed to have gained improvement in the reading skill and vocabulary, the number is only from 41% to 43%
for grammar and the other three communicative skills of listening, speaking and writing. This indicates that the purpose of learning English at college is mostly to help students read and increase their vocabulary; and that the majority of the students are making no or insignificant progress in learning the other communicative skills and grammar. It is made even clearer when only 17% of the students asked believe they can effectively use English and communicate in English in their future work. (see Table 5 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Has your listening skill improved recently?</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Has your speaking skill improved recently?</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Has your reading skill improved recently?</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Has your writing skill improved recently?</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Has your grammar improved recently?</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Has your vocabulary improved recently?</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. With the current teaching and learning of English at college, do you believe you can use and communicate satisfactorily in English in working after graduation?</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Students' Self Assessment

When asked about what should be done to help improve the students' level of proficiency in English, students gave suggestions on a wide variety of things that need to be improved. This shows that in the eyes of the students, a lot of problems exist in the teaching and learning of the English language at COT. The students' most popular recommendation is more chances to communicate, then come better teaching and learning equipment, increase of class time, change of teaching method, and more learning motivation.
Figure 2. Students' Recommendations on what should be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning English

2.2.2.2 Teachers

Through observation, it is noted that the teachers of English at COT are teaching the language in ways not at all similar to CLT. In the classroom, the language is introduced in a teacher-fronted manner with little input from the learners, analyzed and explained in depth in Vietnamese. The teachers do most of the talking in the lesson, and students' individual work seems to be the prevailing activity in the language classroom. A look around the classroom reveals that the arrangement of the furniture is totally unsuitable for any communicative activities to take place. Somewhere in the classroom, seven students sit in one row; in another place, one student has a whole row of desks all to himself. If the students are not asked to move out of their seats, communicative activities like group-work or pair-work are totally impossible. Anyway, no policies have ever asked the teachers to apply CLT in their teaching of English, so why should they take the trouble to themselves?
Another difficulty that prevents the English teachers from applying the communicative approach is the students’ both diverse and poor background of English. At school, some students studied English in the 7-year program, some in the 3-year program and some do not study English at all, which makes it quite problematic for the English teachers. In order to apply the communicative approach in the language classroom, the teachers have to spend more time and effort; therefore, they choose to use the method they are familiar with, which might be the one they think is best for their students in preparing for the end-of-semester exam focusing firstly on grammar and vocabulary, then reading, writing and listening. When the process of teaching and learning is influenced by examinations, the teaching pattern is textbook-based, which can prevent students from improving their communicative competence.

Even when the teachers want to use the communicative approach or try innovation, there is a possibility that they are prevented by the time allowance to finish the lessons specified in the textbook, and by poor classroom facilities which do not encourage any communicative and innovative activities. To stay away from troubles, the teachers, again, have to resort to their familiar teaching method.

**2.2.2.3 Administrators**

While administrators in COT are enthusiastic about developing learners’ communicative proficiency, they have not provided any documented guidance for their students and teachers of English on actually how to integrate CLT into their classrooms. Thus, a clear void exists between a language policy and classroom execution. Teachers, therefore, are free to adopt any teaching method they find most appropriate or one that does not put them in challenges. Also students accept unquestioningly what is delivered to them in English classes. Many COT's students are not even aware of the college's expectation of their English level of proficiency.

Informal talks with the college's administrators show their responsibilities for the development of their students by ensuring that students have a stable and standard education and at the same time being open about studying opportunities offered to the college. The administrators also keep in mind that they are to build up and maintain their students' interest in learning by keeping close contact with the students, providing
prompt guidance related to the college's education, and organizing activities with a view to unite students. However, more attention needs to be paid to the learning and teaching of English in particular. The result from the student questionnaire of 85 out of every 100 students never having a chance to meet, talk to or work with a foreigner within the school's campus reflects a typical non-English speaking environment with very little opportunity to use English for communication. Furthermore, only 28% of the students asked claimed that the college provided off-class activities relating to English. It is easy to see here that attention has not been paid enough to the English subject and a lot more has to be done by the college's administration sector to improve the students' interest in learning English.

2.2.2.4 Curricula and Textbooks

Curricula can greatly affect the quality of teaching and learning English. Our talks with some English teachers at COT helped us learn that VNU has allowed the colleges under it to develop and adapt their own curricula within the university's curriculum framework. However, the study of the college’s documents and the English textbooks being used at COT revealed that the curriculum at COT is not culture-specific and needs based. The textbooks used for teaching General English at COT, the *Headway Elementary* and *Headway Pre-intermediate*, are adopted wholly as they are without consideration as to whether these fit COT's context.

The need to develop General English (GE) materials locally for the relevance of contexts does not seem to gain any recognition at COT. When using the textbook developed in the West, there is a chance that teachers fail to link the content of the lessons to the students' lives and knowledge. This problem is due to the traditional approach to teaching and learning, in which curricula are designed to provide learners with knowledge rather than to satisfy learners' needs.

Furthermore, the pre-intermediate level of English proficiency expected to be acquired by COT's students during the 4-year English program at college is inappropriate. It is a waste of time for COT's students, 94% of which have studied English as a formal subject for 3 years or 7 years at secondary school, to start at elementary level and graduate with the Pre-intermediate level. Although, not all
graduate students reach that low level, the fact that the English subject is not considered important and that the ability to learn a foreign language of the students are underestimated really discourages the students to try. It is the law of nature, you don't aim high, you don't get high.

The fact that the curriculum is more or less exam-oriented also constrains creative teaching and learning. When teachers try to help students acquire enough knowledge to pass the exams which focus on developing linguistic competence in General English and English for Specific Purposes rather than improving the communicative and pragmatic aspects of language, learners' autonomy and teachers' innovations are hindered.

Problems also exist in the continuity of the curricular framework at COT. Officially, English is learnt in two phases by COT's students: Phase One (the first four semesters) aims at developing the students' four language skills and grammar to the pre-intermediate level. Phase Two (the last four semesters) aims at equipping the standard students with ESP with the focus on developing the students’ range of vocabulary and skills to read and translate materials and documents in the field, and not at building up of Phase One. English in Phase Two is mainly taught in a traditional method. The teachers tend to focus on what is required of the subject rather than find appropriate teaching approaches to connect the subject to what students have already known in terms of their language skills and personal lives. Talks with the Vice Dean of FLSP department also revealed that COT’s standard students are not expected to exceed the level of pre-intermediate after the two years studying ESP. Evidence also lies in the fact that those graduate students who want to further their education in the master course have to take the entrance exam for English at the pre-intermediate level. With that low expectation from the administrators, students feel free not to improve their level of proficiency in English. Furthermore, it is really unsure whether the students have reached that level after studying General English in Phase One. Also, the separation of GE phase and ESP phase has led to the students' lack of motivation to learn the language. COT's students claimed that what they learned in GE phase was nothing related to their future profession, and ESP phase did not help them improve their linguistic skills in English.
The syllabus for COT's high quality students, on the other hand, focuses on preparing the students for one of the two international standardized tests being TOEFL and IELTS, and stipulates either of the international standardized tests (TOEFL 500-550 or IELTS 5.0-5.5) as a means of evaluating the high-quality students' English level at the end of the fifth semester. However, the level above said is just individual expectation of the Pre-doctoral Training Center, the institution in charge of teaching the English subject for the college's high-quality students. No language policy has been enforced by VNU or COT so far, and the problem of not even half of the students scoring up to the level expected in the test is still left unsolved.

2.2.2.5 Facilities and Resources

In comparison with institutions in tertiary education around the world, those in Vietnam receive very little investment capital for facilities and resources. This problem can account for the poor technical equipment, lack of text resources and inadequate classroom facilities which certainly affect the teaching and learning process. Moreover, except for the few institutions where foreign language is taught as the major subject, the majority of our colleges and universities receive next to nothing referring national budget for tertiary education, with the current facilities and resources mostly from foreign sponsorship, if there is any (Trinh, 2002).

Observation carried out at COT's teaching site and talks with the assistant of the site reveals the serious lack of equipment for use in teaching English. The whole teaching site where 1817 students are studying is supported with no language laboratory, only four Over Head Projectors (OHP), one of which was unusable, and which were almost never used by any teachers of English, and 8 cassette players three of which are unusable and some of which are so unreliable for electric contact that they are always the last ones picked by the students and teachers when they have listening classes. Therefore, it is normal that some English classes have to do without the cassette players.

An OHP is useless without a computer connected to it. Not every English teacher at COT has a laptop to bring along to college. Moreover, even if the English teachers want to use one in teaching, it is nearly impossible to get it as it has already
been taken long before by another teacher teaching the main subject. In addition, it is a common conception that English classes are already equipped with the cassette players and should leave the OHPs to other classes.

Examination and trial reveal the extremely low quality of the sound produced by these cassette players. There is a lot of hissing noise, which is just a little softer than the desired sound when the tape is played and there is no way the noise can be stopped. The tape should be played for a short time only; otherwise the noise may cause a headache.

The library located at the teaching site is about 50 meters squared and is able to hold 12 people at a time. However, it is observed that students and teachers of English rarely come to the library, especially for anything to do with English learning because except for all the technical books written in English, the library does not provide any materials to learn English at all to the students and the English teachers. Therefore, gaining access to modern language learning and teaching books is a problem for teachers and students, let alone access to the Internet and electronic databases. It is common that staff and students usually seek out and purchase their own books for use at the bookshops.

One more problem to the college's facilities is the unfavourable condition of the classrooms. As having been mentioned in item 2.2.1, the classrooms are located in a noisy environment and are not soundproof. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in such an environment. Moreover, the arrangement of the classrooms' furniture in the traditional way does not promote any communicative activities at all.

2.2.2.6 System of Testing and Examination

According to the data collected, during the first two semester, the students at COT has a speaking mid-semester test of the situations learnt in the textbooks, which accounts for 30% of the total marks for the English subject of each term, and a final test at the end of each term in which the students' knowledge of grammar structures, vocabulary, writing, reading and listening is examined. For the other three semesters, COT's standard students have an oral presentation of the ESP topics learnt in the program as the mid-semester-test with 30% worth of the total marks for each semester, and an end-of-semester written test in which translation and reading of ESP documents
and the knowledge of ESP vocabulary are tested. COT's high-quality students learn ESP and follow the same procedure of testing as that of the standard students in the third semester, then follow the international standardized test preparation program in the last two semesters with both a mid-semester test and an end-of-semester proficiency test in the form of either TOEFL or IELTS.

With the system of testing and examination as such, the college hopes that its students will be encouraged to pay attention to all the four communicative skills and language elements at least during the first two terms while the students are learning General English so that they can be prepared for the second stage in which ESP is taught. But the fact that speaking does not form an integral part in the college’s end-of-semester exams does not encourage the students to continue learning this skill after it has been tested. Moreover, that no further attention is paid to developing students' communicative skills during the second stage actually stops and discourages students' communicative progress among the standard students.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all the factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning of English, learners, teachers, administrators, curricula and textbooks, facilities and resources, and system of testing and examination at COT need improvement if they are to have good effects on the students' learning of English.

First, it is clear that as teachers take on a pivotal role in innovation, if they lack motivation in innovation, they cannot commit themselves to taking challenges, devoting time, and sacrificing some of their benefits.

Second, as administrators play an important role in creating conditions for students and teachers to have access to resources, and the new studying and teaching methods, if favorable conditions are not made, it will be difficult for language acquisition to occur, and any innovations to be made.

Third, as curricula and textbooks are the framework to develop students' language competence and performance, when the textbook is not culturally suitable for the teachers and students and the teaching plans create difficulties for the application of the new approach, slow progress is evident.
Fourth, the ultimate reason for any change is the students. Therefore, if not enough attention is paid to the requirements of students, and not enough efforts are made to find the ways to stimulate and maintain their motivation to learn English, innovation will be of little use.

Fifth, this era of technology has made it a must to incorporate modern technologies into teaching. That will be a waste of resources not to consider the matter in a thorough manner.

Sixth, as the system of testing can shape both content and method of teaching and learning the language, apathy to the system, therefore, can cause the teaching and learning of the language to suffer badly.
Chapter III

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT COT

As the findings of the study have suggested, COT is facing many problems in teaching and learning English. Those problems have resulted in the college’s students’ low level of proficiency in English. The problems, however, do not just exist in COT. They are nationwide problems with the fact that most college students are unable to communicate in English when they graduate from the college. At the moment, people seem to accept that the proficiency level in English of Vietnamese students are unlikely to improve to the level acceptable by international institutions for college students in a number of years and even decades to come. Still, problems need solutions and the future is for us to make. Vietnam has become a member of WTO and if changes do not take place now, it can be too late for them to take place.

We now consider VNU’s expectation of its students’ level of proficiency in English (from 500 to 550 for TOEFL or from 5.0 to 5.5 for IELTS), the level that can be accepted by international institutions for tertiary education, and that allows the students to communicate satisfactorily in the integrated working environment later. In this
chapter, we will try to see if such an expectation of VNU is feasible for COT. To guide the work, we ask ourselves two questions:

1. Is it possible for all COT's students to attain a certain level of proficiency in English?

2. Is it possible (for us) to meet the needs in learning English of a particular group of students at COT?

In answering the question, we propose solutions to the problems found at COT based on the analysis of the factors affecting the quality of language teaching and learning (teachers, students, administrators, teaching methodology, teaching materials, equipment and facilities) and in the light of CLT, with reference to COT's students and the English teachers' recommendations. Also to check the feasibility of the solutions suggested, a communicative syllabus was designed, and a pilot course using the syllabus and taking advantage of the suggestions was held. At the end of the course, a thorough evaluation of the course was conducted.
SECTION 1

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT COT

1. **COT's Administrators’ Setting Clear Curricular Objectives for the Teaching of the English Subject**

As what we have discussed in the previous chapter, attention from the college's administrators should be paid to the English subject in particular. In order to do so, clear curricular objectives of English as a subject need to be specified so that our society and VNU’s expectation of the students' level of proficiency in English can be realized in COT. In “Thoughts on Curriculum Objectives,” Pervez and Alam (2003) suggest clear curricular objectives enable the students

- to think critically and analyze objectively and rationally;
- to develop curiosity so that the students become fond of learning for their own sake;
- to transform available raw materials into useful goods and services;
- to offer marketable human resources acquired through education;
- to manage and administer a diversified society (urban/rural, nomadic/agrarian, industrial/service);
- for living with people of different custom, language, culture, and faith; and
- to be able to adopt a vocation or a profession that one desires to espouse.

With a few exceptions, it is easy to see the implications of the above objectives for teaching and learning English. For instance, the ability to think critically and analyze objectively and rationally; and the ability to interact with people of different custom, language, culture, and faith is important to the successful performance in the global environment, where English plays the role of a global means of communication. VNU as a national university should set up the curricular objectives for language instructors to strive towards achieving them.
Besides, the principle of no aiming high, no reaching high calls for the change in the level of English proficiency which COT's students are to acquire before graduation. Also, from 300 to 720 periods studying English at secondary school should not be ignored like what we are doing. Then in the 2 years to come, when the new 7-year English program designed in the light of Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied nationwide, the majority of first-year students at colleges and universities will be expected to possess at least the basic communicative skills of the language on entering the college. All of the above reasons disclose the fact that the elementary level as the starting point of the college English program is no longer suitable for the students. Still attempts have to be made to help the minority of the students who do not study English as the subject at school (in the case of COT it is 6%), and some other students who, by some reasons, fail to reach the level of English proficiency required at secondary school, get along with their classmates so that they, too, can reach high. The solution can be cheap supportive courses offered to meet the needs of particular groups of students at COT. By saying this, we do not mean to dehumanize those students; we mean to support the whole picture, which is the most important thing.

Still, these supportive courses are not destined for low-level students only. There should be a wide variety of supportive courses of different levels from the lowest to the highest to meet the needs of students of different levels. The organization of these courses will need the cooperation of the college's administrators and supportive agents. At the moment, COT is working with Pre-doctoral Training Center - School of Graduate Studies - VNU to provide supportive courses for COT's high-quality students. This has been the first step towards the matter and the outlook seems really positive.

Another thing to remember when setting objectives of teaching and learning English at COT is that the students have to be able to communicate successfully in English in their professional work in the future. Therefore, skill-oriented teaching should be made official content in the syllabus and ESP also needs to be incorporated in the syllabus right at the beginning of the college's English programme both to enhance students' motivation toward the learning of English and to help them get access to the abundant technical books and materials written in English available at the college and in the society that they would ignore if they are not taught how to read those.
Moreover, to reach the level of proficiency in English expected by VNU for its students, the time allocation for learning this subject has to be modulated accordingly. The division of phases should take on a new meaning. Phases should be shorter and each phase should help the students reach a certain level of language proficiency until VNU’s expectation is met. Given the time allowance of 420 periods of classroom teaching for the English subject, we suggest the following time allocation for the subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>No. of periods</th>
<th>Proficiency level</th>
<th>ESP content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>pre-intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>advanced</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6A. Time allocation suggested for the English subject at COT (plan 1)

An alternative should be more time allocation for the English subject so that the students are more likely to reach the level of English proficiency specified in each phase. It is not an impossible solution as the college is still able to give its high-quality students 490 periods instead of 420 periods according to the regulations to learn the English subject. If more time can be given to all COT’s students to learn the language, we suggest the following time allocation for the English subject,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>No. of periods</th>
<th>Proficiency level</th>
<th>ESP content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>pre-intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>advanced</td>
<td>ESP-incorporated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6B. Time allocation suggested for the English subject at COT (plan 2)

2. **Helping the Teachers of English to Provide More Effective Teaching**

From what we discussed in Chapter 2, it is necessary to improve the knowledge of the subject matters of the English teachers at COT. One solution could be to hold training courses and seminars on the subject matters for the English teachers. Still, teachers of English are not specified in the required technical fields and are not under the control of COT, another solution could be the cooperation of the subject teachers and the English teachers. By doing that, we can strike the balance between the language
and the subject matter, and at the same time, the English teachers do not have to try too hard but still got the reliable learning materials for the students.

Furthermore, it is important that the English teachers be required to use CLT as the official teaching methodology. There can be difficulties, of course, but regular training and seminars on teaching methodologies will help. Again, that should be the job of CFL’s FLSP Department and not of COT. It is, therefore, suggested that COT should have its own English Department and teachers of English so that the college’s changes in policies concerning the English subject can stay nicely within the college’s control. At the moment, COT can only negotiate with CFL’s FLSP Department at the beginning of the new school year to make it a requirement for the English teachers to apply CLT as the official approach in teaching English. No one can say that this approach is a perfect one, but we cannot afford to have another generation of graduate students unable to communicate in the language they have spent so much time at college studying. And anyway, we do not intend to talk people into using CLT in this study, but implicitly accept it as the teaching approach that guides the study. Then, after CLT has been adopted officially in teaching, other methods and approaches (the Grammar-Translation method included) can be used where appropriate; that is, they should be used as teaching techniques only, not as a method or an approach in teaching English.

Also, before the English teachers can provide any effective teaching, they need to build and effective connection with their students. The teachers of English at COT are busy individuals, as they have to spend a lot of time teaching extra classes for extra income. Time spent on their formal teaching at the college, therefore, cannot take up a large proportion. This is a legitimate need and no comments should be made on the matter. However, there exists the situation that the teachers of English at COT are also prevented from having social contact with the students by the time allowance to finish the lessons specified in the textbook. Therefore, the teacher/students relationship is more or less that between the giver and the receivers. When a teacher does not fully understand her students, teaching and learning are just jobs that need to be fulfilled.

Within the scope of this study, any recommendations related to changes in the government’s policies such as raising teachers’ salaries, etc. are not really suitable. It is
therefore necessary to make the best out of what is available and keep in mind that the aims have to be reached.

First, teacher-students meetings need to be held on a regular basis. These meetings do not have to be very long and can be conducted anytime suitable for the teacher and the students. The teacher will help the students develop their studying strategies for English, take their feedback on their classroom learning, guide them on how best to spend their free time with English, or just to play an English game together. It is through these meetings that the teacher can get closer to the students, increase their motivation and learn their progress, expectation and attitude toward her teaching so that timely changes can be made. This definitely will make the teacher feel more responsible toward her teaching and her students' progress; and at the same time make students feel more responsible for their study of the English subject.

Another alternative can be the building of the class forum where teacher and students can post their opinions and exchange information on how best to learn English. In this 21st century, it is a rarity for a young person not to know how to exploit the internet.

3. Incorporating High Technology and the Teaching of English

We are living in a technological era where privilege belongs to those who can make the most out of technological advances. In the case of the College of Technology, it will be a big waste to do the teaching and learning of English in isolation with technology.

As it is previously discussed, students in Vietnam are learning English in a non-English-speaking environment with few opportunities to practise the language they have learnt outside the classroom setting which is also conducted by Vietnamese teachers, making it all an artificial, discouraging environment to learn English. Still, we cannot let this deter the students from getting in contact with authentic English.

Warsi (2004) points out several advantages of using audio-visual aids in a language classroom as follows:

- Audio-visual aids help the learner understand the English language by bringing her or him in direct contact with objects and material artifacts, by
bringing the distant things near, and by bringing the world into the classroom. They help the learner appreciate the subtle nuances of different linguistic systems and cultural values.

- Audio-visual aids promote remembering by involving the perceptual senses of the learners, by arousing the learner’s curiosity, by making use of pictorial content, and by providing varieties in teaching.

- They make teaching effective by creating situations for presentation and practice of language items and by reducing dependence on the learner’s native language.

- They help in formation of language habits by drills, repetition, and constant practice.

- They increase the learner’s experience of language by providing a rich variety and better quality of instruction.

- They increase the instructor’s efficiency by saving time and energy.

- They provide recreation to the learner.

Now, teachers of English at COT can definitely turn their disadvantage of not having a Standard English into the advantage of using Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) or Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to teach standard English to their students. Desktop computers, which are abundant at COT, are able to play natural human speech together with interactive video giving students the opportunity to watch and listening to native speakers responding in an impromptu fashion. This technological wonder can help enhance students' communicative competency and improve students' pronunciation, and at the same time encourage them to practise discussion and argument.

Again, advantages belong to those who can take advantage of technology in this century of technology, and science students like those at COT should be the first to get benefits from this.
4. **Improving the System of Testing and Examination**

When asked if the college's tests and exams are a true indication of their level of language proficiency, only half of the students at COT (50%) gave a positive respond. This is due partly to the subjective part of the tests in which the marks depend upon the examiner’s opinion, judgment or evaluation. It is, therefore, recommended that COT administer objective tests in any parts where objective tests can be applied to its students. If such tests are carefully linked with a teaching program, COT can have a simple, quick, and effective way to check on teaching and learning.

Another reason can be attributed to the difference between what is taught in class and what is tested in the exams. During the first 2 semesters, a large proportion of the final tests aims at testing the students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. As learning a language does not mean learning its grammatical structures or vocabulary most of the time, it is necessary to incorporate a variety of language skills and elements in the tests at an equal proportion. During the ESP stage, it is even more necessary to pay enough attention to the communicative skills, as tests separated from them would handicap the nature of language acquisition.

Finally, to take advantage of the inescapable feature of examinations that they control teaching, it is recommended that more communication-oriented tests be developed so that a communicative English program could result.

5. **Helping COT's Students to Reach the Level of Proficiency in English Expected by VNU**

Learners are always the heart of any innovation in education. No amount of attention is too much if it is paid to learners. COT's students' motivation in learning English seems quite good, but it does not help them learn English better. Therefore, COT's students' needs should really be geared to reaching the level of proficiency in English expected from them by VNU and by the society in the process of globalization. It is recommended that the purposes of learning English have to be made clear to the students right at the beginning of the course so that the students can make arrangement to meet the requirement, and no more time is wasted wondering about this matter.
Also, it is necessary that the students be guided on the appropriate learning strategies for English. This is better done at the beginning of the course, too.

Then, attempts on providing the students with opportunities to get in contact with authentic materials and English native speakers should be realized. The college's library needs more and useful English materials to attract students and teachers of English. Also, its management system should work more effectively to provide better and quicker services for the students and teachers. There should be a self-access centre with guidance on reliable addresses and websites where students can search for the information they need. Moreover, meetings with some English native teachers working within the college should be held as off-class activities to help students enhance their motivation toward the language. To make it even better, English-speaking teachers should join the teachers of English so that the students can have the opportunity to learn English with native speakers and be further motivated to learn this subject.

Furthermore, off-class activities to practise and learn English need to be held more often. The college needs an English-speaking club where all the students are encouraged to go to and participate in its activities. Fortunately, at the time the last few lines of this thesis was written (the end of November, 2006), an English club was going to be set up at the college and was attracting a lot of students.

6. Making Improvement to the Textbooks of English Being Used at COT

Firstly, General English and English for Specific Purposes should be taught together as the separation of these two phases demotivates the students to learn English. At first, when the students' level of proficiency in English is still low, an ESP-oriented syllabus should be built, and later ESP can be incorporated and take a bigger proportion in the syllabus. Even when the students are going to graduate from the college and start their profession, their learning of English should not be all ESP, otherwise their proficiency level in English will have little chance to be raised.

Secondly, the English textbooks being used at COT should be culture-specific and needs-based. Textbooks should be carefully adapted to suit COT's context so that what is taught to the students is linked to their lives and knowledge, making it easier for the students to learn the language. Also, the textbooks should be adapted in the way to
make them communication-oriented. This should benefit the students in developing their communicative skills and at the same time direct the tests and examination toward checking these skills from the students.

Thirdly, COT should take advantage of the knowledge of English the students have possessed since high school and further develop the students' knowledge in English on that background, not start the teaching from the beginning with the lowest level of English as what colleges and universities in Vietnam are doing at the moment. Of course, no students should be left behind and supportive courses as discussed above can nicely solve the problem.

7. **Improving COT's Facilities and Resources to Help the Students Better Learn English**

A technical college like COT has more than what is expected from other colleges and universities for the equipment to teach and learn English. The college should allow English classes to get access to the computer lab sometimes while a language lab is still not available at the college. A computer lab can be used as a language lab by the teachers of English if they receive a brief training on its operation.

Also, it should be made clear to the teacher that they are allowed to use the Overhead Projectors in their teaching at COT, and the teachers of English should be encouraged to use them as well. Moreover, any problems to the teaching equipment should be fixed immediately, and irreparable equipment should be replaced so that teachers of English will not have to do their teaching without the necessary devices.

Because the college's library is a great source of teaching and learning materials, it is necessary that the library be equipped with materials for the teaching and learning of the English subject. Reference technical books written in English are not enough to attract the teachers of English and the students when they learn the English subject. If this problem prolongs, the English subject will not have any place in the library in the eyes of the English teachers and COT's students.

Another thing to consider is the condition of the classrooms. It is hoped that when the college moved into the new place, the classrooms will be better soundproof and the furniture will be arranged in the way to facilitate communication. At the
moment, the only thing to do is either to ask the English teachers and the students to overcome difficulties or to move the English classes to a quieter location.

Sub-conclusion

In this section, we have suggested some solutions to the problems of teaching and learning of English at COT based on the analysis of the key factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning a language and on the application of the Communicative Language Teaching approach. These suggestions, however, will not really be convincing if they are not tested in an experimental course so that feedback from those students being administered with the new teaching method, content and changes in the key factors discussed in the previous chapters can be elicited and analyzed to prove the reliability of the suggested solutions. Also in teaching the course, we can learn from the experience so that correction and adjustment can be made to the suggested syllabus and to the proposed teaching method and changes of the key factors. The following two sections offer the preliminary realization of the proposed solutions being the design of a 50-period communicative syllabus for the first-year undergraduate students at COT and the pilot teaching of a course applying CLT using the proposed syllabus and implementing some changes to the key factors suggested above.
SECTION 2
PRELIMINARY REALIZATION OF THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

I. DESIGNING A 50-PERIOD COMMUNICATIVE SYLLABUS FOR FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT COT, VNU

1.1 Needs analysis (for details, see 2.2. Problems Experienced by COT, page 26)

First-year students at COT cover Stage One of the English program-General English-in two semesters. Students start with the elementary level with the textbook *New Headway Elementary* by John and Liz Soars, and are expected to finish the book at the end of the first semester which lasts 105 periods before moving to the pre-intermediate level in the second semester with the textbook *New Headway Pre-intermediate* by the same authors to be finished in another 105 periods. There are 14 units to be covered for each level, and each unit is studied in 7 periods.

However, the majority of the freshmen (94%) have already learnt English from 300 to 720 periods, making the starting point of elementary level inappropriate.

These first year students have just finished high school and are still familiar with the learning strategies there. High school students are expected to be passive learners in studying English with those series of textbooks used for the 3-year and 7-year English programs, taking everything given to them by the teachers. They are used to studying grammatical structures and vocabulary most of the time, are slow readers, and can hardly communicate using English (Hoang, 2006). The results of the pre-course test held on 4th of October and 7th of October well reflect this. (See Appendix 9)

Students have good intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and see the need to learn the language for communication. Their two most popular reasons for learning English are to get a good job after graduation and to continue further study and improve professional knowledge. Nevertheless, they are losing their motivation due to the lack of time, learning environment, and learning equipment.
At the moment, the students spend very little time on self-study (an average of 3.9 hours per week). The types of off-class English learning are mostly doing exercises in reference books; attending extra classes; reading newspapers, magazines and materials written in English; and learning with TV, internet, audio and visual equipment.

1.2 Objectives of the syllabus

This 50-period communicative syllabus is designed for a course in general English, starting at pre-intermediate level with some ESP components for a group of COT's first-year students. The GE consists of materials to brush up on the students' English; that is to equip them with some aspects of the four language skills and language elements to improve their confidence in learning English. Through the provision of basic language skills, including study skills and communication skills, the communication purposes are emphasized. The ESP consists of materials to help the students get acquainted with some basic technical vocabulary and technical terms.

By the end of the course, the students will be aware that their ability to learn the language is indeed more than what they thought it was. They should be able to do the following:

**Reading**: read passages and articles of about 300 words in length on general topics and on some specific topics such as information technology and nanotechnology, and identify main ideas and details;

**Writing**: write grammatical sentences, and express feelings and tell about experiences in the form of diary entries;

**Speaking**: use familiar everyday expressions to communicate orally in different social situations;

**Listening**: listen for main points and some details;

**Vocabulary**: increase knowledge of general vocabulary and some professional vocabulary, and vocabulary skills;

**Grammar**: develop basic syntax, use basic English grammar of the low pre-intermediate level;
**Pronunciation**: be able to pronounce intelligibly so as to make oneself understood.

**1.3 Syllabus Design and Material Selection**

This item deals with the evaluation and adaptation of the series of textbook *New Headway* being used for General English study at COT.

McDonough & Shaw (2003) provide a definition of what adaptation means:

‘…adaptation is essentially a process of ‘matching’. Its purpose is to maximize the appropriacy of teaching materials in context, by changing some of the internal characteristics of a coursebook to suit our particular purposes better.’ (McDonough & Shaw 2003: 76)

In his article *Textbook Evaluation*, Garinger (2001) mentions a variety of methods of textbook evaluation. Hartley's method involves three content areas that must be addressed: meeting teaching objectives, depth and breadth of material, and the need to be supplemented. Cunningsworth (1984) stresses the importance of relating materials to course objectives and the learner's needs and processes. Sheldon's (1988) touches upon all aspects of content including graphics and physical characteristics to authenticity and flexibility. Skierso (1991) and Chall and Conard (1991) assess the processes and skills that textbooks require learners to perform. Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) include issues such as learners' perceptions of knowledge, language learning and roles, and learners' world view and general knowledge, as well as their affective and cognitive development. However, because textbook evaluation may or may not include the issues or elements that reflect the concerns of teachers choosing textbooks, Garinger suggests selecting particular items for a personal evaluation index as the best method to ensure that the realities of each individual learning situation are addressed.

The personal checklist from Garinger's article created to evaluate textbooks in a local setting was used in the evaluation of the textbook *New Headway* (see Appendix 7). After carrying out the evaluation, we summarize the advantages and disadvantages of the textbook as follows:

**Advantages:**

- The organization of the content is effective with clear layout.
- The language used in the book is authentic, various and can be recycled.
- A variety of language elements and language skills are included.
- The topics are interesting and informative enough to attract users.
- The technique used to develop the skills follows the model Pre-While-Post activities, the current favourable model.
- The tasks and exercises are meaningful, promote communication and allow for negotiation

Disadvantages:
- The textbooks series is not balanced in language content and language skills. Generally, students succeed in the grammar sections while they find the listening activities challenging.
- It is not exactly culturally suitable for Vietnamese students because of the alien information and concepts, as the books are written for international study, and need adapting before being used in any particular environment.
- Some grammatical items of the textbook are too long making students bored.
- There is no direct aim serving to develop any learning strategies and showing ways to students for self-study.

From the textbook evaluation, it is easily seen that the advantages of the textbook exceed its disadvantages. Moreover, the textbook series is being used officially at COT. It must have been carefully selected for the purpose of English training of the college. It is, in fact, accepted worldwide as one of the best textbook series to develop communicative competence not at the cost of other language elements. Besides, the disadvantages spotted can be fixed easily during the adaptation of the textbook. That is why this series of New Headway should continue to be chosen as the course book after going through necessary adaptation.

As we have pointed out in the needs analysis, the majority of the COT's first-year students have already learnt English from 300 to 720 periods at secondary and high school. The starting point of elementary level is no longer suitable for them. We
therefore, suggest the raise of one level up making it the pre-intermediate level as the starting point; and this would naturally lead to the textbook New Headway Intermediate being used in the second semester at COT.

Another equally important matter that deserves attention is the students' needs reflected in their two most popular reasons for learning English namely getting a good job after graduation, and continuing higher study and improving professional knowledge. These reasons are a true indication of the need to incorporate professional English (ESP) into the syllabus. And if reference books in English are expected to be used by second and third-year students in doing scientific assignments, and by fourth-year students in writing their final theses, ESP has to be incorporated into the syllabus right at the beginning of the first year.

However, the syllabus for the first-year students should only be ESP-oriented to help students get used to the most popular technical vocabulary and technical terms. ESP materials, therefore, will be selected from the most common articles, documents and sources such as those from the news-bulletins on Science and Technology at www.voaspecialenglish.com, a website set up for immigrants to America.

One advantage of VOAspecialEnglish news-bulletins lies in their huge supply of audible and visual information written in comprehensible styles mainly to universalize knowledge and information. They are authentic materials and are very close in nature and styles to scientific documents that students will have to deal with soon. On the other hands, the slow-read, clear and high-quality voice of the American native newsreaders can help listeners learn and better their pronunciation.

The materials taken from VOAspecialEnglish news-bulletins will be incorporated in the syllabus in Reading Comprehension and Supplementary Listening sections. The length of the Reading section will be no more than 400 words and the follow-up exercises are designed to help the students learn the reading skill and professional vocabulary rather than to test their understanding in the field. The length of the texts read in the Supplementary Listening section is about 200 words and accounts for 30 or 40% of the Listening section of the whole syllabus. These ESP parts of the
syllabus will have to be suitable for the destined students who are assumed to be somewhere between the high-beginner level and the low-pre-intermediate level.

Finally, changes to the current textbook will be like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Everyday English</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep the origin, cut the fat or keep that part as homework assignment</td>
<td>Keep the origin</td>
<td>Keep the origin, cut off those parts culturally unsuitable for VNese students</td>
<td>Replace with ESP reading materials</td>
<td>Keep the origin, cut off those parts culturally unsuitable for VNese students</td>
<td>Cut half of the listening part and replace with ESP listening materials</td>
<td>Keep the origin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Proposed changes to the current textbook New Headway Pre-intermediate
1.4 *Organization of the content* (see Appendix 7)

Considering the advantages of the book's content organization, it is suggested that we keep the new syllabus organized in the same way as the original one.

**Heading** tells the linguistic aims of the unit.

**Presentation** introduces grammatical point structures.

**Grammar** and **Vocabulary**: explain the grammar point(s) thoroughly, and introduce new vocabulary in a context.

**Grammar Spot**: review and check students' acquisition of the grammar point(s) and vocabulary

**Four Language Skills** are designed systematically for students to develop their communicative competence with the Reading and Listening sections following the format of Pre, While, Post-activities.

**Everyday English** exposes students to the language used in everyday situations.

1.5 *Timing of the Syllabus*

The syllabus is to last a total of 50 periods of 45 minutes each with 42 periods of actual class contact and 8 periods for the pre-course and post-course tests. It is intended for a course of 6 weeks with 3 three-period meetings each and it includes 6 units. One unit is taught in 7 periods.

1.6 *The Proposed Syllabus for first-year students at College of Technology, Vietnam National University (page 61)*

1.7 *The Experimental Textbook* (see Appendix 14)
### Table 8. The Proposed 50-period Syllabus for first-year students at College of Technology, Vietnam National University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT 1</th>
<th>Getting to know you</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Everyday English</th>
<th>READING</th>
<th>SPEAKING</th>
<th>LISTENING</th>
<th>WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tenses</strong></td>
<td>Present, past, future</td>
<td><strong>Parts of speech</strong></td>
<td>adjective, preposition</td>
<td><strong>Words with more than one meaning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social expressions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td>What do you...? Are you married?</td>
<td><strong>Question words</strong></td>
<td>Who..? Why..? How...?</td>
<td>a book to read I booked a table</td>
<td>Discussion - who are your ideal neighbours?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social expressions</strong></td>
<td>- Have a good weekend! - Same to you.</td>
<td><strong>Legal expressions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 2</td>
<td>The way we live</td>
<td>Present tenses</td>
<td>Describing countries</td>
<td>a beautiful country</td>
<td><strong>Nanotechnology</strong> How the Science of the very Small is getting very Big?</td>
<td><strong>Information gap</strong> people's lifestyles</td>
<td><strong>Writing conversations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Past simple</strong></td>
<td>Most people live in the South. What's he doing at the moment? <strong>Have/ have got</strong></td>
<td>We have a population of...</td>
<td>Have you got a mobile phone?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Past continuous</strong></td>
<td>The sun was shining.</td>
<td>Irregular verbs saw, went, told</td>
<td>Making connections break/mend, lose/find</td>
<td><strong>Nouns, verbs, and adjectives</strong> Suffixes to make different parts of speech</td>
<td><strong>Making negatives</strong> pack, unpack</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 3</td>
<td>It all went wrong</td>
<td><strong>Time expressions</strong> the eighth of January at six o'clock on Saturday in 1995</td>
<td><strong>&quot;The burglars' friend&quot;</strong> Newspaper stories</td>
<td>&quot;The beginning of the Information Age&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Information gap</strong> Zoe's party</td>
<td><strong>Listening comprehension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Linking words</strong> while, during, and for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Past simple</strong> He came from...</td>
<td>Past continuous The sun was shining.</td>
<td><strong>Making connections</strong></td>
<td><strong>Making negatives</strong> pack, unpack</td>
<td><strong>Nouns, verbs, and adjectives</strong> Suffixes to make different parts of speech</td>
<td><strong>Writing a story</strong></td>
<td><strong>Listening comprehension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writing conversations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Time expressions</strong></td>
<td>the eighth of January at six o'clock on Saturday in 1995</td>
<td><strong>&quot;The burglars' friend&quot;</strong> Newspaper stories</td>
<td>&quot;The beginning of the Information Age&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Information gap</strong> Zoe's party</td>
<td><strong>Listening comprehension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Linking words</strong> while, during, and for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Information gap</strong></td>
<td>fortunately/ unfortunately</td>
<td><strong>Listening comprehension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Linking words</strong> while, during, and for</td>
<td><strong>Writing a story</strong></td>
<td><strong>Listening comprehension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Linking words</strong> while, during, and for</td>
<td><strong>Writing a story</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNIT 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Let's go shopping!</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>Expression of quantity some and any much and many a lot of a few and few</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Buying things milk, eggs bread, a packet of crisps, a can of Coke, shampoo, soap, jumpers, department store, antique shop, newsagent, trainers, a tie, conditioner</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday English</strong></td>
<td>Prices and Shopping £1.99 $160 What's the exchange rate? How much is a pair of jeans?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td>&quot;The Language of Electronic Mail&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td>Town survey - the good things and bad things about living in your town</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td>Listening comprehension: &quot;My uncle's a shopkeeper&quot; Buying things</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WRITING</strong></td>
<td>Writing diary entries</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UNIT 5</strong></th>
<th><strong>What do you want to do?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>Verb patterns want/hope to do, enjoy/like doing looking forward to doing, 'd like to do Future intentions going to and will She's going to travel the world. I'll pack it up for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Hot verbs have, go, come have an accident go wrong come first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday English</strong></td>
<td>How do you feel? nervous, fed up Cheer up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Google to put millions of books on the internet&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td>What are your plans and ambitions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td>Listening comprehension: &quot;You've got a friend&quot; Supplementary Listening: &quot;Effort aims for Low-cost computers for poor children&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WRITING</strong></td>
<td>Writing a postcard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UNIT 6</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tell me! What's it like?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>What's it like? What's Paris like? Comparative and superlative adjectives big, bigger, biggest good, better, best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Talking about towns Modern buildings, night-life Synonyms and antonyms lovely, beautiful, interested, bored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday English</strong></td>
<td>Directions farm, wood, pond opposite the car park over the bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td>Low cost computers in Thailand Information gap - comparing cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td>Listening comprehension: Living in another country - an interview with a girl who went to live in Sweden Supplementary Listening: Telecommuting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td>Relative clauses who/that/which/where Describing a place Diary entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WRITING</strong></td>
<td>Writing a postcard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. THE EXPERIMENT – THE PILOT TEACHING BASED ON THE STUDY SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS USING THE DESIGNED SYLLABUS

2.1 Aims of the Experiment

The experiment is aimed at

- developing the students' communicative competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening in English;

- familiarizing them with some knowledge in technology through the reading of and listening to texts and articles on technical topics;

- brushing up their knowledge in some areas such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation;

- building the students' positive attitudes toward the language, increase self-confidence to continue learning English, widen knowledge of other countries and their cultures, get used to up-to-date English, and develop fluency.

In general, the students will have to acquire the objectives specified in the syllabus after the course,

**Reading**: read passages and articles of about 300 words in length on general topics and on some specific topics such as information technology and nanotechnology, and identify main ideas and details;

**Writing**: write grammatical sentences, and express feelings and tell about experiences in the form of diary entries;

**Speaking**: use familiar everyday expressions to communicate orally in different social situations;

**Listening**: listen for main points and some details;

**Vocabulary**: increase knowledge of general vocabulary and some professional vocabulary, and vocabulary skills;

**Grammar**: develop basic syntax, use basic English grammar of the low pre-intermediate level;

**Pronunciation**: be able to pronounce intelligibly so as to make oneself understood.
2.2 Selection of the Students

25 students are selected from 562 COT’s first-year students to study in the course.

First of all, the students were informed about the course by the college's Training Bureau. They are to fill in a registration form to express their interest in the course. To make sure that all types of students could register for the course, we offered them a variety of favourable things such as

- no training fee
- free textbooks and learning materials
- application of a new method of teaching
- use of a standard classroom for the training
- outside working-hour classes (evenings and weekends)

From the number of students registered for the course, we chose at random 60 students to take part in the pre-course elementary level test (see Appendix 8) taken from KET (Key English Test), the first of the 5 levels of General English Test from Cambridge ESOL Examinations, one of the popular examinations in Vietnam in general and in VNU in particular. KET is an elementary level exam, testing students' ability to deal with basic written and spoken communications. However, the speaking test was not administered to the students on the day of the entrance test due to the constraint of time and the large number of students. After the test papers had been marked and the results had been released, we ruled out those students who had failed to reach the elementary level, and again selected at random 25 students from the remaining ones. The reason for choosing the elementary level for the pre-course test is that most freshmen have learnt English from 300 to 720 periods at high school and are expected to possess at least the basic knowledge of the language which has to be enough for them to pass the elementary level test. The reason for ruling out those students who scored below the average line of the elementary level is that in the next two years, all high-school graduates will have studied English for 7 years in accordance with a reform in education that has taken effects since 2002. Their knowledge of English will also be higher than
that of the present students. The random selection of the course's 25 students, on the other hand, excludes the risk of organizing a super course for a group of super students. The 25 selected students then took part in the oral test before the course actually started. The oral test was designed in the way that the results of which can be compared to those of the achievement test at the end of the course. \(\text{(see Appendix 8)}\)

2.3 Course Plan

After the pre-course test on Wednesday the 4th of October 2006, the plan for the experimental course was scheduled. Due to the pressure of time and a variety of other unfavourable factors, we decided that the pilot course would focus on testing the feasibility of the new syllabus and the application of CLT, the two biggest matters, only. Other factors, therefore, would have to be kept as close as possible to those in the formal English program at COT.

We then negotiated with the School of Graduate Studies, VNU to rent a classroom to carry out the experiment. The classroom is to resemble a typical college classroom in Vietnam, having unmovable long desks arranged in rows and columns all facing the teacher's writing board. The room is equipped with just a cassette player of a good quality.

Three teachers, two Vietnamese, one American undertook the teaching. The two Vietnamese teachers have the same characteristics as the COT's English teachers, that is, they are young, come from the same educational background as the COT English teachers, have been trained in modern teaching methodology and are receiving the master degree in several months. One of them is even teaching English at COT. The American teacher is teaching English for students at Faculty of Economics, VNU. The reason for the presence of an English-speaking teacher in the course is just natural. In this context of globalization, foreign teachers are being hired more and more frequently for the teaching of the language subject at colleges and universities. This American teacher is teaching at a Faculty under VNU. There is no reason why COT, a college under VNU, shouldn't have one in the coming future. Moreover, it is expected that his presence will have a good effect on the students' motivation to learn the language. The teachers are then made fully aware of the objectives of the course, the students' level of
language proficiency and learning styles, the teaching materials, facilities and available teaching equipment.

A teaching plan for the pilot class was then written. The course was to be conducted at the beginning of the semester, when the first-year students had just started their studying in the college, and would be taught side by side with the college's regular course of English. However, attempts were made so that the pilot course did not affect the teaching of COT's regular course. Pilot classes were held in the evenings and at weekends three times a week for just 5 weeks. We planned to conduct the experiment in such a short time to correct the shortcoming of this part of the study, which is the side by side teaching of the pilot class and the college's regular English course. We hoped that this brief, intensive training of the pilot course could result in a remarkable change to the course students even before any actual changes as the result of the training in the regular English course took place.

The six units of the textbook were covered in 42 classroom periods in a little more than one month. Classes, each lasting 3 periods, took place 3 times a week on Monday evening, Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon. Each unit was learnt in 7 periods as it is now conducted at COT. In general, in preparing for the course, we tried to keep as much of the formal condition of the teaching and learning of English at COT as possible.

After that, a notice was sent to the 25 students of the pilot class. A pre-course meeting was held to hand over to the students the course studying materials, guide them on the positive learning strategies, introduce to them the aims and objectives of the course, and most importantly, build up the friendly relationships between students and students, and between students and teachers. After the meeting, the class has a monitor who won his position with his promise to set up a class forum so that everyone of the class could stay connected.

Table 9. The Pilot Course's Teaching Plan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wed. Oct. 4th</td>
<td>2-period written test</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Hien, Nghi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sat. Oct. 7th</td>
<td>2-period spoken test</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mon. Oct. 9th</td>
<td>Grammar, Practice Vocabulary Reading</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Van (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UNIT 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wed. Oct. 11th</td>
<td>Listening Comprehension Supplementary Listening</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Keith C. Hulsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sat. Oct. 14th</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>Thanh Van (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>UNIT 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mon. Oct. 16th</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>Van (f)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wed. Oct. 18th</td>
<td>Supplementary Listening Everyday English</td>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>Keith C. Hulsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sat. Oct. 21st</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>22-28</td>
<td>Thanh Van (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>UNIT 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mon. Oct. 23rd</td>
<td>Supplementary Listening Vocabulary Everyday English</td>
<td>28-31</td>
<td>Van (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>UNIT 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Wed. Oct. 25</td>
<td>Grammar Practice Vocabulary Reading</td>
<td>32-40</td>
<td>Keith C. Hulsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sat. Oct. 28</td>
<td>Listening Comprehension Supplementary Listening</td>
<td>40-42</td>
<td>Thanh Van (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday English</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>UNIT 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon. Oct. 30</td>
<td>Grammar Practice</td>
<td>43-49</td>
<td>Van (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Wed. Nov. 1st</td>
<td>Reading Vocabulary</td>
<td>49-52</td>
<td>Keith C. Hulsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4th</td>
<td>Supplementary Listening Everyday English</td>
<td>53-55</td>
<td>Thanh Van (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>UNIT 6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mon. Nov. 6th</td>
<td>Grammar Practice Reading Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Wed. Nov. 8th</td>
<td>Supplementary Listening Vocabulary</td>
<td>57-60</td>
<td>Van (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday English</td>
<td>61-64</td>
<td>Keith C. Hulsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 11th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thanh Van (m)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 **Pilot Teaching** *(See Appendix 11 for a look at the class activities.)*

The first lesson of the course started on Monday the 9th of October; and the last one was delivered on Monday the 13th of November. With the aim to develop the students' communicative competence in English, Communicative Language Teaching approach was adopted, and the four communicative skills and the language elements were taught to the students through tasks and exercises in the coursebook which is now named *"An Experimental Textbook for Students of Technology - Pre-intermediate Level"*. An interactive approach to teaching was applied, and the lessons focused on communicative functions and tried to teach the language to the students through meaningful tasks which were made relevant to the language. When encountering a task, the teacher asked the students to work in groups, or in pairs and always maintains a secure, non-threatening atmosphere during class work. When dealing with the ESP part of the textbook, the teacher would remember that this course is just ESP-oriented and the aim of incorporating the part in the syllabus is just to help students get acquainted with some basic technical vocabulary and technical terms. In general, most of the class time was used to develop the students' communicative skills and familiarize them with the new field of ESP. Grammar and practice exercises were introduced and guided on briefly, and were set as homework. The homework also includes the content of the New Headway Pre-intermediate Workbook, some extra ESP reading materials handed over to the students after each reading section, and the students' keeping of a diary with an aim to develop their communicative skill in writing.

2.5 **Course Evaluation**

2.5.1 **Course Evaluation Form**

At the end of the course, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire in which they express their attitude towards the course’s content, the teaching method, the classroom activities, and the teachers’ role. *(see Appendix 11)* The students also self-evaluate their progress after the course and give suggestions on how to improve the course.
In answering the question: "How effectively have you learned the communicative skills and language elements during the course?", from 75% to 96% of the students give their positive responses. (see Table 10 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>from OK to highly efficient</th>
<th>from not very efficient to inefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Listening</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Speaking</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Vocabulary</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pronunciation</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Grammar and structures</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Students' responses to the question: "How effectively have you learned English during the course?"

The evaluation of the content and teaching method of the course from the students is also quite encouraging. The students grade the content of the course to be about 6.8 over 10 and the teaching method to be about 7 over 10. (for details see Table 11 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>content</th>
<th>teaching method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The 4 communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English for Specific Purposes</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Students' grading of the course's content and teaching method from 1-very bad to 10-very good.

Although the numbers demonstrated above are not exceptionally high, the questions asking the students to evaluate their achievements to follow up the grading do give us what we expect and even much more than what we expect. The students claim that the amount of knowledge they have gained from the course contributes up to 29.7% to the amount of English knowledge they had possessed before the course. This percent is perfectly meaningful when we know that the students have learned English formally
as a subject at school for an average of 4.1 years, and informally for an average of 7.2 years while this pilot course only lasted a little more than a month.

The next follow-up question refers to the ESP part of the course. Except for one student who sees the ESP part of the course to be very useful and help him learn a lot, 18 out of 24 students say that the ESP part is OK and they learn some technical vocabulary and technical terms. That is exactly what this ESP-oriented English course aims at (see the syllabus objectives on page 55 of this thesis). Only 5 students do not like the ESP part, saying it is not very useful and they learn almost nothing.

In question 4 of the evaluation form, we ask the students to consider the possibility of the course's content and teaching method to be applied to their college's English program. 20 of the 24 students say that with that possibility, they can effectively communicate and use their English in their professional working after graduation. Of the 24 students, 14 think that their level of English proficiency can be equivalent to the intermediate level, 6 even think of the advanced level, and only 4 still expect to get to the level set for graduate students by VNU at the moment, the pre-intermediate level.

In answering question 5, the majority of the students (19 out of 24 students) think that the pilot course has helped them realize that their ability to study English is more than what they used to think. This coincides the course's objectives (see page 55 of this thesis). One student even believes that he can get very close to the level of a native speaker of English in the future. However, nothing is perfect. The course makes 2 students believe that English is too difficult for them.

When the 24 students are consulted on what classroom activity helps them learn English best, 9 select group work, another 9 choose to listen to the teacher teaching, 4 are in favour of pair work, 1 prefers to work individually, and 1 more wants to combine group work and listening to the teacher teaching. The figures above show that a fair amount of class work that would promote communication has been implemented in the teaching of the course, and it works.

The role of the course's teachers is seen by 17 out of 24 students to be facilitators to their study of English. 5 students think the teachers play the role of people who just give them the knowledge of English. The other 2 see the teachers playing both
of the roles. From the data, we feel contented that the course's teachers have successfully played the role specified for them by the CLT approach.

Also, we noted very positive responses from the students to the role the native teacher played in the classroom. The students saw the presence of the native teacher as a chance to get them motivated toward the learning of the language, build up their confidence in learning the language, and really help them develop their knowledge of the language, especially the two communicative skills of listening and speaking. Besides, the incorporation of the foreign component in the course created a good language environment that can speed up learning.

2.5.2 Achievement Test

A week after the last lesson of the course, an achievement test was held to check if the students have reached the objectives of the course (see Aims of the Experiment on page 63 of this thesis). The test was adapted from a number of tests from the official website English Language Teaching by Oxford University Press at http://www.oup.com/elt/headway that guides and introduces users of the series of New Headway to unit tests. For example, after unit 1 of the coursebook New Headway pre-intermediate has been covered, the learners can get into the website and download the testing materials for this unit. There are 6 units in the course syllabus which is an adaptation of the coursebook New Headway pre-intermediate. Testing materials for the Grammar and Vocabulary Section, the Reading Section, and the Speaking Section of the course's achievement test were selected from this website under the criterion that they have to satisfy the objectives of the course. The Listening Section was made up of parts of the tapescripts of the New Headway Pre-intermediate Student Book itself which had been cut off during the design of the syllabus due to the tapescripts' extra length (T2.5 and T4.5). The Writing Section was designed in compliance with the course's objectives and what had actually been taught in class. In the end, we chose a 100-word writing task in the form of a journal entry. In selecting the materials for the Reading Section of the test, we chose the Reading text and comprehension exercises that can serve the aim of this ESP-oriented course, which is to provide the students with some basic technical vocabulary and technical terms. The Reading Section should assess the students' understanding of the overall meaning of the text as well as check their everyday and
technical vocabulary. At last, a reading text about Bill Gates and Microsoft was selected. (see Appendix 12 for the Achievement Test for the pilot class).

The result of the test is very encouraging. 92% of the students managed to pass the test, which indicates that the objectives of the course have been reached. The average score of all the students of the pilot class is 7 over 10 (see Appendix 13).

When comparing the results of the pre-course oral test and the achievement test, we noted a big improvement in the students' speaking skills and performance. While most of the students sitting the pre-course oral test were remarked as being shy, having little or no communicative ability in English, facing considerable difficulty in understanding spoken English, and only managing to utter separate words or phrases in familiar situations, most of those who took the end-of-course achievement test showed their confidence as they volunteered to take the test even before their names were called. In addition, they have developed their quick response to the teacher's questions and have managed to make themselves understood with a limited range of vocabulary. It is such a big difference, especially when the average marks of the two tests are brought into comparison, 3 over 10 for the pre-course test and 6.6 over 10 for the end-of-course test.

SUB-CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pilot course can be said to have met the experiment's objectives and requirements. The two types of feedback (the objective one being the achievement test, and the subjective one being the students' evaluation of the course) both provide encouraging information. The course has helped the students develop their communicative competence, familiarize them with the new field of ESP, brush up their knowledge in other language elements, and at the same time build their positive attitudes toward the language. From what the students achieved from the course, we claim the appropriateness of the communicative ESP-oriented syllabus, and the Communicative Language Teaching approach being used in the pilot course.
PART 3. CONCLUSION
The end of the journey marks new beginnings (Drake, 1993:52). To conclude on the research at this moment, for me, is not much of a meaningful thing to do. Problems are part of life and there would be nothing to do if problems do not exist. A search for solutions to problems, therefore, is a never-ending process and no conclusion should ever be made on it. That is why in this part of the thesis, I would only like to give a summary of the study and its results before stating the study's limitations and directions for further research.

1. Summary of the Study

After the introduction in which the position of the thesis as part of a VNU project aiming at improving the level of proficiency in English for VNU's undergraduate and post-graduate students is located, the study starts with some orientations that serve as the base for all the other parts of the study, the call of Globalization, CLT as an appropriate teaching method, and the key factors affecting the quality of language teaching and learning. We believe that a reminder of the social requirement for a new level of proficiency in foreign languages, especially in English will make it easy for the acceptance of CLT in teaching English communicatively and that an analysis of the key factors in language teaching and learning will arouse the need for changes toward a better future of language education.

In order to add more force to the theories, we carried out the field study to identify the problems experienced by COT in teaching and learning English. Four research instruments: questionnaires, classroom observation, informal talks and study of textbooks and testing materials used at COT were used to collect the data needed. One big problem found is the absence of CLT in classroom practice. Various kinds of other problems were found to exist in all the key factors affecting the quality of the teaching and learning of English, learners, teachers, administrators, curricula and textbooks, facilities and resources, and system of testing and examination.

The study then proposed seven solutions to improving the quality of teaching and learning English. They are COT's Administrators' Setting Clear Curricular Objectives for the Teaching of the English Subject, Helping the Teachers of English to Provide More Effective Teaching, Incorporating High Technology and the Teaching of
English, Improving the System of Testing and Examination, Helping COT's Students to Reach the Level of Proficiency in English Expected by VNU, Making Improvement to the Textbooks of English Being Used at COT, and Improving COT's Facilities and Resources to Help the Students Better Learn English

Due to the time constraint and financial availability, in the realization of the proposed solutions, we decided to offer a 50-period pilot course in which experiment was administered to the course content and teaching method only. First, we designed a communicative syllabus for the first-year students at COT with the aims to improve the students' communicative competence and knowledge of other language elements, and at the same time enhance students' motivation toward the learning of the language. The syllabus is an adaptation of the New Headway Pre-intermediate with an incorporated ESP part, making the syllabus both communicative and ESP-oriented. The pilot course strictly applying CLT and using the new syllabus was held within the month of October 2006 to test the feasibility of the first two proposed solutions for improvement in teaching and learning English.

Both objective form (an achievement test) and subjective form (students' evaluation of the course) of feedbacks are collected at the end of the course. The analysis of the feedback has proved the feasibility of the first two proposed solutions. The students of the course are highly motivated to learn the language and have learned the language effectively indeed.

2. Limitations of the Study

This study represents the first attempt by the researcher to search for solutions to the problems in the teaching and learning of English in the COT settings, and therefore, limitations are inevitable.

Firstly, the questionnaire was collected on the first, second and third year students at COT only. It should have been collected on the last-year students as well; however, at the time the questionnaire was administered, the last-year students had stopped their classroom study and were in the process of preparing for the graduation theses at home.
Secondly, due to the inexperience of the researcher in doing research, there is a possibility that the proposed solutions do not cover all the problems found in the teaching and learning of the English subject at the college. However, the main problems were all addressed and solutions were suggested to them.

Thirdly, instead of carrying out an evaluation of all the textbooks being used at COT, only the series of textbooks used for General English study at COT, the New Headway series, was examined. This is due to the time constraint and the attempt to narrow down the scope of the study.

Fourthly, the pre-course level exam to select the students for the pilot course was administered to the students with the absence of the oral test due to the constraint of time and the large number of students attending the test. It was only when the 25 students of the course had been selected was the oral test administered to them. The meaning of that oral test is, therefore, limited to the data to be compared to the end-of-course achievement test later.

Fifthly, also due to the pressure of time, the financial availability and a variety of other unfavourable factors, the pilot course only focuses on testing the feasibility of the new syllabus and the application of CLT, the two biggest matters. Other factors, therefore, would have to wait to be dealt with in further research.

3. Directions for Further Research

The search for solutions to problems in education, as being said above, is a never-ending process. Problems that have been solved will sooner or later give way to new problems. That is the way society advances.

The author of the research would, first of all, continue with the administering of the change in the other key factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning a foreign language to the students in other experimental classes, probably in colleges other than COT. Special attention would be paid to the area of interest to the author, the incorporation of high technology and the teaching and learning of English.

Another direction would be to design a communicative ESP-oriented syllabus for the future non-English major college students of the WTO era.
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Tiếng Anh


