Speaking Pedagogy: Insights from Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Cognitions and Classroom Practice

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Recommended Citation
Abstract

The past few decades have witnessed an ever-growing expansion of research on teacher cognition - their knowledge and beliefs - and its relation to their teaching practice. However, teacher cognition about speaking skill instruction remains an under-researched area. In the Vietnamese context, while an increasing body of research has advanced our understanding of the role of EFL teachers’ cognitions in the implementation of the task-based language teaching curriculum in the high school context, research into university teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practice remains to be minimal. Given the mounting socio-economic pressure for universities to produce English-competent graduates, an in-depth and systematic understanding of Vietnamese university teachers’ existing cognitions and practice in teaching speaking is long overdue.

This qualitative study aims to fill this research gap by investigating six Vietnamese EFL teachers’ cognitions and practice in teaching speaking, situated within the scope of the two English-major curricula in a Vietnamese university. The study is underpinned by a comprehensive theoretical framework, integrating Borg’s (2006) model of teacher cognition, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) framework of teachers’ knowledge base, and Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of communicative competence and their holistic approach to teaching speaking. Drawing on data gathered from documents, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the study sheds critical light on three crucial aspects of the teachers’ cognitions, namely curriculum, subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, and illuminates how the cognitions are manifested in the teachers’ practice.

Findings from the study highlight the lack of explicit guidance from curricular documents concerning the speaking subject matter content, pedagogy, and the connection among different curricular content. In such a context, the prescribed material, especially the textbooks, functions as the major embodiment of curricular content. Due in part to insufficient curricular specifications, most teachers demonstrated a lack of in-depth understanding of the notion of speaking development, the relationships between speaking subjects in the program and other curricular contents, and how each speaking level might contribute to students’ achievement of the overall expected speaking outcomes. At the tertiary level, these teachers also perceived there to be an extensive amount of freedom in making their own decisions about both the what and the how of teaching. Such unbridled freedom was identified by the teachers as the key reason for the inconsistency in their teaching practice, which negatively affected the learners’ outcomes.
Findings from the study also indicate that the teachers adopted a common eclectic, context-oriented approach to teaching speaking. Such an approach integrates features of the presentation-practice-production (PPP) model, which has long dominated the Vietnamese context, with the communicative-focused orientation promoted by CLT/ TBLT. On the one hand, the teachers displayed a narrow view of speaking competence, which encouraged them to focus primarily on linguistic and topic-specific knowledge as the two most fundamental content components in teaching speaking. Providing learners with sufficient input and opportunities to practise speaking in communicative situations was, thus, found to be the overriding objective of their lessons. On the other hand, findings in relation to the teachers’ selected speaking tasks for their lesson suggest the dominance of highly communicative speaking tasks which they employed for both whole-task and part-skill speaking practice (Littlewood, 2004, 2013; Goh & Burns, 2012). However, the teachers’ insufficient knowledge of task characteristics, namely task purpose and meaning-focus extent, authenticity, and the predictability and control of the language and meaning students produce through the tasks, appears to have negatively affected the teachers’ design of the tasks. Such a gap in the teachers’ understanding of task characteristics seems to have also undermined the intended values and effectiveness of the tasks for speaking development when implemented in the classroom context. In terms of lesson sequencing, while the teacher’s lessons are still constrained by the popular PPP lesson structure, enhanced opportunities for learners’ speaking production have been observed across the lessons, which reflects to a certain extent the teachers’ consideration of optimal conditions for speaking practice through communicative situations.

These findings, although based on a single case study, have generated a comprehensive empirical account of Vietnamese teachers’ cognitions in speaking instruction, thus contributing to the current understanding of speaking pedagogy from the teacher cognition perspective. These findings have practical implications for curriculum developers, university executives, and teacher trainers in the Vietnamese context, in relation to the specific areas of teachers’ knowledge of speaking skill content and pedagogy, which need to be addressed for further improvement of their teaching quality. These findings also establish a solid foundation for the development of a context-sensitive pedagogical model for teaching speaking in Vietnam.
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Certification

I, Nguyen Hai Quan, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Nguyen Hai Quan
31st, March, 2018
List of Abbreviations

CEFR: European Common Framework of Reference
CLT: Communicative language teaching
EFL: English as a foreign language
EIT: English Interpretation and Translation
ES: English Studies
ESL: English as a second language
ETE: English Teacher Education
FL: Foreign Language
L2: Second language
LT: Language teaching
LTC: Language teacher cognition
MOET: Ministry of Education and Training
PCK: Pedagogical content knowledge
PPP: Presentation-Practice-Production
SCT: Sociocultural theory
SMCK: Subject matter content knowledge
SOE: School of Education
SOSSH: School of Social Sciences and Humanities
TBLT: Task-based language teaching
TC: Teacher cognition
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The curriculum innovation in the Vietnamese context since 2006 has promoted the development of learners’ communicative competence as the ultimate goal in language teaching and learning (Canh, 2011; MOET, 2006). This innovation foregrounds the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach as “the policy backbone intended to accomplish an innovative curriculum” (Manh, Nguyen, & Burns, 2017, p. 20). Despite efforts to improve learners’ communicative competence in this context, research continues to demonstrate that students struggle with oral communication across school years (Anh & Hanh, 2004; T. Ha, 2008; Hao, 2017; Tuyet, 2013). Many studies (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) report that, within school walls, teachers have continued to adopt a traditional, form-focused approach with only limited focus on the development of speaking competence. These studies, in line with research on other Asian countries (e.g. Carless, 2004; D. F. Li, 1998; L. Li & Walsh, 2011; Littlewood, 2004, 2013), have consistently identified insufficient attention to teachers’ existing knowledge and beliefs, and the effects of contextual conditions, as crucial factors that significantly reduce the effectiveness of endeavours to improve learners’ communicative competence outcomes. Limited understanding is currently available in relation to Vietnamese teachers’ knowledge and beliefs in teaching speaking, which marks a critical gap in the literature.

Over the past four decades, research on teacher cognition (TC) or “what language teachers think, know and believe, and its relationship to teachers’ classroom practices” (Borg, 2015b, p. 1) has provided valuable insights into our knowledge of teachers and their teaching (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). Studies in this domain shed critical light on the intricate, symbiotic interrelationship between teachers’ cognitions and their classroom practices (Borg, 2006; Zheng, 2013b), positing that teachers’ practices are generally “shaped by teachers’ thoughts, judgments and beliefs” (Borg, 2015a, p. 488), mostly in “unique and often unpredictable ways” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). In return, teachers’ cognitions are also “shaped by the activity of language teaching in diverse sociocultural contexts” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). Investigating teachers’ cognitions, as such, has become central to understanding their teaching practice and the underlying rationale for their classroom behaviours (Borg, 2003, 2006,
This has led to a growing interest in TC in the Vietnamese context over the last two decades. However, the primary focus in these studies (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; Trang, 2013; N. G. Viet, 2013) appears to be anchored in the implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT) at high school level within the setting of curriculum innovation. To date, limited attention has been given to cognitions held by university teachers, given their different working conditions. In this light, the present study aims to investigate the quality of the teaching of speaking in this context by examining Vietnamese university English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers’ current knowledge and beliefs in teaching speaking, and their relationship with teachers’ practice in relation to the mediating impact of the contextual conditions. Findings from the study establish a critical foundation for recommendations to Vietnamese teachers on how to teach speaking in a systematic, principled and effective manner.

1.2 My personal motivation for the study

The impetus for the present study firstly stems from an urge to search for an explanation for a practical problem I encountered in my own teaching context. During my 12 years working as a teacher and an executive board member at one of the most prestigious universities in Vietnam, I witnessed three successive curriculum innovations implemented by the university, aiming to improve English major students’ language learning outcomes. Most critical to these innovations was the university-wide shift from a year-based to a credit-based system in 2007, with a view to prioritise three important aspects: (1) the development of learners’ communicative competence; (2) the enhancement of learners’ awareness for self-study; and (3) the teachers’ freedom in making decisions about teaching and evaluation (Tran, 2010). This movement towards a communicatively oriented, learner-centred approach with sufficient autonomy granted to teachers appears to be in alignment with the principles promoted by the contemporary communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach. Such an innovation was expected to create breakthroughs in the quality of students’ learning outcomes, especially with respect to their speaking performance.

However, in contrast with these curriculum requirements and expectations, there appears to have been a downtrend in the quality of student outcomes, especially in their
English communication ability. Official data from in-house tests administered to graduates from the English major programs (English Studies (ES) and English Interpretation and Translation (EIT)) reveal that the majority could not achieve the intended outcome levels (using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level C1), with speaking reported to be among the students’ least competent skills in the test. Such unsatisfactory learning outcomes have led to an increase in complaints from stakeholders, especially teachers and employers, as reflected in official meetings in my department, regarding graduates’ low speaking proficiency levels. Evidence from the most recent survey on learners’ employability after one year of graduation shows that, on average, only 44.1% of graduates from the ES and EIT disciplines were recruited for English-related working positions (Ngoc, Hien, Quyen, & Diep, 2017). The report also points out that, given that speaking competence is regarded as the most crucial qualification that English major graduates rely on to compete for employment, their failure to achieve the desired communicative outcomes has had detrimental effects on their employment prospects. This puzzling reality has motivated me to seek for explanations for the problem by identifying factors that affect teaching quality in this particular context, which would provide an important foundation for informed suggestions on improving students’ speaking outcomes.

My personal experience of the situation has shown that, while students’ communicative competence has been identified as the central goal in the newly adapted curriculum, guidance on how this goal can be achieved appears to be minimally available to the teachers. More importantly, although the curriculum has been implemented for around 10 years, no evidence has been officially documented concerning how teachers perceive and interpret the content specified in the curriculum, what they think about the teaching material and content, and how they actually enact speaking instruction in the context of this new curriculum. Obtaining an in-depth understanding of these crucial aspects, it is my belief, is the first critical stepping stone for directing future endeavours to improve the learning outcomes of the innovated curriculum. Enhancing insights into these aspects, therefore, constitutes the major goal of the present research. In particular, the focus of the study intersects three domains: (1) the specific context of Vietnam; (2) speaking skill pedagogy; and (3) second language (L2) teacher cognition. The next section provides the context for the study by presenting background information related to each of these domains.
1.3 Context of the study

1.3.1 Developing Vietnamese learners’ speaking competence: its importance and challenges

English has become the dominant foreign language in Vietnam since the country’s implementation of its socio-economic reform policy, or ‘Doi Moi’ from 1986 onwards (Wright, 2002). In the context of its new market economy, English communicative competence was identified as a key factor in facilitating the reform approach and “enhancing Vietnam's competitive position in the international economic and political arena” (Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013, p. 52). Accordingly, for young Vietnamese, the ability to communicate in English “has become a passport to a better job” (Hoang, 2010, p. 9). Compounded by the rapid globalisation process, “the English boom” (P. L. Ha, 2006, p. 3) has experienced unprecedented expansion and created mounting pressures on decision-making bodies, which quickly realised that, “without changes and sizeable inputs in its curriculum and courses, methodology and materials, English teaching in Vietnam would soon cease to effectively serve the demands being made on it” (Hoang, 2010, p. 10). In an attempt to meet these burgeoning demands, in 2006 the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) officially institutionalised a new set of English curricula across different school levels with a view to improve the quality of English teaching and learning (Canh, 2011).

This newly developed curriculum has promoted English communicative competence as the central goal of English teaching (MOET, 2006). One significant feature of this curriculum is its strong emphasis on a “learner-centred, communicative task-based pedagogy” (Canh, 2011, p. 24). At the secondary school level, the curriculum is operationalised in a new series of theme-based and skill-based textbooks, claimed to be designed in accordance with TBLT principles (Canh, 2011). In using the embodied textbooks, teachers are expected to promote students’ engagement in “thinking, high in-class participation and problem-solving” (Canh, 2011, p. 24). However, no further explanations are provided concerning how the task-based pedagogy should be implemented and how these prescribed objectives could be achieved. In delivering the curriculum nationwide, a top-down mechanism with “power-coercive strategies” has been employed, which “obliges teachers to adopt changes” (Canh & Barnard, 2009, p. 30) and enact it in an indisputable manner (Canh, 2007). At the tertiary level, however,
MOET simply prescribes a general timeframe for all institutions. Each university is allowed to make its own decisions on the content, methodology and assessment. As observed, under such a management policy, different institutions took different views on these issues, which has “created diversity on the one hand, but chaos on the other” (Hoang, 2010, p. 13).

Over the past decade, the expected learning outcomes from the new curriculum are still far from satisfactory (Hao, 2017; Tuyet, 2013). Evidence from multiple studies investigating teachers’ enactment of the newly prescribed task-based curriculum at secondary school level demonstrates that traditional teaching methods have continued to dominate classroom practice. Canh (2011), Canh and Barnard (2009), N. G. Viet (2013) and Nam (2015), for example, all report on Vietnamese teachers’ strong inclination towards a form-based approach. Findings from this body of literature show that, although Vietnamese teachers were supportive of the communicatively-oriented principles promoted by TBLT, their classroom practice was still characterised as having a strong emphasis on the explanation of grammar rules, rote learning, memorisation, and reproduction of linguistic knowledge (Canh, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015). In an effort to understand this contradiction between teachers’ thinking and practices, these researchers consistently emphasise the importance of obtaining a more insightful understanding of their existing knowledge and beliefs in teaching, and how their interactions with the contextual conditions shape classroom behaviour.

Findings from the research strand that focuses on Vietnamese teachers’ knowledge and beliefs and the impact of contextual conditions have brought to light a multitude of factors that hinder teaching quality in Vietnamese high schools. Firstly, historically resting on Confucian ideology, Vietnam’s educational philosophy and practice are characterised as examination-oriented, book-based and teacher-centred (Canh, 2011). Constrained by this philosophy, Vietnamese EFL teachers are expected to function as “the transmitters of knowledge and models of morality and wisdom” (Canh, 2011, p. 12), whose main duty is to prepare students for examinations, rather than to create opportunities for students to use language and develop skills for genuine communication (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004). This deeply rooted cultural perception of the teachers’ role has prevented Vietnamese teachers from embracing learner-centred and communicative-focused principles, seen as the key tenets of CLT (Harmer, 2011;
Nunan, 2004; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). In addition, similar to students in other Asian contexts, Vietnamese learners are strongly driven by the need to pass form-focused examinations; thus, they are commonly found to resist participating in communicative activities, which encourages teachers to resort to conventional approaches (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010).

Findings from these studies have further informed on a constellation of factors at various levels that may obstruct Vietnamese teachers’ compliance with CLT/TBLT approaches in their teaching practice. Nhung (2017) and Hiep (2005), for instance, report that, despite an awareness of the need to develop learners’ speaking ability, Vietnamese teachers seem to adhere to a form-based practice due to insufficient confidence in proficiency and knowledge of speaking pedagogy. This lack of confidence, compounded by unfavourable conditions such as large class size, time restriction, and rigid top-down control (Canh, 2007; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hao, 2017), has restricted teachers’ adoption of a communicatively focused teaching practice and significantly impacted teaching quality. In light of these findings, specialists (Littlewood, 2013; Nunan, 2003; Pham, 2011; Thanh, 2010) maintain that, in attempts to improve teaching practices, unless substantial attention is paid to contextual conditions, especially the existing local practices and rules and teachers’ existing knowledge and beliefs, “the potential to fail is huge” (Pham, 2011, p. 526). As a solution, they consistently suggest adopting ‘a context-sensitive approach’ (Littlewood, 2013, p. 1) or culturally-appropriate pedagogy (P. M. Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006; Pham, 2011). Such an approach, as these researchers contend, first needs to be grounded on the basis of important contemporary theories and principles of speaking pedagogy; but more importantly, it must pay due appreciation to the teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices.

A number of studies of the Vietnamese context (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; Trang, 2013; N. G. Viet, 2013) have closely investigated critical aspects of teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices. Mostly informed by rich qualitative data, these studies focus primarily on various pedagogical aspects including Vietnamese teachers’ tendencies in using the prescribed material, their selection of instructional activities, and sequencing of lessons. Findings from these studies have not only identified the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs in
relation to these pedagogical dimensions in teaching and unveiled their classroom behaviours but have also pinpointed specific contextual conditions mediating their beliefs and practice. The majority of these studies also reaffirm Vietnamese teachers’ alignment with the conventional form-based PPP model (Canh, 2011; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013). These studies, however, exclusively focused on the Vietnamese lower and upper secondary school contexts. To date, no studies have systematically investigated teachers’ pedagogy at the tertiary level with a specific focus on their knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices in developing students’ communicative competence.

Research on English teaching and learning at the tertiary level in the Vietnamese context, apart from being scant, also appears to mainly focus on examining student learning outcomes, consistently reporting on the disappointing speaking competence of students. For instance, T. Ha (2008), in a review of reports from 59 universities nationwide, informs that 51.7% of graduates from these institutions were unable to meet the English proficiency required for their work. In a recent investigation into 108 students’ English proficiency at a Vietnamese university, Hao (2017) reports that students scored lowest in speaking skills, despite their good performance in writing and grammar assessments. Speaking, as generally identified by students in Hao’s study, was the most challenging skill to master. This finding resonates with the results from Anh and Hanh’s (2004) survey of 925 third-year students from five prestigious universities in Ho Chi Minh City, finding listening and speaking to be the two weakest skills among students. In another report by TuoiTreNews (2014), Vietnam is listed among the countries identified as having the lowest English proficiency level, especially with respect to its young generations’ speaking ability. These findings generally reflect a lack of effectiveness of English teaching at the tertiary level in relation to the development of students’ communicative ability.

Recent investigations into the proficiency levels of in-service English teachers nationwide continue to raise critical questions concerning English language teaching quality at universities. In the context of the national project, “Teaching and Learning Foreign Language in the Public-Sector Educational System for the 2008-2020 Period”, a large-scale English proficiency training project for Vietnamese EFL teachers, results of proficiency tests administered to in-service teachers were, in general, described as disheartening. Official reports from MOET (2015) show that, at the onset of the project
in 2011/2012, 83% of primary school teachers, 87% of lower secondary teachers, 91.8% of upper secondary school teachers, and 44.6% of university teachers scored below the expected standards (using CEFR, respectively, for these levels: B2, B2, C1, and C1). Within the scope of this project, teachers’ lack of confidence and low speaking proficiency were identified as key factors that negatively affect the teaching quality (Trinh, 2015). Teachers’ inadequate speaking proficiency has been found to have resulted in teachers’ efforts to sideline speaking skills in teaching and stay comfortably aligned with more conventional teaching approaches with a central focus on language forms (Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014). These findings directly depict the current, alarming situation concerning in-service teachers’ low speaking proficiency (Manh et al., 2017; V. T. Nguyen & Mai, 2015). Improving in-service teachers’ speaking competence, especially their ‘classroom English proficiency’ (Burns, 2017a, p. 87), is recommended as a central focus for ongoing professional development activities for teachers in this particular context (Burns, 2017a; Nhung, 2017).

Evidence from the discussion above highlights the general limited effectiveness of the current English major curricula at universities in helping their graduates to achieve the intended speaking outcomes. The discussion also points out the low speaking proficiency among in-service teachers and the burgeoning need to improve their speaking competence through professional development activities. Efforts to further improve speaking teaching quality in this context, as earlier discussed, might fall short of effectiveness unless they are based on thorough understanding of the current English language curriculum, specific contextual conditions, and the teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices in teaching speaking. Although current understanding of these issues in relation to Vietnamese teachers at secondary school level is relatively substantial, insights into similar aspects at the tertiary level appear to be largely missing from the existing literature, leaving a critical gap, the filling of which has long been overdue in research involving the Vietnamese context. As such, promoting understanding of these dimensions, which is the major end goal of the present study, is critical to providing a solid foundation for suggestions for or the development of a context-based pedagogy that improves the learning outcomes of both pre-service training programs and ongoing in-service professional development activities. Furthermore, as explained earlier, suggestions for improving the quality of speaking instruction also need to incorporate key contemporary theoretical bases and
principles of speaking pedagogy. In the next section, an overview of current literature about speaking pedagogy will be provided.

1.3.2 An overview of current understanding of speaking pedagogy

Proposing an effective pedagogical approach to the teaching of oral skills has been highly problematic (Goh & Burns, 2012). From a historical standpoint, speaking skill pedagogy has generally remained an unrecognised research area until recently (Bygate, 1998; Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014; Goh & Burns, 2012), although speaking proficiency has become a top priority for many L2 learners in various contexts (Burns, 2017b; Horwitz, 2013). This underexplored area has resulted in limited understanding of speaking pedagogy in comparison to that of grammar and other language skills. Hughes (2012) further observes that advances in speaking pedagogy at the theoretical level have been taken up only slowly for the development of speaking pedagogical models that teachers could easily transfer to their classroom practice. In addition, given that spoken interactions are multifaceted, requiring speakers to concurrently employ various knowledge, skills and processes in a spontaneous and appropriate manner (Burns, 2017b), it has been a challenging undertaking to develop a principled pedagogical approach to teaching speaking that reflects this complexity (Goh & Burns, 2012). To date, although a number of pedagogical models have been proposed, most of them are constrained by certain limitations that reduce their effectiveness.

An exploration of existing pedagogical models for teaching speaking shows some of these limitations. Firstly, early teaching models (Bygate, 1987; Byrne, 1976; Littlewood, 1992; Rivers & Temperley, 1978) appear to strongly focus on language accuracy, through presentation and practice of linguistic knowledge at the sentence level (Burns, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012). The majority of these models (e.g. G. Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 1987; Byrne, 1976; Thornbury, 2005) also tends to be based on a narrow conceptualisation of speaking competence, which views linguistic knowledge as the single most crucial element of speaking ability and pays modest attention to other components such as socio-cultural knowledge and communicative strategies. This narrow focus on linguistic knowledge at the morpho-syntactic level has been criticised for not effectively preparing learners for real-life communication situations (Canale, 1983; Goh & Burns, 2012; Hymes, 1972; Nazari, 2007). More importantly, the majority
of these models are constructed and discussed mainly at the theoretical level. Many do not provide guidance on how teachers can translate these into classroom practice in a systematic manner (Goh & Burns, 2012), and few appear to take teachers’ viewpoints and voices into account. In addition, little empirical research has been undertaken to examine how these models can be enacted in diverse classroom contexts and how effective they are in facilitating the development of learners’ speaking competence.

A review of previously conducted studies into speaking pedagogy in practice reveals a lack of depth and breadth in this body of research. In particular, more than half of these studies mainly survey teachers’ perceptions of speaking competence (Chen & Goh, 2011; Nazari, 2007) or explore speaking pedagogy based on the teachers’ self-reports (Alonso, 2013; Baleghizadeh & Shahri, 2014; Chen & Goh, 2014; DeBoer, 2007; Goh & Chen, 2013). Borg (2006) maintains that investigations that neglect classroom realities might provide flawed or partial characterisations of teachers and their teaching. To date, Chen (2013) and A. Cohen and Fass (2001) appear to be the only two studies that examine speaking pedagogy with in-depth analyses of classroom evidence. Findings from these studies have significantly advanced understanding of teachers’ practice in lesson planning, selection of activities, use of prescribed material, and teachers’ talking time in the classroom. However, none of these studies systematically examine and theorise the teachers’ selection of content components and instructional activities in teaching speaking as well as their sequencing of speaking lessons. These dimensions are, however, viewed as crucial aspects of language curriculum and pedagogy (Nunan, 1991, 2004; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003); thus, they should be treated as a central focus in investigations into teachers’ speaking teaching practice. In addition, although these studies investigated the activities that teachers employed in speaking instruction, none closely analysed the characteristics of the activities, especially when enacted in classroom conditions. Teachers’ knowledge of and ability to select, design and implement appropriate instructional activities and tasks in teaching is, however, considered as a decisive factor in their teaching quality (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989, 2004). Exploring these critical aspects of speaking pedagogy, as such, constitutes the major goal of the present study.

In summary, this overview of previous studies exploring speaking pedagogy in Vietnamese and other contexts has highlighted the burgeoning need for an in-depth
investigation into Vietnamese university teachers’ speaking pedagogy. It has further pointed out that such a study needs to direct substantial attention to the teachers’ existing knowledge and beliefs in teaching and their relationship with classroom contexts. In the section to follow, contributions from the research strand that focuses on teachers’ unobservable mental aspects will be discussed.

1.3.3 Research on language teacher cognition (LTC)

Over the past three decades, the field of applied linguistics has witnessed a massive expansion of research into teacher cognition, or “what teachers think, know and believe” (Borg, 2006, p. 1). Research within this domain has contributed critical insights into the tacit aspects of teachers’ mental lives and “how these shape and are shaped by the activity of language teaching in diverse sociocultural contexts” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). Substantial evidence from these investigations into teachers’ unobservable dimension of language teaching (Borg, 2003) indicate that teachers’ beliefs are complex, dynamic, contextualised and systematic (Borg, 2006; Zheng, 2013b), and their relationship with what happens in the classrooms is reported to be complicated and symbiotic (L. Li & Walsh, 2011). Within this relationship, “teachers’ practices are shaped in unique and often unpredictable ways by the invisible dimension of teachers’ mental lives” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). Given this complex nature, investigating teachers’ tacit cognitive dimensions, their relationship with actual classroom teaching, and their interactions with specific contextual conditions, has become a central focus in endeavours to understand and improve teaching behaviours and quality.

Teacher cognition research, despite its robustness, has not commonly been used in certain curricular domains. Previous research into TC has a predominant focus on teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing (Borg, 2006). More recent TC studies show that TC about technology use in language teaching appears to have become an area of increasing interest (e.g. Alghamdi & Prestridge, 2015; Howard, Chan, & Caputi, 2015; Howard & Gigliotti, 2015). However, the long-existing dearth of in-depth research into TC in teaching speaking skills (Borg, 2006; Chen, 2013; Chen & Goh, 2014) remains. Given the complex nature of spoken interactions and teachers’ common lack of confidence in and knowledge about how to teach speaking effectively
as informed by previous studies (Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014; A. Cohen & Fass, 2001; Goh & Chen, 2013), there is an urgent need for further investigations into TC about this under-studied domain.

In the Vietnamese context, there has been an expansion of research into LTC in the past decade. However, most studies (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; Trang, 2013; N. G. Viet, 2013) are framed within the context of the implementation of the newly prescribed task-based curriculum. As such, the central focus of this body of research has been on “teachers’ beliefs, perceptions and attitudes in relation to their classroom practices of TBLT in upper secondary school” (Nam, 2015, p. 50). Loi’s (2011) study appears to be the only attempt to investigate TC at the university level. The focus of Loi’s research, however, is centred on the teachers’ perceptions of the facilitating conditions of input, interactions, and output. None of these studies, therefore, features a focus that intersects the curricular domain of speaking skills and teachers’ cognitions in the context of the Vietnamese tertiary level. Given this under-researched status and the accelerating socio-economic pressure for Vietnamese universities to provide highly English-competent workforce, there is a strong need for an in-depth inquiry into Vietnamese university EFL teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking.

1.4 A summary of the research problem

With pressure to produce English-competent citizens to enhance socio-economic development and competitiveness (Burns, 2017b), English communicative ability has been recognised as the central goal for English teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam (Canh, 2011; Hoang, 2010). Findings from previous studies in this context, however, show that English-major programs offered by universities nationwide have apparently failed to help learners achieve this desired communicative competence. Research evidence further reveals that teachers are in urgent need of knowledge about how to effectively teach speaking skills in a principled manner (Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014; Goh & Burns, 2012). While a number of pedagogical models are available at the theoretical level, most of these are constrained by limitations, either conceptualising speaking subject matter content in a narrow manner, or not sufficiently supported by empirical evidence. As such, they tend not to promote an approach to addressing speaking
development in a systematic and holistic fashion. Empirical evidence in relation to how these models are implemented in classroom contexts is also missing from the current literature. The majority of empirical research into speaking pedagogy is found to neglect classroom evidence. Those few studies that take classroom practice into consideration, despite their valuable contributions to the current literature, are found to pay limited attention to teachers’ selection of instructional content and activities, and to sequencing of speaking lessons, the two most critical aspects of teachers’ pedagogy (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1991, 2004). To date, no study appears to have examined important characteristics of the tasks that teachers employ in teaching speaking practice. Obtaining insights into these pedagogical dimensions, therefore, may not only address the critical gap in the current literature but might also provide an important empirical basis for the development of an appropriate model for teaching speaking skills in the Vietnamese context.

In the meantime, evidence from an extensive number of studies illustrates that TC research offers a fruitful avenue for an in-depth exploration of teachers’ professional development and teaching. Findings from TC studies indicate that attempts to understand and improve teachers’ practice need to take into consideration teachers’ complex unobservable mental aspects and their intricate interrelations with their observable classroom behaviours. Research into TC in teaching various curricular domains has also brought to light critical contextual factors that affect teaching quality in each specific context. With this value, the TC research approach provides the present study with a powerful lens for investigating Vietnamese university teachers’ understanding and practice in relation to critical aspects of speaking skill pedagogy.

1.5 Research aim and strategy

The present study aims to systematically investigate teachers’ cognitions about speaking skill instruction in the Vietnamese tertiary context. The exploration involves both teachers’ reported and actual teaching practices. Three crucial pedagogical aspects of the teachers’ cognitions in teaching speaking are comprehensively examined: (1) teachers’ interpretations of the English major curricula; (2) teachers’ cognitions about speaking subject matter content; and (3) teachers’ cognitions about speaking skill pedagogy. The study is anchored around the following three research questions:
1. How do the teachers interpret the curricular specifications concerning speaking teaching content, organisation and pedagogy?
2. What cognitions do the teachers have regarding speaking skill subject matter content and pedagogy?
3. How are these cognitions manifested in the teachers’ classroom practices in teaching speaking?

The exploratory nature of the study lends itself to a naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which enables the researcher to obtain a deep understanding of the Vietnamese teachers’ speaking teaching practice, which is seen as a social phenomenon occurring in its natural setting. Accordingly, a qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2013) is employed to allow the study to fully capture the complexity and depth of teachers’ knowledge and beliefs and their intricate relationship with their classroom practice. It also enables the study to direct substantial attention to how different conditions in this particular context mediate teachers’ beliefs and classroom behaviours. Six EFL teachers who taught speaking skills within the scope of two English major curricula in a Vietnamese university participated in the study.

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ cognitions and their complex relationship with their classroom practice, the study relies on multiple data sources. In particular, to shed light on the teachers’ interpretations of the curriculum, analyses of relevant documents, including the two English major curricula (ES and EIT programs) currently implemented at the participating university, syllabi of six speaking levels, and the prescribed textbooks, are conducted. Findings from the analyses establish an important foundation for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ cognitions in relation to three major curriculum aspects: teaching content, content organisation, and pedagogy. The teachers’ cognitions about speaking subject matter content and pedagogy are investigated in terms of both reported and actual practices through semi-structured interviews and observations. The main aim is to provide a rich description of the teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and practice in teaching speaking, and subsequently to interpret and discuss these findings within the specific context of a university in Vietnam where the teaching took place.
The theoretical lens underpinning the study incorporates a number of different frameworks. Firstly, Borg’s (2006) model of TC is drawn on as an overarching framework for examining the teachers’ cognitions, their interrelations with their classroom practices, and the mediating role of contextual factors. To investigate the teachers’ knowledge base for speaking instruction in a comprehensive and interrelated manner, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) seven-category model of teachers’ knowledge base is employed and modified into three main groups: curriculum; subject matter content knowledge (SMCK); and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). In accordance with this modified conceptualisation, PCK functions as an umbrella notion that incorporates teachers’ knowledge of learners, contexts, speaking subject matter content, and pedagogy. As earlier presented, investigations into the teachers’ speaking pedagogy in the present research tend to centre on two major aspects: the teachers’ selection of activities, and sequencing of speaking lessons. To further provide the study with a lens for exploring these two pedagogical dimensions, Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking is further incorporated, which serves as a basis for the development a priori codes (Creswell, 2013) informing the analyses and coding of interview and observation data. In particular, three aspects of Goh and Burns’ approach are employed: their conceptualisation of speaking competence; the principles for selecting instructional activities in speaking instruction; and the model for speaking lesson sequencing. This comprehensive framework enables the study to explore the teachers’ cognitions in teaching speaking in a systematic manner, and allows an in-depth understanding of crucial aspects of their knowledge of speaking pedagogy.

1.6 Significance of the study

By focusing on the under-studied topic of speaking pedagogy in the Vietnamese tertiary context from the TC perspective, the present study makes the following contributions to the existing literature from empirical, practical, and theoretical perspectives.

From the empirical aspect, the study promotes understanding of the two specific research domains: TC, and speaking skill pedagogy. As discussed, although there has been a surge of research on LTC in the past three decades, there remains a dearth of studies that investigate TC about speaking skills (Borg, 2006; Chen & Goh, 2014). Efforts to redress this under-researched status are evident in a number of recently
conducted studies (e.g. Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014; A. Cohen & Fass, 2001; Goh & Chen, 2013). None of these, however, systematically investigate speaking skill pedagogy in a comprehensive manner with sufficient attention to all three critical aspects, of curriculum, SMCK, and PCK. By shedding light on these dimensions, the present study not only advances understanding of the teachers’ existing knowledge and practices in speaking instruction but also brings to light how contextual conditions mediate the teachers’ knowledge and shape their classroom behaviours. Such an understanding forms a critical foundation for the development of a contextually grounded approach or pedagogy for effective speaking instruction in Vietnamese and related contexts.

The research is also expected to make meaningful contributions to the current understanding of TC and speaking pedagogy in the specific context of Vietnam. As discussed earlier, TC research in this setting, despite its increasing interest, has mainly focused on lower and upper-secondary school levels with a primary focus on exploring teachers’ perceptions and implementation of the newly mandated TBLT curriculum. Few studies have investigated English teaching realities at the tertiary level, and none have explored how speaking skills have been taught within the specific context of an English-major curriculum. By targeting speaking skill instruction at a Vietnamese university, the present study aims to provide a detailed and comprehensive empirical account of TC in this under-researched context. Given the currently unprecedented motivation for universities to respond to the need to develop future employees and teachers with strong English communicative competence, findings from the study provide important foundations for future curricular innovations aimed at improving English major students’ speaking proficiency outcomes.

On this basis, the present study is also significant from a practical standpoint. By advancing understanding of Vietnamese teachers’ classroom behaviours and their relationship with the teachers’ current insights into speaking pedagogy, the study provides university executives and policy makers in the Vietnamese context with important insights into potential directions for curricular innovations, in both design and operationalisation, with a view to further promoting the learners’ speaking outcomes. More importantly, the study results establish solid foundations for the planning of ongoing professional development activities for teachers at the university level to address their beliefs and practices in such a way that can empower them to effectively
accommodate the development of students’ speaking competence. Research findings in relation to the teachers’ understanding of speaking SMCK and PCK also allow the teacher participants and other university teachers in similar contexts to reflect upon their current beliefs and practices, and enable them to consider how to better accommodate the communicatively-oriented approach in their existing teaching contexts.

Theoretically, the study is valuable on a number of bases. Firstly, the overarching framework adapted from Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model facilitates the exploration of different categories in the teachers’ knowledge base in a comprehensive and interrelated manner. Although Shulman’s framework has been widely used in educational research, employing it to explore teachers’ knowledge base in teaching the specific but multi-faceted skills of speaking from the teacher cognition perspective is innovative. The combination of Shulman’s framework with Borg’s model of TC enables the investigation of teachers’ knowledge base and its inextricable relationship with classroom practice in a dynamic manner. In addition, by integrating Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking as a departure point for the exploration of the teachers’ SMCK and PCK, the study hopes to further refine the model to make it better suited the Vietnamese context, based on empirical evidence in relation to the Vietnamese teachers’ existing knowledge and skills in teaching speaking as informed by findings of the present study. In a similar vein, in drawing on Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking for exploring the teachers’ speaking pedagogy, the study sheds important light on two crucial aspects, of teachers’ selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. Findings from this investigation will establish critical bases for adapting Goh and Burns’ model to make it better suited to the context of Vietnam and the teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and practice.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature across three sections. Section 2.2 examines the theoretical bases and methodological models of the content components of speaking competence, followed by an investigation into what content teachers in different contexts have included in speaking instruction. The next section (Sections 2.3) presents the theoretical bases and models of speaking pedagogy together with key findings from previous
studies regarding how speaking instruction has been implemented in the classrooms. Section 2.4 reviews TC studies with a focus on those that have explored the relationship between teachers’ reported and actual practices in relation to the Vietnamese context and speaking skill pedagogy.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It begins with Borg’s model of TC (Section 3.2) and discusses how the model provides the study with an overall lens for examining the tripartite relationship between teachers’ cognitions, classroom practice, and contextual conditions. Section 3.3 presents conceptualisations of teachers’ knowledge base with a focus on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge base, and suggests its necessary modification to better suit the context of the present study. In Section 3.4, Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of speaking competence and their holistic approach to teaching speaking are integrated to provide the study with a lens for investigating the two crucial aspects of the teachers’ speaking instruction: subject matter content knowledge, and pedagogy.

Chapter Four addresses methodological issues of the study. It begins with a discussion of the suitability of the naturalistic research paradigm (Section 4.2), qualitative design (Section 4.3), and case-study approach (Section 4.4), to the nature of the research. The next three sections provide a detailed description of: the research setting, participants and the researcher’s role (Section 4.5); data collection instruments (Section 4.6); and the framework for data analysis and coding (Section 4.7). Section 4.8 discusses ethical issues; followed by a discussion of measures to optimise the trustworthiness of the research design of the present study (Section 4.9); and then by a summary of the whole chapter (Section 4.10).

Chapters Five and Six present key findings from the study, targeting each research question. Chapter Five, which is structured into two main sections, addresses the first research question, focusing on the teachers’ interpretations of the curriculum documents. Section 5.2 presents findings revealed from document studies concerning the two English major curricula, six speaking subject syllabi, and textbook analysis. These findings provide an important foundation for understanding the teachers’ interpretations of the content prescribed by the curriculum documents, which are presented in Section 5.3. Chapter Six presents findings in relation to research questions
2 and 3, which concentrate on the teachers’ SMCK and PCK and their enactment of speaking instruction in classroom contexts. In Section 6.2, the teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK as revealed by the teachers’ interview data are presented. Following this, Section 6.3 presents findings with respect to the teachers’ cognitions about PCK, which encompass three main aspects: teachers’ knowledge about contexts, teachers’ knowledge about learners, and TC about speaking pedagogy.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter in this thesis, summarises key findings from the study (Section 7.2) and presents an adapted model for teaching speaking in the Vietnamese context (Section 7.3). It then discusses implications of the study from empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical standpoints (Section 7.4). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of suggestions for future directions of research in the area of TC about speaking pedagogy (Section 7.5); followed by a conclusion for the whole thesis (Section 7.6).
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study examines speaking skill instruction in an English program in a Vietnamese tertiary context, from the perspective of teacher cognition (hereafter TC). The focus of the study centres on three aspects: (1) teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the English major curriculum in relation to the speaking skill content and pedagogy; (2) what they know and believe about the speaking subject matter content and pedagogy; and (3) how they implement speaking teaching. This chapter reviews three topics related to the study: (1) conceptualisations of speaking competence; (2) speaking skill pedagogy; and (3) teacher cognition. The first section (Section 2.2) discusses the theoretical foundations that inform the conceptualisation of speaking competence. On this basis, it examines existing models of speaking subject matter content before providing an overview of empirical studies investigating speaking teaching content in different contexts. Section 2.3 explores speaking skill pedagogy from four perspectives: (1) theoretical foundations; (2) speaking skill pedagogy in an integrated context; (3) speaking skill pedagogy in a skill-based context; and (4) speaking skill pedagogy in practice. The final section (Section 2.4) reviews TC studies, focusing on those investigating the relationship between teachers’ cognitions and classroom practice. This section highlights the significant contributions of the TC perspective in advancing understanding of teachers and teaching and its suitability to the exploration of the multifaceted skill of speaking in the present study.

2.2 Conceptualisations of speaking competence

Teachers’ comprehensive knowledge of what constitutes speaking competence is essential to teach speaking skill in a systematic and principled manner (Goh & Burns, 2012). This is because teachers’ understanding determines how they conceptualise speaking lessons and what content they include. In general, the identification of what content speaking instruction encompasses has been influenced by how communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) is defined. As such, retracing the development of conceptualisations of communicative competence is crucial for identifying components of speaking skill and how they relate to one another (Canale & Swain, 1980).
2.2.1 Theoretical bases for conceptualising speaking competence

Since Chomsky’s (1965) introduction of the concept of language competence, which describes grammatical knowledge of a native speaker, various theoretical perspectives sought to extend this notion, which led to the development of communicative competence consisting of sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies.

Early conceptualisations of language competence established the role of grammatical knowledge as a fundamental component of speaking competence. Chomsky (1965), in his influential generative-transformational theory, characterised language as being composed of two distinct aspects, of competence and performance. Accordingly, competence is seen as “knowledge of an ideal speaker-hearer, in a completely homogeneous speech community” (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3), which is separated from performance, defined as the ability to use language. Language competence is, therefore, considered as equivalent to grammatical knowledge, encompassing syntax, grammar, morphology, phonology and phonetics. From this perspective, language is largely viewed as rule-governed systems unaffected by social and situational variations (Lyons, 1996), and language learning merely involves the mastery of morpho-syntactic knowledge at the sentence level. Chomsky’s conceptualisation of language competence has been criticised as being a “reductionist” view (Llurda, 2000). However, the established role of grammatical knowledge as one of the most important components underlying speaking competence has survived the test of time.

Responses to Chomsky’s view on language competence have led to recognition of the role of sociocultural knowledge as a critical component of speaking competence. This recognition has brought to the fore the importance of language use “appropriate to the context in which they are made” (Campell & Wales, 1970, p. 247). Hymes (1972) argues that “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (p. 278). To extend Chomsky’s language competence, Hymes (1972) proposed the concept of ‘communicative competence’ which encompasses grammatical and sociolinguistic knowledge. In this light, effective communication requires, in addition to grammatical competence, knowledge of culture, society and communicative contexts. That is, to communicate effectively, speakers’ ability to tailor their linguistic knowledge for appropriate use is crucial.
Subsequent developments in the conceptualization of communicative competence have further established the importance of discourse and pragmatic knowledge in communication. Canale and Swain (1980), based on Hymes’ model, define communicative competence as including grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Their definition of sociolinguistic competence, however, combines sociocultural rules of use, which is reminiscent of Hymes’s sociolinguistic ability, with knowledge of rules of discourse or the ability to organise speech consistent with the discourse type produced in each communication context (Goh & Burns, 2012). In communication, speakers’ discourse knowledge enables them to make appropriate links among utterances for cohesion and coherence. In a subsequent model, Bachman and Palmer (1996) re-categorise language knowledge into organisational and pragmatic competence. Accordingly, pragmatic competence integrates speakers’ sociolinguistic competence with speech acts, defined as the ability to produce utterances in accordance with their communicative goals. These reconceptualisations have grounded the pivotal role that discourse and pragmatic knowledge play in effective communication.

These subsequently developed models have also promoted the value of speakers’ communicative strategies in speaking interactions. In Canale and Swain’s (1980) conceptualisation, strategic competence is viewed as one of the three fundamental components of communicative competence. It is defined as “verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or insufficient competence” (Canale & Swain, p. 30). Effective use of these strategies is crucial for speakers’ fluency and confidence in spontaneous communication. In Bachman and Palmer’s (1996) model, strategic competence is further refined in a way that moves beyond the verbal and non-verbal strategies to incorporate strategies at a meta-cognitive level. These are defined as a set of higher order executive processes comprising goal setting, assessment and planning that “provide a cognitive management function in language use” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 70). When effectively employed, strategies at these different levels enable speakers to minimise communication breakdowns and “manage their own performance, emotions and language development” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 141).

This overview of conceptualisations of communicative competence has provided well-established theoretical foundations for the crucial role that linguistic, sociocultural,
discourse, pragmatic and strategic competence each plays in effective speaking performance. Among these, linguistic competence upholds a cornerstone position that enables speakers to “determine and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). However, speakers might not be able to produce fluent and coherent messages in a contextually appropriate fashion without effective use of sociocultural, discourse and strategic knowledge. In this sense, pedagogical models aimed to prepare learners for effective speaking interactions are required to promote the development of these components. In the sub-section that follows, existing pedagogical models of speaking subject matter content will be examined.

2.2.2 Models of speaking subject matter content

In contrast to the well-established theoretical bases that pinpoint speaking competence, a review of existing pedagogical models of speaking subject matter content reveals a fragmented picture in the ways in which these components are presented. This reflects a common observation that theoretical developments have been slow to filter through the teaching of speaking (Hughes, 2002; McCarthy & O'Keeffe, 2004).

A review of language teaching (hereafter LT) methodology publications shows that speaking teaching content appears to be under-represented. For instance, in Ur’s (1991) methodology book, the whole chapter on teaching speaking is devoted to the selection of teaching activities and techniques. With regard to teaching content, discourse knowledge is the only component included, which is briefly introduced with an aim to raise teachers’ awareness of different spoken interaction types. A similar focus on activity selection is evident in Harmer’s (2011) and Brown’s (2007) work. With respect to speaking subject content, these publications focus on the importance of pronunciation, conversational strategies and spoken genres. The roles of other components such as sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, and meta-cognitive strategies appears to be downplayed. These fragmented representations of the elements of speaking competence might promote an incomplete understanding of the subject matter content and a belief that each component can be addressed independently in speaking instruction.
Similarly, teaching methodology publications that exclusively focus on speaking skill pedagogy present speaking subject content in a broad brush way. Early works by Byrne (1976), G. Brown and Yule (1983), Burns (1998) and Bygate (1987) limited their discussions of components of speaking competence to some typical features of the spoken language, interaction modes (interactional and transactional), and the selection of speaking activities. In Burns’ (1998) and Bygate’s (1987) work, however, there was a noticeable shift of emphasis toward the importance of interactional strategies. There still remained a lack of consideration of other components essential for effective communication. In Thornbury’s (2005) and Jong’s (2014) work, a more comprehensive conception of speaking subject content is presented including a more encompassing approach to speaking. In these models, both micro and macro elements of speaking such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, genres, speech acts, register, discourse, and sociocultural knowledge are included. Taking a lexical approach, Jong (2014) steps further to give prominence to the teaching of prefabricated chunks or “phraseological units” and “problem-solving mechanisms” or strategies (p. 2). However, given the comprehensiveness of the model, a lack of consideration remains of the interrelation among the components and how they together constitute effective speaking performance.

Speaking subject content, nevertheless, is conceptualised in a holistic and interrelated manner in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of communicative competence. Modelled on the notion of communicative competence, Goh and Burns make suggestions for a three-component framework, encompassing knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and communicative strategies. Along with sentence-level grammatical knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, discourse knowledge of spoken genres and their structures, speech acts and sociocultural practices forms the knowledge foundation that students need to develop their speaking competence. Goh and Burns (2012) maintain that, by drawing on knowledge of discourse, speakers can put their linguistic knowledge into use to express meaning in a socially appropriate manner. In addition, attention to effective use of communicative strategies such as cognition, metacognition and interaction, which are crucial for negotiation of meaning and regulation of thinking during interactions, is also important.

Significantly, this model includes core speaking skills as an important component of
speaking competence. These skills are defined as “knowledge about language and communication that is put into action when in speech production” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 58). Drawing on Johnson’s (1996) skill learning theory, Goh and Burns (2012) argue that, to be effectively prepared for real-life communication, speakers need to be provided with opportunities to practise and automatise the underlying knowledge and skills in communicative contexts. Core speaking skills, therefore, function as a connection between speakers’ underpinning knowledge and the proceduralised skills that can be automatically used in spontaneous communication. In this sense, learners’ development of these skills can be viewed as an effective conversion of the speech-enabling knowledge into important skills that they could deploy in interactions.

This review section reveals that speaking subject matter content has been narrowly represented in most existing pedagogical models. Except for Goh and Burns’ model, other conceptualisations tend to present speaking subject content in an incomplete or incoherent manner. One further limitation of these models is that they are mainly theoretically-driven development with scant attention to the critical perspective on teachers’ knowledge and classroom practice. In the next section, empirical studies that investigate speaking subject matter content in relation to teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practice will be reviewed.

2.2.3 Speaking subject content in teaching practice

A review of empirical studies investigating speaking teaching content in practice in different contexts shows that teachers lack knowledge and skills in teaching speaking or have their exclusive focus on the linguistic component. In China, for example, Chen and Goh’s (2011) survey of 331 EFL teachers suggests that the majority of teachers avoided teaching speaking due to the low-efficacy of their language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge. This was compounded by the students’ insufficient linguistic knowledge, which created barriers and reduced teachers’ motivation to address speaking skill. In Iran, Nazari’s (2007) case study of three EFL high school teachers’ conceptions of communicative competence reports that the teachers lacked systemic knowledge of speaking skill, narrowly conceiving it as mainly comprising grammatical knowledge. Consistent with this conception, teaching practice was found to be limited to merely morpho-syntactic features. In the same context, Baleghizadeh and Shahri (2014), in an
in-depth study of teachers’ reported practices in teaching speaking, also found that vocabulary and grammar dominated the teachers’ conception of speaking knowledge. Together, findings of these studies reflect insufficient attention to speaking skill and a common teaching practice that mainly focuses on linguistic knowledge.

Similar findings have been reported from studies examining the effectiveness of CLT in promoting learners’ speaking competence. Evidence from an extensive number of studies shows that CLT has been mostly resisted or improperly implemented due to teachers’ misconceptions, lack of confidence and the mediation from contextual conditions across Asian contexts: Carless (2004) in Hong Kong; Hu (2005) in China; Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) in Thailand; (Karakas, 2013) in Turkey; D. F. Li (1998) in Korea; C. Tan (2005) in Singapore; Littlewood (2007) and Nunan (2003) in Asia. Such resistance is frequently associated with the teacher’s avoidance of teaching speaking or exclusive focus on grammar and vocabulary when teaching speaking. In the Vietnamese context, for example, research indicates that linguistic knowledge has continued to dominate the content of classroom teaching (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Loi, 2011; Nunan, 2003) even though speaking competence has long been mandated as the primary goal for English teaching.

A number of studies, however, have highlighted contributions of the teaching of separate speaking components to the learners’ overall speaking development. For example, Bardov-Harlig, Mossman, and Vellenga (2015), report that the teaching of pragmatic routines remarkably improved learners’ oral production in academic simulated conversation. In another study, Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga (2012) found that, although students’ uptake of pragmatic knowledge could be subject to their inter-language level, its explicit instruction was predicted to yield achievements in learners’ speaking ability. Teaching communication strategies was also found to notably enhance learners’ overall oral proficiency (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1991), since it increased their awareness and use of these strategies for maintaining fluency and meaning negotiation when encountering communication problems (Nakatani, 2005; Rabab'ah, 2016). Findings from these studies appear to advocate the inclusion of these components in teaching speaking. However, none of these studies discusses how these elements can be comprehensively integrated with other components of communicative competence to effectively facilitate learners’ overall speaking development.
The reviewed evidence shows that speaking skill has been commonly neglected in various contexts. In settings where it is taught, studies investigating teachers’ knowledge and practice reveal the dominance of linguistic knowledge as the central teaching content. To a certain extent, these findings have advanced understanding of the current speaking classroom practice and the problems that teachers encounter. However, few of these studies have attempted to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers’ knowledge base in relation to how they conceptualise speaking competence. In addition, while some studies report the teachers’ exclusive focus on grammatical knowledge in teaching speaking, none investigates the underlying beliefs that shape this practice. These are the gaps that the present study aims to contribute to filling.

2.3 Speaking skill pedagogy

This section reviews four areas that are closely relevant to speaking skill pedagogy. Firstly, it examines theoretical foundations that directly inform the development of speaking skill pedagogy. On this basis, the next two sub-sections investigate speaking skill pedagogy in an integrated and ‘skills-based teaching context’ (Newton, Ferris, Goh, Grabe, Stoller & Vandergrift, 2018, p. xv). Accordingly, the former explores how speaking skill development has been addressed in different language teaching methods and approaches whereas the latter refers to contexts where speaking is taught as an independent subject, separated from other language skills and components in the curriculum. In both of these sections, the central focus is on principles underlying selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. In the final sub-section, a review of empirical studies that investigate the implementation of speaking teaching in different contexts is presented.

2.3.1 Theoretical bases for speaking skill pedagogy

Various theories have informed the development of speaking skill pedagogy, among which the cognitive and social perspectives, as Burns (1998) contends, have been regarded as the two most influential theories underpinning recent work on the teaching of speaking. Each of these two theories will be discussed in the next sub-sections as a way to foreground important principles underpinning effective speaking skill pedagogy.
2.3.1.1 Cognitive approach to speaking pedagogy

This section discusses key cognitive theories and hypotheses that are pivotal to the development of speaking skill pedagogy. These include input, interaction, output and noticing hypotheses, and the skill learning theory. This discussion aims to generate key principles informing the selection of teaching activities and the sequencing of speaking lessons.

Input-Interaction-Output hypotheses and speaking development

Input, interaction and output are considered as the three key components that formulate the language learning process (Gass, 1997). They provide a platform for the development of pedagogical principles that promote optimal conditions to foster language learning (Loi, 2011). As such, pedagogical approaches that aim to effectively facilitate learners’ speaking skill development need to pay due attention to each of these components so as to create most favourable learning conditions.

The first consideration that speaking skill pedagogy needs to respond to is the provision of comprehensible input. Krashen (1985), in his Input Hypothesis, suggests that learners can “automatically acquire language if comprehensive input is available and their affective filters are low” (p. 5). Input modifications or elaborations are, therefore, crucial for language learning since they facilitate comprehension (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Long & Ross, 1993; Nunan, 1991; Oh, 2001; Zhao, 1997). Parker and Chaudron (1987), in a review of 12 studies on input modifications, explained that elaborative modifications contribute to language redundancy and make the thematic structure of the sentences clearer, which enhance comprehension. Empirical research evidence also shows that simplified input facilitates acquisition (Ellis, 1995; Ellis et al., 1994; X. Han, 2010; Nunan, 1991). Given its facilitative value to language learning, comprehensible input should be properly addressed by speaking pedagogical models.

Interaction is the second facilitative condition that impacts on the development of speaking competence. Interaction is believed to create conditions for “negotiation of meaning”, which is essential for comprehension (Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987) and acquisition (Long, 1983; Mackey, 1999; Pica, 1992; C. Sato, 1986). Long (1996) maintains that learners’ use of conversation strategies such as confirmation and
comprehension check facilitates their input comprehension and allows them to notice the gaps in their “interlanguage” (Selinker, 1972). Through these interactions, learners are motivated to adjust their output to become more target-like. In this sense, interaction functions as both a source of comprehensible input and opportunities for output that foster the internal acquisition processing (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). As such, in selecting speaking teaching activities, teachers should give priority to those that can promote interaction and effectively induce meaning negotiation, such as information-exchange activities (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005).

Another factor that directly informs teachers’ selection and design of speaking activities is task output. In Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1985), she argues that only production forces learners to undertake complete grammatical processing, since it pushes them to test their knowledge and notice problems in using language. Learners, therefore, have opportunities to analyse and break messages into their constituents (Pica, 1992) and produce forms that may “lie at the cutting edge of their linguistic ability” (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 208). Modified output, as Swain (1985) also contended, “drives forward most effectively the development of L2 syntax and morphology” (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013, p. 175). The facilitative role that modified output plays in language acquisition has been supported by ample empirical evidence (Branden, 1997; De-la-Fuente, 2002; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnow, 1999; Loewen, 2005; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993). Numerous studies on modified output (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Pica, 1998; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989) have further identified the feedback types that best facilitate negotiation of meaning and motivate learners to make output adjustments. Such established value of the pushed output has important implications for teachers’ selection of activities and feedback strategies in teaching speaking.

**Noticing Hypothesis and speaking development**

Noticing is another important facilitator of learners’ intake and acquisition in language leaning (Schmidt, 1994). It is defined as “the process of bringing some stimulus into focal attention” (Mitchell et al., 2013, p. 146). This process allows learners to consciously attend to exemplars of the target language forms, notice the gap in their existing knowledge, and make intentional changes in their interlanguage system (Ellis &
Shintani, 2014; Schmidt, 2001). Noticing is, therefore, necessary for “the conversion of input to intake for learning” (Schmidt, 1994, p. 17) and beneficial for promoting both incidental and explicit learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Various studies have found that teaching approaches that promote learners’ noticing result in greater learning gains (Leow, 2000; Marsden & Chen, 2011; Norris & Ortega, 2000; J. N. Williams, 2005). It has also been reported that unless learners’ attention was directed specifically to the form-meaning connection, no significant learning achievements were observed (Marsden, 2006; Marsden & Chen, 2011; VanPatten, 2004). This evidence suggests that activities that promote learners’ noticing should be included in speaking lessons.

**Skill acquisition theory and speaking development**

Under the scope of a cognitive approach, the skill acquisition theory (Anderson, 1983; K. Johnson, 1996) provides a pedagogical model for teaching speaking skill. The theory is developed on the basis of the “interface” position on the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge (DeKeyser, 1998; N. Ellis, 2005; Ellis, 1994). Explicit or declarative knowledge refers to knowledge accessible to conscious awareness (Y. Han & Ellis, 1998) and used when the participants perform tasks without time pressure (Bialystok, 1982; R. Ellis, 2005). In contrast, implicit or procedural knowledge is essential for spontaneous use where “immediate access to knowledge is required” (K. Johnson, 1996, p. 85). From the interface perspective, explicit knowledge introduced via explicit teaching could be transformed to implicit form through practice. In accordance with this view, the major concern of speaking skill pedagogy centres on how instruction effectively facilitates the transformation of explicit language input into implicit knowledge, which learners can use instantly in spontaneous interactions.

Based on this interface view, the skill acquisition theory provides an approach for converting explicit to implicit knowledge that directly informs speaking skill pedagogy. According to the theory, learning begins with establishing explicit knowledge, which can be temporarily activated in the working memory and requires much attentional control for maintaining and using it (Mitchell et al., 2013). This newly-established knowledge then needs to be proceduralised, through extensive drill-like practice (K. Johnson, 1996), and reassembled as chunks, which allows quicker access with fewer demands on the working memory. Since the knowledge is still prone to restructuring or
reincorporating (Mitchell et al., 2013), further extensive practice is crucial at this point to facilitate its automatisation, through the use of “combinatorial activities” such as role-play, discussions, simulations and communication games (K. Johnson, 1996). Once automatised, the knowledge can be used without required attention, allowing speakers to perform various processes simultaneously in communication. This skill learning theory provides a model for structuring a speaking lesson that moves from comprehensible input provision to proceduralisation and automation, in which practice plays a pivotal role.

As discussed, different hypotheses and models incorporated under the cognitive perspective to language development foregrounds important principles that directly inform speaking skill pedagogy. Firstly, the language input provided in each lesson needs to be selected and modified for learners’ comprehensibility. Secondly, activities selected for speaking lessons need to promote opportunities for students’ noticing and interaction as well as present them with clear outcomes for which learners are pushed to produce. With respect to sequencing, this cognitive perspective supports a lesson structure that moves from input presentation to extensive practice and production. The primary concern in this sequence centres on how practice effectively facilitates learners’ comprehensions and automatisation of the provided input. In this sense, the cognitive approach “offers a language framework” which provides not only the substance of what is to be learned as well as how it should be learned (Lantolf, 2011, p. 304).

Despite these practical values outline above, the cognitive perspective is frequently criticised as conceiving speaking competence as a mere automatization of required language components. In addition, the perspective is seen as teacher-centred with learners taking a passive position whilst teachers taking control of the input, activities, sequencing and output of the lessons. The section that follows will explore how a sociocultural perspective offers a complementary view on speaking development. As will be discussed, the sociocultural theory (hereafter SCT), viewing language, learners and the language learning process from a social lens, advocates a learner-centred approach to speaking development. An integration of cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, as such, provides critical guiding principles for the development of an effective pedagogy for teaching speaking skills.
**2.3.1.2 Socio-cultural perspective on speaking development**

SCT provides a view which revolutionised the focus of speaking pedagogy. The SCT sees language as “a tool of thought” rather than an instrument for conveying predetermined meaning and messages (Lantolf, 2001). In language learning, language functions as a means for accomplishing social interaction and of managing the mental activity of learning (Ellis, 2003). Otherwise stated, language learning involves developing the means for mediating learning and the language itself. In this sense, the learning process and products merge, since learners’ ability to use language develops along with their learning to mediate language learning (Swain, 2000). In alignment with this view, the focus of speaking pedagogy appears to shift, from providing learners with separate language components to prepare for their subsequent communication, as promoted from the cognitive perspective, to creating opportunities for social interactions in which speaking competence develops.

SCT also looks at learning and learners from a different angle. In particular, learning is viewed as participation and joint construction, rather than acquisition or the taking in and possession of knowledge (Lantolf, 2001). Learning occurs mainly in meaningful social interactions, in which learners actively construct their learning environment with their own goals and operations. In this sense, learning is seen as a goal-oriented action in which interaction functions as the key mechanism that provides a window into developmental process (Ohta, 2001). In interactions, language development occurs moment by moment through a dynamic transformative process called micro-genesis (Ohta, 2001). This view of language learning informs speaking pedagogy in two important ways. Firstly, speaking teaching activities need to provide learners with optimal conditions for collaborative activities. Secondly, when participating in meaningful social interactions, learners need to be allowed to take control of the goals and the approaches to complete the communication tasks.

On the basis of these views, SCT provides a learning mechanism that directly lends supports to the development of speaking pedagogy. In alignment with the sociocultural perspective, learning is a transformation process from an inter-mental (or inter-psychological) to an intra-mental (or intra-psychological) activity. As constructors of knowledge through interactions in this transformation process, learners undergo three
stages to become independent language users. In stage one, learners’ language use is other-regulated, where external mediation or assistance is available mainly in the form of verbal interactions. Development occurs when learners appropriate the dialogically-based mediation and manifest new language features in interactions with others or by externalising their inner thoughts for self-regulation (Foley, 1991). Through these verbalisations, language features are internalised and learners take control of their use without others’ assistance. In light of this mechanism, speaking lessons should be structured in a sequence that allows learners to move from assisted performance with scaffolded input to co-constructed interactions where they can appropriate new language to develop “collaborative dialogues”, and finally to independent performance.

In accordance with the sociocultural perspective, one aspect that crucially affects the learning outcomes is the way in which scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) is provided. To effectively facilitate language internalisation, scaffolding needs to be contingent and graduated (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis, 2003; Ohta, 2001). Assistance is only offered when needed (Ohta, 2001). In addition, scaffolding needs to be graduated in the sense that it moves from more explicit to more implicit knowledge, and subsequently withdrawn when learners show signs of independent functioning (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). In teaching practice, these two principles can be achieved when teachers, as expert others, engage in collaborative dialogues with the learners. These dialogic interactions help the teachers to discover precisely what kind of scaffolding learners need for a task, how they can fine-tune the supports appropriately, and when to withdraw assistance to allow the learners to take control of their performance. In this sense, these principles in scaffolding inform speaking pedagogy not only in terms of how to select and provide input for each task but also when and how much the input and assistance need to be available.

The SCT view on speaking development provides important foundations for the design, selection and sequencing of speaking activities. Since meaningful social interactions function as the primary means for speaking development, activities employed for speaking lessons need to be designed and selected in a way that reflects life-like communication and motivates learners to participate in collaborative dialogues to achieve the task outcomes. Such tasks promote a strong focus on meaning (Skehan, 1996) and highlight the centrality of the learners’ role as active participants who have
their own goals, approaches and needs in learning (Littlewood, 2013). In terms of sequencing, activities should be structured in such a way that allows learners to move from using language structures through collaborations with others to more independent use of the structures they have internalised in relatively undemanding tasks, and finally to use them in cognitively more complex tasks (Ellis, 2003). Language scaffolding in speaking lessons, therefore, should be provided in contingency with the learners’ needs and gradually withdrawn so as to allow learners to move from assisted to appropriated and independent speaking performance.

In summary, the cognitive and sociocultural approaches inform speaking skill pedagogy in different but complementary ways. In accordance with the cognitive perspective, comprehensible input, noticing, interaction and pushed output provide crucial conditions for the development of speaking ability. Most critical to the learners’ speaking development process, however, is the accomplishment of language automatization, for which, practice plays a key role. The sociocultural theory further “provides learners with a psychological framework that organises development” (Lantolf, 2011, p. 304). From this view, learners are accorded an active role in social interactions, through which new language features are internalised and speaking competence develops. In this sense, in addition to providing the above-mentioned facilitating conditions and opportunities for practice, it is crucial for teachers, through their selection and sequencing of activities, to best facilitate meaningful interactions. Lessons need to be carefully designed and provided in such a way that allows learners to gradually develop self-regulation in the performance of the speaking tasks. On the basis of these theoretically-based principles, the next two sections discuss speaking skill pedagogy in integrated and skills-based contexts.

2.3.2 Speaking skill pedagogy in an integrated context

This section examines how speaking skill pedagogy has been formulated in an integrated context. In particular, it investigates how the development of speaking competence has been facilitated by different LT methods. A general review of LT approaches reveals that speaking has not always been the primary focus of language teaching and learning, as evident in the Grammar Translation and during the prime time of Universal Grammar Theory (Chomsky, 1965). This review section, therefore, focuses
on methods and approaches that feature substantial attention to the development of speaking competence. These include the audiolingual method, presentation-practice-production (PPP) model, and communicative language teaching (CLT) approach.

The audiolingual method, underpinned by behaviourism, considers speaking development from a form-based perspective. Accordingly, speaking development is viewed as engendering good habits through continuous positive reinforcement (Harmer, 2011). In teaching, considerable attention is directed to accuracy in pronunciation and grammar use (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). In terms of teaching activities, repetition and memorisation of dialogues, from which structures are extracted for drills and pattern-practice exercises, dominate the classrooms. In this manner, despite its strong emphasis on speaking, the audiolingual method remains accuracy-focused and teacher-fronted with learners holding “little control over the content, pace or style of learning” (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003, p. 62). As observed, its de-contextualised, drill-based activities do not enable learners to transfer the acquired skills to real-life communication (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003).

The PPP model partly addresses these problems by promoting the use of contextualised language input and opportunities for speaking production. Key to this three-stage model is its sufficient attention to the contextualisation of language presented and practised in the first two stages and opportunities for learners to produce language in the final stage. These features, to a certain extent, reduce the existing gap between classroom language and its real-life use. PPP is, however, criticised for breaking language into pieces, and views language development as linear, which reflects “neither the nature of language nor the nature of learning” (Lewis, 1993, p. 90). Pedagogically, it promotes a trajectory for speaking development that moves from input presentation to controlled and free practice. In such a sequence, practice plays a crucial role in learners’ speaking development, and the teachers hold a central position in controlling the teaching content, activities and learning outcomes. In addition, it still relies on accuracy-based techniques, including repetition and cue-response drills, which mainly facilitate language acquisition at the sentence level (Harmer, 2011). That said, the importance of meaningful interactions in the production stage realised in PPP paved the way for the advent of CLT.
CLT advances speaking pedagogy from a strong meaning-based perspective. Central to this approach is the view that language is a system for making meaning, which allows interactions and communication (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). Communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) is highlighted as its ultimate goal, which is specified as the ability to interpret, express, negotiate meaning, and enact appropriate social behaviours (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1972). In accordance with this view, speaking development is seen not as the accumulation of “bits of language” (Harmer, 2011) but rather the advancement of the ability to link language forms and all aspects of meaning (conceptual, social and functional) and to interpret and express these links in specific situations (Littlewood, 2008). To achieve this competence, learners need to be provided with “opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes”, which is commonly considered to be the weak version of CLT’s (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). In this sense, CLT supports a traditional accuracy-oriented methodology (Brumfit, 1984) and simultaneously emphasises “the functional and social side of competence” (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 43). In other words, it facilitates learners’ speaking development through “a systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language” (Littlewood, 1981, p. 1).

In its strong version, CLT, commonly known as task-based language teaching (TBLT), promotes the strongest meaning-focused approach to speaking development. Viewed as a logical development of CLT (Littlewood, 2013), TBLT advocates the “using English to learn it” perspective (Howatt, 1984, p. 279), which values direct rather than delayed practice of communication (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). In this approach, speaking development is fostered through meaningful communication tasks mediated through language (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). The use of these meaning-focused tasks in language classes is designed to enable learners to use language for communicative purposes rather than simply for the sake of practising the language itself (Littlewood, 2013). TBLT, therefore, is open to accommodating any teaching activities that engage learners in life-like communication through which interaction, negotiation of meaning (Long, 1983, 1996), and information sharing (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003) are facilitated.

Apart from a strong focus on meaning, TBLT also promotes an active role that for learners to play in the classroom. In TBLT, learning is seen as social events and learners
are viewed as active negotiators and contributors (M. Breen & Candlin, 1980) who “navigate their own paths and routes to learning” (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p. 73). Littlewood (2008) suggests that learners have their own mechanisms for making sense of language input and constructing their own language systems. The main conditions that facilitate these mechanisms, as Littlewood explains, include exposure to meaningful language input and motivation to use it for real communication.

The meaning-based principle and learners’ active role promoted in CLT provide important implications for the selection of activities in speaking instruction. Littlewood (2008) contends that, in communication, learners need to become actively involved in language use, not only to respond but also to initiate. To achieve this, learner-centred activities should be used to enable learners to express language with both conceptual and communicative meaning. In other words, through the tasks, they use language for real communication rather than conveying information already known to the teacher and classmates or simply regurgitating other people’s meanings (Skehan, 1998). Harmer (2007) also maintains that, to make classroom activities truly communicative, learners need to have a desire or a purpose to communicate. With such a communicative purpose, learners are required to use language in a comprehensive manner to express meaning rather than focusing on one particular language form. To further motivate learners’ engagement in classroom activities, Gong and Holliday (2013) suggest that tasks should be designed or selected based on content relevant to learners’ lives and interests. When learners’ living, thinking, experiencing and feeling are positioned at the centre of the learning process, learning becomes a personally contextualised and meaningful activity to the learners (Hanauer, 2012).

This review section highlighted the crucial need to accommodate meaning-based activities in speaking teaching. To effectively prepare learners for real-life communication interactions, classroom activities must be selected in such a way that they feature authentic communicative situations, where spontaneous interactions and the expression of real meaning become important. In selecting these tasks, teachers also need to take their learners’ interests and backgrounds into account and consider whether these tasks provide the learners with a strong motivation and a clear purpose in communication.
In the next section, pedagogical models for teaching speaking in a skill-based context will be examined. This review is aimed to further foreground important principles of speaking activity selection and the sequencing of speaking lessons.

2.3.3 Speaking skill pedagogy in a skills-based context

In the skill-based context, speaking skill pedagogy has been traditionally constrained by the dichotomy between controlled/direct and transfer/indirect approaches (Burns, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012). The direct model features a teacher-led approach, emphasising structural accuracy obtained through the practice of isolated language components. Pedagogical activities integral to this approach include drills, pattern practice, structure manipulation and other language awareness-raising activities (van Lier, 1995) aimed to develop speech-enabling skills. In contrast, the indirect approach is characterised as learner-centred with a strong focus on engaging learners in producing “authentic” and “functional language use” (Burns, 1998, p. 103). It promotes learners’ fluency and autonomy through information sharing and negotiation activities such as discussions (Ur, 1981), information gaps (Yorkey, 1985), simulations (Crookall & Oxford, 1990), project work, and role-play (Ladousse, 1987). By focusing exclusively on either accuracy or fluency, neither approach effectively accommodates the processes of speaking development (Burns, 1998; Bygate, 2001; Goh & Burns, 2012). They do not “enable learners to produce the spoken discourse that is socially and interpersonally appropriate, and grammatically accurate” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 136). These limitations promote the need for a combined approach that draws sufficient attention to forms and meaning in an appropriate manner.

Early combined models advocate a skill-learning approach to speaking pedagogy. Rivers and Temperley (1978), for example, proposed a three-stage model of skill-getting, pseudo-communication and skill-using. Accordingly, learning speaking begins with obtaining grammatical structures through syntactic manipulation exercises (Rivers & Temperley, 1978). Learners then internalise the grammatical input by participating in pseudo-communication activities, mainly in the form of structured interaction exercises. In the skill-using stage, learners’ communicative competence is facilitated through autonomous interaction. This competence, however, is defined as the ability “to express personal intentions through all kinds of familiar and unfamiliar re-combinations of the
language elements at their disposal” (Rivers & Temperley, 1978, p. 46). The learners’ main objective in learning is, therefore, not to achieve communicative competence they need for real-life interaction but rather the ability “to translate personal meanings into language” (Bygate, 1987, p. 59), mainly at the sentence level. In addition, the distinction the model makes between skill-getting and skill-using shapes a belief among teachers that linguistic components need to be gradually accumulated before learners begin to interact in communication (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

The skill-learning theory also underpins Littlewood’s (1992) two-tier model, of pre-communicative and communicative stages. In this model, pre-communicative activities provide learners with opportunities to be trained in the “part-skill” (K. Johnson, 1996). These include structural activities that draw learners’ noticing to isolated linguistic input, and quasi-communication that directs their attention to the link between forms and functional meanings. The learners’ goal in this stage is to produce acceptably accurate and appropriate language rather than “to communicate meanings effectively” (Littlewood, 1981, p. 83). In the communicative stage, learners practice “the total skill” (Littlewood, 1981) or “the full activity of communicating meanings” (Bygate, 1987, p. 61). This stage includes functional communication in which learners are required to cope with communicative demands and get their meanings across, and social communication, which requires them to take into consideration the social context in which communication takes place and produce language with social acceptability. This model, by drawing on part-skill and whole-task practice, promotes a combined focus on meaning and forms, and allows learners to move from non-communicative to controlled and authentic communication activities (Goh & Burns, 2012). Its fixed sequence of the stages, however, tends to suggest that pieces of language need to be learnt and automated before being put into use in communication.

Littlewood’s model provides crucial implications for the selection of activities in speaking instruction. His suggestion for the use of social communication activities significantly promotes the importance of authentic communication tasks in facilitating learners’ speaking competence in the classroom. This principle in task selection is further refined in Littlewood’s (2007, 2013) continuum of activity communicativeness. In this fine-grained model, classroom activities can be categorised into five different groups: non-communicative, pre-communicative, communicative language practice,
structured, and authentic communication (detailed information of the continuum is provided in Section 4.6.3 in the Methodology chapter). In teaching practice, Littlewood (2013) strongly emphasises that meaning-focused activities, namely structured and authentic communication should play a central role in speaking lessons. As he explains, these activities should allow learners to use language for expressing authentic meaning in a creative and unpredictable manner.

The value of meaning-based activities in speaking development is further advocated in Bygate’s (1987) pedagogical model. In this model, Bygate especially emphasises the importance of classroom interaction and the need to teach communication strategies and discourse skills in developing learners’ speaking fluency. To best accommodate classroom interaction, as he explains, group work activities such as information-gap, communication games, simulations and project-based activities should be prioritised. Effectively used, these tasks facilitate learners’ mastery of interaction strategies and the ability for meaning negotiation, which are important for real-life communication. The model, however, does not discuss how speaking lessons could be sequenced to best accommodate the learners’ development of these interaction strategies. In addition, similar to previously discussed models, Bygate’s approach addresses speaking instruction from the teachers’ perspective with only modest attention to the learners’ role in the learning process.

The model proposed by Thornbury (2005), however, complements earlier models by approaching speaking development from the learners’ standpoint. Informed by the socio-cultural perspective, Thornbury (2005) suggests three stages for a speaking lesson: awareness-raising, appropriation, and autonomy. The central principle of this lesson sequence is the progression of learners’ control or self-regulation of their speaking performance across the stages. In stage one, learners participate in awareness-raising activities, through which they receive input, notice the gaps in their knowledge and isolate language features for practice. Following this, learners are encouraged to exert progressive control over the speaking activities, where external supports are still available. Finally, they participate in life-like communication and demonstrate the capacity to self-regulate performance as a result of their increasing control over the skills formerly regulated by others. To facilitate this progression of learners’ control, teachers are required to gradually reduce and finally withdraw the input and assistance
available to the learners towards the end of the lessons. This model, therefore, contributes to speaking pedagogy not only in terms of lesson sequencing but also in the way scaffolding should be provided.

Goh and Burns’ (2012) model continues to advance speaking pedagogy with a holistic approach to speaking development. In accordance with the model, each speaking lesson is sequenced as a cycle with seven steps. In the first step, pre-task planning stage, learners are prepared for approaching the tasks, and plan for their overall speaking development. Steps two and four include part-skill practice activities through which learners’ schemata are activated and essential scaffolding is provided through explicit instruction. These stages have learners practice using and automatising segments of knowledge, skills and strategies that underpin the whole-task practice in steps three, and five. Through these whole task activities, learners are provided with opportunities to comprehensively use language in life-like communication situations. The final two steps, six and seven, allow learners to reflect and “self-regulate their learning through monitoring and evaluating what they have learnt in the preceding stages” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 161). These final stages also serve as opportunities for learners to consolidate their knowledge, skills and strategies and to receive feedback about their performance from the teacher and their peers.

Goh and Burns’ (2012) model moves speaking pedagogy forward in three important ways. Firstly, it highlights the role of metacognitive awareness as a key factor that determines the success of language learning (Goh & Burns, 2012). By developing students’ metacognition (in steps 1, 6, and 7), teachers place learners in a central position and allow them to take control of their learning. Secondly, it emphasises the importance of whole-task repetition (steps 3 and 5) as an important way to reduce cognitive load in speaking, refine learners’ confidence, and improve their speaking fluency. In addition, its use of part-skill practice activities (steps 2 and 4) allows a focus on form where teachers can scaffold speaking learning with necessary input. It also emphasises that the scaffolded content needs to be selected based on teachers’ observations of what learners cannot perform well in their first encounter with the whole-task practice in stage 3. In this sense, teachers’ scaffolding is contingent on the learners’ needs rather than pre-determined by the teachers.
The review of speaking pedagogical models in the skill-based context has reconfirmed the value of meaning-based activities in speaking teaching. To be best prepared for real-life communication, learners need to be provided with opportunities not only to participate in authentic communicative activities but also repeat these tasks in the classrooms. While form-based activities are still acknowledged as being an important element of these speaking lessons, it is crucial that the content embedded in these form-focused activities be selected based on learners’ real needs to serve the purpose of further improving their performance of the communicative tasks. It is also critical for speaking lessons to be sequenced in such a structure that allows learners to develop their meta-cognitive awareness of their learning and the ability to self-regulate their speaking performance.

In brief, evidence from the reviewed theories and pedagogical models has foregrounded key principles for effective speaking teaching. Firstly, although attention to both form and meaning is important for learners’ speaking development, meaning-based activities should hold a central position in preparing learners for real-life communication. These tasks should also serve as the key criterion for teachers’ selection of the scaffolded input in each lesson. Secondly, practice is essential for learners’ development and achievement of speaking accuracy, fluency and complexity. However, it should take place in the form of meaningful interactions through which language forms are internalised. In designing and selecting speaking tasks, it is necessary for teachers to consider the relevance of their content to learners’ interests and experiences and present them with a clear purpose for communicating real meaning through the tasks. In addition, speaking lessons should be sequenced in a manner that allows learners to gradually move from other- to self-regulation of their speaking performance. This requires teachers not only to select appropriate activities for each lesson stage and ensure that scaffolding is provided in a contingent and graduated manner, but also to provide sufficient opportunities to learners to develop their meta-cognitive awareness in the learning process.

In light of these principles, the next section proceeds to examine how speaking skill has been actually implemented in different classroom contexts.
2.3.4 Speaking pedagogy in practice

A review of studies that shed light on speaking skill pedagogy in practice in different contexts reveals a general dearth of research on the topic. This paucity reflects an ongoing under-studied status of speaking skill pedagogy which has been long highlighted (Bygate, 2009; Chen & Goh, 2014). The review of the existing literature presented in this section revolves around three main issues: (1) mixed research findings concerning speaking teaching approaches; (2) problems in teachers’ knowledge base of speaking pedagogy; and (3) key factors that hinder speaking instruction and its effectiveness.

Studies investigating speaking pedagogy in different contexts tend to report mixed results. On the one hand, findings from quantitative studies reflect a strong orientation towards a meaning-based teaching practice. For instance, Goh and Chen (2013), in a survey of 527 EFL teachers in 56 universities in China, found that the teachers advocated the importance of developing students’ communicative competence through authentic material and tasks. In teaching, drills and repetitions, traditionally used to instill accurate speech patterns and grammar, were reportedly replaced by communicative tasks. Similarly, Alonso’s (2013) study of 80 teachers in state language schools in Spain reported the dominant use of discussion, problem solving, simulations and role-play in speaking classrooms. These activities were valued for promoting students’ interactions and active participation, fostering their motivation and self-confidence and allowing them to experience a variety of social situations, which improved their communicative skills. In Thailand, Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, and Radic-Bojanic (2015), exploring 439 university students’ perspectives on speaking teaching practice, found that teacher-centred activities including pattern drills or rote memorisation were replaced by communicative group activities. These students reported that they frequently engaged in meaningful communication where they actively expressed meaning as in real-world interactions. These studies together reflect teachers’ leaning towards meaning-focused teaching, as revealed by their selection of teaching activities.

Qualitative studies, however, appear to highlight the dominance of an accuracy-based and teacher-fronted approach in teaching speaking. Cohen and Fass’s (2001) study of
forty teachers and 63 students in Colombia using questionnaires, interviews and observations, found that teacher talking time dominated speaking lessons. In contrast to the curriculum objectives and teachers’ beliefs, classroom teaching mainly focused on grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary rather than on the communicative competence. In addition, *questions and answers* were used as the dominant classroom activities whereas group and pair work interactions were minimally employed. Similarly, Nazari’s (2007) research with Iranian EFL teachers reports that speaking was developed mainly through decontextualised activities, which required learners to memorise syntactic structures and vocabulary. Findings from Chen and Goh’s (2011) study of 331 Chinese EFL teachers from 44 universities using questionnaire and interviews also shows that teachers either excluded speaking skills or switched to the traditional form-based instruction.

The discrepancies in these findings may be partly derived from the methodology employed in each study. As Borg (2006) maintains, studies that do not take teaching realities into consideration might only provide partial characterisations of teachers and teaching. Empirical evidence further advocates that teachers’ knowledge and practice need to be investigated in close connection with their “personal histories” (Borg, 2001; Farrell, 1999). In an investigation of three Iranian teachers’ conceptions of speaking skill instruction using in-depth interviews (Baleghizadeh & Shahri, 2014), it is reported that teachers had unique ways of thinking, driven by their personal experiences. Teaching beliefs were found to be permeated with life in such a way that teaching acted as a personal space where individuality revealed itself. Such entanglement of teaching practices in teachers’ lives beyond the classroom reveals the multifaceted nature of teachers’ knowledge. Expert teachers in Baleghizadeh and Shahri’s (2014) study were also found to have theorised their practice (Tsui, 2003) and developed their personal elaborate teaching theories. This evidence suggests that efforts to obtain insights into teaching pedagogy need to be approached in a contextualised manner in which the teaching settings and teachers’ experience should be taken into consideration.

A large proportion of studies exploring speaking pedagogy further reports on key factors that hinder teaching effectiveness. Among these, teachers’ lack of confidence and knowledge has been identified as a major barrier for teaching quality. In a study with 275 K-2 teachers in Utah, DeBoer (2007) found that over a third of the teachers
rated their knowledge of teaching speaking as “less than adequate”, especially with regard to knowledge of curriculum, content and PCK. The teachers’ perception of insufficient speaking pedagogical knowledge was believed to encourage them to opt for the traditional structural-based teaching. In the same vein, Chen and Goh’s (2011, 2014) studies reveal that Chinese teachers’ low level of self-efficacy concerning their speaking proficiency and pedagogical knowledge forced them to either avoid teaching speaking or to switch back to accuracy-based instruction. Based on this evidence, both Chen and Goh (2011) and A. Cohen and Fass (2001) argue for the central importance of developing teachers’ confidence and knowledge base in endeavours to improve speaking teaching quality. They, however, do not specify which aspects of speaking pedagogical knowledge need to be prioritised in addressing these problems.

Some studies also pointed out the powerful effects of contextual factors on teachers’ speaking teaching practice. In particular, learners’ low and mixed proficiency levels were found to demotivate teachers in promoting communicative activities (Chen & Goh, 2011; Gan, 2012; Goh & Chen, 2013). Students’ shyness and hesitation to engage in speaking interactions also prevented teachers from employing meaning-based activities (Nazara, 2011). In many contexts, large class sizes (Bruner et al., 2015; Chen & Goh, 2011; Nazari, 2007), poor learning facilities (Nazara, 2011), insufficient time allocated to speaking (Chen & Goh, 2011; Nazara, 2011; Nazari, 2007), and unrealistic input models and uncommunicative speaking activities provided in materials embodying the curriculum (Bruner et al., 2015; A. Cohen & Fass, 2001; Goh & Burns, 2012; Hughes, 2002; McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2004) were all reported to further obstruct effective speaking instruction.

This reviewed evidence has highlighted the scarcity of empirical studies devoted to speaking skill pedagogy. As Chen and Goh (2014) and Bygate (2009) remark, this long-existing, under-researched status of speaking skill remains. This review also points out three important limitations from the previously conducted studies. Firstly, none of these studies has investigated speaking pedagogy in a comprehensive manner. While most studies focused on teachers’ selection of speaking activities, none of them discussed the crucial aspect of the sequencing of speaking lessons. Some studies have raised the importance of improving teachers’ knowledge base for speaking instruction; yet, none has gone further to inform what aspects of the knowledge base are of the two most
crucial importance and urgency to be addressed.

In addition, many of these studies explored speaking pedagogy by relying solely on quantitative evidence. Minimal attention was, thus, paid to the examination of teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practice in teaching speaking in connection to a specific curriculum context in an in-depth fashion. Such a study, however, would allow the interpretation of teachers’ intricate personal teaching theories in conjunction with their teaching setting and experience. Furthermore, the majority of these studies - except research by Chen and Goh (2014) and A. Cohen and Fass (2001) - did not involve classroom observation data. The inclusion of classroom evidence, however, is viewed as crucial for an accurate and holistic depiction of the teachers’ tacit knowledge base and its inextricable relationship with their classroom practice.

In the next section, the review turns to the research strand of teacher cognition, which has been proposed as an appropriate approach for teasing out the hidden mental aspects of knowledge, beliefs and thoughts that teachers resort to in teaching speaking.

**2.4 Language teacher cognition (LTC)**

LTC has been at the forefront of applied linguistics over the past four decades, and has significantly advanced understanding of the complex inner dynamics underlying teachers’ work (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). It is defined as “what language teachers think, know and believe – and its relationship to teachers’ classroom practices” (Borg, 2006, p. 1). Underpinning this inquiry strand is the recognition of teachers’ role as active, thinking decision-makers who can critically shape classroom events (Borg, 2006) and the powerful impact that teachers’ knowledge and beliefs have on their pedagogical practice (Borg, 2003, 2006; Ng & Farrell, 2003). Given its well-established robustness in illuminating “the fullness of the complex and problematic work of teaching” (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015, p. 585), LTC provides the present study with an appropriate avenue for exploring speaking skill pedagogy in the specific context of Vietnam. This review section focuses on three main aspects of LTC that are most closely related to the current study: (1) the nature of TC and its relationship with classroom practice; (2) TC studies about speaking skill pedagogy; and (3) TC studies in Vietnamese context.
2.4.1 LTC – its nature and relationship with classroom practice

Studies investigating teachers and teaching from TC perspective have brought to light the multifaceted nature of TC and its intricate relation to teaching practice. They have further established the role that contextual conditions play in mediating the complicated relationship between these two dimensions.

Extensive evidence from TC research has justified the significant influence that TC has on teachers’ practice. Many studies (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2003; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2004; Ng & Farrell, 2003) have found that teachers’ practices functioned as representations of their teaching principles and beliefs. These beliefs directly affect teachers’ perceptions and judgements of classroom interactions and govern what they do and say in the classrooms (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clark & Yinger, 1977). Such deep-rooted cognitions were found to pervade classroom behaviours much stronger than any particular methodology that they were told to adopt (M. Williams & Burden, 1997). They might also interfere in teachers’ interpretations of new knowledge (Freeman, 2002; K. E. Johnson, 1999), filter their acceptance and uptake of new teaching approaches and techniques (Donaghue, 2003), and hinder their decisions to apply new pedagogical techniques (Mak, 2011). This evidence suggests that teachers’ mental lives powerfully shape their classroom behaviours, and thus that efforts to improve teaching practices should commence with the advancement of insights into this hidden aspect of teacher cognitions.

More in-depth examinations of the relationship between TC and classroom teaching further reflect its highly complicated nature. A review of studies with a focus on investigating the convergence between these two dimensions shows mixed results. On the one hand, convergence is reported by numerous studies with diverse research foci including teachers’ questioning strategies (Cundale, 2001), the use of Singlish (Farrell & Kun, 2007), explicit form-instruction (Vibulpol, 2004), writing instruction (T. E. Kim, 2006), pronunciation teaching (Baker, 2011) and reading instruction (Kuzborska, 2011). On the other hand, limited congruence was found in an extensive research volume (Anstrom, 2003; Feryok, 2004; Graham, Santos, & Francis-Brophy, 2014; K. E. Johnson, 1992; Maikland, 2001; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Sinprajakpol, 2004; Sugiyama,
Evidence from many studies also reveals that the connection between cognition and practice is not linear, straightforward and unidirectional, but rather “symbiotic” (L. Li & Walsh, 2011; Mak, 2011) and mediated by a multitude of factors (Borg, 2006).

Studies that pinpoint the causes of incongruence between cognition and practice continue to highlight the multifaceted nature of TC. For instance, Zheng (2013b) found that teachers in her study failed to distinguish between “professed” and “implicit beliefs” that underpin their practice. When interviewed, the teachers, thus, described what they believed about how teaching should be enacted, which might differ to or contradict how they actually implemented teaching in specific situations. L. Li (2013) and Zheng (2013a, 2013b) also argue that teachers’ cognition was not static as “the realm of reality inside teachers’ heads” but rather conceptualised in and contextualised by a given environmental setting (L. Li, 2013, p. 176). The interaction between practice and beliefs was, therefore, found to be dynamic and interactive, in which one practice might be underpinned by several core or peripheral beliefs. These beliefs possibly co-exist in harmony or in tension with each other. In different teaching contexts, they might contradict, which require teachers to either prioritise the core beliefs or adopt “an eclectic approach” to compromise different teaching objectives (Zheng, 2013b, p. 340). This inherent complexity requires inquiries into TC and its relationships with classroom practice to be both conceptually clear and contextually sensitive.

Studies in this strand have also identified a constellation of contextual factors that mediate the relationship between cognition and classroom implementation. Most commonly reported factors include students’ attitudes and levels, large class sizes, examination backwash effects (L. Li & Walsh, 2011), time restrictions from a mandated curriculum, and limited resources (Duffy, 1977; Duffy & Ball, 1986). In many cases, these environmental constraints impede teachers in converting their beliefs into practice (Basturkmen, 2012; Sinprajakpol, 2004; Sugiyama, 2003), while in others, they outweigh teachers’ beliefs and exert a stronger influence on their decisions (Davis, Konopak, & Readence, 1993). In Nishimuro and Borg’s (2013) study, for example, learners’ low proficiency and motivation compounded by limited syllabus time forced teachers to switch back to traditional grammar teaching, a practice which runs counter to their beliefs in communicative activities. These findings appear to further suggest that it is inevitable for research into the connection between TC and classroom practice to
examine the mediating role of contextual factors in specific teaching contexts.

Many TC studies further report on the differences between experienced and novice teachers in relation to their cognition and teaching enactment. In general, experienced teachers were found to have richer, more elaborate and coherent knowledge than novice teachers (Tsui, 2003). In Tsui’s (2003) study, expert teachers were reported to have theorised their practice, which enabled them to see teaching in an all-interrelated manner rather than as a set of discrete skills. J. Richards, Li, and Tang (1998) also found that experienced teachers, compared to the novice, held a deeper understanding of the subject matter and a better ability to think about the content from the learners’ standpoint, and to present and integrate it appropriately within broader curriculum goals. In practice, Nunan (1992) observed that experienced teachers paid more attention to language issues and content than did novices who were more concerned with classroom management. J. Richards (1998) also reported that the experienced engaged more in improvisational teaching and steered attention to maintaining learners’ active involvement, with greater consideration of learners’ difficulties, rather than trying to cover the planned contents in the time available. As suggested by these descriptions, TC is not only contextually sensitive but also progressive and changeable in accordance with each teacher’s personal experience.

Evidence from these studies highlights the multifaceted and complex nature of TC and its relation to teachers’ classroom activities. This nature needs to be taken into consideration in studies that set out to explore teachers and teaching from the TC perspective. Such studies need to draw sufficient attention to specific contextual conditions as well as the teachers’ personal background, and to tease out how these impact on their beliefs and practices.

2.4.2 Teacher cognition in Vietnamese context

There have been a growing number of TC studies in Vietnamese context in the past few years. However, the majority of these studies focus on teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to the implementation of CLT and TBLT. In this review section, key findings from these studies will be reviewed and presented.
One of the central focuses of TC studies in the Vietnamese context is teachers’ beliefs about CLT and TBLT. For example, Minh’s (2015) and Canh’s (2007) studies both centre on teachers’ perceptions of the TBLT curriculum and its accompanying textbooks at upper secondary school level. Minh’s study of 250 teacher trainers and EFL teachers across the country reported that the participants held a positive attitude towards the TBLT curriculum. Similarly, in Canh’s (2007) study, questionnaire and interview data collected from 249 teachers across 11 provinces in northern Vietnam revealed that teachers perceived the next task-based textbooks as being more interesting, communicative and motivating to students. However, the data also indicates a discrepancy between teachers’ stated beliefs and their self-reported practices, believed to result from the conceptual mismatch between the teachers and the textbook writers. In particular, these teachers, in spite of their supports for TBLT, defined CLT as simply teaching by including games, group and pair work, with the four skills being taught separately. This “surface or cosmetic understanding of learner-centred CLT” (Canh, 2007, p. 207) appears to have directed the teachers to continue following their accustomed form-based teaching approach. Evidence from these studies appears to suggest a lack of congruence between teachers’ beliefs and their reported teaching practices. It also raises the importance for TC studies to obtain in-depth qualitative data, rather than being merely based on questionnaire information (Canh, 2007).

In-depth studies that investigate teachers’ cognitions and practices in the Vietnamese context tend to highlight the dominance of the traditional structural-based teaching approach. For example, research by N. G. Viet (2014), Barnard and Viet (2010) and Nam (2015) all report on Vietnamese teachers’ alignment with the PPP model. These studies, relying on multiple data sources, show that Vietnamese upper secondary school teachers had a strong inclination towards explicit presentation and explanation of structures and preparation for communicative practices. In alignment with this, teachers’ selection and adaptation of tasks and lesson sequencing indicates a strong focus on the teaching of concrete linguistic items before students’ performance of language production tasks.

Three other studies, conducted by Canh (2011), Canh and Barnard (2009) and Canh and Maley (2012) appear to show similar findings. These studies again focused on upper-secondary school teachers, and data were collected from a variety of sources including
observations, interviews, and post-observation interviews. Evidence from these studies consistently shows that classroom pedagogy remained textbook-based, test-oriented, and teacher-fronted, which goes against the curriculum developers’ emphasis on communicative competence (Canh & Barnard, 2009). In classroom practice, the teachers were found to mainly concentrate on students’ reproduction of knowledge (Canh & Maley, 2012) through presenting and explaining grammatical structures and facilitating students’ memorisation of grammatical rules and terminologies (Canh, 2011). Opportunities for learners’ genuine interactions in the target language were largely absent, and classroom activities were restricted to teachers’ giving and checking understanding of instructions where display and direct reference questions (Canh, 2011) dominated. One uniform conclusion drawn from these studies is that teachers’ beliefs and practices were largely divergent from principles promoted by TBLT.

Another major aspect that these studies shed light on is the critical factors that hindered Vietnamese teachers’ alignment with TBLT principles and the lack of convergence between teachers’ cognitions and practices. Consistently, numerous studies identify four key socio-cultural constraints that need to be addressed for teaching quality improvements. These comprise: (1) backwash effects of inappropriate assessment approach; (2) learners’ low proficiency and lack of motivation; (3) restricted curriculum time and unfavorable teaching conditions (large class sizes and insufficient resources); and (4) teachers’ professional development issues (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013, 2014). It should be noted that, while these constraints are prominent for teachers working in secondary school levels, they might seem irrelevant to teachers working in universities, where autonomy is granted to each institution in the development of its own package programs (Trinh, 2005). At tertiary level, teachers, therefore, might enjoy the freedom to contribute to the construction of curriculum and subject outlines and the development of tests and examinations. Under these seemingly favorable conditions, what obstructs university teachers’ teaching quality and interfere in the relationship between their cognitions and practices might be different from those identified above. These factors, however, have not been investigated.

This review section has highlighted the recent surge in TC research on the Vietnamese context and a lack of balance in the focus of these studies. In terms of research content,
the central focus has been on teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to the enactment of TBLT, resulting in a general neglect of other research domains including speaking skill. With respect to research setting, secondary school contexts have attracted the most substantial attention, leaving the tertiary level under-researched. In addition, findings from these previously conducted studies have significantly advanced insight into teachers’ current knowledge, beliefs and teaching implementation in secondary school settings, and have identified key socio-cultural factors impacting on these aspects. Given the fact that English teaching at tertiary level is constrained by different conditions, in-depth investigations into university teachers’ cognitions and practices in relation to speaking instruction are expected to both narrow the gap in the research focus within the context and further advance a comprehensive understanding of TC in the Vietnamese setting.

2.4.3 Teacher cognition about speaking skill instruction

Studies whose focus intersects the two domains of TC and speaking skill, despite the long-existing concern over their scarcity, have mysteriously remained minimal (Borg, 2006; Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014). To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, only five of such studies are available, A. Cohen and Fass (2001), DeBoer (2007), Chen and Goh (2011, 2014), and Baleghizadeh and Shahri (2014), which will be reviewed and presented in this section. However, due to the aforementioned paucity, research on TC about the instruction of two closely related components, pronunciation and listening are also included where relevant.

One of the most significant contributions from TC studies is the depiction of the knowledge base teachers draw on in speaking instruction in different contexts. In China, Chen and Goh’s (2011) large-scale investigation of 331 university EFL teachers revealed that, after years of teaching, their knowledge about oral language instruction was “obscure and fragmented” (p. 341) and classroom practice was mainly driven by intuition. In a different study, Chen and Goh (2014) focused on PCK and knowledge of students’ oral English characteristics. Results show that teachers’ self-perceived knowledge of both categories was insufficient to assist them in enacting speaking teaching effectively. Similar challenges to effective speaking instruction caused by teachers’ insufficient knowledge are reported in DeBoer’s (2007) study on L1 teachers
in Utah, the USA. In this comprehensive investigation into teachers’ self-perception of seven knowledge categories employing Shulman’s (1987) framework of knowledge, DeBoer (2007) found that over one third (32.9%) of the teachers felt they had “less than adequate” knowledge of various aspects of oral language instruction. Except for the knowledge of general pedagogy, more than half of the teachers reported having inadequate knowledge of the oral language curriculum (58.8%), oral language educational context (55%) and around one third perceived themselves as holding insufficient knowledge on oral language content and learners’ oral language characteristics. To a great extent, results from these studies underline teachers’ lack of knowledge in speaking instruction and the need to improve this knowledge base so that they can implement teaching speaking in a principled and systematic manner.

A few other studies in this strand shed direct light on important pedagogical aspects of speaking instruction in teaching practices. Cohen and Fass’s (2001) study on the Colombian context, for example, examined teachers’ perceptions of speaking competence, textbook use, selection of activities, interaction modes and classroom talking time. Findings show that the teachers prioritised fluency as the most important characteristic of good oral language. Observation data, however, reveal that accuracy remained the principal focus in speaking teaching and assessment, which contradicts the objectives stated in the prescribed curriculum. Accordingly, teacher-talk dominated the classroom time, and nearly half of the classroom activities were questions and answers. Even though the majority of teachers held a strong belief on the importance of pair and group interaction for speaking development, only 8% and 3% of classroom activities, respectively, fell into these categories. Evidence from this study highlights the divergence between teachers’ beliefs and practices, and calls for training programs that improve teachers’ knowledge of how to make their classroom teaching genuinely communicative (A. Cohen & Fass, 2001).

Research into speaking-related domains further underlines teachers’ lack of PCK knowledge for effective speaking teaching. In pronunciation instruction, Baker’s (2011, 2014) in-depth investigation of teachers’ cognition and actual practice shows that teachers held limited understanding of how to incorporate pronunciation into oral skill instruction. In terms of activities, controlled techniques, which are non-communicative and might restrict the development of comprehensible pronunciation in authentic
conversation (Baker, 2014, p. 153), dominated classroom teaching. In another study on TC of pronunciation teaching of 28 experienced and well-qualified teachers in Uruguay, Couper (2016) reports that most teachers were uncertain about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. These teachers either did not know how to teach pronunciation or lacked confidence in teaching. Pronunciation teaching was reported to be ad hoc and in response to errors, in which awareness-raising and input providing dominated classroom activities. Similarly, Graham et al’s (2014) study of 115 FL teachers in England concerning their stated beliefs and practices in teaching listening reports the dominance of the comprehensive approach. Echoing findings from Field (2008) and Goh (2008), they found that, due to insufficient knowledge about alternative listening teaching techniques, these teachers uniformly focused on the product of listening and turned every listening activity into a test of learners’ listening ability. Since listening and pronunciation are integral in speaking development and instruction, limitations in teachers’ knowledge of how to effectively teach these components indirectly reflect problems in teachers’ current knowledge of speaking instruction and the challenges this poses to their classroom practice.

Investigations into teachers’ stated beliefs and practices have also reported on the highly personal nature of teachers’ approaches in teaching speaking. For instance, Baleghizadeh and Shahri (2014) found that each of the three teachers in their study had unique experience and understanding of how speaking should be learnt and taught. For one teacher, speaking learning was underpinned by a two-tier system in which speaking teaching begins with providing learners with an adequate dose of simple grammar and structures for basic communication and fluency practice, followed by an upgrading of vocabulary to become native-like. The second teacher, however, strongly believed that speaking competence should be developed via constructing a bank of sentences extracted from listening activities, followed by internalising and personalising their uses. The third teacher supported learning speaking via authentic materials and activities such as songs, movies and drawings. Resonating with findings from Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard (2001), these individual approaches were found to have originated in the teachers’ personal history, especially their previous learning experiences which were gradually shaped into a form of personal practical knowledge. Evidence also supports a distinction between expert and novice teachers. Expert teachers were found to have theorised their practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985) and developed intricate teaching
theories. In addition, expert teachers are reported to highly value the role of private speech for speaking development while novice teachers advocated the importance of talking to others. Findings from this study have significantly advanced understanding of individual teachers’ self-developed theories in speaking teaching, and further highlight the need for TC studies to pay due attention to teachers’ personal experiences.

2.5 Summary of the chapter and research questions

This review chapter has shed light on three major aspects. Firstly, it presented the solid theoretical bases that lend support to the conceptualisations of speaking subject matter content and pedagogy. On this basis, it critiqued the slow progression in applying these theoretical advancements to the development of pedagogical models for speaking instruction. The review also highlighted the dearth of in-depth empirical studies investigating teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practice, in relation to speaking skill pedagogy in relation to a specific curriculum context.

Secondly, the review of previously conducted studies exploring teachers’ speaking teaching practice has underlined significant contributions from these studies to the understanding of teachers’ knowledge base, actual practices, and key factors hindering their teaching quality. However, these studies, apart from being minimal in volume, feature critical limitations. Very few studies explore speaking skill pedagogy in a comprehensive manner in which all important pedagogical aspects are examined. Many studies also do not involve classroom observation data or pay sufficient attention to the contextual-sensitive and personal nature of the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and behavior in teaching. Insufficient attention to these features is, however, predicted to lead to partial or flawed representations of the researched problem.

Thirdly, the review of TC studies in different contexts including Vietnam has promoted the robust contributions from this research strand to understanding of the multifaceted mental aspect of teachers’ mind which underpins their classroom actions. It further spotlighted the notable lack of balance in the focus of TC studies on the Vietnamese context. While studies that intersect TC and speaking skill are, in general, scant, none of such studies have been conducted on the Vietnamese context. Given the unprecedented attention to the development of learners’ speaking competence as specified in the
national policies and curriculum, studies of this type have long been overdue in the Vietnamese context.

As an effort to narrow the identified gaps, the present study sets out to comprehensively investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers’ cognitions and practices in speaking instruction in the context of a specific university in Vietnam. The study centres on the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practices in relation to three knowledge components, speaking curriculum, subject matter content and pedagogy. With data collected from multiple sources including classroom observations, the study is aimed to advance a contextualised understanding of teachers’ cognitions and practices in speaking instruction in which the teachers’ experiences are appreciated. To this end, the study aims to address the following three research questions:

1. How do the teachers interpret the curricular specifications concerning speaking teaching content, organisation and pedagogy?
2. What cognitions do they have regarding speaking skill subject matter content and pedagogy?
3. How are these cognitions manifested in the teachers’ classroom practice?

In the next two chapters, theoretical frameworks that underpin the study and the research methodology will be presented.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed relevant literature and highlighted the burgeoning need for an in-depth study that investigates teacher cognition (hereafter TC) about speaking subject matter content and pedagogy, and how speaking instruction is enacted in a Vietnamese tertiary context. It emphasised the necessity for the study to capture the complexity of the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and practices, as well as the intricate interrelations between these dimensions within the mediating impact of contextual factors. To this end, the study employs a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceptualising speaking instruction, which incorporates Borg’s (2006) model of TC, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge base, and Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking.

This chapter begins with an introduction to Borg’s (2006) model of TC, in particular focus on how the model provides a theoretical lens for examining the interactions between the teachers’ tacit mental aspects and classroom practices. Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge categories is then incorporated to provide an overarching framework for investigating specific components of the teachers’ knowledge base for teaching speaking. Finally, Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking is integrated for a threefold purpose. Firstly, their conceptualisation of communicative competence is employed as an analytical tool for exploring the teachers’ cognitions about speaking subject matter content. Secondly, their principle for selecting instructional activities is adopted to provide a frame for examining the activities that the teacher participants selected for their speaking lessons. Finally, Goh and Burns’ teaching-speaking cycle is used as a heuristic guiding framework for investigating the teachers’ lesson sequencing. Together, this integrated framework enables the description, analysis and theorisation of the teachers’ cognitions and practices in teaching speaking, as well as of the multifaceted relation among them, in a Vietnamese tertiary context.

3.2 Borg’s model of language teacher cognition

Teacher cognition has been defined as “the complex, practically-oriented, personalised and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language
teachers draw on in their work” (Borg, 2006, p. 272). Research into this domain has contributed critical insights into the unobservable aspect of teachers’ mental lives (Borg, 2003), and has “illuminated complex inner dynamics underlying language teachers’ work” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). Given the complexity of the teachers’ mental aspects, a multitude of previous studies on teacher’s cognitions have attempted to draw a clear distinction between teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. However, given that the distinction between beliefs and knowledge is commonly perceived as being “hazy” (Baker, 2011, p. 8) and problematic, the present study, in line with many previous studies (Baker, 2011, 2014; Borg, 2006; Nam, 2015), employs teacher cognition in its broad sense to comprehensively encompass knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and similar constructs as one whole.

In general, TC comprises “complex conceptual processes that are interrelated” (Burns et al., 2015, p. 589); and its relationship with classroom practice is viewed to be nonlinear and multidirectional, with each shaping and being shaped by the other in a unique and unpredictable way (Borg, 2006; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; L. Li & Walsh, 2011). These complicated processes and interrelations are depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Elements and processes in language teacher cognitions (Borg, 2006, p. 283)
The first critical aspect illustrated in the model is the relationship between teachers’ learning and their cognitions. The model highlights in particular the role of teachers’ learning experience via schooling or pre-service and professional education or in-service, both as major sources of cognitions and factors that exert critical impact on their cognitions. Teachers’ early cognitions, commonly referred to as ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) or ‘craft knowledge’ (Calderhead, 1996), permeate into teachers’ later teaching career and mediate their uptake of new teaching techniques and approaches (Donaghue, 2003; Mak, 2011). In the present study, although tracing the sources of the teachers’ cognitions is not a major goal, gaining insights into what shapes the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs in teaching speaking is crucial for understanding and interpreting their current cognitions and practices in a comprehensive and contextualised manner.

Another key component of the model that is most relevant to the present study is the intricate relationships between TC, classroom practice and contextual factors. Interacting with various contextual factors, TC is reported to critically shape classroom events (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 2003). With their mediating roles, teaching practice and contextual factors concurrently influence TC, thus resulting in either changes in cognitions or the tension between cognitions and classroom practice. Ample empirical evidence has illustrated the influence of teaching practice (Farrell, 2003; Pennington & Richards, 1997) and contextual factors (L. Li, 2013; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013) on what teachers think, believe and know. In many cases, despite how strongly teachers may hold particular beliefs, they have not been borne out in classroom practice, due to a complex array of interacting factors (Borg, 2012). As such, exploring the mediating conditions operating in each specific context, each of which is itself a dynamic and complex system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), is crucial for “unpeeling the complexities of the interaction of cognition and classroom action” (Borg, 2012, p. 3). Borg’s model, therefore, provides a means for illuminating the interactions and relationships among the three crucial components that the present study aims to explore, namely TC, classroom practice and contextual conditions.

Despite this value, the model appears to be constrained by two main limitations when applied to the context of the present study. First, although the model specifies 12 aspects
about which teachers have cognitions - teaching, teachers, learners, learning, subject matter, curricula, materials, activities, self, colleagues, assessment and context (Borg, 2006) - these components appear to be presented in a fragmented and isolated manner. The integration of these knowledge components into a composite that constitutes the teachers’ knowledge base is, therefore, not fully captured. In addition, given that the study aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ knowledge base for teaching speaking, the model does not present itself as an effective tool for investigating specific elements that each of the knowledge component encompasses. In other words, it does not fully provide the study with an efficient tool for describing and analysing the subsets of the teachers’ cognitions about speaking subject matter content and pedagogy, and the connection between these aspects. As an attempt to redress these limitations, Section 3.3 presents a discussion of conceptualisations of teachers’ knowledge base and provides justifications for the employment of Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model as an overarching framework for exploring teachers’ knowledge for teaching speaking in the present study.

3.3 Conceptualisations of teachers’ knowledge base

Conceptualising the types of knowledge that teachers need for successful teaching performance has always been a focal point of educational research. To this end, early research primarily focuses on identifying specific “behaviours, routines and scripts” of effective teachers, which serves the purpose of prescribing discrete knowledge of theories and methods “assumed to be applicable to any teaching context (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 399). Such a focus on ‘quintessential teaching behaviours’ (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 399), or formal knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994), has been criticised as trivialising the complexity of teachers’ expertise. This realisation has redirected the focus of educational research to the teachers’ practical knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994), or the knowledge teachers construct from their professional experience (Fernandez, 2014). In accordance with this refocusing, teachers’ knowledge is conceptualised as complex, multifaceted, and “largely socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come” (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 400). This type of knowledge, which is commonly referred to as personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1983) or craft knowledge (Calderhead, 1996), is shaped not only by the contextual conditions but also by the
teachers’ prior learning experiences (Lortie, 1975) and their personal values and beliefs (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Pajares, 1992). These advancements brought about by educational research have provided important foundations for the development of different conceptual models of teachers’ knowledge base.

Many conceptual models have been proposed, identifying various components constituting teachers’ knowledge base. Elbaz (1983), for instance, suggests five components, comprising knowledge of: yourself, the environment, the content, the development of curriculum, and instructional strategies. Calderhead (1996) also identifies five elements: knowledge of yourself, subject matter knowledge, students’ knowledge, curriculum, and teaching methods. Grossman (1990) and Carlsen (1999), however, propose four knowledge components: general pedagogical, subject matter, pedagogical content, and context. As demonstrated by these models, teachers’ knowledge base, at its core, encompasses knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy. Other knowledge categories such as curriculum, contexts, learners and knowledge of yourself, however, are not consistently realised across all the models.

Among existing models, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) seminal work on teachers’ knowledge base offers a holistic view that is distinct from others for its fine-grained list of knowledge categories (Park & Oliver, 2007). As presented below, evidence from previous studies also proves that the model is open to adaptations to better suit the context of specific research. Shulman’s model, with its comprehensiveness and flexibility, provides the present study with a fruitful avenue for exploring in depth the specific subcomponents of each knowledge category constituting the teachers’ knowledge base for teaching speaking.

3.3.1 Shulman’s model of teachers’ knowledge base

Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model provides a comprehensive framework for identifying and describing specific categories of the teachers’ knowledge base. In particular, it promotes a typology of seven knowledge types, encompassing: (1) subject matter content (SMCK); (2) general pedagogical knowledge; (3) curriculum knowledge; (4) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); (5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics; (6) knowledge of educational contexts; and (7) knowledge of
educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds. Among these categories, Shulman (1987) strongly emphasises the importance of the teachers’ knowledge of curriculum, SMCK, and PCK for effective teaching performance. He also acknowledges the contributing role of the teachers’ understanding of the sociocultural contexts and learners in their pedagogical decisions. Shulman further maintains that, although some of the knowledge types may be truncated or not drawn upon in particular teaching circumstances, the development of all the knowledge aspects and the teachers’ ability to activate each category when called upon are critical for effective teaching. As such, teachers who have gaps in their knowledge of any of these types are “deemed as under-prepared” for the career (Exley, 2005, p. 23). Investigations into teachers’ knowledge base, therefore, inevitably involve the exploration of their understanding of each category, as well as of how each contributes to their teaching performance.

Shulman’s model has been empirically demonstrated to be a useful tool for exploring teachers’ knowledge base and teaching practice in relation to different content areas. Baker (2011, 2014), for instance, employed the model for an in-depth investigation into ESL teachers’ knowledge base for teaching pronunciation. Baker’s study not only teased out teachers’ knowledge of pronunciation subject content, pedagogy, and learners but also illuminated how pedagogical aspects of teaching and assessing techniques and activities, curriculum and materials are enacted in the classrooms. Shi (2015) also adopted the model for exploring Chinese EFL teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of the effectiveness of applying genre pedagogy in supporting Chinese students’ learning of writing skills. In Zhang’s (2008) research, the model was used as an organising framework for investigating teachers’ knowledge base in teaching vocabulary, which shed important light on the three knowledge categories of content, pedagogy, and learners. With such robustness, the model presents itself as a powerful tool for capturing the multifaceted nature of the teachers’ knowledge base in teaching speaking skill, which the present study aims to achieve.

Evidence from various studies that have employed Shulman’s model for exploring teachers’ knowledge base, however, suggests that modifications to the model are required to make it better suit specific context of each study. Among the seven categories, PCK appears to attract most extensive debate and generate a high volume of
proposals for modifications in relation to what subcomponents this knowledge category encompasses. In Shulman’s (1987) original model, PCK is defined as:

the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction (p. 8).

As indicated in this definition, Shulman posits teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy, or the teachers’ ability to organise, represent, adapt, and present content to specific groups of learners, as the most central component of PCK. He specifies in the definition that this knowledge of pedagogy must be grounded on the basis of the teachers’ understanding of the teaching content and the learners in regard to their diverse interests and abilities. However, in Shulman’s model, teachers’ knowledge of subject content and learners are both also listed as independent categories. Cochran, DeRuiter, and King (1993, p. 4) argue that this way of presentation, to a certain extent, “veils the importance” of these two components and does not clearly depict their interrelatedness with the teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Sharing a similar view, Carlsen (1999), Grossman (1990) and Kennedy (1990) advocate that, to accurately reflect the blending nature of the sub-components incorporated within PCK, knowledge of learners and of subject matter need to be treated together as integral subsets of PCK, rather than as independent components.

Arguments have also been made for the need to incorporate knowledge of context as an indispensable component of PCK (Park & Oliver, 2007). In Shulman’s model, although knowledge of context is viewed as an important basis for teachers’ selection of instructional strategies, it is presented as two independent components: knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds. Many scholars (Borg, 2006; Cochran et al., 1993; Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2006; Park & Oliver, 2007), however, suggest that teachers’ understanding of the contextual conditions, with their powerful influence on their teaching practice, should be considered as an inseparable constituent of PCK. In accordance with this re-conceptualisation, PCK is redefined as “teachers’ understanding and enactment of how to help a group of students understand specific subject matter using multiple instructional strategies, representations and assessment while working within the contextual, cultural and social limitations in the learning environment” (Park
In this sense, teachers’ pedagogical decisions are not simply seen as an integration of their knowledge of the teaching content and pedagogy but further as integrally underpinned by their thorough understanding of the learners and of the contextual setting in which they enact teaching.

The discussion above has established the foundation for implementing important modifications of Shulman’s model when employed for the present study. Accordingly, Shulman’s original seven knowledge groups are, instead, re-categorised into three major groups: curriculum, SMCK, and PCK. In this adapted model, PCK is conceptualised as an umbrella concept that integrates four components, namely knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter content, contexts, and learners. Among these sub-components, knowledge of pedagogy occupies the most central position, while the other three, as interrelated subsets within PCK, function as underlying conditions that shape the teachers’ pedagogy in specific teaching contexts. In addition, it should be noted that, although teachers’ knowledge of SMCK is acknowledged as a subset of PCK, it is intentionally utilised in this study as an independent component. As earlier highlighted in the literature review, although a number of models of speaking competence have been suggested at the theoretical level, current understanding of how teachers in different contexts conceptualise speaking competence is extremely limited. Teachers’ understanding of what speaking ability encompasses, as suggested by Goh and Burns (2012), significantly impacts their decisions on what to include in teaching and how the content is presented to learners. Thus, in-depth investigations into Vietnamese teachers’ conceptualisations of speaking competence, which is established as an important objective in the present study, is significant for advancing understanding of teachers’ existing knowledge and beliefs about speaking SMCK.

In accordance with this adapted model, each of the three knowledge components entails various constituents that need to be carefully unpacked. In the next section, a detailed discussion of how these knowledge categories are conceptualised in the context of the present study is provided.
3.3.2 Conceptualisation of knowledge of SMCK, curriculum and PCK

Subject matter content knowledge is the first category that warrants Shulman’s substantial attention and elaboration. In its simplest sense, SMCK is defined as “the knowledge, understanding, skills and disposition that are to be learned” (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). In alignment with Schwab (1978), Shulman emphasises the substantive and syntactic structures of teachers’ SMCK as two fundamental aspects of knowledge underlying effective teaching. The former refers to “the variety of ways in which the basic concepts and principles of the discipline are organised to incorporate its facts” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). The latter, however, goes beyond the content domain to “the set of ways in which truth or falsehood, validity or invalidity, are established” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). In teaching practice, the substantive structure enables teachers to define to students the accepted truths, facts, and knowledge in a domain, while the syntactic enables them to justify why a given topic, content or skill is particularly crucial to a discipline whereas others may be peripheral. A thorough understanding of both the ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing why’, as Shulman (1986) maintains, is critical for effective teaching of any particular discipline.

Shulman’s concept of subject content knowledge with substantive and syntactic aspects provides the present study with a tool for exploring the teachers’ SMCK. It allows the study to unpack the content components that the participating teachers prioritise in speaking instruction and to uncover the underlying rationale for their selection. Together, these findings shed light on how teachers conceptualise speaking competence, and tease out the specific factors that shape this conceptualisation. In addition, to obtain in-depth insights into the subcomponents of the teachers’ speaking SMCK, the study further employs Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of communicative competence. Greater detail related to this model will be discussed in Section 3.4.1 of this chapter.

The second knowledge component proposed in Shulman’s original model that is retained in the present study is curriculum knowledge. Shulman (1986) defines curriculum knowledge as being represented by a full range of programs designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level, the variety of instructional materials available in relation to those programs, and the set of characteristics that serve as both the indications and contraindications for the use of particular curriculum or
program materials in particular circumstances. (p. 10)

Central to this definition is the crucial role that teachers’ understanding of the teaching programs and their embodied resources plays in their knowledge of curriculum. Shulman (1986, p. 10) refers to these programs and their accompanied materials as material medica of pedagogy; that is, resources of teaching content from which teachers draw tools for presenting or exemplifying content, and remediating or evaluating the adequacy of students’ accomplishments. This explanation suggests that teachers’ understanding of the curriculum directly contributes to their pedagogy and shapes their decisions on teaching strategies and techniques. Further highlighted in the definition is the importance of teachers’ insights into characteristics of the curriculum that serve as ‘indications’ and ‘contraindications’ for the enactment of the curriculum in specific contexts. In other words, in implementing a curriculum, teachers are expected to be fully aware of the parameters for adjustments of the programs and materials. In light of this, the exploration of teachers’ knowledge of curriculum in the present study focuses specifically on what the participating teachers know, believe and think about the positions of speaking subjects in the English major curricula, their materials, and how these can be modified when enacted in different teaching contexts or with different groups of learners.

Shulman (1986), however, further explains that, to function effectively in teaching, teachers are also required to thoroughly understand the lateral and vertical aspects of the curriculum. The former refers to the connection between contents of a given subject with those that learners simultaneously interact with in other subjects in the same semester. The latter describes the links between topics, skills and concepts covered in one level of a subject, with the ones included in other levels that learners have been or will be taught. In the context of the present study, teachers’ understanding of how content of speaking subjects is vertically and laterally related to other curriculum content areas is crucial for effective instruction, given that speaking is a multifaceted skill and its development follows trajectories (Goh & Burns, 2012). In particular, investigating the lateral aspect reveals teachers’ understanding of the connection between speaking and other language skills and components such as writing, reading, and grammar and more discipline-specialised subjects in the curriculum (e.g. English linguistics and literature), as well as of how these subject areas contribute to the
development of speaking competence. In a similar vein, analysis of the vertical dimension discloses teachers’ knowledge of how different speaking levels in the curriculum are related, and of how each of these levels functions as a building block for learners’ achievement of the overall desired speaking competence as specified in the curriculum goals.

The third knowledge component in the adapted model, PCK, is also characterised as a multifaceted component. PCK is defined as “special amalgam of content and pedagogy” (Shulman, 1987, p. 8) that differentiates expert teachers of a subject from the subject area experts (Cochran et al., 1993). This knowledge component “goes beyond the domain of subject knowledge per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9), and functions as the most fundamental knowledge component that teachers rely on for the transformation of the SMCK into forms that are comprehensible and accessible to learners (Carter, 1990; Geddis, Onslow, Beynon, & Oesch, 1993; Shulman, 1986, 1987). As previously mentioned, PCK in the present study is conceptualised as an umbrella construct that represents the teachers’ integrated understanding of four sub-components: pedagogy, subject matter content, learners, and contexts. Among the subsets, knowledge of pedagogy occupies a central position, while the other three serve as contextual conditions that the teachers draw on in making pedagogical decisions. Each of these sub-components, in turn, encompasses various constituents that will be discussed next.

As a core sub-component of PCK, knowledge of pedagogy encompasses various elements. In Shulman’s model, a distinction is drawn between the general pedagogical knowledge and PCK or ‘subject specific’ pedagogy (Borg, 2006, p. 19). General pedagogy, as Shulman defines it, includes teachers’ ability “to manage classrooms, organise activities and allocate time and turns”, whereas subject specific pedagogy refers to the “most useful forms of presentations” and “most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations” teachers can generate (Shulman, 1986, p. 8). Nunan (1989, 2004), however, maintains that, in making pedagogical decisions, teachers simultaneously draw on knowledge of general and of content specific pedagogy. These pedagogical aspects should, therefore, be viewed together as an integral component, rather than as two separate areas. Nunan (1989, 2004), in line with Ellis (2003) and J. Richards and Rodgers (2003), further suggests
that the focus of investigations into teachers’ pedagogy should be anchored in the approaches or methods they employ and how they select and sequence learning experiences. Extensive evidence from the literature (Baker, 2011, 2014; Chen, 2013; Chen & Goh, 2011; A. Cohen & Fass, 2001; Nam, 2015; Nunan, 2004; N. G. Viet, 2013) demonstrates that teachers’ selection of instructional activities and lesson sequencing are the most central concerns in the explorations of their pedagogy. In this light, the investigation into the teachers’ speaking pedagogy in the present study primarily focuses on three major aspects: (1) teachers’ methods and approaches in speaking instruction; (2) selection of instructional activities; and (3) sequencing of speaking lessons. Further detail in relation to these pedagogical aspects will be discussed in Section 3.4.3 and Section 3.4.4 of this chapter.

The second sub-component of PCK, knowledge of learners, also entails multiple features that are influential in teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Shulman (1986) especially emphasises the role of teachers’ understanding of learners’ preconceptions of learning content as directly contributing to the ease or difficulty in acquiring certain contents. Understanding learners’ prior conceptions, as such, enables teachers to appropriately adjust their teaching strategies. Park and Oliver (2007) advocate Shulman’s view in recognising the importance of understanding learners’ preconceptions, but further maintain that teachers’ knowledge of learners’ motivation, interests, needs and difficulties in learning also plays a decisive role in their selection of teaching approaches and strategies. Empirical evidence from various studies (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003) further indicates that learners’ backgrounds, proficiency levels, motivations and needs are among the most powerful factors that affect teachers’ selection of teaching strategies, techniques and activities. This evidence suggests that teachers’ pedagogical decisions in teaching speaking in the present study might also be influenced by their awareness of the learners’ attributes. Exploring teachers’ knowledge of learners is, thus, crucial for establishing a background context for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ cognitions and practices in teaching speaking in a comprehensive manner.

Knowledge of context is also found to encompass multi-level factors that need to be reconceptualised for the present study. In Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model, contextual conditions comprise two categories: knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of context.
of education ends, purposes and values. However, limited explanations or elaborations are provided. In categorising contextual conditions, Borg (2006) suggests two groups of ‘inside’ and ‘around’ the classrooms; while L. Li (2013) classifies these as micro- and macro-level conditions. Accordingly, micro-level or ‘inside the classroom’ factors refer to physical settings (Borg, 2006) and the teacher-learner interactions in the classrooms (L. Li, 2013). Since the classroom context is seen as the place where teachers’ knowledge and beliefs intersect with learners’ behaviour (Baker, 2014) and teachers’ power and identities are actually negotiated and realised, understanding micro-level conditions is crucial for the identification of immediate factors that directly impact teachers’ pedagogical practice (L. Li, 2013; Zheng, 2013a, 2013b).

Concerning the macro-level and ‘around the classroom’ conditions, both Borg (2006) and L. Li (2013) appear to incorporate factors at sociocultural and institutional levels together. Fulmer, Lee, and Tan (2015) and Kozma (2003), however, clearly distinguish between the macro level of sociocultural conditions and the meso level of institutional context. They contend that conditions at each of these levels might impact teachers’ decisions in different ways, thus, they deserve substantial attention separately. Evidence from research in the Vietnamese context (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hiep, 2000, 2005; N. G. Viet, 2013) also shows that each of these levels presents teachers with various factors that shape their practice in different ways. In line with these arguments, investigations into contextual factors in the present study focus on three different levels: the micro level of the classroom, the meso level of institutional factors and the macro level of sociocultural conditions. Examinations of conditions at all three levels are important for identifying the key factors that influence teachers’ cognitions and their classroom practices as well as the interactions between these dimensions.

3.3.3 The adapted model: A summary

As discussed, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) original model of teachers’ knowledge base features several major modifications when adopted for the present study. In particular, the seven knowledge types in Shulman’s original model are restructured into three closely interrelated categories, namely knowledge of curriculum, SMCK, and PCK. While the SMCK and curriculum knowledge retain their roles and conceptualisations as
per Shulman’s original model, PCK undergoes a significant expansion in its coverage. Accordingly, it encompasses four sub-components, comprising pedagogy (including both general and subject-specific pedagogy), SMCK, learners, and contexts within one whole. As explained earlier, however, to ensure substantial attention to the exploration of teachers’ knowledge of SMCK, this knowledge component, although acknowledged as a subset of PCK, is designated and presented as an independent component in this study. In Table 3.1, the adapted model with its three major components and the sub-components for each category is presented.

Table 3.1: An adapted model of Shulman's teachers' knowledge base

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge categories</th>
<th>Explanations and subcomponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of curriculum</td>
<td>Knowledge of the teaching programs, teaching content and materials; indications and contraindications for the program implementation; viewed from lateral and vertical aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject matter content</td>
<td>Including the substantive aspect (the knowledge, understanding, skills and disposition that are to be learned) and syntactic aspect (justifications/explanations for the inclusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical content</td>
<td>Encompassing teachers’ knowledge of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge (PCK)</td>
<td>- pedagogy (general and subject specific pedagogy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This adapted model provides the present study with an overarching framework for exploring and organising different components of the teachers’ knowledge base for speaking instruction. The sub-components identified for each of the three knowledge categories also function as a priori codes for the analysis and coding of teachers’ interviews and observation data in relation to each of the three categories of the teachers’ knowledge base. As previously mentioned, one important goal of the present study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ conceptualisation of speaking competence and their practice in selecting instructional activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. To provide the study with a tool for examining these aspects, Goh and Burns’ (2012) approach for teaching speaking skill is incorporated and discussed in detail in the section that follows.
3.4. Goh and Burns’ holistic approach to speaking pedagogy

Goh and Burns (2012) propose a balanced approach on speaking development, which combines the strengths of existing approaches to speaking pedagogy into a coherent and comprehensive model for developing speaking competence in a systematic manner (Shu & Renandya, 2016). Grounded in the socio-cognitive theoretical perspective, the approach views learning as “not just a cognitive, but also a social process” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 4). Underlying this perspective is a strong interface position (DeKeyser, 1998), which claims that the explicit, declarative knowledge, or knowledge students consciously learn and use through controlled processing needs to be transformed into implicit, procedural knowledge that is available for automatic process (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). It is this implicit form of knowledge that allows learners to function effectively in spontaneous communication. From this perspective, speaking development resides in the conversion of the declarative into procedural knowledge through controlled and communicative activities (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Through these communicative activities, learners are provided with opportunities to practise using the proceduralised knowledge in social, communicative situations, which can be transformed into automatised forms. Helping learners develop easy access to this kind of automatised knowledge, as such, becomes key to effective speaking teaching, given that speaking is a complex skill which requires learners to perform multiple processes simultaneously (Goh & Burns, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2013).

Informed by this perspective on speaking development, this approach, as will be discussed in the next sections, promotes a holistic conception of L2 speaking competence together with principles for selecting and sequencing activities in a speaking lesson. The employment of Goh and Burns’ model, as argued earlier, serves a two-fold purpose. First, their holistic conceptualization of speaking competence provides the study with an analytical framework for examining the teacher participants’ selection of teaching content in speaking instruction. Second, their principles for selecting and sequencing instructional activities in a speaking lesson in accordance with the socio-cognitive perspective are employed in the study as a heuristic tool for data analysis as well as evaluating the teacher participants’ selection of their instructional tasks and activities and the organization and sequencing of their speaking lessons. In the following sections, each of these three aspects will be discussed in detail.
3.4.1 Conceptualisation of L2 speaking competence

Goh and Burns’ approach offers an integrated conception of speaking competence, bringing together various notions of communicative competence including Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman and Palmer (1996), and K. Johnson (1981). The model, as presented in Figure 3.2, encompasses three key components: (1) knowledge of language and discourse; (2) core speaking skills; and (3) communicative strategies. Underpinned by a socio-cognitive perspective, the model defines speaking development as an increasing ability to integrate these three components into production of fluent, accurate, and socially appropriate utterances and discourses (Goh & Burns, 2012). These components, each playing different contributing role to speaking performance, encompass various subcomponents that need to be included as crucial speaking-teaching content.

As depicted in the figure, knowledge of language and discourse functions as the most fundamental component of speaking competence. Goh and Burns (2012) suggest that, in communication, speakers’ linguistic knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation plays a key role in the conceptualisation, formulation and articulation of their utterances. However, to produce coherent stretches of speech that are appropriate to the setting and participants, speakers are also required to draw on their discourse knowledge about spoken genres and its conventional structures, pragmatic knowledge about speech acts, or patterned language structures used to perform communicative functions (A. Cohen, 2017), and sociocultural norms in different societies (Burns, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012). Knowledge of language and discourse, as such, needs to be adequately incorporated in speaking lessons as a crucial component. More importantly, in developing these knowledge components, students need opportunities to apply the newly learned knowledge into speaking production at the discourse or textual levels. In this way, learners’ attention in learning new knowledge is directed to not only its structure and meaning but also its usage (Canale & Swain, 1980).
As well as the knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills are proposed as the second critical component of speaking competence in the model. To effectively function in spontaneous interactions, having good knowledge of language and discourse, though fundamental, is not sufficient. Key to successful communication in real-life contexts, where speakers are required to concurrently attend to both forms and meaning in speech processing, is the ability to activate their underlying knowledge and put it into speech production in a timely and an appropriate manner (Goh & Burns, 2012). K. Johnson (1996) suggests that this simultaneous activation and use of the knowledge can be achieved when specific components of students’ knowledge of language and discourse become automatic. In this sense, speaking development is much dependent on whether students are provided with adequate opportunities for practising and turning their underlying knowledge into automatic skills (Anderson, 1982; Goh & Burns, 2012; K. Johnson, 1996). Goh and Burns (2012) suggest four important skills that need to be included in teaching speaking namely pronunciation, speech function, interaction management, and discourse organisation. They further emphasise that, for teaching effectiveness, the pedagogy that the teachers employ need to concertedly
support the transformation of those declarative knowledge, or the knowledge available only through controlled processing, into procedural knowledge or automatised skills that are available for automatic processing (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; K. Johnson, 1996). As Goh and Burns contend, this transformation could be achieved through the teachers’ utilisation of whole-task and part-skill activities. Further detail in relation to the selection of these activities will be discussed in Section 3.4.2.

The third crucial underlying component of speaking ability depicted in the model is communicative strategies, which encompasses three categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and interactional strategies. Cognitive strategies are concerned with the tactics speakers employ such as paraphrasing, approximation, and formulaic expressions, to mentally manipulate intended messages when encountering problems in formulating ideas due to gaps in their knowledge and ineffective skills. These strategies are vital to speakers, especially those at low proficiency, for improving their chance of effective communication and reducing the risks of conversation breakdowns (Goh & Burns, 2012). Besides, metacognitive strategies are mental operations – useful for planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluation, and thus are essential for regulating learners’ thinking and language during speaking (Goh & Burns, 2012; Vandergrift, 1999). Finally, interactional strategies have its reference to strategic behaviours such as comprehension checks, clarification and repetition requests, which speakers rely on when facing communication problems during interactions (Nakatani, 2006). Employing these strategies will provide learners with opportunities for the ‘negotiation of meaning’ (Long, 1983) through which learners are pushed to notice gaps in their interlanguage and modify their language to produce ‘comprehensible output’ (Swain, 1985, 2000). Such an interaction process contributes to language acquisition (Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) and facilitates speaking development (Goh & Burns, 2012). In this sense, each of the three categories of strategies plays a different contributing role to the development of learners’ ability to overcome gaps in their linguistic knowledge, repair communication breakdowns during interactions and enhance the appropriateness of the discourse they and their interlocutors jointly produce (Goh & Burns, 2012). All three types of communicative strategies, as such, need to be included as important content in speaking lessons.

Based on this conception, speaking instruction should be modelled on three major
components of knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills and communicative strategies. This model provides the present study with an analytical framework for analysing teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK. In particular, the three components together with the fine-grained subcomponents proposed in the model are employed as codes for the analysis and coding of the interview data, which generates insights into the teachers’ conceptualisations of speaking competence, and the specific content they prioritise in teaching speaking. Teachers’ understanding of what constitutes speaking competence is critical for a comprehensive inclusion of important teaching content. This holistic view on speaking competence, however, is not sufficient for effectively facilitating learners’ speaking ability unless it is concertedly supported by an appropriate approach to selecting and sequencing instructional activities for each speaking lesson (Goh & Burns, 2012). The next two sub-sections will discuss the principles in relation to these two pedagogical aspects that underline Goh and Burns’ approach, and further explain how these principles provide the study with a means for evaluating the pedagogical choices made by the teacher participants.

3.4.2 Goh and Burns’ principle for selecting activities

The selection of learning tasks or activities occupies a central position in language pedagogy (Nunan, 1991). Teachers’ selection of tasks directly determines not only teachers’ and learners’ actions in the classrooms but also students’ performance and outcomes in each lesson (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001). Goh and Burns (2012), drawing on Littlewood (2004, 2013), argues that effective speaking development depends upon a combination of part-skill and whole-task practice. These two task types, each with its own nature and functions, enable teachers to incorporate important components of speaking competence in their lessons in a systematic manner. As presented in Table 3.2, part-skill practice draws learners’ attention to the practice of one or two components of speaking competence such as grammar, vocabulary, discourse knowledge, skills or strategies (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992). These activities, with its strong emphasis on language forms, provide learners with opportunities to produce language in a controlled and predictable fashion. DeKeyser (1998) contends that learners can learn a language rule first as declarative knowledge and, through repeated controlled practice, gradually construct an implicit representation of this rule and transform it into procedural knowledge for automatic use. Part-skill
practice activities, therefore, are essential for “fluent and accurate execution of the speaking tasks” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 144) since they facilitate the automatisation of discrete components of knowledge, skills and strategies that serve as stepping stones of speaking ability (Anderson, 1982; Ellis, 2003; Goh & Burns, 2012; K. Johnson, 1996; Nation & Newton, 2009).

Table 3.2: Distinctive features between part-skill and whole-task practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distinctive dimensions</th>
<th>Part-skill</th>
<th>Whole-task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content focus</td>
<td>One / two components</td>
<td>Integrate all components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus/purpose</td>
<td>Forms / language practice</td>
<td>Communicating meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/predictability</td>
<td>Controlled / predictable</td>
<td>Free / creative / less predictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Inauthentic</td>
<td>Authentic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whole-task practice, in contrast, focuses on ‘authentic communication tasks’ (Littlewood, 1992, 2004, 2013) that are aimed at developing learners’ ability to use language for expressing meaning creatively (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992). This type of activities requires integration of a range of knowledge, skills and strategies for the production of coherent and appropriate language, under extensive pressure in spontaneous communicative situations (Burns, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012). In such contexts, learners’ language use is less constrained by teachers’ control and features a low extent of predictability. The combination of part-skill practice with whole-task activities is, therefore, critical to achieving a balanced attention to both forms and meaning, which is vital to the development of speaking competence (Burns, 1998; Bygate, 2001; Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992; Nunan, 2004).

In the present study, the combination of whole-task and part-skill forms of practice is employed as the key principle in the investigation of the participating teachers’ selection of instructional activities. The distinctive features between these two task types also serve as a framework that guides the analysis and categorisation of the instructional activities conducted in the teachers’ observed lessons. Evidence from the current literature, however, suggests that classifying activities based on their characteristics can be messy (Deng & Carless, 2009; Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2004, 2013). In addition, although the aforementioned features proposed by Goh and Burns (2012) and Littlewood (1981, 1992) serve to distinguish whole-task from part-skill types of practice, not all activities neatly fall into either of these task types. As such, establishing
an efficient framework for analysing and categorising each type of the activities observed in the present study is of crucial importance. This analytical framework will be discussed in detail in Section 4.7.3 of the Methodology chapter.

In the next section, principles of sequencing instructional activities in speaking lessons will be discussed.

3.4.3 Goh and Burns’ teaching-speaking cycle for lesson sequencing

Goh and Burns (2012) propose a seven-stage teaching cycle for structuring speaking lessons in a way that develops speaking competence in a systematic and principled manner. The model, underpinned by the socio-cognitive perspective, views speaking development as facilitated by a combination of learners’ active participation in social, collaborative interactions through whole-task practice with substantial attention to forms via controlled part-skill practice. As will be presented below, drawing on principles of task-based learning, the model promotes a primary focus on meaning by optimising opportunities for learners to engage in whole-task activities prior to and after their involvement in language or skills focused activities. Such a sequence also provides meaningful contexts for learners’ attention to language forms. Further incorporated in the sequence is the emphasis on the importance of developing learners’ metacognitive awareness about L2 speaking learning and development promoted in the pre-task and post-task stages. As will be discussed below, this sequence model not only allows teachers to incorporate all aforementioned components of speaking competence but also enables them to draw on a coherent combination of whole-task and part-skill forms of practice for speaking development.

As illustrated in Figure 3.3, the first two steps of the cycle, which function as the pre-task stage, prepare learners for the speaking tasks they are expected to perform in ways that promote language acquisition in a contextualised manner (Ellis, 2003). In these steps, students are guided to plan for their overall speaking development; for instance, by discussing the demands of learning to speak an L2 language, determining their personal goals in learning, and planning specific steps to help them achieve the set objectives (Goh & Burns, 2012). Supporting students in planning for the speaking tasks that they subsequently engage in is also an important part of this pre-task stage. This is
achieved through activities that are aimed at familiarising them with the task outcomes, analysing its requirements, and activating relevant language and content from their background knowledge (Goh & Burns, 2012). Teachers can further support learners with key knowledge of language, skills or strategies necessary for the task performance (Ellis, 2003; Goh & Burns, 2012). These activities are considered crucial preparation steps as they provide learners with the time needed for conceptualising and formulating ideas. These preparation steps, as such, are beneficial to their speaking performance and development since they partly free their attentional resources in speaking and give them the mental space for attending to forms when focusing on meaning (Ortega, 1999). Given these values, the pre-task planning stage plays an important contributing role to the improvement of learners’ fluency, accuracy and complexity in speaking performance (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Goh & Burns, 2012; Ortega, 1999; Skehan, 1998).

Figure 3.3: The teaching-speaking cycle (Goh & Burns, 2012)

Following this, the next three steps, which feature a strong emphasis on the repetition of whole-task practice in conjunction with substantial attention to language forms, constitute an innovative sequence of the during-task stage. As depicted in the cycle, the central focus in this stage is drawn towards the implementation of the whole-task activity. However, unlike most conventional task-based sequences (e.g. Ellis, 2003; J. Willis, 1996) that include single task performance, this cycle allows students to conduct the main speaking task in stage 3 and re-perform the same or similar task in stage 5.
This repetition of the whole-task practice optimises opportunities for learners to engage in and rehearse communicative situations, which is essential for the automaticity in integrating various components of their speaking competence (Goh & Burns, 2012). In this sequence, the first performance serves as students’ prior knowledge or schemata for the second time of conducting the task, which facilitates learning and memory (Rumelhart, 1980). The whole-task repetition, as such, enables learners to continue to build upon the relevant knowledge, content and task routines for achieving better performance, which significantly enhances their confidence and motivations in speaking (Goh & Burns, 2012). In addition, these whole-task activities are supplemented by a form-focused stage (stage 4) where students are given opportunities to notice and analyse the language, skills or strategies they utilise in the preceding stage, and will be consolidated them through controlled, part-skill activities. These activities are considered important for helping students “improve language accuracy as well as enhancing their effective use of skills and strategies.” The repeated task will further enhance their performance (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 160). In this sense, by positioning the language-focused step between the two whole-task performances in the while-task stage, the model allows learners to draw their attention to language forms within a meaningful communicative context.

In the post-task stage, which includes steps 6 and 7, the central focus is directed to reflection and feedback activities. In this stage, learners are encouraged to reflect on their performance, monitor and consolidate and evaluate the new knowledge of language, discourse, skills and strategies they have learned in the preceding stages (Goh & Burns, 2012). Such activities are valued for fostering the development of learners’ metacognitive awareness about L2 learning and the ability to manage their performance, emotions and language development (Goh & Burns, 2012), which are essential to the success of language learning (Wenden, 1998). In the final step, teachers can provide learners with feedback on their performance and further support them by drawing their attention to specific content components that they have not effectively appropriated, and providing them with opportunities to continue practising these elements through part-skill activities. In this way, teachers can also support learners in evaluating how much they have achieved the target outcomes set for the lesson and plan further for future speaking development.
As discussed, Goh and Burns’ (2012) teaching-speaking cycle presents teachers with a coherent structure for adequately incorporating crucial components of speaking competence and logically combining whole-task and part-skill practice in a speaking lesson. In the present study, this seven-stage teaching speaking cycle provides a heuristic tool for analysing the speaking lesson structure designed by the teacher participants. Given that TBLT has been widely introduced in Vietnam as a mandated teaching approach across school levels (Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003), the employment of this task-based teaching model in the study is considered to be relevant and appropriate to the researched context. In addition, although teachers have not been exposed to the seven stages contained in the model, the analysis of their lesson sequence will shed light on prominent ways in which speaking lessons are structured and sequenced, which in turn will provide insights into their cognition about speaking instruction.

3.5 Summary

This chapter presented important theoretical foundations that the present study is built upon in exploring the teachers’ cognition and practices in teaching speaking in a Vietnamese tertiary context. It first discussed how Borg’s (2006) model of TC provides the study with a theoretical lens for illuminating the intricate interactions between teachers’ cognitions, classroom practices and contextual conditions. To further complement Borg’s model with an overarching framework for describing, analysing and organising specific components of the teachers’ knowledge base for teaching speaking, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of seven knowledge categories is incorporated with modifications to better depict the interrelatedness of different knowledge categories in the teachers’ knowledge base. Accordingly, the exploration of the teachers’ knowledge base for speaking instruction in the present study is centred on three interrelated categories of teachers’ knowledge of curriculum, SMCK and PCK. Finally, to provide a frame for investigating specific sub-components of the SMCK and PCK in relation to the teaching of speaking skill, the study integrated Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking. This integration offers the study with a fine-grained framework for investigating the teachers’ conceptualisation of speaking competence, their selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. In the next chapter, the research methodology that the study employs will be presented.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that the present study employs for investigating the research problem. As discussed in the theoretical framework, a central concern of this study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking in relation to three aspects: curriculum, SMCK and PCK. The literature review also highlighted the importance for the study to draw sufficient attention to two key issues: (1) the intricate relationship between the teachers’ cognitions and their classroom practice; and (2) how contextual factors mediate the teachers’ cognitions and practice. To address these issues, a naturalistic, qualitative case-study research design is opted to allow the depiction of the complexity and depth of the teachers’ tacit mental aspects in a contextualised manner. This chapter begins by explaining the suitability of the naturalistic paradigm and the qualitative case-study design (Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). The next three sections provide detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants and the researcher’s role (Section 4.5), data collection instruments (Section 4.6) and data analysis and coding (Section 4.7). Ethical considerations, and issues related to the trustworthiness of the research design are discussed in Sections 4.8 and 4.9, followed by a summary of the chapter (Section 4.10).

4.2 Research paradigm

Research paradigm is defined as a set of beliefs and philosophical assumptions that underpin researchers’ approach to research undertakings (Phakiti & Paultridge, 2015). These underlying philosophical views shape the ways researchers formulate research questions, define their methods of evidence collection (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Phakiti & Paultridge, 2015) and guide how they interpret findings (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Selecting a suitable research paradigm, as Creswell (2013) suggests, requires consideration of three aspects: (1) the nature of reality (ontology); (2) what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified (epistemology); and (3) the role of values in research (axiology). The researchers’ orientations in relation to these concepts, in turn, determine the research methodology or approach they take for specific studies. In general, research methodology has been underpinned by two major traditions of positivism and
naturalism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; K. Richards, 2003). In the present study, the naturalistic paradigm was opted for its suitability to the aim, scope and nature of the study.

The naturalistic paradigm provided the present study with a suitable avenue for exploring speaking teaching as a social phenomenon occurring in its natural settings. In accordance with this paradigm, researchers embrace the idea that reality is “multiple as seen through many views” (Creswell, 2013, p. 21). Naturalistic inquirers’ role is, therefore, to obtain a deep understanding of these realities and report them in the form of themes developed from the data. Epistemologically, naturalistic researchers acknowledge that knowledge is gained through the subjective experiences and evidence provided by the participants. As such, research underpinned by this paradigm needs to be conducted in the field where the participants live and work, which helps provide important contexts for understanding and interpreting their words and worlds (Phakiti & Paultridge, 2015). In addition, the “objective separateness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) or distance between the inquirers and the participants, as supported by the naturalist paradigm, should be minimised. With respect to axiological assumptions, naturalistic inquirers admit “the value laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Stated otherwise, this paradigm accepts the researchers’ presence and roles as the main research tool.

The naturalistic paradigm also presents itself as the most appropriate to the present study, given the insider role of the researcher. As mentioned earlier, the research site is the place where the researcher used to work, thus granting him important insights into the context. In this situation, the naturalistic paradigm allows him to maintain his identity as an insider when engaging in the research site and interacting with the participants. During these processes, his thorough understanding of the setting enables him to draw attention to the most critical issues related to the phenomenon under investigation. Borg (2006) maintains that taking contextual conditions into consideration is crucial to studies designed to explore the complexity of teachers’ cognitions and their intricate relationships with the classroom reality. By adopting the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher could make sense of the evidence gathered from the participants, and interpret and present this within the particular socio-cultural,
institutional and classroom contexts of the study.

As discussed, the naturalistic paradigm gains value for its power in enabling in-depth understanding of meaning in context. The data generated by naturalistic inquirers, as generally suggested, are largely qualitative (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). In alignment with this paradigm, the present study adopted a qualitative case-study design. This design, as will be presented in the next sections, provided an appropriate approach for the inquiry into the teachers’ beliefs, knowledge and practice in teaching speaking.

4.3 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research design was adopted since it is inherently suited to the philosophical assumptions underpinning the present study. As discussed in Section 4.2, underlying the naturalistic perspective is the assumption that reality is complex and multifaceted, which requires the researchers to search for a holistic inquiry approach. Such an approach needs to take into consideration the sociocultural factors of contexts, values, the researchers’ role and how these may influence the study. It also needs to acknowledge that research findings are created and generated from the interactions between the inquirers and the participants (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Taking these factors into account, Gall et al. (2007) suggest that the naturalistic perspective and qualitative design appear to be “virtually synonymous” (p. 31). In the present study, the naturalistic paradigm and qualitative design enable the researcher to obtain a rich contextualised understanding of the research problem from the insider perspective, and also to value the participants’ sociocultural worlds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Qualitative research design has been strongly recommended as the most adequate and appropriate for studies with a focus on TC (Burns, 1996; K. E. Johnson, 2006). Barnard and Burns (2012) contend that teachers’ knowledge and beliefs comprise a “complex nexus of interacting factors” (p. 2). Finding appropriate ways for “making teachers’ implicit theories explicit” has, therefore, become a major challenge for educational research (Marland, 1995, p. 133). Sharing the same view, Borg (2006) describes teachers’ cognitions as “value-laden, tacit, systematic, dynamic, and highly context-
endeavours to understand teachers’ cognitions and practices divorced from the contexts in which they occur, as Borg (2006) argues, “will, inevitably, provide partial, if not flawed, characterisations of teachers and teaching” (p. 275). Given the centrality of teachers’ cognitions in the present study, a qualitative approach potentially offers the most fruitful pathway to gain insights into the teachers’ implicit speaking teaching theories.

The suitability of qualitative design to LTC research has also been supported by ample empirical evidence. In a review of current approaches to researching LTC, Borg (2012) reported that 24 of 26 reviewed studies employed a qualitative design. Among authors of these studies, L. Li and Walsh (2011) suggest that a qualitative approach was the most appropriate way to investigate teachers’ beliefs and their relationships with classroom interactions and professional practices. Werbinska (2011) further emphasises the need to study teachers’ cognitions qualitatively since this affords insightful and contextualised understandings of cognitions with a strong local relevance. Other studies investigating TC (Baker, 2011, 2014; Couper, 2016; L. Li, 2013; L. Li & Walsh, 2011; Maikland, 2001; N. G. Viet, 2013) similarly reported robust results from the qualitative design. This evidence justifies for the suitability of the qualitative design to LTC research, including the present study.

A qualitative design, by nature, also suits the aims and scope of the present research. Compared to a quantitative approach, a qualitative design is commonly criticised for its limited possibility for validity, reliability and generalisation of the findings (Berg, 2005). However, obtaining objective and generalisable knowledge is simply not the aim of the qualitative inquirers. The power of qualitative research, as Snape and Spencer (2003) argue, lies in its ability to provide “an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, by learning about people’s social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (p. 22). The qualitative researchers’ primary concern is to “get to the bottom of what is going on in all aspects of social behaviour within specific contexts” and search for a thick description that depicts “the full complexity and depth of what is going on” (Hollliday, 2015, pp. 50-51). With its descriptive and interpretative power, a qualitative design provided the present study with an appropriate avenue to obtain insights into the teachers’ practice in teaching speaking within its close relationship with their underpinning knowledge and beliefs, all
bounded within the context of a Vietnamese university.

In addition, the qualitative design was especially appropriate to the present study for its capacity to accommodate multiple data collection methods. Multiple data sources have been emphasised as a crucial strategy for the corroboration of research evidence (Erlandson et al., 1993; Merriam, 1998), which enhances trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Barnard and Burns (2012, p. 4) maintain that “a judicious blend of methods of data collection” is critical to inquiries that set out to uncover the complexities of the interactions between teachers’ cognition and classroom actions. As they explain, various data sources allow emerging themes to be triangulated and enable a rich description of the context, which together minimises the researcher’s subjectivity. Given that the researcher’s role as an insider of the research context in the present study might raise concern over the trustworthiness of its findings, the use of multiple data sources afforded by the qualitative design was of ultimate importance for optimising the rigour of the results.

In short, following the tradition of studies in LTC, the present study opted for a qualitative approach. This selection is seen as an alignment to the naturalistic paradigm and the most appropriate design for the study, taking into account its aim, scope and nature. This approach of inquiry is expected to enable the researcher to generate reliable and useful data, and interpret and present the findings in a contextualised and comprehensive manner. In the next section, the case study approach employed for the study is discussed.

4.4 Case study approach

Case study is defined as the exploration of a case within real-life, contemporary bounded systems through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). Through case study, the participants’ voices and perspectives in relation to the phenomenon under investigation are clearly reflected (Gall et al., 2007). Viewed as “the most widely used approach to qualitative inquiry” in education, case study “represents a basic form of qualitative research” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 447). In the present study, a single case study design was adopted, aiming to obtain an insightful understanding of TC about teaching speaking.
The case was a cohort of six EFL teachers in a Vietnamese university. As explained below, this design allowed the researcher to systematically gather information from the teacher participants and generate a thick description of the phenomenon, which enabled a thorough understanding of how these subjects operate and function in their natural setting.

A qualitative case-study design is suitable for research that aims to obtain deep insights into the research problem in a particular context. As Yin (1994) argues, case studies offer a holistic perspective that enables a comprehensive exploration of the research topics. In educational research, this design has been highly valued since it affords the researchers sufficient tools for achieving an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). In this sense, the nature of the present study fits the characteristics of a qualitative case study. As discussed earlier, the present study sets out to uncover, describe and explain Vietnamese EFL university teachers’ beliefs and knowledge as related to teaching speaking and how these interrelate with their classroom practice. The approach opted for the study, therefore, needs to allow the researcher to gain access to this real-life, bounded setting and engage with the participants, to obtain a holistic and insightful understanding of the research topic and the context in which the teachers’ beliefs and practice are formed.

In employing a qualitative case-study design, measures should be carefully planned to address issues that might undermine the rigour of the results. Case studies, as with other qualitative designs, are frequently criticised for limitations linked to their replication and generalisability of their findings. This criticism, as Gay (1987) points out, however, often stems from research that provides insufficient indication of the degree to which the case represents others. While case studies aim at advancing better understandings of a unique case, case-study inquirers should be able to point to ways that findings of the study “can promote better insights into other typical cases” (Exley, 2005, p. 123). In addition, although the lack of possibilities for replication is acknowledged as a downside of case studies, the detailed descriptions generated of the case and the research contexts allow the readers to experience the reported happenings and draw conclusions for themselves (Stake, 2000). In the present study, thick descriptions were identified as an important strategy for addressing these inherent limitations of the case-study design it adopted. In particular, detailed descriptions of the research setting,
participants and the researcher’s role, which are presented in Section 4.5, provided an important contextual background for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ cognitions about speaking instruction.

Strategies were further implemented in the present study to minimise the risk of researchers’ biases, which is commonly referred to as a limitation of case study. As previously mentioned, while qualitative design accepts the researchers’ presence and subjectivity, the researchers’ work still needs to be reliable, rigorous and accountable. To achieve this, the use of multiple methods of data collection has been strongly recommended. Multiple data sources enable the participants’ voices and thoughts to be articulated and triangulated by different sets of evidence, which minimises the researchers’ biases (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Empirical evidence from previous qualitative case-study inquiries (Baker, 2011; Exley, 2005; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) demonstrates that multiple data collection methods significantly enrich the data and enhance the reliability of the findings. In the present study, data were collected from three different sources: interviews, observations, and documents (see Section 4.6 for detail).

In short, this study employed a multi-method, single case-study design to examine the complexities of teachers’ cognitions and practices and the interconnection between these dimensions. The need to obtain a holistic understanding of these multifaceted aspects within their specific setting strongly supported the adoption of the qualitative case-study design. Taking cognisance of the power and inherent limitations of the design, the researcher relied on multiple data sources for triangulation and rich descriptions of the research setting as major measures for minimising the inquirer’s bias and improving the trustworthiness of the findings. In the next two sections (4.5 and 4.6), detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants and data collection instruments are provided.

4.5 Research setting

A rich description of the research context was identified as a crucial strategy for addressing the limitations of the qualitative case-study design that the present study employed. In this section, a detailed description of the research setting is provided. It
includes three sub-sections: research context, participants and the researcher’s role. This description provides the foundation for the researchers’ understanding and interpretation of the perspectives obtained from the participants.

4.5.1 Research context

The present research was undertaken in a university in the Mekong Delta area, south of Vietnam. Established in 1966 as the first public educational institution in the region, the university has now grown to become a multi-disciplinary university. At the time of the study, it was ranked among the top five universities in Vietnam. The university currently offers 93 programs at the undergraduate level, including three English major degrees: English studies (ES), English Interpretation and Translation (EIT), and English Teacher Education (ETE). The selection of this university as the participating institution was, firstly, for convenience since this was the place where the researcher taught for 12 years before commencing his doctoral program. The researcher’s familiarity with the context, therefore, helped minimise typical research obstacles such as gaining access and approvals (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the primary impetus that motivated the researcher to pursue the study was his desire to search for ways to improve the university English major graduates’ inadequate speaking outcomes, which have persisted, despite recent developments of the curriculum. Selecting this university in the research project was appropriate as students’ lack of speaking competence is a problem that confronts many language teachers in Vietnam. Practically speaking, this choice could advance understandings of problems that the researcher encountered in his own working context.

In exploring the teachers’ cognitions about these English program curricula, an understanding of the institutional conditions is essential. Firstly, insights into the university administration are important, as they may provide a foundation for interpreting the teachers’ views of the curricula. At the time data were collected, the three English major programs were administered by two separate schools. The ES and EIT programs were housed within the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SOSSH), while the ETE was managed by the School of Education (SOE). As such, the curricula and syllabi for the first two majors were similar but significantly different from those of the ETE. Each of these schools also had its own group of teachers, most
of whom were graduates from this same university. These teachers, therefore, experienced a transition from the perspective of a student to that of a lecturer in the same context; thus, they were fully aware of the recent curricular changes. In addition, as a rule in these schools, novice teachers need to spend at least two years teaching general non-English major students before being assigned to teach subjects in English-major programs, which explains why none of the teacher participants was a novice.

Historical development of these English curricula is another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration. All the curricula examined in the present study were products of successive curriculum innovations undertaken by the university in an effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In 2007, the university switched from a year-based to credit-based system, aiming to promote learners’ autonomy and develop their self- and life-long learning skills. In accordance with this shift, the curriculum for English major students underwent a significant reduction in both the number of required subjects and classroom hours. In particular, from 254 credits that students were originally supposed to complete in four years in the former year-based system, students were later only required to take a total number of 120 credits. Different from the year-based system where all students progressed through 8 semesters with fixed subjects, allocated schedules and teachers, students are now allowed to choose for themselves the subjects they enroll in each semester, their teachers as well as their own pace of study. According to the university’s guidelines, each credit was equivalent to 15 hours of classroom teaching and 30 hours of self-study. In 2010, modifications were made to these requirements, which resulted in a slight increase in the total credit number to 140 (See Appendix C, pages 302-303 for the sample curriculum). The reduction in the course’s total credit numbers has further led to a notable cutback in the time allocated to skill subjects, including speaking. These historical developments might have impacted on the teachers’ perspectives on the programs, which needs to be taken into consideration in any efforts to understand their beliefs about the curricula.

An understanding of the curricular structure is also essential for interpreting the teachers’ knowledge of the programs. In the new credit-based system, the English major curricula consist of three components of knowledge: (1) general knowledge; (2) discipline-foundation knowledge and (3) discipline-specialised knowledge. In alignment with this structure, all English skill subjects including speaking are designed in the
second block of discipline foundation. In both the ES and EIT programs, speaking skill subjects account for 16 out of the total 140 credits. These 16 credits are divided into four general speaking subjects, namely Language Skills 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A (3 credits each), and two Advanced Listening and Speaking Skills 1 and 2 (2 credits each). Students were required to complete these subjects in the first 6 semesters of the program in a fixed sequence, since the completion of a certain level serves as prerequisite for its subsequent subject. This design features a strong link among the speaking levels in terms of content and expected outcomes. As such, investigations into the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula need to shed light on their understanding of this connection, and how it is realised in their practice to help students achieve the overall desired speaking outcomes.

4.5.2 Research participants

As discussed earlier, the present study aimed to obtain a contextualised, in-depth understanding of Vietnamese EFL teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking and their interrelations with their classroom practices. To this end, the study employed a purposeful maximum variation sampling (Gall et al., 2007). Maximum variation sampling “involves selecting cases that illustrate the range of variation in the phenomena to be studied” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 182). This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to document and present multiple perspectives from different teachers working in the same context with the aim to search for common patterns in these teachers’ practices and beliefs in teaching speaking. Specific steps in sampling selection are presented below.

The participant selection process was implemented in light of the terms outlined in the ethics approval obtained from the University of Wollongong. It started with seeking approvals from the leaders of the participating university and its two English departments. Once permissions were granted, the researcher contacted the university’s Department of Academic Affairs to obtain a list of teachers assigned to teach speaking subjects for the studied semester (February - June, 2015). Based on the provided list, a total number of 10 teachers were identified as potential participants. However, two of the teachers from the SOE were native speakers of English who worked as volunteers, so they were not included. The researcher then contacted the other eight teachers, who
all belonged to the SOSSH, via personal email to invite them to an information session held in the department’s office. Six of the eight teachers agreed to participate after the information session. These teachers’ profiles are presented in Table 4.1.

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the six participants represented a wide range of teaching experience and language proficiency and educational backgrounds. As required by the English Department, teachers must have at least two years of experience teaching non-major English programs before being assigned to teach language skill subjects to English major learners. Hence, all six teacher participants in this study had extensive teaching experience at the time of data collection. Among these, Rose and Thomas were the two most experienced teachers with 21 and 18 years of teaching, respectively, followed by Lee and Jenny with 15 and 10 years respectively. Jessica and Lucy were the two youngest teachers with the fewest years of teaching experience (5 years). With respect to the teachers’ English ability, although no official data were available concerning the teachers’ proficiency levels, all six teachers claimed that they were extremely confident with their speaking ability. In particular, Jessica and Lucy reported that speaking was actually their strongest skill, so they felt very confident in teaching listening and speaking subjects.

These teachers also brought with them a range of different educational levels. Rose had the highest qualification with a doctoral degree. Lee, Jenny and Thomas held masters degrees while Jessica and Lucy had bachelor degrees. While all of these teachers obtained their undergraduate degrees from their current serving universities, there was a wide range of institutions from which they had received their higher degrees. Rose, Lee and Jenny earned their masters and doctoral degrees from various countries, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the UK, respectively, whereas Thomas and obtained his masters degrees from the same university as his undergraduate degrees. Jessica was in her final term in the masters program offered by her serving university. The diversity of the teachers’ background and experience represented a natural cross-selection of teachers at the university, thus, all six teachers who agreed to participate were included in the study.
Table 4.1: The teacher participants' background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study level</td>
<td>Bachelor*</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of study</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject teaching</td>
<td>LS 2A**</td>
<td>LS 2A</td>
<td>LS 2A</td>
<td>LS 3A</td>
<td>LS 1A</td>
<td>LS 1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of students</td>
<td>Mainstream full-time</td>
<td>Mainstream full-time</td>
<td>Mixed (resit &amp; mainstream)</td>
<td>Full-time; Second degree</td>
<td>Full-time; Second degree</td>
<td>Full-time; Second degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* At the time of data collection, Jessica was in her final semester of the master’s program.
** LS 1A: Language Skills level 1A  LS 2A: Language Skills level 2A  LS 3A: Language Skills level 3A

There were also differences among these teachers in terms of the subjects and student cohorts they were teaching. As showed in Table 4.1, three speaking levels were taught by the participating teachers. Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy were all teaching Level 2A, while Rose was teaching Level 3A and Thomas was working on Level 1A. In addition, the student groups that Jessica and Lee taught were mainstream full-time on-campus groups. Students in this cohort were mainly high school graduates who immediately moved to university after passing the entrance examinations. Rose, Lucy and Thomas were, however, full-time second-degree adult learners who had already obtained their first degrees and went back to university to study the bachelor course in ES as a second degree. The group that Jenny taught was a mix of university full-time students and those who had previously taken the subject but failed or chose to redo it to improve their results. It should be noted that all of these groups include a mix of students from both English Studies and English Interpretation and Translation cohorts since the same curriculum and syllabi are used for these two majors. Again, with the subjects and student types that these teachers were teaching, the data show a notable degree of variation among the teacher participants.

These natural variations, although they might affect the teachers’ beliefs and practices, were acceptable and included in the study for two reasons. Firstly, this strongly emphasises the need to investigate the research phenomenon in its natural setting and in a comprehensive manner rather than disregarding the reality of the educational context.
Secondly, according to the university policy, the same curricula, syllabi, textbooks and expected outcomes are applied to all student groups regardless of their backgrounds and learning modes (full-time, part-time, first and second degree). In addition, including teachers of all three speaking levels provides a holistic picture of the program in its current setting. In this sense, the exploration of teachers’ cognition and practice in teaching speaking is not restricted to one specific subject but within its interconnection with the other levels. This converges with a primary goal of the study, which is to obtain an understanding of the teachers’ cognitions about the curriculum with a focus on their perceptions about the links among speaking levels, as well as how these levels are built upon each other in the programs.

In brief, to remain true to the natural conditions of the educational setting and to explore and report on the multiple realities of the research topic, the present research employed a purposeful maximum selection sampling. This selection strategy enabled the researcher to include a group of six teachers with various backgrounds in terms of experience, educational levels and learning institutions. The speaking subjects included in the study were also chosen to enhance the richness of the data, by enabling the exploration of the variability and complexity of the research context.

4.5.3 The researcher’s role

In this study, the researcher had the position as an “insider” (L. Breen, 2007; Unluer, 2012) in the research context. This status served to facilitate the collection of data; however, it also brought about challenges and threats to the values of the collected data that need to be addressed appropriately. These issues are presented in this section together with measures to minimise the potential effects from the researcher’ role on the trustworthiness of the data.

On the one hand, the insider position afforded the researcher favourable conditions for collecting useful data for the study. As previously discussed, the researcher taught in the university where the study was conducted for 12 years before commencing his doctoral degree. During this time, he acted as the Vice-Dean of the school and Vice-Head of the English Department. As such, most of the teacher participants, who were all his colleagues, used to work with him in curriculum innovation projects, program reviews
and textbook selection meetings. Three of the participants (Jessica, Jenny and Lucy) were the researcher’s former students and used to work under his supervision during their first year of working. The researcher also used to teach the same speaking subjects with these teachers.

This shared background with the participants awarded the researcher with numerous advantages which are inaccessible to outsiders. Firstly, it was considerably more convenient for gaining access to the research site, establishing a rapport with the participants, and identifying important field-related issues during the data collection process. In such a context, he found it easier “to speak the same insider language” (Unluer, 2012, p. 5), and made better sense of what the teachers expressed during the interviews. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) further highlight that, as an insider, the researcher possesses a superior understanding of the group’s culture which enables him to interact naturally with the group and its members and create greater relational intimacy with the group. Tedlock (2000) also notes that researchers of their own working context are better informed of the formal and informal power structure and the possible impact this might exert on the quality of the data collected, so they are more likely to be able to control and find measures for minimizing the possible problems.

The insider position, however, also posed challenges to the collection of valid information needed for the study. In the present study, the previous power relationship between the researcher and some of the participants could further hinder open discussion where the teachers might feel uncomfortable expressing their true views and accurately reporting their practices. This issue has been noticed by Canh and Maley (2012), in their study of the Vietnamese context, where showing respect to and saving face for more senior colleagues is essential. In addition, the researcher’s familiarity with the context and the participants might lead to a loss of objectivity due to erroneous assumptions he makes simply based on his prior knowledge and experience (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002, Pitman, 2002). Unluer (2012) further explains that such thorough understanding of the culture might lead to the overlooking of certain routine behaviours. In other words, the researcher, as an insider, might impose his own assumptions about the meanings of events and thus not seek to clarify these from the participants’ perspectives and opinions, which might lead to misinterpretations of information or overlooking important aspects. To optimise the rigour and robustness in
the data collected, measures need to be in place to address these issues properly.

The first strategy taken to address the aforementioned threats was the provision of sufficient information to the participants. This was done prior to and during the information session, when the researcher repeatedly emphasised the primary aim of the study and his current role as a researcher. Similar efforts to address the issue were made during informal gatherings between the researcher and the three less experienced teachers, when they occasionally showed concern about whether they should honestly share their thoughts about the programs during the interviews. Every time this happened, the researcher carefully explained that obtaining a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the teachers’ beliefs and practices was the central goal of the study, so honest opinions were crucial and appreciated. This same message was restated at the beginning of every interview conducted by the researcher. These efforts were observed to effectively reduce these participants’ initial concerns over what was expected from their responses in terms of its truthfulness.

Another approach that helped to minimize the potential impact of the researcher’s insider role in the study was the promotion of a welcoming attitude towards critical comments. From all interviews, the researcher frequently emphasised that the purpose of the study was not to assess teachers’ knowledge and skills. Information provided would be kept confidential and pseudonyms would be used in reporting. He also stressed that, coming from the same background, he understood how much the teachers desired to improve the teaching quality and learning outcomes. As such, open discussions regarding specific problems hindering teaching quality were strongly encouraged. These, however, seemed insufficient to motivate the teachers to always express their true views. In the first two interviews, both the researcher and teachers perceived that the interviewees’ negative comments were directed to the researcher, as he used to be part of the management team. Hesitations were sometimes sensed in the participants’ voices and some teachers even asked, “Do you really want to hear the truth?”, before expressing negative comments. To address the problem, the researcher spent two weeks practising responding to the teachers’ criticisms in an open manner with a more welcoming voice and facial expressions. As observed, this effort created a secure and comfortable atmosphere, which motivated the teachers to express their truthful opinions in a more open manner.
Efforts to minimise the potential effects from the researcher’s relationship with the participants were also made in classroom observations. During these observations, the researcher took the role of a non-participant (Creswell, 2013). However, even though the researcher repeatedly explained this role to the participants, he switched to the participant role in two lessons since the teachers insisted on his involvement. As a solution, the researcher re-explained to the teachers the reason why it was important for him to remain to be a non-participant. In addition, to minimise the obtrusive impact of the researcher’s presence, it was agreed that the researcher would have five minutes in his first meeting with every class to explain his study, and students would be free to ask questions. With the four less experienced teachers, it was also arranged that the first observed class was not recorded, so that the students and the researcher could establish rapport in a comfortable atmosphere. This arrangement was observed to significantly reduce the students’ concern about the researcher’s presence in subsequent lessons.

In short, as collecting useful and valid data is of crucial importance, researchers need to be fully aware of how their roles and relationships with the participants might affect the value of the information collected. In this study, the researcher’s insider status presented him with both advantages and challenges. To encourage the participants’ sharing of genuine opinions, the researcher had to ensure that important information relevant to the participants, especially the research aim and measures taken to protect the confidentiality of their information, was frequently conveyed. In addition, the researcher’s open attitude towards the participants’ potentially negative comments was adequately taken care of during the data collection process. The potential effects that the researcher’s presence might exert on the learners and learning context were also reduced by the researcher’s non-participant role during observations, together with an effort to build friendly relationships with the learners right from the beginning.

4.6 Research instruments

As discussed earlier, the present study adopted a qualitative case-study design. In an effort to optimise the rigour and robustness of the data collection and analysis, the study employed multiple data collection methods as a strategy of triangulation. These comprise interviews, classroom observations and document studies. The importance and
suitability of each of these methods to the study will be discussed in detail in the sub-
sections that follow.

4.6.1 Interviews

Interviews provide a crucial source of data for explicating the teachers’ knowledge, 
beliefs and reported practice in teaching speaking in the present study. Interviews have 
been suggested as being effective for studies that seek to uncover the tacit and 
maintains that by having teachers talk about their practices, the researcher could 
effectively elicit their underlying beliefs. In a similar vein, Canh and Maley (2012, p. 
90) contend that interviews are “an important part of triangulated data collection.” With 
these values, interviews have been observed to be increasingly employed in 
contemporary qualitative research (Talmy, 2010) and the most widely adopted method 
in research into teachers’ beliefs (Borg, 2015a). In the present study, semi-structured 
and stimulated recall interviews were conducted with each teacher participant to gain 
information about the teachers’ cognition about teaching speaking. The interview data 
further functioned to triangulate the evidence obtained from classroom observations.

4.6.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed in the present research as the main strategy 
to elicit verbal accounts of the teachers’ cognitions in relation to three aspects: the 
curriculum, SMCK and PCK (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). They were 
conducted face-to-face with each of the six teachers, following a consistent procedure. 
Each interview began with a restatement of the interview purpose by the researcher. 
Then, the participants made a short introduction about themselves including their 
backgrounds, experience and the programs they were teaching. Following this were the 
main interviewing sections, with questions designed in accordance with the three 
aforementioned knowledge categories. The interviews ended with a brief moment when 
the participants were invited to make further comments.

Semi-structured interviews were highly valued in the present research since they 
enabled the researcher to explore the teachers’ cognitive aspects in a flexible manner. 
This interviewing strategy has been widely used in general educational and LTC
research due to the flexibility it affords to the interviewers and interviewees (Borg, 2015b). Kvale (1996) suggests that, by using open-ended questions, the researcher can lead the interviews in the form of a two-way conversation rather than a formulised exchange that is strongly controlled by the interviewer. This dialectic nature of knowledge construction in these interviews helps establish and refine the rapport between the researcher and the participants, which is fundamental to the quality of the inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 1994). It also minimises the asymmetrical relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees. Maintaining such a dialectic-interviewing manner is especially important in the present study, taking into account the researcher’s insider role in the research context.

The flexibility enabled by semi-structured interviews also provides the researchers with opportunities to probe a more in-depth understanding of the teachers’ tacit mental aspects. In semi-structured interviews, the conversations between the researcher and the participants do not proceed in a predetermined manner, but rather through the interviewer being responsive to the interviewees’ answers. This reflexive interviewing approach allows the researchers to promptly make necessary adjustments in the focus of the questions during the interviewing process. In this way, the researchers may generate more qualitatively elaborate data and possibly make unexpected discoveries (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). In other words, although the researchers base interviews on a pre-determined list of guiding questions in these interviews, they can go beyond these planned questions to respond to the interviewing conditions and to elicit the most appropriate set of data possible.

This interviewing method further provides the participants with an active role, which enables them to provide fully developed responses. During the interactions, the interviewers work as active listeners who comment on the interviewees’ responses and asks for clarifications when necessary. The respondents, therefore, have opportunities to elaborate on their answers. In addition, the use of open-ended questions facilitates the respondents’ freedom and confidence in their answers (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2010). Through these conversational interviews, which are typically conducted in a friendly and open manner, the respondents are encouraged to talk about the topics in any direction they perceive as relevant (Borg, 2006). In this sense, in studies employing semi-structured interviews, the interviewees take on a more active role rather than
simply being passive objects to be studied (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). In the present research, empowering the teachers with such an active role is significant in the context of Vietnam, since it enables them to verbalise their beliefs and knowledge in a more in-depth and holistic manner.

In this study, the interviewees’ active role was facilitated through various strategies. Firstly, all the interviews were conducted in the form of a friendly conversation in which the researcher was responsive to the teachers’ answers rather than rigidly followed the guiding questions. This provided the teachers with sufficient freedom to direct the interview focus to aspects in teaching speaking that they perceived as important. In many cases, the interviewees initiated discussion of issues rather than waiting for the researcher’s prompts. In these cases, the researcher had to respond appropriately to the teachers’ answers to encourage more sharing. At the same time, he needed to find ways to include pre-determined interviewing questions in such a way that it did not interfere with the flow of the teachers’ information. Secondly, by promoting a welcoming attitude towards the teachers’ critical comments, the researcher observed that the participants became more engaged and relaxed in expressing truthful views. As an insider, it was easy for the researcher to show empathy to the teachers’ opinions and probe critical issues from their responses for follow-up questions. That said, to give prominence to the participants’ voices, the researcher consciously refrained from imposing his views or expressing his personal standpoints on the issues. These attempts helped to create a more open atmosphere for discussing and sharing ideas, which elicited more fully expressed opinions from the participants.

Optimal flexibility was also provided to the interviewees in this study to ensure that they felt most comfortable to express their views. The teachers had the right to decide the language they preferred so that they could best convey their opinions. As they suggested, four interviews (with Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy) were conducted in English, whereas interviews with Rose and Thomas were in Vietnamese. The selection of time and venue for the interviews were also made according to the participants’ preferences. From the beginning, the researcher told the teachers that the interviews could be organised wherever and whenever they wished as long as the location was quiet enough for good sound quality when recorded and the interviews would be uninterrupted for at least 45 minutes. As suggested by the teachers, three interviews
(with Jenny, Lucy and Thomas) were conducted in the researcher’s office, whereas the interviews with Rose and Jessica were conducted in the department meeting room. The interviews with Lee were organised in a quiet local coffee shop. As Canh and Maley (2012, p. 97) suggest, the researcher’s flexibility “to respond to opportunities and constraints” within the research setting is critical in the Vietnamese context. Unless the interviews were organised for the interviewees’ greatest convenience, the chance of a participant withdrawing from the study might have increased. Even with this effort, interviews were postponed many times and rescheduling occurred frequently.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews, the study also employed stimulated recall interviews, conducted after classroom observations, with each teacher participant. Table 4.2 below presents an integrated schedule for all semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated-recall interviews with each of the teacher participants. A total of 6 semi-structured interviews, each with one teacher, were conducted prior to observations. Observations were made with 12 lessons (2 lessons for each teacher) and 10 stimulated-recall interviews were conducted within 48 hours of the observations.

Table 4.2 Integrated schedule for interviews, observations and stimulated recall interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Semi-structured Interviews</th>
<th>Classroom observations</th>
<th>Stimulated recall interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Int.1 30.03.2015 09.04.2015</td>
<td>Ob.1 10.04.2015 17.04.2015</td>
<td>Ob.2 04.04.2015 19.04.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 13:30-16:30</td>
<td>L. 1-P.2 07:00-9:40</td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 07:00-9:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 07:00-9:40</td>
<td>L. 2-P.1 07:00-9:40</td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 07:00-9:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Int.3 18.03.2015 15.04.2015</td>
<td>Ob.9 15.04.2015 22.04.2015</td>
<td>Ob.10 16.04.2015 24.04.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 07:00-9:40</td>
<td>L. 2-P.1 13:30-16:00</td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 13:30-16:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Int.4 20.03.2015 03.05.2015</td>
<td>Ob.13 05.05.2015</td>
<td>Ob.14 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 18:30-21:00</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Int.5 22.03.2015 11.05.2015</td>
<td>Ob.15 13.05.2015</td>
<td>Ob.16 13.05.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ob.17 13.05.2015</td>
<td>Ob.18 13.05.2015</td>
<td>20.05.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 18:30-20:45</td>
<td>L. 2-P.1 18:30-20:45</td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 18:30-20:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Int.6 12.04.2015 14.06.2015</td>
<td>Ob.19 14.06.2015</td>
<td>Ob.20 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 1-P.1 13:30-17:00</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 2-P.1 13:30-17:00</td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 13:30-17:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. 2-P.2 13:30-17:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L: Lesson - P: Part
The next sub-section will discuss the values and suitability of stimulated-recall interviews to the present study.

**4.6.1.2 Stimulated recall interviews**

Stimulated recall interviews, which were identified as an important method for exploring the teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking in this study, were conducted for a twofold purpose. Firstly, it provided a means of triangulation (Gass & Mackey, 2000) to the evidence collected from the teachers’ initial interviews and classroom observations. Secondly, it afforded the participants opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice, explain the purpose of lesson activities, and provide justifications for their selection of content and pedagogy. Through these interviews, the teachers’ rationale for practice could be captured, thus providing a fuller understanding of their principles and approaches in speaking teaching.

Stimulated recall interviews provide a broad avenue for exploring the teachers’ unobservable cognitive processes in teaching (Calderhead, 1981). It involves the verbalisation of cognition retrospectively rather than concurrently (Ryan & Gass, 2012). This method has been widely used to elicit qualitative data relevant to thought processes during the performance of an action or participation in an event. In these introspective verbal reports, the participants receive a stimulus (a video recorded event) and recount of the event at the time it occurred. In educational studies, this helps uncover cognitive aspects that underlie the teachers’ decisions and actions. The value of stimulated recall interviews lies in the fact that, since teachers cannot concurrently articulate what they think while teaching, retrospective accounts are the best ways to relive teachers’ thinking and behaviours (Borg, 2006; N. G. Viet, 2013). This approach was given merit in the present study since it allowed the teachers to look back at their lessons and verbalise the underlying beliefs that controlled their practice.

Empirical evidence has further demonstrated that stimulated recall interviews are powerful in examining different aspects of teachers’ cognitions. For instance, Borg (2006), in a review of 10 studies using stimulated recall interview, reports a wide range of research focuses of these studies including teachers’ decision making processes (Golombek, 1998; K. E. Johnson, 1994), the connection between teachers’ plans and
practices (Woods, 1996), and evidence of CLT in classroom practices (Mangubhai et al., 2004). More recently, Baker (2011, 2014) employed this method alongside observations to explore teachers’ cognitions about pronunciation teaching. In the Vietnamese context, N. G. Viet (2013) and Canh and Maley (2012) report that these retrospective verbal accounts provided a useful approach for examining hidden aspects of teachers’ classroom practices that observations could not capture.

In employing stimulated recall interviews in studying TC, however, sufficient attention needs to be paid to the potential threats to the validity of the data it produces. As Borg (2006) comments, the use of this method is “not unproblematic” (p. 211). One critical issue in using stimulated recall is the time elapses between the original activities and the interviews. Gass and Mackey (2000) suggest that, the greater the delay, the greater the potential for memory lapses. Therefore, the time intervening between mental operations and reports “should be minimised as much as possible” (J. D. Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p. 55). As Borg (2006) explains, however, the problem of time elapsing is a concern mainly for studies designed to capture the teachers’ interactive decision making. In case of the present research, where stimulated recall is used “with a more general purpose of facilitating the discussion and analysis of teachers’ actions and rationales” (Borg, 2006, p. 211), this concern appears to be of minimal relevance.

One major threat to the data validity that remained valid to the present study was associated with ‘post-hoc realisations’ (Borg, 2006, p. 211). Ryan and Gass (2012) observe that comments from these verbal reports often slide into what teachers are thinking about when watching the video rather than what they were thinking during the original actions. Yinger (1986) also warns that data obtained from these interviews may be simply fabricated. In other words, instead of articulating real thoughts, teachers might verbalise beliefs about what they may have thought at the time of the events (Borg, 2006; Yinger, 1986). To improve the validity of the data collected from the stimulated recall, Ryan and Gass (2012) suggest that the researchers need to especially pay attention to the way they pose the questions, to ensure that they can probe the teachers’ real thoughts rather than reflection-on-action (Yinger, 1986).

Both issues of post-hoc realisation and time lapse were properly addressed in the present study. Firstly, to avoid misleading the participants to reflect on their current
thoughts while watching the videos, questions were designed based on Gass and Mackey’s (2000) guidelines for designing interview questions. Typical examples of these questions included: “What were you thinking at this point? Here you started to organise the speaking activity, what did you have in mind about the purpose of this activity? Here you began to introduce the speaking activity to the students, could you tell me at that time what you had in mind about the goal of this activity?” In addition, although the problem of time lapse does not apply to the context of this study, efforts to limit the intervening duration were made whenever possible. However, due to the teachers’ busy schedules and the fact that each speaking unit was typically designed into two lessons, interviews were conducted upon the completion of the whole unit rather than of each lesson. Although this arrangement sometimes stretched the intervening time between observations and interviews, it enabled the researcher and the teachers to examine the lessons in a more coherent manner in terms of its content and pedagogy.

Stimulated recall interviews were conducted with a clear focus and a consistent procedure in the present study. In total, 10 interviews were conducted (two each for Jessica, Lucy, Jenny and Lee, and one each for Thomas and Rose). The interviews mainly focused on three aspects: (1) general sequencing of the teachers’ speaking lessons; (2) classroom practice that was divergent from the teachers’ reported practice; and (3) lesson stages where objectives were not clearly stated. To prepare for the interviews, the researcher watched the recorded video lessons again and reread his field notes to identify episodes and points to focus on during the interviews. As for interview procedures, each interview began with the teachers’ summary of the lesson content and structure and any general comments they wished to make. Then, the researcher played the video so that the teachers could watch and give comments on whatever they felt relevant. Along the way, the researcher drew the participants’ attention to the lesson episodes that he pre-identified as interviewing focus. Each interview ended with a short moment when the teachers were invited to make any further comments or reflection on the lessons. In this manner, the teachers were encouraged to initiate comments on any aspects of their lessons while the researcher could still facilitate the discussion by orienting the teachers’ attention to the focused episodes (see Appendix B for a sample transcription of the stimulated recall data).
4.6.2 Observations

In combination with the interviews, observations were employed in this study as the second major data source. Observations are defined as the act of noting the researched phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer (Creswell, 2013). This has become a key tool for data collection in qualitative studies, and has a central role to play in TC research since it provides “a concrete descriptive basis in relation to what teachers know, think and believe” (Borg, 2006, p. 231). It allows the inquirers to capture live data in real-life settings (Gall et al., 2007), which enables the exploration of various cognitive aspects that might be missing from the interviews (L. Cohen et al., 2000). In this study, observation data were treated as a critical aspect of TC, in the form of “teachers’ professional actions” (Borg, 2006, p. 229) or enacted cognition in actual practice. Recorded videos from observations also functioned as stimuli for the stimulated recall interviews.

The inclusion of classroom evidence was critical to the exploration of TC about teaching speaking in the present study. As Borg (2006) argues, studies on TC in isolation from practices and the context in which they occur will inevitably “provide partial, if not flawed, characterisations of teachers and teaching” (p. 275). Although it was evident that teachers’ practices were underpinned by their cognitions, the relationship between these aspects was neither linear nor unidirectional but rather directional and symbiotic (L. Li & Walsh, 2011). Numerous empirical studies have reported a lack of convergence between teachers’ reported and actual practices as a result of contextual mediation. In exploring the teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking, it is essential for this study to take into consideration not only how speaking is actually taught but also how the sociocultural, institutional and classroom conditions impact on this practice and shape the teachers’ beliefs. By including the classroom data and paying due attention to the contextual mediation, the researcher could minimise the chance of the aforementioned ‘flawed characterisations’ and avoid a simplistic or superficial interpretation of the intricate links (Borg, 2006).

In the present study, observations were consistently conducted over two complete units for each teacher. As previously mentioned, each speaking unit in the program typically comprised two lessons. To optimise the robustness of the data but minimise the
interference on the teachers’ classroom plans, the researcher asked to conduct observations of lessons that met the following two conditions: (1) the units provided a typical representation of their teaching practice; and (2) observations could be conducted in a successive manner with all lessons designed for the whole selected unit. Four of the teachers (Jessica, Lucy, Thomas and Jenny) selected two consecutive units in the programs, while Lee and Rose chose two units with a two-week interval between the two. For Jessica, Jenny, Lee, and Lucy, each observed unit was designed into two lessons, taught on two separate days in a week. Each lesson lasted for three fifty-minute periods, which totaled 12 fifty-minute observed periods for each of these four teachers. Thomas and Rose, however, completed each unit within one teaching session, which lasted for four fifty-minute periods. For these two teachers, as such, the total observed hours were eight fifty-minute periods. Altogether, the observation data included 64 fifty-minute periods.

Despite the value that observations brought to the study, measures needed to be taken to maximise the validity of the data collected. Of most critical concern in using observations has been the degree of authenticity of the observed lessons. Borg (2006) argues that, although observations are typically made with naturally occurring teaching, this should not “imply that those being observed have not altered their behaviours in any way in response to the observers’ presence” (Borg, 2006, p. 236). The presence of the researcher and the video recording of the lessons, by nature, are intrusive to the normal teaching and learning context. This intrusive nature of the observer, however, could be minimised by careful considerations of the observer’s role and the extent of information disclosed to the participants.

These aspects were both properly addressed to optimise the authenticity of the observed data in the present study. When conducting all observations, the researcher took the role of a non-participant who sat in the back of the class making notes and restricted interactions with the teachers and students. A non-participant role is a preferred role for researchers in most LTC studies since it limits their interference in the natural occurrence of the classroom events (Borg, 2006). Maintaining this role, however, was challenging since the teachers sometimes called for the observer’s participation in the lessons. The researcher’s response to these situations, as Borg (2006) observes, is not simply governed by a determination not to participate, since it involved ethical...
concerns. When this happened in this study, the researcher agreed to assist as an effort to save the teachers’ face, but quickly found ways to withdraw from the participant role so that the classrooms could quickly resume their normal routine. This was also followed by re-explaining to the teachers after the lessons about the importance for the researcher to remain in his non-participation role.

The researcher’s intrusive impact was also addressed by the maximisation of information disclosure to the participants. In alignment with the ethics approval, necessary information was provided to all the teachers verbally in the information session and via the consent form and the information sheets for the participants. The teachers were, therefore, fully aware of the researcher’s focus in the observations. However, a few teachers shared their concern that the researcher’s presence and the video recording might affect the learners’ behaviours, especially in the first meetings with the classes. To address this, an agreement was made that the first meeting with each class would not be recorded and the researcher would have five minutes to talk about his study where the students had opportunities to ask questions. In this way, all students were well informed about the aims of the study and how important it was for the videos to capture their most normal classroom atmosphere and behaviours.

4.6.3 Documents

Document analysis has been observed to be common as a means of triangulation in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). As rich sources of data of educational programs, examinations of these social facts (Atkinson & Coffrey, 1997) could help elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the present study, although document analysis did not shed direct light on the teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking, it provided important contextual background for understanding and interpreting their beliefs and practice. In total, three types of documents were examined: (1) two English major curricula (2) syllabi of the six speaking levels; and (3) the prescribed textbooks for the speaking subjects (See Appendix C for samples of these documents).

Analyses of these documents served a twofold purpose in the present study. Firstly, they provided important corroboration of information obtained from the teachers’ interviews
and observations. Findings from these analyses established a foundation for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs of the curriculum, SMCK and PCK in relation to speaking instruction. The provision of background information of the research context is crucial for studies that employ the naturalistic qualitative design, since it allows the findings to be interpreted in a contextualised manner. Secondly, by investigating the extent to which these teachers complied with or departed from curricula, syllabi and prescribed textbooks, their speaking teaching orientations with respect to their content and pedagogy would also be illuminated.

In brief, this study employed interviews, observations and documents as the three main sources of data in the investigations of the teachers’ cognitions and practices in teaching speaking. This use of multiple methods for data collection was to obtain rich, triangulated information, which is essential for enhancing the trustworthiness of the study findings. As presented earlier, this strategy was crucial to studies designed to explore the multifaceted tacit aspects of TC and their complex interrelationships with classroom practices. In the section that follows, issues related to data analysis are discussed.

4.7 Data analysis

The present study draws on three primary data sources, interviews, observations and documents, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers’ cognitions as reflected via their reported and actual practices. Altogether, the analysed data in the research consisted of approximately four hours of semi-structured interviews, 6.5 hours of stimulated recalled interviews, and 64 fifty-minute periods of classroom observations. Document analyses encompassed two curricula (ES and EIT programs), six speaking syllabi, and one textbook series. The use of the data in relation to each research question and the general focus in the analysis of each data set are presented in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3: Data sources for each research question and analysis focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Focuses of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do the teachers interpret the curricular specifications concerning speaking teaching content, organisation and pedagogy?</td>
<td>Document analysis; Initial interviews; Stimulated recall interviews</td>
<td>Teachers’ interpretations of curricular contents, organisations, pedagogy and teaching indications and contra-indications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What cognitions do the teachers have regarding speaking skill subject matter content and pedagogy?</td>
<td>Initial interviews; Stimulated recall interviews; Classroom observations</td>
<td>Teachers’ cognition of speaking subject matter content, teaching methods, selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons; teachers’ knowledge of learners and contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How are these cognitions manifested in the teachers’ classroom practice in teaching speaking?</td>
<td>Classroom observations; Stimulated recall interviews</td>
<td>Teachers’ selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analysis process began with translating and transcribing the interviews and classroom observations. During the data collection period, the researcher managed to complete transcribing the initial semi-structured interviews, since these provided important bases for classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews. This also allowed him to cross check with the interviewees on the accuracy of the information and to ask for clarifications when necessary. Classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews, however, were translated and transcribed after the data collection was completed. This work was done by the researcher, who is a native speaker of Vietnamese and a qualified teacher of English. As four of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the researcher translated them into English and had the translations sent back to the interviewees for member checking before the analysis took place. The researcher also provided a randomly selected sample of the translations (using pseudonyms) to a peer Vietnamese doctoral student in the faculty to double-check the accuracy of ideas in the translated version.

In general, the data analysis process in the present study conformed to three principles. Firstly, it followed a thematic approach that has been commonly employed for qualitative data coding (Creswell, 2013). Thematic coding is defined as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting categories or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In accordance with the approach, the researcher underwent different stages in the process: becoming familiarised with the data, coding the data based on a
priori codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing and refining themes, and reporting the results (Creswell, 2013). Such analysis practice reflects an iterative rather than linear process, since the researcher frequently went backward and forward among these steps. Numerous empirical studies (Exley, 2005; Nam, 2015; Shi, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) have demonstrated that a thematic approach to data analysis enables the researchers to achieve robust findings which best represent the participants’ voices.

Secondly, this data analysis process reflected both a deductive and an inductive approach (Dowling, 1998; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). In particular, the data coding and theme development processes were guided by pre-existing categories or ‘a priori codes’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). This use of pre-conceived codes, as suggested by the existing literature, presented both benefits and risks. Constas (1992), for example, argues that their use enables the researchers to organise themes and codes in a systematic manner. However, Creswell (2013) and Crabtree and Miller (1992), although supporting their use, caution that relying on a priori codes might restrict the analysis to the pre-set codes rather than reveal emergent ones that reflect the participants’ perspectives. To address the issue, the data analysis in the present study, while guided by pre-existing codes, combined this analysis with an inductive approach, which allowed for the addition of codes as generated from the collected data (Creswell, 2013). This approach enabled the researcher, along with his growing understanding of the data over the coding process, to continuously refine the codes in a way that was most representative of the data.

Thirdly, the coding and theme developing process in the study was informed by a prior codes that were established on the theoretical bases of Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge base and Goh and Burns’ (2012) approach to teaching speaking. These pre-existing categories were used as orienting frameworks to organise themes and codes, which were presented in three different layers in Figure 4.1. In the first layer, drawing on Shulman (1986, 1987), teachers’ cognitions were organised into three broad knowledge categories, comprising curricular knowledge, SMCK and PCK. Each of these categories are sub-divided into different groups in layer 2. Drawing on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) notion of curriculum, the curricular knowledge was analysed through four sub-categories of TC: curricular content, content organisation, pedagogical content, and instructional indications and contra-indications. Similarly, SMCK was examined through Goh and Burns’ (2012) conception of speaking competence, which comprises
knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and communicative strategies. The analysis of the PCK was based on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) aforementioned model of pedagogic knowledge encompassing knowledge of learners, contexts and pedagogy, each with further elaborations (See Sections 3.3 and 3.4 for a detailed discussion of these sub-components).

Layer 1

Layer 2

Layer 3

Figure 4. 1: Organising structure of codes and themes

Layers 3 offered more fine-grained analysis to provide detailed description of each of the categories in Layer 2. The inclusion of categories in layer 3 in the coding process allows an in-depth investigation into the specific components of the teachers’ cognitions of SMCK and PCK. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, based on Goh and Burns’ model, each of the three components of SMCK in layer 2 are further divided into multiple sub-components in layer 3. Similarly, as discussed in the theoretical framework, to allow a close investigation into contextual factors at various levels impacting on teaching practice, the teachers’ knowledge of contexts are coded into micro, meso and macro levels, which were established on the basis of the review of current theoretical and
empirical evidence (e.g. Barnard & Viet, 2010; Fulmer et al., 2015; GAtbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Kozma, 2003; D. F. Li, 1998; L. Li, 2013; L. Li & Walsh, 2011; Littlewood, 2013; Nunan, 2003). In a similar vein, the organisation of codes housed under the teachers’ knowledge of learners was guided by, but not restricted to, four pre-determined groups: learners’ conceptions and misconceptions in learning, affective factors, proficiency levels, and learners’ background (See Section 3.3.2 for the empirical and theoretical bases for these codes). Finally, as earlier discussed in the theoretical framework, of central focus in the analysis and coding of the observation data were the two aspects of teachers’ selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. This coding process, which was generally guided by Goh and Burns’ (2012) approach to teaching speaking, is described in detail in Sections 4.7.2 and 4.7.3 of this chapter.

4.7.1 Coding of interview data

The coding of interview data was conducted based on a priori codes presented in the first three layers of the organising structure presented in Figure 4.1. This coding process included two major steps. In step 1, after repeatedly reading the transcribed interviews, the researcher coded the raw data into the three layer-one categories, namely curricular knowledge, SMCK and PCK. In step two, the researcher closely examined the data in each of these categories and further coded it into its sub-groups based on the list of pre-existing layer-two codes. In this way, the coded data in relation to the teachers’ cognitions of curricular knowledge, which were completed in this second layer, could be categorised into one of the four groups: curricular content, content organisation, pedagogical content, and instructional indications and contraindications. The data housed under SMCK and PCK, however, were further coded into sub-components at the second and third layers. For instance, the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK could be assigned to such codes as: SMCK (layer 1) - linguistic knowledge (layer 2) - vocabulary (layer 3) or SMCK (layer 1) - discourse knowledge (layer 2) - pragmatics (layer 3). Similarly, the teachers’ cognitions about PCK were coded as PCK (layer 1) - knowledge of learners (layer 2) - proficiency levels (layer 3) or PCK (layer 1) - knowledge of pedagogy (layer 2) - sequencing of lessons (layer 3). The coding process of the SMCK and PCK ended in layer 3, except for the two sub-categories of teachers’ selection of activities and sequencing of lessons, for which the coding continued to the fourth layer.
(see Section 4.7.3 below). An example of the coded interview data is presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: An example of the coded interview data in layers 1, 2 and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ interviews</th>
<th>Interview data</th>
<th>Layer 1 Coding</th>
<th>Layer 2 Coding</th>
<th>Layer 3 Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica – Int. 1</td>
<td>Very various I have to say because many students come from the countryside where they their access to the language for example cable TV or the Internet is very limited while some of them come from cities and they have the whole variety of input for them to practice [...]</td>
<td>PCK</td>
<td>Knowledge of learners</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[...] like in my class now one girl in her 2nd semester of the 1st year and she score 38/40 for the IELTS listening test for the 1st time I give the test; very outstanding compared to other students who just scored 5/40. And the background knowledge are very different, very various, also the motivation because many of them think they don’t know why they take this course and many thing is too easy for the level, it’s really various.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee – Stimulated interview</td>
<td>[...] I just want to brainstorm some ideas related to travel so that students can have some ideas about what they are going to talk or what they are going to include in their speaking. I remember that normally at the end of the listening part and I will ask them to check some structures, like focus on in this part focus on apologising or complaining.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To maximise the trustworthiness of the coding results, member-checking (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016) and intra-coder (Miles & Huberman, 1994) techniques were adopted. Accordingly, after completing the coding of one interview (Jessica’s), the researcher sent the coded interview back to the interviewee for member checking. After two weeks, the researcher coded same lesson again, following the same procedure. When the researcher received the interviewee’s comments, he compared the three documents together: the researcher’s first and second coded versions, and the teacher’s returned coded interview with comments. Remarks from the teachers showed that the coding accurately reflected the interviewee’s intended meaning in the interview.
Comparison between the two versions coded by the researcher, however, showed a difference in rate of 11%. Analyses of these differences revealed that mismatches occurred with codes in the third layer with content in which the teacher discussed several categories together. For example, when Jessica explained how she structured a speaking lesson, she also discussed the types of activities and the content she selected. Inconsistencies occurred when the researcher assigned one code to the content which was different for each time. It was, therefore, decided that, in these cases, double or multi-codes be employed, which means that these sections would be attached to different codes they were relevant to. On this basis, the researcher coded the rest of the interview data.

4.7.2 Coding of observation data

Following the thematic coding process earlier described in the coding of interview data, the researcher followed multiple stages in the coding of classroom observation data. Firstly, once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher repeatedly read each transcribed lesson in its entirety to familiarise himself with and make sense of the data. He also referred to the field notes to check and better understand lesson stages where the videos did not provide a clear depiction. One lesson was then randomly selected for sample coding, following two specific steps. In step one, the researcher identified activities and episodes in the lesson. Following Gibbons (2006) and Lemke (1990), the researcher marked episodes based on three features: (1) participatory structures; (2) physical seating arrangements; and (3) its purposes or functions. Ongoing coding evidence, however, showed that, in most cases, seating arrangements mostly remained the same for the teachers’ whole lessons. As such, only two features of participatory structures and purposes were used for marking the beginning and closing of episodes in the present study. Activities, however, were defined as independent that might include one or many episodes.

In step two, the activities identified were classified into three categories based on their functions or purposes: (1) non-speaking oriented activities; (2) non-production speaking-oriented activities; and (3) speaking production activities (see Appendix D for detailed explanations and examples of activities in these groups). Group one includes procedural activities such as homework checking, leading in and lesson wrapping. The
second group refers to speaking-oriented activities teachers organise to activate learners’ background knowledge, present input, or guide students to notice, analyse and practise the input to prepare for speaking production activities. The final group includes all activities in which students participate in speaking production activities, either as part-skill or whole-task practice (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992). Along with the categorisation of the activities, the sources of the activities (e.g. textbooks, supplemented or self-designed) were also examined. This examination illuminates the teachers’ patterns in using the prescribed material. An example of the coding in this step is provided in Table 4.5. The analyses in this step helped to mark the boundaries among activities and lesson stages, which was important for the coding of lesson stages and sequencing. This coding the lesson structures and sequencing, as explained earlier, was heuristically informed by Goh and Burns’ seven-stage speaking lesson model.

Table 4.5: Example of observation data coding in steps 1 and 2 (Lee's lesson - Travel)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Teacher-student exchange</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>P/F</th>
<th>Act. Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Ok, now I would like you to work with a group of 4 people. What are you going to do now? With the information here about VLJs, I would like you to work with your group. I would like you to sit together and summarise the speech you just listened to and also express your ideas about VLJs. &lt;The teacher also distributed a handout with some guiding questions for students to work on in planning for their summary&gt;. Now when discussing in your groups, please have a look at the questions in the paper I just gave you. You will have 10 minutes to prepare.</td>
<td>T-WC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students worked in groups of 4 to prepare for the talk shows.</td>
<td>GR</td>
<td>Task rehearsal</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ok finished? Now I want you to come up here and present your ideas. Remember that you should play the role of the representatives from the Aviation Company who came to talk to audience about their new product of VLJs.</td>
<td>T-WC</td>
<td>Check progress; prepare</td>
<td>Speaking production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Five pairs of students presented their ideas in front of the whole class.</td>
<td>GR-WC</td>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ok good. As you see, groups 235 did a great job right? They summarised the information but also added their opinions. I like group 3 most because they made a show right? Very active and interesting […]</td>
<td>T-WC</td>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this, in the third step, each activity in the non-production speaking-oriented and speaking-production categories was analysed in detail, focusing on its content focus.
and characteristics. As earlier explained, non-production speaking-oriented activities were mainly designed to provide learners with necessary input of language, skills or strategies that students need for approaching subsequent speaking tasks. The focus in analysing these activities was centred on the content that the teachers aimed to provide through the activities. In coding this content focus, Goh and Burns’ (2012) conceptualisation of communicative competence (see Figure 4.1) served as a frame for organising the codes. The results of these analyses provided important triangulation for the interview data in relation to the teachers’ content priorities in teaching speaking. Together, these data shed light on the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK. Table 4.6 provides an example of a category-two activity coded in step 3.

Table 4.6: An example of step-3 coding of group-2 activities (Lee's lesson 1 - Travel)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Teacher-student exchanges</th>
<th>Purposes/Functions</th>
<th>Content focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee-L.1-A.5</td>
<td>T Ok. This is one situation related to problems you might face at the airport. And in this situation if you listen to the way people say sorry and yes so how did she say? Yes and the man, he wants to complain about the situation, what did he say?</td>
<td>Drawing students’ attention to target structures; Presenting and explaining functions of the expressions</td>
<td>Knowledge of language - Grammar/Functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S &lt;Excuse me&gt;; &lt;Help me&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T Yeah, “Excuse me”. “Please help me”. These are some expressions you can use. Now can you look at the back. Here are some expressions and take a look this is the way you complain, the way you apologise. Here what do we say when someone complains? “I’m terribly sorry”. “I’d like to apologise for that”. Right? There are a few structures here you can use right?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding of speaking-production activities focused on two dimensions of task content and characteristics that distinguish between part-skill and whole-task practice. Accordingly, the analysis of the content dimension primarily focused on whether the activity directed students’ attention to a restricted number (one or two) of discrete components of communicative competence or allowed them to employ all available resources in a comprehensive manner for task completion. With respect to the characteristic dimension, the analysis focused on three specific features: task focus/purpose, control/predictability, and authenticity. The analysis of these three features

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was informed by the analytical framework that will be discussed in the section that follows.

4.7.3 The analytical framework for task characteristics

The analysis of speaking-production activities centred, firstly, around task focus/purpose. In categorising speaking tasks, Goh and Burns distinguish two types of activities: part-skill activities with their strong emphasis on the practice of language forms; and whole-task practice, with its primary focus on communicating meaning. This definition of focus or purpose resembles other approaches to classifying task purposes such as Ellis’ (2003) distinction between ‘tasks’ and ‘exercises’ and Estaire and Zanon’s (1994) categorisation of ‘enabling tasks’ and ‘communicative tasks’. Other theorists (e.g. Carless, 2004; Morris et al., 1996; Nunan, 2004), however, argue that this binary distinction is not sufficient for categorising all activities that teachers implement in classroom practice. Instead, they suggest a third category of ‘communicative activities’ (Nunan, 2004), or ‘contextualised practice activities’ (Carless, 2004; Morris et al., 1996), as a transition commutative activity between ‘tasks’ and ‘exercises’ (Nunan, 2004) where students practise specific language items while their main focus is placed upon expressing meaning (Nunan, 2004). These activities vary according to the degree of their communicativeness, and have formed the basis for Littlewood’s (2004, 2013) communicative continuum of communicative activities from those with a focus on forms to those focusing on meaning. As presented in Figure 4.2, different activities are placed along a continuum, differing based on their communicative orientation: moving from an exclusive focus on forms to meaning-based communication. These activities comprise non-communicative learning, pre-communicative language practice, communicative language practice, structured communication, and authentic communication.
Focus on forms

Non-communicative learning
Focus on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution, exercises, ‘discovery’ and awareness-raising activities

Pre-Communicative language practice
Practicing language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. ‘question and answer’ practice

Communicative language practice
Practicing pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap activities or ‘personalised’ questions

Structured communication
Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving

Authentic Communication
Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion

Focus on meaning

Figure 4.2: The continuum from focus on forms to focus on meaning (Littlewood, 2004, 2013)

Littlewood’s continuum of communicative activities was broadly adopted in various studies (Brandl, 2008; Deng & Carless, 2009; Ma, 2008), providing a robust tool for analysing classroom activities (Deng & Carless, 2009). In the present study, these categories are adopted and linked to Goh and Burns’ part-skill and whole-task activities to provide a fine-grained analysis of the focus/purpose of the teachers’ selected tasks. Accordingly, as illustrated in Table 4.7, the first three categories on the left end of the continuum, with their strong focus on the practice of pre-taught language, may be usefully categorised under part-skill practice activities while the remaining two activities have a strong focus on meaning and thus may be associated with whole-task practice.

Table 4.7: Task characteristics: Categories and criteria for classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus/Purpose</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Part-skill practice</th>
<th>Whole-task practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-communicative learning</td>
<td>Pre-communicative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/Predictability</td>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled/predictable Situational grammar exercise</td>
<td>Focused (Ex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-authentic</td>
<td>Interational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-personalised</td>
<td>Personalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goh and Burns also distinguish part-skill from whole-task practice according to the control/predictability nature of the activities. In part-skill practice, students’ language and meaning are highly controlled and predictable; whereas, through whole-task
practice, students are encouraged to produce language in a free and less predictable manner. A similar differentiation can be discerned in Ellis’ (2003) categorisation of ‘situational grammar exercise’ and ‘unfocused tasks’. The consideration underlying this categorisation concerns the predictability of the language to be used in the activities. Accordingly, situational grammar exercise refers to contextualised practice of specific linguistic feature drawing on pre-taught language that serves to reproduce the language and message prescribed to them (Ellis, 2003, p. 141). The language structures assumed by ‘unfocused tasks’, however, are not readily predictable. Furthermore, Ellis’s categorisation also includes ‘focused tasks’ or activities designed to induce learners to process or produce some particular linguistic features. Such tasks are valued since they can “stimulate communicative language use” and “target the use of a particular, predetermined target feature” (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Focused tasks are further divided into implicit and explicit focused tasks, as determined based on whether students’ attention was indirectly or directly drawn to a particular linguistic feature for task completion. In summary, an activity could be categorised as: (1) situational grammar exercise; (2) focused (explicit); (3) focused (implicit); and (4) unfocused. Thus, part-skill practice may be regarded as including situational grammar exercise and explicit focused tasks where language produced is more predictable. Whole-task practice involves more implicit focused and unfocused tasks that promote a free and less predictable use of language. In this study, these categories and its characteristics provide a frame for examining the extent of control/predictability of the speaking-production activities that the teachers employed.

Finally, part-skill practice and whole-practice activities can be examined by task authenticity. Task authenticity refers to the extent to which the task resembles a real-world activity (Ellis, 2003). Real-world tasks provide learners with in-class opportunities to approximate or rehearse “the sorts of behaviours required of them in the world beyond the classroom” (Nunan, 1989, p. 40), whereas ‘pedagogic’ tasks involve learners completing tasks that they are unlikely to experience in real life. While real-world, authentic tasks are desirable in speaking instruction, pedagogic tasks are essential for stimulating “internal processes of acquisition” and to develop “the necessary prerequisite skills required by learners for communicating in the target language” (Nunan, 1989, pp. 40-41). As well as situational authenticity, Ellis (2003) suggests that some tasks may possess interactional authenticity, which invite genuine
communicative purposes in a classroom context (Ellis, 2003). As informed by these categorisations, the authenticity of a task, based on its inherent design, could be classified as pedagogic, interactional authenticity, and situational authenticity. While all these task types have a different role to play in students’ speaking development, whole-task practice is required to feature either interactional or situational authenticity to enable learners practise or rehearse the behaviours they need for spontaneous communicative situations (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Another important aspect of task authenticity investigated in the present study was task relevance to the students’ interests and experiences. Littlewood (2013) suggests that learners’ motivation and personal involvement in the learning tasks is a crucial factor that determines the success of task selection and design. Gong and Holliday (2013) and Hanauer (2012) further maintain that teachers could effectively enhance learners’ engagement by making tasks relevant to students’ lives and interests. In this way, learning becomes a personally contextualised and meaningful activity to the learners. In examining the degree of task relevance, Trang (2013) suggests two criteria to consider: personalisation and immediacy. Accordingly, a task can be categorised as ‘personalised’ or ‘non-personalised’ (Trang, 2013, p. 81) based on whether it involves “students talking about themselves, their lives and their experiences”. Immediacy refers to the extent to which a task relates to the students’ immediate needs, interests or preferences. In terms of immediacy, a task can be classified into ‘more immediate’ or ‘more remote’ (Trang, 2013). In this sense, personalised and more immediate tasks are preferred for both part-skill and whole-task practice, since they facilitate students’ engagement in classroom activities. In the present study, the authenticity of a task is analysed and classified from three aspects: (1) its inherent authenticity (pedagogic, interactional and situational); (2) personalisation (personalised or non-personalised); and (3) immediacy (more immediate or more remote).

Table 4.7 provides a summary of the characteristics of an activity. These characteristics are drawn on in this study to analyse the quality/nature of speaking-production activities the teachers conducted in all observed lessons. They were also used for analysing the nature of speaking-production activities included in the sample lessons taken from the prescribed textbooks. In Table 4.8, an example of step-3 analysis of speaking production tasks based on these criteria is provided.
Table 4.8: An example of step-3 coding of speaking-production activities (Category 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Teachers’ instructions</th>
<th>Content focus</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica’s lesson 4 – News – speaking activity 3, Episode 1</td>
<td>We have just listened to some news reports right? Now, what I would like you to do is to create your own piece of news, with a partner. Clear? Here I have some local newspapers I collected during the last two weeks. Sorry, in Vietnamese though. Each group will have two newspapers. Here you are. Now, work with your partner, choose the piece of news you love. Then based on the news you choose, create a news reports in English with your partner. If you have a different news story that you think more interesting than these, use it. Now, you would have 20 minutes to work on the task, so spend about 3-5 minutes reading and selecting the news. Then discuss and create your news story in pairs. Clear? Any questions? No? Okay. Now remember when you finish, you will need to share your news, in English, to other pairs. And I will ask some of you to report your news to the whole class too.</td>
<td>All/Comprehensive</td>
<td>Focus/ Purpose: Communicating meaning/authentic communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee’s lesson 4 – Celebrities – Speaking activity 2, Episode 1</td>
<td>That’s it. So, we just listened to some fans talking about the celebrity they love. Now, work in pairs. You will have 3 minutes to try to remember the information about one of these celebrities. One of you will talk about Angelina Jolie and the other talks about Bill Gates. Ok? You can look at your notes and try to remember the facts about them, but when you speak, you are not allowed to look at your notes then. Ok, remember to use the vocabulary the speakers have used to describe these celebrities too. Now, five minutes to prepare. You can discuss with your partner about which celebrity you want to talk about.</td>
<td>All/comprehensive</td>
<td>Focus/ Purpose: language practice – memorising and reproducing facts and vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7.4 Analysis of documents

Document analysis in the present study involves three sets of documents: two curricula of the ES and EIT programs, six speaking syllabi, and one textbook series. As explained earlier, this analysis aimed to provide contextual background for investigating and discussing the teachers’ interpretations and implementation of the curricula.

One primary focus of the analyses of these documents was to explore the relationship between speaking skills and other curriculum contents. Drawing on Shulman’s (1986) concepts of lateral and vertical curricular aspects, the analyses centred around two issues: (1) the relationship between speaking and other language skills or components such as reading, writing, grammar and pronunciation; and (2) the link among different
speaking levels in the curriculum. Investigations of the former aspect promoted understanding of how the teachers interpreted the links between speaking skills and other language components in the curricula, which might affect their decisions in content selection in teaching speaking. Examinations of the latter dimension shed light on their views concerning how different speaking levels in the program are linked and built upon each other in terms of objectives and content to facilitate the development of the learners’ speaking competence. To achieve these purposes, analyses were conducted with the two curricula and with one sample syllabus (Language Skills level 1A) with close attention to its stated objectives, specifications on the teaching content and its grading/sequencing, pedagogy and assessment. A cross analysis of all six speaking syllabi in the curricula was also conducted to examine the vertical relationship among these levels; that is, how objectives, content and outcomes covered by one specific level are related to those of another level.

The second focus in the document analyses centred around the prescribed textbook series. The results of textbook analyses, firstly, provided an important foundation for understanding the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula with respect to the selection and sequencing of activities. They also formed the basis for exploring the teachers’ pedagogical orientations in speaking instruction based on how they actually used the prescribed material in teaching practice. The analyses of the textbook series, therefore, included three main parts: (1) general design and topics/themes of the units; (2) structure of a speaking lesson; and (3) characteristics of the speaking tasks. The analysis of task characteristics was relied on the same framework employed for analysing classroom activities discussed earlier in Section 4.7.3, focusing on three characteristics: focus/purpose, control/predictability, and authenticity.

4.8 Ethical considerations

All possible efforts were made prior to, during and after the data collection process to ensure compliance with the ethics codes of conduct as regulated by University of Wollongong Ethics Committee. These attempts were evident in the procedures followed, the flexible adjustments made in response to specific research site problems, and the commitment to manage and present the data in its most secure and accurate manner.
The researcher’s effort to conform to ethical regulations was approached from different aspects. Firstly, all the activities related to data collection commenced after the ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee from the University of Wollongong on March, 19, 2015 (see Appendix E). Contacts and invitations to potential participants were made after permissions were granted from the participating university’s gatekeepers. In addition, optimal information disclosure was made to ensure that both the teacher and student participants were well informed about the study, their roles, and potential effects from the study. Opportunities for questions from the participants were also provided throughout the data collection process. As such, all participants were fully aware of the voluntary basis for their participation and that they were allowed to withdraw at anytime, without penalty, if they wished. None of the participants, however, withdrew from the study.

Efforts were also made to minimise the intrusive effects from the study to the teachers, students and their teaching and learning context. As described earlier, in consideration of teachers’ busy schedules, arrangements for interviews and classroom were made at times most convenient for the teachers. Flexible adjustments of the original plans for interviews and observations were also made to reasonably respond to practical field problems in ways that were most convenient for the participants but still ensured the rigour of the data. To further reduce the potential effects on their lessons, the researcher took the role of a non-participant in all classroom observations, except in a few minor instances as noted earlier in Section 4.4.2.

The researcher also strictly conformed to ethical values in managing and presenting the data and study findings. In particular, pseudonyms were used in all publications and presentations with information relevant to the participants. At all times, data collected from the participants were securely stored with protected passwords, and only the researcher and his supervisors could gain access to. It was also repeatedly explained to the teachers and the department managers that all the data would be kept in strict confidentiality. Finally, the researcher made every single effort possible to present the research findings in their full and fair representation of the teachers’ voices, opinions and practices from the study.
4.9 Trustworthiness of the research design

The research design and context present two major challenges that need to be properly addressed in the present study. Firstly, as qualitative case-study research, findings cannot be easily generalised to other settings. In addition, as with any other types of qualitative studies, the potential researcher’s bias might affect the trustworthiness of the data, and the interpretations of the study findings has been a matter of concern. In the present study, this issue was further complicated by the researcher’s status as an insider of the research context. As earlier explained, however, the major goal of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practices in teaching speaking in the specific context of a Vietnamese university. In other words, research findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions in teaching speaking need to be understood and interpreted within the context they occurred and with sufficient attention to the impacts from the contextual factors. In this sense, as an insider with a thorough insight into the setting, the researcher possessed strong credentials to provide such expected contextualised discussion of the topic under investigation.

This insider status also provided the researcher with favourable conditions for collecting valuable data that outsiders might not be able to gain access to. Given the teachers’ heavy workload and busy schedules, efforts to invite the teachers to participate in the study might have been rejected right from the beginning unless the researcher held an in-depth understanding of the context and clearly understood the teachers’ preferences and stresses. Gaining permission from executive boards at different levels of the university was also easier, which allowed the researcher to collect data within the planned time frame. The insider status also enabled the researcher to act more flexibly in responding to problems the teachers encountered during the data collection process such as cancelations or sudden changes of schedules for observations. This level of sensitivity ultimately leads to zero participant withdrawal from the study.

In addition, the researcher took several additional measures to ensure the robustness of the research design. Firstly, a thick description of the study context and the researcher’s role was provided from the onset for clarifying the researcher’s bias (Creswell, 2013). Such a rich description, on the one hand, enables readers to understand the researcher’s possible assumptions and biases that might impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). It also
enables them to reflect on their own contexts and draw conclusions for themselves based on the study findings (Stake, 2000). Secondly, the employment of multiple data sources, including interviews, observations and documents in the study, further provided effective triangulation and strengthened the robustness of the findings (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, in analysing the data, various strategies including member-checking, intra-coder and peer review were employed. These techniques helped maximise the trustworthiness of the data, codes and themes and minimise any potential researcher biasness in interpreting the viewpoints expressed by the participants.

4.10 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology that the present study adopted to explore the teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking skills. In order to obtain a holistic and contextualised understanding of the teachers’ cognitions about speaking instruction, the study employed a naturalistic paradigm, which aligned with the qualitative single case-study design that the study followed. Thick descriptions of the research setting, participants and the role of the researcher were clearly presented to provide a detailed contextual background for interpreting the teachers’ meaning and allowing the audience to draw conclusions for themselves. As measures for addressing the limitations of the qualitative design, multiple data collection methods were employed, namely interviews, observations and documents. The analyses of these data sets were conducted in a systematic fashion involving four different layers, guided by an organising framework with a priori codes generated from various theoretical, methodological and empirical bases. In addition, the combination of deductive and inductive approaches in coding and theme development further refined the coding processes by allowing the addition of emergent codes generated by the data analysis. The chapter also discussed the researcher’s commitment to conform to the codes of conduct as regulated by the university’s ethics committee to minimise any intrusive impact on the participants. In particular, the issue was addressed by the researcher’s alignment to the proper data collection procedure, his non-participant role during observations, and the efforts he made to maximise information disclosure to the participants. In the next two chapters, the study findings will be presented. Chapter Five first outlines findings derived from document analyses, which forms the basis for the
discussion and interpretation of the teachers’ cognitions about the curriculum, which are later presented in the chapter. Chapter Six focuses on key findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK and PCK.
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS: CURRICULUM SPECIFICATIONS AND TEACHERS’ COGNITIONS ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 present key findings from the research. This chapter includes two sections: specifications from the curricula; and the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula. The first section (Section 5.2) reports findings from the analyses of three documents that the teachers reported drawing on when teaching speaking: curricula, syllabi, and textbook materials. The analyses focused on specifications from these documents regarding the goals and objectives of the programs, instructional content, pedagogical content, and instructional indications and contraindications. These findings provide a contextual background for the discussion and interpretations of the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula, SMCK and PCK, which will be presented in the latter part of this chapter and in Chapter 6. The second section (Section 5.3) of the chapter presents key findings related to teachers’ cognitions about the curricula as revealed by the interview data. Drawing on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) notion of curricular knowledge, investigations into the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula are centred on four aspects of teachers’ knowledge of: (1) the teaching programs; (2) teaching content and material; (3) vertical and lateral aspects of the curricula; and (4) instructional indications and contra-indications.

5.2 Specifications from the curricula

A curriculum, in its essence, not only informs teachers about what outcomes to be achieved, what content to be taught, and what teaching methods to be employed but also describes the context and manner in which the curriculum will be implemented (J. Richards, 2017). Specifications from the curriculum play a pivotal role in teachers’ implementation of education programs since they may guide, govern or hinder their classroom practice (Burns & Joyce, 2007). Understanding curriculum specifications is, therefore, essential for interpreting teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the curriculum as well as how and why they implement it in the way they do. In the present study, all six teacher participants reported relying on three sets of documents as guidance for their teaching practice: the two curricula of the ES and EIT programs, syllabi of the six speaking subjects included in the programs, and the prescribed textbooks. To understand the particular conditions under which the teachers
implemented their speaking instruction, each of these documents was analysed. The results from these analyses are presented in this section and organised into three sub-sections in accordance with the three sets of documents.

5.2.1 General descriptions of the curricula

This section presents findings from the analysis of the curricula of the ES and EIT programs under investigation in the present study. As previously described, these curricula were the result of numerous innovations at the participating university. In accordance with the university-wide shift from a year-based to a credit-based system in 2007, the curricula of both programs underwent a significant reduction in the total credit number, from around 250 to 120. Since its implementation, the curricula continued to be revised, and at the time data for the present research were collected, its third version was being implemented with a total credit number of 140. An example of the curricula is provided in Appendix C.

One of the most prominent features of the revised curricula is the focus on learners’ speaking competence as a key learning outcome. This emphasis on communicative ability is, first of all, indicated in the outcome standards of the curricula, which outline the key knowledge and skills graduates from the programs are expected to achieve. As presented in Table 5.1, communicative competence constitutes an important part of both the knowledge and skill domains of the outcomes. In particular, it is stated that graduates are expected to demonstrate the ability to “proficiently use English language skills”, and “understand and use language fluently and appropriately in different communication contexts.” They are also required to display general linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, general knowledge of pronunciation, and profound knowledge of grammar. These knowledge components, as informed by Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, are critical building blocks of speaking competence. This evidence shows that learners’ communicative ability is identified as a paramount goal of these programs.
Table 5.1: Standards for graduates in terms of language knowledge and skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Graduates are expected to have:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- in-depth knowledge of English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- knowledge and ability to use English in social and academic contexts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- profound knowledge of English grammar;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- general knowledge of English pronunciation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- general linguistic (syntax, pragmatics, semantics, phonology) and sociocultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Graduates are expected to be able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- proficiently use English language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (equivalent to level B2 – CEFR);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- understand and use language fluently and appropriately in different communication contexts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- analyse texts and realise meaning-hindering factors in language use, based on their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significance of speaking competence in the programs is also evident in the number of credits allocated to speaking skill subjects. As designed, the curricula consist of three knowledge domains, including general knowledge, discipline foundation, and discipline specialisation (See Appendix C). The number of credits allocated to each of these domains is the same in both the ES and EIT programs. In particular, the first domain consists of 23 subjects that make up 38 credits. Included in this block are subjects mostly prescribed by MOET and taught in Vietnamese such as political sciences, military training, informatics, physical education and foreign languages (French). The second domain, which comprises 20 subjects and accounts for 48 credits, includes all subjects related to language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and language aspects (grammar and pronunciation). Within this group, one third of the credits (18/48) are allocated to six listening and speaking subjects, comprising Language Skills 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A (3 credits/each) and Advanced Listening and Speaking Skills 1 and 2 (2 credits/each). This substantial credit number distributed to speaking subjects reaffirms the strong focus on speaking competence of these programs.

The discipline-specialised domain, which encompasses 54 credits for both ES and EIT programs, includes subjects that are mainly aimed to equip learners with distinctive specialised knowledge and skills for their disciplines. However, a notable number of subjects in this domain, including pragmatics, semantics, phonology, phonetics, morphology and syntax, and culture and society of English-speaking countries, are also designed to contribute to the development of learners’ speaking competence. These
subjects, to a great extent, are aimed to support learners with in-depth linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, which is seen as fundamental to effective communication (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Goh & Burns, 2012; Hymes, 1972). This evidence suggests that, while developing learners’ communicative competence appears to be the central focus of the six speaking subjects, other subjects in the discipline foundation and specialisation domains also play a contributing role. To effectively support students’ achievement of the desired speaking outcomes, teachers enacting the programs need to be equipped with a good understanding of how the specific subject they teach is positioned in the curricula, how it contributes to the achievement of the curricular overall outcomes, and how it is related to other subjects included in the curricula.

All information related to these important aspects, however, are absent from the curricula. Apart from the general descriptions of the curricular outcomes presented earlier and a list of subjects in the programs, no specifications are provided concerning how different subjects in the curricula are connected to concertedly uphold the development of learners’ speaking competence. In these curricula, the six speaking subjects appear to be listed as independent units, insulated from other subjects. This subject-based design, as Miller and Seller (1990, p. 58) suggest, might lead to “the establishment of arbitrary distinctions” and “fragmentation” among closely related teaching content. In this sense, without explicit guidance from the current curricula, teachers may not clearly understand the intended connection among the subject areas, which might lead to a teaching practice where teachers pay exclusive attention to the particular subject they are working on, rather than aiming for achieving the overarching goal of the programs.

The above discussion points out the importance of communicative competence as a major goal of the two English major curricula. The discussion, however, also reveals the lack of essential specifications from these curricula regarding the connection among different subjects included in the programs, and how they each contribute to students’ accomplishment of the overall expected communicative outcomes. Nunan (1988) suggests that, to achieve the expected effectiveness in curriculum enactment, this emphasis on communicative ability needs to be consistently reflected “not only in the curriculum documents and syllabus plans but also in classroom activities and patterns of classroom interaction” (p. 5). In other words, the teaching objectives that the teachers
set and the content and pedagogy they employ in delivering each subject need to concurtantly support this overarching goal. Given that limited information related to these aspects is provided in the curricula, examinations of specifications from other curriculum-related documents that the teachers relied on for teaching are essential. The next section will present findings in relation to specifications from the subject outlines of the six speaking subjects in the programs.

5.2.2 Specifications from the syllabi

The syllabi, commonly seen as an embodiment of the curriculum, are the second major type of document all teacher participants reported to have consulted in their teaching practice. While the central concern of the syllabus is anchored in the selection and grading of teaching content (Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 1988), there is a strong consensus among proponents of CLT/TBLT that it should also specify or, at a minimum, provide a basis for an appropriate pedagogy (J. Richards, 2017). With communicative competence identified as an overarching aim of the curricula, there is a high expectation that a consistent focus on this competence is evident from specifications in the syllabi. Such an emphasis is expectedly indicated not only in the objectives and through the selection and grading of content for each subject but also through the selection and sequencing of teaching activities and learning experiences.

In this section, important findings from the analysis of the six speaking syllabi (including Language Skills 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A and Advanced Listening and Speaking Skills 1 and 2) that are included in the current curricula are presented. To provide a comprehensive picture of the specifications provided in these syllabi, the section first presents a detailed analysis of one sample syllabus, followed by a comparative analysis of the objectives and teaching content specified in all six syllabi. This comparative analysis is expected to illuminate not only the connection among the six speaking subjects but also the relationship between speaking skill and other curricular content areas. Insights into these relationships are critical for understanding how the overall expected outcomes of students’ speaking competence could be achieved as planned in the curriculum.
5.2.2.1 A detailed analysis of a sample syllabus

This section provides a detailed analysis of the syllabus designed for the subject Language Skills 1A (see Appendix C), the first speaking level in the curricula. This syllabus was selected since, in the semester data collected for the present study, most teacher participants were teaching levels 1A and 2A. In addition, it could be seen as a typical example of other syllabi in the programs. As designed, all syllabi of the six speaking subjects, developed at the department level and prescribed to teachers, are consistently structured with four major components: (1) subject objectives; (2) teaching content and its structure; (3) teaching methods; and (4) assessment guidelines. Investigations into these four components of the syllabi shed light on important prescriptions in relation to the objectives, teaching content and pedagogy for each speaking level that the teachers based their teaching on.

The first prominent finding from the analysis of the objectives stated in this sample syllabus is their strong emphasis on speaking competence. As can be seen in Table 5.2, except objectives 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 that focus on self-study and IT skills, the other nine objectives are centred around speaking ability. Some of these objectives describe the subject outcomes in a general manner such as “develop listening and speaking skills” (4.2.1) or “improve and consolidate fluency and confidence in English communication” (4.1.6). Some other objectives focus on the specific components of speaking competence such as vocabulary and topic-specific knowledge (4.1.2), pronunciation (4.1.4 and 4.1.5), interactional skills (4.2.2) and presentation skills (4.2.5). Two other objectives relate to contexts of language use, focusing on communication in classroom and social contexts (4.1.1) and speaking interactions in testing conditions (4.1.5). As a whole, these objectives, which reflect an alignment with the general goal stated in the curricula, provide insights into how the development of speaking competence is conceptualised.
Table 5.2: Subject learning outcomes - Language Skills 1A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Specific objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Knowledge | 4.1.1 Understand and appropriately respond to instructions and requirements in in-class and social communication;  
4.1.2 Accumulate enough vocabulary to talk about daily life topics such as schools, classes, friends, teachers, music, food, holidays…  
4.1.3 Recognise and produce important sounds accurately;  
4.1.4 Apply basic rules in sentence stress and prominence in conversations;  
4.1.5 Prepare basic listening and speaking skills for tests including CEFR, TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC;  
4.1.6 Improve and consolidate fluency and confidence in English communication in practice. |
| Skills | 4.2.1 Develop listening and speaking skills through classroom activities and homework;  
4.2.2 Develop pair and group work skills;  
4.2.3 Improve self-study skills through weekly listening and speaking assignments;  
4.2.4 Apply IT skills through group Powerpoint presentations;  
4.2.5 Obtain and apply basic presentation skills through group presentations; |

One prominent feature of these objectives is that they appear to be stated in a very generalised fashion, rather than as measurable and observable behaviours or performances. Such phrases as “develop listening and speaking skills”, “develop IT skills”, “improve and consolidate fluency and confidence” or “prepare basic listening and speaking skills” seem too general for teachers to translate into classroom behaviours. While these general objectives are important long-term goals that provide teachers with an overarching direction in lesson planning and selecting teaching content, they might be of limited usefulness in helping teachers identify specific teaching content that they should focus on in this particular subject. Some other objectives such as “accumulate enough vocabulary”, and “produce important sounds accurately” are not precise enough to support teachers in specifying the teaching content and qualifying students’ performance. Such general and unclear objectives, which J. Richards (2001) considers not useful and not giving a precise focus to the program goal, might lead to a misalignment between the curriculum intended goal and the enactment of the curriculum.

Evidence from this sample syllabus further shows that only modest guidance is available to teachers with respect to teaching content and its sequencing. A consistent feature presented in all six syllabi is the division of the teaching content. Each syllabus is structured around two parts: a brief description of the subject content, and the subject content structure. As illustrated in Table 5.3, the information presented in the first part appears to be a restatement of the objectives earlier described in the objective section of
this same syllabus. The second section simply lists all the titles of units or lessons from the prescribed textbooks, the time allocated to each topic, and the objectives that each lesson is intended to address. Such simple specifications of teaching content seem insufficient to provide teachers with a clear direction about how to best facilitate learners’ speaking competence through their selection and grading of teaching content.

Table 5. 3: Prescribed content for the subject: Language Skills 1A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief descriptions of the content</th>
<th>Number of periods</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gradually develop students’ listening and speaking ability for successful communication in classroom contexts;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1; 4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide students with opportunities to learn and practice listening and speaking skills in social communication contexts;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1; 4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand students’ vocabulary related to daily life topics such as schools, classes, friends, teachers, music, holidays, etc.;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1; 4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students correctly use intonation, pronunciation, phrases and language functions about familiar daily life topics.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1; 4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goh and Burns (2012) suggest that, to effectively foster speaking development, teachers need to provide students with opportunities to obtain sufficient knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills and communication strategies, which function as underpinning components of speaking competence. From the syllabus, however, no guidelines are provided in relation to what specific knowledge, skills and strategies teachers are expected to focus on for this particular level. As can be seen in Table 5.2, instructional content specified in this syllabus is presented mainly in terms of topics, which are copied out from the prescribed material. For each topic, several objectives (e.g. 4.1, 4.2.1) are allocated which might provide teachers with an idea about what skills, knowledge or strategies to focus on. However, as discussed above, these objectives are too general to support teachers in translating them into classroom practice. This way of content depiction might lead to teaching practice where the focus is on covering the prescribed topics, rather than ensuring that all the crucial underlying components of communicative competence are comprehensively incorporated for a systematic development of students’ speaking ability.
Similarly, limited information is provided in this syllabus in relation to teaching methods and evaluation. Investigations into the methodology section of the syllabus show that no specifications are made regarding the methods and approaches teachers were expected to adopt. Instead, only brief descriptions of the teaching strategies and interacting modes are included. As uniformly presented in all subject outlines, this methodology section includes short descriptions using only key words or phrases such as: lecturing, pair and group work, individual work, presentations and discussion. These simple descriptions do not indicate any pedagogical orientations that inform teachers about what principles or approaches underpin the design of the curricula and syllabi and thus that they should be consistently employed and promoted by the teachers in teaching implementation (J. Richards, 2017).

In a similar vein, modest guidance with respect to assessment is included in the syllabus. Typically, in all the six subject outlines, only information in relation to how students’ final marks are allocated to each assignment or test is presented (e.g. attendance 10%; group presentations 10%; midterm listening test 20%; final exam 60%). No guidelines are provided regarding what kinds of speaking task types and evaluation criteria should be employed. In this sense, learners’ expected speaking performance upon completion of each level does not seem to be specified. Teachers are left to rely on the general objectives of the subject to evaluate students’ speaking outcomes.

The analysis of this sample syllabus suggests that specifications provided in the syllabus might not sufficiently provide teachers with the guidance they need to implement teaching in a way that best serves the goal of developing learners’ communicative competence. All they could receive from this document appears to be vague and general objectives and a list of topics copied directly from the prescribed material. Based on such an outline, teachers appear to be expected to make their own interpretations about teaching content, methodology and assessment. The analysis also suggests that, while the curriculum and syllabi are available for reference, it is the prescribed textbooks that most likely function as the primary embodiment of the curriculum.
5.2.2.2 A cross analysis of objectives and teaching content across speaking levels

The analysis of the curricular documents and the sample syllabus presented above established that speaking competence was consistently promoted as a principal learning outcome of the programs. As a multifaceted skill, the process of learning speaking follows “development trajectories” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 5). As such, to effectively facilitate its development, different speaking levels in the curricula need to be appropriately sequenced in a way that the content and outcomes of each level serve as a building block of not only the next level but also the overall desired outcomes of the whole program. This section presents findings in relation to the relationship among the six speaking levels and the basis on which they are linked together, as informed by a cross analysis of the objectives and content specified in the six syllabi.

Table 5.4: Objectives combined from all six speaking subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blocks</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Target communication contexts</th>
<th>Objectives/ Desired Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Language Skills 1A and 2A</td>
<td>Communication in daily life contexts</td>
<td>- gradually develop students’ listening and speaking ability for successful communication in classroom contexts; - provide students with opportunities to learn and practice listening and speaking skills in social communication contexts; - expand students’ vocabulary related to daily life topics such as schools, classes, friends, teachers, music, holidays, etc; - help students correctly use intonation, pronunciation, phrases and language functions about familiar daily life topics; - develop students’ public speaking skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Language Skills 3A and 4A</td>
<td>Understanding and using English in media/broadcasting</td>
<td>- develop students’ listening and speaking skills; focusing on English in media (BBC and CNN); - develop listening skills: listen for gist, key/stressed words and detail from news programs; - expand students’ vocabulary in relation to the topics included in the subjects (12 topics each); - improve speaking and discussing skills in English through group activities; - develop self-study and life-long learning skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 3</td>
<td>Advanced L/S Skills 1 and 2</td>
<td>Communication in academic contexts</td>
<td>- develop listening and speaking skills in conjunction with critical thinking; - improve knowledge and vocabulary in relation to the topics included in the subject; - develop listening and note-taking skills for academic contexts; - develop skills for speaking interactions such as suggesting ideas, sharing experiences, conducting interviews and surveys, presenting and discussing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cross analysis of the objectives from the six syllabi reveals a clear distinction among three different blocks of speaking subjects in the curricula. Further analysis shows that each of these blocks is characterised by a specific communication context for which the programs aim to prepare the students. As depicted in Table 5.4, the first
block, which includes the two beginning levels (1A and 2A), focuses on developing learners’ ability to communicate in daily life contexts. Block 2 incorporates levels 3A and 4A, which concentrate on developing students’ ability to understand and use English in broadcasting and media. The final block, intended for students at advanced speaking levels, focuses on students’ competence to use English for communication in an academic context. This evidence suggests the existing boundary among the three distinct blocks of speaking subjects in the curricula as marked by the shift in three communication contexts: moving from daily life communication, to English in media, and finally to academic context. In operationalisation, each block is embodied by a different textbook series, respectively entitled Listening Advantage, Hot Topics and Academic Encounters. In this sense, while the target communication contexts set the general boundary among these subject blocks, the objectives and teaching content for each block and subject appear to be mainly defined by the prescribed textbook material.

Evidence from the analyses shows that the parameters marking the boundary between two subjects within the same group are not clearly defined. As presented in Table 5.4, every two subjects in the same block promote a similar set of objectives and employ the same textbook series. The only difference between these two levels, based on the content in the syllabi, appears to be the topics covered in each subject (information in relation to the prescribed textbooks and topics listed in each of the six syllabi is presented in Table 5.5). A closer analysis of these topics further shows that all of them are taken from the prescribed material and listed in the syllabi in the same order suggested in the textbooks. This evidence seems to indicate that the teaching content prescribed to teachers in the syllabi is derived from the textbooks. In other words, the prescribed material functions as the principal embodiment of the curricula that teachers might rely on for teaching content. None of the syllabi provides descriptions of the teaching content in terms of the knowledge, skills and strategies that underpin speaking competence as suggested in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model. None of these refers to the learners’ expected outcomes in terms of speaking fluency, accuracy and complexity (Goh & Burns, 2012) or discusses how these qualities could be gradually built up over the levels. As such, the crucial aspects of what speaking competence level learners need to demonstrate upon the completion of each specific level, and how it serves as the input for the next level, are not explicitly discussed.
Table 5.5: Prescribed textbooks and topics for each level from the six subject outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Prescribed materials</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Skills 1A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Listening Advantage 1 &amp; 2; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> (1) Tactics for listening-Basic; (2) Interactions 1-L/S Skills</td>
<td><strong>24 topics:</strong> (1) Names and addresses; (2) Numbers; (3) Going places; (4) Locations; (5) Likes and Dislikes; (6) My stuff; (7) Home life; (8) Classmates; (9) Best friends; (10) Holidays; (11) Dating; (12) My future; (13) Keeping busy; (14) School; (15) Food; (16) My phone; (17) Music; (18) Video games; (19) Meeting people; (20) Heroes; (21) Teachers; (22) Money; (23) Advertising; (24) Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Skills 2A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Listening Advantage 3; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> (1) Tactics for listening – Developing; (2) Interactions 2-L/S Skills</td>
<td><strong>12 topics:</strong> (1) Using computers; (2) Study after school; (3) Part-time jobs; (4) Parties; (5) Movies; (6) Hanging out; (7) Cyber friends; (8) Boyfriends and Girlfriends; (9) Celebrities; (10) Health and Body; (11) News; (12) Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Skills 3A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Hot topics 1; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> BBC six-minute English</td>
<td><strong>13 topics:</strong> (1) Mobile phone; (2) Living abroad; (3) School and Education; (4) Intelligence; (5) Stress; (6) Modern Marriage; (7) Shopping; (8) Gluttony (food); (9) Sports Doping; (10) White-collar crime; (11) The homeless; (12) Beauty contests; (13) Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Skills 4A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Hot topics 2; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> TV English 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td><strong>12 topics:</strong> (1) The reality of Reality TV; (2) Sports fans or foes; (3) Selling to kids; (4) Time crunch; (5) Internet dating; (6) Alia’s Bright future; (7) Graffiti Gallery; (8) Child Labour in India; (9) Is monogamy natural?; (10) Culture Shock; (11) Tough decisions; (12) Attitudes to new technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Speaking Skills 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Q: Skills for Success 5 – L/S; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> (1) Tactics for Listening-Expanding; (2) Achieve IELTS – Intermediate</td>
<td><strong>10 topics:</strong> (1) How do people get news today?; (2) How does language affect who we are?; (3) Where can work, education and fun overlap?; (4) How can the eyes deceive the minds?; (5) What does it mean to be a global citizen?; (6) How do you make a space your own?; (7) Where do new ideas come from?; (8) How do people react to change?; (9) Where should the world’s energy come from?; (10) Is bigger always better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Speaking Skills 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major textbooks:</strong> Academic Listening Encounters: Life in Society; <strong>Supplemented:</strong> (1) Mosaic 1-L/S; (2) Presentations in English; (3) Quest 3-L/S; (4) IELTS Graduation</td>
<td><strong>5 major themes (each theme includes two lessons):</strong> (1) Belonging to a group; (2) Gender roles; (3) Media and society; (4) Breaking the rules; (5) Changing Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings from the cross analysis of specifications from the syllabi highlight the distinction among the three blocks of speaking subjects in the curricula. However, they also reveal the lack of specifications or indications of the foundation on which these subjects rest and how they are intended to contribute to the overall goal of the program. Evidence from the analysis further suggests that the prescribed material is viewed as the major embodiment of the curricula dictating the objectives and teaching content for each speaking level. Investigations into the content of the textbooks, therefore, are essential for understanding content and pedagogy from the curricula.
5.2.3 An analysis of the prescribed textbooks and a typical lesson structure

This section closely examines the textbooks prescribed for the speaking subjects in the curricula. As a key embodiment of the curricula, these textbooks likely provide teachers with important guidance in terms of content and pedagogy in speaking instruction. As previously mentioned, in accordance with the three blocks of speaking subjects, three textbook series were selected and prescribed by the English Department. However, in the semester data collected for the present study, except for Rose who taught Level 3A, all the other participants were teaching either Level 1A or 2A and using the Listening Advantage Series (Kenny & Wada, 2009) as the major textbooks. The analysis of the textbooks presented in this section will, therefore, focus on this series, beginning with a general description of their features and structures, and then moving on to an analysis of the typical structure of their lessons and characteristics of their activities.

Listening Advantage is a four-level textbook series that incorporates listening and speaking skills in each lesson. Each level covers four thematic areas, with each theme consisting of three units. The themes, units, topics and target content for each topic are clearly presented in the table of “scope and sequence” at the beginning of each book. As highlighted by the authors, besides “realistic listening passages” and speaking practice activities, the books provide learners with “useful language and pronunciation practice” as well as “important strategies” that students need for both listening and speaking in “situations from real life.” Apart from these descriptions, however, no further information is provided concerning the learners’ intended speaking outcomes and the theoretical principles that underpin the material.

Units in this textbook series are presented in a consistent structure. Typically, each unit is organised into two topic-based lessons. As demonstrated by the sample unit (Appendix C), lesson A is constituted of three sections: warm-up, listening and further listening. The Warm-up section comprises one vocabulary activity, followed by a controlled speaking activity where learners are expected to use the newly introduced vocabulary in speaking. Following this section is the Listening Section, where students are expected to complete two listening exercises. The final section, Further Listening, starts with one listening activity, followed by a language focus part where the target grammatical structures in the lesson are extracted from the listening texts and
introduced. This section ends with a speaking production task.

Lesson B is basically structured in the same manner. It begins with a *Before You Listen* section, which provides learners with new vocabulary followed by a speaking practice activity. This section appears to be designed in exactly the same way as the Warm-up section in lesson A. Following this is the *Extended Listening* section which includes one listening activity, typically with two or three exercises. Immediately following the Extended Listening is the *Conversation Strategy* and *Catch It* sections where the target interactional strategies and pronunciation features embedded in the listening content are, respectively, isolated and presented. Lesson B also ends with one speaking production activity in the *Try It Out* section. Altogether, each unit typically includes two vocabulary activities, three listening activities, four speaking tasks, and three language focus activities. These general descriptions appear to show that listening skill, rather than speaking, occupies a central position in the textbook series.

With respect to content, evidence from the analysis shows that the textbooks tend to promote a dominant focus on the knowledge of language in speaking development. As described earlier, each unit contains two activities (Warm-up and Before You Listen) that explicitly concentrate on vocabulary. Also included in each unit are activities that draw learners’ attention to pronunciation features (Catch It section), and functional grammar (Language Focus). To a certain extent, although the textbook features several non-linguistic content components such as speech acts and interactional strategies, its dominant focus is placed on linguistic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, which appears to reflect an alignment with the structural perspective on speaking development. As illustrated in Table 5.6, all other important constituents of speaking ability including knowledge of discourse, core speaking skills and communication strategies, which are seen as two crucial components underlying speaking competence (Goh & Burns, 2012), do not seem to have been considered. Although grammatical knowledge is fundamental to the conceptualisation and formulation of speaking ideas, an exclusive focus on this component in teaching speaking might restrict opportunities for learners to develop the ability to communicate meaning appropriately and fluently in spontaneous interactions (Goh & Burns, 2012).
Table 5.6: The content focus of the prescribed textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of speaking competence</th>
<th>Sub-components</th>
<th>A-WU</th>
<th>A-LF</th>
<th>B-BYL</th>
<th>B-CS</th>
<th>B-CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of language and discourse</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spoken genres</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sociocultural knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Core speaking skills</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech function</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction management</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse organisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication strategies</td>
<td>Cognitive strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meta-cognitive strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactional strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Analyses of the characteristics of activities from the textbooks also suggest that they are underpinned by a language-based rather than communicative-focused orientation. As presented in the textbooks, each lesson typically begins with a vocabulary teaching activity, in which pre-determined vocabulary items are introduced, mostly in a de-contextualised manner. Students, without being provided with contexts or clues, are required to work out the meanings of the new words, mainly through matching exercises. Similarly, speech acts, communicative strategies, and pronunciation features which are introduced in a limited way in each lesson, although embedded in the listening content, are not connected to any communicative tasks or contexts. In addition, follow-up activities designed to provide learners with opportunities to practise using the newly presented content mostly require them to recognise, repeat or reproduce new language features at the sentence level. This de-contextualised way of content presentation and practice seems to reflect a structure-based approach to speaking development where learners are expected to acquire discrete knowledge components before practising using them in communicative contexts (J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003; D. Willis & Willis, 2007). Such an approach, however, has been considered as having only modest value in facilitating the development of learners’ ability to effectively use the newly learned knowledge in communication (Goh & Burns, 2012).
An analysis of the characteristics of speaking activities provided in the textbook material further indicates a strong focus on the practice of language, rather than on meaningful communication. As previously described, each lesson in this series includes two speaking activities: one at the beginning and one at the end. To provide a detailed characterisation of these speaking activities, two speaking tasks from Lesson A, Unit 8 (See Appendix C) were analysed as examples. This unit was selected since it represents the typical design of other lessons in the textbook and was also the topic taught in two observed lessons. For each activity, analyses were conducted with two dimensions: content focus (whether it focuses on one/two discrete linguistic components or a comprehensive use of all knowledge, skills and strategies), and characteristics. The analysis of the characteristics of these activities was informed by the analytical framework presented in Section 4.7.3, focusing on three main features: the task purpose and its extent of focus on meaning; the control and predictability of the meaning and language students produce through the task; and the authenticity of the task (see Section 4.7.3 for a detailed discussion of these features).

This analysis reveals that the first speaking task in this lesson demonstrates a strong focus on vocabulary practice. It requires students to rate their interest for seven characteristics of a person, using a five-category scale from definitely interested (5) to not at all interested (1), and then compare the answers with a partner. These seven characteristics are newly introduced vocabulary items in the preceding activity. As such, although learners are allowed to express personalised meaning about these characteristics, their messages are partly constrained by the seven prescribed vocabulary items and the five suggested scales, rather than freely expressed. In this design, the outcomes of the task appear to be a mix between linguistic (the practice of the vocabulary) and meaningful communication (expressing personalised messages). By focusing on the learners’ ability to incorporate these seven words in their speaking performance, this activity tends to promote an emphasis on the practice of making sentences using newly introduced vocabulary rather than a genuine focus on meaning (D. Willis & Willis, 2007). Such an activity could be categorised as an explicit focused task (Ellis, 2003). As informed by Littlewood’s (2004, 2013) continuum, this activity is categorised as communicative language practice.
The activity also features a moderate degree of authenticity. Apart from requiring learners to compare their answers with a partner, the task does not present learners with a specific life-like situation where people rate and share ideas about the characteristics they are interested in. As such, although the pair-work exchange might reflect the kind of life-like interactions, it does not correspond to any real-life communicative situations. In this sense, the activity is categorised as interactionally rather than situationally authentic (Ellis, 2003). In performing the task, however, learners are allowed to draw on their personal preference to decide what characteristics they are interested in. The task, as such, appear to promote a high extent of personalisation.

Table 5. 7: An analysis of the characteristics of two speaking activities in a sample lesson (Listening Advantage 3 - Unit 8 - Lesson A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions for analysing</th>
<th>Activity 1</th>
<th>Activity 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content focus</td>
<td>One: Vocabulary</td>
<td>Two: Vocabulary and grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes</td>
<td>Mixed: language practice</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning focus extent</td>
<td>Communicative language practice</td>
<td>Communicative language practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/ Predictability</td>
<td>Explicit focused</td>
<td>Explicit focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalised</td>
<td>Personalised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second speaking task, designed as the final speaking production activity in the lesson, also appears to feature similar characteristics. In this task, students are required to “circle three descriptive words” introduced in the lesson input and “have a conversation with a partner about the kind of people [they] like.” In terms of content focus, the activity draws learners’ attention to the practice of two specific linguistic components: vocabulary (language for describing) and grammar (structures for expressing interests and preferences). In performing the task, students have the freedom to choose who to describe and what to say about this person; yet their language choice is restricted to the newly presented “descriptive words”. Students are also encouraged, through provided examples, to use structures taught in the lesson to express interests such as “I’m fond of…” and “I’m not into…” By explicitly making these language features salient to the learners, the activity restricts the learners’ freedom to freely draw on whatever resources are at hand to fulfil the task requirements. The language that students employ through the task, as such, appears to be partly predictable. In this sense, the task features a mixed purpose on language practice and meaning conveying. Similar to speaking activity 1, this speaking task is characterised as communicative language
practice (Littlewood, 2004, 2013) and explicit focused task (Ellis, 2003). The task also requires students to express personalised meaning about the person they choose to describe and allows them to “have a conversation” with a partner, which enables them to participate in the kind of interactions they might experience in real life. However, students’ conversation or exchange of information are not clearly linked to any authentic communication contexts. Students’ speaking interactions, thus, simply serve the purpose of language practice, rather than catering for any genuine communication demands.

The analysis of the characteristics of these activities highlights the dominance of part-skill practice tasks in the prescribed textbooks. As discussed, both speaking activities designed in each lesson place their primary focus on providing learners with opportunities to practise discrete linguistic components rather than enabling them to express meaning in genuine communicative situations. In most cases, the target language learners are expected to use in performing the tasks are made salient or are explicitly presented to the learners. Students’ language and meaning, as such, are partly controlled and predictable. In this sense, these activities mostly feature the characteristics of part-skill practice tasks (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1992). Such part-skill, communicative language practice activities, although being valued as crucial for students’ development of discrete linguistic components that serve as stepping stones in developing communicative competence, are not sufficient for facilitating the development of learners’ ability to concurrently employ language in a fluent, accurate and appropriate fashion in authentic communication (Goh & Burns, 2012). These analyses suggest that what appears to be crucial but absent from the textbook material is the whole-task practice activities where the focus is placed on learners’ interactions in authentic communicative contexts. Such opportunities are critical for developing learners’ competence in using language in a holistic and free manner to achieve their communicative purpose in spontaneous, unpredictable communication (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1992).

These findings from the document analysis establish a contextual background informing specific conditions under which the teachers implemented their speaking instruction. Shulman (1986, 1987) maintains that teachers’ perceptions of these contextual conditions significantly impact their pedagogical decisions. In the section to follow, the
5.3 Teachers’ cognitions about the curricula

This section presents findings in relation to teachers’ cognitions about the curricula, drawing on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) notion of curricular knowledge. Shulman suggests that, in enacting a program, it is crucial for teachers to have good knowledge of the teaching programs, the topics and the variety of instructional materials in relation to each subject in the curriculum. He further emphasises the importance of teachers possessing a thorough understanding of the lateral and vertical aspects of the curriculum: that is, the relationship between the teaching content of their subject and that of other subjects and other levels in the same subject area. More importantly, to make informed decisions in teaching practice, teachers are required to have a solid awareness of the characteristics that serve as the indications and contra-indications of the implementation of the curriculum in specific teaching contexts. Framed by Shulman’s curricular knowledge, the findings in this section are organised into five categories of the teachers’ cognitions: (1) general understanding of the teaching programs; (2) teaching content and material; (3) curricular vertical aspect; (4) curricular lateral aspect; and (5) instructional indications and contra-indications. Supporting evidence is taken from the interview data, and findings from document analysis (as presented in Section 5.2) are also drawn on for the interpretations of the teachers’ cognitions. It should be noted that in both Chapter 5 and 6, the label ‘Int’ refers to the initial semi-structured interviews conducted before classroom observations while ‘SR’ refer to stimulated recall interviews (See Table 4.1 in Section 4.6.1.1 in Chapter 4 for further detail on the number of each interview).

5.3.1 Teachers’ general understanding of the teaching programs

Understanding the full range of programs designed for the teaching of particular subjects in a curriculum is considered a crucial component of teachers’ curricular knowledge (Shulman, 1986). In the exploration of the teachers’ knowledge of curricula in the present study, each teacher was asked in the interviews to share their understanding of the design and structure of the curricula and the value of the specifications provided in the curricular documents. In this section, the teachers’ responses to this question are discussed. It should be noted that the teachers equally
employed the term subject outlines and syllabus to describe the same documents. These two terms are, therefore, used interchangeably in this section.

It is important to highlight that, as informed by the interview data, most of the teacher participants reported not having participated in the curricular development process. The curricula, syllabi and textbooks they were currently using were mainly developed and selected by a group of senior teachers of the department and prescribed to all other teachers. They mostly reported to have been invited to meetings where they were presented with these documents for comments and feedback before the implementation, yet they had limited opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process or make changes to these documents. Such limited opportunity to participate in making these decisions might have negatively impacted the teachers’ understanding of the programs they were implementing and, to a certain extent, their attitudes towards these programs.

The most recurrent theme derived from the analysis of the interview data was the teachers’ lack of confidence in their knowledge of the curricula. Most of the teachers (except Rose) exhibited a degree of uncertainty when discussing the curricular structure and the number of speaking subjects in the program. Lee, for example, said that “students studying English programs need[ed] to spend four years, maybe four years and they must finish four semesters for listening and speaking” (Int.2). Similarly, Thomas stated: “If I were not wrong, for listening and speaking, [students] just study for four or five semesters” (Int.6). Jenny also expressed that students had to study speaking skills in “maybe four, four or five [subjects], around that” (Int.3). In the same vein, Jessica and Lucy believed that, “for speaking skills, [students] need to finish five subjects I guess” (Int. 5), “in the first five semesters I believe” (Int.1). The teachers’ use of hedging language such as “maybe”, “if I were not wrong”, “around that” or “I guess” depict their insufficient confidence in the information they provided. In addition, the fact that these teachers described the programs as including only four or five speaking subjects, rather than the accurate number of six levels, reflects the inaccuracy of the information, which indicates a gap in their curricular knowledge.

The second notable theme revealed from the interview analysis is the teachers’ doubt about the value of the specifications from the curricular documents. All six teachers described the guidelines from these documents as “vague”, “general”, “not very clear”
and “not specific enough.” Aside from Rose, who did not perceive these general guidelines as being problematic, the other five teachers were critical of them. Lee, for instance, complained that the subject outlines simply listed “some ideas, topics or just all titles of the units from the textbooks” (Int.2). Similarly, Jenny maintained that “the syllabus just provided [teachers] with general objectives and guidelines, like how many units [teachers] needed to cover from the textbooks” (Int.3). Necessary information “about the content and other relevant issues” (Int.3) was all missing. Jessica and Lucy claimed that the only information they referred to from the subject outlines were the general objectives and the topics, which they described as “not very useful” since they were “similar to what was written in the [textbook] material” (Int.5). These comments suggest that, from the teachers’ perspective, guidance from the curricular documents does not feature the extent of specificity they expect to help them translate these into classroom teaching.

Thomas, in his interview, provided further insights into the relationship between the curricula, the syllabi and the textbooks. As he stated, based on his analysis, he believed that the curricula and subject outlines were derived from the textbooks, rather than being developed first on their own merits, followed by the development or selection of the textbooks to address the outcomes originally provided in the curricula. He explained that instead of treating “the desired outcomes as the foundation for developing the syllabus and selecting textbooks, [program developers] seemed to choose the textbooks first and then wrote the guidelines” (Int.6). As such, these subject outlines simply “list[ed] again all the objectives and topics from the selected [textbook] materials” (Int.6). From this standpoint, Thomas appeared to believe that it was more important for teachers “to base on the textbooks and work out the objectives for each lesson by themselves” (Int.6), rather than relying on those general guidelines from the syllabi. This evidence indicated a common doubt among these teachers about the usefulness of the specifications from the curricular documents, and reaffirmed the valuing of the textbooks as the most fundamental embodiment of teaching content from the curricula.

Another emergent theme from the analysis of the interview data is that the teachers mainly defined the curricula by referring to the general objectives presented in the “curricular outcome standards”. In sharing their understanding of the curricula, all six teachers focused on describing the outcomes that graduates are expected to demonstrate.
Jessica stated that, “upon graduation, students needed to be able to communicate effectively in appropriate situations with an appropriate person, in real life and academic conditions confidently” (Int.1). Lee expressed that “the objective of the program is to help students develop their listening and speaking skills for academic contexts and in communication in general” (Int.2). Jenny likewise described that “students need to have good communication skills so that they can communicate with other people fluently in common situations and also in academic situations” (Int.3). Rose, Thomas and Lucy all expressed similar opinions, referring to the learners’ ability to communicate effectively in daily life and academic situations as a primary goal of the programs. These teachers’ statements indicated that, in alignment with the overarching goal of the curricula, these teachers perceived that developing learners’ communicative competence was the fundamental aim of the programs.

The teachers’ reliance on the general objectives as key defining features of the curricula indicates two issues. Firstly, what they described as the principal goal of the programs matched the specifications from the curricula. In this sense, even though they were, as discussed earlier, unconvinced about the value of the guidelines from the curricula and syllabi, these documents appeared to be the only source of guidance available to them. In addition, compared to the curricular outcome standards (as presented in Section 5.2), these teachers appeared to exhibit a narrow focus on the outcomes related to the specific subjects they teach and paid limited attention to the broader view of the curricula in the interviews. None of them made reference to the specialised knowledge, skills or attitudes that are included in the outcome standards when discussing the general goal of the programs. This might suggest the teachers’ lack of awareness of the overarching goal of the program. It might also allude to their belief that it is not crucial for teachers to obtain an understanding of where their teaching content fits in the curricula and how it is related to other subject areas in enacting the curricula. Such an understanding, however, is considered crucial for effective teaching performance (Shulman, 1986). In the next three sections, an in-depth discussion of the teachers’ knowledge of the teaching content, material and the curricular vertical and lateral aspects will be provided.
5.3.2 Teachers’ knowledge of instructional content and material

Understanding instructional content and the range of material designed or selected for the teaching of each subject is of critical importance to the teachers’ enactment of that program (Shulman, 1986, 1987). As presented in Section 5.2, the analysis of the curricular documents reveals that there was a lack of specificity of the teaching content as included in the curricula and syllabi. The prescribed textbooks, therefore, were found to function as the principal embodiment of the curricula that the teachers relied on in terms of teaching content. Interview data with the teacher participants also shows that the teachers had a tendency to discuss teaching content in tandem with the material. As such, the teachers’ knowledge of these two aspects as evinced from the interview data is presented together in this section.

The most notable theme revealed from the analysis of the interview data is the teachers’ differing opinions on the suitability of the prescribed textbooks. On the one hand, Jessica, Lee, Lucy and Jenny asserted that the Listening Advantage Series was “not suitable to the students” (Int.3). They all complained that these textbooks sidelined speaking and “focused too heavily on listening (Int.2). They argued that there were “not many speaking [activities]” (Int.2), and that most of them were “not interesting” (Int.3), “not authentic”, and “not challenging and attractive” (Int.1). Lucy commented: “in the main textbook for my subject, they [textbooks] don’t really have any speaking activities. They just write down one sentence: You and your friend are in a situation […] and they don’t have guidelines or activities” (Int.5). These four teachers appeared to believe that these activities were only suitable for “weak students”; thus, they needed to be supplemented with more challenging activities to motivate learners at higher proficiency levels. Lee even suggested replacing this textbook with a different series. In a similar vein, Thomas agreed that the content in the major textbooks was “a bit easy”; yet, he reported thinking that teachers could simply adapt it to better suit the students.

In contrast, Rose appeared to advocate the use of this series. In discussing the suitability of the same textbooks, Rose expressed her belief that the design of the curricula and its embodied textbooks were sensible, although she was not confident whether this was the curriculum developers’ intention. She elaborated: “in the first two semesters, it’s good to focus more on listening skill as input, an input-based teaching approach. Of course,
it’s not only listening, but focusing on listening in combination with speaking” (Int.4). Coming from this perspective, Rose seemed to believe that it was important for “the teachers to realise the underlying rationale underpinning the curricula and the reason for selecting the textbooks” (Int.4). With this understanding, as she maintained, teachers could decide “how to adapt the material in a suitable manner” (Int.4). This viewpoint set Rose aside from the other teachers who questioned the suitability of the selected material. Such divergent beliefs among the teachers suggest that these teachers might have employed the textbooks in different manners.

Despite the different opinions, these teachers reported to have uniformly treated the prescribed textbooks as the core teaching material. Consistently, the six teachers claimed that the content they commonly employed from the textbooks was the listening activities. Thomas said that 100% of his classroom listening activities were taken from the prescribed material. The other five teachers also reported that, although they sometimes supplied listening tasks from outside, the majority of them were from the major textbooks. Jenny said that she also retained speaking activities from the books if they were “interesting”. Lee described that she always included one basic speaking activity from the book that she believed to be suitable for weak students and supplemented this with a more difficult task to motivate those at higher proficiency levels. The other four teachers claimed that they mainly supplied speaking tasks from outside the textbook material. However, in selecting these supplemented activities, the topics and the listening content from the prescribed textbooks, as they reported, always served as the major foundation for their choice.

Another consistent theme that emerged from the interview analysis was the teachers’ reliance on the textbooks in their description of the teaching content. When asked what they included in the subject they were teaching, they had a tendency to start by briefly presenting the general objectives of the level before mentioning the name of the textbooks they were using and then listing some typical themes or topics from the books. Lee’s response in the quote below, for instance, is a typical example of the way the teachers described their teaching content.

This subject is mainly about communication in daily life situations, you know. And I am using Listening Advantage 2 as the main book. During the course, my students focus on topics like computers, schools, and then films, movies and
later on cyber friends, you know how to connect to people in virtual life and also describe about entertainment. (Int.2)

Similar to Lee, the other teachers always listed topics from the textbooks in responding to the interview question about teaching content. This suggests that these teachers viewed the textbooks as the principal prescriptions of the teaching content from the curricula. In addition, they appeared to define the teaching content mainly in terms of topics or themes. From all the interviews, none of them discussed the teaching content by referring to the components that are crucial to the development of learners’ speaking competence such as knowledge of language and discourse, communication strategies and core speaking skills (Goh & Burns, 2012). To a certain extent, this reflects an alignment between the teachers’ knowledge and the specifications from the curricular documents in relation to teaching content.

5.3.3 Curricular vertical aspect: relationship between different speaking levels

The vertical aspect of the curriculum is a critical component of the teachers’ curricular knowledge (Shulman, 1986). As previously explained, in this study, the vertical aspect refers to the relationship between the six speaking subjects in the program. As learning to speak a language is a constructive process, following developmental trajectories (Goh & Burns, 2012), teachers’ understanding of how content and outcomes of a specific subject are related to those of other levels and how they contribute to the program overall outcomes is of critical importance. In this section, findings in relation to the teachers’ knowledge of the curricular vertical aspect as revealed by the interview data are presented.

One of the most salient themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data was the teachers’ tendency to describe the connection between blocks of speaking subjects rather than between individual levels. When asked to explain the link between the specific subject that they were teaching in conjunction with other speaking levels in the program, these teachers appeared to possess limited understanding about this connection in terms of teaching content. Instead, most of them simply listed some topics they remembered to have covered in the subject and then focused on discussing the distinction between two groups of speaking subjects that they believed the curricula encompassed. As indicated in their explanations presented in Table 5.8, the six teachers
described that the beginning levels belonged to the basic “English for communication” block, which primarily focused on facilitating learners’ ability to communicate in daily life situations. Subjects in this group were aimed to provide learners with the necessary foundation before they moved to the advanced academic English block where the concentration was placed on developing students’ competence to communicate in academic contexts.

Table 5.8: Teachers’ explanations of the relationship among the six speaking levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>[...] the first two levels will be <em>English for communication</em> where students practice to communicate together or with another people. It becomes more <em>academic</em> later with English for Broadcasting and Academic where students practice to listen and talk about more <em>complicated issues</em>; and the last level will be <em>public speaking</em> which I think is more academic level where [students] have to use <em>formal language</em> to <em>present ideas</em> (Int.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>In my subject, I focus more on <em>communicative activities</em>, you know for them to exchange <em>ideas</em>. Other than that I expect them to <em>present ideas and protect their ideas</em>, so I require them to perform their presentation [...] other subjects maybe focus <em>more on academic</em> but I don’t really remember the syllabus. (Int.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>In the first semesters of listening and speaking, [students] focus on <em>communication skills</em> but when they go up, [they] focus on the skills they need to <em>use in media</em> or when they have the <em>public speaking or like a bit more academic</em>. (Int.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>These first levels are just <em>communication</em>, you know about <em>daily life topics</em> only. When they move to English for Broadcasting or presentations, they would discuss more <em>complex topics</em> and that’s also when they learn <em>presentation skills</em>. At that time, the teachers will need to teach them these skills carefully. (Int.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>My subject is related to basic or maybe really <em>familiar topics in their life</em>, but in the future they will have more time to study some academic subjects, so I consider that if they have good knowledge related to <em>conversations</em>, they have good knowledge to develop listening and speaking skills so they can meet requirements of the English for <em>presentations</em> or <em>broadcasting</em> in the future. (Int.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>I think [these subjects] are clearly distinct. I could see my subject focus on <em>daily life communication</em>, you know <em>topics for communication</em>, between two people in daily contexts. That’s what I think daily conversations. Other levels focus more on <em>presentations</em> for more <em>academic topics</em> with much debating and discussion. You know topics that might cause disagreement with opposing viewpoints (Int.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evident in these explanations is the teachers’ highlighting of the boundary between the “daily life” and “academic” groups of speaking subjects. In doing this, they drew on the typical topics and activities that each block included. In particular, those subjects in the basic communication block covered “familiar”, “daily life topics” or “topics for communication” in “daily contexts”. In accordance with these topics, learners were expected to participate in “communicative activities” or “conversations” where they could “practice to communicate together” and “exchange ideas”. In contrast, the
academic block addressed “complicated issues”, and “complex topics” that might trigger “disagreement” and “opposing viewpoints”. To prepare for learners’ interactions in academic context, they perceived the students as needing opportunities to engage in such activities as “discussion”, “debates”, and “presentations”. In this sense, the teachers viewed learners’ progression from the “basic” to “advanced” blocks as being through the changes of the topics and activities. None of the teachers, however, discussed how the topics and activities from these levels were systematically linked to enable learners achieve the overall speaking competence outcomes upon their completion of these subjects.

These teachers also seemed unable to clearly articulate the relationship and boundary between subjects within the same block. Jessica, for instance, explained that “the only difference between my subject, the second level, with the lower level [was] the topics each subject include[d]” (Int.1). As she commented, “although the difference between the communication and academic groups was clearly distinguished” (Int.1), the distinction between two subjects within this “basic communication” block was not clear. She considered “the objectives presented in the subject outlines for these two subjects to be really similar” (Int.1). Sharing a similar view, Thomas and Lee agreed that the boundary between subjects in the same block was “vague”. Lucy and Jenny contended that, “since subjects in the same group use[d] the same [textbooks] (Int.3) and lessons in these textbooks were “designed in the same format” (Int.5), the purposes [objectives] [were] quite similar” (Int.3). Most teachers, therefore, tended to find it problematic to describe the boundary as well as connection between subjects in the same group. This unclear picture of the relationship might lead to overlapping of the content discussed in different subjects, and does not guarantee students’ achievement of the overall desired learning outcomes. Progression from one level to the next one could, thus, be seen as a continuation of teaching content in terms of topics rather than the development of speaking competence in a systematic way in which each subject functions as a stepping stone.

Interview data also show that it was not a common practice among the teacher community to understand what teachers of other levels focused on and how that was related to their teaching content. Lee, for instance, confessed in the interview that she could not remember the objectives and content of other speaking subjects in the
program. Lucy admitted that what she described about other speaking levels was mainly based on “guessing” and her own experience rather than from official relevant documents. She explained:

I don't have experience teaching higher listening and speaking levels. I really don't know the contents they covers. I just look at the materials like the Hot Topics and I participated in some final examinations and recognised that they have the IELTS test form in speaking and also some materials from CNN student news and some listening material, which are really academic for students. So I guess students would improve from basic to higher proficiency in academic language (Int.2).

Lucy’s comments revealed her belief that teachers could learn about content and objectives of a subject only after experience in teaching it. She explained that what she knew about advanced levels in the program came from her own exploration of the material and what she could accumulate from working as the interlocutor in some final examinations. Similar to Lucy, none of the teachers reported to have accessed and explored subject outlines of the other speaking levels that they were not teaching. This suggests that it was neither a common practice nor a requirement in this context for teachers to possess a complete understanding of the connection among different curricular content in order to enact it. As such, the teachers’ focus appeared to be centred only on the specific subject they were taking charge of.

Thomas, however, appeared to believe that this lack of understanding resulted from the teachers’ deliberate neglect of the guidelines from the curricular documents. He commented that, “many teachers actually even [did] not read the subject outlines they were teaching” (Int.6). In explaining the reasons for this neglect, he presented himself as a typical example. Thomas described:

When I was first assigned any new subjects, I read the syllabus carefully. A long time ago, when I was assigned with level 1, I would also read the syllabus of levels 2, 3, and 4 to have an overall picture of the way the program is designed and see the boundary and the expectations for my subject. After more than 10 years of teaching, however, I don't read it anymore. I now basically estimate: with this textbook, with this subject level, with the students’ levels, from altogether I decide for myself (Int.6).

Evident in Thomas’ descriptions was the teachers’ self-acknowledged neglect of the specific information provided in the syllabi. In teaching practice, they appeared to
subjectively “estimate” and “decide for [themselves]” what content and objectives to focus on, based on the textbooks, the subject level and the students’ levels. Interestingly, Thomas recalled that “reading the syllabus carefully” used to be a practice that enabled teachers to have not only a comprehensive picture of the scope of the subject and the distinction between different levels but also an understanding of principles underlying the curriculum design. Thomas, however, believed that such a practice has discontinued. He also seemed to allude to his ten years of teaching experience as a major factor for the discontinuation of this practice. Admittedly, he argued that having extensive experience would enable experienced teachers to identify the objectives and focus for their subjects by themselves based on the textbooks and learners’ levels. The syllabi developed by the university, therefore, appeared to be valuable only to less experienced teachers. The interview data, however, show that even less experienced teachers appeared not to pay due attention to the information provided in these curricular documents. This evidence reaffirms the teachers’ common belief that the provided guidelines had limited value in helping them translate the curricula into classroom practice.

The discussion in this section reflects a certain alignment between the teachers’ knowledge of the curricular vertical aspect and the information provided in the curricula and syllabi. The teachers’ tendency of grouping the six speaking subjects into the two blocks and their reliance on the general objectives stated in the syllabi to explain the boundary between these groups, reflects resemblance to the specifications presented in the syllabi (as presented in Section 5.2.2). The teachers evidently demonstrated limited understanding of what connected the six speaking levels together and how they built upon each other to ensure students’ achievement of the overall expected outcomes. In explaining the relationship among these levels, none of them touched on learners’ speaking competence, and its qualities such as fluency, accuracy and complexity, as a foundation for grading and marking the distinction among the speaking subjects. In teaching practice, the teachers appeared to see limited value in using the guidelines from the curricular documents. Instead, they relied on the textbooks and learners’ levels to determine the content and objectives they should focus on.

Apart from an understanding of the curricular vertical aspect, teachers are also expected to have knowledge about the relationship between their subjects and other subject areas.
in the curriculum. These teachers’ knowledge of this curricular lateral aspect will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.4 Curricular lateral aspect: the relationship between speaking skill and other curricular content

Another critical component of curricular knowledge that teachers are expected to have is the lateral aspect of the curriculum (Shulman, 1986). In the present study, this aspect refers to the relationship between speaking skill and other subject areas in the curriculum. As presented in Section 5.2, the English major curricula encompass three major knowledge domains: foundation, discipline foundation and discipline specialisation. Most closely related to speaking skill are the language-focused subjects in the discipline foundation group, which include reading, writing, grammar and pronunciation. Several discipline specialised subjects that focus on linguistic knowledge such as semantics, pragmatics, phonetics and phonology are also expected to contribute to learners’ awareness and knowledge required for effective speaking performance. The teachers’ understanding of the connection between these content areas and their speaking subjects is essential for facilitating the development of learners’ speaking competence in a comprehensive manner. Interview data, however, show that such an understanding appears to be largely absent for all teacher participants.

Interview data show that the teachers appear to view speaking as separate from most other subjects in the discipline foundation domain. In discussing how language-focused subjects in the discipline foundation block might contribute to the development of their learners’ speaking ability, Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy all seemed to believe that subjects such as reading, writing and grammar had little relevance to what they were teaching. Jessica stated: “reading and writing teachers used different textbooks and had their own teaching content” (Int.1). Lee and Lucy also reported that they had never taught reading and writing before and these subjects were taken care by a different group of teachers. Thus, they claimed not having a clear view of what content they covered. In this sense, in accordance with the subject-based design of the curricula, these teachers viewed other language skills as an independent body of knowledge, separate from their speaking subjects.
Thomas and Rose, however, did not see reading and writing as irrelevant to speaking skills. They both argued that, “ideally, content from all skill subjects needs to be related” (Int.4) so that students “could use what they learned from other teachers into speaking subjects” (Int.6). However, Thomas maintained that, since each skill was designed as a separate subject in the curricula, teachers, including him, did not pay much attention to this connection in teaching practice. In this sense, these experienced teachers held a strong belief in the need to integrate teaching topics from these different subjects into their teaching. However, in teaching practice, they appeared to choose to stay aligned with the design of the curricula and to restrict their attention to the specific subject they were teaching.

These teachers, however, perceived listening as integral to speaking skill. From the interviews, all six teachers advocated the current design of the curricula in which these two skills are integrated into one subject, and emphasised the crucial role of listening activities in supplying language material for speaking. Jessica and Lee claimed that “these two skills [were] the process of communication, so they should go together” (Int.1) or “should not be separated” (Int.2). Similarly, Lucy and Jenny accorded listening skill an important place in their subject as teaching content. Rose also reported that she devoted an extensive amount of classroom time to listening, especially with basic levels since she contended that “students needed much input from listening before they could speak” (Int.4). Consistently, all six teachers maintained that listening material provided students with vocabulary, pronunciation models, structures and ideas, which are vital for speaking production. In this sense, these teachers, in contrast to the design of the textbook where listening occupied a central position as learning content, viewed it as subordinate to speaking and valued it mainly as “an input source” rather than as an independent content component.

The teachers also viewed pronunciation as closely related to speaking skill and acknowledged its importance to the students’ speaking performance. They, however, displayed a vague idea about the content students learned from pronunciation subjects. Lee, for instance, was certain that pronunciation teachers “had their own material and contents to focus on, different from speaking subjects, but [she] [did] not know exactly what these contents [were]” (SR.3). Thomas said that pronunciation subjects were designed “as separate subjects in the curriculum” and the pronunciation teachers
“maybe were still using the same material as before” (Int.6). Lucy mentioned that she knew that pronunciation teachers used “Ship or Sheep by Ann Baker” as the major textbook. However, as she had never taught this subject before, she did not know exactly what content it included. These comments indicate that the teachers, though acknowledging pronunciation as a crucial part of speaking performance, tended to view this component as an independent teaching content insulated from their speaking subjects.

Most of these teachers further expressed their doubt about the contributions of these discipline foundation subjects to the development of speaking competence. Jenny Thomas and Lucy all argued that pronunciation teaching should “serve the learners’ needs in speaking” (Int.3) and “the purpose of improving learners’ speaking performance” (Int.6). However, they felt that “what the pronunciation teachers were focusing on seemed not to be what students needed for speaking” (Int.3). Thomas contended that pronunciation teachers seemed to place more emphasis on “the accuracy of individual sounds and words rather than on speaking performance” (Int.6). Lucy had a similar observation, explaining that students could “pronounce sounds and individual words correctly” in pronunciation subjects; yet, they “could not produce sounds accurately in speaking” (Int.5). These teachers’ remarks suggest that pronunciation teachers appear to have mainly focused on segmental features at the level of individual sounds and words. Thus, these subjects appear to fail to help students achieve the accuracy and fluency at the suprasegmental level that they need for producing speeches at textual or discourse levels in spontaneous speaking interactions.

Similarly, Rose seemed to believe that what students learned from grammar subjects has limited value to their speaking performance. She described that, although students studied grammar in three semesters, “their grammar [was] terrible when speaking” (SR.7). As she observed, “they [students] made mistakes in almost every sentence; they asked questions like why are you go to school?, why are you can do that?” (SR.7). This observation left Rose with a question: “I started to wonder exactly what these students learned from the grammar subjects” (SR.7). Rose’s comments showed that she was unclear about the content of the grammar subjects; yet, she argued that it failed to provide learners with the grammatical knowledge they needed for producing acceptable utterances in speaking. She also appeared to believe that grammar instruction should
contribute to speaking development. From her perspective, however, students might just accumulate grammatical knowledge separately from a different subject and then transfer it to speaking. She appeared to be unaware that “the accurate use of grammatical resources is often developed through face-to-face communication, particularly in situations where negotiation for meaning is necessary” (Goh & Burns, 2012). In other words, grammatical forms need to be developed from meaning, and through meaningful communication there comes a need for students to learn to use new grammatical structures (D. Willis & Willis, 2007).

In a similar vein, these teachers also questioned the rationale for including discipline-specialised subjects in the curricula. Rose referred to Phonology, Phonetics, Pragmatics and Introduction to Linguistics as “alien subjects”. She argued that the inclusion of these subjects “distracted students’ attention” and occupied so much of their time that they “could not concentrate on developing their language skills” (Int.6). Other teachers described these “theoretical” (Int. 5) subjects as “impractical” (Int.6), “not useful and interesting” (Int.1), and “very challenging” (Int.2). Lucy and Jenny considered these subjects to be included primarily to ensure that learners gain “some specialised knowledge, which distinguished them from graduates from other majors” (Int.3). However, they appeared doubtful whether these subjects “might have any significant contributions to the development of students’ speaking competence” (Int.5). In this sense, the teachers did not realise that these specialised subjects might have a contributing role in improving their learners’ linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, which is essential for their ability to use language in an appropriate manner in communication (Goh & Burns, 2012).

As discussed, the teachers’ understanding of the curricular lateral aspect reflects an alignment with the intended design of the curricula. These teachers mostly viewed speaking skill as an independent body of knowledge, highly insulated from other curriculum content areas. Evidence also depicted that most of them had a vague understanding of the content covered in other subjects and its relationship with the content in their own speaking subjects. However, they were suspicious about the contributions from these subject areas to the improvement of their learners’ communicative competence. Although they all reported believing that grammar and pronunciation instruction should serve the purpose of developing speaking competence,
they tended to think that it was not their responsibility to ensure the content connection among these subjects. This evidence suggests these teachers were advocating a conventional language-focused approach to speaking development where learners could gradually accumulate discrete knowledge components from separate subjects before pulling them all together for speaking (Burns, 1998). In the next section, the teachers’ understanding of the indications and contraindications in teaching will be presented.

5.3.5 Instructional indications and contra-indications

Shulman (1986) suggests that teachers’ knowledge of instructional indications and contra-indications for the use of a curriculum in a particular circumstance plays a pivotal role in their pedagogical decisions. This knowledge component reflects the teachers’ perceptions of the freedom and restrictions they have in enacting the curriculum. It provides an important basis for their pedagogical modifications in a manner that best suits conditions of their specific particular context. In this section, findings in relation to the six teachers’ knowledge of the instructional indications and contra-indications in speaking instruction interpreted from the interview data are presented.

The most prominent theme evinced from the interview data is the teachers’ perception of the extensive freedom in making modifications to almost all prescribed content from the curricular documents to fit their specific teaching conditions. Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy reported that they always redesigned the syllabi before delivering it to students. In rewriting the syllabi, the teachers reported to have intentionally adjusted the teaching material and activities. Similarly, Rose and Thomas, although not providing learners with a copy of the syllabi at the beginning of the semester like the other four teachers, claimed that they adapted most important aspects relevant to their teaching. All six teachers perceived that these adaptations were essential since it allowed them “to make [the syllabi] clearer and more detailed” (Int.2), “bring in more activities for students” (Int.5), “make lessons more interesting” (Int.1), and “to fit in with their teaching plan” (Int.5). They also stated that, in teaching practice, they had freedom to decide the timing, sequencing and pacing in any way they felt effective for the learners.

The first specific aspect that these teachers reported to have modified was the teaching
material and activities. As discussed in Section 5.1, for all speaking subjects, one major textbook and at least two supplementary materials were prescribed in the subject outlines. As presented earlier, in teaching practice, all six teachers reported to have always employed the prescribed textbooks as the core material. However, they also explained that, to better suit the students’ demands, they decided to “skip some parts or activities from the books” (Int.1) and “supplement various activities from outside sources” (Int.3). Five teachers (Jessica, Lee, Lucy, Jenny and Rose) explained that the Internet was the major source of their supplementary material. Thomas and Lucy stated that they used “other textbooks” or “reference books” as supplements. All the teachers contended that, although it was “not stated clearly in the syllabus” (Int.3) concerning what changes they were allowed to make with the material, they viewed that teachers “definitely had the rights to decide” (Int.6). In addition, they also perceived that many speaking activities from the textbooks were “really boring”, “too simple”, “not authentic”, or “not relevant to learners’ interests”. As such, they seemed to believe that adding activities from other sources was essential to make their teaching more “interesting” and “effective”.

Many teachers also reported having departed from the syllabi regarding the sequencing, timing and pacing of the teaching content. Among the teachers, Rose and Thomas had the strongest opinions about teachers’ freedom to make adjustments to these aspects. As presented in the syllabi, the mandated topics for each subject are listed in a fixed order, with each topic allocated a fixed number of teaching periods. Thomas, however, was adamant that “as teachers, [he] had the right to decide where to go fast or slow, where to spend more time on and which lessons to merge together” (Int.6). Rose further claimed that teachers were “the ones that made decisions”. She explained: “if I couldn’t finish the lesson today, I would continue the next day. No one controlled me” (SR.7). She continued: “Sometimes, I planned to do an activity, but then I felt my students were tired, so we stopped. Sometimes I felt students needed to consolidate the knowledge, so I slowed down and reviewed” (SR.7). Lucy and Jessica also mentioned that they rarely followed the sequencing and timing prescribed in the syllabus. Unlike Rose and Thomas, however, they were a little lacking in confidence about the teachers’ complete freedom to do this, although they perceived that such changes were necessary.

These teachers, however, appeared to differ in their perceptions of the freedom to
diverge from the syllabi in terms of topics and objectives. The five less experienced teachers (Jessica, Lee, Jenny, Lucy and Thomas) perceived that it was mandated for teachers to cover the prescribed textbook topics before extending to those from other sources. Jessica explained: “although I had the freedom and no one forced me, I felt that if I went further [departing from the topics], I would be in trouble” (Int.1). Jessica, however, did not specify what that trouble could be. Other teachers felt that the alignment in topics was essential for “fulfilling the program requirements” (Int.2), and “guaranteeing that students from different classes have equal levels when finishing a subject” (Int.3). Thomas maintained that it was crucial for teachers to “stick to the topics from the textbook to ensure that students from different groups [were] consistently prepared with the skills and knowledge for the next level” (Int.6). As such, in selecting supplemented documents, these teachers treated the prescribed topics and objectives as principal criteria for determining the suitability of the added material. In this sense, the teachers, although perceiving that supplementing was essential for effective teaching, still prioritised the inclusion of the prescribed content.

In contrast, Rose expressed a strong belief that teachers were allowed to depart further from the syllabi. As she explained, her students’ proficiency levels were so low that she could not follow any guidelines from the syllabi. As an adaptation, she not only modified the content, activities and material but also lowered the outcome standards. In terms of topics, she reported allowing students to discuss and suggest new topics from outside the major textbooks, although they chose not to pursue this option. She was, however, convinced that, had they done so, she would have certainly included their suggested topics in teaching. Rose also had a strong rationale for all of her modifications. She said: “even if the university rector questioned me why I did not follow anything from the syllabus, I would simply say “students”. They are too weak” (Int.4). Given all these modifications, Rose was confident that she still stayed aligned with the overall aim of the curricula. She explained: “All I based on for these decisions was the ultimate objective: communication ability. This is what my students need to demonstrate after four years” (Int.4). By complying with this overarching goal, Rose felt that “she was not under any pressure or concern” in making modifications. Rose’s firm belief in the teachers’ freedom might have its relevance to the extensive experience in teaching and managing experience she has, in comparison to the other five teachers.
Regardless of the different perceptions, the teachers were unified in their explanations of the main factors that motivated them to make these adjustments. All six teachers consistently stated that students’ proficiency levels were the principal reason for all the changes they made. Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy maintained that the adaptations were to “respond to the learners’ mixed levels” (Int.3). Rose, as mentioned earlier, implemented all modifications to address learners’ low proficiency. These teachers also seemed to believe that “students’ interests” was the second major factor that inspired them to make the adjustments. Jessica, for example, said that she “always selected topics that [students] were interested in” to “improve their motivation” (Int.1). Lee stated that she “included some interesting topics from outside to reduce students’ boredom” (Int.2). Similarly, the other teachers maintained that their supplemented topics, activities, and videos were selected “based on [students’] interests” (Int.3), which aimed “to make classrooms more interesting” (Int.3). In this sense, these teachers appeared to share a belief that responding to learners’ needs and interests was more important than staying aligned with the prescriptions from the curricula and syllabi.

As evident in the discussion, the majority of the teachers perceived a strong need to stay aligned to the prescribed subject objectives and topics. Rose, however, contended that the overarching goal of the curricula, namely developing learners’ communicative competence, was the only component she felt obliged to follow. For other curricular aspects, including material, activities, sequencing, timing and pacing, the teachers all reported believing that they were allowed to make any modifications needed to optimise teaching and learning quality.

5.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter focused on key findings in relation to the curricular specifications and teachers’ cognitions about the curricula. As discussed, the analysis of specifications from curricula and syllabi highlights the position of communicative competence as a primary goal of the English major programs. However, evidence from this analysis also reveals that general specifications from these curricular documents appear to be insufficient to support the teachers to translate this overarching aim into classroom practice. Apart from presenting generalised descriptions of expected outcomes and a list of themes and topics, which the teachers perceived as having little value, these
documents provided only modest information regarding teaching content and pedagogy. Limited elaborations are also made concerning the relationship among different speaking levels and between speaking skill and other subject areas in the curricula. In such a context, the prescribed textbooks become the most fundamental document that teachers relied on in their teaching practice.

A close examination of the textbooks reveals that the material features a stronger focus on listening skill. The analysis of the textbook content also indicates that the material is underpinned by a narrow conception of speaking competence and a language-focused approach to speaking development. In terms of content, the books focus on providing learners with discrete components of grammatical knowledge, and sideline most of the important components of speaking competence such as knowledge of discourse, core speaking skills and communicative strategies (Goh & Burns, 2012). In terms of activities, mainly included in these textbooks are the part-skill, communicative language practice tasks, designed to have learners practise using discrete linguistic components at the morpho-syntactic level in a de-contextualised manner. Authentic whole-task practice, which is essential for the development of spontaneous communicative ability, however, appears to be completely missing from the material. This suggests a misalignment between the curricular documents. While the curricula and syllabi consistently emphasised communicative competence as the principal aim of the programs, the selected textbooks appear not to sufficiently uphold the achievement of this overarching goal.

The second section presented findings in relation to the teacher participants’ cognitions about the curricula, drawing on Shulman’s notion of curricular knowledge. Evidence from the interview data analysis highlights the teachers’ uncertainty about their knowledge of the curricula and the extent of alignment between their knowledge and specifications from the curricula. These teachers commonly viewed speaking skills as independent content units, highly insulated from other content areas in the curricula. They all had limited understanding of the interrelationship among different speaking levels and how each of these subjects contributes to the achievement of the overarching goal of the programs. In addition, these teachers had a tendency to define teaching content in terms of topics rather than referring to the knowledge, skills and strategies that, as suggested by Goh and Burns (2012), function as critical underlying components
of speaking competence.

All the teachers expressed a common doubt about the usefulness of the information provided in the curricular documents. In addition, although most of them claimed to have employed the textbooks as fundamental teaching material, they perceived the textbooks as being inappropriate for helping learners to achieve the desired communicative competence. As such, supplementing these with material and activities from other sources, as suggested by all six teachers, was considered essential to better tailor their teaching to the demands and interests of their students. Consistently, all teachers strongly claimed that they have an extensive amount of freedom to make modifications to various teaching dimensions including the material, activities, timing, pacing and sequencing. The only aspects these teachers felt that they needed to comply with were the general goals, objectives and the topics from the prescribed textbooks.

As previously mentioned, specifications from the curricular documents and the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula exert significant impact on their pedagogical decisions in teaching practice. On the basis of the findings presented in this chapter, the next chapter will focus on the teacher participants’ cognitions about speaking SMCK and PCK, drawing on both interviews and classroom observation data.
CHAPTER 6 - FINDINGS: TEACHERS’ COGNITIONS ABOUT SPEAKING SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

6.1 Introduction

This chapter, addressing research questions two and three, presents important findings in relation to teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK and PCK and their complex relationship with classroom practice. Drawing on Shulman’s (1986, 1987) concept of subject matter content knowledge and Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of communicative competence, the first section (6.2), based on the interview data, closely examines the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the underlying components of speaking competence, their prioritised content in speaking instruction, and the rationale for the content selection. The second section (6.3), framed by Shulman’s (1986, 1987) notion of PCK, sheds direct light on three critical aspects: (1) teachers’ knowledge about context; (2) teachers’ knowledge about learners; and (3) teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy. Insights into the teachers’ knowledge of context and learners, derived from the interview data, provide a foundation for understanding the teachers’ pedagogy in teaching speaking. Findings in relation to the teachers’ pedagogy, as discussed in the theoretical framework, are anchored in three aspects: the teachers’ approaches and methods in teaching; selection of instructional activities; and sequencing of speaking lessons. Investigations into these aspects, which are mainly based on observation data, are informed by Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking.

6.2 Teachers’ cognitions about SMCK

This section examines the teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK as evinced by the interview data. It focuses on the participating teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about what constitutes speaking competence and the content they prioritised in teaching speaking. Shulman (1986, 1987) suggests that teachers’ SMCK encompasses substantive and syntactic aspects; in other words, the content teachers choose to include and the underlying rationale for its inclusion. In the present study, specific aspects of speaking SMCK are further exemplified through Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of communicative competence, which comprises three components: knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and communication strategies. As such, findings concerning teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK will be organised around these three
elements. For in-depth discussion, however, the teachers’ knowledge of language and discourse will be presented separately in this section. Following this, additional components not included in Goh and Burns’ model but rather prioritised by the teacher participants will be discussed.

6.2.1 Knowledge of language

Knowledge of language, as previously defined, includes morpho-syntactic features, encompassing three sub-components, of lexical, grammatical, and phonological knowledge (Canale & Swain, 1980; Goh & Burns, 2012). This knowledge component plays a fundamental role in the development of speaking skill (Goh & Burns, 2012), since it enables learners to “express accurately the literal meaning of utterances” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). Without sufficient linguistic knowledge, speakers will not be able to formulate and articulate the ideas they want to express (Goh & Burns, 2012). Interview data in the present study indicate that all the participating teachers recognised vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation as cornerstones of learners’ speaking competence; thus they treated knowledge of language as a crucial content component in speaking instruction.

Interview data reveals that the teachers consistently viewed vocabulary as the most fundamental component of speaking competence. From the interviews, all six teachers repeatedly emphasised that knowledge of vocabulary played a pivotal role in the learners’ ability to construct and express ideas. The teachers justified its centrality by juxtaposing the role of vocabulary with that of grammar and pronunciation. For instance, Jenny said that “although grammar and pronunciation did have an important role to play, sufficient lexical knowledge was by far of greater importance” (Int.3). Lucy further explained: “even if they [students] don’t have correct pronunciation, they can speak out so that other people can still understand them but, if they don’t have vocabulary, they can’t construct and express their ideas” (Int.5). Sharing this view with Lucy, Jenny emphasised the importance of vocabulary knowledge by specifying how “good vocabulary” can save speakers from misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. She maintained that:

[…] if you compare two things, vocabulary, you use correct vocabulary and other people can somehow understand your topics, but if you use correct structures, correct grammar but not good vocabulary, somehow this makes people misunderstand, then of course the communication will be broken (Int.3).
Evident in these two teachers’ explanations is a belief that sufficient vocabulary can, at least, enable speakers to communicate their messages so that the listeners can, at a minimum, understand the gist of the message the speakers are trying to convey. Both Lucy and Jenny, in discussing the importance of vocabulary, tended to view it as inseparable from the act of conveying speaking messages. As such, it appears that, from these teachers’ perspective, vocabulary functioned as the groundwork for speakers’ formulation and expression of ideas at its most basic level. In other words, they considered vocabulary as vital building blocks for meaning making in communication.

Thomas and Rose, in advocating a similar view about the importance of vocabulary in speaking, also demonstrated a strong tendency to amalgamate it with meaning expression. Rose contended that, “when teaching vocabulary, we [teachers] must also teach them [students] ideas and skills” (Int.4). Thomas further maintained that vocabulary needed to be taught in conjunction with ideas and pronunciation. The “ideas” that these two teachers mentioned, as they explained, referred to students’ knowledge about the topics under discussion in each lesson, whereas the term “skills” that Rose emphasised had its reference to interactional strategies such as clarifying meanings or asking for confirmations. These teachers’ comments appear to indicate a belief that, in order to successfully convey meaning in communication, speakers need to not only draw on their knowledge of various aspects of vocabulary such as meaning and pronunciation but also integrate this knowledge with communication skills and strategies. In this sense, they appeared to view vocabulary not as an isolated linguistic component but rather as integral to the messages speakers express in communication.

Coming from such a standpoint, these teachers consistently supported a teaching practice where the central focus is placed on students’ ability to use the newly learned vocabulary. Jenny, Lee and Jessica asserted that “simply knowing much vocabulary and its associated meaning was not enough” (Int.1). What learners really needed to demonstrate was “the ability to put their lexical resources into use appropriately in communication” (Int.2). Jenny referred to this ability as “good and correct vocabulary” (Int.3), while Jessica and Lee employed the terms “language use in contexts” (Int.1) and “appropriate language use” (Int.2). Thomas also agreed that learners needed to show an understanding of “how to select appropriate vocabulary to use in various contexts” (Int.6). In a similar vein, Rose highly valued the ability “to make use of the vocabulary to express their authentic ideas
or the exact meanings they have and want to express in minds” (Int.4). As she explained, they needed to be able “to express and convey their true intentions and opinions, rather than to mimic and restate other people’s ideas” (Int.4).

These comments indicate the teachers’ emphasis on the learners’ ability to apply newly acquired vocabulary into use in a creative and appropriate fashion in communicative contexts. Such an ability requires learners to clearly understand the conceptual, functional and contextual meanings of the words, thus requiring them, in learning vocabulary for speaking, to master a systematic relationship between forms, meanings and use (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Rose’s emphasis on the learners’ ability to use vocabulary “to express their authentic ideas” appears to resonate with Skehan’s (1998) call for the need to engage learners in genuine communication tasks rather than conveying information already known to the other interlocutors or simply regurgitating other people’s meanings. This evidence suggests that, from these teachers’ perspective, vocabulary should be taught in a contextualised and meaningful manner, which serves the purpose of meaning conveyance. Such a perspective seems to reflect an alignment of the teachers’ beliefs with the meaning-focused principle promoted by CLT (Brumfit, 1984; Littlewood, 2013; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003).

It is also revealed from the interview data that all the participating teachers considered pronunciation a vital component of speaking ability. They maintained that, although pronunciation was not crucial to speakers’ conceptualisation and formulation of ideas as vocabulary was, good pronunciation was an important indicator of competent speaking performance. It could “significantly affect their speaking performance in terms of accuracy, intelligibility and the extent they sound like native speakers” (Int.3). Thomas further equated the role of pronunciation with that of vocabulary and ideas in speaking. Lucy especially emphasised the role that pronunciation knowledge played in the reception of the listening input in speaking lessons. She explained: “if they [students] don’t have the correct pronunciation, they can’t listen to [understand] the recordings and the native speakers” (Int.5). In this sense, these teachers appeared to value pronunciation for both language reception and production in speaking interactions.

Despite their awareness of its importance, the teachers reported to have included only limited pronunciation-related content in their speaking lessons. As they explained,
insufficient time and the heavy teaching content of speaking subjects prevented them from concentrating on pronunciation. Under these conditions, they decided to prioritise providing learners with sufficient vocabulary and topic-specific knowledge rather than focusing on in-depth pronunciation content. In addition, as earlier presented in Section 5.3, these teachers perceived pronunciation as “a separate subject” (Int.1), which was “supposed to be covered by pronunciation teachers” (Int.2). As such, even though they viewed pronunciation as fundamental to speaking performance and that pronunciation teaching should serve the purpose of improving learners’ speaking performance, they appeared to treat pronunciation as isolated curricular content. Holding this belief, these teachers reported that they only touched on pronunciation during the feedback stage rather than as part of the planned teaching content. In addition, the main focus in teaching was centred on what they observed as being “serious or big pronunciation mistakes that students make” (Int.3).

What these teachers perceived as students’ typical pronunciation problems, however, differed to a certain extent. Lee and Jenny, for example, paid attention to “final sounds” and “linking sounds” (Int.2; Int.3). Thomas was more concerned with “accent” and Jenny focused on “stress”. One particular feature that all six teachers paid substantial attention to was “intonation”. Lee complained that her students did not know “the way to raise or fall down their voice” and “sometimes they [students] just speak like [speaking] Vietnamese” (Int.2). Thomas further explained that “teaching it [intonation] can be really difficult” because “we don’t have that [intonation] in Vietnamese” (Int.6). This evidence appears to indicate a lack of consistency in the pronunciation content that they identified as teaching content. However, it apparently depicts their priority given to pronunciation features at suprasegmental levels such as stress, intonation, linking sounds and accent in speaking instruction. Such a view on pronunciation teaching appears to align with the current top-down approach which promotes the role of pronunciation in “a whole stream of discourse” rather than within words or phrases (H. D. Brown, 2007, p. 339).

Evidence from the interview data also shows that teachers tended to diverge in their opinions about the importance of grammar. In particular, Thomas and Rose, the two most experienced teachers, explicitly acknowledged the value of grammar and reported to have included it as official teaching content. They, however, redefined their notions of grammar and preferred to use the term “communicative grammar” (Int.4; Int.6). This was
explained as “simple grammar, which makes [students’] expressions eligible or comprehensible to others, not complicated and advanced, but rather correct” (Int.4). Both Rose and Thomas contended that this communicative grammar was essential for learners’ ability to express comprehensible messages in communication. As such, they appeared to believe that the focus in speaking instruction should be placed on this functional grammar, rather than the traditional grammar as system of rules for constructing language at the sentence level.

Unlike Rose and Thomas, the four less experienced teachers had a tendency to downplay the role of grammar. During the interviews, Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy all stated that grammar should not be emphasised in teaching speaking. By way of comparison, Lucy explained that speakers’ incorrect structures did not necessarily “result in communication breakdowns as in case of insufficient vocabulary” (Int.5). Jenny and Lucy contended that students’ messages expressed in ungrammatical sentences could still be conveyed with good use of vocabulary. This evidence suggests that the grammar these teachers were describing referred to the traditional grammatical knowledge of sentence structures. As these four teachers reported, grammar was not a component that they officially planned in their speaking lessons. These teachers’ perception of the grammatical content and their attitude towards the importance of grammar, thus, appeared to draw a distinct boundary between them and the two experienced teachers in the study.

In-depth analyses of these less experienced teachers’ explanations, however, showed that functional grammar occupied a prominent position in their speaking lessons. In the interviews, these teachers referred to this functional grammatical knowledge by different terms. Jessica, for instance, repeatedly used “formulaic expressions” to describe grammatical structures that could be employed for performing communicative functions such as “requesting, informing or clarifying information” (Int.1). Lucy and Jenny, however, used “structures” and “conversation strategies” interchangeably to refer to this same content. Lee employed “language use” as an umbrella concept that encompassed “learners’ ability to use grammatical and lexical knowledge appropriately in communication” (Int.2). All four teachers seemed to view these “functional structures” as important to teach, since they “enabled learners to use language for performing functions in communication” (Int.1). This evidence shows that, as with Rose and Thomas, the less experienced teachers considered functional grammar, although masked under
different labels, an essential component in teaching speaking. Of central concern to these teachers appeared to be the learners’ ability to use the structures to achieve communication purposes in communicative contexts, rather than to simply construct grammatical sentences. Such a functional view on grammar reflects an alignment to the meaning-based principle promoted by CLT.

The divergence between the two groups of teachers could be explained on a number of different bases. Firstly, unlike the experienced teachers who clearly justified that the inclusion of functional grammar was to enable learners, given their low proficiency level, to express simple but eligible messages in communication, the less experienced teachers appeared to strongly rely on the textbooks. Their terms of reference such as “conversation strategies”, “functional structures” and “formulaic expressions”, and the examples they provided, had a strong resemblance to those presented in the ‘Language Focus’ and ‘Conversation Strategies’ sections in the prescribed material. This evidence suggests not only a lack of a thorough understanding in these teachers’ knowledge of what grammatical system comprises but also the impact from the teaching material on their knowledge of the teaching content. In addition, unlike the experienced teachers who explicitly acknowledged the importance and position of grammatical knowledge as official teaching content, the less experienced teachers appeared to avoid admitting their inclusion of this component. This deliberate avoidance appears to resonate with lip-paying service practice, commonly found among Vietnamese teachers as a response to the criticism from CLT proponents concerning extensive focus on grammar (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nunan, 2003).

In a nutshell, the findings presented in this section indicate the teachers’ general inclination towards a communicative-oriented approach to speaking instruction. These teachers all took cognisance of linguistic knowledge as a cornerstone of communicative competence and advocated a focus on providing students with sufficient knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation to enable them to express comprehensible messages in communication. As such, they argued that vocabulary should be introduced in a meaningful and contextualised manner, and pronunciation teaching should prioritise features at the suprasegmental level. For grammar knowledge, they advocated a concentration on the functional aspects of structures rather than the ability to construct grammatical sentences. These perspectives appeared to feature a strong resonance with
the meaning-focused principle, upheld by CLT.

As Goh and Burns suggest, a good knowledge of language, although functioning as a key foundation for learners’ speaking performance, is not sufficient for their ability to use language appropriately in communication. This grammatical knowledge needs to be supported by a thorough understanding of spoken discourse (Goh & Burns, 2012). In the next section, the teachers’ knowledge of discourse as revealed by interview data will be presented.

6.2.2 Knowledge of discourse

Discourse knowledge, as suggested in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, is a crucial underlying constituent of communicative competence. This body of knowledge encompasses three major components: 1) spoken genres and their structures; 2) speech acts; and 3) sociocultural knowledge with special respect to communication norms in different societies (Goh & Burns, 2012). A thorough understanding of these discourse aspects would enable speakers to produce and structure coherent stretches of speech accorded with selected genre types and suitable to particular sociocultural conventions. Such an ability is critical for enhancing the appropriateness of speakers’ language, minimising communication breakdowns, and contributing to the achievement of their communicative purposes (Thornbury, 2005). Interview data in the present study, however, indicates that the teachers had limited understanding of discourse knowledge. In teaching practice, these teachers reported to have included only minimal discourse content, and that mainly as through awareness-raising activities.

Interview data shows that the teachers demonstrated either an absence of awareness or a fragmented understanding of discourse knowledge and its importance in speaking. In particular, knowledge of discourse was completely absent from three (Thomas, Rose and Lucy) of the six teachers’ interviews. For the other three teachers, their insights into this knowledge component were mainly inferred from their conceptions of a competent speaker rather than from a direct discussion of discourse knowledge. For example, Jenny stated: “Competent speakers need to understand the purpose in communications, and they need to adjust themselves with situations. They need to know how to use language, what to talk to their interlocutors and achieve the purpose in communication” (Int.3). Similarly,
Jessica insisted that “teachers and learners of speaking needed to have a good knowledge of pragmatics” (Int.1), which she defined as “the ability to know what to say, where, when, to whom and in what contexts” (Int.1). Sharing a view with Jenny and Jessica, Lee explained that she expected her students to know “how to react with some real-life situations, both in Vietnamese and in English” (Int.2).

These comments generally reflect the teachers’ awareness of how speakers’ language choice in communication is affected by their knowledge of the communication contexts. They appeared to believe that, to use language in an appropriate manner, learners needed to draw on their understanding of “the situations”, “the interlocutors”, and “purposes in communication” to tailor their language accordingly. These teachers, however, considered the learners’ linguistic knowledge the principal factor determining their ability to use language appropriately in communication. As they later explained, a good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary would sufficiently enable learners to select appropriate language in communication (Int.2; Int.3). None of the teachers appeared to be aware that, to produce coherent stretches of talks, speakers are required to draw on a comprehensive body of knowledge of language, spoken genres, speech acts and sociocultural awareness (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Among the three sub-components of discourse knowledge, the teachers appeared to pay most attention to speech acts in speaking instruction. None of them, however, employed the term speech acts in the interviews. Instead, they used different concepts to describe this knowledge component. As previously mentioned, to refer to grammatical structures in conjunction with its communicative functions, Jenny employed the term “communication or conversation strategies”, whereas Jessica and Lucy used the term “language expressions”. Thomas frequently used the phrase “communication strategies” (Int.6) to describe language functions and conversational management strategies such as facial expressions and eye contact. In general, all these terms were used to describe speech acts or “language functions such as requesting for information” (Int.1), “complimenting, complaining or making suggestions” (Int.2) presented in the prescribed textbooks. All six teachers reported that this content was officially included in their speaking lessons as an important component. This evidence indicates the teachers’ awareness of the importance of speakers’ knowledge of speech acts for effective communication. However, the fact that the terminology they employed to describe this component matched those in the
textbooks suggests that this understanding might have been shaped by the prescribed material rather than on the basis of any theoretical understanding.

Most teachers, however, demonstrated a lack of understanding of *spoken genres*. Of all the interviewees, Rose was the only teacher that ever mentioned the term ‘genres’, and this term surfaced as part of a discussion indicating how she marginally incorporated it in teaching. Rose maintained that, as long as students were aware of the genre types they were producing, they would be able “to organise well and present them logically” (Int.4). Rose also described that her current students already had a good understanding of spoken genres. Thus, she only addressed this knowledge component in the feedback stage, when she reminded students of the genres they were producing so that they could self-evaluate the appropriateness of the language they selected. Knowledge of spoken genres, therefore, was not treated as officially planned teaching content in Rose’s lessons.

Lee also appeared to demonstrate an awareness of spoken genres, although she never used this term in the interviews. In discussing the primary goals in teaching speaking, Lee stated that students’ ability to “organise ideas logically” or “combine sentences” was of utmost importance. She repeatedly emphasised the importance for learners “to know how to link ideas, how to link sentences together when they present their ideas” (Int.2). This ability “to link sentences” to “organise ideas logically” in speaking apparently requires learners to go beyond the scope of grammatical knowledge at the sentence level to larger textual units at the level of discourse. However, as Lee later explained, she believed that this ability was mainly dependent on the learners’ linguistic knowledge of transitional devices for idea linking. Holding this view, Lee reported that she mainly focused on developing learners’ linguistic knowledge of transition signals and linking devices rather than enhancing an understanding of the spoken genres and their structures. A similar lack of awareness of genre knowledge was also evident in the other four teacher participants’ interviews, which suggests a common gap in the teachers’ knowledge of the speaking subject matter content.

Similarly, the teachers demonstrated a modest understanding of *sociocultural knowledge*, and its importance to speaking competence. Among the six teachers, Lucy and Lee were the only two that briefly mentioned the role of this sort of knowledge. In particular, Lucy stressed the importance of raising learners’ awareness of the role of “social contexts”
knowledge in effective speaking performance. This knowledge, as she defined, referred to “the diverse cultural aspects or norms that Vietnamese learners of English need to be aware of so that they could communicate appropriately with interlocutors from different backgrounds” (Int.5). As evident in the quote below, Lucy was particularly concerned with improving learners’ understanding of what topics or questions to discuss, and how to start a conversation appropriately when conversing with speakers from English speaking countries. Lucy’s concept of “social contexts”, as explained in the quote, appears to have reference to the intercultural pragmatic awareness (Goh & Burns, 2012) that is vital for optimising the appropriateness of language used in specific sociocultural contexts:

Social contexts mean that, I just consider that maybe in some lessons I figure out some differences in culture between Vietnam and some nations like the U.S or Australia. In these different social contexts, students should know what questions to ask and what should not. Those kinds of things and other familiar topics like weather as a good way for you to start a conversation with a native speaker. (Int.5)

Similar to Lucy, Lee demonstrated an awareness of the need to improve learners’ understanding of cultural conventions. As she reported, she sometimes showed the students videos from the Internet “to teach [students] something related to cultural aspects of the country shown in the video” (Int.2). Lee, however, explicitly explained that the primary goal of this activity was “to introduce students to new information about these countries and provide more vocabulary input” (Int.2). From her perspective, improving learners’ insights into cultural aspects appeared to be seen as being of secondary importance. Lee said that she viewed cultural understanding as part of the knowledge of the speaking topics, through which she introduced new vocabulary items to the students. In this sense, Lee’s attention to intercultural knowledge tended to be overridden by the need to provide learners with linguistic and topic-specific knowledge that she perceived as being more fundamental to their speaking performance. As with Lucy, Lee minimally included this knowledge component in speaking teaching, mainly for an awareness-raising purpose rather than as an official learning goal. Given that the importance of sociolinguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) has long been acknowledged and has become more prominent today when an increasing number of English users are non-native (Goh & Burns, 2012; Thornbury, 2005), these teachers’ limited understanding of this knowledge component is predicted to restrict its inclusion in their teaching practice, which might negatively affect the development of learners’ speaking competence.
The findings presented in this section appear to depict the common lack of an all-rounded understanding of discourse knowledge among the participating teachers. While these teachers were generally aware of the impact that communicative contexts, purposes and interlocutors exerted on speakers’ language choice and its appropriateness, they appeared to have limited understanding of how discourse knowledge could significantly influence the speakers’ ability to structure coherent speeches or talks. They tended to believe that it was the learners’ linguistic knowledge, not a holistic body of knowledge of language, genres, speech acts and sociocultural understanding, that determined the ability to employ suitable language in communication. As such, in teaching practice, their overriding focus was placed on the provision of knowledge of language. Discourse knowledge was, therefore, only marginally incorporated in the form of awareness-raising activities rather than as official teaching content. These teachers’ modest understanding of discourse knowledge and their inadequate attention to this knowledge component in teaching practice appears to reflect a common gap in their knowledge base of speaking SMCK.

In general, a good knowledge of language and discourse, although crucial to speaking competence, is not equivalent to the ability to transfer that knowledge into behaviour (Bygate, 1987). In real-life communication, speakers are required to demonstrate the ability to concurrently activate numerous components of their knowledge base and put them into use in a timely and appropriate fashion. Such an ability, as suggested by Goh and Burns (2012), is dependent on whether speakers possess efficient core speaking skills that help them function effectively in spontaneous interactions. In the next section, the teachers’ cognitions about core speaking skills will be presented.

6.2.3 Core speaking skills

Core speaking skills are highlighted in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model as a pivotal component that contributes to speakers’ communication success. To be prepared for spontaneous and unpredictable interactions, it is vital for learners to develop the skills for mobilising the underlying declarative knowledge of language and discourse (K. Johnson, 1996; Rost, 2002) and proceduralise it for effective automatic use (Bygate, 1987; Goh & Burns, 2012). As proposed in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, four broad categories of these core speaking skills that need to be focused on in teaching speaking are
pronunciation, speech function, interaction management, and discourse organisation.

Findings from interview data generally indicate that the teachers had a vague understanding of the critical distinction between core speaking skills and the underlying knowledge. When asked about the skills they focused on in teaching speaking, most teachers discussed general skills such as “public speaking” (Jessica and Lee), “presentation skills” (Jessica and Lee) and “communication skills” (Jenny and Lucy). When drawing their attention to the four skill categories proposed in Goh and Burns’ (2012), most teachers tended to view them as knowledge rather than skills. Direct discussion of the importance of these skills and how to facilitate their development was, therefore, absent from the interview data.

It is evident from the interview data that these teachers had limited knowledge of each category of the core speaking skills. For instance, concerning pronunciation skills, the teachers reported that they minimally addressed pronunciation in the feedback stage with a focus on what they perceived as typical problems for Vietnamese students. None of them referred to pronunciation as a skill or discussed how they could develop learners’ ability “to clearly articulate the sounds of the target language at the segmental and suprasegmental levels” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 59). Such an ability to pronounce individual sounds with clarity and to use prosodic features such as intonation, stress and prominence to organise spoken discourse is, however, a crucial skill for speaking intelligibility (Brazil, 1997). Seemingly, this evidence reflects a lack of focus on pronunciation skills in the teachers’ speaking classes and an absence of awareness that these skills could be facilitated and developed directly through instruction.

Similarly, the teacher participants depicted a modest understanding of speech function skills. As with the case of speech acts discussed earlier, none of the teachers referred to the term speech function skills in any of the interviews. A few teachers, however, showed a certain extent of awareness about the need to develop students’ ability to effectively put their knowledge of “communication strategies” or “functional expressions” into use. In Jenny’s discussion of the drawbacks of the prescribed textbooks in the quote below, for instance, she explained explicitly that one of the most important duties for speaking teachers was to provide learners with sufficient opportunities for practice using communicative strategies in contexts so that they can be put into use and converted into
skills. She was convinced that, without opportunities for rehearsing the use of these strategies in appropriate communication, they would inevitably be forgotten:

For example, they [the books] have the conversation strategies, communication strategies and that’s it. They don’t have any tasks to use these strategies, so they [students] just forget about that after you study; so what I want them to do is to use these strategies to practice to speak to their friends, so I will have some other tasks for them to do that (Int.3).

Jessica, Lucy and Thomas all advocated a similar view about the need to develop learners’ ability to use speech acts effectively. As these teachers described, “communication strategies”, the term they used to refer to formulaic expressions or speech acts, were treated as both input content and desired output of their speaking lessons. They perceived that, as teachers, their main duty was to present and explain the strategies to the learners, get them to practice, and ensure that they could “put some of these strategies into use correctly” (Int.1). These teachers regarded learners’ incorporation of the formulaic expressions into speaking production as an indication of the achievement of the lesson objectives. To a certain extent, by providing learners opportunities to practise using these expressions in communicative contexts, they appeared to sense the importance of developing learners’ speech function skills. However, the fact that learners could incorporate these strategies into speaking practice activities might not necessarily mean that they have successfully transformed the newly acquired proceduralised knowledge of these expressions into automatic skills for spontaneous communication. To develop these skills, it is critical for learners to have opportunities to participate in authentic communication where they are allowed to holistically employ language to express meaning. This important step, however, was missing from the teachers’ discussions.

Interview evidence also shows that the teachers were largely unaware of interaction management skills. From the interviews, Jessica and Thomas were the only two teachers that demonstrated an extent of understanding of such important skills as initiating and maintaining conversations, offering turns, and directing and changing conversation (Goh & Burns, 2012). Jessica noted that she often invested time during her first week of classes “to teach students interaction skills when participating in pair and group activities” (SR.2). She especially focused on providing students with “expressions for asking for opinions, checking turns, showing agreement and disagreement or asking follow-up questions” (SR.2). These descriptions reflect Jessica’s awareness of the importance of
developing learners’ interaction management ability. That she conducted this as a one-off activity, however, might not be sufficient for these skills to be established and sustained.

As for Thomas, the only aspect of interactional strategies that attracted his attention was the learners’ use of non-verbal cues such as “facial expressions and eye brows” (SR.10). Thomas repeatedly stated that these features added important value to learners’ conversations and made them “more natural”. In teaching, he reported that the topic of how to effectively use body language to assist language use constituted an important part of the input and feedback he provided. Thomas, however, appeared not to pay any attention to other important interactional skills included in Goh and Burns’ model. His extreme focus on one aspect of the skills, although useful to some extent, might not be sufficient to support learners’ achievement of effective skills to function well in interactive conversations. As with Jessica, Thomas displayed a certain extent of awareness of the necessity to focus on communication management skills in speaking instruction, which set these two teachers aside from the other four teachers. However, their understanding of this knowledge component appeared to be characterised by a lack of comprehensiveness.

Similarly, these teachers’ knowledge of discourse organisation skills was found to be mostly incomplete. Goh and Burns (2012, p. 62) maintain that the skills to concurrently employ discourse, sociocultural and lexico-grammatical knowledge to establish coherence and cohesion in speaking is of crucial importance. Among the six teachers, Rose and Lucy were the only two that discussed the importance of teaching students some aspects of discourse organisation skills. As evident in the following quote, Rose argued that one central focus in speaking instruction was to develop not only learners’ ability to prepare, explain and clarify vocabulary and ideas but also the skills to organise and present their ideas in “succinct and logical way, with well-organised structure” (SR.7). It is worth noting that Rose was the only teacher that referred to this ability as skills, rather than knowledge. Given the fact that she was also the only one that demonstrated an understanding of spoken genres, as previously discussed, the idea of organisation ability she referred to in the quote was likely to have its relevance to discourse organisation skills:
They [learners] need to prepare vocabulary for the topics, but at the same time, they need to prepare ideas so that they can explain it, clarify it. That is the skills, the explanation skills. And another skill is how to present in a succinct and logical way, with well-organised structure. That’s it. That’s what we need to teach (SR.7).

Similar to Rose, Lucy also paid attention to supporting students in their ability to organise and present ideas. Lucy’s major concern, however, was directed to learners’ ability to “expand ideas” and adapt their language use between daily life and academic contexts. As Lucy explained, she noticed that many students seemed not to be aware that academic contexts required a command of different speaking styles and idea organisation. To assist the students, Lucy, as illustrated in the quote, manipulated the difficulty levels of speaking tasks and guided them to gradually shift from daily-life vocabulary to more academically suitable vocabulary. Such an adapting ability appears to require learners to draw on both linguistic and discourse knowledge for tailoring their language accordingly in use. However, as evident from Lucy’ explanations, she appeared to dovetail this ability with students’ knowledge of vocabulary, rather than as a holistic discourse organisation competence in which learners are enabled to simultaneously activate linguistic, sociocultural and discourse knowledge and concurrently put these into use:

From the beginning, I asked them some daily questions, but I raise the difficulties, the level of the questions, and they need to expand their answers and I show them how to expand their answers, how to use just daily words first and then expand to academic questions, and show their ideas. That’s the ways I can develop their speaking skills (Int.5).

These findings generally reveal the teachers’ incomplete understanding of the four core speaking skills, and the critical distinction between these skills and the underlying knowledge that underpins them. Although some of these teachers were, to a certain extent, aware of the need to facilitate the transformation of students’ knowledge into skills for automatic use in speaking interactions, they mainly focused on students’ linguistic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. In addition, although some teachers displayed a certain amount of knowledge of the four skill categories, this understanding was found to be fragmented, sometimes to an extreme degree in certain aspects. As such, all these skills were reported to have been minimally included in the teachers’ speaking instruction. Goh and Burns (2012) contend that, for effective communication, speakers also need good use of communicative strategies that could compensate for their deficiencies in linguistic and discourse knowledge. The next section will discuss the teachers’ understanding of strategic competence and its importance in speaking instruction.
6.2.4 Communicative strategies

Strategic competence is essential to speakers, especially those whose knowledge and skills have not reached the level of automatisation, since such competence helps minimise conversation breakdowns in spontaneous communication (Canale & Swain, 1980). Drawing on Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, these communication strategies are categorised into three groups, namely cognitive, metacognitive and interactional. Given the fact that the majority of learners in the present study were described as having low proficiency levels with limited vocabulary and structural knowledge, the inclusion of these strategies in teaching speaking would be highly expected. Interview data show however that, although most teachers showed an awareness of the three groups of strategies, a comprehensive understanding was missing from all teachers. Experienced teachers were also found to hold more comprehensive insights into these strategies, while less experienced teachers’ knowledge appeared to be closely aligned with the content provided in the prescribed materials.

Among the strategy groups, the teachers appeared most confident with the knowledge of interactional strategies, with more sophisticated understanding demonstrated by experienced teachers. Rose, for example, dovetailed learners’ strategic competence with what she called “speaking style”, through which she emphasised the ability “to exchange information”, “to explain, clarify and track information” (Int.4) in speaking interaction. In this sense, what Rose referred to as speaking styles appear to hint at interactional strategies or “social behaviours for negotiating meaning during interaction” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 66). This speaking style was described as functioning as an important benchmark in both her teaching and students’ evaluation. As she explained, in the quote below, the ultimate goal for learners to achieve is communication, so apart from the vocabulary, teachers needed to ensure that their teaching could gradually facilitate the development of speaking style:

The ultimate objective is communication, the vocabulary about the topics and the style they have when speaking about these topics. When they finish these ten chapters, they need to be able to talk about these chapters […] More important is the way they speak. They need to know how to exchange information in two ways, know how to clarify and explain, track information. As teachers, we need to help students gradually form this speaking style (Int.4).

Similar to Rose, Thomas provided a comprehensive explanation for the need to include
interactional strategies in speaking instruction. He contended that “confidence” and “motivation” were the two key factors that affected speaking performance, which could be observed through the ways learners employed communicative strategies in speaking interactions. Thomas viewed communicative strategies as “an integration of learners’ ability to employ language for clarification and repetition requests and to use body language to assist communication” (Int.6). He expressed that effective employment of these strategies compensated for limitations in learners’ knowledge and skills, to minimise communication breakdowns. It also enabled learners to “show their confidence, intimacy and friendliness in speaking” (Int.6), which he described as the main goal of his teaching. In alignment with their perception of the significance of communicative strategies in enhancing speaking performance, both Rose and Thomas reported to have covered them as important teaching content and evaluation criteria:

Most important for me is the motivation, communication skills, the strategies they use. They know how to ask people for repetition. When they fail to understand, they know how to move their eyebrows. In speaking they need to respond with “no or yeah”; that means the communication strategies, because these make sure to me that they are confident ... For strategies, for example in communication, I really care about strategies. For example, we need to teach them to use “uh huh”, or when speaking with a partner, they need to close their books and get away from the books because they need to look at their partners or eye-contact. This needs to be shown as strong as they can, and for me these strategies convey their friendliness and intimacy in communication (Thomas, Int. 6, translated from Vietnamese).

Different from these clearly articulated accounts, the less experienced teachers appeared to provide a simpler description of interactional strategies. As previously mentioned, Jenny, Lee, Lucy and Jessica employed the term “communication strategies” as an umbrella concept to encompass formulaic expressions, grammatical structures and interactional strategies. They explained that being competent in communicative strategies means “being able to effectively use target grammatical structures to perform specific functions” (Int.1) required by the speaking tasks. Jessica also maintained that “learners sound more like native if they could incorporate these strategies into their speaking performance” (Int.1). In teaching, these teachers reported that strategies were included as an important content component. These comments appear to depict these four teachers’ awareness of the value of interactional strategies in speaking performance.

This awareness, however, appeared not to be supported by a clear rationale. In discussing the reasons for including the strategies in speaking instruction, these teachers could not
provide strong justifications such as Thomas and Rose provided. Rather, they repeatedly referred to the prescribed textbooks as the source of the content and their perceived obligation to include this content component in teaching. This evidence reaffirms the effects of the teaching material on the teachers’ perceptions of the subject matter content. It further echoes a finding from previous studies concerning the difference in the degree of comprehensiveness and depth of the knowledge held by experienced and less experienced teachers (Baleghizadeh & Shahri, 2014; J. Richards et al., 1998; Tsui, 2003).

Teachers’ understanding of the metacognitive strategies is also characterised by a certain extent of divergence. In particular, five of the six interviewees (Thomas, Jessica, Lucy, Jenny and Lee) were aware of the importance of two particular strategies, planning and self-evaluation, and advocated the use of these strategies in speaking instruction. They repeatedly mentioned that planning and self-evaluation were two important stages in their speaking lessons. They pointed out that planning “could help students improve their confidence and performance” (Int.1), while self-evaluation gave students “a chance to reflect and learn from their mistakes upon the completion of a speaking task” (Int.6). These teachers, however, viewed these strategies as steps in a lesson rather than as parts of target teaching content for learners to acquire. As such, while these teachers guaranteed that these stages took place in their lessons, none of them appeared to discuss how they ensured that students could actually take control in practising, in developing the ability to use these strategies effectively.

Different from these teachers, Rose was well aware of planning as a meta-cognitive strategy that might be helpful to learners. She, however, was against rather than supportive of using it. She argued strongly that “having learners think, plan, write down ideas before exchanging information with their partners” would “slow down learners’ thinking and reaction ability” (Int.4). Instead, what was more important to Rose was the ability to think and generate “authentic ideas”, or learners’ self-generated ideas rather than being reproduced from others, and to express these on a spontaneous basis. Rose understood that this could be challenging to students at low proficiency level. However, she was convinced that, only when students struggled to convey their genuine ideas (Int.4), did there appear a need for meaning negotiation and clarification, from which language development occurred. This argument clearly indicates an alignment of Rose’s beliefs with the ‘speaking to learn’ principle promoted by the strong version of CLT.
(Nunan, 2004; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). With this standpoint, Rose distinguished herself from the other five teachers concerning their belief in the value of meta-cognitive strategies in the development of speaking competence.

The teachers also demonstrated a partial understanding of the value of cognitive strategies. From the interviews, most teachers emphasised that one general goal in speaking teaching was to enable learners “to achieve the communication purposes” (Int.3) and “convey their authentic messages and meanings in speaking by using whatever linguistic resources available” (Int.4). All teachers mentioned that, in speaking evaluation, learners needed to demonstrate “the ability to use strategies to complete their speaking tasks in order to pass the test” (Int.3). None of them, however, ever mentioned the importance of psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies such as paraphrasing, approximation, message frames or formulaic expressions. As such, none could articulate how these strategies could be embedded and developed via their teaching. These cognitive strategies, however, are critical in supporting speakers to buy thinking time or compensate for the shortage of their linguistic knowledge, which helps them to maintain interactions (Goh & Burns, 2012). This finding reflects a gap in teachers’ knowledge about communicative strategies and a potential mismatch between the teachers’ evaluation criteria and the content they included in classroom teaching.

As discussed, the teacher participants appear to have divergent understanding of and beliefs in the value of communicative strategies. Experienced teachers demonstrated more elaborate insights into these strategies and the underlying rationale why they are important to be included as teaching content. In contrast, less experienced teachers’ knowledge of this component appeared to be simple and aligned with the prescribed material. Among the three strategy categories, the teachers showed the least understanding of the psycholinguistic group and tended to view metacognitive strategies as lessons stages rather than as an official component of speaking subject matter content. Most teachers were aware of the importance of interactional strategies to learners’ speaking performance, although a systematic understanding of these strategies was still absent from all less experienced teachers.
6.2.5 Topic-specific knowledge

Knowledge of speaking topics, an important part of the extra-linguistic knowledge (Thornbury, 2005), strongly impacts speaking performance in both communication and testing conditions (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Thornbury, 2005). Speakers’ familiarity with and sufficient background knowledge about the topics significantly improve speaking fluency (Ellis, 2003; Nation, 1989; Rahimpour & Hazar, 2007; Robinson, 2001), accuracy (Rahimpour & Hazar, 2007), and complexity (Lange, 2000; Robinson, 2001). Insufficient topic-specific knowledge has also been identified as a major barrier to learners’ speaking performance (H. T. Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Nunan, 1999). Interview data from the present study indicate that all participating teachers identified generating speaking ideas as the most prominent typical problem for Vietnamese learners of English, which motivated these teachers to prioritise knowledge of topics as content of the utmost importance in speaking instruction.

Interview data show that all six teachers uniformly identified lacking topic-specific knowledge as the most typical barrier their students encountered in speaking. Jessica, for instance, emphasised that “students’ lack of social or base knowledge significantly hindered their speaking” (Int.1). As she explained, “many students, without having any ideas for speaking, constantly remained silent” (Int.1). She elaborated: “They don’t have any ideas or background knowledge […] They just have some knowledge about entertainment, but social or base knowledge, they lack that” (Int.1). Jenny raised a similar concern using the term “blank minds” (Int.3) to describe her students’ shortage of ideas. In the same vein, Thomas, Rose, Lucy and Lee repeatedly stressed that “poor ideas in speaking” (Int.2; Int.5) was a major problem that most students struggled with.

Taking cognisance of the students’ difficulties in generating ideas, these teachers prioritised topic-specific knowledge as a crucial content component of their speaking lessons. All six teachers contended that it was the teachers’ duty to guarantee that learners were provided with “some fundamental knowledge” (Int.1) or “information relevant to the topics in the input” (Int.2). Jenny, Rose, Thomas, and Jessica even rated knowledge of speaking topics as comparable to or even more important than the linguistic components of vocabulary and pronunciation. Jenny explained: “I always focus on ideas for speaking first and then vocabulary. They are the two major contents” (Int.3). Thomas
also expressed that, “in speaking, first of all, students need to know what they want to say, the meanings, the contents. Then they need to select vocabulary, pronounce correctly with good intonation and accent” (Int.6). Evident in these comments is the teachers’ common belief that speaking ideas must be treated as a prerequisite of language use. As such, in speaking instruction, teachers should prioritise supporting learners in generating ideas for speaking before working on linguistic knowledge.

Evidence from the interview data also shows that these teachers employed various approaches to support learners to prepare sufficient topic-specific knowledge for speaking. Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Thomas, for instance, relied on listening and reading input as a means to provide learners with ideas for speaking. Thomas stated: “Listening activities readily provided in the textbooks were a great source of ideas for speaking” (Int.6). From listening input, learners could “extract ideas and vocabulary for acquiring and then use them in follow-up speaking activities” (Int.1). Lee mentioned that she occasionally included reading activities in speaking classes as a way to provide learners with “some ideas, some vocabulary for both subsequent listening and speaking activities” (Int.2). This evidence shows that, from these teachers’ perspective, ideas and vocabulary are inseparable, which should be introduced together in a contextualised manner through listening and reading activities.

A few teachers further supported students in generating ideas through appropriate sequencing of instructional activities and manipulation of classroom interactions. Jessica, for instance, reported to have postponed speaking production activities until the end of the lessons. Jessica explained: “If I put speaking first, they will not have many ideas to talk. They struggle with finding the ideas by themselves to express” (SR.1). Jenny also felt that she successfully supported ideas to weak students by manipulating her interactions with different groups of students. In particular, she deliberately delayed asking weak students questions to allow them sufficient time for thinking and collecting ideas. As she observed, this approach was effective in “giving weak students more time for thinking and listening to stronger students’ ideas as well as processing the input” (SR.5). By asking the same questions but allowing strong students to share their ideas first and further sharing her own ideas, she enabled weak students to accumulate sufficient content for their own speaking. In this sense, in dealing with the learners’ shortage of speaking ideas, these two teachers appeared to draw on an intermeshed knowledge base,
which integrates their understanding of the learners, SMCK and also PCK.

Unlike these teachers, Rose dealt with the issue simply by adjusting the expected outcomes for students’ speaking. From the interviews, she repeatedly emphasised that her main goal in teaching was “to enable learners to achieve the ability to express authentic ideas, or the true ideas in their minds that they want to express” (SR.7) using whatever linguistic resources they had at hand. She was also fully aware of the two major challenges in her current teaching: “students’ extremely low proficiency level and highly complex topics prescribed from the textbooks” (SR.7). As a solution, she decided to lower her requirements of learners’ speaking in terms of ideas. Rose explained that all she expected from the students was “simply having enough vocabulary to restate the ideas expressed in the reading passages in the textbooks, not to talk about any new ideas” (SR.7). Rose’s adjustment of speaking requirements as simply “restatements of ideas”, however, appears to contradict her long-term teaching principle, which is to enable learners to express their authentic ideas.

Such a contradiction appears to resonate with the incongruence between teachers’ beliefs and their practice in specific contextual conditions that has been reported in numerous studies (e.g. Basturkmen, 2012; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Sinprajakpol, 2004). For Rose, there appears to exist two different layers of beliefs: one set of core, sustainable beliefs (Zheng, 2013b) that appear to align with communicative-oriented teaching; and the other set of beliefs in action, which are responsive to specific teaching conditions. In this sense, to resolve the tension between these two sets of beliefs, Rose tended to lean towards her beliefs in action to adjust from communicative to reproductive standard. It should be noted that Rose explicitly explained that this adjustment could only be possible if teachers had extensive teaching experience and a clear understanding of the teaching context. In addition, given the fact that Rose was the only teacher in a management position, this status might have also allowed her to make adjustment in a more confident manner, which might explain why this approach was not taken by the other five participants.

As discussed, topic-specific knowledge was consistently promoted by the participants as crucial teaching content in speaking instruction. Interestingly, this knowledge component has been largely ignored in most models of speaking competence, including that of Goh and Burns (2012), which appear to take speaking ideas for granted and treated as
peripheral rather than as official teaching content. The teachers in the present study, however, strongly emphasised that supporting learners to generate sufficient ideas for speaking should be viewed as a top priority for teachers in the Vietnamese context. Resonating with findings from Nunan (1999) and H. T. Nguyen and Tran (2015), these teachers maintained that lacking ideas adversely affects learners’ ability to mobilise and activate appropriate linguistic knowledge for conceptualising and formulating messages. As such, focusing on topic-specific knowledge was perceived by these teachers as crucial for ensuring learners’ participation in speaking activities and stopping them from remaining silent.

To at least equip learners with basic knowledge of topics, the teachers adopted various measures including selecting appropriate listening and reading material and employing suitable lesson sequencing and classroom interactions. The most experienced teacher, Rose, further adjusted the expected speaking standard, which appears to run counter to her long-term teaching belief. These teachers’ priority to topic-specific knowledge and approaches to ensure its inclusion in teaching appear to have been determined on the basis of an integrated knowledge base, which intermeshed SMCK, PCK and knowledge of learners. It also highlights the complicated and situated nature of the teachers’ belief systems and their interactions with the actual teaching realities.

6.2.6 Summary

Findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK presented in this section highlight the central position of linguistic and topic-specific knowledge in the teachers’ conceptions of speaking teaching content. Consistently, these teachers perceived topic-specific knowledge as being the most crucial conditions or means for students’ use of linguistic resources. They believed that lacking background knowledge, a common problem for Vietnamese learners, was a major hindrance to the learners’ speaking performance. They also viewed linguistic knowledge as a fundamental underlying component of learners’ ability to conceptualise and formulate speaking messages. As such, these knowledge components tended to be intertwined in the teachers’ descriptions and treated as the most critical focal points of their teaching content.

The teachers’ understanding of other components of speaking competence proposed in
Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, however, was found to be fragmented rather than systematic. Their awareness of knowledge of discourse, for example, mainly centred on formulaic expressions or speech acts, which appeared to be strongly shaped by the prescribed material. Most teachers seemingly held limited understanding of sociocultural knowledge and knowledge of spoken genres, the two important discourse components that significantly affect speakers’ ability to use language appropriately. Similarly, most teachers appeared to have limited understanding of the critical distinction between speakers’ underlying knowledge underpinning speaking performance and the core speaking skills that enable them to function effectively in spontaneous communication. Their knowledge of the four skill categories, of pronunciation, speech functions, interaction management and discourse organisation was also limited. As such, discourse knowledge and core speaking skills were minimally included in teaching, mainly through awareness-raising and feedback activities. In a similar vein, with respect to their knowledge of strategic competence, while more teachers were aware of the importance of meta-cognitive and interactional strategies, most lacked understanding of strategies at cognitive levels.

The teachers’ dominant focus on linguistic knowledge in teaching speaking appears to reflect a narrow conceptualisation of communicative competence, which mainly includes linguistic components rather than an integration of linguistic, sociocultural and strategic competencies. However, analyses of their explanations for the importance of each linguistic component appeared to reveal their general orientation towards a meaning-focused teaching practice. Uniformly, these teachers highly valued the role of vocabulary as building blocks for the conceptualisation and formulation of ideas, and suggested that vocabulary should be introduced in a contextualised manner and in conjunction with speaking ideas. Their attention to pronunciation, although limited, was mainly anchored in supra-segmental features rather than those at the segmental level of individual sounds and words. All teachers also appeared to concentrate on the functional grammatical aspects, rather than the traditional system of rules for sentence construction. As a whole, these teachers’ cognitions about the linguistic sub-components reflects a strong inclination towards a communicative-focused approach to speaking instruction where the provision of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar knowledge serves the aim of expressing and conveying meaning in communication.
In general, the teachers’ cognitions about speaking SMCK appear to be constrained by three important features. Firstly, experienced teachers tend to possess more intricate and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter content. Their insights were mostly supported by all-rounded justifications that reflected their considerations of relevant contextual conditions, learners and teaching objectives. Less experienced teachers’ cognition, however, appeared to be characterised by a simplistic and incomplete manner, which was found to be more aligned with the curriculum and its prescribed material. This evidence reaffirms findings from previous studies concerning the differences in the level of thoroughness of knowledge held by experienced and novice teachers (Baleghizadeh & Shahri, 2014; J. Richards et al., 1998; Tsui, 2003). Secondly, evidence from Rose’s case further demonstrates the existence of a two-tiered belief system that constrained the experienced teacher’s long-term teaching principle and their contextual-sensitive teaching behaviours and how these interact with contextual conditions (Zheng, 2013b). Finally, teachers’ discussion of the speaking SMCK was frequently indispensable from different aspects of their PCK, especially with respect to lesson sequencing and activity organisation. This suggests an inextricable relationship among different categories in the teachers’ knowledge base, which are usually integrally activated as a whole in decision-making.

Goh and Burns (2012) suggest that, to successfully develop students’ speaking competence, apart from a comprehensive inclusion of all necessary knowledge, skill and strategy components, the pedagogical approach that teachers employ needs to effectively facilitate the transformation of learners’ declarative knowledge into procedural forms for automatic use. In the next section, findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about PCK will be presented.

6.3 Teachers’ cognitions about PCK

This section presents findings related to TC about PCK in teaching speaking, based on both interview and observation data. As discussed in the theoretical framework, a key tenet of PCK is the pedagogical knowledge conceptualised as “the blending of content and pedagogy” (Shulman, 1986, p. 8). It was further argued in the framework that, in specific teaching settings, teachers’ pedagogical decisions are critically shaped by their understanding of the teaching context and the learners. In other words, in selecting
approaches, methods and strategies for organising, representing and presenting content to learners, teachers draw on their knowledge of what they teach, who their learners are, and under what contextual conditions they teach. Informed by this conceptualisation, findings in relation to TC about PCK in this section are structured into three parts: (1) teachers’ knowledge about context; (2) teachers’ knowledge about learners; and (3) teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy.

6.3.1 Teacher’s knowledge about context

Contextual conditions, as discussed in the theoretical framework, encompass factors at macro, meso and micro levels (Fulmer et al., 2015; Kozma, 2003). Previous studies have informed that conditions at each of these levels significantly impact teachers’ beliefs and teaching enactment: the macro level of sociocultural setting (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Hu, 2005; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004); the meso level of institutional factors (Carless, 2004; Hiep, 2007); and the micro level of classroom conditions (L. Li, 2013; L. Li & Walsh, 2011). Results from the present study, as will be discussed below, reveal that, although the teachers discussed various contextual conditions at different levels, the institutional management policy at the meso level was perceived as being the most influential factor that impacted their teaching.

Interview data shows that the institutional management scheme attracted most substantial attention from the teachers. Except for Rose, who was in a management position, the other five teachers all complained about the lack of systematic monitoring of the curriculum delivery. Thomas explained: “there seemed to be no control from the university and department levels over teaching content, pedagogy and assessment” (Int.6). Under these conditions, the teachers perceived that they were solely responsible for defining both teaching content and approaches. They felt that, without sufficient guidelines and proper management, they had the power “to decide the fates of the students” (Int.5). These teachers also reported that meetings among teachers who were teaching the same subjects were also “extremely rare” (Int.6); as such, they had “no opportunities for discussing and reaching a consensus on what to teach, how to teach and how to evaluate students” (Int.5). As evident from these comments, under the current management scheme, the teachers appear to be empowered with an extensive amount of freedom in making pedagogical decisions.
These teachers, however, perceived this freedom not only as unnecessary but also as hindering the teaching quality. They argued that the current lack of control was the main cause for students’ inconsistent learning outcomes. Thomas and Jessica, for instance, were concerned that “a lack of standardisation in the teaching content, material and evaluation would inevitably lead to a vicious circle of long-existing problems” (Int.6). As evident in the quote below, Thomas was critical of the overlapping or repetition of the teaching content in different levels and inconsistency of evaluation criteria among teachers, since they were not systematically organised in the programs. He also raised the concern that this may lead to “an endless circle of mixed proficiency among learners” at both entry and exit levels:

Overlapping in teaching will be unavoidable and everything will soon become fragmented and inconsistent. Since students are taught separately and evaluated by teachers who have different perceptions of students’ speaking levels and different expectations and standards in assessment, problems with students’ mixed levels would persist when cohorts of students who complete a speaking subject together enroll for a higher level (Int.6).

Thomas’s concern was shared by Jenny, Lucy and Lee. Jenny stated that the lack of uniformity in the teachers’ evaluation standards would inevitably lead to “unfair assessment”, and the students’ outcomes would not “correctly reflect students’ achievements, ability or levels” (Int.3). Lee considered this to be the main cause for students’ inconsistent achievement of outcomes for every speaking level. She proposed that, “to minimise differences in the learning outcomes, the department managers should have teachers sit together […] and decide what they are going to teach” (Int.2). Lucy also maintained that “lecturers need[ed] to sit together and talk more about the topics and the way that they evaluate” (Int.5). These suggestions reflect a common belief among the teachers that the current management has failed to ensure the necessary consistency in the teachers’ interpretations of the teaching and evaluation content prescribed from the curricula. It also did not provide them with the required conditions for discussing, sharing and reaching agreements on these issues.

The teachers also contended that the current management practice added unnecessary burdens to their existing heavy workload. Lee, for instance, stated that, without clear guidelines and effective control, “it is very hard for both teachers and students, especially
when teachers actually have to teach many different classes in the same semester” (Int.2). Lucy added: “each teacher has to redesign or adjust the syllabus for their own classes” (Int.5), which she believed to be time-consuming and possibly leading to more significant differences among teachers. With respect to assessment, Jessica contended that “various evaluation standards have led to an extensive number of unnecessary complaints and questions from students” (Int.1), which created extra pressure within the working conditions. As she explained in the quote below, students were also aware of the discrepancies among teachers and had started to challenge this:

It [detailed guidelines] will be easy for the teachers to come to class, not to worry about what to teach today and how to teach, and will save more time. And with the evaluation also, if we make it clear from the beginning, students will know how it is evaluated, and they will know how to study. And teachers will not have to deal with any problems later on, something like: I should get better grades, and that teacher gave a very easy test why you ask so high to us? (Int.1)

As evident in this quote, Jessica believed that a stricter control mechanism with clear, detailed and consistent guidelines would be a sensible solution. Such a practice, as she explained, would not only significantly reduce the hassles they were encountering, but it would also provide learners with clearer expectations of final exam requirements. In turn, this knowledge would help students to effectively prepare to meet these expectations right from the beginning of the semester.

The less experienced teachers also viewed the current management system as the main cause of their low level of teaching confidence. Lucy, for example, confessed that she was constantly overwhelmed with a feeling of uncertainty about every teaching aspect. She recalled: “all the supports I got was the textbooks and the subject outlines, general and unclear, and I mainly based on the pedagogical knowledge I learned from the bachelor program, which I guess is more related to high school” (Int.5). In this situation, Lucy was unsure about “whether what [she] was doing was right, whether other teachers were doing the same things, whether [her] students achieved the objectives [she] was supposed to help them; whether they could mix with other students in the next level” (Int.5). She admitted: “honestly I don’t know how students feel about my teaching. We just look at the scores [students’ results] and maybe my class has a lot of As and we think my teaching is excellent, but I don’t really think so” (Int.5). Lucy’s comments depict her low level of self-efficacy in teaching practice. Such a lack of confidence, as suggested by previous
studies (Chen & Goh, 2011; Shulman, 1986, 1987), might negatively affect teachers’ pedagogical decisions and teaching quality.

Another problem that these less experienced teachers seemed to believe, as stemming from the current management practice, was the limited opportunities for their professional development. As Lucy explained, being aware of her lack of confidence, she reached out for any support that might improve her confidence and teaching quality. She described: “I constantly looked for relevant conferences and workshops on teaching speaking to attend” and “indirectly asked my students what they thought about my teaching” (Int.5). In addition, since meetings among colleagues were rare, Lucy was desperately seeking for opportunities where experienced teachers would share their teaching strategies and material. As she also reported, however, her efforts to gain permission from experienced teachers to observe their classroom teaching were mostly rejected, since there was no culture, obligation or even encouragement from the department for this peer-support practice.

This lack of support from the teacher community appeared to negatively impact Lucy’s perception of the working environment. She appeared to interpret the experienced teachers’ refusal for classroom observations “as a way to selfishly protect the secrets that each teacher has” (Int.5). She recalled: “then I just asked for the materials. I asked other teachers about the contents or just look at their syllabus [...] sometimes I wanted to share the materials but it’s very difficult. Maybe they had their own materials and they didn’t want to share with me” (Int.5). From Lucy’s perspective, the current management did not successfully create a community of sharing among teachers, which limited opportunities for professional development. This finding reconfirms the assertion made by Duyen, Kettle, May, and Klenowski (2016) that management policies can significantly impact the institutional interactions among teachers in the workplace. It also reflects a common problem with regard to limited access to opportunities for ongoing professional development among EFL teachers in Asian contexts (Chen & Goh, 2011).

In contrast to the notable attention to the meso level factor of management, these teachers perceived that the macro level conditions had minimal effects on their teaching. Interview data show that the only sociocultural factor mentioned as a disadvantage for Vietnamese learners was the lack of an English language environment outside the classroom. Jenny
felt that the absence of this condition might “limit the development of learners’ speaking competence and reduce their motivation” (Int.3). However, from her perspective, it did not necessarily exert any strong impact on her pedagogical decisions. Furthermore, different to findings from previous studies in the Vietnamese context (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003; Tuyet, 2013) that reported on the hindering effects on teaching quality from the prescribed curriculum, textbooks and the form-focused examinations, the teachers in this study perceived there to be only minimal influence from these socio-cultural factors. They explained that, at the tertiary level, they were free from these constraints, since “the university had the autonomy to make its own decisions on curriculum development and textbook selection” (Int.4). In such a context, the teachers perceived that they had sufficient freedom in making decisions related to both teaching and evaluating content.

At the micro level, class size was the only aspect that most teachers commented on. As they described, the typical average number of students in speaking classes in this institution was 40, which most of them perceived as “manageable” (Int.3) and “acceptable” (Int.6; Int.4; Int.5). Similar class size, however, has been suggested as restricting teachers’ ability to gauge individual learners’ needs and effectively support their speaking development (Duyen et al., 2016). Among the teachers, Lee and Jessica were the two teachers that expressed a preference for an ideal class size of 20 to 25 students. They explained that 40 students could be challenging for teachers “to promote pair and group activities” (Int.2) and “to afford sufficient attention to individual students” (Int.1). In general, however, they both felt that this size did not necessarily create much trouble for their teaching. These teachers’ perception could be explained by tracing back the changes in class size in this institution. As these teachers described, English classes at this university used to be much larger, sometimes up to hundreds of students. Being aware of such a history, these teachers might have perceived the reduction of class size to 40 as being a positive and acceptable change.

In the same vein, the teachers perceived that other micro level factors did not strongly impact their teaching performance. Thomas, Jessica and Jenny all stated that the present physical classroom conditions and teaching equipment including CD players and projectors, were sufficient and appropriate. Thomas and Jessica were, however, a little concerned about “the classroom layout with long, unmovable tables” (Int.6), which they
reported “might reduce teachers’ and learners’ eagerness to move around and get involved in active speaking activities” (Int.6). Nevertheless, they maintained that these conditions did not significantly change their normal ways of conducting speaking lessons.

Altogether, this study found that contextual factors at the meso level, rather than the macro and micro levels, appeared to have the greatest impact on the teachers’ pedagogy. The teachers perceived that a lack of systematic control from different management levels granted them unbridled power to make pedagogical decisions. This finding presents a stark contrast with results from previous studies on the Vietnamese high school context (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003; Tuyet, 2013), which report that the rigid, top-down management remarkably downplayed teachers’ role and limited their freedom in decision making. Such a restriction of the teachers’ rights has been commonly criticised as a major hindrance to teaching quality. Interestingly, the teachers in the present study, given the optimal autonomy available, viewed this decentralised institutional management not only as the main cause of learners’ inconsistent outcomes and an unnecessary burden to their workload, but also as the major condition that significantly reduced their confidence and restricted opportunities for professional development.

6.3.2 Teachers’ knowledge about learners

Knowledge of learners, the second fundamental element comprising PCK, is another factor that strongly influences teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Ample evidence from the current literature shows that teachers adjust teaching strategies based on their understanding of the learners’ preconceptions and misconceptions about the subject matter (Shulman, 1986), age and affective features such as motivation, interests, personality, and learning difficulties (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Park & Oliver, 2007), proficiency levels, learning styles and attitudes (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Littlewood, 2004, 2013; Nunan, 2003). Interview data in the present study reveal that, as discussed below, the teacher participants identified learner’ diversity as the most influential factor in their speaking pedagogy. As evident from these teachers’ discussion, this diversity was relevant to a multitude of features. Among these, learners’ differences in relation to their speaking proficiency levels appeared to exert the strongest impact on the teachers’ pedagogical decisions.
One major finding from the interview data concerning teachers’ knowledge of learners is centred around the diversity among students. When asked to describe the learners, all six teachers frequently used the two adjectives “different” and “various” to refer to a constellation of the learners’ characteristics. The most prominent feature that all six teachers repeatedly emphasised was the learners’ diverse speaking proficiency levels, which existed between different groups and among individual students within each group. These differences in students’ speaking ability, as Jenny contended, “were so remarkable that it created huge problems in teaching” (Int.3). Most teachers also paid substantial attention to the differences in learners’ motivation. Rose and Thomas especially highlighted that their current groups of students were highly motivated in studying. In contrast, Lee reported that her students were mostly characterised by “a lack of motivation and awareness for self-study” (Int.2).

Other teachers also dovetailed learners’ differences with a cluster of features. Lucy, for instance, directed her attention to the learners’ differences with respect to age, profession and specialisation of their first university degree, which she viewed as having a strong influence over their attitudes and learning styles. Similarly, Lee gravitated her attention towards learners’ differences in learning style and strategies. As she explained, her two classes were “totally different in the ways they studied: their attitudes, learning habits, their learning styles and the way they react[ed] to [her] teaching method” (Int.2). Lee reported that these differences motivated her to constantly adjust her teaching. This evidence suggests that the teachers’ knowledge of learners was dominated by their awareness of the notable differences among learners in relation to various dimensions, including proficiency levels and educational, social and affective backgrounds. Differences in each of these features, as these teachers explained, encouraged them to adjust their teaching practice to optimise learning opportunities to all students.

Further investigations into the teachers’ explanations, however, showed that learners’ diversity in proficiency levels received the most substantial attention from these teachers when making their pedagogical decisions. To provide learning opportunities to students of various levels, the less experienced teachers (Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Lucy) reported to have employed a binary approach as a way to diversify teaching material, content and activities. Jessica, for instance, maintained that to engage both strong and weak students, teachers needed to “fulfil the main content prescribed in the books before expanding it to
a more advanced level” (Int.1). As she explained, “since the prescribed materials [were] not suitable to students’ levels in all classes, [she] [had] to modify and design more speaking activities as well as making them more interesting” (SR.1). Jessica observed that, of the two classes she taught, the stronger one would “get bored easily with the boring topics and activities in the books, so [she] had to change [activities] every time” (SR.1). Similarly, Lee reported to have designed two separate speaking tasks based on the listening activities in the textbook, each targeting a different group of “strong” and “basic” learners. By varying the task types, she explained that she could ensure learning opportunities for students of all levels:

Each unit has two parts and normally the first part is just some basic situations for conversations, so I design the activities so that basic students can exchange information with their partner. The second, I ask them probably to work in groups to present their ideas, or I give them a situation so that they can stand up and talk about the topic individually so that the good students can improve their skills, their levels and their knowledge about that (Int.2).

Evident in Lee’s quote is a strong belief that students of different levels need different activities to facilitate the development of their speaking ability. Low proficiency learners might just need “basic situations for conversations” so that they could “exchange information with their partner.” More advanced learners, however, might need to participate in group activities “to present their ideas” or “talk about the topic individually.” By designing different tasks, Lee explained that teachers could enable learners to “improve their skills, their levels and their knowledge.”

In a similar vein, Lucy responded to the learners’ diverse needs by differentiating the activities she supplemented. In selecting supplemented material, Lucy explained that she intentionally chose “two videos relevant to the same topic but different in terms of speaking performance and levels of language use” (Int.5). By having students compare these videos, she could demonstrate various standards and requirements posed by the same speaking task to learners at different proficiency levels. This design, as she elaborated, allowed students at lower proficiency level “to improve their vocabulary” and advanced learners to “expand their answers and learn how to structure [their speeches] in a logic manner” (Int.5). In this sense, she appeared to believe that, in contrast to the need to focus on linguistic knowledge for low proficiency learners, advanced students might need to concentrate on knowledge at the discourse level to improve their organisation of ideas.
In contrast to these teachers’ two-tiered differentiating approach, Rose, responded to the learners’ needs by further departing from the mandated curriculum. Being aware of her students’ low proficiency, Rose adjusted the prescribed expected outcomes. She explained that, “since [students’] initial conditions [were] so weak, [teachers] [could] not base on the subject outcomes (Int.4). In teaching, Rose reported to have mainly focused on listening, as she believed that “rich listening input” was beneficial to learners at low proficiency levels and matched “[leaners’] passive learning style” (Int.4). She observed that, “by listening, analysing the tape scripts and practicing model conversations, students became more confident, and they thought speaking English is edible [not too challenging]” (SR.7). Rose also intentionally selected different activities for this group. She contended that pair and group activities were not effective for these students, because they would “either keep silent or switch to Vietnamese” (SR.7). Instead, she preferred such activities as Reading Scanning Race, through which students were required to converse in English directly with her. These adjusting strategies appear to distinguish Rose from the other teachers. As evident, to respond to the learners’ proficiency levels, Rose adjusted not only the teaching content and activities but also the expected outcomes from the curricula. In addition, unlike the less experienced teachers who considered the prescribed material and content as a fundamental resource that they needed to follow before supplementing from other sources, Rose did not perceive there to be a strong obligation to conform to the mandated curricula. Such a perception might have derived from the extensive teaching and managing experience she had accumulated from the context.

In brief, learners’ differences in relation to a multitude of features surfaced from the interview data as the most prominent feature that attracted substantial attention from the teachers. However, learners’ differences in speaking proficiency levels were found to be the most influential aspect that these teachers responded to in teaching. To optimise learning opportunities for all learners, the less experienced teachers adopted a two-tiered approach, which allowed them to combine content and activities from the prescribed and supplemented material. In contrast, experienced teachers tended to depart further from the mandated curricula and comprehensively adapt teaching content, activities and learning outcomes. These teachers’ knowledge of the context and learners, as discussed, significantly impacted their decisions in teaching speaking. It also provides an important contextual foundation for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ cognitions about
speaking pedagogy, which will be presented in the sections to follow.

6.3.3 Teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy

Teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy, as discussed previously, occupies a central place in PCK. Informed by Shulman’s (1987) conception of teacher knowledge base, teachers’ pedagogic knowledge can be seen as comprising general pedagogical knowledge and speaking subject pedagogy. As also discussed in the theoretical framework, investigations into the teachers’ speaking pedagogy in this study are centred around two principal aspects: teachers’ selection of activities and sequencing of speaking lessons. Framed by this perspective, findings relevant to TC about speaking pedagogy in this section are organised into three main parts: (1) approaches and methods in teaching speaking; (2) selection of instructional activities; and (3) sequencing of a speaking lesson. Empirical data that support these findings will be drawn from both interviews and classroom observations.

6.3.3.1 Teachers’ approaches and methods in teaching speaking

This section focuses on the approaches and methods the teachers reported to have used in teaching speaking, as informed by the interview data. It specifically draws upon the teachers’ responses to the interview question: “What approaches or methods do you think your teaching is underpinned by?” Relevant classroom observation data, however, will be presented in the sections that follow, and are organised around teachers’ selection and sequencing of teaching activities.

One major finding from the interviews concerning the teachers’ approaches and methods in teaching speaking is the dominance of the CLT as a preferred methodology among the less experienced teachers. When asked about what methods they used in teaching speaking, Lee, Jenny, Lucy and Jessica indicated that CLT principles formed the foundation of their teaching. Lee and Jenny claimed that their teaching “followed CLT method” (Int.2). Jessica asserted that her teaching was underpinned “by a mix of task-based language learning and CLT” (Int.1). Similarly, Lucy reported to have used CLT, although there seemed to be a lack of confidence and consistency in her wording. At times, she reported that “[her] teaching conformed to the PPP model that [she] previously experienced as a student” (Int.5). At other times, she stated: “I maybe use communicative
approach a lot, in all of my activities” (Int.5). As a whole, nevertheless, these teachers’ self-reports indicated a stronger affiliation with CLT as the main teaching approach underlying their speaking instruction.

However, in-depth analyses of these teachers’ self-reported practices appear to reveal important misconceptions about their interpretations of CLT. When asked to specify what it meant to adopt CLT principles, Lucy explained:

[…] in all of my activities, I don’t want the students to write down a lot, and if the students write, I just ask them to discuss, speak out and not write. Also sometimes in games like “shout out” games that make sentences or run around. At that time, I only need them to speak out. I don’t care much about the content they speak and I feel happy when they speak and run around and use the vocabulary that I teach. That’s all. I don’t care much about writing or other skills (Int.5).

Lucy’s explanations suggest that, in her view, CLT is realised by an exclusive focus on ‘speaking out’, while other language skills and forms could be sidelined. Such a view echoes a common misconception held by EFL teachers as reported by previous studies (D. F. Li, 1998; K. Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Thompson, 1996). In addition, Lucy did not appear to attribute much importance to the content of students’ talk. She was more concerned about their opportunities to practise the vocabulary they have learned. This might suggest that learning to speak, in Lucy’s sense, involves talking to practise the language items rather than to express meaning in communication. This belief runs counter to the CLT principle concerning the paramount importance of meaningful communication in contributing to students’ speaking development (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003). It also reaffirms these teachers’ belief that vocabulary learning, rather than the ability to use language for making meaning, constitutes the principal objective driving their speaking lessons.

Similarly, a lack of focus on meaning was also evident in Lee’s specifications of CLT. Claiming to conform to CLT principles, Lee expressed that “encouraging students to communicate in real situations” (Int.2) was the main goal in her teaching. To effectively support learners’ development of authentic communicative competence, Lee maintained that:

Teachers should help [students] to have some ideas about the topics and then allow them to speak or listen freely. That means teachers should not control too much on the
ways students are learning, just encourage them to talk. Teachers need to support [students] with some language use: I mean the vocabulary like what they are going to learn about and then move on to the activities so that they can speak freely. I mean some simple activities, like the context or situations so that they can put [vocabulary] in a sentence (Int.2).

The above quote highlights Lee’s awareness of the need for teachers to “allow [students] to speak or listen freely” and “not control too much” the ways students learn to speak. She perceived that the teachers’ main duties were to “encourage” and “support” students with sufficient language for speaking and to provide them with opportunities to “speak freely”. These comments appear to indicate Lee’s support of a student-centred approach to speaking development where students take control of their learning process and participate in speaking activities to practise using the newly learned language in an uncontrolled manner. However, the last sentence in the quote reveals Lee’s overemphasis on the importance of vocabulary learning. From her explanations, speaking activities were seemingly employed simply to provide students with “the context or situations” to practise using the target vocabulary. These “simple activities” also appeared to mainly focus on language use “in a sentence” rather than in conversations or speeches. This sideling of language production at the textual or discourse level is believed to restrict the development of the competence that students need for real-life communications (Goh & Burns, 2012).

These analyses show that what seems to be absent from both Lucy’s and Lee’s interpretations of CLT is the necessary focus on meaning and students’ uncontrolled use of language, which is considered as the backbone of CLT. Such a focus appears to be overridden by their greater concern over the talking-to-practise principle. These teachers appear to be aware of the need to provide students with sufficient autonomy to take control of their language use and development when participating in speaking activities. However, their overemphasis on the need for learners to acquire discrete vocabulary and structures appears to have motivated them to take back this control. In this sense, even though CLT surfaced as the approach that these teachers claimed to have adopted, their explanations indicate that the important CLT principles, especially a strong focus on meaningful communication and a learner-centeredness, have not been taken up.

In contrast, the experienced teachers’ self-reports on teaching methods appear to be characterised by confidence and consistency. For instance, Rose expressed that she
mainly based her teaching on the PPP model. She was aware that PPP might not be perceived as an effective approach by other teachers, saying that “I just follow PPP, very simple. Although people criticise it, it’s still PPP that I used” (Int.4). She appears to strongly believe that PPP is the most appropriate model for her current groups of learners. Rose explained that developing learners’ communicative competence was her main teaching goal, and she was strongly supportive of CLT and valued the idea of using communicative activities to facilitate students’ speaking competence. However, taking the learners’ low proficiency and the time limit into consideration, she decided to sacrifice opportunities for interactive activities, to focus more on supporting students’ learning of vocabulary and topic-specific knowledge.

Similar to Rose, Thomas clearly articulated and justified his selection of the teaching approach. He described his teaching method as “the input and output approach” (Int.6). As Thomas explained, he “always ensured that learners obtained sufficient necessary input from listening exercises, [his] personal talk and explicit instruction so that they could effectively produce in the speaking tasks” (SR.10). He maintained that, without sufficient “input” and “practice”, students’ speaking “output” would suffer. He, therefore, repeatedly emphasised the importance of developing students’ knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and strategies, and providing them with sufficient language practice opportunities before asking them to produce language.

Thomas’s ‘input-output’ approach appears to be resonant with Rose’s PPP model in the sense that input provision and practice played a key role in the development of learners’ speaking competence. As with Rose, Thomas identified developing students’ competence to communicate naturally and confidently as his ultimate teaching goal. However, he was convinced that the input-output approach was the most appropriate to his present groups of students, taking into consideration their low proficiency. These two teachers appeared to hold a belief that the development of students’ speaking competence was mainly dependent on whether they have sufficiently accumulated and practised linguistic knowledge and ideas, rather than on the opportunities to engage in authentic communication contexts. Both Thomas and Rose appear to believe that CLT was only suitable for learners at an advanced level. This perspective seemed to reflect not only these teachers’ compliance with a cognitive approach to speaking development where the main focus is placed on transforming explicit input into comprehensible output through
practice, but it also reveals a certain extent of misconception about the value of CLT, in that the approach was considered only appropriate for learners at advanced level. Such a misconception about CLT among experienced teachers appears to have been discussed in the current literature in only a limited way.

In a nutshell, although CLT appears to have been a preferred approach among the less experienced teachers, their understanding of this teaching method was marred by misconceptions. As such, their self-reported practice appears to indicate a stronger alignment with the traditional form-focused and teacher-fronted approach, rather than the meaning-based and learner-centred principles underpinning CLT. In contrast, the experienced teachers, despite their awareness of CLT’s values for the development of students’ speaking competence, explicitly advocated the PPP or input-output model. This alignment with more conventional teaching models, although partly affected by a misconception of the unsuitability of CLT to learners at low proficiency levels, was evidently informed by their knowledge of the learners and the need to support their learning with linguistic and topic-specific knowledge.

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers’ speaking pedagogy and how speaking instruction was actually enacted in the classroom contexts, the next sections investigate these teachers’ selection of instructional activities and sequencing of speaking lessons.

6.3.3.2 Teachers’ selection of activities

This section examines the teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy through their selection of teaching activities, based on both interview and observation data. Evidence from previous studies (Nam, 2015; Trang, 2013; N. G. Viet, 2013) demonstrates that investigations into teachers’ common patterns in using prescribed material shed important light on different aspects of teachers’ pedagogical practice. Exploring the teachers’ orientations in employing the prescribed textbooks, therefore, serves as a point of departure in the examination of teachers’ selection of activities in this study. To gain an insightful understanding of the teachers’ pedagogy, the section further examines their selection of speaking task types with closer attention to the characteristics of these speaking activities, drawing on Goh and Burns’ model (2012) and Littlewood’s (1981,
whole-task and part-skill practice and the distinctive features between these two groups of task types.

The teachers' orientations in using the prescribed material

This section presents findings in relation to the common patterns in the teachers’ use of the prescribed textbooks, as evidenced from the analysis of the activities they conducted in teaching practice. As presented in Table 6.1 below, from the 20 observed lessons (12 units: 2 units for each teacher), a total number of 130 instructional activities were identified, among which 80 were classified as non-production speaking-oriented activities (category 2) and 50 speaking production activities (category 3). The 80 non-production activities were sub-classified into four groups: (1) listening and reading activities used as input sources (32); (2) vocabulary activation and presentation (22); (3) language analysis (10); and (4) feedback provision (16). Of the 50 speaking production tasks, 21 activities were designed as main speaking tasks conducted mostly at the end of the lessons. The remaining 29 activities were organised in earlier stages of the lessons, each with a clear focus on either vocabulary, pronunciation, or functional grammatical structures.

Table 6.1: Observed activities conducted by each teacher - Categories 2 and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
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<td>08</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>130</td>
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</table>

The analysis of the origins of the 130 observed activities reveals that a sizable number of the speaking production tasks were supplemented from outside the mandated material. As evident in Table 6.2, around 92% (46/50) of the observed speaking activities was added by the teachers. Jessica, Lucy, and Thomas supplemented 100% of the speaking activities in their lessons. In Lee’s and Jenny’s lessons, supplemented speaking tasks also outweighed the retained ones: seven and six supplemented activities compared to one, respectively. Rose was the teacher that employed the largest number of speaking activities from the prescribed material (2 activities), yet this number was just half of those she supplemented (4 activities). As explained by the teachers, this supplementation of speaking tasks was essential for offsetting the drawbacks of activities from the prescribed
textbooks, which they described as “too simple”, “boring” and “not suitable”. By supplementing “suitable activities”, the teachers seemed to believe that they could create a more “interesting” and “communicative” learning environment. This evidence suggests that the teachers’ decision to supplement speaking activities was underpinned by their inclination towards a communicative-based teaching approach.

Table 6.2: Sources of speaking activities used by the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Prescribed textbooks</th>
<th>Sources of activities</th>
<th>Activity types</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplemented</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other textbooks</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
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<td>00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>04</strong></td>
<td><strong>03</strong></td>
<td><strong>03</strong></td>
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</table>

* Each activity appeared once unless otherwise specified in parentheses.  
** Activities in bold-print were retained from the textbooks.

Evidence from the analysis further shows that the majority of the supplemented activities were self-developed by the teachers. Table 6.2 shows that approximately 86% (40/46) of the added activities were self-designed. In particular, Lee, Rose, Lucy and Thomas exclusively employed tasks designed by themselves. Jessica and Jenny, in comparison, used activities from a range of sources including other textbooks and the Internet; yet self-developed activities still dominated their lessons. In the interviews, most teachers reported that the Internet and other textbooks were key sources of their supplemented activities. Nevertheless, classroom data showed that material from these two sources was used only in a limited way, with only three activities from each source: the Internet (Jessica: 02; Jenny: 01); and other textbook series (Jessica: 02; Jenny: 01). Given the dominance of self-developed tasks in the teachers’ lessons, investigations into the criteria
these teachers drew on in designing these supplemented tasks might provide crucial insights into their pedagogical orientations.

Results from investigations into these teachers’ criteria suggest that, in designing supplemented tasks, the teachers’ central focus was mainly drawn to the content embedded in the tasks rather than the task characteristics themselves. In the interviews, Jessica, Lee, Jenny, Lucy and Thomas all stated that they relied on “the topics” of the lessons to decide what activities to develop. Jessica said: “I design the task myself and the task is related to the topic, […] and the input to decide the activity” (SR.2). Lucy also reported: “I base on the objectives and the purpose of the lesson, then I design the activities” (SR.8). The input and objectives that Jessica and Lucy mentioned, as they elaborated, referred to “the structures and vocabulary” (SR.8) and “communication strategies” (SR.5). Thomas clearly explained that, “as teachers, we need[ed] to have a clear picture about the objectives of each lesson and the input we provide[ed] so that when we design[ed] speaking activities, we could ensure that students could practise using the vocabulary, pronunciation and structures from the input into speaking” (SR.10).

These explanations indicate that the topics, and the target language and ideas, functioned as the key criteria underlying the teachers’ design of these tasks. In other words, their central concern in designing these tasks appears to have been directed to what ideas, vocabulary, structures or strategies students could practise when performing the tasks. Analysis of all interviews further shows that none of the teachers tapped into the importance of task characteristics such as the extent of its focus on meaning, purpose, authenticity, or the predictability of the language and meaning students expressed through the tasks. None of them discussed how carefully the communicative characteristics were considered when designing the tasks. This evidence appears to reflect a gap in the teachers’ knowledge about task features. This lack of understanding of the task characteristics among Vietnamese teachers has been earlier reported in studies conducted by Loi (2011) and N. G. Viet (2013). Such a gap in the teachers’ knowledge, as suggested by these studies, might negatively impact the ways teachers select, design and implement the tasks in classroom contexts.

The second common trend in the teachers’ use of the prescribed material was their
retention of listening and reading activities in their speaking lessons. Evidence from the 20 observed lessons shows that, of 32 listening and reading activities implemented in the classroom, 27 were taken from the prescribed material. In particular, all the listening activities conducted by Lucy, Jenny and Thomas were retained from the mandated textbooks. Retained listening activities also dominated Lee’s lessons (03 retained; 01 supplemented), although she reported that she frequently supplemented her teaching with videos downloaded from the Internet for classroom activities. Jessica, however, appeared to have maintained a balance of listening activities from the mandated textbooks and those supplemented from other textbooks and the Internet, with four activities from each source. Although Rose indicated that both listening and reading activities were adopted from the textbooks, only reading tasks were observed in her lessons, which were all conducted in the same way they were designed in the textbooks.

These teachers’ common practice in retaining listening activities appears to reflect their focus on providing learners with linguistic and topic-specific knowledge. In the interviews, Lee and Thomas reported that, in selecting listening activities, their primary consideration was placed upon whether the activities provided students with “ideas and vocabulary for their speaking activities” (Int.2) or “necessary input for speaking” (Int.6). Similarly, Jenny and Jessica considered whether through these activities students could “realise patterns or structures people often use in conversations to apply in speaking” (Int.3), “get some structures about the topics and make sentences for themselves” (Int.1), or simply “imitate” ideas from the activities and “speak out” (SR.2). Thomas further explained that the listening activities from the prescribed material “already provided sufficient and excellent input for speaking, so there was no need to search for supplemented listening material” (Int.6). These comments suggest that the teachers’ retention of the listening activities was underpinned by the belief that these activities sufficiently provided learners with the linguistic and topic-specific knowledge that the teachers perceived as necessary for students’ speaking performance.

Another important pattern in the teachers’ use of the prescribed material was their modification of vocabulary-providing activities. Observation data show that most lessons started with a pre-teaching vocabulary stage. Activities in this stage were typically an adapted version of the Warm-up and Before you listen sections in the textbooks, in which key vocabulary for each topic was introduced. In presenting the provided words to
students, the teachers always added more vocabulary items, which, as they explained, was crucial for preparing learners for subsequent listening and speaking activities. Lee felt that the adapted word list “help[ed] students approach the listening exercises better and accumulate enough language for speaking production at the end of the lessons” (Int.2). Jessica also stated that, with sufficient vocabulary, students could perform better in “parsing the listening texts for comprehension” and “realise the patterns and structures” (Int.1) in the listening texts. Thomas, Lucy and Jenny all maintained that, although the textbook activities already provided learners with the fundamental vocabulary for each topic, this was not sufficient for them to “parse the listening content easily” (Int.3) and “discuss issues related to the topics” (Int.6). As such, it was vital for the teachers to “consider what vocabulary to add on and present to the learners” (Int.5) so that they could perform the speaking and listening tasks well.

Lee’s lesson, Travel, could be seen as a typical example of the teachers’ adaptation. As designed in the textbook, in this warm-up activity, students were required to classify 10 words into four categories: hotel, air travel, shopping and sightseeing. In teaching this lesson, Lee redesigned this activity in a handout (Appendix F) in which both the vocabulary and the categories were adapted. In particular, 13 new vocabulary items were added to the original list. Concerning the categories, hotel was replaced by a general concept of accommodation, and air travel was restructured as a subset of means of transportation. Similarly, shopping and sightseeing were replaced by two broader topics, of traveling activities and places to visit. Lee’s adaptation of the activity appears to address two levels of students’ lexical knowledge that are both important for their speaking performance: the individual vocabulary size, and the semantic knowledge of relationships among words (Goh & Burns, 2012).

In brief, the discussion of the three common patterns concerning the teachers’ employment of activities from the prescribed textbook in this section reflects three major orientations in the teachers’ speaking pedagogy. Firstly, these teachers’ dominant use of supplementary speaking tasks indicates their attempts to create an environment where learners were encouraged to participate in meaningful communication. This finding appears to run counter to reports from previous studies conducted on the Vietnamese context (Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) concerning teachers’ tendency to convert meaning-focused tasks into more form-based activities. Secondly, the teachers’ retention
of listening/reading activities and modifications of vocabulary-teaching activities appear to reaffirm their overriding concern about the provision of knowledge of topics and language to students. This focus on knowledge provision might direct the teachers to a teaching practice that mainly focuses on the acquisition of discrete linguistic elements. Such an orientation appears to counter their inclination towards a communicative teaching practice identified earlier. This further illustrates that these teachers’ decisions in selecting instructional activities appear to have been underpinned by conflicting beliefs and orientations. While the teachers expressed a belief in the positive role of a communicatively-oriented environment, their reported beliefs of what it means to develop speaking competence appeared to have been grounded in a more structural perspective on speaking development.

Finally, in selecting and designing instructional activities, these teachers demonstrated a lack of understanding of task characteristics. This gap in their knowledge about task features has been identified as a hindering factor that limits the teachers’ ability to design and implement communicative activities in teaching (Deng & Carless, 2009; N. G. Viet, 2013). To shed further light on the teachers’ pedagogical orientations, the next two subsections examine the types of speaking tasks the teachers employed, to identify the characteristics of these tasks as they were implemented in classroom practice.

**Teachers’ knowledge base of speaking task types**

This section explores the teachers’ pedagogical orientations through the examination of their repertoire of speaking task types. To provide a comprehensive picture of these teachers’ knowledge base of speaking tasks, both interview and observation data are included. The inclusion of these two data sets is also crucial for illuminating the relationship between the activities the teachers actually implemented in practice and those they reported to have employed. To stay true to the teachers’ interview data, the names of the activities originally used by the teachers are retained.

The combined interview and observation data generated a total number of 17 speaking task types that the teachers employed either in their self-reported or actual practices. As shown in Table 6.3, *discussions* was the most commonly used by all six teachers, followed by *presentations* and *conversations*, with each employed by five teachers. Following
these were *role-play* and *information-gap*, equally adopted by four teachers: role-play (Lee, Jenny, Lucy and Thomas); and information-gap (Jessica, Lee, Lucy and Thomas). Other activities appeared to be used to only a limited extent, with three activities adopted by only two teachers: *games* (Rose and Lucy), *report interviews* (Lee and Thomas), and *sentence building* (Jessica and Lucy). The remaining activities were each employed only by one teacher: *problem solving* (Lee); *debate* (Jenny); *simulation* (Thomas); *monologues* (Jenny), *drills* (Lucy); and *copying*, *gap-filling*, *dialogue repetition* and *reading scanning race* (Rose). This evidence appears to illustrate the teachers’ relatively broad repertoire of task types in speaking instruction. It also shows that, although these teachers shared a common collection of speaking tasks, they each demonstrated preferences for certain activities.

Table 6.3: Speaking activities used by the teachers based on interview and observation data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies/Techniques</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading-scanning race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monologues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap-filling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogues repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I: Interview data  O: Observation data  
* All tasks occurred once; otherwise stated by the numbers.

As Table 6.3 shows, the dominant use of highly communicative activities was a strong indicator of these teachers’ knowledge base of speaking task types. As informed by key literature on task types in speaking instruction (e.g. Bohlke, 2014; Bygate, 1987; Goh & Burns, 2012; Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 1992, 2013; Thornbury, 2005), most of the activities these teachers commonly employed are inherently classified as strongly
meaning-focused. Activities such as discussions, role-play, problem-solving, information gap, presentations, debates, games, conversations and simulations are considered as communicative since they require learners to listen to and speak with other learners to complete a task or problem solve. These activities engender a real communicative need for learners to use the target language in contexts where meanings are less predictable (Bygate, 1987; Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 2013). The remaining six activities, namely drills, repetition, gap-filling, copying, sentence building and reading-scanning race are usually considered to be form-focused activities because of their controlled focus on the practice of language forms. These activities were employed by only one teacher. This analysis of the teachers’ selection of activities in light of the characteristics of tasks illuminates the teachers’ preference for communicative-based activities in speaking instruction.

Evidence from the data further indicates a complementary relationship between activities the teachers used in self-reported and in actual classroom practice. By way of comparison, congruence between these two groups was mainly found with the presentation and discussion tasks, which were popular from both interview and observation data. Many other activities that the teachers discussed in the interviews, however, were not observed in the classrooms and vice versa. In particular, role-play, which was reportedly employed by four teachers, was only used by Lee. Notably, six activities the teachers reported to have used, namely problem-solving, debates, simulation, report-interviews, dialogue repetition and copying, were absent from their observed classroom practice. In contrast, conversations, the most common activity from the observed data, were only mentioned by Jenny in the interviews. Similarly, drills, sentence-building and monologues were all evident in practice but missing from the teachers’ self-reports. These analyses show that there appears to exist a limited convergence between the teachers’ reported and actual practices. Given this incongruent nature, investigations into teachers’ knowledge of task types that ignore either of these aspects might result in a partial representation of their repertoire.

A closer examination of the activities that each teacher reported to have employed further suggests a relationship between teaching experience and a broader expertise of speaking task types. As shown in Table 6.3, Rose and Thomas, the two most experienced teachers, demonstrated the broadest repertoire of speaking tasks, six for each. Many of these
activities appeared to be drawn on exclusively by these two teachers (Rose: gap-filling, copying, dialogue repetition, and reading-scanning race; Thomas: simulation). The next two teachers with relatively extensive experience, Jenny and Lee, each reported to have used five different activities. In contrast, the two teachers with the least experience, Jessica and Lucy, mentioned the smallest number of speaking tasks, two and three, respectively. Both also drew on common activities such as presentations, report interviews and games. This evidence suggests that teaching experience might have enabled the teachers to gradually build up the breadth of their knowledge of speaking activities.

Such a relationship, however, was not evident in their classroom practice. Observation data show that, despite their rich experience and expertise, Rose and Thomas were observed to conduct a limited number of speaking tasks. Interestingly, Thomas discussed six different tasks in the interviews; yet all the eight activities he conducted fell into one single task, conversations. As for Rose, half of the activities she mentioned in the interviews, namely games, copying, and dialogue repetition, were not borne out in practice. In contrast, Jessica and Lucy were observed to have employed the most diverse range of speaking tasks, each with five types. These numbers were in stark contrast to the limited activities they discussed in the interviews. Besides the presentations and discussions she mentioned, Jessica also employed conversations, information-gap and sentence building in practice. Similarly, Lucy included four activities (information-gap, conversations, drills and sentence building) that were absent in her self-reports. These findings not only highlight a distinction between the experienced and less experienced teachers concerning their expertise with speaking activities and how their knowledge was reflected in teaching enactment, but also reaffirm the divergence between the teachers’ reported and actual observed practices.

The limited congruence between the teachers’ self-reported and actual practices in relation to their use of speaking activities could be interpreted on a number of bases. One possible explanation is that observation data did not cover the teachers’ practice for the whole semester. Therefore, the content of the observed lessons might have not lent itself to the deployment of certain tasks, which could have been used in unobserved lessons. Analysis of all interviews, however, shows that Thomas was the only teacher that mentioned this possibility. Another interpretation could be that these teachers did not
clearly distinguish between “implicit” and “professed” beliefs (Zheng, 2013a, 2013b). As such, many activities that the teachers discussed might be those they believed as ideal for teaching speaking but not necessarily the ones they employed in current teaching and thus not observed in their classes. Both of these explanations, however, could not account for those activities evident in the teachers’ practices but absent from the interviews.

This mismatch, however, could be explained on the basis of the teachers’ experience. As Lucy described in the interviews, novice teachers in her department felt unconfident and under-prepared, and opportunities for learning from experienced colleagues were extremely limited. This reality forced them to outreach to diverse sources for new teaching ideas. As such, many of the activities the teachers implemented might have been the outcome of these outsourcing endeavours. Jessica and Lucy both explained in the stimulated recall interviews that some of the observed activities were trialed for the first time in their teaching. Lucy further described: “I tried out some games I picked up from a workshop I attended. Some other games I learned from the Internet. You know, I am not sure if my students like them but I just tried. If not, I will change” (SR.9). This evidence suggests that these newly learned activities were still in a piloting or “trying out” stage in these teachers’ practice; thus they might not yet be stably anchored in their knowledge base. This evidence reflects the evolving, rather than static nature of the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs when implementing their teaching.

In contrast, the experienced teachers explained that their selection of speaking tasks was mainly based on their understanding of the learners’ characteristics. Their decision to restrict classroom activities to just a few types, as such, could have resulted from their belief that these tasks were the most appropriate to their specific groups of learners. In this sense, the experienced teachers’ decisions appear to have been more responsive to the learners’ needs, whereas less experienced ones were more concerned with the needs for improving their own professional skills and confidence.

In short, the findings in relation to the teachers’ repertoire of speaking tasks presented in this section reveal two important aspects of the teachers’ cognitions about speaking instruction. Firstly, it highlights the potential relationship between teaching experience and the breadth of speaking activity knowledge. This broader repertoire of speaking tasks, however, might not necessarily lead to the actual implementation of a diverse range of
activities. In practice, experienced teachers had a tendency to restrict classroom activities to those they seemed to believe to be most appropriate for each learner group. In contrast, less experienced teachers, with their eagerness to experiment newly learned teaching ideas, were observed to enact a more extensive number of speaking task types. This evidence provides an explanation for the divergent relationship between the speaking activities the teachers actually conducted in classroom teaching and those they reported to have employed. Secondly, investigations into the inherent characteristics of the teachers’ employed activities also reveal the dominance of highly communicative-focused tasks in the teachers’ knowledge base, which appears to signal their inclination towards a meaning-based teaching practice. In the next section, an analysis of the characteristics of these activities when implemented in the classroom context will be provided.

*Characteristics of the teachers’ selected tasks in implementation*

The section provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of speaking production activities that the teachers enacted in classroom practice. This analysis is essential for the characterisation of the speaking tasks the teachers utilised in teaching since, as Littlewood (2013) and Deng and Carless (2009) suggest, the inherent characteristics of a task might significantly change in classroom contexts, depending on how teachers actually design and implement the task (Deng & Carless, 2009; Littlewood, 2004, 2013). In accordance with Goh and Burns’ (2012) principle for selecting activities in teaching speaking, a combination of part-skill and whole-task practice in a speaking lesson plays a critical role in developing learners’ speaking competence. As explained in the theoretical framework (Section 3.4.2), part-skill and whole-task practice activities are distinguished based on their content focus and task characteristics. Regarding the content focus, part-skill are differentiated from whole-task practice based on whether the focus is oriented toward the practice of one or two discrete components of communicative competence rather than an integration of all knowledge, skills and strategies. In terms of characteristics, the distinction between these two task types involves three important features: (1) the purpose and the extent of focus on meaning of the task; (2) the degree of control and predictability of the students’ language and meaning; and (3) the task authenticity.

In the present study, all the 50 speaking tasks conducted in the 20 observed lessons were
analysed, examining both dimensions, of content focus and characteristics. The first important finding revealed from the analysis is that the activities that the teachers included in each speaking lesson comprised two distinct groups of speaking activities. The first group included “main speaking activities” that the teachers typically designed at the end of the lessons to provide learners with an opportunity to transfer the lesson input into speaking practice. In total, 21 of the 50 observed activities were classified into this group. In contrast, the remaining 29 activities were typically organised in earlier stages of each lesson and exclusively focused on the practice of one specific component, of vocabulary, structures, or pronunciation. This difference in the content focus of the activities in the two groups appears to resonate with the distinction in terms of content between part-skill and whole-task activities that Goh and Burns (2012) suggest. However, to effectively facilitate the development of speaking competence, apart from the distinction in terms of content, the activities employed for part-skill and whole-task activities need to feature their distinctive characteristics in relation to the focus, purpose, and authenticity of the tasks, as well as the control and predictability of the learners’ language and meaning produced through the tasks (see Section 4.7.3 for distinctive criteria and categorisations for each of these characteristics).

Such a distinction in terms of task characteristics, however, is not evident from the analysis. Close examination of these activities, firstly, shows that the teachers tended to employ similar speaking tasks as both part-skill and whole-task practice. As presented in Table 6.4, six of the 11 speaking task types conducted in the teachers’ observed lessons, comprising conversations, discussions, presentations, games, information-gap and monologue, were highly communicative tasks. However, they were used interchangeably for both whole-task and part-skill practice. Among the others, role-play was the only activity that was exclusively employed as whole-task (by Jenny), whereas the remaining four activities (reading-scanning race, gap-filling, sentence building and drills) were only used as part-skill activities. This evidence suggests that task types did not function as a distinguishing parameter that the teachers relied on when selecting or designing speaking activities for the whole-task and part-skill practice groups.
Table 6.4: Speaking task types used by the teachers for part-skill and whole-task practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies/Techniques</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Lee</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversations</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-gap</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monologues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading-scanning race</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap-filling</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence building</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P: Part-skill practice  W: Whole-task practice

Results from the analysis of the characteristics of each of the 50 observed speaking tasks reveal that, when the same task type was employed for both part-skill and whole-task practice, it appeared be constrained by similar characteristics of meaning-focus extent, authenticity, and the control of students’ language and meaning. By way of illustration, the section below provides an in-depth analysis of the three characteristics of the two most commonly employed activities, namely discussions and conversations. The discussion of these activities will be presented in the same order, first as part-skill practice and then as whole-task, with classroom snapshots provided as supporting evidence.

**Discussions**, the first activity commonly used as both part-skill and whole-task practice, was mostly employed by Jessica, Lee, Jenny and Rose. As part-skill practice, discussion tasks were typically organised early in the lessons, immediately after the teachers presented new vocabulary for the topic. In Jenny’s lesson entitled *Boyfriends and Girlfriends*, for instance, after introducing eight new vocabulary items about people’s personality, Jenny had students work in groups to discuss and rate their interests for seven characteristics just presented in the preceding activity. Jenny’s instructions for the task are presented in Extract 6.1 below:
Extract 6.1 Jenny’s instructions for the discussion task - Observation 9 (Lesson 1: Boyfriends, Girlfriends)

Now, I’d like you to look at page 42, Warm-up activity B. Alright? Now you can see there are 7 adjectives, 7 characteristics to describe a boyfriend or a girlfriend. I want you to discuss with your friends and rate the levels of your interest from 1 to 5. 1 means not at all interested and 5 means definitely interested. Ok? Now get in groups of 3 or 4 and discuss.

As evident in Jenny’s instructions, the central focus of the task was placed on the practice of using the newly introduced vocabulary for describing people’s personality in a speaking context. In this task, students’ ideas were restricted to the seven provided characteristics, rather than any particular personality of their own interest. Their opinions were further bounded within the five provided scales from “not at all interested” to “definitely interested”; thus, students’ messages were partly controlled within the pre-determined content. However, in performing the task, students were still allowed to draw upon their personal knowledge and preferences to explain why they ranked each characteristic at a certain scale. Such a task, with its explicit focus on the practice of the target linguistic content in a communicative situation, is characterised as communicative language practice (Littlewood, 2013). The task also features a degree of interactional authenticity and allows students to personalise their messages. Given that the students were mostly university students, discussing issues related to qualities of a boyfriend or girlfriend is seen as highly immediate and relevant to the learners’ interest and preferences.

When employed as whole-task practice, however, the discussion task appeared to feature critical limitations in its characteristics that restrict learners’ opportunities for speaking development. For example, in Lee’s lesson entitled Very Light Jet, the discussion task was designed as the main speaking production activity, organised at the end of the lesson. It was conducted after students completed a listening activity, which was a talk delivered by representatives of an airline manufacturing company to its potential purchasers. In the activity, students were required to discuss issues related to two kinds of airplanes, very light jets (VLJ) and jumbo jets. Information about the two kinds of airplane was presented in this listening exercise. Lee’s instructions for this speaking task are presented in Extract 6.2 below:
Extract 6.2: Lee’s instructions for the discussion task – Observation 5 (Lesson 1: Very Light Jet?)

Ok now I would like you to work with a group of 4 people for a discussion. What are you going to do now? With the information here about VLJ, I would like you to work with your group. I would like you to sit together and summarise the speech you just listened to and also express your ideas about VLJs. Now when discussing in your groups, please have a look at the questions in the paper I just gave you. You will have 10 minutes to prepare.

Here are my questions (from the handouts). I would like you to look at the planes and the questions and discuss a little bit about it. So the first one is a light jet and the second one is a jumbo jet. Now move to the second question, how different are they? You can think about the size you already mentioned right? How about the weight? The speed, the flight distance, transiting places of travel? […] Ok, you can also act as in the lecture if you like.

Lee’s instructions appear to indicate that the most prominent focus of this discussion activity was placed on the reproduction of ideas. Lee explicitly required the students “to summarise the speech.” She further identified the main points for students’ discussion through a list of questions: differences between the airplanes in size, weight, speed, flight distance, and transiting places. In addition, answers to these questions had already been presented in the talk that students just listened to. As such, even though students’ meaning and language were not scripted or strictly controlled and students were encouraged “to express ideas”, these ideas were apparently restricted to the points Lee pre-identified, and students could simply rely on the listening content for their answers. In this sense, even though the task appeared to promote a strong focus on expressing meaning, its primary intended purpose appears to have been to mainly provide students with an opportunity to memorise and reproduce ideas and language from the listening activities. Therefore, the language and meaning students produced when performing the tasks, although not prescribed, were highly pre-determined and predictable. As a whole-task practice, this discussion does not appear to have provided learners with a communicative context where they could express more purposeful meaning in an uncontrolled manner.

This discussion activity also lost its original authenticity and had little relevance to the students’ interests and experience. Both the discussion content and situation appear to be far removed from the students’ daily lives. For most of the students, who have never travelled by air, requiring them to discuss the differences and express preferences for the two airplanes seems overly challenging and unrealistic. Lee also suggested that students
could play the roles of the speakers in the context of the listening activity. However, playing the role of affluent people who are interested in buying a private aircraft is even more distant from the learners’ real-life experience. There was also a low extent of personalisation of the learners’ meaning and language when performing the task. This evidence appears to reveal the teacher’s lack of consideration for the learners’ background, knowledge and experience in designing the task. As such, the activity does not engender learners with the authentic motivation or purpose that kindles their interests and engagement in speaking interactions (Goh & Burns, 2012; Gong & Holliday, 2013; Hanauer, 2012).

The whole-task discussion in Rose’s lesson appears to have been characterised by similarly limited enactment. As presented in Extract 6.3, students were asked to discuss whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: Drug using should be legal. The task was designed as the main speaking activity in the lesson after the students watched a group presentation about “drug using and its impacts” and completed a reading activity about the same topic. To further provide students with ideas for speaking in the discussion task, Rose provided each group with one or two specific arguments that she extracted from the reading (distributed to each group in a handout). Each argument was scripted in separate sentences such as “Drug using shouldn’t be legal because it might encourage more people to try using it”:

Extract 6.3: Rose’ instructions for the discussion task – Observation 13 (Lesson 2: Crimes)

[…] Ok now I’d like you to discuss this in groups. And you will tell me whether you agree with it or don’t agree with it and why? You need to tell me why you agree or don’t agree with them. It’s ok for me if you agree with them but you have to tell me why. Ok? And it is also ok for me if you don’t agree with them but again tell me why not? Now work in groups. How many people you want in your groups? In groups of three, so now you can choose your partners in groups of three ok? You discuss and write down your notes. Can you write down your notes?

Evidence from Rose’s instructions appears to reflect her valuing of students’ personalised arguments through her emphasis on the need for them to provide justifications for their opinions. However, interestingly, the specific arguments she prescribed and distributed to each group appear to undermine this value of students’ genuine opinions and convert the activity into a language and idea reproduction activity. Observation data show that, in
performing the task, students simply reproduced the scripted sentences from the papers that Rose provided or restated ideas from the preceding reading and presentation activities. In the stimulated recalled interviews, Rose admitted that, given the students’ extremely low level of language proficiency, “to restate the ideas” and “reuse the language in the reading texts” (SR.7) were key ways to promote speaking competence, and hence her primary teaching objectives. She confessed that it was a good way to address the issues of students’ lack of topic-relevant ideas and silence when discussing relatively complex topics that seemed to be beyond their levels. Designed in this manner, this discussion task might provide learners with opportunities for practising the input ideas and language in a controlled and predictable manner, which function as important stepping stones for speaking performance. However, as a whole-task activity, it did not afford them with a genuine communication purpose as well as sufficient freedom to express authentic meaning.

Another task type that was commonly conducted as both whole-task and part-skill by most teacher participants was conversations. This activity was deployed throughout different stages in many of the teachers’ lessons. As observed, these conversation tasks were characterised by three common features: (1) pair and group interaction modes; (2) the exchange of information; and (3) students’ use of the lesson input for sharing their personalised information or expressing personal opinions. Conversations, therefore, appear to highly resemble an information-exchange or information-gap activity. However, one distinctive feature of this task is its high extent of personalisation. In other words, in performing these tasks, learners were required to mainly talk about themselves in relation to the topics under discussion rather than memorising facts or opinions from others.

Conversations, although employed as a part-skill practice task in these teachers’ lessons, appears to have demonstrated a high degree of focus on meaning. For example, in Jessica’s lesson about appearance and personality, after leading in the topic, activating and pre-teaching vocabulary for describing appearance, Jessica asked the students to sit in pairs to do “the describe and draw” activity as instructed below:
Extract 6.4: Jessica’s instructions for conversation task – Observation 1 (Lesson 1 - Appearance and Personality)

Ok now we are not going to describe everyone, but you are going to do that. Now I would like you to take out a piece of paper and sit in pairs. […] Now close your eyes, just close your eyes, think of a person you love the most. Don’t tell me. I don’t know. I don’t know who that person is. Ok? Think about how that person looks and what are the good things about that person. You have 1 minute 30 seconds to do that.

Now open your eyes, you have a blank piece of paper, whether you are good at drawing or not, just use your words to describe the person you love to your partner and your partner has to draw it. Like that, like what I drew. Is that clear? No Vietnamese. Now draw and make conversations with your partners.

One notable feature of the task, as evident in the instructions, was the extensive amount of freedom Jessica provided to students in selecting what meaning and language to express in the activity. To complete the task, learners were asked to choose “the person they love the most” and plan for how to describe that person to the partner, drawing on whatever resources were available. In this sense, even though the intended purpose of the activity, as Jessica explained in the stimulated recall interview, was to have students practise using the vocabulary items presented or activated in the preceding activity, the enacted focus appeared to be placed on the communication of meaning. In the instructions, Jessica did not explicitly require students to use the vocabulary they just learned. In addition, in performing this description task, students were likely to draw on different kinds of linguistic knowledge, skills and strategies rather than to restrict their language use to the target group of vocabulary. In this way, the activity, although intended as a part-skill task for vocabulary practice, was implemented for a different purpose.

In contrast, most teachers tended to restrict the language and meaning that learners expressed through conversation tasks during whole-task practice. Jessica’s whole-task activity for the lesson Boyfriends and Girlfriends could be seen as such an example. This activity was designed as the main speaking task at the end of the lesson, after the teacher presented the target vocabulary and structures to students. Two separate part-skill activities were also organised to have students practise using the newly introduced linguistic knowledge in speaking. In this main speaking task, Jessica aimed to provide students with a communicative situation where they could employ all vocabulary, structures and ideas from preceding stages of the lesson for the task performance. As can
be seen in Extract 6.5, Jessica provided students with detailed instructions and explained what she expected from the students when performing the task:

Extract 6.5: Jessica’s instructions for the conversation task – Observation 4 (Lesson 4: Boyfriends – Girlfriends)

Now you are going to have a friend. And that friend of you starts to date somebody and that relationship is getting serious. Ok that’s the situation. Remember your best friend went on a date and their relationship is serious now. And you will have seven advice, I am going to give it to you. And you have to make a conversation. Oh, oh conversations again. That’s it. In your conversation, there must be a discussion about a perfect partner. What criteria, which one is the perfect partner and the advice you give for someone who goes on a date and wants to be in a serious relationship. Is that clear?

Okay I will say that again. In your conversation, there should be two main points: the first one is criteria about a perfect partner. You might want to ask your friend some questions: what do you think about? Why did you choose? For example, why did you choose age instead of vehicles? Isn’t personality more important than age? Things like that. Or what things not important for you? And you might want to use some structures like: for ...; he or she should be because we are mentioning about something in the future. We suppose we ... We are not sure so we have to use: "Can be, should be, they have to be, they should have, they can have, they should not be; I don’t think this and this and that ... is so important. So I think this and this is more important than that; or for personality, he should be friend, handsome, no not handsome...

Those are some structures you are going to use to discuss about the perfect partner. The second thing you are going to do is to give each other some advice for someone who wants to get seriously into the relationship. Is that clear?

One striking feature of this task is the extent of control Jessica exerted on not only students’ meaning and language but also on the structure of the conversation they constructed. As evident, she explicitly explained that the conversation should include two parts: discussing criteria of a perfect partner and giving advice. In terms of content, she provided students with seven pieces of advice that they could just choose from. She further suggested the questions students could ask and the grammatical structures that were needed to be used in the conversations. In this sense, the meaning, vocabulary, grammatical structures and the organisation of ideas that learners produced through the task were largely prescribed and made salient to students by the teacher. Given this control from the teacher, learners’ messages and language became increasingly controlled and predictable. It could be argued that these prescriptions were essential to ensure that students at a low proficiency level were supported with sufficient ideas and language for
speaking. However, as this whole-task practice was organised after students had already completed multiple part-skill activities where they practised and automatised discrete knowledge and skill components for this whole task, these prescriptions appeared to have been unnecessary. Such a prolonged control over students’ freedom in selecting language and messages in this main production stage might undermine opportunities to develop the skills and strategies students need for spontaneous interactions in real-life contexts (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981).

Similar characteristics were evident in Thomas’s conversation tasks. For instance, in a lesson entitled *Hobbies and Daily Routines*, Thomas structured the lesson content into three different sections: moving from introducing vocabulary for describing hobbies and activities, to presenting typical structures for making and responding to questions about frequency of activities, and finally to presenting language for interacting and using intonation to make “natural conversations”. For each part, Thomas introduced the target input, demonstrated its use by talking about himself, and then asked students to practise speaking about themselves following his demonstration. In the final speaking activity, he asked the students to engage in pair conversations. His instructions for the activity are provided in Extract 5.6 below:

Extract 6.6: Thomas’s instructions for conversation task – Observation 20 (Lesson 2: Hobbies and Daily Routines)

1 T Now class, we have learnt about different activities right? What are some examples of them? Do you remember?
2 Ss <Play badminton><watch movies><go shopping>
3 T Yes, many more right? Drink beer with friends, play the guitar, take care of children, take them to the park, do housework.
4 Now, we also learnt about how to make questions about frequency and routine, remember? What are they? How often? How long? What time?
5 Ss <Sometimes>, <frequently>, <often>
6 T Yes, and always, usually, occasionally, once in a while right?
7 T Now I want you to make conversations in pairs. Ask and answer about your hobbies and daily routine. Now do you know what I do in my free time? Can you guess?
8 Ss <Iron clothes>; <Do you play guitar?>
9 T Good. Now I would like you to do the same thing. Asking your partner and answer their questions. Ok, in pairs please. Look for your partners please.
Thomas’ instructions for this conversation task appear to feature a relatively high degree of focus on meaning. Unlike Jessica, Thomas did not explicitly specify the language structures that learners needed to use to express their meaning in this task. In conversing with each other, students were generally allowed to convey language and meaning of their own choice. However, as a whole-task activity, this conversation task was limited in two ways. Firstly, Thomas’s review of the target vocabulary and structures of the lesson, through his interactions with the students before assigning the task, implicitly reminded the learners of the need to employ these linguistics features for task completion. By making these linguistic features salient to the learners through the review, the teacher might, to a certain extent, shift a meaning-focused task to a linguistic practice activity (Ellis, 2003; N. G. Viet, 2013), since the language they produced becomes more predictable and controlled. Secondly, although learners were allowed to draw on their personal hobbies to converse through the task, there was no clear purpose for these interactions. In the instructions, no evidence was found to show that Thomas attempted to link this task with a genuine communicative need. As such, while the topic of hobbies could be seen as relevant and immediate to the students’ world, their exchange of personalised information about their hobbies through the task appears to have primarily served the purpose of practising the language introduced to them earlier in the lesson rather than to use the learned language to achieve a specific communicative goal.

In summary, the analysis of the speaking task types and their characteristics in this section highlights the teachers’ tendency to employ similar types of activities for both part-skill and whole-task practice in their speaking lessons. While the teachers designed distinct activities for the two groups of part-skill and whole-task, these activities were found to be implemented in a similar way. In most cases, when employed as both part-skill and whole-task practice, these activities appeared to serve a mixed purpose of language practice and meaning conveyance. Both part-skill and whole-task practice activities in these teachers’ lessons appear to have promoted a relatively strong focus on meaning. Nevertheless, in implementing whole-task practice, the teachers tended to make the target linguistic features salient and explicitly required students to use them in the speaking tasks. As such, in most cases, the language and messages students produced through these activities became partly predictable and controlled rather than free and spontaneous. Given these characteristics, most activities the teachers implemented, as both part-skill and whole-task, were characterised as communicative language practice (Littlewood,
2004, 2013), through which students practised using lesson input in a communicative situation. This finding reaffirms the interview findings about the teachers’ excessive concern about the acquisition of linguistic knowledge through their speaking lessons. The finding, however, suggests the gap in these teachers’ knowledge about the purpose and function of the tasks that has been reported earlier.

In terms of task authenticity, it was found from the analysis that most of these activities were categorised as interactionally but not situationally authentic (Ellis, 2003). While most activities presented learners with communicative situations resembling those they may encounter in real-life communication, many of the situations were distant from the students’ experiences, interests and backgrounds. As a whole, these activities presented themselves as suitable for part-skill practice, since they provided favourable conditions for learners to practise and automatise separate knowledge and skills that underpin speaking ability. As whole-task practice, however, they do not appear to have provided learners with authentic communicative contexts where they had genuine need to communicate meaning in an uncontrolled and creative fashion. These limitations might restrict the development of the interactive competence that learners need for real-life communicative situations.

In conjunction with the selection of suitable activities, Goh and Burns (2012) also maintain that speaking lessons need to be structured in a way that allows an appropriate combination of part-skill and whole-task practice activities. In the next section, findings concerning the teachers’ sequencing of speaking lessons will be discussed.

6.3.3.3 Teachers’ sequencing of speaking lessons

This section presents findings in relation to the teachers’ sequencing of speaking lessons. Data for the section include the teachers’ responses to the interview question, “How do you typically structure a speaking lesson?”, as well as observation data. As explained in the methodology chapter, the observation data were analysed and organised into episodes (Gibbons, 2006) to depict interrelated parts in each lesson, before an analysis of the teachers’ lesson structure was conducted. This analysis of the teachers’ speaking lessons was generally informed by Goh and Burn’s (2012) seven-stage teaching speaking cycle.
Results from the analysis of the interview data depict a common three-stage lesson structure that the teachers employed, each stage with a distinct focus. As will be presented below, the first stage primarily focused on vocabulary knowledge, where teachers concentrated on activating learners’ background knowledge of vocabulary, pre-teaching new vocabulary and organising part-skill practice tasks, so that students could practise using these target vocabulary items in a contextualised manner. Following this, in stage two, the teachers focused on presenting learners with further linguistic input from listening sources. In this stage, grammatical structures, pronunciation and vocabulary, which were drawn out from listening content, occupied a central position. Finally, each lesson ended with one main speaking production activity.

The analysis of the observation data shows that 16 of the 20 observed lessons were designed in accordance with this typical structure, with the remaining four lessons featuring a random sequence. This typical lesson structure was commonly employed by five less experienced teachers (Jessica, Lee, Jenny, Lucy and Thomas). Rose claimed not to have followed any fixed pattern; yet one of her three lessons reflected this typical structure. In the sub-sections below, each stage in this typical lesson structure will be discussed in detail, followed by a model of the teachers’ typical speaking lesson structure grounded in examination of both their interview and observation data.

**Contextualised vocabulary presentation and practice in pre-task stage**

In accordance with Goh and Burns’ (2012) teaching-speaking cycle, one major function of pre-task activities is to prepare learners for the main speaking task of the lesson. In this stage, teachers guide students to plan for the speaking task, activate relevant background knowledge, and introduce new content and language necessary for the task performance. The analysis of the prescribed textbook series, as presented in Chapter 5, showed that most activities designed for this stage from the book focused on the introduction and practice of the target vocabulary in a de-contextualised fashion. Evidence from the interview and observation data reveal the teachers’ primary concentration on preparing learners with sufficient vocabulary for subsequent speaking tasks. However, in most cases, vocabulary was activated or introduced in a contextualised manner. Opportunities for practising using the newly learned vocabulary into speaking were also provided in this stage.
The interview data consistently suggest that vocabulary occupied a central position in the first stage of their speaking lessons. Jessica, for instance, reported: “I provide vocabulary first and after that I have listening section” (Int.1). Lee also stated that, “first, [she had] some warm-up activities for [students] to study vocabulary, like a game for them to guess the meanings of the words” (Int.2). Lucy further explained: “in the speaking lesson, of course, [students] need some vocabulary first” (Int.5). Thomas and Jenny both reported to start with some speaking. Jenny said: “I just start[ed] the periods by saying about something and then relate to vocabulary for the topics” (Int.3); while Thomas described: “Normally, I begin by talking about myself […] or guessing games […] to begin with simple vocabulary and then expand to more words. That’s the vocabulary material or input” (Int.6). These descriptions consistently show that vocabulary was viewed as the most fundamental component of speaking competence; thus, it was treated as top priority in the pre-task stage of these teachers’ speaking lessons.

The analysis of observation data similarly depicts the teachers’ primary concentration on vocabulary knowledge as a departure point of their lessons. Evidence from all 20 observed lessons show that, in this stage, the teachers either activated learners’ background knowledge in relation to the topics or presented target vocabulary items before organising a part-skill speaking activity to provide learners with opportunities for practising using the newly learned vocabulary in communicative situations. In most cases, vocabulary was activated and introduced in meaningful contexts, in conjunction with the topics and the communicative tasks that learners were going to perform in the subsequent part-skill speaking activity. Jessica’s lesson entitled Personality, presented in Extract 6.7 below is such an example for the activities the teachers conducted in this stage:

In this episode, Jessica started with some drawings to lead students into the topic of describing people (lines 1-10). Then, she gradually supported students in generating relevant vocabulary (lines 11-31) for describing people’s appearance. Through interactions with students, Jessica diagnosed the vocabulary and ideas that students already had in relation to the describing task. This also enabled her to grasp the opportunity to introduce the word “slim” (lines 32-36). This new word was introduced as Jessica’s response to the learners’ shortage of vocabulary, indicated by their silence.
to her questions. As evident, all the vocabulary generated was framed within the context of the task of describing people. The vocabulary mobilised in the episode was mainly activated from the learners’ existing knowledge. The word “slim” was also introduced in a contingent way to the learners’ need for communication rather than as pre-determined content.

Extract 6.7: Pre-teaching vocabulary episode – Observation 1 (Jessica’s lesson 1: Appearance)

1  T  Now look at this and tell me what we are going to do today. Don’t write anything.
2  (Teacher drew started to draw figures on the board)
3  You can guess what we are going to talk about today. (Students kept silent and watched the teacher’ drawing).
4  Not yet? Now some more. (Teacher drew two more figures).
5  S  Describe the people.
6  T  What? I just heard something right.
7  S  Describe the people.
8  T  Describe the people. Good. So we are going to describe people. To describe the people, what are we going to describe first?
9  Ss Appearance.
10 T  About appearance, how many things you need to describe?
11 S1 The face.
12 T  Ok, what are in the face?
13 Ss <Nose, eyes, mouth, chin, cheeks, ears, hair, eyebrows>
14 T  Yes. What else?
15 Ss <Lips, teeth, skin>
16 T  Ok, that’s about the face, what else?
17 S  Body.
18 T  Ok the body, what is, what do we have in the body when you describe?
19 S  Height.
20 T  Ok we have height and weight. So for height we have tall, short and middle?
21 S  Medium.
22 T  Medium height. How about weight?
23 Ss <Fat, thin>
24 T  How about a model? How is she/ he like?
25 S1 Thin?
26 T  Yes she is very thin. How about another word for thin?
27 S1 Good shape.
28 T  Good shape, yes. One word similar to that. She is quite thin. Anyone?
29 Ss (Students kept silent)
30 T  How about “slim”? Does anyone know the word “slim”? What does it describe?
31 Any idea?
32 S  Someone thin and tall?
33 T  Yes, thin and tall and beautiful, like the models right? Ok so that’s about the appearance, the look outside, now we are going to look inside.

In a similar vein, Lee’s lesson on Travelling demonstrated a primary focus on generating contextualised vocabulary in the first lesson stage. As can be seen in Extract 6.8, after leading into the topic, Lee skillfully introduced the planned target vocabulary
through questions and elicitations, which set a context for generating key ideas for the topic and introducing new vocabulary items. As such, these target words, although not introduced as a response to learners’ need for vocabulary for expressing meaning as in Jessica’s lesson, were still presented on the basis of learners’ existing vocabulary knowledge. For instance, the word “destinations” (line 3) was introduced as a substitute for the learners’ phrase “where to go”. The terms “tourist attractions” (line 7) and “duration” (line 15) were also inserted as a response to students’ phrases, “famous places” and “how long”, respectively. Similarly, based on the word “transportation” that students’ proposed, Lee introduced the phrase “means of transportation” (line 9). This evidence shows that, as in the case of Jessica, Lee demonstrated an effort to introduce new vocabulary items as not only attached to the topics and students’ background knowledge but also as highly responsive to their existing knowledge. In this way, vocabulary teaching was conducted in a meaningful, rather than decontextualised manner:

Extract 6.8: Pre-teach vocabulary episode – Observation 7 (Lee’s lesson 3: Travelling)

1. T Ok now everyone, today we are going to talk about traveling. When alright
2. we talk about traveling, what can we talk about?
3. S1 Where to go?
4. T Ok where to go. Some places we will visit, some destinations.
5. S2 Attractions
6. T Ok, places, destinations. Diep already mentioned right? Some famous
7. places we are going to visit? You can say tourist attractions. What else?
8. S3 Transportation
9. T Ok so what means of transportation are you going to travel? Right what
10. else, what else?
11. S4 Who?
12. T Ok who are you going to travel with? Going sorry. And what else?
13. S5 How long?
15. before traveling. We can use the word duration instead.

Lucy’s lesson, Hopes and Plans, is another instance that demonstrated a strong focus on vocabulary in the first stage. In this lesson, Lucy started with an explicit vocabulary-teaching activity. Immediately after introducing the topic, Lucy drew students’ attention to the target vocabulary through a context she created. As illustrated in Extract 6.9, Lucy employed photos displayed on the screen to elicit and guide learners to construct a situation for introducing the phrase “look forward to doing something” (lines 11-14). This constructed context also supported the learners to figure out the meaning of the phrase. The analysis of the rest of this episode shows that Lucy employed the same
approach to introduce the remaining five vocabulary items in this stage. Together, the six situations Lucy co-constructed with the students formed a well-linked story about a girl’s future hopes and plans. As such, although these newly presented words, as Lucy explained, were her planned, pre-determined teaching content and explicitly presented to learners, they were all introduced in a meaningful context, in tandem with the topic under discussion in the lesson:

Extract 6.9: Pre-teaching vocabulary episode – Observation 15 (Lucy’s lesson 1: Hopes and Plans)

1  T  Now first of all I want to teach you some vocabulary. Ok have a look at this:  
2  S  Girl or boy? (Teacher showed the first slide with a photo on the screen)  
3  T  Girl.  
4  S  Excellent. And the first one, how does she feel?  
5  T  Stressed  
6  S  And the second?  
7  T  Happy  
8  S  Ok happy, happy and so she is thinking about her…  
9  T  Her friends, now repeat her friends (students repeated twice)  
10  T  And now I have a sentence: she is looking forward to seeing her friends so that she can change, she can change her mood, or she will be happy. She is looking forward to seeing her friends so that she can feel happy, happier. So look forward to doing something, what does that mean? You please.  
11  S  Trông chờ (Trans: look forward to)  
12  T  Ok. That’s good. That’s good. (The teacher continued introducing the other 4 words in the same manner)

Data of the 20 observed lessons also reveal that, immediately following this vocabulary generation activity, the teachers provided learners with an opportunity to apply the newly acquired vocabulary items into a speaking situation. This part-skill practice task was found in 19 of the 20 observed lessons (except one lesson by Rose). As previously presented in Section 6.3.3.2, most activities the teachers used for part-skill practice in this stage featured a high extent of similarity with those they planned as a main speaking task, or whole-task practice at the end of the lessons. In particular, discussions and conversations were the two most common task types that the teachers utilised. Such activities were significantly valued in this stage since they provided learners with highly communicative situations for practising and automatising the newly learned vocabulary items, which are seen as crucial for developing learners’ speaking fluency and accuracy (Goh & Burns, 2012).

As highlighted in this section, supporting students in generating necessary vocabulary
for the speaking tasks and providing opportunities for applying the vocabulary into a speaking situation constitute the major objective of the first lesson stage of these teachers’ lessons. This focus on vocabulary in pre-task stage resonates with what Canh (2011) and Nam (2015) have previously reported about Vietnamese teachers’ typical lesson sequencing, and partly aligns with the design of the textbook these teachers were using. However, what distinguished the teachers in the present study from those in previous studies was their approach to activate and introduce vocabulary in a contextualised and meaningful manner. Newly taught vocabulary, which was presented in connection with the speaking topics and learners’ speaking ideas, was mostly either responsive to the learners’ needs for communication or built upon their existing vocabulary knowledge. Such a practice suggests the teachers’ compliance with the meaning-focused principle in vocabulary instruction that has been strongly promoted by the CLT/ TBLT approach (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; J. Willis, 1996). In addition, the part-skill practice conducted in this stage further provided learners with opportunities to practise using the newly learned vocabulary into speaking, which is critical for the development of learners’ speaking competence (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992).

Further provision of listening-based linguistic input in while-task stage

As informed by Goh and Burns’ (2012) teaching-speaking cycle, the while-task stage provides learners with opportunities to perform and re-perform the main speaking task of the lesson. Between these two times that students conduct the main speaking task is the important form-focused step where learners’ attention is drawn toward the target linguistic features, skills and strategies necessary for their performance of the speaking task. This step allows learners to notice, analyse and practise the language forms, which facilitates the development of speaking fluency, accuracy and complexity, especially when they re-perform the speaking task (Bygate, 2001; Goh & Burns, 2012). Evidence from both the interview and observation data in the present study, however, shows that, in accordance with the design of the textbook, most teachers focused on listening activities as a means to further support learners with linguistic knowledge. While vocabulary was still an important focus in this stage, the teachers’ central attention appeared to be directed to functional grammatical knowledge and pronunciation features.
It is evident from the interview data that, in this while-task stage, the teachers primarily focused on listening activities as a means for providing learners with further linguistic knowledge. They maintained that, through listening, learners could develop ideas and language necessary for subsequent speaking tasks. Lee, Jessica, Lucy and Thomas emphasised that learners could extract “important structures”, “pronunciation” and “vocabulary” from the listening texts. Thomas explained that, “from the listening input, [students] made use of intonation models, maybe structures, vocabulary, and more importantly awareness about speaking, about how to interact in a natural manner” (SR.10). Jenny appeared to place a greater focus on listening as a source of “strategies” or “functional structures” that she deemed as necessary for speaking performance. These teachers’ explanations consistently indicated that, in this stage, listening activities served as a fundamental platform for supplying learners with more vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation knowledge.

The analysis of classroom data reveals the teachers’ similar focus on listening activities in this lesson stage. Listening activities were employed in 17 of the observed lessons as a source of language input provided to the learners in this stage. Evidence further shows that, in conducting listening activities, the teachers followed a similar procedure with four episodes: (1) orienting students to the listening context; (2) first listening for gist; (3) second listening for detail and answering questions; and (4) third listening with pauses for language parsing and answer checking. When guiding learners to deconstruct the listening texts through these episodes, the teachers employed the listening context to introduce new vocabulary to the learners. This was most clearly evident in the third time of listening, when the teachers frequently paused the recording where target vocabulary items were mentioned. An example of this third listening episode is presented in Extract 6.10 below. In this episode, Jessica introduced two new vocabulary items in this episode, share the common belief (lines 5-11) and study (lines 15-19). In both cases, the newly presented vocabulary was extracted from the listening content. Jessica also relied on the listening contexts to explain the meaning of the new words and phrases to the students:
Extract 6.10: Jessica’s third listening episode – Observation 4 (Jessica’s lesson 4: News)

1  T  Ok, any more notes? Now listen again one more time: this time one by one
2  sentence. (Teacher played the recording and repeated every single sentence
3  from the recording)
4  [...]  
5  Now what did you hear? If you are the people who **share the common belief**
6  (Teacher repeated the sentence). What does it mean: share a common belief?
7  Anyone knows its meaning? People who believe in the same thing right?
8  **(Teacher played the recording again and repeated the sentence)** If you are
9  the people who believe that older woman? Older women cannot be good
10  mothers. Then think again. What does this mean?
11  Ss  Older women can be good mothers.
12  T  Uh huh. Older women can be good mothers. And he will give examples for
13  that. In a recent? What?
14  Ss  <Study>
15  T  **Study.** Study here what does it mean? Learn? (**Students kept silent**). Study
16  here you can understand here as research. Researchers compare the experience
17  of the mothers in their 30s, 40s and 50s. The result is surprising. So who will
18  find it more stressful? Women in their 50s, 40s or 30s?

Similarly, in Lee’s third listening episode in Extract 6.11, both phrases *that’s a big plus* (line 6) and *who cares about* (line 15) were taken out from the listening content. Lee’s explanations of the meaning of these phrases were mainly dependent upon the listening contexts from which they were drawn from. As with Jessica, Lee tended to dominate the conversation and provided most explanations of the meaning of the newly introduced phrases. However, they both ensured that the new vocabulary items were introduced in a contextualised manner:

Extract 6.11: Lee’s third listening episode – Observation 6 (Lee’s lesson 2: Travel)

1  T  Now next speaker, number 2. (**Teacher played the recording**).
2  What? It’s so ….
3  Ss  <Hard/ difficult>
4  T  So hard, so hard means difficult to make a choice. I can speak …?
5  S  English
7  (**Students kept silent**). Plus here means advantage ok? So a big plus means one
8  benefit for her. Different ok. (**Teacher continued playing the recording**). Now I
9  live near…
10  Ss  <Beach>
11  T  Beach, so who cares about going …?
12  S  Swimming
13  T  Uh huh. Who cares about going swimming? Does she like swimming?
14  Ss  <No.>
15  T  No right. When you say “**who cares about**”, you want to say you are not
16  interested in doing something right? (**Teacher continued playing the recording**).
The analysis also revealed that the new vocabulary items introduced in the while-task stage appeared to be different from those presented in the pre-task stage in terms of importance. As explained by the teachers, vocabulary presented in this while-stage was not considered key target vocabulary of the lessons; as such, students were not expected to produce or reuse them immediately in the main speaking tasks. The primary purpose in explaining their meaning appeared to mainly support students’ deconstruction and understanding of the listening texts. Vocabulary presented in this stage was, therefore, strongly connected to the listening contexts but not contingent on the learners’ needs for speaking production. This also explained why most teachers did not always include part-skill speaking tasks in this stage to provide learners the chance for practising these newly presented words.

The teachers, however, appeared to pay substantial attention to the presentation and practice of functional grammar and pronunciation features in this stage. In all 17 lessons that focused on listening activities in this stage, the teachers explicitly included a post-listening activity where they isolated the target structures and pronunciation features from the listening texts for further explanations and practice. Among the teachers, Jessica, Lee and Jenny exclusively focused on grammar while Lucy and Thomas addressed both grammar and pronunciation in this stage. By way of examples, three language-focused episodes from lessons taught by Jessica, Lee, and Jenny are presented in Extract 6.12.

As evident in these episodes, the teachers always referred back to the listening contexts as a way to make the target linguistic features salient to learners. In drawing learners’ attention to these target features, they highlighted the communicative functions of the structures such as apologising (Jessica), complaining (Lee) and expressing preferences and interests (Jenny). Similarly, all the pronunciation features in the observed lessons (Thomas: sentence stress; Lucy: word stress and contraction forms) were all found embedded within the communicative contexts associated with the listening activities. In this way, the linguistic input presented to the learners was not only closely connected to the situations featured in the listening content but was also in conjunction with its communicative values.
Extract 6.12: Examples of post-listening language-focused episodes

Jessica

T Ok everyone let’s have a look at **apologising**. Usually when we do the service and our customers complain, that’s a big trouble. For example, if you sell cakes, and they complain that your case is not good. You are in a trouble because I am your customer and customers are always right. So here are some language we can use to give apologise. To apologise. We say: *I am terribly ....* ‘What?’

S Sorry.

T Could you give me another adverb that I can put in here?

Ss <*I am sorry.* / *I am honestly sorry.* / *I am extremely sorry.*>

T You can change the adverbs right? *I apologise. I am very sorry about that. And I’d like to apologise for that.*

Lee

T Ok. This is one situation from the listening related to problems you might face at the airport. And in this situation if you listen to the way people say sorry and yes so how did she say?

Ss *I am terribl...*

T Yes and the man, he wants to **complain** about the situation, what did he say?

Ss *Excuse me....*

T Yeah, *excuse me. Please help me.* These are some expressions you can use. Now can you look at the back. Here are some expressions and take a look this is the way you complain, the way you apologise.

---

Jenny

Now if you look back at the listening part again, do you remember all the structures that the speakers used to express their **preferences** and **interests**?

*I’m crazy about....; I’m into something; I’m a fan of....; I’m fond of....; I can’t stand....; I’m turned off by....*

Now think about your speaking. If you want to talk about what you like or don’t like, I want you to learn and use some of these structures ok?

Results from the analysis of observation data also show the teachers’ attempts to provide students with opportunities to practise using the newly provided grammatical structures and pronunciation in speaking. These part-skill practice tasks were, however, only evident in seven of the observed lessons, with four focusing on grammar and three on pronunciation. In the remaining lessons, immediately following these language-focused phase were the final speaking production activities that, as the teachers explained, were designed as main speaking tasks of the lessons. Similar to part-skill activities in the pre-task stage, speaking activities designed in this while-stage drew learners’ attention to the practice of one specific linguistic component. In terms of task types and characteristics, no notable differences were found between these activities and those organised in the pre-task and post-task stages of the lessons (see Section 6.3.3.2 for detail).
The findings presented in this section highlight that, in alignment with the textbook content, the teachers placed a central focus on the provision of linguistic knowledge through listening activities in the while-task stage. In other words, listening activities were employed as a means for introducing new vocabulary, grammatical structures and pronunciation features to students. As such, the linguistic features presented in this stage were strongly connected to the listening contexts and pre-determined by the textbooks and the teachers, rather than contingent to the learners’ needs for expressing meaning in communication. This practice appears to largely diverge from what Goh and Burns (2012) proposed in the speaking-teaching cycle concerning the need to focus on providing learners with opportunities to conduct and re-conduct the main speaking tasks in this stage. Evidence from the interview and observation data consistently show that none of the teachers introduced main speaking tasks in this during-task stage, or provided students with opportunities to repeat the tasks. Instead, they all included main speaking production activities in the final stage at the end of each lesson. A detailed discussion of the final stage will be discussed next.

Communicative language practice in the post-task stage

The post-task stage, in accordance with Goh and Burns’ (2012) teaching cycle, is crucial for providing learners with opportunities to reflect on and receive feedback about their performance of the whole-task practice. These activities are valued for raising students’ metacognitive awareness about the speaking tasks and promoting their self-regulation of the learning process. In the present study, the interview and observation data both show that the teachers focused on two activities in this final stage: organising main speaking tasks and providing feedback.

Speaking production was found to be the main activity that the six teacher participants consistently focused on in the final stage of their speaking lessons. From the interviews, all teachers reported to have always included one main speaking task at the end of each lesson. Lee, Jenny, Rose and Lucy explained that these speaking activities were aimed to provide a communicative situation where learners could practise using what they have learned in the lesson for speaking performance. Jessica elaborated that, after accumulating all the necessary vocabulary and structures, students began to “apply the structures to talk about the topic” (Int.1). Similarly, Thomas contended that students...
were expected to show their ability to “make use of the input, vocabulary, intonation, structures” (Int.6) in this speaking task. These explanations highlight the primacy of learners’ ability to make use of the lesson input that students have been introduced to and practised across lesson stages, in the final speaking activity. These teachers appeared to view students’ ability to apply the lesson input into this main speaking activity as an indication of the achievement of the lesson objectives. As such, the final speaking activity in their lessons appear to have been mainly designed as the communicative language practice (Littlewood, 2004, 2013) that is commonly included in the production stage of the PPP model (D. Willis & Willis, 2007).

In alignment with this finding from the interviews, observation data reflect a similar focus on speaking production in the final stage. Evidence from the analysis of 20 observed lessons shows that each lesson typically ended with one main speaking task. Closer examination of the design of these main speaking activities further depicts its strong connection, in terms of content, with the part-skill speaking activities organised in earlier stages of the lessons. As discussed earlier, speaking activities in the first two stages were designed to help students accumulate and practise various linguistic components to prepare them for performing the final speaking tasks. These linguistic components, therefore, appear to have served as the main foundation that linked these activities to the main speaking task at the end of the lesson. In this design, the progression across the stages in each lesson appeared to be marked by gradual movement from gathering and automatisation of vocabulary, structures and pronunciation to a comprehensive use of all the accumulated knowledge in the final speaking task.

Jessica’s lesson entitled Boyfriends and Girlfriends could be seen as a typical illustration for this lesson sequencing. As presented in Extract 6.13, the first speaking activity in this lesson was designed in the pre-task stage to provide learners the opportunity to practise using the seven target phrases to talk about qualities of an ideal partner. Then, in the while-task stage, another part-skill practice task was organised in which students were provided with three situations for giving advice: how to make new friends, how to create a good impression on your first date, and how to maintain a good relationship with friends. In the instructions, Jessica explicitly highlighted language practice as the main purpose of this speaking activity, saying: “we just learned some
expressions for giving advice, right? Now I want you to use these to give advice to your friends.” The vocabulary and structures that the students practised through these two speaking activities then functioned as the backbone of their performance in the final task designed as the main speaking task at the end of the lesson. In this task, students were required to give advice to a close friend about what makes a perfect partner. In accordance with this design, the lesson progressed from students’ focus on vocabulary in the pre-task stage to grammatical structures in the while-task, and finally to a comprehensive use of these linguistic components for performing the final speaking task in the post-task stage:

Extract 6.13: Jessica’s sequencing of speaking activities - Observation 3 (Jessica’s lesson 2: Boyfriends and Girlfriends)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Stages</th>
<th>Jessica’s instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage one</td>
<td>Okay we just learned seven qualities right? Now we have seven criteria, now which criteria, which are the three most important criteria you are going to choose for your ideal partner? You don’t tell me. Tell your partner. Five minutes to talk. You have your pairs yet? Pairs please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage two</td>
<td>Now from the listening, we just learned some expressions for giving advice right. Now I want you to use these to give advice to your friends. I will give you some situations here in the copies. Right. In groups of three. I want you to take turns and choose the situation, one each time. Then you tell your friends your situations. Your friends, two people, will give advice. Each person needs to give at least one advice. Is that clear? Ok, here are the copies. Now I’d like everybody to stand up, get out of your seats and get in groups of three, maybe someone far from you. Go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage three</td>
<td>Now you are going to have a friend. And that friend of you starts to date somebody and that relationship is getting serious. Ok that’s the situation. Remember your best friend went on a date and their relationship is serious now. And you will have seven advice, I am going to give it to you. And you have to make a conversation. Oh, oh conversations again. That’s it. In your conversation, there must be a discussion about a perfect partner. What criteria, which one is the perfect partner and the advice you give for someone who goes on a date and wants to be in a serious relationship. Is that clear? […] Okay I will say that again. In your conversation, there should be two main points: the first one is criteria about a perfect partner. You might want to ask your friend some questions: what do you think about? Why did you choose? For example, why did you choose age instead of vehicles? Isn’t personality more important than age? Things like that. Or what things not important for you? And you might want to use some structures like: For …; he or she should be …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar progression was evident in the lesson Jenny designed for the same topic, Boyfriends and Girlfriends. As illustrated in Extract 6.14, speaking activity one was organised in the pre-task stage where students were expected to read the adverts about
four people who are looking for friends, select one they are interested in and explain their choice. In designing the four adverts, Jenny included all the seven vocabulary items about people’s qualities just introduced in the preceding pre-teach vocabulary activity. As such, the central goal of the activity appeared to be providing learners with an opportunity to practise using these seven words in a meaningful, contextualised situation. In the second speaking activity designed in the while-task stage, Jenny clearly explained to the learners that they were expected to practise using the typical expressions for reacting and showing interests that they just learned from the listening activities in the conversations with their partners. Moving to the final speaking task, Jenny explicitly reminded the students of the need to reuse the linguistic components practised in the two previous activities. She emphasised: “Remember to use what we have learned, ok?” As she continued to elaborate, “what we have learned” included how to describe qualities and how to react to their partner while listening, which they have practised earlier in the lesson:

Extract 6.14: Jenny’s sequencing of speaking activities – Observation 9 (Jenny’s lesson 1: Boyfriends and Girlfriends)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Stages</th>
<th>Jenny’s instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage one</strong></td>
<td>Alright, now if you looked at the handout I gave you, you could see the adverts about four people who are looking for friends. Now, I’d like you to read these adverts and then select one person that you are really interested in. Then share with your friend about the person you choose and explain why you choose that person. Ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage two</strong></td>
<td>Now, I’d like you to spend about 15 seconds thinking about something interesting in your life. It could be anything that you find interesting. Then tell your friends about these interesting things. Remember when you listen to your friends’ stories, react and show your interests by using the expressions we just learned from the listening exercise. Ok, now 15 seconds to think.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage three</strong></td>
<td>Now everyone. Look at the board (Teacher wrote on the board: Describe a person that you get a strong impression: characters? How long? Occasions?) Ok. I would like you to think about one person that you have got a good impression about in your life. And think about that person’s personality, appearance. Also about how long you have known that person and how you got to know him or her. All right, you now have 3 minutes to prepare for your ideas and then talk to your partner about this person. Remember to use what we have learned ok? How to describe qualities? What qualities impressed you? Then when you talk to your friend, your friends must listen and react to that right?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As depicted in these analyses, the teachers’ lesson sequencing appears to feature significant divergence from Goh and Burns’ (2012) teaching-speaking cycle. As Goh and Burns (2012) contend, in combining whole-task and part-skill practice, it is critical
for learners to experience the whole-task activity at least once before focusing on language forms. In this way, the language forms that students focus on are framed within the meaningful communicative context of the whole-task practice. In these teachers’ lessons, students’ attention was directed towards separate linguistic components prior to the introduction of the whole-task practice, typically designed at the end of the lesson. This whole-task practice was, thus, employed mainly to serve the purpose of language practice rather than as an authentic communication task (Littlewood, 2004, 2013). As also discussed in Section 6.3.3.2, in these teachers’ design, the whole-task activities featured similar characteristics as those of the part-skill activities organised in the pre- and while-task stages. Accordingly, students’ language and messages expressed in this main speaking task were still partly controlled and predictable. To a great extent, these teachers’ lesson sequencing depicts their leaning towards to the ‘synthetic’ or ‘structural’ approach (Wilkins, 1976) to speaking development, in which speaking competence is seen as the result of gradual accumulation of discrete linguistic components (Nunan, 2004). Such a sequence further reflects their compliance with the conventional PPP model that most of these teachers claimed to have employed or known about.

One prominent finding in relation to these teachers’ sequencing of speaking lessons, however, is their typical procedure in conducting the main speaking tasks. Data from all 20 lessons consistently shows that, in implementing the whole-task practice at the end of the lessons, all six teachers appeared to follow three similar steps. These include: (1) teachers’ introduction to the task; (2) students’ rehearsal of the task in pairs/groups; and (3) public task performance by some selected pairs or groups in front of the whole class. A similar pattern in task implementation has been identified earlier by Trang (2013) and Trang, Newton, and Crabbe (in press) as a typical practice by teachers in an elite high school in Vietnam. Such a practice has been interpreted as an effective pedagogical strategy that these teachers utilise to maximise students’ interactions and negotiations through the tasks, which is beneficial in enhancing learners’ uptake of new language features (Trang et al., in press). This evidence suggests the contextualised nature of the Vietnamese teachers’ knowledge and practice in task implementation. Given its value, closer investigation into how this procedure has developed and sustained in this context is crucial for suggestions to further improve the quality of speaking teaching in this particular setting.
Another common activity that most teachers focused on in the post-task stage, as indicated by their observed lessons, was feedback provision. Classroom data show that Rose and Thomas provided ongoing feedback after every speaking activity throughout their lessons, while Jessica, Lucy, Jenny and Lee consistently included a feedback episode following the main speaking task at the end of each lesson. As commonly observed, the main speaking task was typically organised into three episodes: task implementation among students, selected performance in front of the whole class, and feedback provision. The feedback that the teachers provided, therefore, mainly focused on the students’ selected performance in the second episode. In most cases, the feedback was provided by the teachers, in lecturing mode. This is demonstrated in the feedback episode taken from Lucy’s lesson as presented in Extract 6.15. This feedback was provided at the end of the lesson after one pair of students, Nhungh and Khanh, conversed about future plans in front of the whole class:

Extract 6.15: Lucy’s feedback episode – Observation 16 (Lucy’s lesson 2: Hopes and Plans)

1 T Ok so I will give comment in Vietnamese as usual. I will give feedback as usual now. Now I will ask some of you whether your friends have performed well then. First, what should we look at? Pronunciation first. How was their pronunciation?
2 They did not use gonna, wanna well right? What else? Any other problems in pronunciation? Did any of you realise any problems?
3
4 S1 Garage, graduate. (Giang called out the words “garage” and “graduate” as examples of pronunciation mistakes the speakers made)
5 T What else Mr. Giang?
6 S1 I could not hear, Teacher.
7 T What do you mean by not able to hear? Go and see the doctor for checking your ears then. Ok, pronunciation, many final sounds were missed right? For example, house and famous.
8 Nhungh did most of the talking right? Khanh just nodded his head most of the time so he did make as many mistakes as Nhungh. Now about pronunciation: not very good right? So more practice please. And the words I just taught, they did not use right. Now what’s next? Fluency? Were they fluent in speaking?
9
10 Ss <No> <Inaudible>
11 T Why not?
12 Ss <Inaudible>
13 T Right, they said something like honeymoon, honeymoon. Seems like Khanh likes honeymoon a lot, right? Go alone. That belongs to what? Accuracy right?
14 Accuracy was not very good. Now next, vocabulary use? Rather okay right?
15 There were some words I wished to hear in their conversation: three-car garage, going to, we are going to. Structures seemed ok right? Famous singer [...]
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In this episode, the feedback Lucy provided appeared to serve a twofold purpose. Firstly, she evaluated whether the two students reused the language input they practised in earlier lesson stages in this main speaking task. She explicitly commented that these students successfully employed “some words [she] wished to hear in their conversation” (lines 25-26); yet they did not include the target pronunciation feature of contracted sounds such as gonna and wanna (lines 4-6). She also explained that they did not incorporate the typical vocabulary and structures for talking about “hopes and plans” introduced earlier in the lesson (lines 15-16). In this sense, students’ performance was evaluated mainly based on their ability to include the target linguistic features of the lesson in their conversations. This evidence clearly indicates that, from Lucy’s perspective, students’ acquisition of linguistic knowledge and ability to reuse it in speaking performance constituted the major goal of their speaking lessons, rather than the ability to employ this knowledge for expressing their genuine meaning and achieving a communicative goal through the task. Secondly, Lucy further pointed out and corrected the specific words that students mispronounced in the conversation, including “garage”, “graduate”, “house” and “famous”. This explicit correction depicts Lucy’s strong focus on language accuracy in giving feedback about the learners’ performance. Attention to the students’ meaning and the extent to which they achieved the communicative goal through the speaking task, however, appears to be completely missing in this feedback episode.

Jessica also focused on the same two purposes when giving feedback. In the feedback episode presented in Extract 6.16, besides general comments about students’ interactions in the conversations (lines 1-4), Jessica concentrated on correcting students’ mistakes. These included their inaccurate use of prepositions for time references (lines 9-12) and the misuse of the two adjectives “understandable” versus “understanding” (lines 12-16). She also complimented the learners’ ability to incorporate vocabulary and ideas from previous activities in this task, saying “it’s good that you used some advice here.” She explained that students needed to “apply more new structures” or “practice new structures into [their] speaking” (lines 17-19). These analyses show that, as with Lucy, Jessica focused on correcting students’ mistakes and evaluating their ability to reproduce the language input in performing the main speaking task. This focus on accuracy and language practice suggests their orientation towards a form-based teaching practice.
Alright some of the comments for your two conversations. It’s good that you can interview and interact well with each other. However, there are something we need to consider: it’s interesting that you guys interact very naturally together, but it could be better if you used more sentences instead of phrases. For example, “what’s his nationality?” “English or he’s English or he comes from England”. There should be more sentences instead of phrases or words like that. “Vietnamese or he’s Vietnamese.” Either ways are ok but there should be more sentences.

I have met him 3 months? For 3 months, right?

He will back, he will back to England 4 months later. Is it okay? He will be back to England 4 months later? Is that okay? In 4 months, not 4 months later.

Er outgoing, understandable. Thuyet, did you say someone “understandable” it means you are able to understand that person or if he is “understanding”? Or if you say that person is outgoing and understanding something like that, why don’t you give some examples. For example, she always smiles and when I say something she always understands and things like that.

It’s good that you use some advice here and you have very few structures, new structures, you need to apply more new structures, you need to practice new structures into your speaking, but generally it’s good.

Some other teachers appeared to exclusively focus on correcting students’ mistakes in speaking. The feedback episode in Jenny’s lesson presented in Extract 6.17 below, for example, was completely devoted to the correction of students’ mistakes in pronunciation. In particular, she was particularly concerned with the students’ inaccuracy in pronouncing the two words ‘have’ and ‘has’. In this episode, Jenny pointed out the students’ mistakes (lines 1-4), and further modelled their correct pronunciation before getting the whole class to repeat and practise saying the words (lines 6-12). To provide further practice, Jenny engaged four individual students in a short question-answer interaction (lines 13-22), which allowed them to practise pronouncing these words at the level of sentences and conversations. This evidence suggests that accuracy and language forms attracted most substantial attention from the teachers in feedback provision.
Right, also here when we say: She has a friend (T wrote the sentence on the board). Ok now, could you pronounce these two words?

T pointed at these two words several times for students to repeat.

Now repeat after me: I have a friend. She has a friend. (T modelled and students repeated 2 times).

Ok, so how many friends do you have?

I have a lot of friends.

Ok, a lot of friends. Right. Do you have any pets at home? You?

No. I don’t have pets.

Ok right. What do you have in your bag?

Many things.

For example?

<Inaudible>

Ok, do you know what she has in her bag?

Yes, she has many things.

As with Lucy and Jessica, Jenny appeared to take complete control of this feedback episode. In all cases, teachers were the ones that initiated the feedback activity, directly pointed out learners’ errors, and provided corrections or comments on their performance. Limited attention appears to have been paid to students’ self- or peer-feedback and evaluation. Given that opportunities for learners to consolidate their newly learned knowledge, reflect and evaluate their learning are crucial for the development of their metacognitive knowledge about learning to speaking an L2 language (Goh & Burns, 2012), the lack of teachers’ encouragement of students’ self- and peer-feedback in this stage might limit their opportunity for enhancing their ability in self-regulation in learning.

In brief, the findings presented in this section depict the teachers’ primary focus on speaking production activities and feedback providing in the final lesson stage. All teachers consistently ended their lessons with one main speaking task, through which they expected students to comprehensively put the language input provided and practised throughout the lesson into speaking. In placing this main speaking task at the end of the lesson after students have focused on discrete linguistic content in earlier stages of the lessons, these teachers demonstrated a stronger alignment with a form-based PPP approach. Accordingly, speaking competence is viewed as coming after students have accumulated sufficient linguistic knowledge in a separate manner. These teachers’ orientation towards a form-focused teaching practice was further supported by the feedback they provided with a strong focus on language accuracy and explicit correction. Students’ speaking performance was also mainly evaluated based on
whether they could incorporate the target linguistic input of the lessons in fulfilling the speaking task, rather than the extent to which they achieve the communicative task. In this sense, a refocus in the content of the teachers’ feedback might also be needed so as to optimise the value of the feedback in facilitating learners’ speaking development.

*The teachers’ typical structure of a speaking lesson*

The findings presented above provide bases for the construction of the three-stage typical speaking lesson structure commonly employed by the teacher participants. As presented in Figure 6.1, the first two stages each appear to be well bounded by a distinct content focus and a typical group of activities. In particular, typical activities in stage one, including warm-up speaking, teachers’ talks, schemata activation and pre-teaching vocabulary, were consistently employed for one central purpose: equipping learners with sufficient vocabulary for the topics. Opportunities for part-skill speaking activities through which learners practised using the newly introduced vocabulary into communication were also provided. Within this stage, the lesson progresses from vocabulary activation and presentation phase directly to the production phase where students are expected to practise using the newly obtained vocabulary in a part-skill, communicative language practice task. In this sense, activities in this pre-task stage reflect a resonance with the PPP model with the practice stage omitted.

![Figure 6.1: The typical three-stage speaking lesson structure](image)

Similarly, activities in the while-task stage also feature the traits of the presentation-production structure. During this stage, the teachers devoted a significant amount of time supporting students to deconstruct the listening content, from which the target linguistic features were isolated for presentation. Following this, the teachers further
provided learners with opportunities for practising using these newly grammatical structures or pronunciation features in part-skill practice tasks. In this sense, the teachers mainly focused on the presentation and production steps but skipped the practice phase of the PPP model.

In the post-task stage of this typical lesson structure, primacy was given to communicative language practice activities where learners were expected to practise using all input provided throughout the lesson for performing the main task. Feedback is also provided in this stage with a focus on language accuracy and students’ ability to reproduce all lesson input in their performance of the speaking tasks. This final lesson stage, therefore, seemed to be reminiscent of the production step in the common PPP lesson model.

6.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter, drawing on both interview and observation data, presented key findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK and PCK, as informed by Shulman’s (1986, 1987) conception of knowledge base and Goh and Burn’s (2012) framework of speaking competence and their holistic approach to teaching speaking. In terms of SMCK, interview data indicates that the teachers placed top priority on the topic-specific and linguistic knowledge as the two most important components of teaching content. Consistently, all teachers identified topic-specific knowledge as a prerequisite for the learners’ use of language. Generating sufficient topic-related ideas in speaking, however, was uniformly identified as the most typical challenge for their learners. Topic-specific knowledge, as such, occupied a central position in the teachers’ instructional content. The teachers also viewed linguistic knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation as the most fundamental underlying components of communicative competence, and they reported to have drawn substantial attention to this component in teaching speaking. They, however, appeared to have limited knowledge about other important components of communicative competence as illustrated in Goh and Burns’ (2012) model, including knowledge of discourse, core speaking skills, and communication strategies. Although some teacher participants exhibited a certain extent of understanding about these components, their understanding was mostly characterised by a lack of comprehensiveness. In teaching practice, they
reported to have covered these content components in only a limited way, mainly conducted in the forms of awareness-raising activities, rather than as officially planned teaching content.

With respect to the teachers’ cognitions about PCK, three major aspects were explored, comprising the teachers’ knowledge of context, learners and speaking pedagogy. Concerning the teachers’ understanding of the teaching context, it was found from the interview data that the meso level condition of the institutional management practice was perceived as the most influential factor. In contrast with numerous previous studies in the Vietnamese context (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) that have reported on the teachers’ lack of freedom in making relevant pedagogical decisions, the teachers in the present study reported to have been granted excessive, unquestioned power to decide almost every aspect of their teaching. Interestingly, such freedom, however, was perceived by these teachers more as a hindering rather than a favourable condition. These teachers viewed the current management system as the main cause for inconsistent teaching outcomes, creating further workload and pressure, and limiting opportunities for their professional development.

With respect to knowledge of learners, the diversity among students was found to attract most substantial attention from all teacher participants. While this diversity has its relevance to a constellation of aspects, such as levels, social backgrounds, learning strategies and styles, and ages, learners’ diverse proficiency levels were consistently identified as the most crucial feature that strongly motivated the teachers to adapt their teaching strategies. In attempting to provide optimal learning opportunities to students at all levels, less experienced teachers appeared to opt for a two-tiered approach in which a combination of the prescribed and supplemented material and activities was sought. More experienced teachers, however, appeared to further depart from the syllabus and employ a more comprehensive adjusting approach in which even the subject objectives were adapted to fit better to the learners’ proficiency levels.

The teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy were, first of all, explored through their selection of instructional activities. In alignment with previous studies, the teachers’ patterns in using the prescribed material were investigated, which reveals two
apparently contrasting orientations in these teachers’ pedagogy. On the one hand, their practice in supplementing most speaking activities from outside the prescribed textbooks clearly indicates their attempts to create a meaningful and communicative learning environment. This finding appears to contradict what previous studies (Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) have reported concerning teachers’ tendency to omit more meaning-focused activities or adapt them into more form-based and less demanding activities for the learners. On the other hand, their practice in retaining listening/reading activities, which they perceived as valuable input sources, and their modifications of pre-teaching vocabulary activities from the textbooks, appears to reaffirm their overriding focus on learners’ acquisition of discrete linguistic knowledge components. Such a practice tended to reveal their inclination towards a structural approach to speaking development.

In-depth analyses of the characteristics of the speaking activities further shows that the teachers appear to have been aware of the need to combine whole-task and part-skill practice in their speaking lessons (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992). However, in designing and implementing speaking tasks, the teachers appear to have relied on the content dimension as the main distinguishing criterion between the whole-task and part-skill. As such, although the activities they employed for these two groups featured a clear distinction in terms of content, no notable differences in terms of task types and characteristics were found between them. In their design, both part-skill and whole-task activities were mostly characterised as communicative language practice rather than as authentic communicative activities. In other words, these activities provided learners with a communicative situation where they could reuse, practise and procedualise the language input in each lesson. However, when performing these tasks, the main goal in these students’ language use was still placed on the practice of language rather than the expression of their genuine meaning. The students’ language use and messages were still partly prescribed, controlled and predictable. Many of the activities the teachers utilised as whole-task practice were also distant from the learners’ experience and preferences, and featured a low extent of authenticity. Such activities, although appropriate to be used as part-skill activities that might function well as part-skill practice, could not be sufficient for developing students’ competence in using language effectively and appropriately in spontaneous and unpredictable communicative contexts.
Another aspect of the teachers’ speaking pedagogy explored in the study was their typical sequencing of speaking lessons. Results from the analysis of both interview and observation data depict a common three-stage lesson structure. In this structure, the pre-task stage was devoted to supporting students in mobilising sufficient vocabulary for the topics, and further giving them the chance to practise using the vocabulary through part-skill practice tasks. The while-task stage promoted a strong emphasis on listening activities, which served as the means for providing learners with further knowledge of functional structures, pronunciation and vocabulary. Opportunities for practising using these newly introduced linguistic knowledge components were also provided. In the post-task stage, all teachers focused on presenting learners with one main whole-task speaking activity, through which learners were expected to reproduce and reuse all the language input they obtained from the lesson. Such a lesson structure appears to reflect the teachers’ orientation towards a structural-based teaching approach where learners’ accumulation of discrete linguistic knowledge was considered as crucial to the development of their speaking competence.

In alignment with findings from previous studies, these teachers’ approach to speaking development appears to still dominantly comply with the conventional PPP model which emphasises the importance of knowledge presenting, practice and production. Speaking competence, as such, appears to be viewed as the result of the accumulation of discrete linguistic components across lesson stages. However, these findings further reveal that integrated into this traditional teaching model was the teachers’ strong orientation toward a communication-oriented teaching practice where students’ ability to employ language for expressing meaning in communication was prioritised. In this sense, in convergence with these teachers’ self-reported practice, their current teaching practice appears to be characterised by a hybrid, eclectic approach to speaking development. In light of these findings, the next chapter discusses key findings from the study in relation to the current literature, and proposes a contextualised model for the teaching of speaking skill in the Vietnamese tertiary context.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In the Vietnamese context, research (e.g. Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hiep, 2007; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) has continuously reported on the limited effectiveness of curricular innovations aimed at developing learners’ communicative competence. As with teachers in other Asian contexts, Vietnamese teachers are in urgent need of a pedagogical model that is not only effective for facilitating speaking development but also appropriate for local contextual conditions. Findings from the present study provide a solid foundation for the development of a context-sensitive pedagogical model informed by insightful understandings gained from Vietnamese teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and practices in relation to the teaching of speaking, and the complex relationship among these dimensions. Employing a naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and a qualitative single case-study design (Creswell, 2013), the study sheds light on three aspects of the teachers’ cognitions, namely curriculum, SMCK and PCK. Six university teachers participated in the study, with data collected from multiple sources, including documents, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews. Underpinning the study is a comprehensive theoretical framework integrating Borg’s (2006) model of TC, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge base, and Goh and Burns’ (2012) holistic approach to teaching speaking. Detailed findings from the study in relation to each research question are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Drawing on the findings and initial discussion presented in Chapters 5 and 6, this final chapter, firstly, provides a summary of the most critical results from the study and extends the discussion of the findings in relation to speaking instruction in the Vietnamese context. These include the teachers’ cognitions about the curriculum (Section 7.2.1), teachers’ cognitions about SMCK (7.2.2), and teachers’ cognitions about PCK (7.2.3). This discussion sketches out a holistic picture of the teachers’ current cognitions and practices in speaking instruction and provides an empirical evidence base for the proposed model for teaching speaking skill in Vietnamese tertiary context presented in Section 7.3. The implications arising from the findings will be discussed in Section 7.4, along with acknowledged limitations of the study (7.5), directions for future research (7.6), and will conclude with final remarks in Section 7.7.
7.2 Summary of key findings

7.2.1 Teachers’ cognitions about curriculum

The focus of investigations into the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula in the present study, as outlined earlier, is centred on the teachers’ understanding of the curricular content, the vertical and lateral relationships between the content, and the indications and contra-indications for curriculum implementation (Shulman, 1986, 1987). The first significant insight derived from the findings in relation to these aspects is the teachers’ reliance on the prescribed textbooks as the major embodiment of curricular content. Interview data from the study showed that the only information these teachers referred to from the curricula and syllabi documents was the goals of the programs, whereas much of their remaining knowledge was derived directly from the adopted textbooks. Even though most teachers were critical of the suitability of the textbook material for speaking development, they all reported to have utilised these textbooks as core teaching content. In defining teaching content, these teachers either explicitly referred to the themes and topics listed in the textbooks or specified the content directly based on such terms as ‘language focus’ and ‘conversation strategy’ used in the textbooks. Teachers’ reliance on textbooks for teaching content has been considered a norm in the Vietnamese context, especially at the high school level, where this content is rigidly prescribed from top down (Canh, 2007; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003). Evidence from the present study further demonstrates that, in university settings, where teachers have much freedom to make decisions on content and pedagogy, prescribed material might still critically shape their teaching content as well as their understanding of the subject matter content.

Noteworthy is the finding about the teachers’ limited knowledge base about the lateral and vertical aspects of the curricula: that is, the relationships between speaking and other curricular contents, and among the six speaking subjects, respectively. Interview analyses showed that all teachers did not seem to have a clear understanding of how subjects from each of the three key curricular knowledge domains (general, discipline foundation, and discipline specialisation) inform and complement each other, and how they work together to contribute to the achievement of students’ desired speaking outcomes. They also demonstrated a limited awareness of how each of the six speaking
levels is defined in the program. These teachers mostly related students’ progression from one speaking subject to the next level to their ability to communicate about changing topics in varying communicative situations. None of the teachers associated speaking progression to students’ cumulative knowledge, skills and strategies, or their growth in speaking fluency, accuracy and complexity (Bygate, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). These findings suggest that teachers lacked a deep understanding of the notion of speaking development as intended by the curricula. This is problematic, as alignment with the curriculum intent is a key factor in successful curriculum enactment (J. Richards, 2017). Such alignment ensures that all curricular elements are consistently integrated in curriculum planning and implementation in a way that decisions at one level are not in conflict with those at the other (Nunan, 1988). Equipping teachers with an in-depth understanding of the curriculum intent, as such, is critical to attempts to support these teachers to achieve the curricular intended learning outcomes.

Another prominent aspect of the teachers’ cognitions about the curricula is their common perception of the extensive freedom they possess in making decisions regarding its implementation. As evidenced from the interview data, all teacher participants reported that there was a lack of a systematic control over the teaching content and pedagogy at the institution. This lack of control was compounded by the insufficient support from the curricular documents in relation to how teachers should specifically teach curricular content. Under these conditions, all teachers perceived that, in implementing the programs, they were granted a great deal of freedom in making decisions concerning content and pedagogy. Experienced teachers (Rose and Thomas) were strongly confident that they had the right to depart from and make any necessary adjustments to curricular content to better suit their learners’ needs. This finding contrasts with a common finding from many previous studies (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hiep, 2005; N. G. Viet, 2013), which report on the restricted autonomy that high school Vietnamese teachers are provided with. Instead, this finding appears to reflect Hoang’s (2010) description of the freedom granted to teachers at the university level in Vietnam in developing their own curricula and syllabi.

Findings from the study also highlight critical factors that are most influential for the teachers’ decisions in curriculum enactment. The first prominent factor reported to have
strongly impacted the teachers’ current practice was the meso-level, or institutional management scheme. As earlier described, a lack of systematic control compounded by limited information from curricular content was identified by the teachers as the most critical factor that limited the consistency among teachers in curriculum enactment. The second factor that was influential for the teachers’ pedagogical decisions was the diversity of learners’ proficiency levels. As suggested by interview analyses, all teachers adapted their teaching in an effort to provide learning opportunities to learners at various levels. Accordingly, less experienced teachers had a tendency to employ an ‘adopt but adapt’ approach, employing both prescribed and supplemented content and activities. The most experienced teacher (Rose), however, departed further from the curricula, adjusting the content, activities, material as well as the learning outcomes to better suit the learners’ proficiencies. This evidence not only suggests the effects of learners’ proficiency levels on the ways teachers implement the curricular content but also highlights the different approaches that teachers with different levels of experience employ in adapting their teaching to address students’ needs.

7.2.2 Teachers’ cognitions about SMCK

Teachers’ knowledge of what constitutes speaking competence, the second central focus of the present study, determines what they choose to include in teaching (Goh & Burns, 2012). Interview and observation data from this study reflect a lack of a systematic understanding in the teachers’ knowledge base of the core underlying elements of speaking competence. Such a common gap of the teachers’ understanding needs to be appropriately addressed in endeavours to improve the effectiveness of speaking teaching in this context.

Most prominent from the findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions of SMCK is their limited view on communicative competence. Resonating with the perspectives of Vietnamese teachers in previous studies (e.g. Canh, 2007; Canh, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013), the teachers in the present research viewed speaking competence as mainly comprising linguistic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Such a strong focus on the knowledge of language has commonly been interpreted as an alignment with a structural approach that privileges the form of discrete linguistic components over communication and meaning (J.
Richards & Rodgers, 2003). In a similar vein, the teachers in the present study placed stronger emphasis on students’ accumulation and practice of discrete linguistic knowledge, and gave greater consideration to students’ ability to reproduce the learnt knowledge in speaking activities as an overriding teaching objective.

Also noteworthy from the findings is the teachers’ strong emphasis on the importance of topic-specific knowledge (Elizabeth, 2012; Hill, 2008). The influence of speakers’ knowledge of topics on speaking performance in communication and testing conditions has been extensively discussed (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Lange, 2000; Nation & Newton, 2009; H. T. Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Nunan, 1999; Rahimpour & Hazar, 2007). However, its role in speaking-teaching content is only marginally addressed in most discussions of speaking subject matter content (e.g. Bygate, 1987, 2009; Goh & Burns, 2012; Thornbury, 2005, 2012), in which the generation of learners’ ideas for speaking appears to be taken for granted. All teachers in the present study, however, consistently maintained that this knowledge played a crucial role in helping students to overcome their typical problem of lacking ideas in speaking. In addition, topic-specific knowledge, when included as teaching content, also provides teachers with a meaningful context for introducing new linguistic features in the lessons. This evidence reflects the situated nature of the teachers’ knowledge of speaking subject matter content, which is shaped by their understanding of the learners in this particular context. In this sense, more substantial attention needs to be directed to the role of topic-specific knowledge in models of speaking competence suggested in particular for Vietnamese or similar contexts where learners have similar problems in generating ideas for speaking.

Findings from the study also point out critical gaps in the teachers’ knowledge base that need to be addressed in efforts to improve speaking teaching quality. Interview and observation data both demonstrated the fragmentation of the teachers’ understanding of discourse knowledge, core speaking skills, and communicative strategies (Goh & Burns, 2012). Their discourse knowledge was exclusively centred on formulaic or functional expressions, whereas their awareness of spoken genres and sociocultural knowledge was largely missing. Similarly, among the three types of communicative strategies, their understanding was mainly anchored in interactional strategies. Their awareness of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, which are crucial for compensating gaps in their knowledge of language and discourse, was minimal. Interview data also
demonstrated that the teachers had limited understanding of the distinction between the core speaking skills and the knowledge underpinning speaking competence. As such, in both reported and actual practice, their central focus was placed upon knowledge transmission and practice, whereas the underlying skills were not included as official teaching content. This finding suggests a lack of a holistic view on speaking competence, which is vital for effective teaching (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nazari, 2007). Enhancing these teachers’ knowledge of discourse, core speaking skills and communicative strategies, and the contributing roles these components play in learners’ speaking performance, is critical for helping teachers to improve the quality of their teaching of speaking.

The final notable finding in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK is their inclination toward a communication-oriented teaching practice. In contrast to a common report from previous studies (e.g. Canh, 2007; Canh, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) concerning Vietnamese teachers’ focus on decontextualised, explicit presentation and practice of pre-determined language forms, the teachers in the present study demonstrated a strong dedication to focusing on communication in how they selected content for teaching. Interview and observation data indicated that new vocabulary was mostly introduced in a contextualised manner or contingent to learners’ needs for vocabulary in speaking that they identified through interactions with the students. The teachers repeatedly emphasised in the interviews that their primary goal in teaching vocabulary was to enable students to master not only the word forms and meaning but also their usage so that they could employ the vocabulary for conveying ideas rather than just regurgitating other people’s messages (Skehan, 1998). In teaching pronunciation, their central attention was drawn towards the suprasegmental features of intonation, stress, and linking sounds, which reveals their valuing of the communicative aspect of pronunciation. Their focus in teaching grammar was also directed to the functional aspects of structures, rather than the ability to create correct sentences. This evidence appears to reflect an integration of the CLT’s communication-focused principle into the teachers’ knowledge and practice in this context.

Overall, the teachers’ understanding of SMCK, constrained by a limited view on speaking competence that is centred on linguistic and topic-specific knowledge,
generally reflects a leaning toward the conventional structure-based teaching orientation. However, this understanding also indicates the situated nature of the teachers’ knowledge of SMCK in this context, and their attempt to accommodate a communication-focused component in their current practice.

7.2.3 Teachers’ cognitions about PCK

The exploration of teachers’ cognitions about PCK in the present study, as previously discussed, focuses on three aspects: the teachers’ commonly employed method/approach, their selection of instructional activities, and their lesson sequencing. Findings in relation to these dimensions, as addressed below, reflect the teachers’ eclectic, context-sensitive approach to teaching speaking. This approach combines the traditional PPP model with some communication-oriented principles from CLT/ TBLT.

One notable finding from investigations into the teachers’ commonly employed approach is their misinterpretations of CLT/ TBLT. These misconceptions not only reflect a strong resemblance with previously reported misinterpretations held by teachers in various contexts (e.g. Thompson, 1996) but also further indicate an experience-related difference of these interpretations. As evident from interview data, less experienced teachers in this study, claiming to have adhered more to CLT/ TBLT, interpreted it as an exclusive focus on speaking, with other skills and grammatical knowledge sidelined. These conceptions are in resonance with Thompson’s (1996) report that teachers’ downplaying of grammatical knowledge and exclusive focus on speaking skill are the two most persistent and widespread misconceptions in the implementation of CLT in different contexts. In contrast, the teachers with extensive experience (Rose and Thomas), although fully supportive of the role of CLT for speaking development, chose to stay with the conventional PPP model. They appeared to believe that PPP, as compared to CLT, is more appropriate for learners at a low proficiency level since it enabled them to respond better to the learners’ needs for language input and practice. Constrained by these perceptions, both experienced and less experienced teachers reported to mainly focus on presenting students with linguistic and topic-specific knowledge and providing them with opportunities for practising and reproducing these elements in speaking activities. This focus suggests the teachers’ compliance with the ‘learning to speak’, rather than ‘speaking-to-learn’, principle.
(Hughes, 2012; Newton, 2017). In other words, the meaning-focused principle, a key tenet of CLT (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; J. Richards & Rodgers, 2003), appears to be missing in the teachers’ understanding of CLT.

In previous research, teachers’ divergence from the meaning-focused principle in the Vietnamese context has been reported and interpreted as examples of teacher resistance or ‘paying lip-service’ to CLT (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nunan, 2003). Evidence from the present study, however, indicates that the divergence is driven by the teachers’ misconceptions of CLT values and how they are realised in classroom practice. Given that misconceptions about CLT among Vietnamese teachers, especially experienced teachers, are only marginally discussed in the current literature (e.g. K. A. Viet, 2008), these misinterpretations need to be closely examined and properly addressed in attempts to support teachers to better align their practice with a communicative-focused approach.

Another noteworthy finding related to the teachers’ PCK is their inclination toward a meaning-focused principle, as evident in their selection of activities. Investigations into the activities these teachers selected for their lessons indicated the dominance of more meaning-focused speaking tasks that the teachers supplemented, either self-designed or borrowed from other sources, to replace form-focused activities from the prescribed material. A similar practice was previously found to be employed by teachers at an urban, elite high school in Vietnam as reported by Trang (2013) and Trang, Newton, and Crabbe (2018). The teachers in these studies, motivated by a commitment to “engage the students socio-affectively in the tasks” (Trang et al., 2018, p. 27), frequently transformed textbook activities from closed and inauthentic into open-ended and authentic tasks. Similarly, in an effort to create an interesting and communicative learning environment, the teachers in the present study substituted “boring” and “simple” activities from the textbooks with those they perceived as engaging and interesting to the learners. This finding shows a stark contrast with reports from many previous studies of Vietnamese context (e.g. Canh, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Nam, 2015; N. G. Viet, 2013) that conclude that teachers tended to omit meaning-focused tasks or convert them to more form-based activities. The teachers in the present study, in comparison, demonstrate a full awareness of the need to employ meaning-focused activities in teaching speaking, and attempted to incorporate a communication-focused
component into the current practice.

Findings of the study also point out critical limitations in the teachers’ design and implementation of speaking tasks in teaching practice that negatively affect the intended values of the activities and their effectiveness for speaking development. Interview data showed that, in designing tasks, the teachers mainly focused on the content dimension and paid only minimal attention to important task features such as the task’s purpose, form/meaning focus, authenticity and the control/predictability of students’ language and meaning. Observation data further indicated that, in task implementation, the teachers had a tendency to explicitly require learners to reuse the target linguistic features in task performance, which significantly reduced the meaning-focus extent of the task and increased the control and predictability of the messages and language produced by learners. As such, the speaking activities the teachers conducted as both whole-task and part-skill practice (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992) were dominantly characterised as ‘communicative language practice’ (Littlewood, 2004, 2013), designed to provide learners with opportunities to practise using pre-taught knowledge in speaking situations. Such activities, when employed as whole-task activities, could not provide learners with authentic communicative situations where they could use language for expressing meaning in an uncontrolled and unpredictable manner, which is crucial for preparing them for spontaneous real-life communication (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 1981, 1992, 2013; Skehan, 1998). In this sense, equipping teachers with a deep understanding of task features and of how to retain the meaning-focus extent of the tasks in classroom enactment is of critical importance to efforts to improve the quality of teaching speaking in this context.

The most prominent finding derived from analyses of the teachers’ lesson sequencing is their efforts to incorporate enhanced opportunities for speaking production into the conventional PPP model that has long dominated in the Vietnamese context. As presented in Section 6.3.3, observation data from the study depicted a common three-stage lesson structure, each stage with a distinct content focus. Accordingly, each of the first two stages, focusing on vocabulary and grammar, or pronunciation respectively, features a simplified version of the PPP model with the practice stage omitted. A similar vocabulary-grammar-practice lesson model has been previously identified by Nam (2015) as a commonly employed lesson sequence in the Vietnamese context. What may
seem to be an innovative feature in the common lesson structure designed by the teachers in the present study, however, is the inclusion of speaking practice activities in all three lesson stages. With this design, the teachers, on the one hand, maximise students’ opportunities to be involved in speaking production activities across lesson stages. On the other hand, the omission of the practice stage suggests an intentional downplaying of the role of form-focused activities. While a primary focus on meaning is critical for speaking development, sufficient attention to forms is equally important (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 2013; Nunan, 2004). Given that language-focused activities are increasingly being recognised as essential for providing affordances for learning and facilitating internalisation of L2 (Nation & Newton, 2009; Newton, 2017), attempts to improve the quality of the teachers’ current practice need to provide teachers with directions on how to achieve a better balance between a strong focus on meaning and sufficient attention to language forms through their sequencing.

In a nutshell, the key findings in relation to three aspects of teachers’ cognitions, of curriculum, SMCK and PCK, summarised in this section together depict the eclectic nature of the teachers’ current knowledge and practice in relation to speaking teaching content and pedagogy. On the one hand, the teachers are still constrained by the conventional PPP model which encourages them to place more emphasis on presenting learners with linguistic and topic-specific input together with opportunities for practising these knowledge components in speaking. On the other hand, motivated by a strong need to develop learners’ communicative competence, these teachers made attempts to integrate the meaning-based principle into their current practice through their selection of teaching content, activities and their ways of sequencing lessons. These findings provide a critical evidence base for the development of a context-sensitive model for the teaching of speaking in Vietnamese context to be presented in the following section.

7.3 The context-sensitive model for teaching speaking in Vietnamese context

This section presents a pedagogical model for the teaching of speaking in the Vietnamese context. The model serves as the first ‘localised methodology’ (Ho & Wong, 2004) or ‘culturally sensitive approach’ (Littlewood, 2013; Samimy &
Kobayashi, 2004) for this setting and is an important contribution on two critical counts. Firstly, it was constructed on the basis of Vietnamese teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and practices, as informed by the findings of the present study. In this way, the model acknowledges and values what the teachers have been doing, which allows them to “grow but retain a sense of security” (Littlewood, 2004, p. 247). Such acknowledgement of the teachers’ existing cognitions and practices is critical, since teachers tend to support a new model only when they find “personal value and reward in adopting it” and understand how to integrate it in their existing networks of educational beliefs and practice (Branden, 2016, p. 174). Secondly, findings from this study show that although the teachers, with their strong advocacy for the role of CLT/ TBLT in learners’ speaking development, already incorporated a communication-focused component in their current teaching, this practice still features a lack of systematic translation of fundamental principles of the communicatively-based approach due to certain misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge base. The model suggested in the present study, as such, presents teachers with directions for further aligning this practice with a principled, communication-oriented pedagogy.

From the theoretical standpoint, the model promotes a socio-cognitive perspective on L2 speaking development. The findings from this study in relation to the teachers’ current knowledge and practice in teaching speaking, as presented above, reflect their predominant focus on the cognitive aspect of speaking development. Although efforts to further incorporate a meaning-based component in this current practice were evident, there still lacked a systematic focus on the social aspect of the learning process. As a direction for addressing this limitation, the model promotes the importance of three critical conditions: (1) sufficient meaningful input (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Krashen, 1985; Nation & Newton, 2009); (2) a primary focus on meaningful social interactions through authentic communicative tasks (Goh & Burns, 2012; Littlewood, 2004, 2013; Long, 1983, 1996); and (3) substantial attention to form-focused and language practice activities (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Goh & Burns, 2012; Newton, 2017). To enable teachers to easily translate the model into practice in a way that optimises these conditions, the model presents them with guidance in relation to four dimensions: (1) desired outcomes; (2) speaking subject matter content; (3) activity selection; and (4) lesson sequencing.
As depicted in Figure 7.1, L2 speaking competence, which functions as the ultimate desired outcomes in speaking instruction, is placed in the central circle of the model. Drawing on key discussions of qualities of L2 speaking competence (e.g. Bygate, 1998; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009; Skehan, 1996), these desired outcomes are further categorised into three qualities of speech, which include fluency, accuracy and complexity. In this sense, effective speaking pedagogy needs to provide teachers with directions on how to comprehensively develop all these qualities in their teaching. As discussed below, the model offers teachers a way to achieve this through a holistic view on speaking subject matter content and a principled approach to selecting and sequencing activities.

Figure 7.1: A Vietnamese context-sensitive model for teaching speaking

To begin with, the model illustrates a broad, contextualised view of its conceptualisation of communicative competence. As depicted in the second circle from the centre of the figure, the model presents three crucial components of speaking competence: knowledge of topics, language and discourse; core speaking skills; and communicative strategies. The most innovative feature of the model is its repositioning of topic-specific knowledge (Elizabeth, 2012; Hill, 2008) as a fundamental teaching content. This
knowledge component, as discussed earlier, is consistently prioritised in the teacher’s current practice, although it is marginally addressed in most discussions of speaking subject matter content (e.g. Bygate, 1987; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009; Thornbury, 2005). In this model, topic-specific knowledge is integrated with knowledge of language and discourse into one whole component, which together with core speaking skills and communicative strategies that theoretically form crucial stepping stones of speaking competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Goh & Burns, 2012; Hymes, 1972) constitute a comprehensive model of speaking-focused SMCK.

In relation to the selection of activities for teaching speaking, the first important component of teachers’ PCK, the model emphasises the importance of combining meaning-based, whole-task practice with form-focused activities. Findings from the present study reveal that, despite the teachers’ attempts to optimise learners’ opportunities to participate in meaningful speaking tasks, the majority of their classroom activities were characterised as ‘communicative language practice’ (Littlewood, 2004, 2013), where the meanings and language students produce are predictable and controlled by the teachers. In addition, opportunities for learners to be involved in form-focused activities, which are critical for the automatisation of discrete components of knowledge, skills and strategies (K. Johnson, 1996; Littlewood, 1981, 1992; Nation & Newton, 2009), were also limited. These limitations in the design of whole-task practice and the downplaying of form-focused activities in the teachers’ current practice might restrict the development of learners’ desired speaking competence, especially in relation to their core speaking skills.

In light of these limitations, the model provides learners with optimal opportunities to participate in whole-task practice in steps 3 and 6. Such whole-task activities are critical for providing communicative situations where learners experience personal needs and motivation to interact in pairs or groups (Goh & Burns, 2012), which facilitates ‘negotiation of meaning’ (Long, 1983). The role of negotiation of meaning in language acquisition and speaking development has been strongly supported by ample evidence from empirical studies (e.g. Mackey, 1999, 2012; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Oliver, 2000). In this model, these meaning-focused tasks are further supported by learners’ attention to forms through input-based and language-focused tasks, respectively, in steps 4 and 5.
In this way, the model offers a way to achieve the desired combination between authentic communicative tasks and form-based activities necessary for speaking development. This combination of sufficient opportunities for focus on forms through part-skill activities with authentic communicative situations afforded by whole-task practice, as argued by Goh and Burns (2012) and Nation and Newton (2009), is crucial not only to the acquisition of discrete language components but also to the automatisation of core speaking skills and communicative strategies, which are necessary for the development of students’ communicative competence.

Evidence from the current literature shows that the inherently designed characteristics of communicative tasks might significantly fluctuate when implemented in classroom contexts (Deng & Carless, 2009; Littlewood, 2004, 2013). Findings from the present study further demonstrate that the extent of meaning focus of whole-task practice, as designed and implemented in the teachers’ current practice, was notably reduced due to the teachers’ overriding concern about the linguistic content students could reproduce through the tasks. To improve the effectiveness of the teachers’ current practice, three important conditions, as such, need to be satisfied. Firstly, tasks employed as whole-task practice need to feature characteristics of authentic communicative situations and be relevant to students’ life and experience (Gong & Holliday, 2013; Hanauer, 2012; Littlewood, 2013). Secondly, to retain the extent of authenticity and meaning-focus of the tasks in classroom practice, teachers need to withdraw their control over students’ language and meaning so that students’ full attention during task performance can be focused on meaning expression, rather than worrying about how to include the language features as required by the teachers. Thirdly, the teachers’ current practice in task implementation to include the provision of task input, pair/group rehearsal and public performance should be acknowledged and retained, since it offers teachers an effective pedagogic strategy to facilitate students’ interactions and negotiations, increase opportunities for attention to forms, and enhance their uptake of new language features (Trang et al., in press).

With regard to sequencing, the second key aspect of PCK, the model presents a seven-step lesson structure that integrates and aligns the teachers’ current typical lesson with a principled, task-based sequence. As presented below, steps 1, 2, 4 and 7 in the model have generally retained the teachers’ existing practice, whereas steps 3, 5 and 6 are
newly incorporated, drawing on Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of speaking lesson sequence. One key innovative feature that distinguishes this adapted model from Goh and Burns’ (2012) sequence is its explicit inclusion of the three stages of a task-based lesson (pre-task, during-task and post-task) and the connection of these stages to the seven proposed steps. In addition, the listening input-based tasks, commonly employed by the teachers but absent from Goh and Burns’ sequence, is incorporated. In this way, the model allows teachers to reflect on the steps and activities they typically design for each lesson stage in their current practice, and to consider the adaptations they might need for each stage so as to structure their lessons in a systematic manner.

As outlined in the sequence, the pre-task stage includes two steps: (1) lesson orientation, and (2) task preparation. Analyses of the teachers’ typical lesson structure in the present study showed that the activities they currently design in this stage such as introducing the topics, activating students’ background knowledge, introducing key vocabulary and ideas, and organising part-skill activities, reflect a strong resonance with those proposed by most task-based proponents (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Goh & Burns, 2012; Nunan, 2004; D. Willis & Willis, 2007; J. Willis, 1996). Such activities serve as vital preparatory steps for students’ performance of subsequent tasks, since they set the context and build up students’ schema for the tasks, and further support them with necessary material for subsequent task performance (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nunan, 2004). As informed by these experts, the teachers’ current practice could be expanded in two dimensions. Firstly, the content focus in this stage should be extended to include knowledge of discourse, strategies and skills, rather than being restricted to vocabulary and topic-specific knowledge as in their current practice. Secondly, for complex tasks, teachers might also need to guide learners to do some planning: for instance, by having them discuss the possible outcomes and the knowledge, skills or strategies needed for effective task performance. These activities are valued for facilitating idea conceptualisation and formulation in speech production and reducing students’ anxiety in performance (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Following this, the while-stage, which encompasses steps 3 to 6, aims to enhance the teachers’ current practice by addressing two specific issues. As discussed earlier, in most observed lessons, the teachers restricted students’ opportunities to participate in whole-task practice to the final stage, after students had accumulated the linguistic and
topic-specific knowledge needed for the tasks. Such a sequence appears to reflect an alignment with the conventional PPP model or ‘task-assisted teaching approach’ (Ellis, 2003). In addition, in the while-task stage, these teachers typically employed listening activities as a means for presenting students with the target ideas, language, strategies and skills they subsequently needed for speaking production. As observed in most lessons, however, these listening activities were implemented as isolated learning content, without a close connection to the students’ communicative needs in the main speaking tasks they performed at the end of the lessons.

These findings highlight the need to contextualise the listening input, create a strong connection between listening and speaking tasks, and optimise students’ opportunities to participate in authentic communicative activities. The model, therefore, restructures the sequence in this while-task stage by repositioning whole-task practice in step 3, followed by the listening input-based tasks in step 4, and language-focused tasks in step 5, before students redo the whole-task in step 6. This restructuring of the task sequence is essential since it allows the whole-task practice in step 3 to function as a meaningful context and to provide a purpose for students’ involvement in the listening activities in step 4: obtaining features of language, discourse, skills or strategies needed for improving the speaking task performance. In addition, students’ engagement in language-focused activities in step 5 further allows them to notice, analyse, practise and gradually automatise the listening-based input of knowledge, skills and strategies before applying these features in re-performing the whole-task in step 6.

Compared to the conventional task-based sequence, the during-task stage in this adapted model is innovative in a number of important ways. Firstly, the model officially incorporates the listening input-based tasks that the teachers typically include in the while-stage in their current practice. The role of language-focused tasks, which were minimally employed in the teachers’ observed practice, is also emphasised as an important step in the sequence to ensure teachers’ substantial attention to these activities in their lessons. Secondly, the repositioning of form-focused activities as part of the while-task, rather than post-task stage, which is in line with Goh and Burns (2012) and Nunan (2004), helps frame students’ attention to forms within the overarching focus on meaning promoted by the communicative, whole-task activities. Finally, by having students re-perform the whole-task activities in step 6, the model optimises their
opportunities to participate in authentic communicative situations where they use language for communicating meaning in a free, unpredictable manner. Evidence from ample empirical studies (Bygate, 2001; Ellis, 1987; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Yuan & Ellis, 2003) shows that task repetition helps learners to improve various aspects of fluency, accuracy and complexity. Such opportunities to redo the same or similar tasks, as Goh and Burns (2012) suggest, facilitate “automaticity in combining various types of linguistic knowledge and skills” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 161) and allow students to apply the newly acquired knowledge, skills and strategies into speaking, which enhances their speaking performance and confidence.

Given that whole-task repetition is critical for facilitating the development of language automaticity and enhancing learners’ speaking confidence and motivation, it is essential for teachers to be aware of options for designing the repeated tasks, so as to avoid learners’ boredom. In implementing task repetition, Goh and Burns (2012) and Bygate (2005), drawing on various research (e.g. Aubrey, 2015; Y. Kim, 2013; Mackey, Kanganas, & Oliver, 2007), suggest both procedural and task/content repetitions. To maintain learners’ engagement and interest, teachers might introduce a similar task to the one they perform in step 3, concerning the task type, its requirements and challenging levels. Teachers might have students redo the same task in its entirety or only one part, but with a different partner and different time limit. Evidence from Lynch and McLean (2000) shows that such activities as the ‘poster carousel’ task, which requires learners to repeatedly explained their posters to different groups of visiting audiences, are not only fun for learners but also make a positive contribution to the development of their speaking fluency and accuracy. To further ensure that the repeated tasks are relevant to learners’ experiences and preferences, teachers might also allow learners to select their own topics, situations and partners or group members to work with. For instance, teachers can retain the genres of the speaking tasks such as presentations or story telling but allow learners to make their own decisions on what to say and how to say it when redoing the task. In this way, students have the chance not only to use language in a personalised and free manner but also to get involved more in their own learning process.

In the post-task stage, the major focus is placed on reflection and feedback activities. By encouraging learners to reflect on their performance, evaluate and consolidate the
knowledge, skills and strategies they learn from the tasks, students can develop their self-regulation and metacognitive awareness about L2 speaking learning and development (Aubrey, 2015; Y. Kim, 2013; Mackey et al., 2007), which are essential for the success of language learning (Wenden, 2001). Goh (2014), drawing on various studies (Glover, 2011; He, 2011; Y. H. Tan & Tan, 2010), suggests that learners’ personal involvement in “understanding, enhancing and managing their learning process” significantly improves their speaking performance as well as the overall development of their speaking competence (p. 1). Evidence from the present study show that, in feedback activities, the teachers mainly focused on correcting students’ errors and commenting on whether they have successfully incorporated the target linguistic features in speaking performance, rather than the extent to which they have achieved specified communicative goals through the tasks. In most cases, teachers took control over the feedback activities by directly pointing out and providing corrections for students’ errors. As a direction for expansion, there is a need for both a refocus of the content of teachers’ feedback and a promotion of self-evaluation and peer-feedback. Reflection and peer and teacher feedback, thus, constitute central components of the post-task stage in the model.

Overall, the suggested model provides teachers with guidance in relation to three critical dimensions in the teaching of speaking: objectives, SMCK and PCK. It presents teachers with specific directions on what to teach, what activities to choose, and how to sequence speaking lessons in a principled manner. Apart from explicitly accommodating effective aspects of the teachers’ current practices, the model presents teachers with ‘provisional specifications’ (Littlewood, 2004, 2013) that direct the expansion of their existing expertise and practices in a way that helps facilitate students’ speaking development in a systematic and effective manner.

7.4 Implications of the study

As a pioneering study that systematically investigates teachers’ cognitions about teaching speaking in the Vietnamese tertiary context, the study offers meaningful implications from practical, pedagogical, methodological and theoretical standpoints.

From the practical perspective, findings from the study inform policy makers and
university executives about three issues that need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of teaching speaking. Investigations into the teachers’ knowledge of the contexts revealed that the key factor impacting their practice was the lack of a systematic control with sufficient guidelines concerning teaching content and pedagogy. As suggested by the teachers, redesigned curricula and syllabi with clear, consistent specifications on what and how to teach and assess would significantly reduce their workload, and minimise inconsistencies in teaching practices and learning outcomes. Interview data further suggest that, given the absence of clear guidelines for teaching the curricular content, the unconstrained freedom that these teachers perceived themselves to have is considered to be just as much a hindrance to their performances and development as having a lack of autonomy, as noted by previous research (Canh, 2007, 2011; Canh & Barnard, 2009). Evidence from these teachers’ explanations suggests that what they need does not appear to be this unbridled freedom, but rather opportunities to participate in developing curricular documents that provide them with more explicit support in the teaching of L2 speaking.

Limited consideration from leaders and curriculum developers to teachers’ voices has been identified as a key reason for the limited effectiveness of most rigid top-down curriculum innovations in Asian contexts (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hoang, 2010; Nunan, 2003; Yook, 2010). Burns (2017b, pp. 251-252) also contends that many mandated curricula for the teaching of speaking are “introspected by curriculum developers and policy makers”; thus, they are subsequently decontextualised from students’ cultural and social lives and interests. More substantial consideration to teachers’ perspectives in curriculum-related decisions would, therefore, offer a pathway towards “the contextualisation of speaking syllabi, content and activities within learner experience and needs and in relation to current theories of learning” (Burns, 2017b, pp. 251-252). Such a teacher-consulted curriculum would also bridge from the curricular content to the teachers’ existing cognitions and practices, which would improve the teachers’ compliance and consistency in enacting the curricula.

In conjunction with sufficient consideration of the teachers’ voices, close attention also needs to be paid to the selection of appropriate textbooks. Findings from the present study suggest that less experienced teachers perceive there to be a strong need to stay aligned with the curricula, and view their retention of textbook content as evidence of
this compliance. As such, although they are critical of the textbooks as insufficient in providing students with optimal conditions for speaking development, their knowledge, beliefs and practices are nonetheless strongly shaped by the textbooks. The influence of the textbooks is most evident in their conceptualisation of speaking competence, the metalanguage they use to refer to the knowledge components, and their reliance on the textbooks as justifications for their pedagogical decisions. Given the textbooks’ influence on the teachers’ current cognitions, a new textbook series that clearly reflects a broad view on speaking competence and provides teachers with authentic whole-task activities could serve as “the agent of change” (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 315) which would continue to facilitate the development of their knowledge and beliefs in a way that aligns more closely with communicative-oriented teaching practices.

Results from the study also highlight gaps in the teachers’ knowledge base that need to be adequately addressed in pre- and in-service teacher training programs. Firstly, findings in relation to the teachers’ cognitions about SMCK indicate the teachers’ narrow perspective on speaking competence with their focus on linguistic and topic-specific knowledge. Their understanding of discourse knowledge, core speaking skills and communicative strategies (Goh & Burns, 2012) is largely fragmented, which results in minimal inclusion of these components in teaching practice. Given that teachers’ perception of speaking competence determines what they include in teaching (Goh & Burns, 2012), equipping teachers with a deeper understanding of what constitutes speaking competence through professional development activities would enable them to facilitate students’ speaking development in a holistic manner.

Secondly, in relation to PCK, these teachers need to be equipped with a better understanding of task characteristics and the distinctive features between part-skill and whole-task activities. It was found in the study that, in both designing and implementing speaking tasks, the teachers have limited understanding of a task’s features including its focus/ purpose, authenticity, and the control/ predictability of students’ language and meaning through the tasks. They demonstrated lack of awareness of how these characteristics might affect their learners’ speaking performance and development. As such, although they attempted to increase the opportunities for students’ involvement in speaking production activities, these opportunities were mostly restricted to the form of communicative language practice. In their practice, both authentic communicative tasks...
and meaningful form-focused activities (Littlewood, 2004, 2013) which are vital for speaking development were missing. To enable these teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness, equipping them with an in-depth understanding of task characteristics is crucial. In this sense, professional development activities that provide the teachers with hands-on experience in selecting, adapting, designing and sequencing tasks would significantly contribute to their ability to design and implement effective speaking lessons.

From a pedagogical perspective, the present study offers important implications through the suggested model for teaching speaking in Vietnamese context. This model provides a demonstration of how more generic, theoretically-based models could be adapted to better suit a local context, and to connect to what teachers in a particular setting have already known, believed and practised. In other words, the model values and retains what the teachers are familiar with and better aligns this knowledge and practice with contemporary theoretical models that will help them to expand their knowledge and teaching quality. In this way, the study contributes to the efforts to bridge the long-existing gap between theory and practice in education.

Methodologically speaking, the study reaffirms the need for research on teachers’ cognitions and practices to include multiple data sets, collected from different sources. In resonance with suggestions from Baker (2014) and Borg (2012, 2015b), evidence from the present study shows that coupling teachers’ self-reported practice via interviews with actual practice through observations is crucial. Findings of the study reconfirm that neglecting either of the two aspects will inevitably “provide partial, if not flawed, characterisations of teachers and teaching” (Borg, 2006, p. 275). The findings of the present study show that there exists a complementary, rather than convergent, relationship between the activities the teachers reported to have used and what they actually employed in practice. It was also found that, when implemented, the inherent characteristics of a task might significantly vary, rather than remain static. The inclusion of interview and observation data is, therefore, crucial for a more holistic perspective of the teachers’ knowledge base. Evidence from the study further suggests that document analyses (curricula, syllabi and textbooks) are vital for grounding the contextual foundations for understanding and interpreting the teachers’ cognitions and practices in a holistic and contextualised manner.
At the theoretical level, the study offers several implications for research on teacher cognition. Firstly, given that the distinction between beliefs and knowledge is commonly perceived as being “hazy” (Baker, 2011, p. 8) and problematic, the present study, in line with many previous studies (Baker, 2011, 2014; Borg, 2006; Nam, 2015), demonstrates that combining knowledge and beliefs into one overarching concept of TC provides a practical, fruitful avenue for exploring teachers’ tacit mental aspects. This integrated approach allows researchers to explore in-depth the teachers’ beliefs, in conjunction with their knowledge, rather than exclusively focusing on one single aspect. In the context of the present study, such an approach enables the researcher to fully explore the depth and breadth of the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs and to closely investigate their intricate relationship with classroom practice under the mediation of diverse contextual factors.

Another important theoretical implication the study offers is the employment of Shulman’s (1986, 1987) model of teachers’ knowledge base for examining TC in teaching the multifaceted skill of speaking. As discussed earlier, although Borg’s (2006) model of TC provided the study with a useful overarching frame for exploring the complex relationship between TC, classroom practice and contextual factors, it did not supply a lens for describing and categorising specific components of the teachers’ knowledge base. Shulman’s fine-grained model with seven knowledge categories served to complement Borg’s framework. With further adaptation to better capture the interrelated nature of different categories in the teachers’ knowledge base, Shulman’s notions of curriculum, SMCK and PCK offered the study a robust tool for holistically describing, organising and categorising various components of the teachers’ knowledge base and capturing the intermeshed nature of these categories. The present study also demonstrates that Shulman’s PCK functioned as a robust construct that could be flexibly modified and bridged to the domain of a specific subject. Such flexibility allowed the integration of Goh and Burns’ (2012) approach to teaching speaking into Shulman’s PCK for investigating two crucial pedagogical aspects of activity selection and lesson sequencing. This evidence shows that Shulman’s model offers a fruitful lens for exploring teachers’ knowledge base not only in relation to the general context of a curriculum but also to teaching a specific subject such as speaking.
The present study also advances theoretical understanding of speaking pedagogy by contextualising Goh and Burns (2012) approach to teaching speaking in Vietnam. As discussed earlier, this pedagogical model, although strongly underpinned by theoretical bases, appears to be based on limited empirical evidence from teachers’ perspectives. In the present study, this model, employed as a heuristic framework for exploring the teachers’ speaking pedagogy, has been expanded in two important ways. Firstly, their conceptualisation of speaking competence has been extended to include topic-specific knowledge, which the teachers in the study consistently suggested as a crucial component underlying learners’ speaking performance. Secondly, their speaking lesson model has been adapted to build on the teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs and practices. These adaptations could be seen as an example of ‘the talk back’ to the centre (Hannerz, 1992, p. 219) from the perspective of Vietnamese classroom practitioners. The proposed model, as such, enables teachers in this particular context not only to retain features of their current practice but also to move more closely to a communicative approach for teaching speaking skill in a more principled and systematic manner.

It should be pointed out that for effectiveness, this contextually-embedded model needs to be responsive to the institutional conditions. First and foremost, findings from the present study revealed that the majority of the teacher participants had limited understanding of the lateral and vertical relationship between speaking subjects and other instructional contents in the curricula. Evidence from the teachers’ practice further showed that different language components that are vital for the development of learners’ speaking competence such as pronunciation and grammar were taught separately, rather than in an integrated manner. As such, to effectively facilitate students’ speaking development, it is crucial for the university to not only ensure the lateral and vertical relationships among different curricular contents but also to ensure teachers’ solid understanding of the connection among these contents in implementing the curricula. In addition, as a key factor contributing to the inconsistency in the teaching contents, was the following: the lack of control from the current management system; limited opportunities for professional learning; and an improvement in this management scheme where meetings among teachers and peer classroom observations are strongly encouraged will both promote teachers’ better understanding of the connection among curricular contents and create a more supportive environment for less
experienced to exchange and learn from more senior teachers.

7.5 Limitations of the study

The present study has sought to improve understanding of teacher cognitions in relation to the under-researched area of speaking skill instruction. Nonetheless, it inevitably features a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. In addition to the limitations in relation to the insider status of the researcher presented earlier in Chapter 4 (Section 4.9 – Trustworthiness of the research design), four further limitations are discussed in this section. First of all, as a qualitative, case-study design, findings from the research cannot be easily generalised to other settings. Given the context-bound nature of these findings, they should be interpreted and transferred to other similar settings with due caution and special attention to the specific contextual conditions of which a rich description is provided in the study.

Another limitation of the study is related to the selection of student participants. As explained in Chapter 4, the study involved six teacher participants who were teaching two cohorts of students: English Studies and English Interpretation and Translation. The group of English Teacher Education students, however, were excluded due to the fact that, in the semester data for the study were collected, these groups were taught by English native volunteer teachers, not Vietnamese EFL teachers. The inclusion of this student cohort, however, would have provided a far more comprehensive picture of the researched context and the teachers’ current knowledge, beliefs and practice in teaching speaking. It would have also generated more meaningful and significant findings since students from the English Teacher Education will mostly become high school teachers upon their graduation from the university. In this sense, follow-up studies investigating issues in relation to the teaching of speaking skills in Vietnamese tertiary context should consider including this particular group of learners.

The third limitation is related to the quality of the data collected from stimulated-recall interviews. In accordance with the original design, stimulated recall interviews would be conducted immediately after every classroom observation. However, due to most teachers’ busy schedules, these interviews were frequently rescheduled. As such, even though all stimulated-recall interviews were conducted within the 48-hour timeframe,
participants had limited time for discussing relevant aspects in-depth. In some cases (Thomas and Rose), the stimulated recall interviews were made after the whole units, rather than after each observed lesson. Furthermore, since the majority of these teachers might not be familiar with watching their own classroom videos and commenting or reflecting on them, they tended to provide limited discussion in relation to the two key pedagogical aspects of selecting instructional activities and speaking lesson sequencing that the study aims to investigate. Because of the time constraint, these teachers often did not have time to watch their classroom videos prior to these stimulated recall interviews. As a result, despite the researcher’s effort to draw the teachers’ attention to episodes of their lessons that needed their critical reflections, clarifications or explanations, an extensive amount of what the participants commented appeared to echo what they already discussed in the initial semi-structured interviews. Future studies that explore TC using stimulated recall interviews, therefore, need to consider how to familiarise participants with this method and find ways to fit them better in their busy schedule and heavy workload.

Finally, the study set out to broadly investigate the teachers’ cognitions and practices in relation to teaching speaking skill in a Vietnamese tertiary context. As explained in the theoretical framework, the study employs the concept ‘teacher cognition’ in a broad sense that incorporates teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and similar constructs as one whole, rather than attempting to make a clear distinction among them. Yet, it needs to be acknowledged that the study focused on a narrower focus on teachers’ knowledge, rather than beliefs. This may have partly resulted from the fact that teachers were not used to reflect on their own teaching practice through stimulated recall interviews. As such, although the teachers’ knowledge of speaking competence and speaking instruction can be clearly depicted through the study, the discussion of their beliefs and voices are, somewhat, limited.

### 7.6 Directions for future research

The present study advances understanding in relation to two under-researched domains, of speaking skill pedagogy and Vietnamese university teachers’ cognitions. Findings of the study highlight the contextualised nature of the teachers’ cognitions, and illustrate the teachers’ eclectic, localised approach to teaching speaking, established on the basis
of their learning and teaching experiences, and a thorough understanding of the teaching context and learners. These findings lay the foundation for a number of directions in future research into speaking skill pedagogy and TC in the Vietnamese and other similar contexts.

The most obvious direction for future research is a replication of the present study in different tertiary contexts in Vietnam. The present study, although making meaningful contributions to the understanding of Vietnamese teachers’ current knowledge, beliefs and practices in speaking instruction, remains a small-scale, single-case study. Findings of the study demonstrate that the teachers’ cognitions and practices are strongly bounded to the contexts in which they enact teaching. In addition, as Hoang (2010) observes, the autonomy that Vietnamese universities are provided in curriculum development and quality control has created “diversity” and “chaos” (p. 13). In this sense, future studies that examine teachers’ cognitions and practices in teaching speaking in different universities would provide important insights into how teachers working in various institutional settings but similar socio-cultural contexts conceptualise speaking competence, select instructional activities, and sequence their speaking lessons. Together, findings from this body of research would depict a holistic picture of Vietnamese teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and practices, which would form a solid foundation for further suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of teaching speaking in this environment.

Another important contribution to future research would be a study exploring Vietnamese teachers’ current cognitions and practices in teaching speaking that involves learners’ perspectives. Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015) and Tsui (2011) posit that, despite the ever-growing body of research on teachers’ cognitions, little attention has been drawn towards the relationship between these cognitions with students’ learning experiences. By bridging “the links between teachers’ inner worlds, their practices and their students’ language learning experiences”, such a study would shed crucial light on some of the most pertinent questions asked by language teachers, teacher educators and learners, which is how teachers “create meaningful language learning environments for their students” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 445). In addition, there is a general consensus among task-based teaching proponents (M. Breen, 2009; Bygate et al., 2001; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989, 2004) that, while it is important for teachers to select, design
and implement tasks in a way that effectively facilitates learners’ speaking development, learners might have a different view on the nature, demands, focus, and the ways to carry out their tasks. As such, investigations into the learners’ perspectives on the teachers’ current practices in selecting and sequencing tasks and how these practices impact the students’ learning experiences and achievements would significantly enhance the practical values of LTC research.

Finally, a quasi-experimental study that allows teachers to pilot the teaching-speaking model suggested by the present research into their own contexts would make meaningful additional contributions from a practical standpoint. As presented in Section 7.3, the model was established on the basis of contemporary theoretical understanding of speaking development, and of actual insights into Vietnamese teachers’ cognitions and practices in speaking instruction as informed by the present study. The model might, however, only provide teachers with provisional specifications, rather than a “one size fit all” model for all institutions in Vietnam. Studies in various contexts including Vietnam (e.g. Canh, 2007; Canh & Barnard, 2009; Hiep, 2005, 2007; Hu, 2005; L. Li & Walsh, 2011; Littlewood, 2004; Littlewood, 2013; Nam, 2015) show that, unless pedagogical models are strongly supported by teachers and contextual conditions, these models might not find ways to enter the classrooms. To optimise its chance of transference into classrooms, the model should be presented as “one that teachers can easily understand and translate into a systematic procedure” (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 138). As such, by exploring teachers’ perceptions of the model, the ease to apply it into their settings, and the particular contextual conditions that hinder the implementation of the model and its effectiveness, this quasi-experimental study would continue to provide a crucial empirical foundation for further refinement to the model.

7.7 Conclusion

This study responds to the urge towards addressing the limited understanding of TC about the teaching of speaking (Borg, 2006, 2015b; Bygate, 1998, 2009; Chen & Goh, 2011, 2014), and the call to develop context-sensitive pedagogy that suits specific teaching settings (Branden, 2016; Carless, 2004, 2007; Deng & Carless, 2009; Ho, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2003; Littlewood, 2004, 2013). By systematically investigating the teachers’ cognitions in relation to curriculum, SMCK and PCK, and
how these are manifested in classroom practices under the mediating impact of contextual conditions, the present study provides a detailed, empirical account of Vietnamese teachers’ cognitions about speaking pedagogy.

Research into the Vietnamese setting highlights teachers’ resistance to and limited compliance with the contemporary CLT/ TBLT approach, and considers this lack of alignment as the key factor that leads to the modest effectiveness of attempts to develop learners’ communicative competence. Findings from the present study, in resonance with those reported Trang (2013) and Trang et al. (2018), recast a positive view on the issue. Results from the study reveal teachers’ wholehearted advocacy of the role of CLT/ TBLT in developing learners’ speaking competence, and further depict their eclectic, contextualised approach in which a communicative-oriented component has been gradually integrated. Such an approach, although still featuring a lack of systematic application of the principles of CLT/ TBLT, could be seen as the teachers’ efforts to mould innovations to accord with their own abilities, beliefs, and experiences and their immediate context (Carless, 2004) in a way that accommodates the meaning-focused principle in the most effective ways possible.

Findings from the study also point out that underlying this lack of systematic alignment appears to be the teachers’ misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge base about task characteristics, and how to select, design and sequence tasks in a manner that facilitates speaking development in a systematic fashion. Addressing these misconceptions and knowledge gaps should, therefore, be seen as a top priority in professional development activities for teachers in this context. In this sense, the adapted model for teaching speaking proposed by the present study could be viewed as a pioneering attempt to tap into these issues. By valuing the teachers’ current knowledge, beliefs and practices, and bridging these with theoretical bases of speaking competence, development and pedagogy, the model provides the teachers with an informed framework for implementing teaching in a more principled and contextually-appropriate manner. The model, however, should not be treated as “global prescriptions” (Branden, 2016, p. 178) that direct all Vietnamese teachers on how to teach speaking. Rather, it offers a number of “provisional specifications” that they can try out and further adapt to better suit their particular setting (Ellis, 2003, p. x). In this way, the present study not only advances the understanding of teachers’ current practice in teaching speaking by providing an in-
depth account of empirical evidence, but further bridges this practice with theoretical foundations to establish directions for further expansion and improvements of their teaching quality.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview protocol

PART 1: Teacher cognition about the speaking curriculum

1. Where are you working now? How long have you been teaching there?
2. What English majored programs are offered in your school?
3. How would you describe the curriculum for these programs?
   How long is the whole program? How many credits/subjects do students need to complete?
4. What are the expected outcomes for students at their graduation level?
5. How important is speaking skill compared to other contents in the curriculum?
6. How many levels are there for speaking skill? How long is it taught for?
7. How would you describe the students that these curricula are designed for?
   (their entry levels/family background/motivation/conditions for admission)
8. What skills/subjects do you often teach in these programs? When did you start teaching speaking skills?
9. Do you like teaching speaking? Do you feel confident in teaching this skill?
10. In your opinion, what are important requirements that a teacher of speaking skills needs to satisfy?
11. What speaking level are you teaching this semester?
12. How would you describe the objectives of this level? How is it related to other speaking levels?
13. What resources are you supposed to use for your subject(s)? Do you like them?
14. Does the curriculum describe the methods/approaches you have to use for teaching speaking? Do you like them? Do you think they are appropriate?
15. Does the curriculum describe how you should evaluate your students?

PART 2: Teacher cognition about teaching and assessing speaking skills

1. How do you define a competent speaker of English?
2. When teaching speaking skills, what do you actually teach? (What knowledge/skills/strategies do you teach your students?)
3. Do you always follow the course books? Do you supplement additional contents from other sources? How do you select these materials?
4. Do you use oral activities in the books the way they are organized/designated?
   a. What kinds of changes do you make to the books’ oral activities? Why do you make these changes?
   b. Do you provide additional oral activities for your classes?
   c. What criteria do you use to select these activities?
5. What approaches/methods do you think you are using? Do you think you are using CLT?
6. What techniques, tasks or activities do you often organize in your speaking class? Are they effective? How do you know they are effective?
7. How are your lessons typically structured? Why are they structured this way?
8. Do you evaluate your teaching? How do you do that?
9. How do you evaluate your students?
   a. How often do you assess your students?
   b. What kinds of tasks do you use for assessment?
   c. What criteria do you use for grading? Are these criteria known to your students?
      How and when?
   d. To what extent is your way of assessment similar to that used by other teachers?
Appendix B: Sample transcriptions of interviews, observations and stimulated recall interviews

Appendix B.1: Sample Interview data (Teacher 01 – Interview 1)

INTER: Ok, so thank you very much for being the participant in my study, and as you know this is a kind of very voluntary work for you, so you have the options of agreeing or not agreeing to participate and if you wish you can stop at any time you like, ok. So in the next 60 minutes or so I am going to ask you some questions about your background in teaching speaking skill and er your experience of teaching. Ok could you, could you first tell me about your working environment here? How long have you been working?

T: I’ve been working here since the middle of 2012.

INTER: (Ok); so it’s about 3 years in general? And when did you begin to teach speaking skill?

T: I started teaching speaking skills er right at that time for the students in the center of foreign language; er for the students at the university, I started at the beginning of 2013.

INTER: Ok so that’s about 2 years of experience. Do you enjoy teaching speaking skills?

T: Yeah I always enjoy teaching this skill because I think this is my strength.

INTER: So when you say your strength, it means your own speaking skills.

T: Well yeah because I am into speaking the performance more like more than other skills related to language competence. So I I like more into speaking skills both in teaching and learning, both for myself and my students.

INTER: Ok then in your opinion, in order to teach speaking skill effectively, what are some basic requirements that teachers need to meet?

T: Well I think the first primary requirement for the teachers is language competence in general, not only speaking skills but also other skills. Eh moreover the teacher should have good knowledge of pragmatics because er what to say, where and when and how, to whom is really important in communication.

INTER: So pragmatics you mean the ability to use language appropriately in context? So let’s talk a little bit about the program that you have been teaching with speaking skills in it. How would you describe the curriculum?

T: Well the curriculum will start with 5 levels; the first two levels will be English for Communication where students practice to communicate fluently together or with another people, it’s become more academic lately with English for Broadcasting and academic where students practice to listen and talk about more issues, more complicated issues; and the last level will be public speaking which I think in more academic level where you have to use very formal language to present your ideas.

INTER: So does that mean that students will study Listening and Speaking in 5 semesters? (yes) and how is it designed in the curriculum if you look at the whole curriculum?

T: Er well to be honest looking at the whole curriculum, there will be not enough time for students to practice speaking because each semester they have one speaking session and every week they have about 9 hours of Listening and Speaking in general,
INTER: So along with Listening and Speaking what are some other skills/subjects they have to study?

T: Five basic skills of English reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar and also pronunciation and other four 3rd year and for 2nd students they start to learn some linguistic subjects like morphology or phonetics and phonology. (Interesting subjects?) not really, useful but not for them because they find it not very practical and interesting.

INTER: Would you say that the L skill is a priority if you compare with other skills? Does the curriculum really emphasize in speaking skill?

T: Well you can say that because comparing the number of credits, comparing with other subjects, usually we have more credits for Listening and Speaking skills. For example, they have usually four no when I was student I had three and now they also have three credits one more credit than before.

INTER: So totally how many credits students have to finish in order to graduate from the program?

T: Over 100, 130 or 35.

INTER: And we have about 10 or more credits for speaking or more than that?

T: Let me see. About 15 credits or so.

INTER: So how would you describe your students at their entry levels?

T: Very various I have to say because many students come from the countryside where they their access to the language for example cable TV or the Internet is very limited while some of them come from cities and they have the whole variety of input for them to practice, like in my class now one girl in her 2nd semester of the 1st year and she score 38/40 for the IELTS listening test for the 1st time I give the test; very outstanding compared to other students who just scored 5/40. And the backgrounds knowledge are very different, very various, also the motivation because many of them think they don’t know why they take this course and many thing is too easy for the level, it’s really various.

INTER: I find it very hard, you know I can kind of foresee that it’s very hard to manage and teach such a group of various levels of students (absolutely); so in your opinion er you think that the curriculum designed for this group of students is somehow appropriate or not appropriate?

T: Well it’s in the well Intermediate level I mean for most of the students is ok, just right to their level, but to a group of others too easy for them and another group they need more time to practice to catch up with others.

INTER: What are the resources you have to use for your teaching?

T: I use a lot of them beside the materials – the main course book, I use a lot of resources from the Internet, mostly from BBC and from British Council. I also withdraw some authentic materials for some topics about for example about jobs, I will have some job ads online.
Appendix B.2: Sample observation data (Teacher 01; Lesson 02 – Topic: Boyfriends and Girlfriends)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episodes</th>
<th>Teacher-student(s) exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directly introduce students'</td>
<td>Directly introduce students' presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentations.</td>
<td>Introducing student Group presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback</td>
<td>Giving feedback when every group presentation is finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activate background knowledge</td>
<td>We are going to discuss about our perfect partner. Right. My question is “what do you think is important in an Ideal Partner?” Tell me some. Handsome; Open minded; Intelligent; Understanding; Talented; Sympathetic; Good listeners; Brave; Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
S: Yes.

T: So you care about if that person has or does not have a job yet?

S: (Silence)

T: No/yes. It’s up to you. So it’s about jobs.

S: Characters (noise continues)

T: It’s not about character. It’s about money: Rich or poor. So is money important in a relationship?

S: Very important.

T: Very important. So briefly tell me how many criteria?

S: Age, appearance, body shape, vehicles, jobs, styles, money.

Task preparation (Int) Okay you have 7 criteria, now which criteria, which are the three most important criteria you are going to choose for your ideal partner? You don’t tell me. Tell your partner. Five minutes to talk. You have you pairs yet? Pairs please.

Task implementation Speaking task 1

T: Okay. Now I need you to introduce someone.

Lieu.

S: Yes,

T: Who did you talk to? Okay, what are the criteria when choosing an ideal partner?

Lieu: Er She just asked me.

T: She just asked you? So what are your three most important criteria?

Lieu: I er, I don’t er tell her er some parts about…

T: Ok just tell your criteria.

Lieu: Yeah, I think an ideal partner is a person who er understands me; and have some hobbies like me. Yes.

T: Ok, thank you Lieu. And now, Phuong An. Who did you talk to?

An: I er talked to Huong.

T: Ok Huong. And what about her criteria?

An: Ok her criteria are age, job and [inaudible].

T: ok that’s her criteria.

An: (continue to describe in detail in long sentence): older than her….stable job…. (some parts are inaudible)

T: Okay, one person from this side (of the room). Phuong An can you choose one person from this side?

Anh: Er Tu.

Tu: (standing up)

T: Who did you talk to?

Tu: Nhi.

T: Okay, what are Nhi’s criteria in choosing an ideal partner?

Tu: Nhi said her ideal partner must be, must have three criteria: first money, career and appearance.

T: Ok, money, career and appearance. Alright. Thank you.

Task preparation (Int) T: Now you are going to interview your partner. And this is the interview sheet. Have a look at it. Is there enough for everyone?

Provide input/guide planning T: Now everyone, let’s have a look very firstly at the interview. You are going to be an interviewer; one of you will be the interviewee. You will ask your friend some questions about his or her ideal partner, the perfect partner.
So you can see here some characteristics that you can ask your friends: adventurous, you know adventurous?

S: Yes.

T: Cautious? (yes) Very careful.

T: Considerate? No? Considerate is a person who cares about what other think. So that is a considerate person.

T: Conventional, huhu, what does it mean? Ok very traditional, kind of.

T: Easy going, outgoing, friendly right?


And in part 2, you can see there are 6 other qualities: age, height, nationality, job, … and you have to ask your partner if it is really important or not. Okay? And that’s only for number 1 and 2. Now you are not going to interview the one that is sitting next to you. And you are not going to stay in the same place that you are sitting now. Now I’d like everybody to stand up, get out of your seat and interview 3 people far away from you. And try to get back as soon as possible. If you are the last person to get back, you will be punished.

**Pre-teach vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task conducting</th>
<th>Speaking task 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrapping up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Everybody remember the last person to go back to your seat will be punished.</td>
<td>T: Everybody remember the last person to go back to your seat will be punished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: You interviewed enough people? Now everybody let’s have a look at the table. I think you have the information already. You are going to use that information very soon.</td>
<td>T: Okay now let’s have a look at five, no five, ten adjectives, describing about people and its definitions. We will do it all together quickly. Okay, so you can start with what you know and go down to what you just guess. A Classy. A classy person is a person?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S: …

T: Always look at the mirror?

S: Always look at the mirror.

T: great so just start with what we know: confident?

S: Sts talking among themselves.

T: They think themselves better than the others? No.

S: Always,

T: knowing how to dress. Always look at the mirror?

S: knowing that he/ she looks great.

T: Knowing that he/ she looks great? So that’s person is confident. How about a snoopy person?

S: No.

T: No so we will leave it there. Six. Sensitive. Sensitive.

S: Care about others.

T: Care about or being able to express themselves emotionally. Which one?

S: being able to…

T: being able to express themselves emotionally. Possessive.

S: Always controlling someone.

T: Yes, Always controlling someone.

T: How about narsictic?

S: No.

T: No. Considerate I have just told you.

S: Care about…..
### Task preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T: Yeah, care about…. So where is it? ABCDE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S: E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: E. Sarcastic. It’s a negative word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Yeah, talking in a mean, hurtful way. Goofy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Silly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Silly. How about now we have classy, snoopy, narcissic and …. Ah that’s it. Now classy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Thinking…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Thinking himself/ herself better than others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: No; Yes knowing how to dress. Right snoopy. Okay a snoopy guy is a person who thinks he is better than the others. And narcissistic? Is a person who always looks at the mirror to see how good he looks. Have you met that kind of person yet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: You like them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Nooooo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task preparation (Int)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T: Okay, so whenever you describe someone, you have to use adjectives. You have to describe that adjective that way. “I like classy girl, the one who knows how to dress, things like that. Describe your ideas and your opinions in that way you have to explain it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task preparation (Int)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now you are going to have a friend. And that friend of you starts to date somebody and that relationship is getting serious. Ok that’s the situation. Remember your best friend went on a date and their relationship is serious now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And you will have seven advice, I am going to give it to you. And you have to make a conversation. Oh oh conversations again. That’s it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your conversation, there must be a discussion about a perfect partner. What criteria, which one is the perfect partner and the advice you give for someone who goes on a date and wants to be in a serious relationship. Is that clear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay I will say that again: in your conversation there should be two main points; The first one is criteria about a person partner. You might want to ask your friend some questions: what do you think about? Why did you choose? For example, why did you choose age instead of vehicles? Isn’t personality more important than age? Things like that. Or what things not important for you? And you might want to use some structures like: for … he or she should be because we are mentioning about something in the future. We suppose we … We are not sure so we have to use: &quot;Can be, should be, they have to be, they should have, they can have, they should not be: I don’t think this and this and that . is so important. So I think this and this is more important than that; or for personality, he should be friend, handsome, no not handsome...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those are some structures you are going to use to discuss about the perfect parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The second thing you are going to do is to give each other some advice for someone who wants to get seriously into the relationship. Is that clear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: How many main points are you going to discuss?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Two. Are you going to sit in groups? Are you going to sit in groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Four.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: No, this time you are going to sit in pairs. And work out a conversation, Make it a conversation, Okay/ So two of you. I need someone to sit here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T: You can make a talk show or you can make a talk. Or you can make anything you like. Make anything you like for the conversation. For each pair you will have two papers like this. Two pieces of paper and one will, each person will talk one. In each piece of paper, the advice are different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task conducting</th>
<th>Speaking task 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student's selection</td>
<td>Okay one person in each pair comes here and decides who is going to talk. Go back to you seat. Okay: One who are you? Number? You can take the paper with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td>Pairs 1+ 2 performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| T: Ok I don’t think we don’t have time for the third group, but we are going to leave it there for the beginning of the next meeting. Alright some of the comments for your two conversations. It’s good that you can interview and interact well with each other. However, there are something we need to consider: it’s interesting that you guys interact very naturally together, er and you but you it could be better if you used more sentences instead of phrases. For example, what’s his nationality? English or he’s English or he comes from England. There should be more sentences instead of phrases or words like that. Vietnamese or he’s Vietnamese. Either ways are ok but there should be more phrases I have met him 3 months? => for 3 months. He will back, he will back to England 4 months later. Is it okay? He will be back to England for months later? Is that okay? In four months. Not four months later. Er outgoing, understandable. Thuyet did you say someone understandable it means you are able to understand that person or if he is understanding? Or if you say that person is outgoing and understanding something like that, why don’t you give some examples. For example, she always smiles and when I say something she always understands and things like that. It’s good that you use some advice here and you have very few structures, new structures, you need to apply more new structures, you need to practice new structures into your speaking, but generally it’s good. The second group: er I always expect you to speak loudly in front of everyone because otherwise everybody will focus on their smart phones. They not focus on you because they don’t understand and they loose their patience to listen to you. So you just speak to yourself. You don’t speak like you are speaking in front of many people. And you talk and you want your friends to listen. However, it’s good that you have the interactions and you meet the requirements of the task. The boy is handsome er a handsome boy things like that because you use two verbs in one sentences. Age, appearance and jobs, as the other groups you don’t you did not mention about any examples or things like that you just mention the criteria and you leave it there. There should be more explanations. Wiser. Wiser and more mature. Ok, keep your relationship. A good looking guy or something like that but not a good looking. You not pay attention, you not pay attention, who are understanding a lot….you use understanding as an adjective right? At the end of the conversation, you are tired so you end the conversation not, not in the way it should be, so there should be more preparation as well as explanations and next time you speak, please speak louder. Okay did you share any ideas on yesterday meeting online yet? Yes. If not, do that before the deadline this Wednesday. Next week how many groups are going to present? Only one? Okay, that’s all for today everybody. Bye. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide feedback</th>
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<th>Closing</th>
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</table>
Appendix B.3: Sample stimulated recall interview data (Transcriptions 48 Teacher 01)

Inter: Thank you for allowing to sit in your lessons and er basically I have two days right sitting in your Listening and Speaking lessons and er now I would like to get a review look at the videos again and I will ask you some questions about the way you actually teach Listening and Speaking lessons to your students. Er now you remember the topics of the lessons I have observed?

T: Yes certainly. It’s plans and hopes and plans.

Inter: And so er before you began to teach this lesson, what objectives did you have in mind that you want your students to achieve after the lessons?

T: So after the lesson, I hope that students can get some vocabulary related to hopes and plans, specifically some structures and vocabulary like want to, hope to and they also know how to reduce, know a little bit about the reductions of some verbs like hafta, gonna and wanna. And I also want students to use all vocabulary, structures and pronunciation in the speaking so that they can produce the whole speaking section in 5 minutes about the specific topic which is, which appears in the final examination.

Inter: Uh huh so if you design a speaking task related to this speaking lesson, so what will be the situation question?

T: The situation question is er they work in pairs and make a plan for their life in the next 5 years and I also give some pictures which can elicit some ideas from the students so that they can make the conversations naturally and use the structures as well as pronunciation and vocabulary that I taught in class.

Inter: So let’s wrap what you said: the situation is to make a conversation about their future plans and hopes in the next 5 years and the purpose of this lesson is to provide them the vocabulary and structures and er..

T: Grammar, the structures, the vocabulary and I also review the listening and speaking skills.

Inter: Ok that sounds a very clear purpose and objective of the lesson. Do you remember all the activities that you have organized in the lesson?

T: Er so I designed my lesson into three stages: presentation and then er I also have er a kind like ere r …presentation and something I can’t remember er producing something.

Inter: Ok so let’s go through the lesson again from the videos, I think that’s that the introduction right?

T: Yes the introduction and then I want to introduce about er the topic so I used about 5 sentences in which I used various structures like hope to, want to, wish, dream and then I make a conversation by using some photos that I downloaded from the Internet. That looks like the story of a girl. Actually at the beginning, at the end of the story I said that it’s the story, my story. It makes the students quite interested in the story.
**Inter:** I think I really liked that activity. If I were the student sitting there of the pictures and they are connected into a story yeah, especially when you said this is my story, the students really paid attention to it.

**T:** Yeah I just wanted to check that if they smiled and that recognized that they understand what I said, what I told them about the story and at that time they saw the connection between er their teacher and the story and they laughed and at that time they can feel relaxed and maybe interested in the lesson.

**Inter:** So you said the objective of this activity is..

**T:** To introduce topic about hopes and dreams, plans and also give them the general idea about structures like *want to, hope to*

**Inter:** And after that activity you give them a chance to play a game right, let’s say “shout out” games (yes). What’s the purpose of this activity?

**T:** Uh so this activity er gives the students opportunities to review the words that they have. I strongly believe that all the students already some phrases related to hopes and plans and sometimes they don’t use in class and I want them to remind about those activities and also have a chance to shout down and to check the pronunciation before they start the lesson and that also I want the students to pick to shout down and to tell me some phrases that I will use in the listening activities.

**Inter:** You assume that they already have vocabulary and ideas about future plans at home?

**T:** So I just want give them a chance so that they can think and then will collect the vocabulary that they have before and they also share the ideas with their friends. This activity gives them time to compare and the collect ideas so that they can use in the lessons.

**Inter:** Right and when you run this activity do you really care about how much your students can speak and how accurately or fluently they speak because that might affect to the lesson plan you had before you came to class?

**T:** Er I also so I give them a time so that they can speak together. I don’t care much about the mistakes in pronunciation because I just want to get the ideas and I want to evaluate that how so er what vocabulary that they have in their heads what vocabulary that they know so that I can add more in the following activities and when they shout out I can listen and correct some mistakes but very, in a very er soft way like “ok ok that’s good ideas then I pronounce in the correct way so that they can listen and self-correct their mistakes.

**Inter:** Right and their performance in this activity, would you say that, for example, if you want to diagnose, you want to see like how well they can speak about future plans and hopes. But for example in this activity they spoke in a very perfect way already, yeah like they can talk about their future plans and future hopes in a very good way and that’s the purpose of your lesson today, would you change the activities later on?
T: Er so if they have already have the vocabulary, so I can go into the listening exercises right after that. And I also recognize that if they already have all the vocabulary so I can expand about the topics, talk about more the general views and use more structures and if they don’t have those structures, then I will review and I guide them in the first speaking activity I may say that for the students like basic students they don’t have much structures but not for good students but the second activity I want that all students especially good students I want them to have more ideas, they can express so in the second speaking activity I also went around and I listened to many interesting but I did not have a chance to tell you but I did not have a chance I just wanted to see how much not good students have but actually they don’t know much.

Inter: Ok so in that case I would say that you had a plan for the lesson but when you came to class you kept it quite flexible, so depend on the students’ levels so that you can tell like how you will change and adjust the lesson.

T: Yeah if I teach this lesson in another class and where students don’t know much about the vocabulary I will tell some plans in Vietnamese and I guide them to translate into English. That’s also the same activity but we need to elicit some clues for the students to think and then maybe I draw a map and I give them some important words for them to think like about families, houses and we will have the specific plans for themselves.

Inter: So you keep the core activity that you designed but you lower or raise the level of difficulty depending on the students; quite flexible. Do you remember after this game? What did you do in class?

T: So I just shared the ideas among students and then go on to the listening 1 (ok)
Appendix C: Sample curriculum, syllabus, and lesson from the textbooks

Appendix C.1: Sample Curriculum (English Studies Program)

CURRICULUM

Major: English Studies
Code: 52220201
Mode: On campus
Duration: 4 years
Faculty: Foreign Languages
Department: English

No  Codes  Course names                      CRE  Com  Sel  H (T)  H (P)  PRE-RE  TERM

General courses
1  QP002  Military Training (*)              8    8  105  45  I, II, III
2  TC100  Physical Education 1+2+3 (*)     1+1+1 3  90  I, II, III
3  XH004  Basic French 1 (*)               3    3  45  XH004  I, II, III
4  XH005  Basic French 2 (*)               3    3  45  XH005  I, II, III
5  XH006  Basic French 3 (*)               4    4  60  XH005  I, II, III
6  TN033  Basic Computer Skills (*)        1    1  15  I, II, III
7  TN034  Basic Computer Skills – Practice (*)  2    2  60  I, II, III
8  ML009  Marxism and Leninism 1           2    2  30  I, II, III
9  ML010  Marxism and Leninism 2           3    3  45  ML009  I, II, III
10 ML006  Ho Chi Minh Ideology             2    2  30  ML010  I, II, III
11 ML011  Communist Party Studies          3    3  45  ML006  I, II, III
12 KL001  Basic Laws                        2    2  30  I, II, III
13 ML007  Logic Studies                     2    2  30  I, II, III
14 XH028  Basic Sociology                   2    2  30  I, II, III
15 XH011  Vietnamese Culture                2    2  30  I, II, III
16 XH012  Vietnamese letters and language   2    2  30  I, II, III
17 XH014  Documents and Archive Studies     2    2  30  I, II, III

Total: 38 credits (Compulsory 33; Selective: 5)

Discipline-foundation knowledge
18 XH254  Linguistic Skills 1A (L/S)        3    3  90  I, II
19 XH255  Linguistic Skills 1B (R/W)        3    3  90  I, II
20 XH256  Linguistic Skills 2A (L/S)        3    3  90  XH254  I, II
21 XH257  Linguistic Skills 2B (R/W)        3    3  90  XH255  I, II
22 XH258  Linguistic Skills 3A (L/S)        3    3  90  XH256  I, II
23 XH259  Linguistic Skills 3B (R/W)        3    3  90  XH257  I, II
24 XH260  Linguistic Skills 4A (L/S)        3    3  90  XH258  I, II
25 XH291  Linguistic Skills 4B (R/W)        3    3  90  XH259  I, II
26 XH292  Basic Grammar 1                   2    2  60  I, II
27 XH293  Basic Grammar 2                   2    2  60  XH292  I, II
28 XH294  Advanced Grammar                  2    2  60  XH293  I, II
29 XH295  Basic Pronunciation in practice 1 2    2  60  I, II
30 XH296  Basic Pronunciation in practice 2 2    2  60  XH295  I, II
31 XH297  Advanced Pronunciation in practice 2 2  60  XH296  I, II
32 XH298  Academic Writing 1                2    2  60  XH291  I, II
33 XH299  Academic Writing 2                2    2  60  XH298  I, II
34 XH300  Advanced Reading Skills 1         2    2  60  XH291  I, II
35 XH348  Advanced Reading Skills 2         2    2  60  XH300  I, II
36 XH349  Advanced Speaking Skills 1        2    2  60  XH260  I, II
37 XH382  Advanced Speaking Skills 2        2    2  60  XH349  I, II

Total: 48 credits (Compulsory: 48; Selective: 0)

Disciplined-specialised Knowledge
38 XH175  Research Methodology – English      2    2  60  XH299  I, II
39 XH465  Theory of Translation              2    2  30  XH258  I, II

305
<table>
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<th>No</th>
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<th>Sel</th>
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<th>H (P)</th>
<th>PRE-RE</th>
<th>TERM</th>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>XN345</td>
<td>Field trip – English</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>≥ 105 TC</td>
<td>III</td>
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<tr>
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Total: 54 credits (Compulsory: 29; Selective: 25)
Total - 140 credits (Compulsory: 106; Selective: 34)
Appendix C.2: Sample syllabus (Subject: Linguistic Skills 1A – Listening and Speaking)

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL IN THO UNIVERSITY

SOUTH VIETNAM

Independence – Freedom – Happiness

------------------------------------------

SYLLABUS

1. Course name: Linguistic Skills 1A (Listening and Speaking)
   - Code: XH254
   - Credits: 3
   - Number of periods: 90 (50 minutes each)

2. Administrative unit:
   - Department: English
   - Faculty/ School: School of Foreign Languages

3. Pre-requisite: No

4. Course objectives:

4.1. Knowledge:
   4.1.1. Understand clearly and respond appropriately in accordance with requirements and
   instructions in classroom and social communication contexts.
   4.1.2. Accumulate sufficient vocabulary to talk about daily life topics such as schools, classes, friends, teachers, music, food, holidays and so forth;
   4.1.3. Realize and pronounce accurately important sounds
   4.1.4. Apply principle rules in word stress, sentence stress in communication/ dialogues
   4.1.5. Prepare basic skills for international tests including CEFR, TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC
   4.1.6. Reinforce and enhance fluency and confidence in English communication on daily life contexts

4.2. Skills
   4.2.1. Develop listening and speaking skills via in-class activities and homework assignments
   4.2.2. Develop pair and group work skills
   4.2.3. Develop self-study skills via speaking and listening homework assignments
   4.2.4. Apply IT skills by preparing for power-point presentations
   4.2.5. Master and apply basic presenting skills via group presentations

4.3. Attitude
   4.3.1. Actively participate in class activities
   4.3.2. Be confident in presenting ideas in discussions, group work and presentations
   4.3.3. Cooperate with friends well for pair and group work
   4.3.4. Be aware of the importance of self study
   4.3.5. Realize that the main purpose of language learning is to be able to use its for their future jobs

5. Brief description of course content
   Linguistic skills 2A will:
   - Gradually develop listening and speaking skills for English-majored students who want to be successful in academic contexts and in English speaking classrooms
   - Provide opportunities for students to learn and practice listening and speaking skills that are important for social communication
   - Develop students’ vocabulary knowledge for daily life topics including schools, classes, friends, teachers, music, holidays and so forth

307
Help students use intonation, pronunciation, word phrases and other language functions in daily life topics.

6. Course structure
6.1. Theory

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<tr>
<th>Book 1</th>
<th>Number of periods</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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7. Teaching methods: Lecturing; pair and group work; individual work; presenting; discussing

8. Students’ responsibilities:
- prepare lessons before going to class
- Do listening homework (self-study)
- Attend at least 80% of the classroom practice time
- Actively participate in in-class activities
- Make group presentations
- Attend quizzes and tests
- Attend the final exam

9. Evaluation
9.1. Evaluating methods: Students are evaluated basing on:

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<th>Mark components</th>
<th>Regulations</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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| 1  | Participation   | - Attend 100% of classroom hours  
|     |                  | - Actively participate             | 10%   | 4.2.1, 4.2.3, 4.3.2 |
| 2  | Group presentations | - Presenting with guidance from teachers  
<p>|     |                  | - Verifications of participation from the group | 10%   | 4.2.5, 4.3.1 |</p>
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<th>Theory</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Students’ tasks</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Unit 3: Going Places Unit 4: Locations</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 3, 4 2/ Learn new vocabulary 3/ Self-study: + Unit 1,2 (Tactics for listening)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Unit 5: Likes and Dislikes Unit 6: My stuff</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 5, 6 2/ Learn new vocabulary 3/ Self-study: + Unit 3, 4 (Tactics for listening) 4/ Prepare for surprising listening tests</td>
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<td>Unit 7: Home Life Unit 8: Classmates</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 7, 8 2/ Learn new vocabulary 3/ Self-study: + Unit 5, 6 (Tactics for listening) 4/ Prepare for surprising listening tests</td>
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<td>Unit 9: Best Friends Unit 10: Holidays</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>6</td>
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    Unit 2: School | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 2: Unit 1, 2  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 11, 12 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  |
| 8 | Unit 3: Food  
    Unit 4: My Phone | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 2: Unit 3, 4  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 13, 14 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  |
| 9 | Unit 5: Music  
    Unit 6: Video Games | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 5, 6  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 15, 16 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for presentations  
    5/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  |
| 10 | Unit 7: Meeting People  
    Unit 8: Heroes | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 7, 8  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 17, 18 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for presentations  
    5/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  |
| 11 | Unit 9: Teachers  
    Unit 10: Money | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 9, 10  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 19, 20 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for presentations  
    5/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  |
| 12 | Unit 11: Advertising  
    Unit 12: Happiness | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Listen in advance: + Book 1: Unit 11, 12  
    2/ Learn new vocabulary  
    3/ Self-study: + Unit 21, 22 (Tactics for listening)  
    4/ Prepare for surprising listening tests  
    5/ Prepare for presentations  |
| 13 | Presentations | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Self-study: + Unit 23, 24 (Tactics for listening)  
    2/ Prepare for presentations  
    3/ Review for final exams  |
| 14 | Presentations | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Prepare for presentations  
    2/ Review for final exams  |
| 15 | Presentations | 0 | 6 |
|   | 1/ Prepare for presentations  
    2/ Review for final exams  |
Appendix C.3: A sample lesson from the prescribed textbooks

Listening Advantage 3 (Theme 3: People I know – Unit 8: Boyfriends and Girlfriends)

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<td><strong>Lesson A: I’m not crazy about possessive guys</strong></td>
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**WARM-UP**

A. **Match the vocabulary word to its definitions**

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<th>Definition</th>
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<td>goofy</td>
<td>a. trying to control</td>
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<tr>
<td>genuine</td>
<td>b. real, true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generous</td>
<td>c. interested in knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intellectual</td>
<td>d. talking in a mean, hurtful way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observant</td>
<td>e. silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possessive</td>
<td>f. watching carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic</td>
<td>g. kind, giving</td>
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<tr>
<td>modest</td>
<td>h. shy talking about one’s good points</td>
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B. **What do you think? Rate each characteristic from 5 (definitely interested) to 1 (not at all interested). Then compare your answers with a partner.**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>goofy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intellectual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genuine</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possessive</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modest</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LISTENING**

A. **Listen to the people describe their most recent dates. Where was the date? Choose picture a or b.**

B. **Listen. Decide whether each speaker wants to go on another date. Write yes or no.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FURTHER LISTENING**

A. **People are recording a video introduction for a local dating service. What do they say about themselves? Circle the correct words. Each has more than one.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>modest</td>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rich</td>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generous</td>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient</td>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talkative</td>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived abroad</td>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rich</td>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic</td>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressive</td>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hot</td>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. **Listen again. Fill in the missing words to complete the explanations.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Missing Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LANGUAGE FOCUS: Describing interest**

These words and phrases can be used instead of interested in or not interested:

Interested in: a fan of, crazy about, fond of, into
Not interested: not a fan of, can’t stand, not fond of, turned off

C. **Listen for the phrases each person uses to describe the types they like. Use a check (v) to show what they are interested in and an X to show what they are not interested in.**
TALK IT OVER
Circle three descriptive words on this page. Then have a conversation with your partner about the kind of people you like.

Examples: I’m fond of considerate guys. / Me too. I’m not into snobby people.

UNIT 8: Boyfriends and Girlfriends
Lesson B: That’s how you met? No way!

BEFORE YOU LISTEN
A. Match the idiom with its meaning. Listen and check your answers.
1. in a second a. happen suddenly
2. hang b. Do you best.
3. tell me about it c. Relax together
4. Go for it! d. I agree with you.
5. You’re up. e. I’ll explain it.
6. Here’s the thing. f. It’s your turn.
7. BAM. g. Quickly
8. Blah blah blah h. And so on

B. Choose words or phrases from above to fill in the blanks.
I was at school, at lunchtime with my friends near the fountain – that’s where we just _________. I said “Time for another soda,” and my friend said to me, “__________.” But at the soda machine was this guy I kind of like, so I didn’t want to go, but my friends were, like, hey ___________! So I went to get a soda and we started talking, ______________ and ______________ suddenly, he asks me for my phone number. And that’s how we started dating!

EXTENDED LISTENING
A. Three new co-workers have dinner together and discuss their romantic partners. Listen and write how long each couple has been together.

Sonia and Brandon
Michael and Sarina
Ola and Jean-Pierre

B. Listen again and answer true (T) or false (F) to each statement.

1. Sonia met Brandon in psychology class. T/F
2. Sonia’s boyfriend is intelligent and a bit arrogant. T/F
3. Mike met his girlfriend in a night class. T/F
4. Mike’s girlfriend is tall and plain-looking. T/F
5. Sonia thinks Mike’s girlfriend is a bit dangerous. T/F
6. Ola’s boyfriend is fashionable, but not well-travelled. T/F

CONVERSATION STRATEGY: REACTING
Here are some expressions people use to react:
Isn’t that great? Isn’t that lovely? No way! Sweet Amazing Awesome.

C. Listen once more. What reactions do they have when listening to each love story? Write the words or phrases in the blanks below.

Talk # 1 (Sonia’s boyfriend)

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CATCH IT! NEGATIVE PREFIXES

A. It's easy to miss the negative prefixes on adjectives because they are unstressed when spoken in natural conversation. Listen to the examples.

He's polite. He's impolite.

B. Circle which adjective you hear in each sentence.

1. intelligent unintelligent 5. considerate Inconsiderate
2. responsible irresponsible 6. sensitive insensitive
3. friendly unfriendly 7. observant unobservant
4. fashionable unfashionable

TRY IT OUT!
Imagine you have the perfect boyfriend or girlfriend. Answer these questions, and then practice asking and answering each question with your partner.

Example:
A: What makes your boyfriend/ girlfriend extra special?
B: She’s very fashionable. She’s warm and friendly to everyone. And she speaks perfect English.
A: No way!

1. How did you meet your boyfriend/ girlfriend?

2. What makes your boyfriend/ girlfriend extra special?
### Appendix D: Categories of classroom activities and explanations for step-1 coding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Non-speaking-oriented activities: <em>Activities that are not relevant to the teaching content in the lesson and are parts of the lesson as procedures.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening phrase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homework checking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan and purpose</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead-in</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Procedural activities** | Reference to activities that are parts of classroom procedure including:  
- Topic/activity introduction  
- Task orientation/giving instructions  
- Task specifications/explanations  
- Task demonstrations  
- Comprehension verification of directions for an activity  
- Organize seating or classroom settings for an activity |
| **Discipline** | Reference to disciplinary statements or directives, classroom management issues (e.g. asking students to be quiet or focus on the task) |
| **Closing phrase** | The period when teachers finish the last activity and signal students the end of the lesson including wrapping up the content of the lesson, orientation and link with content of the next lesson, assign and explain homework to students and saying goodbye. |
| **Wrap-up** | Brief teacher-or student-produced summary of points or items that have been practiced or learned. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 2: Non-production speaking-oriented activities: <em>Activities teachers organize to activate learners’ background knowledge, present the input, get students to notice, analyse and practice the input to prepare for their speaking production.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activate schemata</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input providing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noticing/Sensitising/Analysing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 3: Speaking production activities: <em>Activities in which students participate in speaking production.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentations/Talks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion/Debates</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
can apply the language input presented in the lessons in their creative and personalized manner. These can be supported by visuals such as pictures/ videos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-play/ Simulations Creative</th>
<th>Activities in which students adopt the role of another persona or in a simulated situation and try to act out in accordance with the roles they take. However, students have freedom to determine the roles, interactions and the language they use in their role-plays/simulations basing on general guidelines from the teachers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games Creative</td>
<td>Teachers have students engage in a language activity that involves an objective, a set of rules and a degree of competition. The focus of the game is that students can achieve the goals/objectives of the game and students are free to use any language resource they have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations and chats</td>
<td>Activities in which students make casual conversations for which they are free to choose topics, content and language to use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Ethics Approval

APPROVAL LETTER
In reply please quote: HE15/026

19 March 2015

Mr Nguyen Hai Quan
8/12-14 Gladstone Ave
Wollongong NSW 2500

Dear Mr Hai Quan,

Thank you for your response dated 16 March 2015 to the HREC review of the application detailed below. I am pleased to advise that the application has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE15/026
Project Title: Bernsteinian perspective on speaking skill pedagogy in Vietnamese tertiary context
Researchers: Mr Nguyen Hai Quan, A/Professor Honglin Chen, Dr Amanda Baker
Approval Date: 19 March 2015
Expiry Date: 18 March 2016

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

Approval by the HREC is for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date. Continuing approval requires:

- The submission of a progress report annually and on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at [http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html](http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html). This report must be completed, signed by the researchers and the appropriate Head of Unit, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.
- Approval by the HREC of any proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- Immediate report of serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- Immediate report of unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Associate Professor Melanie Randle
Chair, UOW Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee
Appendix F: Lee’s handout for the pre-teaching vocabulary activity – Lesson 1: Travel

**WARM-UP:** Which aspect of travel is each of the following words related to?

*Put the words into the mind map.*

- buying
- souvenirs
- motorbikes
- ferry
- landmarks
- bus
- economy/ business class
- car discounts
- mileage points
- shopping
- resort
- museums
- ship
- bargain
- train
- deluxe suite
- complimentary
- breakfast
- boarding pass
- customer
- platform
- hotel

![Mind map diagram](image)